Seven secrets
behind every
successful site

How to design a
website that delights
your customers and
grows your business

brandfocus

digital experiences
designed for your audience

Contents

Seven reasons your website isn't working for your customers or your business:

1. The layout doesn't fit well on the phone.

2. The customer benefit isn't clearly defined.

3. The logo, imagery, or color is outdated.

4. The important content is hard to find.

5. The space is poorly used and looks messy.

6. The fonts are the wrong size or hard to read.

7. The customer struggles to complete tasks.

1. The layout doesn't fit well on the phone.

More people are looking at your website on a phone or mobile device rather than a desktop, so you'd better make sure it looks the way you want it to look on both. If you don't trust your developer skills, choose an easy website builder like WIX. You can see how it looks on desktop and phone — in real time as you design — before you publish the site.

Details >

Is your website layout optimized for phone or mobile device?

We've experienced big changes in the way we work and live. So, more and more of us are using our phones instead of our desktop computers to view websites. That's why it's so important to make sure your site layout looks great and functions well when viewed this way. Mobile-first designing is a smart solution.

Eat a frog first thing in the morning

In following Mark Twain's advice, it's often recommended you address the most challenging thing first. When designing your layout, it's best to start with the phone, because that's the most challenging space to fit all your content. You'll also find it easier to adapt your mobile design — to the desktop afterward — rather than the other way around.
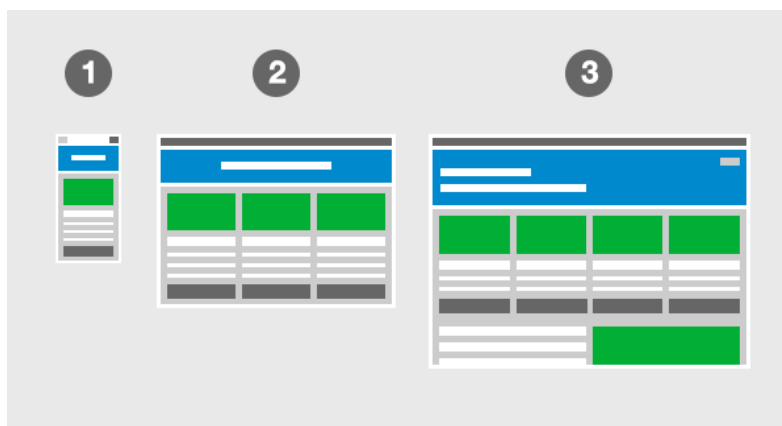
Content is king

After you've determined the type of content your audience needs, organize it hierarchically. What's the most important information to address? Sort it into primary, secondary and tertiary content. You can conduct a simple card-sorting exercise to determine this. Make sure the content tells a story so the customer can complete their tasks throughout the journey. Outline the interactive steps and a 'call to action' the user will take to be successful.

Everything in its place

There may not be a place for all your content. Determine what stays and what goes. Aspire to a simple and clean design by editing wisely, aligning content elements on a grid, and applying the rule of thirds. Use a website builder like WIX — allowing you to preview your work on both desktop and mobile — while you design. This will show you how the layout is responding to the devices. Consider which tertiary content to keep for the desktop view.

A sight for sore eyes

Practicing adaptive design methods will enable you to add more detail for tablet and even more for desktop. Review and test all views with your potential audience before publishing the site. When all is said and done, the customer journey should be functional, and your screen layouts should be beautiful. The result should look good and work well on any device. Your responsive site will delight your audience and build brand loyalty.

2. The customer benefit isn't clearly defined.

When a potential customer visits your site, they should immediately understand why they are there, and how they will benefit. Think of your website like an excellent wait staff — always one step ahead of you — attending to your desires so you don't have to do a lot of thinking. Be sure to define your offerings in a way that's really clear to them.

