

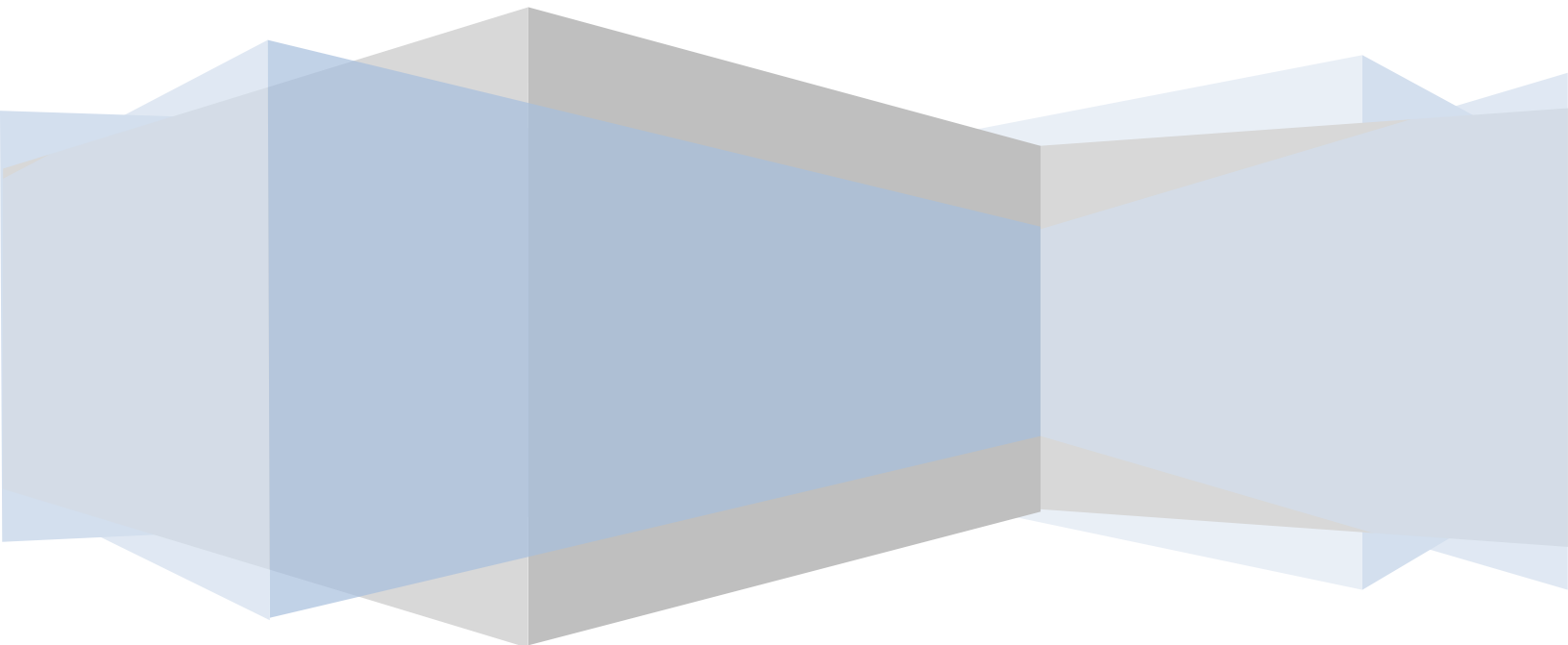
Written by Aji Issac when he was heading DA web marketing team

# “Whose design is it anyway?” – Expected and Unexpected role of clients in website designing

**Be web business educated**

[Weekly Educative series – XI]

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After working with over three hundred websites and few dozens of web designers (both local and Stanford level), I realized that the method differs hell heaven and the results too. Web designing is not all about talent or art. It is a mixture of engineering and art. I have seen artistic designers getting applause for their work and engineers getting high incentives for better sales through websites. I will share a story about designing later.

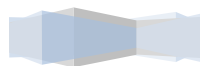
After talking to some of the designers, I was shocked to hear these sentences, “we design as per the guidelines given by the client”. This happens when clients take the engineering chair and throw artistic tasks to designers. Engineering needs a lot of study. Clients should only take up the job of engineering if he/she has spent enough time engineering designs. “Whose design is it anyway?”- In this article, we will explain the expected role of a client, designing team, usability expert and others involved.

