

Web 2.0 Design Principles

Simple layout

We are seeing more straightforward 1, 2 and 3 column designs than in previous years.

These pages read in a straightforward way from top to bottom, and you don't find your eye skipping around trying to work out what to look at. It's a much calmer and more solid browsing experience than in times gone by.

Centered orientation

The other thing you notice about **all** the best web designs is that they're all laid out around a central axis.

Whereas a couple of years ago, you'd find a lot of liquid layouts and left-aligned fixed-width layouts, today content goes in the centre of the screen.

Design the content, not the page

Good modern web designs put less energy into designing the page background – the canvas and permanent page features – and rather focus on designing the content itself.

This reflects the principle of drawing the viewer's attention to the content.

We see the effects in:

- Freer, less boxed-in page layouts
- Softer, simpler, receding page "furniture"
- Strong color and 3D effects used to draw attention to the content itself, including the main branding
- The focus is on making the site's subject look good, rather than making the web designer look good (which is better for the designer in the long-term!)

To take away...

What designers should learn from this trend is that it's not enough to design a blank page, to be stuffed with content later. Content is our problem. As designers, we're communicators (not 'decorators') and site content carries the majority of our message.

Why center-align?

I like center-aligning, and have been tending to use it on my designs for a while.

When the content sits in the centre of the screen, it feels **up-front** and **confident**.

It also gives a sense of **simplicity** and **balance**, which reflects the move towards a clean, more Zen, design.

The most common centered designs are either **fixed-width** (i.e. master width in pixels or percent) where the line-length is prevented from getting too long on larger screens. (Very long lines of text are less efficient.) However it's also possible to have a **liquid layout with a center-orientation**.

3D effects are used sparingly

Well designed sites use gradients subtly, either to give bars a slight roundedness, to create a soft feeling of space in the background, or to make an icon stand out with embossing and subtle drop-shadows.

Reflections & fades are prevalent. **Drop-shadows** are still used, but with care.

Soft, neutral background colors

Well designed sites have a plain background, the most popular being white and grayscale fades. These give a cool, neutral, soft base against which you can flash strong color to draw the eye.

Strong color, used sparingly

A soft, stylish background is a good base for adding eye-catching features. Strong colors and tonal contrast are great for drawing the eye to the more important elements on the page.

Cute icons are used sparingly

There's a theme here: Don't use too many **attractive** elements on the same page view (i.e. that appeals to the eye and draws the user's attention).

As with strong color and 3D effects, appealing icons and buttons can add that bit of polish to help give a page a high-quality feel. But used too much, they'll have the counter effect, cluttering the page and confusing the user.

Plenty of whitespace

Today's best web designs are so fresh they feel like they've taken a deep breath.

Your eye needs space (guttering in typo language) around stuff to help you clearly and cleanly identify things.

In general, more white space is better design. It's very rare to look at a page and think: "Gosh, they really need to cram that page up a bit!"

Of course, "white" space doesn't have to be **white**. But it does have to be space!

It's great to see so many designs using good-sized margins to space elements apart, and extra line-height to aid on-screen reading.

Look at all this lovely refreshing white space!

Nice big text when needed

I'm not saying that all the text on a web site should be supersized. In fact, in some scenarios, small text is better (We tend to take in and retain more when text is a bit smaller).

What this principle means is that the most important text on the page, paragraph headers, titles, and certain other elements should be larger.

Like the other design techniques, this principle works best when used in moderation. If all your text is big, then none of your text is big.

Using bigger text helps visitors see quickly what the page is about, what's most important, and where they should look next.

Thanks to 'Web Design from Scratch' (www.webdesignfromscratch.com) for this excellent summary of Web 2.0 principles.

