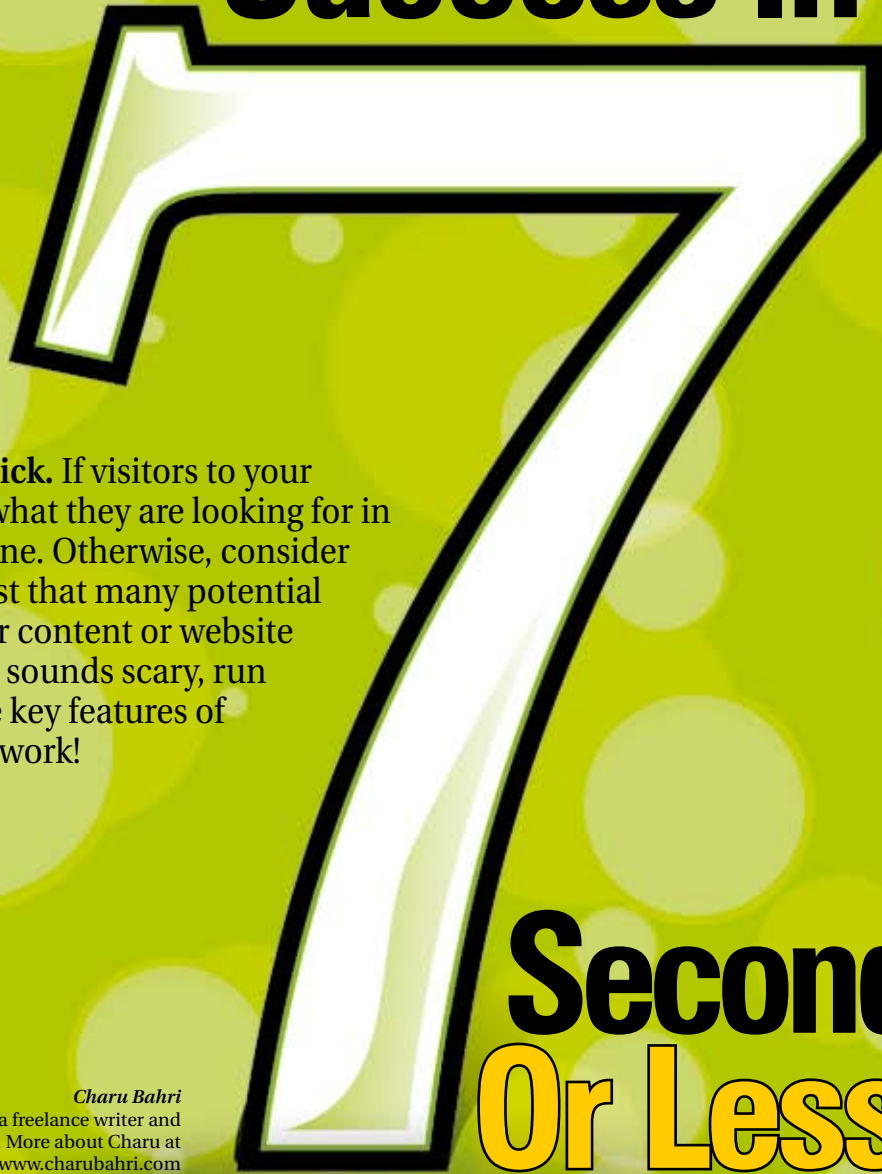


# Success In



# Seconds Or Less!

**Click, click, click.** If visitors to your website find what they are looking for in three clicks, fine. Otherwise, consider that you've lost that many potential clients to poor content or website design. If that sounds scary, run through these key features of websites that work!

*Charu Bahri*





The author is a freelance writer and columnist. More about Charu at <http://www.charubahri.com>

**C**reating a successful website is not rocket science. It does, however, involve following a step-by-step approach, which starts with appropriate website design.

### **Setting goals for the design**

So, what do you need to know about website design? Most importantly, your design team must be guided by a clear purpose. All successful sites are carefully

crafted to achieve a purpose, i.e., to meet the objective articulated by your organisation. Website design is not only about looking good, or following the latest trends. In other words, allow your website's form (looks) to follow its function. Are you clear about what function your website is expected to perform? This table may help your team members chart the way forward for your website by identifying the goals set for it, and using these to guide the process of design.

