



Visual Communication through Web Design

Web design has become a dominant factor in how well your business communicates online. Design elements should work seamlessly with written messaging to create connection in obvious ways. When properly considered, web design also works for your business in ways that are psychologically and emotionally subtle, yet still very effective.

To better understand some of the psychology behind making your best decisions in web design, we spoke with San Francisco web design expert Melvin Ram of Web Design Company, Inc.



Basic Design Principles

Ram states that there are some basic, underlying design principles that will make a significant difference in your web designs. He suggests reducing it to the core design elements that blend within any visual piece. "Line, shape, form, value, space, color and texture will all work together to make your work resonate, so these are the variables you will look to optimize," says Ram.

Identify Your Goals

Like other forms of online optimization, to make the most of your website design efforts, you need to begin by setting realistic goals and a means to test and measure your results. Ram states, "The goals driving a business' optimized web design focus on three main areas:

- To clearly communicate, making it easy for users to understand the message;
- To instill the confidence required to build trust;
- To provoke the emotional and logical responses needed to encourage action."

"By always returning to these goals to drive and balance the decisions being made along the way," states Ram, "your creative process remains trained on achieving the best possible return on investment (ROI). If a change or decision being made can't be clearly justified through one or more of these filters, it is a change or decision worth reconsidering."

Testing Design Changes

Testing the effects of design changes might be handled through:

- focus groups,
- using visual tracking created from click-based "heat" maps,
- split-testing (or A/B testing),
- multivariate testing

"Split-testing is a great way to optimize your conversion rates," states Ram. "If you want to know how people are interacting and moving within your design, split-testing or heat-mapping will give you the data needed to make informed decisions." He adds, "Design decisions supported by data are the best decisions you can make."

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Ram suggests that in optimizing web design, it is critical to identify where the eye is first attracted and how the user's attention then flows through the web page. Using strategic variations of the core design elements he mentions, you can focus and then guide this user attention to reach very specific areas of your website.

"When testing changes to the core design elements, it is important that you properly isolate your results," says Ram. "Changing multiple aspects of your design for each test simply makes it harder to determine the root cause for any change in user behavior. The more tests you perform, the stronger your case becomes for making one design decision over another."

With clearly defined business goals in place and a means to measure and test them, you are ready to consider the deeper psychology of professional design.

End of part one of this two-part feature.

Part two of this feature will cover "Using Design to Persuade" and offer insight into: Selecting site imagery, The Emotional Side of Color, Bringing focus to your core ideas, and the thoughts behind proper use of negative or "white" space.