Website Usability

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Problem Statement

- What is the standard for a website page (width, length)?
- How do you (code wise) restrict pages from changing size?
Width and Length

- Computer screens are typically smaller than most opened books or magazines.
- In academia and business are
  17 to 19 inches (43 to 48 cm) in size,
  800 x 600-pixel screen (display)
- Graphic "safe area" dimensions for layouts designed for 800 x 600 screens:
  Maximum width = 760 pixels
  Maximum height = 410 pixels
  (visible without scrolling)
Website Restriction Example:

Mapquest

Too-wide layout does not fit on 800 x 600 screen

Single-screen design
Page Size Restriction

- Fixed vs. Flexible width table

- Table width:
  - will determine how much of the browser space (horizontally) will be used to display your table.

- Depends largely on how its cells are defined

- Expand and collapse to accommodate the contents and also to fit the dimensions of the viewer's browser window.
Flexible Width Table

- Known as Relative, Variable width table.

- A relative table width is specified as a percentage of the width.
  eg) `<table width="50%">`

- Let table cells size themselves according to their contents and size of the browser window.
Disadvantages

- You still can't anticipate exactly what your page content will look like to a visitor.
- When the browser window gets too narrow, your text and graphics in the various columns will suddenly be misaligned.
Fixed Width Table

- Where the cell width of the table is specified in pixels.
  
  eg) `<table width="500">`

- Restricts pages from changing size.

- If the resolution drops below the fixed width assigned, the visitor would have to scroll horizontally.

- **Pixels:**
  - smallest logical unit for display.
Fixed Width Table

- Two technique:
  1. Defining cell widths with absolute values
     - To keep the tables from expanding to fill the window
  2. Including an invisible image equal to the width of the cell in each table cell.
     - To keep tables from collapsing when the browser window is too small to accommodate their dimensions,
Fixed Width Table

- For precise layouts
- For stable layouts

means that:

1. You can fix the position of elements on the page.
2. Control typographic features such as line length and spacing.
Fixed Width Table

- **Downside:**
  - On large display screens, a major portion of screen is unused.

- Generally speaking, if you want greater control over how your site looks then fixed tables might be a better choice.
**Italics**

Italicized text attracts the eye because it contrasts in shape from body text. Use italics for convention – when listing books or periodical titles, for example – or when text for emphasis on foreign words or phrases. Avoid setting large blocks of text in italics because the readability of italicized text, particularly at screen resolutions, is much lower than in comparable sized roman text.

**Bold**

Boldface text gives emphasis because it contrasts in color from the body text. Section subheads work well set in bold. Boldface text is readable on screen, though large blocks of text set in bold lack contrast and therefore lose their effectiveness.

**Underlined**

Underlined text is a carryover from the days of the typewriter, when such options as italics and boldface were unavailable. In addition to its aesthetic shortcomings (too heavy, interference with letter shapes), underlining has a special functional meaning in Web documents. Most readers have their browser preferences set to underline links. This default browser setting ensures that people with monochromatic monitors or who are color blind can identify links within text blocks. If you include underlined text on your Web page it will certainly be confused with a hypertext link.

**Fixed-width table maintain their dimensions regardless of the size of the browser window**

**Variable-width tables reflow to fill the browser window**
What is it?

• Usability means that users can easily perform the tasks associated with using or navigating your web site. (Assessing Web Site Usability, Guenther)

• Usability assesses how easy user interfaces are to use. (Useit.com)

• A usable Web interface is accessible, appealing, consistent, clear, simple, navigable and forgiving of user blunders. (collectionscanada.ca)
Why use it?

- People leave if...
  - If a website is difficult to use
  - If the homepage fails to clearly state what a company offers and what users can do on the site
  - If users get lost on a website
  - If a website's information is hard to read or doesn't answer users' key questions
When do you use it?

• We built it... but they didn’t come
• We want to get it right the first time
• Visitors come, they browse, but they don’t buy
• We have online self-help, but our customers keep calling
• Our customers say our site is unfriendly - but why?
• We want to expand and improve our site - what new features do we add and in what order?
How do you use it?

- **Site Wide**
  - Present your message efficiently and avoid clutter. Every element of your design should support the goal of your message.
  - Maintain consistent visual identity.
  - Use either plain-color backgrounds or extremely subtle background patterns.
  - Use navigation elements consistently.

- Use the top and left areas of the page for navigation and id entity. Users are comfortable and familiar with this design. It also clearly and consistently separates navigation from content so that users know where to find each.
How do you use it?

- Page
  - Critical elements to identifying page contents need to be visible in the image-safe area without scrolling.
  - Avoid requiring the use of horizontal scroll bars. Keep the design from scrolling horizontally.
  - Provide persistent links to the home page and to high-level site categories.
  - All Web pages longer than two vertical screens should have a jump button at the foot of the page.
How do you use it?

- Text
  - Create effective headings and place important information first.
  - Use labels that clearly indicate the function of links.
  - Use black text on white background whenever possible for optimal legibility.
  - Make sure text is in a printable color (not white).
  - Design for default browser fonts
  - Write scannable text by using frequent subheadings, creating bulleted lists, and highlighting keywords
  - Draw attention to new or greatly changed content.
How do you use it?

- **Graphics**
  - Don't load your page up with unnecessary graphical elements.
  - Animation is a visual distraction. Only use if it makes a visual point about content.
  - Inform users of the content and size of media objects.
  - Encourage scrolling by splitting an image at the fold.
Current Issues:
Top 10 Mistakes in Web Design

- Bad search
- PDF Files for Online Reading
- Not Changing the Color of Visited Links
- Non-Scannable Text
- Fixed Font Size
- Page Titles With Low Search Engine Visibility
- Anything That Looks Like an Advertisement
- Violating Design Conventions
- Opening New Browser Windows
- Not Answering Users' Questions
Future trends

- Search Engine
- Advanced Graphics (Flash, Javascript, Perl, CGI, CSS, HTML and (X)HTML)
- Interactive Forms/Email
Questions?

The End