



The CaffiNation Blog Design Guide

How you present your ideas

Often matters more than what you have to say

If you have good content...

Why would you make it painful to read?



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The Basics


When you start your blog or a redesign you want to spend a couple of minutes considering what colors you would like to have included in the overall design of your site. Ask yourself some simple questions.



Do you have a favorite color, or does your topic lend itself to a certain color?
How do you want your site perceived? Playful, Serious, Lighthearted, Aggressive?
What do you want your site to do? Business Venture, Personal Portfolio, Online Resume



Better men and women than I have spent years studying color and its affects on the human brain, but that doesn't mean you need to.

 Bright active hues can make the site friendly,  cool calm hues can make your site feel relaxed. With the CaffeNation I tried to pick colors that both relaxed,  and gave a gentle reminder of coffee / tea with milk in it.  Even though I prefer my beverages black the color of cup of coffee with cream in it is a subtle way of connecting to people via the design of the site. A cup of dark, rich black coffee is very hard to differentiate from black and is a bit too bold for how I wanted the site to appear. For darker accent colors on the blog I chose slightly different shades of the same two base colors. For a The Blues,   The Tans  


I usually suggest that people pick one color that fits the tone of their writing, or pick a favorite color of your own. After you pick the primary color of your site, you need to figure out two things. First off being what colors work well with your primary, secondly how much is too much. Pink might be great for your site but  too much of it is harsh on anyone's eyes.



Managing Color

When arranging colors in a pattern, on a site or collecting just a few of your favorite things the collection as a whole can illicit different feelings than any one color by itself. They can create a feeling of Harmony , or just as easily disharmony.  When you match colors into a set you can invoke very strong feelings on either side of the line. Proceed carefully.

Complementary colors are colors which work well together and are opposite each other on the color wheel. There is a whole lot to learn in terms of color theory, we're just giving you the basic here to help you planning your website's pallet.

There is also a concept known as Tertiary colors. Each Color you select is one third around the color wheel, equidistant from the others. Such as this 

I would say stick to two or three main colors. Different shades of the same color, ie lighter or darker without moving its place on the color wheel, can be used while still keeping the same feel of your site.

If you are starting a blog about a sports team your pallet is pretty well laid out for you. Anything else and you can make the colors work for you.





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Connotations



Some colors also have connotations beyond what you might imagine, I was working with a friend who wanted to use the colors to the left in a site design. Which wouldn't be a problem except for the fact that those three colors have a close association with the Mardi Gras Celebration. Don't be afraid to ask what other people think of your color choices. If you started a tax company with the Mardi Gras theme you might seem a bit more fun.

Looking for inspiration? Try ColourLovers.com the wealth of color present in the world around you will start to show itself. The site in and of itself is a fantastic resource, but the blog can truly open your eyes. You might take your site inspiration from a napkin at a restaurant, a piece of pie or a wedding dress.

For readability and originality keep the darker colors, and the electric hues as accent colors on your blog. But everything in moderation, a little bit goes a long way. A hint of a bright color can still produce the desired effect without burdening your reader with a fluorescent lightshow.

I'm not a big fan of dark backgrounds with light text, it makes it a bit harder to read for most interfaces. It can cause eye strain and in most cases the text isn't a bright enough hue to be readable on most monitors. When the color on a monitor starts it starts to lose the ability to render black well, this can lead to your design looking washed out. The only exception to this is a black background with bright green text, it always reminds me of terminal screens, so I set every single one of my terminal programs to use this color scheme. It's less of a readability issue at that point and more of a visual cue to what I'm working on at the moment.

```
drwxr-xr-x 17 psul psul 4096 2008-04-08 15:28
drwxr-xr-x  3 psul psul 4096 2009-02-27 07:04
drwxr-xr-x 11 psul psul 4096 2008-04-08 15:27
drwxr-xr-x  2 psul psul 4096 2008-04-08 15:27
-rw-r--r--  1 psul psul 25477 2008-03-22 11:02
drwxr-xr-x 13 psul psul 4096 2008-04-08 15:27
-rw-r--r--  1 psul psul 3362 2008-03-22 11:03
-rw-r--r--  1 psul psul 1170 2008-03-22 11:03
-rw-r--r--  1 psul psul 12301 2008-03-22 11:03
```



