

Web Design

Introduction

Web design encompasses many different skills and disciplines in the production and maintenance of websites. The different areas of web design include web graphic design; user interface design (UI design); authoring, including standardised code and proprietary software; user experience design (UX design); and search engine optimization. Often many individuals will work in teams covering different aspects of the design process, although some designers will cover them all. The term "web design" is normally used to describe the design process relating to the front-end (client side) design of a website including writing markup. Web design partially overlaps web engineering in the broader scope of web development. Web designers are expected to have an awareness of usability and if their role involves creating markup then they are also expected to be up to date with web accessibility guidelines.

Content table

1. **Introduction**
2. **What is Web Design?**
3. **Finding Inspiration**
4. **Choosing a Web Design Tool**
5. **Visual Elements**
6. **Functional Elements**
7. **Types of Web Design: Adaptive vs. Responsive**

What is Web Design?

Web design is the process of planning, conceptualizing, and arranging content online. Today, designing a website goes beyond aesthetics to include the website's overall functionality. Web design also includes web apps, mobile apps, and user interface design.

Did you know that web design can have a huge impact on your performance in search engines like Google? This article will give you some helpful insight into how to create a website that not only looks good, but functions properly and ranks highly in search.

Finding Inspiration

Designers look for inspiration everywhere. Here are some of the best sites to help get your creative juices flowing:

- Behance
- Pinterest
- Awwwards
- Web design inspiration
- Site Inspire

Choosing a Web Design Tool

There are two main ways to design a website: using a desktop app or using a website builder. The tool you decide to use will vary greatly based on your team size, your budget, and the type of site you wish to build and its technical requirements.

1. Desktop Apps

Desktop apps require designers to create their design and send it to a development team who can then convert the design to code. The most popular desktop apps for designing websites are Photoshop and Sketch.

Typically, this is the standard for large and/or complex websites because it allows the designer to focus on the overall look and feel, while all the technical challenges are transferred to the development team. Unfortunately, this process can be expensive and time-consuming because multiple resources, skill sets, and team members are required.

To avoid involving a developer, it is beneficial to use a website builder to design a website with fewer technical requirements.

2. Website Builders

There are many website builders on the market today that offer a wide range of features and services. Wix, Squarespace, Webflow, and PageCloud, are just a few examples of popular website builders that vary in design capabilities, template options, price, and overall editing experience. Be sure to do your research, experiment with free trials, and determine which platform best fits your website needs.

Website builders create either adaptive or responsive websites, which offer different building experiences. These concepts will be discussed in more detail below so you can best understand which builders will work for you. If you don't know how to code, becoming familiar with the freedoms and limitations of various website design tools is essential. For example, although Wordpress is the most used website platform, it's not popular with visual designers because of its limited customization options.

Before you start building a website, determine your website needs: Are you creating a photo gallery? How often will you update your site? Do you need a contact form? Choose a website builder that can help you effectively accomplish those goals.

Web Design Elements

When designing a website it's important to consider both the site's appearance and functionality. Integrating these elements will maximize the site's overall usability and performance. Your site's usability includes elements such as an easy-to-navigate interface, appropriate use of graphics and images, well-written and well-placed text, and a color scheme. Your site's performance refers to its speed, ranking, searchability, and ability to capture your audience.

