

Web Design Facts Everyone Should Know

Courtesy of ComptonMedia.Com (www.comptonmedia.com)

Many organizations have only a vague understanding of how to design, build, and maintain a web site. But to save money, time, and stress it's important to get it right from the beginning.

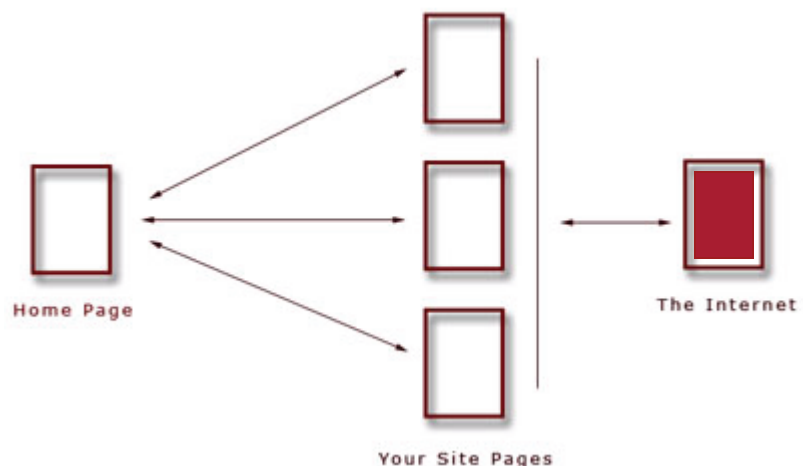
So let's go over the basics of the web-site design process. For practical reasons, we'll keep the information simple. You can plumb the depths of the subject later, but before your plunk down your money for a web site, there are a few technical details you should know. Let's start at the beginning.

What Are Web Sites Anyway?

Basically a web site is a set of documents on a computer. The documents are called *web pages*, and they are all *linked* to each other. (A link is just an address to another web page.) The computer is connected to the Internet, which is a bunch of other computers connected to each other on a world-wide network.

You can view this set of web pages by using a web browser (such as Internet Explorer from Microsoft). Type in the "address" of the web site, and your browser displays the first page of the site. For example, the address of ComptonMedia.Com is *http://www.comptonmedia.com*.

The first page is called the "home page." It enables you to navigate to all the other pages in the site. In turn, others can find their way to your home page and site.



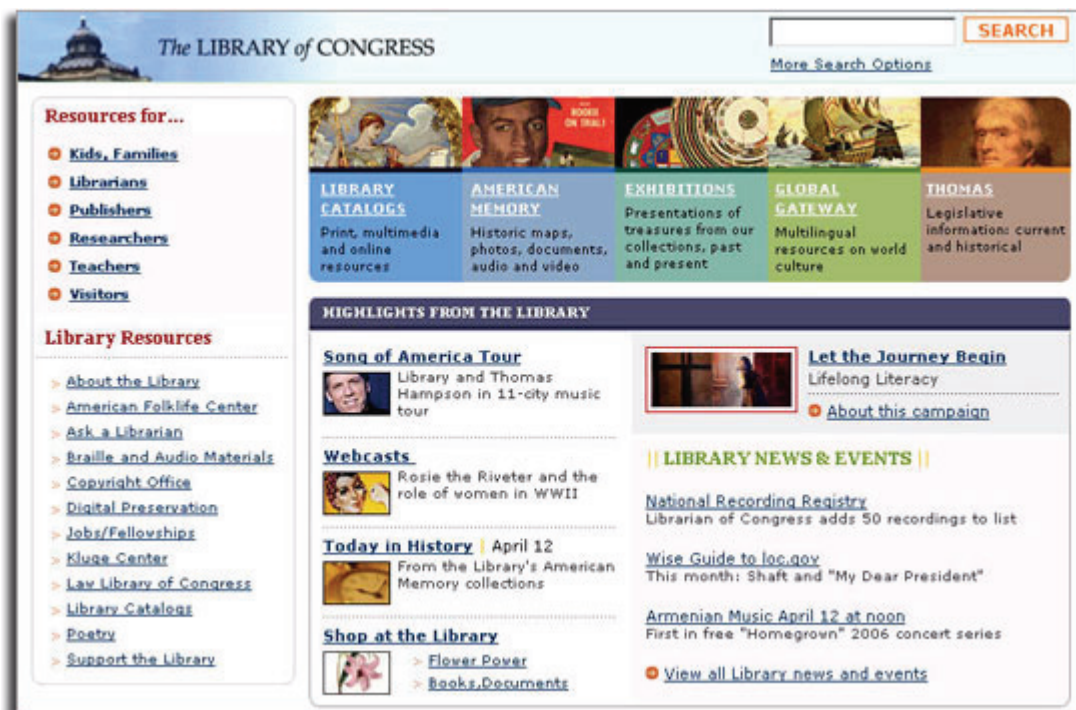
What Is A Web Page?

