NMS530: Journaling Assignment

Jennifer Lavine

DePaul University

**WEEK 1 (9/10-9/17)**

After talking about content versus design, it is important to understand how these two components work together (or in any case, do not work together). Jeffrey Zeldman argues in his article “The Lords of Vendoration,” that certain agencies get away with crappy web design, simply because the cite functions (2014). The piece is almost poetic in nature, comparing it to a restaurant with subpar food or a band that can’t keep rhythm or key with the difference being that terrible websites thrive while the two examples would not.

While as a designer you may be thinking about optimizing functionality with design, your client may not. When people, such as the school board that Zeldman uses as an example, try to create rather than design a website it does not take into account the users needs. Zeldman makes a clear distinction about creating versus design, where creating takes little development into account and designing does (2014). It is obviously very clear that design proceeds creating, but unfortunately it appears the bear minimum will survive simply because it works.

**WEEK 2 (9/18-9/24)**

Running an efficient site is the pillar to good web design. You cannot run an efficient site without good code, so it is important to take inventory and run the occasional audit on your code. This will hopefully result in consistency, standardization, and a reduce file size which will allow for increased performance (Robertson, 2014). In contrast to Zeldman’s “The Lords of Vendoration,” article, user friendly interfaces can be created along with being designer friendly.

A few tools are mentioned to create this audit. The type-o-matic, created by Nicole Sullivan, looks for redundant type styles that may be cluttering your CSS. CSS Lint is another tool that’s mentioned that examines a breadth of potential problems and creates a list of suggested changes. The best part about this program is that you can customize it to examines very specific features, such as properties that might be repeated (Robertson, 2014). There are several other programs that allow you to examine your code, but the bottom line is the same; reduce redundancy and ensure that your code is compliant. It is also important to take note of any changes you have corrected, because the best way to keep future code tightened up is to learn from your past mistakes. Doing all of this will lead maximized efficiency and make you look like a genius when presenting to your client.

**WEEK 3 (9/25-10/1)**

Graphics have come a long way since the early ages of the internet. As we had discussed in class “web safe colors” are no longer an issue. There are also now so many pixels that the old 8-bit icons we used to see are now obsolete. Still, it is important to recognize that these individual components were (and are) something absolutely vital to website design.

Zeldman writes to promote the “Dead Pixel Society,” which is a group of “90’s era icon designers,” (2014). The society replicates current icons and turns them into pixelated images, contrasting what they currently look like versus what they would have looked like if design had not evolved. It is not only humbling to see the difference, but it is interesting to see the complexity that a simple image has. The website states that in 1996 (what they refer to as a “simpler time in technology) desktop items were made pixel by pixel in a 32 by 32 grid and produced by a program called ResEdit (The Dead Pixel Society 2014). Icons now have a much larger canvas and are produced with industry standards like Illustrator and Photoshop. It’s still fun to see what the web would look like without these innovations. My favorite icon is the 1996 version of Grumpy Cat.

**WEEK 4 (10/2-10/8)**

With the internet becoming a endless resource, and websites like Wikipedia becoming a staple in almost everyone’s life (from academics to the passive web user that just wants to find out what kangaroo’s eat). However, most people do not went to spend time shuffling through mounds of text and images help break up the design to make the text more approachable. It is an undeniable fact that these two elements work together, but the biggest question is when to use them.

The one place where visual content is an absolute must is the homepage (Blake, 2014). The homepage is the first impression, and sets up the rest of the website. Pictures and graphics are received and processed faster than text, and will draw the viewer in rather than leaving them with the tedious task of reviewing the entire page. The exception to this is a slogan or brief description (Blake, 2014). This can also be easy processed, and is not meant to take up the whole page. Social media can also combine text and pictures, but again should be used together in much the same manner so as to be more digestible. The bottom line is that creating visual heavy content that has minimal text is the best approach to creating a well designed website that will draw people in and keep them interested. Combining both elements is pleasing to the eye and the mind.

**WEEK 5 (10/9-10/15)**

As a matter of pride, most designers probably prefer to deliver their website from scratch. The idea of utilizing creativity is an attractive idea. “How to Increase Productivity by Building Your Websites with a Multipurpose Theme,” by Jane Miller makes the argument that starting from scratch is inefficient and undesirable. Instead, using a baseline that has a multi-purpose design is the proper way to build a website. Using a design that is narrow and meant for only one purpose inhibits what you can do and cannot be reused, while using a well thought out template will continually provide consistent results and solid coding (Miller 2014).

The case study that is cited reveals that using a multipurpose theme, such as those provided by Royal Themes, allows for cross-browser and cross-device support with retina display in mind (Miller, 2014). This is something that can be very difficult to achieve from scratch. With so many different browsers and mobile devices around, it would be impossible to test your website on everything out there. Employing this strategy takes away the guess work, and allows you to focus on content rather than functionality leaving you with a happy client. If necessary, it is possible to tweak the template a little bit so creativity is not completely out of the question. However, having a springboard is a great way to produce a quality website.

**WEEK 6 (10/16-10/22)**

One thing that has been briefly touched upon in this course is working with, and pleasing clients. At the end of the day your website, no matter how well designed, needs to appease the audience and the client. The latter can be particularly difficult when they are “Subject Matter Experts,” (referred to as SMEs). SMEs wanted to be presented in a very particular way, that reflect their field and their work. This is not like any other client, however in this case the SME commands a knowledge that is directly related to the websites success that could take a web developer weeks or months to try to even come close to attaining (Costello, 2014).

Therefore, it is vital to have a good working relationship with your SME. This can be difficult when your ideas are being knocked down without recourse. What may seem like a brilliant idea to you may be scoffed at by the person who’s web presence you are trying to build. The key is to understand them, and as a result get them to understand you. The example used in “The Specialized Web: Working with Subject-Matter Experts,” describes an instance where an SME’s reluctance was sprung from previously having no say in the content or design of her personal web space (Costello, 2014). Once that was revealed, it was easier to include her in the process and reach common ground. Another suggestion made was to show the SME all the different ways social media could be utilized, so as to create an understanding that you yourself have specialized knowledge.

Working with people is never easy, but being able to reach an understand is imperative to creating a solid piece of work. While taking the time and asking questions this can be accomplished.

**WEEK 7 (10/23-10/29)**

To (almost) end the semester on a high note, two big things happened in the past week. Everyone knows that Google is the mecca of search engines, and most people focus their website design on search engine optimization specifically aimed at Google. Making your webpage Google friendly can be the difference between being on the front page of search results, or being buried somewhere under the “click here,” ads. While Google used to only look at the content of the HTML, it has now announced that it will be examining JavaScript and CSS as well (Murtaugh, 2014). Not only that, but it will also give preference for faster loading pages (Murtaugh, 2014). This will make it all the more necessary to run code audits, not only on HTML but on CSS and JavaScript as well.

Additionally, W3C has finalized its recommendations for HTML5 (Murtaugh 2014). This means that most codes in play will stay in play, with few adjustments. Now browsers have a chance to catch up with the current code, giving HTML5 a stronger foothold in the field. I will also hopefully not have to learn new code for at least another two years (but maybe I’m just being optimistic). These two developments are incredible and exciting news for web developers all around.

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