HANDS-ON HTML

WEB SITE DESIGN DOS AND DON'TS

There are a number of essential points to keep in mind when you are putting your Web site together. To ensure you don't overlook them, we have put together a list of our five top design tips for your information and guidance. Aren't we nice?

1. KNOW YOUR GOALS
Take time to determine what your Web site is intended for, and stick to you plan when you are designing your Web pages. The stronger the vision you have for your site, the more structure you can bring to it and the better it will be as a result.

2. STATE YOUR PURPOSE
Ensure that your pages are identified. This can be as simple as providing headings and a brief description of the content of the pages. Also make sure you have provided an e-mail address where readers can contact you.

3. KEEP THE DESIGN SIMPLE AND BE CONSISTENT
Make your pages clean and

uncluttered and try to keep it that way through the entire site. Pages that contain massive amounts of text are typically not read, so instead of bunging in a huge wad of text, separate it into segments by using sensible links and provide a table of contents on the home page. (For more on creating contents table, see our tip of the month box on page 95). Try to restrict yourself to only one or two topics per page.

4. LINK HOME
Make sure you provide links from every page on your Web site back to your home page. If you have designed your home page as a table of contents for the rest of the site, it will provide a strong reference point and will prevent your readers from feeling lost.

5. KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE
Structure your language, vocabulary and syntax to suit the readers you are aiming at. If your readers are using a particular browser, develop the site using that browser.

2. EXTERNAL LINKS

To link to a page on the Web, you will need to know its Uniform Resource Locator (URL). The URL is the page's Internet address as shown in the location box of your browser. The information contained within the URL includes how the page is to be obtained, what machine the page is stored on, where the

page is on that machine and what the page is called. To add the URL to your link, you'd use the following:

<A HREF="http://www.futurenet.co.uk">Futurenet</A>

This specifies the full URL as the link destination. If you link to other sites

though, you need to be careful to check on a regular basis that the link works. It's possible that it may have changed without warning as you generally don't control the location of the destination page. Also keep in mind that since this is an Internet link, you'll need to be connected to the Internet for it to work.

3. OTHER LINKS

You can make a link to anything that exists on the Web, including pictures, sound files, movie files, Telnet sites and more. The browser deals with these by using helper applications called plug-ins which you can download from the Internet. For more information on plug-ins, take a look at the About Plug-ins section of your browser menu. When you click on these sound or movie files, your browser launches the appropriate plug-in which then runs the file.
        If you wanted to route a link to a newsgroup, you would do the following:

<A HREF="news:alt.elvis.sightings">Elvis sightings

This would bring up articles in the alt.elvis.sightings newsgroup. You could link

to a Telnet session like this:

<A HREF="telnet://pctravel.com">PCTravel</A>

Clicking on PCTravel would then start up the Telnet session. Alternatively, you could log on to an FTP server where you could download software:

<A HREF="ftp://ftp.sausage.com/pub/hdp2inst.exe">Hot Dog Pro</A>

Clicking on Hot Dog Pro would start downloading that program from the location ftp.sausage.com.
        Keeping this in mind, don't be afraid to put different sorts of files on your page as there is bound to be a way for readers to run them. You could even provide a link for them to download the appropriate plug-in in case they don't

have it. You may also want to elicit some feedback from your readers by including a mailing address. This is done by using the mailto facility. On the page, it looks a bit like a normal hypertext link, but it will automatically open an addressed e-mail window from which the user can type in a message and send it to you.
        The markup is a variation of the normal link tag but contains the e-mail address like this:

<A HREF="mailto:netmag@futurenet.co.uk">e-mail .net magazine</A>

The purpose of this is to get your name in there. As well as making the whole thing a little less impersonal, it ensures that your reader isn't scratching his or her head wondering who or what you are. **n&**

HANDY HINTS

You can't do without .net when it comes to advice and hints for setting up your own site. But that doesn't mean you can't pinch ideas from elsewhere as well. Here are a few sites on the Web that might provide you with some ideas for structuring your own pages.

http://www.intel.com/contents.htm
A good example of a site that has an efficient table of

contents. Apart from it providing a quick way for people to find what they want, it is also super fast to download. Worth a look.

http://www.demon.co.uk/london-calling/content.html
Created for Londoners who are looking for something to do rather than for visitors from out-of-town and it is perfect for those who shun tired guide books and are looking for the hippest things

to do in London. This site is a good example of a smart use of links in and around a Web site.

http://www.webpagesthatsuck.com/home.html
One of the best ways to make your own site better is to learn from the things that make other sites bad. For a good laugh and a healthy supply of pretentious pages, have a look at this site.

To create really good Web pages, it helps if you know what bad design looks like. The Web Pages That Suck site shows you what to avoid.