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Visual Accessibility

Blogs are a visual media, from layout to color choice each decision that you make sets the website up as a canvas to be viewed. The problem with thinking that way is you end up alienating visually impaired users. So your canvas means nothing to them, or does it?

As it turns out small design changes make your website much more accessible to visually impaired users.

Build from the left to the right, Putting your blog-roll on the right hand side allows for the first content picked up by screen readers to be the content of your site, and not the sites you link to.

I would hope that no one has auto-play turned on for any music on their site. Besides being tacky it also makes your site invisible to screen readers, as the music plays over the reader.

Always use the ALT text for images. Be short and to the point describing the content of the image. You can see the alt text for existing images but hovering your mouse over the image. If nothing pops up chances are that image is white space to visually impaired readers.

Avoid using Click Here. This is just good web design, and good SEO. The sites and pages you link to gain and lose PageRank based off of the descriptive keywords you use to link to them. The reasons just multiply when you consider visual impaired readers who have no context to judge the link if click here is the only provenance given.

Take into consideration people who are color blind when designing, if elements needed to navigate your site disappear to the colorblind you are cutting a portion of people out of your possible audience. You can always check to see how your site looks to the color blind : <http://colorfilter.wickline.org/>

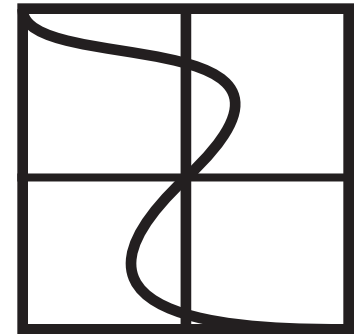


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The Weight

Chances are that your eyes naturally flow from left to right and top to bottom when you look at a website. Where you have the content on the site dictates whether people will act on it first or not at all.

Line your elements up from top left to bottom right in order of importance. Line content up for an even flow. Deviate from the norm when you want attention.



Centered content might look awesome.

But should only be used to provide a visual break in the action. Do this for small graphics, titles and commentary only. If you center the whole paragraph it puts the eye off. You want the content to flow across the screen and into the person's eyeballs, only pausing where you choose them to. If you center the whole paragraph their eyes stutters at the beginning of each line as they try to find their place.

You also want to avoid right justifying text as well for the same reason. Your eyes like a consistent left hand edge to the text block to make reading easier.

If you have graphics running like Nascar down the one side of your page even the width, the height can vary but as long as they fall in line the eye will flow over them without throwing off the flow of your page.



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Breaks

When used properly you can break the flow of text and the flow of the site design when you have a button you want people to act on, survey links, pay now buttons, all fit into this category.

PAY ME!

These action items are meant to fly against the overall design convention of the site to make your eye rest on them. Also this is one area where you can break from your color scheme to gain notice as well. The less often you break the flow the more effective it is when you do it.



The orientation of colors can also have the same effect. The stronger color in this example is blue, it is darker and has more presence, out of the three bars of color which looks the most natural to you? Most people say the one with blue on the right and white on a left, the white bar in the center doesn't look too bad but would get old quickly as your eye isn't sure where to focus.

Large blocks of text bore the eyes. Even in article where there isn't a graphic component try to break the flow of the paragraphs into small ideological chunks or most people will gloss over the content. This is not a place for pictures of your cat.



Make graphic element relevant, and clean. If you don't have good quality pictures you don't need to resort to using junk. **Bold**, *Italics*, Line Breaks and underlines are all effective ways of doing the same thing.