Details >

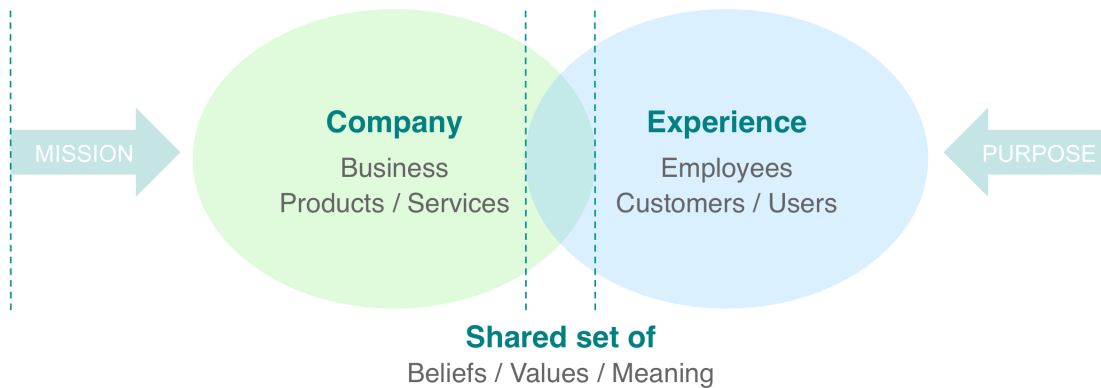# Does your website clearly define the customer benefit?

In case you didn't already know, your website is all about your customer, not about you. When a potential customer visits your site, they should immediately understand why they are there, and how they will benefit. You have their attention for about six seconds — to communicate your value — before they decide whether to stay or whether to leave.

Walk a mile in their shoes

It's best to apply the WIFM principle (what's in it for me) when communicating with your customers. If you have a hard time putting yourself in their shoes, try facilitating a simple usability study to learn what they're expecting to gain from visiting. Put aside your ego and open your eyes & ears. You may be surprised at what you learn about their preferences.

The definition of success

The customer benefit may not be monetary, or about what kind of deal they can get. Financial-related institutions often talk about "trust" or "quality of life" rather than money. Your audience will feel successful when they discover a connection between what they're looking for and what you're offering. A shared set of beliefs, values, and meaning is a strong foundation for any good relationship. Make a connection and win them over.

Company
Business
Products / Services

Experience
Employees
Customers / Users

MISSION

PURPOSE

Shared set of
Beliefs / Values / Meaning

Clear as a bell

Sometimes it takes a couple sentences or a whole paragraph, sometimes a single sentence or just a great a tagline, and sometimes it's only a word or two that rings true with your audience. But be sure to speak their language. If they aren't multi-generational, speak to them in a voice and tone that resonates specifically with their generation. Find the word(s) or phrase(s) that cut to the essence of the benefit your product or service is providing them.

When all is said and done

Remember, you don't have your customer's attention and commitment until they're confident they're in the right place. If your tagline doesn't express the benefit clearly, be sure to express it near the top, above the fold or first screen load. Give them the reason(s) to invest their precious time on your site. Keep them on your site by making the benefit clear along every part of their journey.

Think of your website like an excellent wait staff — always one step ahead of you — attending to your desires so you don't have to do a lot of thinking. These principles apply to any site, whether it's for a simple small business or for a complex large enterprise. The clearer the benefit is, the better chance they'll want to engage.

3. The logo, imagery, or color is outdated.

You may have heard the saying "a picture is worth a thousand words." This is especially true on the Internet as you compete for attention. Get the aesthetics right and people will want to pause and read the words. Your logo is the picture that matters most, because it represents your brand identity. Also pay close attention to the photos, illustrations, patterns, and colors.

Details >

Are your website aesthetics pleasing and up to date?

Most people are naturally drawn to beauty and delight. If your website doesn't look great or the experience feels awkward, your visitors will know it, and may be turned off. Of course, keeping your text current and engaging is important. But, the cliche "a picture is worth a thousand words" is true. So paying close attention to your logo, your colors, photos, illustrations, icons, infographics, and other visual elements is vital.

The brand identity or logo

Your brand (what people think about you or your business when you're not there) is represented by a name, and a symbol, or a mark — most often referred to as a logo. If you can only choose one aesthetic element to update, choose your logo. This is often the first image your audience sees when exposed to your brand identity. Your logo should represent your identity in the best way — the same way you'd present yourself on a first date.

Some people will have strong opinions about logos — what they like or don't like. The key to a great logo is that it captures the essence of your story. It may or may not include the name, but it must be the most simple and quickly recognizable image — boiled down to its essence. No less. No more. Be certain it's well-designed and reflects your personality.

