**Basic Web Design: Designing for the Web**

Design involves more than just graphics; it is the entire user experience. Here are a few things to consider.

Scrolling is OK, even expected, as long as the user doesn't have to scroll to view navigation elements, splash screens, or anything else that they should be able to view all at once. The most important things, obviously, should appear right at the top.

Don't overload your front page with content; users can only take in so much at a time. Make certain that you maintain a clear and obvious focal point for the page, and don't succumb to clutter as so many web designers have. It's all right if users have to click to get more information, as long as they don't have to click too much.

Remember that the most important part of your web page is about 100-200 pixels tall, running across the top of the browser window from the left. This is where users look first! That's why advertisements always live in that space, and why people pay money to rent it or buy it. Don't waste that space! Some of my students in the past have filled that space with emptiness or only a pretty picture with no real content. At least stick your name or company name in there, or whatever you're interested in promoting or selling!

Maintain a clear navigational structure. There is nothing more annoying than losing your way in a website of any size, small or gargantuan, and having no clear idea of where you are or how to get anyplace else.

Remember that you are designing for a non-print media. Flexibility in a visual design is all important! You will never completely control the manner in which text wraps, nor will you always be able to get elements into the exact same positions on every browser. Don't focus on these minutiae, as they will give you nothing but ulcers! Focus only on the things which you can control reliably, and don't worry about the rest. Use designs with strong focal areas which don't require pinpoint positioning.

CSS will help you control your designs more effectively, but it is not a miracle cure; it is just an improvement over plain HTML tags alone. Modern HTML, XHTML, and XML rely strongly on CSS for all appearance control!

Don't feel obliged to trap users in your website. The Internet was made for surfing, with easy access to and from locations on the Web; if you lock people into your website for any reason ("branding", ignorance, or just plain fear), you may confuse or even infuriate your users. Make sure that it is as easy to EXIT your site as it is to enter it; users can always hit the "Back" button if they want to return to your site.

**Final Note**

Pretty pictures and elegant graphic design are only a small part of a website; visuals only set the stage. The complete design considers the entire user experience, from ease of access to key content and information, to arrangement of content, to navigational structures and site maps, to proper management of expectations regarding wait and delay (a primary component of most web experience). Technology must be harnessed to provide an enjoyable and seamless user experience; in the best sites, the technology is invisible, subservient to the delivery of information, entertainment, news, shopping, or business. The best use of technology gives the illusion of utter simplicity; you have used technology well if users don't even notice it.