Visual elements

Here's a quick overview of the elements you should consider while designing your

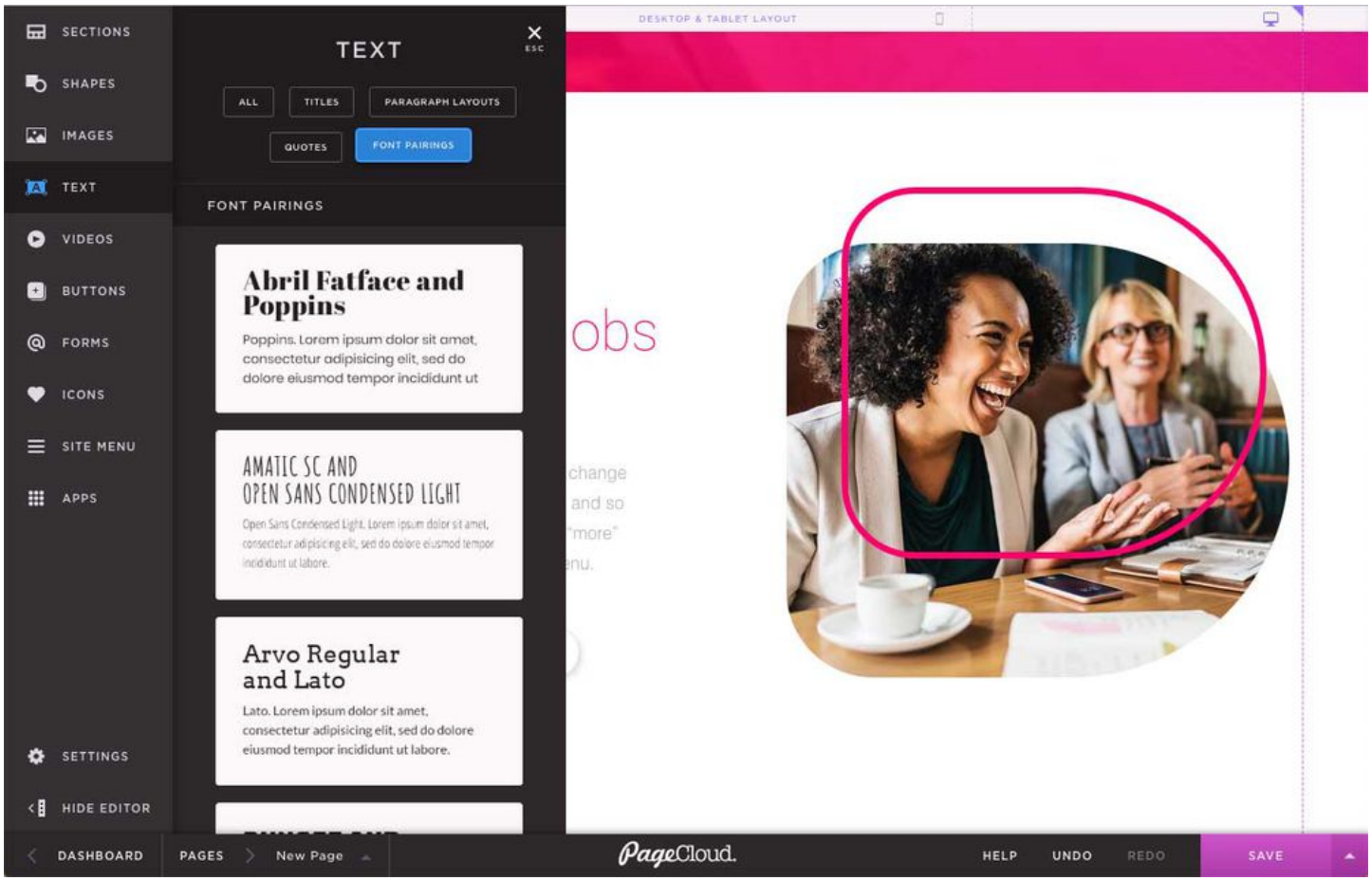
website to make sure everything works well together. Each section will provide tips and tricks to help you get started.

Written copy

Fundamentally, your website's appearance and text go hand-in-hand. It's important to have your content writers and designers work together in order to create a cohesive design with balanced elements. Focus on creating chunks of text (using text blocks) in order to compliment your graphics and images.

Fonts

Choose a font that compliments your overall design. Font should pair with your color scheme, graphics, images, and strengthen the overall tone of your website. Tools like Canva's Font Combinator can help you find a perfect match for your font. Web design tools like PageCloud even include numerous font pairings within their app.



Colors

Colors are one of the most important elements to consider when designing a website. Keep in mind there are many misconceptions about the psychology of color, and it's more important to focus on colors that compliment your overall design and tone of your website. Align your color scheme with your brand and the messages you want to convey to your audience.