Color my world

What color(s) should your brand identity or logo be? You may have a favorite color. Is that the right color to use? There's no simple answer. But because color has such an impact, you might want to use color psychology to find out. The act of choosing color is creative yet scientific. Some colors look better together than others, and some colors represent different things from others.

The best colors for your brand are colors that visually connect with the benefits or experience of your business, are appealing to your ideal customers, and are distinct from your competition. Also, be consistent by applying your brand colors throughout your site in the navigation, the illustrations, the background, etc.

Photography and illustration

On your website, the photography is almost as important as the logo, because it fills in the story. Your brand identity is who you are AND what you offer. So generally, you can think of the logo as the who, and the photos as the what. Your photos should portray your identity — whether it's technical, whimsical, dangerous, or sporty — and be of the highest quality. Blurry, poorly-lit photos or screen captures from your phone reflect poorly on your brand.

If you don't have access to representative photography, use illustrations. They're just as good or sometimes better at filling in the story. A good illustrator can create something specific for you that might be impossible to capture in a photo. Be sure to consider the style of the illustrations, because they must also portray your identity.

Icons, infographics, and more, oh my!

A good story needs supporting characters. Website icons are the characters people will lean on to accomplish their tasks. If they have questions, they may be looking for your chat icon. When they're ready to make a purchase, they'll be looking for your shopping cart icon. Whatever the icon, make sure it's easy to find. Keeping all your icons the same size and style for sake of consistency and ease of use, will provide a more seamless user experience.

Website infographics are prime storytelling devices. Have you ever been in a meeting where the person talking starts drawing on a notepad or white board to explain their point? Some concepts are difficult to convey without a conceptual infographic. The challenge in this case is to simplify the complex, while still offering clarity.

Shared set of
Beliefs / Values / Meaning
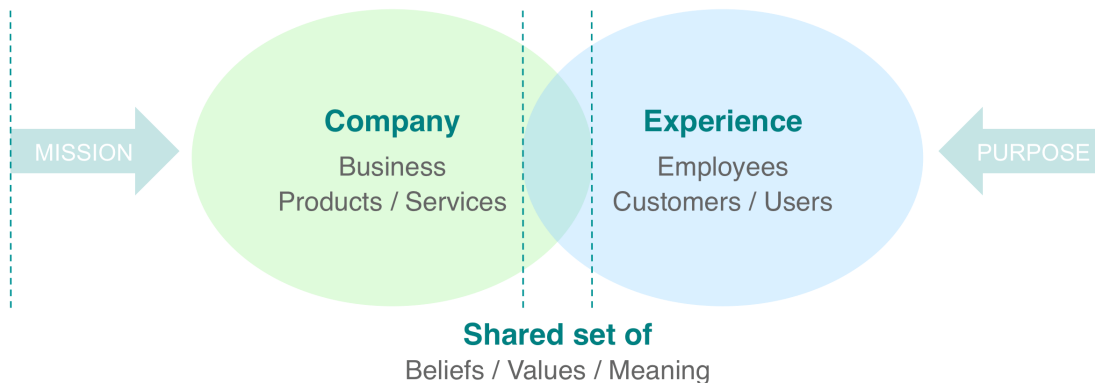
Other elements like lines or patterns, backgrounds or fills, can be applied to render your design complete. But don't overdo it. For example, using boxes or lines to separate your text may add noise so it becomes more difficult to consume. Aesthetics should always enhance and never distract. And leave room for white space so your design can breathe.

The way it looks and feels

If you focus your attention on the logo, colors, imagery, and the rest, you may still end up with a website that doesn't have the right look and feel. Design is very subjective. For example, you could place all the most amazing furniture in your home, but the overall look and feel is off. If that's the case, it may be time to hire a good interior designer. The same goes with your website. A fresh set of eyes will often bring the clarity you need.

4. The important content is hard to find.

The content you share is best communicated if it tells a story. When a customer comes to your site, they're on a journey to find what they're looking for. Think about the hierarchy of your content. Make it easy for them to start their journey, experience the story, and end by reaching their goal. Understand what is most important to them and organize accordingly.

Details >

Is the important content on your website easy to find?

The content you think is most important on your website may not be most important to your audience. Many businesses think their customers care about the same things they do, but often that's not the case. Your goal is to keep them engaged and coming back for more. If you aren't sure your site does this, there are many ways to find out.

