

# Web Design **BASICS**

Stubbs • Barksdale



 For 15+ Hours of Instruction

# INFORMATION DESIGN

## OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, you should be able to:

- Identify and document your Web site's message.
- Identify and tailor your information for your Web site's audience.
- Identify and develop your Web site's purpose and scope.
- Structure your Web site's information into a flowchart.

**Estimated Time: 3 hours**

## VOCABULARY

Chunks  
 Design document  
 Flowchart  
 Hierarchical structure  
 Information design  
 Linear structure  
 Mixed structure  
 Persona  
 Random access structure  
 Scope statement

## What Is a Design Document?

Great Web sites are not usually built by individuals; they are built by teams with members who have three essential skills:

- Writing
- Computer programming
- Artistic skills

It is nearly impossible to find a single person who can write well, is a great artist, and can program a computer. Instead, companies that make great Web sites will hire several people with different skills and abilities and have them work together as a team to build the Web site.

A *design document* keeps all of these talented people working together effectively. A design document is to a Web site what the blueprint in Lesson 2 is to the building of the house, or what a script is to producing a movie—it guides what happens. A design document outlines the goals of the site and describes or illustrates all its parts. Good design documents contain at least three kinds of information:

- Information design
- Interaction design
- Presentation design



Remember the questions we said you needed answers to in Lesson 2? Well all those questions fall under three types of design.

### Information Design

Information design includes these questions:

- Who is this Web site's audience? Who is it for?
- What is its message? What is it about?
- What is its purpose? What is it for?

### Interaction Design

Interaction design includes these questions:

- How will the information be organized?
- How will the Web site work? What will people do to get around in it?
- How can I make it easy to use?

### Presentation Design

Presentation design includes questions like these:

- What will it look like?
- How can I make its look and its message work together?

The first kind of design, information design, often requires a team member who can write well. The second, interaction design, usually needs someone who can program a computer. The third, presentation design, most often needs an artist. Blending writing, programming, and art using information, interaction, and presentation design are the keys to a successful Web site. And, that is exactly the job of the design document.

A design document keeps the writers, programmers, and artists working together well. In this unit we will briefly explore information, interaction, and presentation design. In the process, we will show you how to put them all together into a design document to keep the Web site's development moving forward. In this lesson we will focus on the specifics of information design. Lesson 4 will discuss interaction design. And finally, Lesson 5 will demonstrate how to integrate presentation design into your Web projects.

## *Information Design*

The auditorium is filled with thousands of people, all there to hear you give a speech. Suddenly, you are being introduced! In about three seconds, you will step up to the microphone and begin your speech. Then it hits you: You don't remember what you're there to talk about! You don't remember who these people are, or why they should care what you have to say. Why are you giving this speech anyway?

Sound far-fetched? Sound like a nightmare? Well, it happens every day on the Web. Thousands of people visit Web sites looking for something interesting or important to them. Instead, they find aimless, meaningless, disorganized, and sometimes downright confusing information.



### What is wrong with these Web sites?

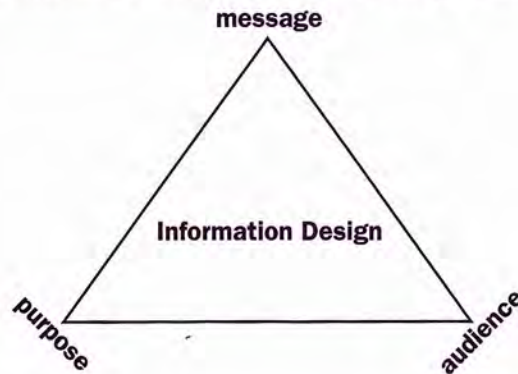
There might be any number of reasons why a Web site doesn't work. However, it is our experience that the designers of most poor Web sites neglected to answer three important questions before they started to build the site:

- What is this Web site about? (What is the *message* of this site?)
- Who is this Web site for? (Who is the *audience* for this site?)
- What is this Web site for? (What is the *purpose* of this site?)

The answers to these three questions make up the Web site's *information design* (see Figure 3-1). An information design helps your Web site avoid mediocrity. When you figure out the answers to these questions, you will want to write them down so you can refer to them later. These written answers are the first part of your design document.

**FIGURE 3-1**

Information design is made of message, audience, and purpose



Among these three parts of information design, which one comes first—the audience, the message, or the purpose? Actually, sometimes it is one and sometimes it is another. The following examples will help. They show how other Web site developers faced these three design issues.

- The purpose of a bookseller's Web site is to make money selling books; therefore, making money (the purpose) is the seller's first thought, followed closely by the books he is selling (the message), and finally the people who buy books (the audience).
- A student shared her university's sports history (the message) online. Those interested in the site included sports fans and alumni of the university (the audience). The site was used to help promote interest in the university's sports program (the purpose).
- Another Web site supports the families of people who suffer from cancer. The audience (the families of cancer sufferers) was thought of first, with the purpose in mind (to comfort families) using the message (in-depth information about cancer research).

As you can see, it is very hard to separate these three design questions—they're all connected. If the bookseller's Web site focused so much on making money (its purpose) that it didn't show off the books very well (the message), or didn't show respect for its customers (the audience), it wouldn't sell many books. The bookseller would lose customers, and the Web site's original purpose—to make money—would be ruined. Good design requires you to think carefully about all three questions.



## Discovering a Message for Your Web Site

As a Web page designer, your first task is often to figure out what your message is and research it. What? You say you don't know what to create a Web site about? Well, this next activity will help you figure that out. First, you'll brainstorm a list of topics you're interested in, then refine that list to one or two good ideas.

### STEP-BY-STEP 3.1

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1. Brainstorm with classmates and write down ten topics in which you are interested. These can include hobbies, interests, pets, favorite school subjects, your family, work, or just about anything. If you are developing your site as a partnership or team, develop ten topics with your partner or team.
2. Copy the items in your list in the order in which they most interest you (or your team), with the most interesting topic first. (If you get stuck trying to decide which item should be first, compare them two at a time, putting a mark next to the one that wins each pairing. The one with the most marks is first, the one with the second highest number of marks is second, and so forth.)
3. Look at the first topic in your list and ask yourself, "Can I create a great Web site based on this idea or topic?" If you don't feel you can build a Web site about your first topic, continue down the list until you have at least one topic that can make a great Web site. You should choose something that (1) you either know or are willing to learn about, (2) you are interested in, and (3) is not too narrow and not too broad. If necessary, have your instructor help you decide which topic would be most suitable for a Web site.
4. Your chosen topic or subject will become the message of your Web site. Talk with your instructor or team members about this message. Discuss whether it would be a good topic before you finally decide to develop your Web site around it. Make sure it is a topic you will enjoy spending many hours working on.
5. After you have discussed your message with your instructor, open your word processor and key the heading **Message**. Under this heading, write a description of your message statement beginning with the words **This Web site will** \_\_\_\_\_. This will be the beginning of your design document.
6. Spend some time (three to ten hours outside of class) researching your message. Take your time and learn as much as you can. Naturally, the Web is one great resource to draw from. You may also want to spend some time in the library or talking to others who know about your subject. Write down what you learn and where you learned it.