More Effective Web Page Elements for Classroom Support

**Gerald Boerner, Grace Boerner
David McGill, Patricia Skalnik &
Paul Verdugo**
Azusa Pacific University

Syllabus 2000 Conference

Questions to Ponder about Effective Sites

A number of serious questions need to be addressed by any instructional support web site…

Think about These Issues…

- **What organizational objectives and resources are available on the site?**
- **What do you want the site to do (short & long term) for the class?**
- **Who is your intended audience for this class web site? Can the audience be segmented? If so, how?**

Think about These Issues… (Cont'd)

- **What content and functionality will the site contain? How will users find information on the site — organization, navigation, labeling, searching systems?**
- **How will you monitor and maintain the site? How often will this be done?**

Think about These Issues… (Cont'd)

- **Review other web sites. What do you like/dislike about other sites? What would your audience(s) like/dislike?**
- **What is your vision of the web site? How would it "feel" (aesthetics)?**

Think about These Issues… (Cont'd)

- **Is the site "professional" looking?**
- **Are your audiences returning? How will you know?**
- **Did you copyright your ideas?**

(The above questions are contributed by Dr. Patricia Skalnik, School of Business, Azusa Pacific University)

M.A.P. for Effective Web Page Elements

We must consider the following context for determining whether a web page element is effective or not...

Basic Rules of Web Page Design

■ **Rule #1:**
 ◆ The purpose of having your Web site is the foundation for all your design decisions on content and design

■ **Rule #2:**
 ◆ Your audience's wants and needs come first, yours come second! Usability is #1!

July (2000)   More Effective Web Page Elements for Classroom Support   8

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Remember to MAP out your Web site

■ **Message**
 ◆ What is the message you wish to convey through your web page or web site?

■ **Audience**
 ◆ Who is your intended audience? What are their characteristics — both demographic and psychographic?

■ **Purpose**
 ◆ What is the purpose of having a web page or a web site?

July (2000)   More Effective Web Page Elements for Classroom Support   9

_____

_____

_____

_____

Top 10 "Pet Peeves" of Web Site Users

Let's proceed to examine what "bugs" web users and how we can address these issues...

Before we start...

■ **Excellent References on Web Site Effectiveness...**
  ◆ **Fleming (1998)** *Web Navigation: Designing the User Experience*. O'Reilly [15659-23510]
  ◆ **Nielsen (1999)** *Designing Web Usability*. New Riders Publishing [15620-5810X]
  ◆ **Rosenfeld & Morville (1998)** *Information Architecture for the World Wide Web*. O'Reilly [15659-22824]

July (2000)   More Effective Web Page Elements for Classroom Support   **11**

Other References...

■ **Web Sites**
  ◆ **Jakob Nielsen's AlertBox (ZDNet) —** http://www.zdnet.com/devhead/alertbox/index.html **This is an all-around good site for web design issues...**

■ **Our Article**
  ◆ **Boerner, et. al. "Elements of Effective Web Pages,"** *Syllabus Magazine*, **April, 2000.**

July (2000)   More Effective Web Page Elements for Classroom Support   **12**

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

The Approach to our Analysis

- **The following "Top 10" List will present key user "pet peeves" in the order of importance, stressing:**
  - ◆ **What DON'T users like…**
  - ◆ **What can be done to remedy the problem with the web site, and**
  - ◆ **Examples of the principle, with a focus on GOOD examples!**

July (2000)   More Effective Web Page Elements for Classroom Support   **13**

1 Confusing Web Site Organization

- **If the web site developer does not understand the structure of their information, how can the user?**
- **Decisions:**
  - ◆ **Breadth vs. Depth**
  - ◆ **Logical Grouping vs. Flat Structure**
  - ◆ **"Chunking" (Short Pages) vs. Articles**
  - ◆ **Static vs. Dynamic Web Pages**

July (2000)   More Effective Web Page Elements for Classroom Support   **14**

2 Difficulty in Navigating the Web Site

- **Can the user FIND appropriate information on your web site?**
- **Decisions:**
  - ◆ **Uniformity vs. Uniqueness**
  - ◆ **Logical Navigation arises from a logical Web Structure**
  - ◆ **Is the site "Bobby" (ADA) compliant?**
  - ◆ **KISS Principle!**

July (2000)   More Effective Web Page Elements for Classroom Support   **15**

3 Poor Graphic & Layout Design

- **Does the site use good graphic and layout design, or is it just "flashy"?**
- **Decisions:**
  - ◆ Color scheme, typography, etc.
  - ◆ Maintaining graphic "integrity"
  - ◆ Consistency on element placement
  - ◆ Compatible with the user's visual tendencies!

July (2000)   More Effective Web Page Elements for Classroom Support   **16**

4 Inappropriate Content for Audience

- **Does your site "reach" your intended audience(s)?**
- **Content is irrelevant if the user doesn't stay on the page**
- **Decisions:**
  - ◆ What is "tone" of the site?
  - ◆ How will multiple audiences respond?
  - ◆ How can the site "shape" behaviors?