Where's Waldo?

The book originally titled Where's Wally asks readers to scour detailed illustrations to locate the lost traveler. Hunting for Waldo is meant to be a challenging and entertaining experience. Yet — for the majority of websites — there is no experience more aggravating than having to hunt for content. Your customer should never feel like a lost traveler on their journey to find what they're looking for.

First things first

To discover what content is most important to your audience, start by conducting a journey mapping exercise. This user experience method will help you understand the process that a person goes through in order to accomplish a goal. If you don't know your customer very well, you may need to go even deeper with empathy mapping. This is a design thinking method to uncover your customer's desires. Either way, investing time on a method at the beginning when there's a small cost for failure is better than later when failing becomes more expensive.

Showing up

Determining the goals of your customer informs how you organize the website content. You want the right content to show up in the right place at the right time, so put yourself in the customer's shoes. Right up front, your tagline should reflect the benefit you offer and give them a sense of place. After that, display your navigation text at the top or side — where they expect to find it — so they can easily navigate between pages. Be sure to use terms that they use when they think about your products and services.
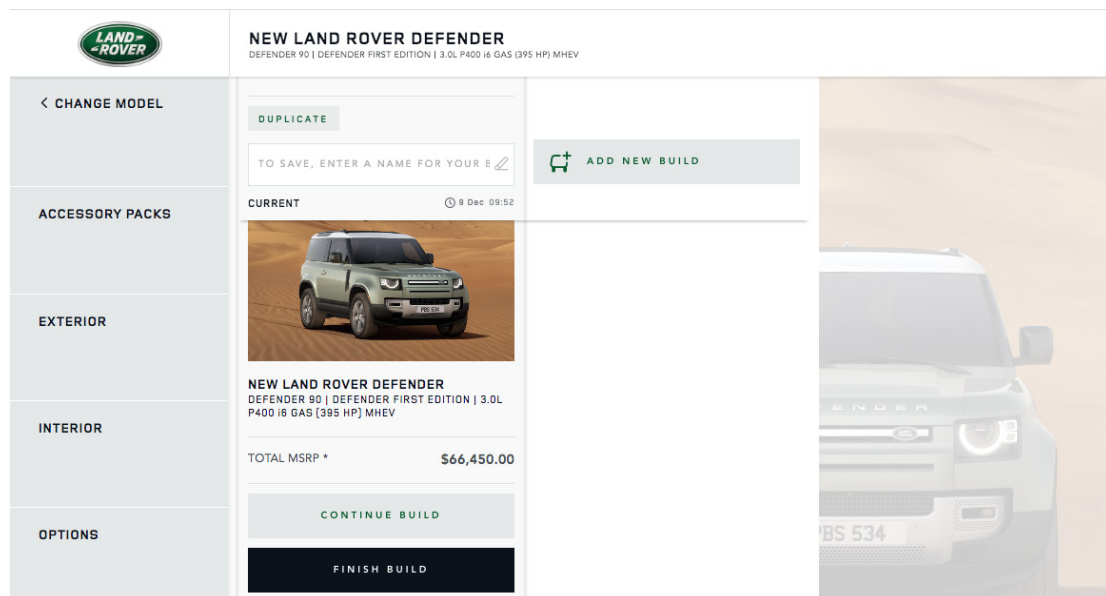
Telling a story

The content you share is best communicated if it tells a story. Remember, when a customer comes to your site, they're on a journey to find what they're looking for. So think about the hierarchy of your content. Make it easy for them to start their journey, experience the story, and end by reaching their goal. If part of the story is making a decision about whether or not to engage

in some way — like registering for a webinar, or adding something to a shopping cart — make that choice easy to find. And the text you use for buttons and forms should be clear and actionable.

The cast of characters

The content elements your customers use on your site — to gain knowledge or to complete steps in reaching their goal — are like a cast of characters in the plot of your story. Each character affects the outcome, and big important characters should take up more space than supporting characters. Make your navigation noticeable, important headings large or bold or colored, and call-to-action buttons prominent so they can't be missed. Your story will be easier and more enjoyable to follow.

In the end

What you communicate, how you communicate, and where you communicate the content on your site is very important. Equally important is the way the content appears to your audience. It should be visually pleasing, discoverable, and easy to consume. The point here is to keep them interested and engaged, not confused or frustrated.

