

15 Tips for Designing Web Sites

by Dianne E. Butts

With my first book nearing publication, I wanted to use the internet to make it available. I knew I wanted a web site, but I didn't have a clue how to go about designing one.

Since that first desire over a year ago, not only do I now have a web site, I've also learned some helpful tips about designing them:

1. On your home page, let your site visitor know what's available on your site. Try to keep your home page clear and clean; too much information can be confusing. If possible, show the main information without having to scroll down.
2. Pay attention to the time it takes for your site to load. If your visitor has to wait too long, they may move on before viewing your site. My web site design program shows me how long my site takes to load. If photos take too long to appear, try reducing the pixels for a faster load.
3. Use complimentary wallpaper, buttons, banners, etc. to give a nice appearance to your site and continuity between pages. The web design program I use allows me to pick a theme, then the program does all the rest for me.
4. Make sure it's easy to navigate between your pages.
5. Insure your site shows your very best writing. Strive for excellence. Ask a friend to read your site searching for typos or confusing content.
6. While your writing on your site itself will be your most important writing example, you may also want to include your bio, resume, list of publishing credits, and other samples of your writing.
7. If you offer books or other goods for sale, create an order form visitors can print and mail with their payment. Include your mailing address on the form.
8. You may want to include photos and graphics on your site. Some can be fun but too many can

clutter your pages and become distracting.

9. Use headers and footers throughout your site to include repeated information on all your pages, such as your mission statement, company name, slogan, or copyright.

10. Include your contact information. Either have an e-mail box on your site or give your e-mail address. You may also want to include your postal address. Phone and fax numbers are optional.

11. You may want to include links to other sites that may be helpful to your visitors. Keep in mind, however, that those sites can compete for your viewers. Some sites are reluctant to put on a link to your site. It is good to be generous to your viewers and your industry associates, but this is one area where it may also be wise to consider what you are getting back for what you give.

12. My web site program includes an option which automatically shows the date each page was updated. I enjoy this feature on sites I visit regularly because it saves me time: I can quickly see if anything is new and on which pages.

13. If designing a web site is new to you, don't feel you have to build an elaborate site all at once. Start with a basic home page, then add other pages and information as you have time.

14. Explore other features you may want to add to your site. I recently added a hits counter.

15. Include your copyright on every page.

This article with sidebars appeared in the June 2003 issue of *The Christian Communicator*. Please note Microsoft discontinued FrontPage as of March 2007, replacing it with Expressions Web. (An update is available for owners of any previous version of FrontPage.) Also, I have found companies who register domains and provide hosting for far less than I quoted in this article. Please see the Resources page on the "For Writers" section of my web site for more information about where to find Expressions Web and my recommendations for your domain registration and hosting at www.DianneEButts.com