Function	Aim	Design suggestions	Examples
E-commerce	Decrease bounce rates	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. "Online shoppers have largely got used to a standard design, like Amazon.com," opines online media specialist Manu Srikumar. "Use standard lists, good product visuals, and no jazz to distract potential clients from the act of buying."</li> <li>2. Draw attention to RSS feed subscription buttons, as this is a great way to keep potential clients abreast of the latest products and offers.</li> </ol>	<p>www.amazon.com www.ebay.com</p> 
To deliver information (news / blogs)	Increase the number of subscribers to your website, increase RSS feed subscribers.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Minimalist interface with a minimum of graphical elements and features, along with a subtle design and colour scheme. As a result, the interface will fade into the background and content will stand out. This enhances readability.</li> <li>2. Use colour and contrast to draw attention to your focal point — the registration button or link; this encourages sign-ups. Streamline the registration process by keeping compulsory elements to the bare minimum.</li> </ol>	<p>New York Times at www.nytimes.com</p> 
To entertain	Increase user participation	Your website's focus should be the user experience, so aesthetics is important. Wrap content around a fun, colourful, graphical interactive interface with a lot of visual elements.	<p>www.tinkleonline.com</p> 
To provide access to an online service or online application	Explain the service / application and encourage sign-ups.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Provide a tour button or link option prominently on your home page.</li> <li>2. Use large imagery (screenshots of your application and diagrams or videos) to illustrate how your product or service can help users solve a problem.</li> <li>3. The sign-up or download link must be accessible from all pages.</li> </ol>	<p>www.Stubmatic.com an online box-office application.</p> 

## Check-point

### Is your website compatible with multiple browsers?

Successful websites are browser independent, which means that they open up and look the same across different browsers. Ask for the technical team to optimise your website and test it on all popular browsers, such as Internet Explorer 6 and 7, Firefox, Safari, and Opera, to name a few. This will not cost you any money, if your team uses Browsershots, a free open source online service that makes screenshots of your website's design in different browsers for you to check out.

### Is your site SEO friendly?

All successful websites are Search Engine Optimised (SEO). Simply put, this means that when someone queries search terms related to your website, it comes out at the top of the search engine ranking lists. This is usually achieved by preparing keyword rich content, with the keywords reflecting the overall purpose of your site.

Manu Srikumar, an online media specialist, suggests that the design should as far as possible be minimalist and elegant, particularly for content rich websites like FreshersWorld.com where the most important component is the listing of jobs. For more design inspiration, guide your website team to check out sites like CSSMania.com or W3CSites.com

## The elements of design

The foremost element of design is the layout. In this context, successful websites score by avoiding information overload or cluttering a page with too much, thereby distracting visitors from the key content. The key to a good layout is to identify the focal point of every page of your website, which will take up the most space. Then use other elements of design like colour, font size and sufficient white space to balance content, allowing key elements to stand out.

This takes us to the realm of colour. A colour scheme should ideally match the image of the organisation or business it represents. For instance, the website of a society aimed at spreading the message of 'going green' could use earthy tones – greens and browns. Font size, also an integral element of design, must be large enough so that visitors can easily read content. Experts usually recommend a minimum font size of 11 points, and suggest that a final call on font size be taken in keeping with the average age of your target audience.

## The target audience

Apart from keeping your target audience in mind while selecting font sizes, there are other demographic aspects that should influence

your design. These include the predominant gender, profession and technical competency of your target audience. You may think, "Why can't I have a website that pleases all its visitors?" But as Rajesh K P, technical head, The Pixals – Instant Innovation, realistically points out, "The most important step in the development of any website is deciding what segment (people) you want to attract, and then, how best to attract that group. No single website can do everything for everybody. You have to focus on the people who are most important to your business. Everything about your site should be designed to bring those people to your site and to keep them coming back."

## Navigation

Remember 'the three clicks' at the beginning of this article? Each click represents navigation from one page of your website to another. Websites that really work (read 'are successful') ensure that users find it easy to navigate from page to page, to reach the content they need. The worst thing that you could do is to make your visitors search



Manu Srikumar,  
an online media specialist

**“Use standard lists, good product visuals, and no jazz to distract potential clients from the act of buying.”**

for information. Navigation, one of the basic elements of your website, assumes an especially important role if your target audience is older and less technically savvy. Typically, you should ensure that text (not image) navigation links appear at the same location on every Web page.