5. The space is poorly used and looks messy.

There's a lot to consider including on a website, but don't be tempted to fill up the whole page. The unused space is just as important as the used space. Allow your customer the space to breathe while they consume. Not using these spaces wisely will make everything look messy. Apply the rule of thirds and keep elements aligned to each other on a grid.

Details >

Is your website layout clean or cluttered?

Filling up every inch of every page on your website is tempting. However, the unused areas of the page layout are actually just as important as the areas filled with content. Designers call the unused area white space or negative space. Giving attention to space will improve your design, making your website cleaner and easier for your audience to consume.

More doesn't mean better

While it's wise to place your most important content in the first screen view, your audience can only take in so much at once. Logo, tagline, navigation, and call-to-action are most important, but any more than that could over-whelm your audience. It's better to setup a simple journey they can follow, rather than try to tell your whole story up front.

Cleaning up a messy room

Cluttered content is a lot like a messy room. By not designing the layout wisely, it'll look messy and confusing to the viewer. Tidy up your layout by aligning elements on a grid. Apply the rule of thirds when designing your composition. Doing this will help you determine how your content fits into the space. You may find it's time to clean house, simplify your message, and discard some of the content that's less usable.

light

The air that I breathe

Allow your customer the space to breathe while they consume. Even if a website has a lot of detailed content to offer, it doesn't have to appear complicated. Have you ever noticed the airiness of the popular large sites like Apple or Google? The designers of these sites fought hard to retain space to breathe, and the experience is delightful because of this. For some inspiration, take a look at one of my current favorite sites called Light.

Clean and simple

In the end, a clean, simple experience always outshines a cluttered, complicated one. The design, the fonts, the amount of content, the style of your visuals, and the white space must all be arranged in a way that's pleasing, yet purposeful. You want to invite your audience to engage, help them along their journey, and encourage them to come back for more.

6. The fonts are the wrong size or hard to read.

Fonts are an extension of your logo and brand identity, so choose wisely. Hierarchy is also especially important to consider when it comes to fonts. The most important messages usually carry the largest font, but there's a balance. Limit your font sizes to three if you can and be sure they're legible on both desktop and mobile devices.
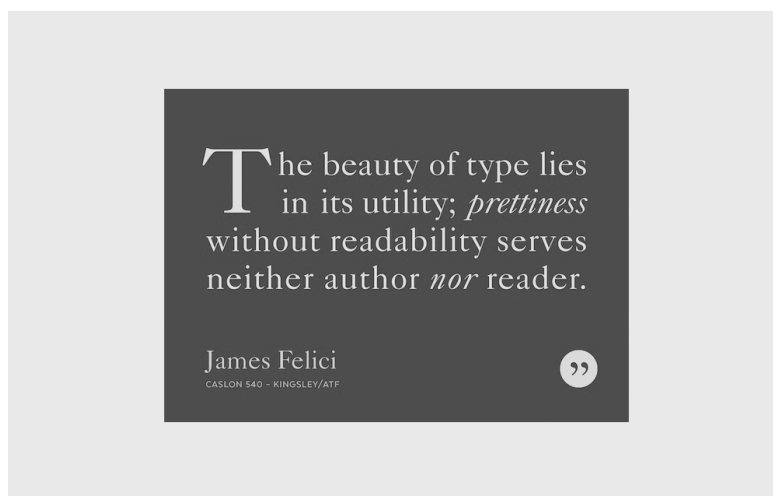
Details >

Are your website fonts readable and on-brand?

We can all agree that displaying easily readable text on your website is paramount. But not everyone understands this is about more than just sizing and legibility. The fonts you apply to your text could be aiding or impeding your communication. Successful fonts will express both your brand look & feel and the tone of the story you wish to tell.

Head, subhead, body

There needs to be a hierarchy in your fonts for your communication to work. The messages of your story depend on a hierarchical structure so the reader can easily understand. Like a book, your website content requires a title, headlines, and subheads — which usually carry the most visually prominent font family — while the body copy, quotes, and call-outs usually carry the supporting font family. The key is to strike a balance between them.

The beauty of type lies in its utility; *prettiness* without readability serves neither author *nor* reader.

