



## Common Web Site Mistakes

Creating and maintaining a Web site is a lot of work. Sometimes, it is hard for us webmasters to view our Web sites with a critical eye to identify areas that need improving. Vincent Flanders' article "Biggest Mistakes in Web Design 1995-2015" and accompanying checklists identify common mistakes that Web designers make. Consider the following list of common errors, taken from Flanders' article and checklists, when you analyze your Web site:

**1 The Web site exists to meet the designer's needs, instead of the visitor's needs.** When setting out to design a Web site, it is important to keep in mind that people visit Web sites because they want/need one of four things: a) information, b) to make a purchase or donation, c) to be entertained, or d) to be part of a community. If your Web site does not meet the needs of your target audience, they will look elsewhere.

In order to avoid making this mistake, you need to know your target audience and understand what information they want/need, and design your site to provide them with this information. Ask yourself, "Who do I want to visit my site?" and "What information do my visitors need to find? Is it easily located?" If you are having difficulty approaching your site with an unbiased perspective, you may want to recruit a fellow LWMLer from your local society or a non-LWML member from your community to visit your site and give you candid feedback.

*More information on identifying your target audience and designing your site to meet their needs can be found in the January 2008 edition of Cyber Scoop <http://lwml.org/resources/webmasters/>.*

**2 Your Web site's message is unclear.** It should take less than four seconds for a visitor to scan your Web site and determine what it is about. If your home page does not convey that the site is dedicated to information about the Lutheran Women's Missionary League, it is unlikely that a visitor will surf through the rest of the site to

discover what your message is about.

To communicate your site's message clearly, be sure to include keywords in your headings. For example, use words like missionary, spiritual growth, Lutheran, and women. In addition, include a logo in the top left-hand corner of the page. Your logo should communicate graphically what the LWML is all about. A quick scan of your home page should provide a visitor with a basic understanding of LWML. Using short, clear statements in your home page text will identify who you are and what you are about; visitors captured by this introduction are more likely to navigate deeper into your Web site.

Each page of your Web site should reflect the underlying message of your site. Reiterate keywords and continuously ask yourself, "How does this information support the message of the LWML and of my district?"

*More information on designing your Web site with a clear message can be found in the February 2008 edition of Cyber Scoop <http://lwml.org/resources/webmasters/>.*

**3 Your Web site is not aesthetically pleasing.** In the world of Web design, looks are important. The visual stimulus of a Web site will determine how long a visitor will remain on the site. Visual appeal is a combination of appropriate color, text font and size, page length, and graphic quality.

If a visitor to your site is greeted with mismatched colors in the text and/or background, they are not likely to stay. In the worst case scenario, a visitor may not even be able to read what is on your Web site. For example, choosing a pale yellow font color on top of a white background makes the text almost impossible to distinguish. Vincent Flanders recommends using a white or cream-colored background with a dark font for your text.

Text size is also important. Attempting to cram a large amount of information onto a single page by reducing the text size makes reading the text difficult.

## Have a Famous, not an Infamous, Site

My local newspaper is infamous. In fact, hardly a day goes by that I don't hear or participate in a conversation about a story that has run in the morning paper. Are you curious as to why this publication is so popular? It's not because my community is full of exciting news (quite the contrary, in reality). The reason our local paper is renowned is because not a day goes by that a typographical or grammatical error, misstated headline, or week-old news story doesn't greet us when we sit down for our morning coffee. The editorial staff typically utilizes more column space for corrections than it does for new stories. Yep, it's that bad. The most popular reason for subscribing to the paper is that there aren't any other options.

Unlike my local paper, Web sites exist in an intensely competitive environment. Each time you visit the World Wide Web and do a topical search, you are inundated with options for sites that contain the information you seek. I don't know about you, but when I am sifting through a haystack of Web sites trying to locate my needle, I will discount immediately any site I visit that appears unprofessional. Misspelled words, formatting errors, and other similar indications of dishevelment raise my suspicions about the authenticity and professionalism of the site, and I exit. It is imperative that the strictest attention be paid to LWML district Web sites to ensure that the presentation of our information conveys a message of professionalism and expertise.

This edition of *Cyber Scoop* is dedicated to providing you with the tools you need to make your district Web site attract and retain visitors.

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Additionally, using too large a font reduces the number of words you can fit on a single line, increasing the length of your page. The font style you select (i.e. New Times Roman, Verdana, etc.) will influence the size that is appropriate. To select an appropriate size, you may wish to ask someone else to view your Web site and give you feedback. Your visitor should not have to squint to read your text, nor should they have to keep their hand on the mouse to scroll down a lengthy page.

When writing content for your Web site, avoid underlining text that you wish to emphasize. Underlined text on a Web page indicates a hyperlink. For emphasizing text, use **bold** or *italicized* fonts.

