

# Website concept development

Utilise best practice design principles to ensure your site appeals to your target audience

By Kimberley Ward



*“A well-designed website that is easy to use and navigate is an essential marketing tool for any practice. But what exactly constitutes good design?”*

*Part four of a six article series that focuses on the importance of your web presence as an integral component of your practice marketing.*

**T**he concept development stage of the web development process is when you really get to see your website start taking shape.

A well-designed website that is easy to use and navigate is an essential marketing tool for any practice. But what exactly constitutes good design? Since our response to any design is largely subjective, when it comes to your website, expert advice suggests that you follow best practice principles, and let the visual design of the site support the architecture and further the accessibility of the site - and not the other way around.

Some basic ‘best practice’ principles in web design address:

- Tone;
- Text;
- Navigation;
- Links;
- Graphics; and
- General Design.

## Tone

The most important of the ‘best practice’ principles addresses the least tangible feature of your site. The tone of your site will evoke feelings within the visitor via a personal response to the colours, page layout, the use of imagery and the balance of the pages within the site. As this response is subjective,

you may not have complete control over this, however you can aim to guide and influence responses via the visual clues you incorporate throughout the site. The tone is set by the sum of all these elements and the way they work together within the greater site design.

The tone of your website should communicate your brand essence and showcase your brand attributes and personality.

## Text

The size and type of font used throughout a site can have a huge impact on the visitors experience. Font sizes should be large enough to read, without being so large that they look clumsy. You should ensure there is ample contrast between the colour of the text and that of the background to aid legibility (in general dark background colours make text more difficult to read) and font sizes and types should make clear to the reader the hierarchy of the information contained within the site.

You should also ensure your web site developer is creating the site using screen fonts, such as Arial or Helvetica, which are viewed consistently across all platforms. This allows for greater control over the design. Due to their shape these fonts are also easier for a user to comprehend on screen than some alternate fonts.

Text should also incorporate upper and lower case letters as used in normal communication. An entire paragraph in caps can be difficult to read and appears to be shouting!

## Navigation

All navigation tabs and bars should be easy to use and understand and be represented consistently throughout your site. The way in which your navigation is represented should also provide clues to the site visitor as to where they are within the site and how to progress through the site to the information they require. There is nothing worse than clicking through to a secondary page of a website and not being able to determine how to get to the other pages you require!

## Links

Your developer should ensure the colour of links are coordinated with the colour scheme of the site as a whole. This is a small design element that can have a very large impact on the look and feel of the site. Paying attention to details such as the link colour suggests you pay that same attention to detail within the services you provide. As a general rule, all links should be underlined so they are instantly recognizable as such. Underlining should always be avoided in normal text.

## Graphics

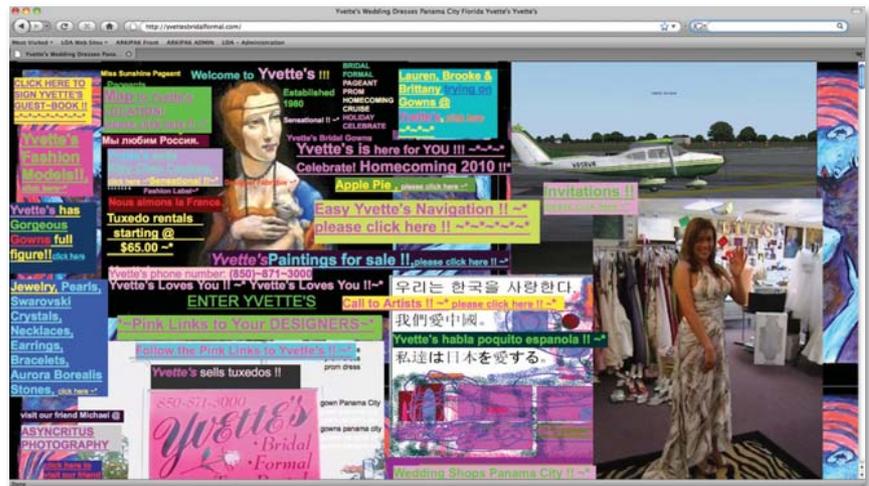
Graphics add interest to your page and aid in visually breaking up blocks of text. We will talk more about image selection in the next article in the series, however at a very basic level, any graphics included on the site should add value to the site and act to support the statement being made in the accompanying text.

The use of elements such as images, headings, sub-headings and pull-out quotes should be arranged in a way that acts to break up large areas of text, creating clear delineation between the different 'stories' that are running on the page. The layout of these elements should be repeated throughout the site, to show the relationship of each page as a part of the greater whole.

In terms of incorporating movement within the site, it is best to limit any animations to the home page. This provides a point of interest without slowing the loading speed of the pages. Avoid anything that 'blinks' at your audience, as this generally serves as more of a distraction than anything else, and animations that never stop are a definite no-no.

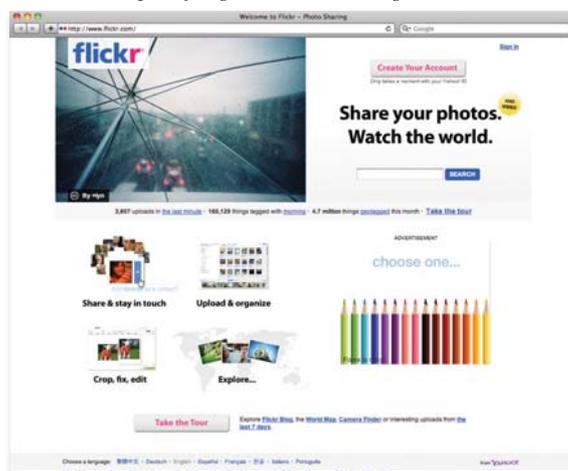
## General design

Some designers believe that "White space" is the cornerstone of good design and therefore not something to be afraid of!



Above: Example of a bad website design - Yvette's Bridal.

Below: Example of a good website design - Flickr.



*"The Flickr website embraces many of the best practice principles that relate to website design... While the Yvette's Bridal site throws them all out the window!"*

White space is the negative or unfilled space that surrounds objects on a page. It is essential in ensuring a design remains clean and clear, and directs people to focus on the important elements within the page. Unfortunately, white space tends to scare many of us and we want to see every inch of a page filled! A good designer will know how much white space to include in your design and where.

Best practice also dictates the size of your pages, in particular your landing page and/or home page should fit within an 800x600 pixel space. This ensures that regardless of the users screen size, they will not need to scroll to see all the elements contained within this page. All other pages should be designed to have immediate visual impact within this frame, even when scrolling may be required to view all the information within the page. Scrolling should be limited to vertical scrolling - a user should

never have to scroll across to see the entirety of your site.

A decision must also be made as to the orientation of your site. It does come down to personal choice, however the majority of sites you will find are centred within your screen. A centred site offers balance and suggests harmony between all the elements it contains.

## About the Author

Kimberley Ward is Business Development and Marketing Manager, for Levitch Design Associates, one of Australia's leading healthcare interior design consultancies who offer an integrated approach to practice presentation. Custom corporate identity solutions, brand development, graphic/web design, promotional strategies and marketing campaigns are some of the services provided. For more info, please contact (02) 9880-9300 or visit [www.levitch.com.au](http://www.levitch.com.au)