Layout

How you decide to arrange your content will have a dramatic impact on both the usability and functionality of your site. There are no specific rules to follow when choosing a layout, however, there are a few main principles to keep in mind. Make sure to consider the needs of your target audience and avoid using an overstimulating layout that might detract from the messages you want to convey.

Shapes

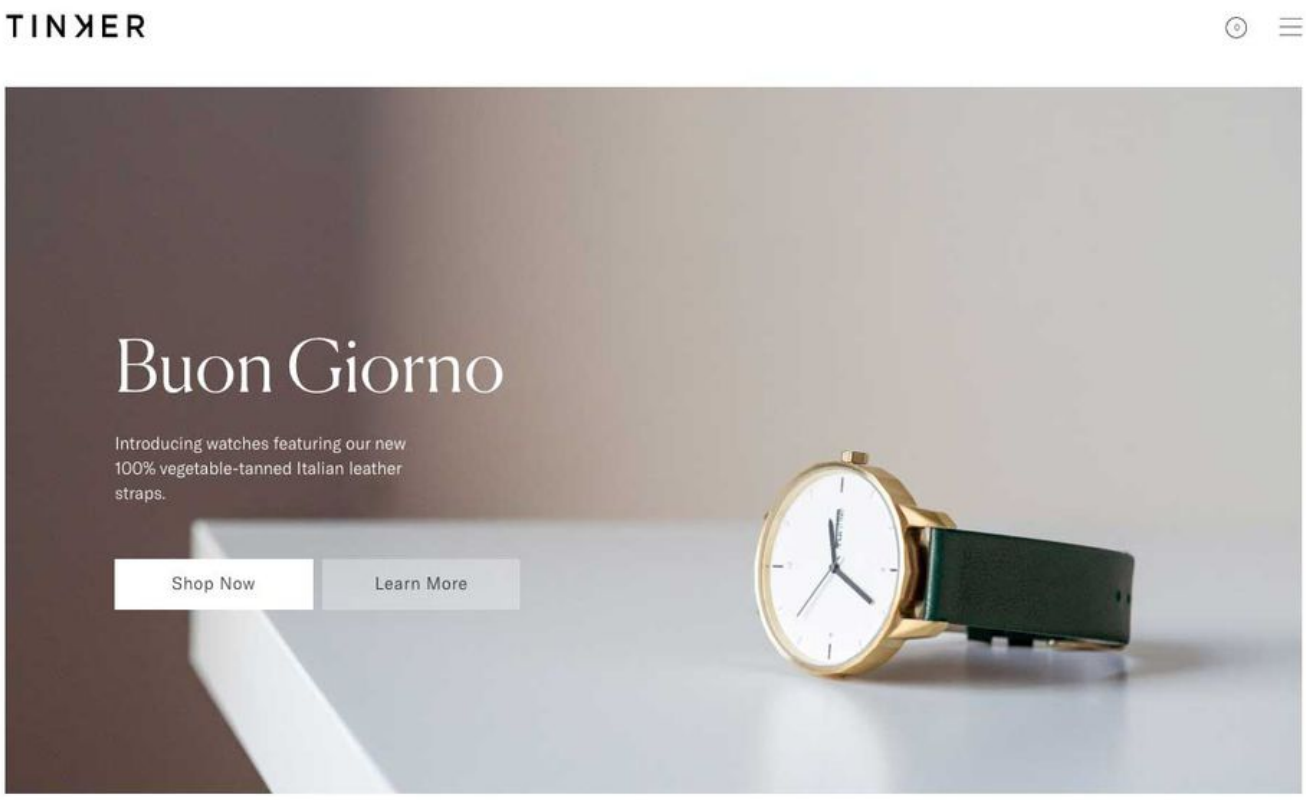
The use of graphic elements in web design can help seamlessly integrate text and images, and help with the site's overall appearance. Combining beautiful colors and

shapes can help direct the attention of your sites visitors and contribute to your site's overall flow.



