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Content + Design + Usability = Because your business needs more than "design"

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## Make your website an easy read

Good type design and page layout help customers quickly get what they came for--information about you. And good design isn't just for designers. If you are adding content to your website, here are a few things to keep in mind.

**Be short.** Make your paragraphs short. Make your headlines short. The rule-of-thumb is one main thought in each paragraph. Cut out unnecessary words and rephrase to be more concise. This makes your material easier to read which means it's more likely to be read.

**Be scannable.** Most people come to your website for information, not entertainment. So don't make them have to read. Good use of headlines, sub-heads, and run-in heads will make your content very accessible. Also consider making certain words in your text "pop" by making them bold or using color. But be careful to not overdo it. Too many bold words just create visual spam and do more harm than good.

**Use white space.** How well you use white space is one of the most important aspects of good type design. Allow sufficient room between elements and within a paragraph so that your page doesn't feel crowded. Remember, if it's hard to read, then it won't be read.

**Think in bullets.** Rather than writing long paragraphs, think about ways to break your ideas into bulleted or numbered lists. This adds more white space to your page and makes it easier to read. Keep in mind that readers will often skip the prose and jump right to your bullets. Make it easy for readers to understand the point you are making just by reading your bullets.

**Chose readable type.** It might look cool to have white type on a black background, but it's very hard to read so use it sparingly. The same is true of fancy fonts. Always be thinking about the purpose of your website and doing everything you can to fulfill it.

**Visual hierarchy.** Content needs to be logically organized so that it's clear what elements are most important and which elements go with others. At first scan, people will see a page as shapes and colors. Visually organize your elements so that it's clear on first glance what's most important and what goes with what.

**Break it up.** If you have a lot to say on a subject, consider breaking it into several pages. Longer pages mean longer download times, which can turn users off. It can also add to confusion because navigation links are no longer visible on the screen. Also keep in mind that some people print longer files so if you do break the text up, be sure to give them a printer-friendly option.

**Less is more.** When it comes to type styles, fewer is better. You should generally not use more than two fonts--one serif (e.g., Times New Roman) and one sans serif (e.g., Verdana). Also keep in mind that fonts won't look the same on different systems and in different browsers so your best bet is to stick with fonts that are common to all systems.

Content may be king, but badly designed web pages will kill content. There is an expectation that information will be easy to access and if it isn't, then the "back" button will become you and your website's worst enemy. --LB

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## Notes on ... web readability

### Be consistent

Utilize a consistent layout, use of headlines, and flow to your website and it will be easier for customers to get around. No two websites are the same, but your website should have a consistent flow and feel.

### First things first

Put the most important information near the top of your page. Not only will most people lose interest quickly, but search engines typically only scan the first 200 words on a page. Newspapers put the most important stories "above the fold". Websites should put the most important information "above the scroll".

### Getting lost on the page

Ever wonder why newspaper and magazine text is set in columns instead of across the whole page? Because wider columns are harder for your eyes to follow and you tend to get lost if the column is too wide. Optimum column width is a factor of how large the type is. So the smaller the type, the more narrow your column of text should be.

### Something has to win

An important rule of design is that if too many things are in competition for your attention, then nothing wins. You end up with a visual cacophony! So step back and see whether your eyes seem to naturally move across the page or if they jump back and forth between elements, unable to stop anywhere without being assaulted by other elements on the page.

### To CAP or not to CAP

Words in ALL CAPS ARE MUCH MORE DIFFICULT TO READ THAN words in lower case. Notice how you need to show down and read each word. All caps are like speed bumps in the road. It's also more difficult to read phrases where each word starts with a capital letter.

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For information on how **CDUdotcom** can help you plan, create, refresh, or optimize your website, [contact us](mailto:contact@cdudotcom) for a free consultation.

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