A web page is a computer document specially formatted for viewing in a web browser. Web pages are different from documents that you create on your own computer.

For one, a web page is located on one or more of the myriad of computers that make up the computer network we call the Internet. Your documents are usually located on your own computer.

A web page is a shared document. You can view it no matter where it happens to “live” on the Internet.

Put a collection of web pages together, each linked to the rest, and you have a shared set of documents (the web site) viewable across the Internet. The advantage to this scheme is that the web site is publicly available at all times. Your organization then has a virtual place for millions of people to visit. If your organization is a business, people can use it to buy products listed on its pages. If your organization is service oriented, people can use your web site to find out about your services, or to view any information you have written and placed on the site.



The screenshot shows the homepage of The Library of Congress. At the top, there is a search bar with a "SEARCH" button and a link for "More Search Options". Below the search bar is a navigation menu with five categories: "LIBRARY CATALOGS", "AMERICAN MEMORY", "EXHIBITIONS", "GLOBAL GATEWAY", and "THOMAS". Each category has a brief description of its content. Below the navigation menu is a "HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE LIBRARY" section. This section features several featured items: "Song of America Tour" (Library and Thomas Hampson in 11-city music tour), "Webcasts" (Rosie the Riveter and the role of women in WWII), "Today in History" (April 12, From the Library's American Memory collections), and "Shop at the Library" (Flower Power, Books/Documents). To the right of these highlights is a "Let the Journey Begin Lifelong Literacy" campaign with an "About this campaign" link. Below the highlights is a "LIBRARY NEWS & EVENTS" section with links to "National Recording Registry" (Librarian of Congress adds 50 recordings to list), "Wise Guide to loc.gov" (This month: Shaft and "My Dear President"), and "Armenian Music April 12 at noon" (First in free "Homegrown" 2006 concert series). A "View all Library news and events" link is also present. On the left side of the page, there is a "Resources for..." section with links for Kids, Families, Librarians, Publishers, Researchers, Teachers, and Visitors. Below this is a "Library Resources" section with a list of links including About the Library, American Folklife Center, Ask a Librarian, Braille and Audio Materials, Copyright Office, Digital Preservation, Jobs/Fellowships, Kluge Center, Law Library of Congress, Library Catalogs, Poetry, and Support the Library.

The Library of Congress home page.

Links to the World

A web page contains “links” to other web pages, either in your organization's site or other pages on the Internet. Essentially, a link is a pointer to other web pages. When you use your mouse to click on a link (usually highlighted by underlining), your browser first locates the web page the link points to, then displays the page.

For example, if you are viewing a web page that contains a link to the Library of Congress web site, you can click on that link to display the Library of Congress site.

Links provide the real power of the Internet because they enable information to be shared quickly across the world. You can view web sites and their pages not only from your own computer, but from any computer with access to the Internet. So if you are traveling, for instance, you can use a computer at an airport to view a web site that provides maps and directions to the city you are in. Or you can even use the airport computer to get and send email.



On the home page for the Library of Congress, the mouse cursor has changed to a hand icon to indicate that the “Kids, Families” link is active. Clicking on this link opens up the web page associated with the “Kids, Families” resources.

Creating A Web Site

To create a web site means to put together a set of web pages and make it available on the Internet. Each of the pages is linked to the others, and the whole thing forms an easily navigated virtual “document.” As long as the pages are coherently organized and designed. Because web sites can have a large number of pages to them, organizing the links becomes an important part of the design of the site.

The Library of Congress, for example, contains hundreds of web pages with a lot of information on them. The home page, however, contains the basic links to all the rest of the pages, and those links are organized in just a few categories. From the home page, you can click on links that lead to an online store, library exhibitions and catalogs, and much more.

Web Designers

People who create web sites are called web designers. Their job is to create each web page and then link them all together into a well organized web site. Web designers use special software to create the web pages. When the pages are finished and linked to each other, the web designer transfers the pages to a server. A server is a computer connected to the Internet and set up to display (“serve”) web sites.

Of course, there’s a lot that goes into designing both the site’s pages and the overall design of the site. Web designers are the experts at designing the pages and the sites made from those pages.

Content

The information on each web page has to be created by someone. You can supply the web designer with the specific content (words or graphics) or hire a professional copywriter to come up with the content. Often the web designer can create the content as well.

