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Chapter 3: Billboard Design 101

In this chapter, Krug discusses the importance of visual hierarchy — making sure users understand how to navigate elements on a webpage and focus on the right information. There are six guidelines for an effective web usability: take advantage of conventions, create effective visual hierarchies, break pages up into clearly defined areas, make it obvious what's clickable, eliminate distractions, and format content to support scanning.

Existing conventions, or widely used or standardized design patterns, will help the user navigate easier because they are already familiar with the convention and how it functions. For web interfaces, conventions have evolved over time but the expectations for a web page stays the same. This allows users to intuitively understand the standard functions of a website, such as the scroll bar or the buttons on a navigation bar. However, designers tend to not take advantage of conventions because they want to be innovative. This is risky because if the innovation is too different it creates a more complicated and confusing site. Krug gives the advice to "innovate when you know you have a better idea, but take advantage of conventions when you don't".

Along with keeping a page familiar enough so a user won't get confused, making sure there's visual hierarchy is another important factor. Placing more important information at the top of a page, with bigger or bolder font is a way to separate the important information from the rest. Grouping similar elements together on a page allows users to know what goes together and helps to guide the user. Visual hierarchy allows users to know where they want to look, and where they want to ignore. Making sure the page is organized, not stuffed with too much information, and formatting text to make it easier to understand creates a clear and not-confusing interface.

A real-life example of a website with excellent visual hierarchy and beautiful design is http://www.jennyjohannesson.com/, the portfolio for Jenny Johannesson, a Senior Designer at Ueno. Each page clearly states what the project is by displaying the titles with the main typeface,

as well as a short blurb in a smaller, serif typeface and accompanying images. The main page features some innovation, but includes tiny conventions, such as the magenta line to indicate the user to scroll down.

Focusing on creating effective visual hierarchies and understanding when to innovate and when to stick to conventions allows for an easier website for a user to scan, and not have to stress or get confused when trying to find what they need. Though websites the latest web trends continue to evolve, it is best to try to stick to conventions to make sure your content can be intuitive and users can decide "what to focus on and what to ignore".