### Catchy content

Coming to the actual content — the words, images and videos that detail your website; here's a simple rule of thumb to evaluate what you have, against the most successful websites: are you giving people a reason to visit and revisit your website? This suggests that your content should be unique, and since your content usually describes your business proposition or the products for sale, make sure your content is written in a way that highlights how your service or product can make a significant difference to potential clients. The tone of the language should be just right for your target audience, and always be easy to understand. As reading through plain text is boring, break up a page by using bulleted lists, paragraphs differentiated by sub-headings, and make the page visually attractive by interspersing photographs and videos. Speaking of content, Rajesh cautions, "Never copy paste content from elsewhere. It is not only a crime (you can be sued by the copyright owner of the original content) but search engines do not like to see duplicate content."

If your website is meant to function as an interactive space, like FaceBook, a lot of your content will come from visitors. Even if it doesn't, try to include some form of user interaction on your site, since this is the surest means to make visitors feel at home! It also signals that you are transparent about having your work

assessed, which is a quality that is certain to attract new clients. Another important aspect is to desist from using technology or content that will make your site heavy, and hence slow to open. For instance, minimise your use of Flash, and optimise page sizes by compressing the photos and videos you upload to your site.

### Offer a great landing

Your website's home page is the equivalent of your living room, where you usher in guests to your home. It goes without saying then, that in describing what your website is all about, the content on your home page should be especially intriguing, short and to the point. It should clearly tell your visitors where to go next, depending on their needs. Ideally speaking, your home page should help earn your visitor's trust by clearly displaying customer opinions, depending on the kind of business you are engaged in.

### Frequently update content

So, you've laboured to put together the right content for your site. Well, don't sit back just yet! A website is always a work-in-progress — constantly being improved, and never a finished product. You need to give people reasons to revisit your site by updating its content on a regular basis. Irrespective of the kind of business, there is always scope to update one or more sections of a site, such as, new products and user testimonials for a service or product selling site, a blog for a professional service site, and so on. Rajesh suggests you "...post content regularly, even if it is once a week. Also, encourage others to link back to your site, as this increases 'page ranks' and you can get a higher ranking from the search

### Successful websites...

- **Ensure you get a good domain name:** A domain name should be short, unique, suggestive of the business you're in, easy to pronounce and spell, and easy to remember.
- **Include a site map:** A representation of the architecture of your website, the site map lists the pages on your website, typically organised in hierarchical fashion. This helps visitors and search engines find pages on the site.



Rajesh K P, technical head,  
The Pixals - Instant Innovation

**“No single website can do everything for everybody. You have to focus on the people who are most important to your business.”**

engines. Make it easy for visitors to 'Bookmark' your website pages for repeat visits and more traffic."

### Choose the right host

Your website may exist in the virtual world, but even so, it takes up space somewhere! Your website's host is the server you upload your site's content to. Since this server's downtime will translate into your site's downtime too, choose well. All successful sites are up almost all the time. But if you need a provider offering support 24x7, Directi, Oriensoft and AwareINDIA.net are good choices.

As Samir Jhaveri, an Internet marketing consultant, points out, "You should aim for an uptime of at least 99.5 per cent. Since Web hosting is a global business, it really doesn't matter where your site is hosted. Still, evaluate your needs and then make a decision. Do you need hand-holding support, for instance, to configure e-mail accounts? If so, it makes sense to choose a local provider. Hosting rates vary from a few hundred to a few thousand rupees per annum so you may find it difficult to choose. You should also check whether you receive complete control over your domain, and whether the provider backs up your data, in case the server fails."

To add to this, Rajesh suggests that you do not make this choice until after your website has been designed, "Your Web host will allocate you some bandwidth, which determines the number of visitors you are allowed in a given time period. Flash or multimedia websites, or sites that run many streaming videos, use more bandwidth. Hosting for websites built for such purposes will be more expensive, so check out the options before you start."

Follow these steps, and you'll be sure of crafting that perfect website! ■



Samir Jhaveri,  
an Internet marketing consultant

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