We will continue this article and in the next article, we will conclude with some important points and processes. Please ask questions.

## Make it dirty and sales improved

I heard this story when I was working with a designer from Stanford (*He happened to be designer to some important Gnome interfaces*). In a city mainly consisting of rich farmers, a businessman decided to build a movie hall. He called the best artistic guys to design the hall. After it was finished with red carpets, the initial media praises were really high. Everyone was expecting a big boom but the bust happened even before the boom. The turnout was really low from the very first week. The business owner waited for some time but there was no change. He called up another designer, who was renowned to make things work. He came in and after a week of analysis, splashed mud all around the movie hall to lend it a DIRTY look and feel. Not many accepted his way of working but WOW! It just did wonders. Farmers started pouring in with their families. Later, a survey revealed that earlier, farmers felt out of place with the sophisticated ambience of the hall. They were reluctant to dress up formally for the movie. After putting mud all around, they felt more comfortable to come in their causal dresses. The top artistic design failed to generate sales whereas a dirty but purposeful design lured visitors.

“Business is not all about look and feel but about understanding the requirement and nowadays, separating website from business can be unwise.”



## Good designing means sales

People say that at any point in time, you can improve the conversion by another 10% by improving the design. Good design is very important from sales perspective. Read <http://www.ljean.com/files/whatIsTrust.pdf> and <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/990307.html> to understand how good design improves trust and trust sales.

**A**bout once a month, I get one of these phone calls:



(Source: Sensible.com, Steve Krug)

At times, these calls are something similar to what we get. Many a time, we get a call just before or after launch. It is painful to ask for a design change when the website is just few days old.

## What is a good website design?

Toughest question! **There is nothing like a good design. It is about opinions and satisfaction.**

The key players involved are:

1. Business owner(s)
2. Employees
3. Designers (Graphic designers, web designers, flash designers)
4. Programmers
5. SEO experts
6. Content writers
7. Project managers
8. Others (Including your spouse, kids etc)

Hell! **What happened to the real user?** Of course! Various opinions will cover a lot about real users as well. Instead of calling it a good website design, let's redefine our question: "What is a better usable design?"

## What is a better usable website design?

Easier question! One that helps us in improving:

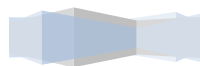
1. **Stickiness** (where people don't abandon your website after looking at your page): You can measure with the following units
  - Bounce rate: Lower the better
  - Average page per visit: Higher the better (in most cases, as people browse around before taking a sales action)
  - Average time spent: Higher the better
  - Exit ratio: Lower the better
2. **Sales:** We also call it conversion. You can use the following units to measure it:
  - **Define various goals (pages):** Almost all web tracking system allows you to define goals. In other words, pages that you want people to visit. Example: You may consider a visit a success if a visitor visits your portfolio page or contacts you. Generally, we define goals when a visitor takes an action towards becoming a customer.
  - **Phone calls:** Many people do not prefer to fill in the signup form. Instead, they prefer to call up using the number given on the website. Putting up a tracking system can let you know the number of customers who are contacting you after visiting the website.
  - **Personal visits:** Keep simulating whether the visit is because of the website. This can be done by various feedback forms.
3. **Loading time:** An improvement in loading time is also important. According to various studies, "Every 100ms delay costs 1% of the sales to Amazon" and "Every 500 ms delay costs 20% traffic to Google". According to these two surveys, conducted by Forrester Research and Gartner Group, ecommerce sites are losing \$1.1 to \$1.3 billion revenue each year due to customer click-away caused by slow loading websites. (How to improve loading time is itself is a technical post; please let me know if you want me to cover it in detail. <http://developer.yahoo.com/performance/rules.html> has covered the most important points. Use various applications to judge it:
  - **Http watch** - <http://httpwatch.com/>
  - **Yslow** - <http://developer.yahoo.com/yslow/>
  - <http://www.websiteoptimization.com/services/analyze/>
  - Many other tools.



