

How can designers strike a balance between uniformity and variation in design?

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It's really important to think about your website as software. It's not actually a beautiful postcard where we can do anything we want and it will be beautiful and gorgeous. Your website is software. People are coming there to accomplish a specific task. The more you make a design that's actually kind of like everybody else's in terms of its structure (navigation bars and logos and messaging and so forth), the less people have to think about what it is they're trying to accomplish when they arrive on a website.

Now, that's not to say that every website has to look like every other one. There's exceptions to every rule on the web. And sometimes the right way to address this--let's just say you're making a website for a spooky movie. You want to have a really spooky kind of website that's a little mysterious and maybe not everything is obvious because that's part of the brand of the movie and the feeling that you're trying to evoke.

But if you're building the average business website, you have a lot less latitude for this type of experimentation. People want to get in. They want to get out. They don't want to be bogged down by your interface.

So, do consider that as you start to think about designing websites. Try to make the general structure of it the same. You can experiment more with colors and photos, but you don't want to get wild and crazy and do something completely different than every other website out there.