July (2000)   More Effective Web Page Elements for Classroom Support   **17**

5 Lack of Attention to Details

- **Mechanics, mechanics, etc.**
- **Academic sites MUST model good use of language, spelling, grammar, etc.**
- **Decisions:**
  - ◆ Language of the user (English vs. ??)
  - ◆ Globalization of site...
  - ◆ Display & Browser issues

July (2000)   More Effective Web Page Elements for Classroom Support   **18**

6 Lack of Content Currency

- **The core of an class support web site!**
- **Must be revised or it becomes irrelevant...**
- **Decisions:**
  - ◆ **How maintained (FP2K, HTML, etc.)**
  - ◆ **Limited access to class members**
  - ◆ **Timeliness of content for discipline...**

July (2000)   More Effective Web Page Elements for Classroom Support   **19**

7 Broken or Inappropriate Links

- **The constant problem with web sites — external sites change & so must your links!**
- **Decisions:**
  - ◆ **How do you check your links?**
  - ◆ **How often do you check links?**
  - ◆ **Maintaining vigilance on external content**
  - ◆ **Content becomes out-of-date**

July (2000)   More Effective Web Page Elements for Classroom Support   **20**

8 Gratuitous Use of "Bells & Whistles"

- **Remember, animation is a "pre-potent" web page element!**
- **Animation and activity is, by itself, neutral; the value comes in "the details"**
- **Multimedia is GOOD when it enhances the message!**

July (2000)　　More Effective Web Page Elements for Classroom Support　　**21**

8 "Bells & Whistles" (Cont'd)

- **Decisions:**
  - ◆ **When do animations enhance your site?**
  - ◆ **Should you use GIF Animations, JavaScript Animations, or Flash?**
  - ◆ **When is video needed and justified?**
  - ◆ **What requirements does the use of multimedia require a certain browser and/or plug-ins?**
  - ◆ **What is the effect on bandwidth?**

July (2000)　　More Effective Web Page Elements for Classroom Support　　**22**

9 Web Sites as Showcase for Designer

- **The difference between "vanity" sites and good class support sites lies in usability!**
- **Does the site promote content or just show off the latest web "widgets" and techniques?**
- **Basically, for whom is the site designed?**

July (2000)   More Effective Web Page Elements for Classroom Support   **23**

9 Web Sites as Showcase for Designer

- **Decisions:**
  - ◆ **Does the site focus on the information needs of the user?**
  - ◆ **Do the techniques and "do-dads" contribute to the viewing experience?**
  - ◆ **Have "good" elements been misused and/or abused?**
  - ◆ **Do users have the bandwidth with which to view the page?**

July (2000)   More Effective Web Page Elements for Classroom Support   **24**

10 Sites "Under Construction"

■ **While a necessary transition, some sites never are finished!**

■ **Placeholder pages may be required for a "good" web site architecture, but should you define them if you can't support them?**

10 Sites "Under Construction"

■ **Decisions:**

◆ **Can your web editor perform some update tasks automatically at specified intervals?**

◆ **How much functionality can a class support web site include within the full responsibilities of the faculty member?**

◆ **What is reasonable?**

Some Final Thoughts…

**Let's examine a couple of
overall techniques for
maintaining "good" web sites…**

Determining User Characteristics

- **Developing a web site must be based upon certain assumptions, such as:**
  - ◆ Browsers to support
  - ◆ Languages to support
  - ◆ Time Zone issues
  - ◆ Operating Systems
  - ◆ Technologies that can be used

July (2000)　　　More Effective Web Page Elements for Classroom Support　　　**28**

User Characteristics (Cont'd)

- **An example: SiteMeter**
  - ◆ A free web monitoring service at http://www.sitemeter.com
  - ◆ Provides weekly reports of web and page "hits"
  - ◆ A very usable function for determining the characteristics of your visitors…

July (2000)　　　More Effective Web Page Elements for Classroom Support　　　**29**

Checking your Links

- **Maintaining links must be a scheduled task, not an afterthought!**
- **Options vary from the simple (and cheap) to the sophisticated (and expensive)**
- **Some options...**

July (2000)   More Effective Web Page Elements for Classroom Support   30

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Boerner & Boerner: Developing Online, Web-based Support Materials...

Contact Information

**For more information, and/or
to exchange your thoughts and
ideas, use the following...**

Gerald Boerner, Group Leader

■ **APU Office**
   ◆ **(626) 815-5322**
■ **Email**
   ◆ **Jboerner@apu.edu** or
   ◆ **Jboerner@boerner.net**
■ **Web Site**
   ◆ **http://www.boerner.net**

July (2000)   More Effective Web Page Elements for Classroom Support   32