## How to start website designing?

By asking various questions over and over again:

1. **Purpose:**
  - a. Will it be a sales tool?
  - b. Will it allow sales?
  - c. Do I need customers to revisit for activities other than sales?
2. **Targeted Segment:** (People who are looking for mortgage)
3. **Segment-broad segment into various smaller parts.** People who are looking for mortgage are also looking for:
  - a. Mortgage calculator
  - b. Mortgage rates
  - c. Mortgage lenders
  - d. Mortgage community
  - e. Mortgage loan etc
4. Now **cater a group of 100 people from homepage.** Say, if 100 people visit your website randomly, what will they be looking for? (Example: 20% mortgage rates, 20% mortgage lenders, 20% need to ask a question, 20% need to know about your company as mortgage lender, 20% others) This will help you design your navigation.
5. Now **design a navigation tree** with not more than 7 branches in each node (People can't handle more than 7 choices; keep it to 5 or less for better satisfaction). Take it as deep as possible.
6. After finalizing the navigation, ask the following questions:
  - a. Will this website have changing content? How many sections will be changing? (Example: Will new blog posts be done? Will you prefer to show new lenders getting added? Will you prefer to show new forum posts? Etc)
  - b. How will you highlight the most important sales products? There are some products that will have higher sales than others. Highlighting such products is advisable.
7. **Understanding your strengths and weaknesses:** It is very important to understand your strengths and weaknesses while designing the website. Highlighting your strength and hiding your weakness can improve sales and overall experience. Example: If you are a printing press company and have printed only for 3 companies, it would appear as a weakness. Hence, it will be advisable not to show the client count. On the other hand, you might have printed 30 million pages; so you should highlight that on the website. If you are new in the industry, then you can highlight 100 thousand prints in last month. You might even like to highlight your products being used by celebs. Anything that can act as your strength over your competitors should be highlighted.
8. **Understand your opportunities:** It is important to get hold of new opportunity through the website. Example, when mortgage lenders did not have a community, then it was advisable to highlight "Join Lender's Community" image prominently as even an addition of one lender could be considered better than 10 customers. A community with maximum lenders will always attract more customers. Knowing the detailed opportunity and using it to build your business through website is needed.



9. **Hire a usability expert:** Explain all the above points in a written document and keep improving the written document to avoid communication gap during the next phase of designing.
10. **Hire a web marketing/SEO expert:** Explain them about projects and the requirement using a document and collect their requirements.
11. **Engineer the website:** Have the usability expert engineer the website on a file (MS word file will also do).
12. **Pass it on to artists:** Pass it on to the designers to express their creativity on the engineered framework. Pass on suggestions only after seeing 2 to 3 mockups. Let their creativity decide various dimensions.

## Beta testing

Get hold of a small group and test the website before finalizing the design. Use

[http://sensible.com/Downloads/DMMTchapter09\\_for\\_personal\\_use\\_only.pdf](http://sensible.com/Downloads/DMMTchapter09_for_personal_use_only.pdf) and

[http://sensible.com/Downloads/DMMTchapter10\\_for\\_personal\\_use\\_only.pdf](http://sensible.com/Downloads/DMMTchapter10_for_personal_use_only.pdf) for reference.

## Website design is never complete

Never let your website die with one design. Keep checking the analytics for possible designing flaws. Keep writing down the possible flaws. Keep taking reactive steps by fixing as many issues as possible. Don't hesitate in considering a redesign if you feel the design is not working well.

## Homepage is a disputed area

Everybody wants a pie from the homepage. SEO will like to insert some keywords, designer some flash, programmers some geo targeting and affiliate codes, community leaders a link to the community and CEO, his pic. Homepage is generally where the navigation starts. This page will remain a disputed no-man's land. Keep compromising, testing and improving.

## Expected/Unexpected

- **Unexpected role of a client:** When a client dictates the design without following the proper process.
- **Unexpected role of web designing firm:** When they don't suggest best practices to the client and allow the client to make common mistakes.
- **Expected role of client:** Explain Strength/Weakness/Opportunity to the web designing company. Hiring usability experts and co-ordinating with usability expert and designing team. Helping the usability expert engineer the right framework.
- **Expected role of web Design Company:** Suggesting good practices to the client. Keeping the right mix of art on the top of engineering framework.

## Useful links:

1. <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/20021223.html> - Avoid some common mistakes
2. <http://usableweb.com/>
3. <http://www.webpagethatsuck.com/> (Deconstruction)
4. <http://www.siteconfidence.com/benchmarks/benchmarks.aspx>
5. <http://www.worstoftheweb.com/> (Deconstruction)