James Felici
CASLON 540 – KINGSLEY/ATF

Choose wisely

There are a bazillion fonts to choose from. However, since fonts are an extension of the look & feel of the logo and identity, they should be on-brand. To achieve this, start by visually leveraging the font displayed in your logo type. Then choose another font that best compliments the first font, and stick with just those two font families. Using one font family for headline styles and a second font family for body styles will lay a foundation for clear communication. Any additional fonts will only distract from your story.

There's an art to choosing and pairing fonts. For inspiration, look at some of your favorite sites to see what they've done.

Size does matter

Applying an appropriate size to each font style will enhance your page design. Pay attention to the lightness or heaviness of the fonts, the surrounding white space of the page, the space above and below headings, and the space between the lines within paragraphs. Adjust the sizes until everything plays together nicely. And limit your font sizes to three if you can.

Left to their own devices

People prefer their own particular device for consuming content. Your website fonts will appear different on each different device. Review the display of your fonts to make sure they're legible on a desktop device and all other devices. Some website builders are easier than others at allowing you to adjust the fonts for each device view.

Readability rules

There's no magic silver bullet when it comes to fonts. But if your logo type will accommodate, it's generally a safe bet to combine a serif font family with a sans serif font family. The article you're currently reading is a perfect example. And even though the digital age has brought many sans serif paragraph text, most of us read serif text faster. The reality is they worked well in books for centuries and they continue to work well today.

7. The customer struggles to complete tasks.

This is perhaps the most important reason your website isn't working. The last thing you want is an aggravated customer, right? So pay extra attention to making their journey an easy one. Step one, step two, step three is usually a good approach. Give them clues along the way so they know they're reaching the goal. Win them over with delight.

Details >

Are the tasks on your website easy to complete?

Everything you require your website visitor to do is considered a task. Even if the tasks are part of a complex system, product, service, or industry, they must be easy to complete. Just because your offerings are complex, doesn't mean the tasks have to be. Simplify them. Make the goal easy to achieve. Help your visitor engage and want to become a repeat customer.

On a journey to success

Think of the tasks you want your visitor to accomplish as part of a journey. At the end of the journey is the goal. First, you need to figure out what matters to your potential customer. Many of them don't know who you are, or what benefit you offer, or why they should trust you, so make it immediately clear. More than likely, they'll also want to find examples of what you offer, or how much your products and services cost. Help them along the way.

The journey must be simple and painless. If you wonder why you aren't engaging the visitor and converting them on your website, review the journey and make adjustments. Improve the experience significantly with a clear call to action (CTA). Try displaying a button with text, like "show me" or "add to cart." Tell a good story, make it about them, and be specific. Give them what they want, when they want it, so their journey is successful.

Simplicity isn't easy

No doubt about it. The best design leaders admit simplicity can be really hard to achieve. Here's what the late Steve Jobs had to say on the topic:

> That's been one of my mantras — focus and simplicity. Simple can be harder than complex; you have to work hard to get your thinking clean to make it simple.
> [and]
> Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication. It takes a lot of hard work to make something simple, to truly understand the underlying challenges and come up with elegant solutions.

One, two, three

Another method to making the customer journey an easy one, is providing a step one, step two, step three framework. Start with the primary objective — whether it's about contacting you, or scheduling a demo of your offering — by adding this CTA to the upper right area of your site so they won't miss it. Provide steps for the tasks that are more complex. Simplify the experience for them. Give clues along the way so they know they're reaching their goal.

No worries

The last thing you want is an aggravated customer. Even if your site seems perfectly logical and easy for you to use, it may not be. Put yourself in their shoes. You can find out if they're completing the tasks by conducting a simple usability test. Your ultimate objective is to provide an elegant solution that'll win them over with delight.

It's all about empathy.

Your website might not work for your customers or your business for many reasons, but its success hinges on these seven:

1. Layout for desktop and phone
2. Clear customer benefit
3. Great logo and aesthetics
4. Easy to find content
5. Clean use of space
6. Legible fonts
7. Tasks are completed with confidence

What's next?

Contact Bruce Fenske for a complimentary discovery session to learn how much more your website can engage your customers and grow your business.

Bruce is an award-winning brand design strategist, creative director, and entrepreneur. He helps businesses by providing digital experiences that are designed for their audience — including brand identity, brand refresh, brand stewardship, mobile/web design, graphic design, and all kinds of visual solutions.

brandfocus