



Your Company's Most Valuable Real Estate

Your Home Page

What is your company's most valuable real estate? It's your Web site's home page. At less than a square foot in size, a company's home page has become its face to the world. So it has to be good, and not just another pretty face.

With so many engineers and technical professionals now searching for products and services on the Internet, your target audience is sure to check out your Web site before deciding to do business with you — whether or not they do their purchasing online. The fact is your home page will always be the most-visited page on your Web site.

Two Goals

Take a moment to consider your home page from a bird's eye view. It really has two main goals: to provide users with relevant information and to give users logical paths to other information on your Web site.

The two-goal principle makes perfect sense. Anyone coming to your site has informational needs. Your job is to understand those needs and make their information-finding tasks easy to complete.

1st Goal: Provide Information

One flaw of many home pages is they don't have anything useful to say. They are merely directional or flashy, pointing you to where the really useful content resides. That's not the only payoff your home page should provide to busy visitors.

Remember, the first goal of your home page is to provide relevant information. When users land on your home page, they will spend no more than a few seconds finding out if you matter to them. Immediately they want to know who you are, what you do and why they should do business with you.

Therefore, obvious information on your home page should include your company name and description, usually placed in the upper left area of the page where users look first. A positioning statement about how you are different from your competitors is also helpful. It should be brief and clear. This information can be linked to and continued in the "About Us" or "Company" area of your Web site.

2nd Goal: Point the Way to Information

Now that you've proven your company is worthy of a longer look, it's time to point users to additional useful content. Here's where navigation and search take over.

Navigation should follow accepted industry standards for Web design. Users don't want to decode a new navigation concept; they want familiar tools to help them find information quickly.

Your main navigation menu should appear horizontally near the top of the page or vertically down the left side. Navigation labels should clearly communicate where they are leading users.

A search box should be readily apparent on your home page, so users can easily find all pages relevant to a specific keyword. The search box typically resides near the top right of the page. If a user has to search around to find your search tool, that's one search too many.

Home Page Graphics

Graphics can be a powerful feature on your home page. People are drawn to images. The rule to keep in mind is that any graphics should serve a purpose. For example, photos of your products or people using your products show useful information. Stock photos of smiling people do not. Icons that clearly indicate content are helpful. Cheap clip art is not. Additionally, keep in mind that too many graphics can increase the time that it takes your page to load, which can be frustrating to visitors.

Most companies have gotten the message that Flash introduction pages annoy users — most users either choose to skip the introduction or leave the Web site altogether. Yet Flash and other dynamic content can be useful on the home page, as long as it does not take up too much space and does not distract from other content. A rotating display of product images or white paper offers would provide useful information and point users to additional content.

Keep it Updated

Old, irrelevant content gets in the way of users finding what's really important on your Web site. It also reflects negatively on your company. Old news is bad news when it comes to home page. If your most recent news entry is more than a month or two old, it isn't news anymore. Instead it's a signal to users that nothing much is happening at your company. It's critical to keep your home page up to date and relevant.

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