Spacing

Spacing is a key element to creating visually pleasing and easy to navigate websites. Every element in your design will incorporate spacing in one way or another. Appropriate use of whitespace is crucial in creating a design that perfectly balances text, photos, and graphics. Keeping your spacing consistent can help your users navigate your website with ease. The concept of whitespace is definitely a priority of modern web designers.



Images & Icons

Amazing designs can communicate a lot of information in just a few seconds. This is made possible with the use of powerful images and icons. Choose images and icons that support and strengthen your message. A quick Google search for stock images and icons will generate thousands of options. To help simplify your search, here are a few favourites:

Free images and icons

- Pexels
- Unsplash
- IconMonstr

Premium images and icons

- Shutterstock (Getty)

Videos

Integrating videos into web design is becoming increasingly popular amongst designers. When used properly, videos can help your users experience or understand a message that can’t be properly conveyed through text or image. Keep in mind that like having a TV screen on in a restaurant, visitors’ eyes will be drawn to moving images. Make sure your videos don’t compete with or detract from other important elements.

Functional elements

These functional elements are imperative to consider when designing your website. A website that functions properly is crucial for ranking highly on search engines, and giving your users the best possible experience.

Navigation

Your website's navigation is one of the main elements that determines whether your website is functioning properly. Depending on your audience, your navigation can serve multiple purposes: helping first time visitors discover what your site has to offer, giving easy access to your pages for returning visitors, and improving every visitor's overall experience. Check out these best practices for more tips on navigation.

User Interactions

Your site visitors have multiple ways of interacting with your site depending on their device (scrolling, clicking, typing, etc.). The best website designs simplify these interactions to give the user the sense that they are in control. Here are a few examples:

- Never auto-play audio or videos
  Never underline text unless its clickable
- Make sure all forms are mobile-friendly
- Avoid pop ups
- Avoid scroll-jacking

Animations

There are tons of web animation techniques that can help your design grab visitor's attention, and allow your visitors to interact with your site by giving feedback. For example, adding "like" buttons or forms can keep your site's visitors engaged. If you're new to web design, we'd recommend keeping your animations simple to avoid developer intervention.

Speed

No one likes a slow website. Having to wait more than a few seconds for a page to load can quickly deter a visitor from remaining on or returning to your site. Regardless of how beautiful, if your site doesn't load quickly, it will not perform well in search (i.e. won't rank high on Google).

Top site builders typically compress your content for faster load times, however, there are no guarantees. Make sure to research which site builders will work best for the content you will have on your site. For example, PageCloud optimizes your images to ensure fast loading times for sites with large and/or multiple photos.

Site structure

A website's structure plays an important role in both user experience (UX) and search engine optimization (SEO). Your users should be able to easily navigate through your website without encountering any structural issues. If users are getting lost while attempting to navigate through your site, chances are "crawlers" are too. A crawler (or bot) is an automated program that searches through your website and can determine its functionality. Poor navigation can lead to a poor user experience and site ranking.

Cross-browser & cross-device compatibility

A great design should look polished on all devices and browsers (yes, even Internet Explorer). If you're building your site from scratch, we'd recommend using a **cross-browser testing tool** to make this tedious process faster and more efficient. On the other hand, if you're using a website building platform, the cross-browser testing is typically taken care of by the company's development team allowing you to focus on design.

Types of Website Design: Adaptive vs. Responsive

Understanding the pros and cons of adaptive and responsive websites will help you determine which website builder will work best for your website design needs.

You might come across articles online that talk about a whole bunch of different website design styles (fixed, static, fluid, etc.). However, in today's mobile-centric world, there are only two website styles to use to properly design a website: adaptive and responsive.

Adaptive websites

Adaptive web design uses two or more versions of a website that are customized for specific screen sizes. Adaptive websites can be split into two main categories based upon how the site detects what size needs to be displayed:

1. Adapts based on device type

When your browser connects to a website, the HTTP request will include a field called "user-agent" that will inform the server about the type of device attempting to view the page. The adaptive website will know what version of the site to display based on what device is trying to reach it (i.e. desktop, mobile, tablet). Issues will arise if you shrink the browser window on a desktop because the page will continue to display the "desktop version" rather than shrinking to the new size.