Each page on your Web site should convey one main idea. Too many ideas on a single page creates confusion for the reader, and typically results in lengthy pages. If you can't fit the information you want to convey into a page that is no more than two 'Scroll Downs' in length, you should consider separating the information into subtopics on unique pages.

One final point related to aesthetically pleasing Web sites: graphics. It is better to create a site void of graphics than it is to clutter one with poor graphics. A bad graphic is one that is large in file size (meaning it takes longer for the Internet browser to load the site), is pixelated or fuzzy, or is used without permission from the copyright owner. For example, Microsoft Office Clip Art is copyrighted, and should not be used on Web sites. The national LWML Web site has a Logos and Style Sheet page ([www.lwml.org/resources/Logos\\_and\\_Style\\_Sheet.htm](http://www.lwml.org/resources/Logos_and_Style_Sheet.htm)) with downloadable graphics for you to use.

*More information about selecting a text style and about working with graphics can be found online in the April 2008 edition of Cyber Scoop (<http://lwml.org/resources/webmasters/>).*

**4 The technical elements of your site are non-functional or are not user-friendly.** There is nothing more frustrating than selecting a link on a Web site, only to discover that it is broken. Finding more than one broken link on a site almost certainly deters your visitor from attempting another link and remaining on your site. Links that are at the greatest risk for breaking are those that direct your visitor to a different Web site. The URL addresses of other sites can change

without your knowledge, leaving your site with a broken link. One way to avoid numerous broken links is to minimize the number of links you provide to outside Web pages. If you do provide outside links, choose sites of respected organizations that are expected to exist perpetually. In addition, try to avoid linking your site to an internal page of the foreign site. For example, if you wish to provide your visitors with a link to Bible study resources from Concordia Publishing House, use the home page URL ([www.cph.org](http://www.cph.org)), rather than the Bible Study page URL (<http://www.cph.org/cphstore/category.asp?find%5Fcategory=79977&find%5Fdescription=Bible%20Studies&NU=0>). These internal page URLs are much more likely to change, resulting in broken links on your Web site.

Web sites that are difficult to navigate are not visited frequently. At a minimum, your Web site should contain a navigation bar, a menu of the most important topics within the Web site that visitors can utilize to move through the site. Site maps provide a more detailed navigational tool for visitors. The site map should be organized so that it makes sense to a visitor who is unfamiliar with the LWML. For example, an alphabetical listing of your site's content would be easier to understand than arranging content according to committees (i.e. Human Care Committee).

When you create links and design navigational tools for your site, be sure to communicate where the link will take the visitor. Do not simply put 'Click Here'; include a description of where the link will take you ('Click here for more information about Mission Grants,' for example). Another common mistake with links is to use jargon or acronyms when identifying where the link will take you. Instead of listing 'MAGS' on your navigation bar, write out 'Mission Advocacy and Grants.'

**5 The content on your site is outdated, is not what people are looking for, is incorrect, or is difficult to find.** If you do not visit your own Web site frequently, no one else will, either. Updating the content on your site is imperative for retaining visitors. No one wants to re-read the same information they read last month or last year; make your visitors curious about what new information they will find on the site.

And, ask for feedback from visitors to your site! Make yourself available to them

## Devil is in the Details

Another resource to utilize as you review your district's Web site is the LWML Style Sheet, available on the national LWML Web site under the Resources link (<http://lwml.org/resources/index.htm>). This valuable tool outlines proper phonetics and grammar in LWML publications and communications.

## More Resources...

- For checking for broken links: <http://validator.w3.org/checklink>
- For ensuring that your site content is not too 'smart' for your audience: <http://juicystudio.com/services/readability.php>
- For checking the color contrast between your text and background: <http://juicystudio.com/services/colorcontrast.php>
- For checking your page's performance and Web page speed: [www.websiteoptimization.com/services/analyze](http://www.websiteoptimization.com/services/analyze)
- For determining the first five keywords you use to describe your site: [www.instantposition.com](http://www.instantposition.com)

for questions or comments. The Web Site Task Force suggests using an alias\* e-mail to direct communication from visitors on your Web site to your personal e-mail account. When you have the opportunity to interact with LWML members in your district, ask them what they like or dislike about the Web site. Communicating with your audience will increase the likelihood that you will be able to provide them with the information they need from your site.

Do not put anything on your Web site that cannot be validated. As mentioned before with graphics, it is better to have a Web site with a small amount of factual information than to have a site that is filled with half-truths or unsubstantiated claims. Your site represents more than just your district, you represent the entire LWML organization, and the integrity of the LWML is at stake.

*\*More information on alias e-mail addresses can be found in the February 2009 edition of Cyber Scoop (<http://lwml.org/resources/webmasters/>).*

*Information for this article derived from Vincent Flanders ([www.webpagesthatsuck.com](http://www.webpagesthatsuck.com)).*