

## Top Ten Usability Issues in Web Design

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### 1. Useless Home Pages

In today's competitive online environment, you have about 5-8 seconds to grab your visitors' attention. It must be immediately apparent from the home page who your company is and what it does. The home page must also provide clear and easy access to all your site's important features. It must usually serve multiple markets in support of multiple user goals and company objectives. Splash screens, welcome messages and vision statements cannot accomplish these things. If your home page doesn't effectively communicate with its target audience, it's worse than useless: it's a liability.

### 2. Poorly Defined Audience

Without a clear market, a website's objective is quickly lost - and its visitors are likely to follow. When you understand your target audience, you can begin to think about ways to reach them, and how to generate your desired outcomes. For visitors to take the action you want them to take (e.g., register with the site, make an online purchase) your website content must be compelling, persuasive, and user-focused. Speak to your visitors' needs and you can drive them to your desired action. It pays to know your audience.

### 3. Use of Jargon

We all use jargon in our professions. Between colleagues and co-workers it's a shared language that allows for quick understanding of complex information. However, what may be perfectly natural to you can sound like a foreign language to your prospects and customers. Don't assume that everybody knows what you're talking about. Find new ways of explaining these terms in plain English. Not only will your copy be more readable, but you'll stand out from the crowd.

### 4. Unreadable Fonts

The fact is, you can't choose a single font that's right for everyone. You also can't assume that a particular font is available on your visitor's computer. The safe choices are: Times New Roman, Georgia, Trebuchet MS, Verdana, Arial, Helvetica, Courier New, Lucida Console and Comic Sans. Of this limited group, Verdana is easily the most-used font on the Web, and for good reason: it's highly legible and looks even better at smaller sizes. When used with Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) and a high text-to-background contrast (typically black text on a white page), the result is a website that's easy to read and easy to maintain.

## 5. Nonstandard Links

Link color is a common visual cue that helps people determine which pages they've visited in a website. When you depart from user expectations (unvisited links = blue, visited links = purple) you undermine your visitors' ability to successfully navigate your site and achieve their goals. Another common problem that's easy to avoid is the "red herring" (red herrings look like links but aren't). This might be an underlined word, button-like object, or any page element that looks like it should be clickable, but isn't. To reduce confusion, reserve underlining for links, and use **bold**, CAPS or *italics* for emphasis. These simple guidelines can make it easier for users to navigate your site and reduce the chance they will miss important content.

## 6. Unhelpful Link Labels

Helpful links are those that summarize the linked page's content. Helpful links give the visitor enough information to decide if the link is worth following. Helpful links contain keywords that make them easy to scan. Helpful links don't say, "[Click here](#) for a complete guide to link wording." Helpful links say, "A complete [guide to link wording](#) is available at [linkwording.com](#)." Because the major search engines, such as Google, place a good deal of importance on the wording of text links, effective link writing is not just good usability design, but can also help your site achieve a better ranking in search results.

## 7. Misappropriated Content

Content repurposed from other media often makes for cheap and plentiful Internet fodder. However, that doesn't mean your company's printed brochure or technical manuals are appropriate for the Web. Because Web users read in different ways and for different reasons than print readers, most repurposed content needs to be edited substantially for the online environment. So, before you spend valuable time and resources transforming that snazzy Powerpoint demonstration into Web content, ask yourself if it's worth it. If it doesn't support the website's goals or those of your visitors, then the answer is probably *no*.

## 8. Popup Windows

Popup windows are a distraction. They are such an annoyance that a search of "popup blocker" on Google returns more than 2 million results. Irritating ads aside, popups take control away from the user, effectively disable the BACK button, and are easily dismissed (how many popups have you closed without reading?). In addition, anyone landing on a popup window from an outside link, such as a search engine, will find themselves on a page without navigation or identity.

## 9. Frames

Perhaps the most troublesome aspect to frames is that they "break" the user's Web browser. Functions such as Print, Find and Bookmark don't work as expected. Frames also cause problems for search engines. The URL of a framed page is generally the frameset URL, which contains no content for search engines to index. If search engines actually do look beyond the frameset page, they will always link directly to the individual page in search results, so that users will enter your site outside its intended frameset.

## 10. Subscription Required

There are good reasons for registering with some sites, like having My Yahoo! remember your preferences so it can serve up personalized news and weather, or being able to participate in your favorite discussion forums. Still, people dislike having to register with a site. It's a pain to keep track of login IDs and passwords, and privacy is always an issue. So, unless your content requires personalization or personal interaction, such as e-commerce, don't make registration compulsory. It's annoying, and a waste of time. Those who aren't deterred are just as likely to enter fake demographics in order to preserve their privacy. Clearly, putting up a registration barrier serves no one.