In the world of web design, the phrase “Content is king” is well known. Without compelling content on each of your pages, your web site is just a haphazard collection of words and images. Well written and organized content, however, can turn your web site into something much more. Good content creates a “place” where people come to get information, services, or products they cannot get anywhere else. Good content, in other words, is the heart of a good web site.

If you consider your web site as a brochure, a well written and well designed brochure will get much more attention than a hastily put-together brochure. If you are not experienced in designing your own web site, it pays to have professionals do it for you.

Interaction

A web site can offer more than a well designed collection of web pages. Typically, a good web site features interactive features that enable visitors to do more than view the pages. Your web site can, for instance, contain forms. Visitors can fill out the forms to receive information, or download documents and products. (“Download” means to retrieve some sort of information from a web site and store it on your personal computer.)

A web site can contain many different types of interaction, from videos to “chat forums” (real-time sending of messages back and forth among people who are logged on to your site). At a news web site, to take one example, you can view videos of late-breaking news stories. At a web site devoted to a particular hobby, say biking, you can exchange messages with other biking enthusiasts.

In general, you will normally want to have some type of interaction on your web site to make it “come alive.” The interaction can be as simple as a link for your visitors to send email to you, a searchable database of information, or even an online store. It all depends upon the purpose of your site.

Tip: *Be careful of too many interactive features. An excess of any communication is just noise: too much text, too many flashy videos, too many banner ads. Make sure it's easy for a visitor to use your site (simpler tends to be better in many cases).*

Much of the initial web design is deciding what type of interaction you want to have on your site. Often it helps to visit other web sites. Ask yourself what you like or don't like about the site's interactive features. Are the forms well designed and easy to use? Does an online store make it difficult to order a product? Is it easy to find the contact information? (You'd be surprised at the number of web sites that bury contact information within the site.) Take notes of your preferences and you can apply them to your own site.

What Is A Domain Name and Why Do I Need One?

A domain name is the address for your web site. Just as a house requires an address for others to find it, your web site requires an address for visitors to find it. Recall that the Internet is a collection of many computers all networked together? The domain name serves as a way for other computers to point to the computer where your site is located.

An example of a domain name is *www.amazon.com*, a popular shopping site. Your web designer can take care of obtaining a domain name for you. You can also use a domain-name provider, such as *www.godaddy.com*, to buy one online.

If you're new to web sites, your designer will have more experience than you in how to decide upon a domain name. Take advantage of that experience.

For example, which of these two addresses would be easier for you to remember?

www.~s9ekinc.org

www.wesellcandy.com

When in doubt, ask your web designer for help in choosing your domain name.

What Is A Host?

A host can refer to a) the computer that contains your site files, or b) the business that owns that computer. Web hosting refers to the business of selling computer space for web sites. It also refers to the many other services necessary to host a web site. For instance, when your site files (web pages) are ready for the bright lights, there has to be a way to get them from the computer where they are currently located to the host computer. Most often a special technology for sending files is used. Its name is FTP, or File Transfer Protocol. A host provides the FTP service for you, usually as part of its fee.

When you hire an experienced web designer, you are also hiring someone with experience in getting the right host for your site. This is the person who can answer the questions:

- “How much disk space does your site need?”
- “How much bandwidth does your site need?” (Bandwidth refers to the amount of information that comes and goes to and from your web site.)
- “Is there FTP access available?” (FTP, or File Transfer Protocol, is a way to transfer files on the Internet.)
- “Do you need your own domain?”
- “What kind of third-party software support is there?”
- “Does the host provide customer support? If so, how much and what kind of quality?”
- “Does email come with the hosting package?”
- “Does the host support mailing lists?”
- “Is there support for streaming audio and video?”
- “Are there any online site-management tools?”

The Bottom Line

As you can see, there are many things to consider when it comes to setting up your web site. But an experienced “web pro” can smooth the way—and keep your site running smoothly as well. After all, it's one thing to design and set up a web site, but another to keep it running. You should ask your web designer if monthly maintenance is an option. Having your site maintained, usually by a subscription plan, helps you to keep focused on your business or organization without worrying about your site day in and day out.

At ComptonMedia.Com, we have the experience you need in a web designer. From initial setup to finished site, you can count on worry free web design and implementation.

Need a great design for your business or organization? **ComptonMedia.Com is the all-in-one web-design service** for you.

Need your site maintained so you can keep your hands free? ComptonMedia.Com provides **monthly maintenance plans** at reasonable rates.

Contact us at info@comptonmedia.com. Remember to ask for your free pop-up blocker!