2. Adapts based on browser width

Instead of using the "user-agent", the website uses media queries (a CSS feature that

enables a webpage to adapt to different screen sizes) and breakpoints (certain width sizes) to switch between versions. So instead of having a desktop, tablet, and mobile version, you will have 1080px, 768px, and 480px width versions. This offers more flexibility when designing, and a better viewing experience as your website will adapt based on screen width.

Pros

- WYSIWYG editing (what you see is what you get)
- Custom designs are faster and easier to build without code
- Cross-browser and cross-device compatibility
- Fast-loading pages

Cons

- Websites that use “device-type” can look broken when viewed in a smaller browser window on a desktop
- Limitations on certain effects that only responsive sites can accomplish

Responsive Websites

Responsive websites can use flexible grid layouts that are based on the percentage each element takes up in its container: if one element (e.g. a header) is 25% of its container, that element will stay at 25% no matter the change in screen size. Responsive websites can also use breakpoints to create a custom look at every screen size, but unlike adaptive sites that adapt only when they hit a breakpoint, responsive websites are constantly changing according to the screen size.

Pros

- Great experience at every screen size, regardless of the device type
- Responsive website builders are typically rigid which makes the design hard to “break”
- Tons of available templates to start from

Cons

- Requires extensive design and testing to ensure quality (when starting from scratch)
- Without accessing the code, custom designs can be challenging

It’s important to note that website builders can include both adaptive and responsive features. For example, PageCloud recently introduced a series of features that allow your content to act responsive even though the website itself is still adaptive.

Adaptive Website Builders

Wix and PageCloud are arguably the two best visual website builders on the market today. Both use an adaptive approach, meaning their drag-and-drop and WYSIWYG capabilities are second to none. You can build just about anything without having to write a single line of code.

Wix has been around since 2006 and has since developed a wide range of features and templates to suit just about every business need. Today, it's considered one of the easiest tools for beginners.

Wix has been around since 2006 and has since developed a wide range of features and templates to suit just about every business need. Today, it's considered one of the easiest tools for beginners.

Although it's hard to choose a winner in this category, here are few things to keep in mind:

- If you're looking for the most customizable experience, choose PageCloud.
- If you're looking for something really easy and don't have much design experience, choose Wix.
- If you're looking to work with a developer, choose PageCloud.
- If you want many template options, choose Wix.
- If you like shortcuts and the experience found in desktop publishing apps, choose PageCloud.

As both platforms offer free trials, we'd recommend trying them both before deciding.

Responsive Website Builders

Tools like Squarespace offer responsive website builders, however, this means your editing experience is more limited. Creating a fluid responsive website is hard, and without knowing how to code, it is nearly impossible to build unique websites using responsive website builders.

This is where more complex web design tools, like Webflow and Froont, come into play. Here are some of the pros and cons to consider when looking to adopt one of these tools:

- Ability to create custom responsive sites without having to write code
- Unmatched control over every element on the page
- Ability to export code to host elsewhere

Cons

- Complex tools with steep learning curves
- Slower design process than adaptive website builders

E-commerce

E-commerce websites are an important part of website design. Creating an online store that is easy to navigate, informative, and accurately displays your products is crucial to creating the best online shopping experience for your customers.

Next Steps

Hopefully this article helped you to better understand the essentials in web design. To review, let’s take a look at some key elements in designing a website that is both beautiful and functional:

1. The user always comes first: user experience should be at the forefront of your design, as your users will ultimately be the ones to determine whether your website is worth visiting.

2. Choose the best website builder for your needs: ask yourself what your website’s major functions will be, and choose a website builder that will ensure those needs are met.

3. Balancing visual elements: it’s important to maintain a balance between your text, graphics, multimedia, and color scheme to avoid an overstimulating website that detracts from the messages you are trying to convey.

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