

Online Art Marketing



The Essential Guide for Self-Representing Artists

by Steven Marwick

www.onlineartmarketing.com

Chapter 2 - Making Your Website User Friendly

Be Prepared

One of the most important things to remember when designing a website to sell your art is that you will have no idea which combination of web browsers, internet security settings, screen sizes etc potential users will visit your website with so this means that your website must be as compatible as possible with all variations and not (for example) just be optimized for display on the latest version of Internet Explorer and a screen resolution of 1024 x 728. (The most common)

Special Effects / Popups

This all sounds quite complicated but a rule of thumb is don't over complicate things. Don't go for sparkly effects where the cursor is changed into stars which follow the mouse movements. Using JavaScript to create fancy effects can slow down the computers of your website visitors or even cause your webpage not to correctly load all the time which would mean you would lose a potential customer before they had even made it to the content of your website. Try not to use windows which pop up automatically as these are often blocked and indeed are blocked by default in the latest versions of both the most popular web browsers: Firefox and Internet Explorer. If a website unexpectedly tries to launch a pop up window, many people assume that the warning message means that the website had just tried to give them a virus etc so using automatic pop ups which do so without the user selecting them could really harm the perception of you and your art business.

I generally try to start with a centered website content area with a width of not more than 750 pixels. This means that you can cater for people with smaller screen sizes or resolutions but in a way that doesn't look out of place on monitors with higher sizes or resolution settings either.

Background Music

Likewise, don't use background music on your webpage which starts automatically. If you do choose to use background music, make it "opt in" with a play button so the visitor can choose to hear it if they want to. Nothing makes me leave a website faster than unwanted music. This is because I usually listen to my own music whilst browsing the internet and it is annoying to have someone else's musical tastes inflicted on you suddenly, not to mention the near heart-stopping fright it can give you if you are not expecting it!

Keep It Simple

Try not to use so-called "splash pages" on your website. Most people are familiar with these "click here to enter website" pages. They serve no real purpose but act as another step before a potential customer gets to your products for sale. Always try to make the path to a sale easy for the end user and ensure that it consists of as few steps as possible. Most people are surprised how much difference little things like making buy now links a little more prominent and getting rid of splash pages can make to their "conversion rate" or percentage of visitors to a website go on to make an online sale.

Site Maps

If your website is graphic intensive and all your internal site links are done with image files, you should include text links at the bottom of each page to each of your main site sections. It will also help if you include a Site Map page on the website. A Site Map is just a textual page which lists all of the links within your website in a tree structure, charting their relationship to each other. Dictionary.com defines a site map as:

“Overview of the navigational structure of a website, acting like a Table of Contents, and used to orient users and show them the scope of the site. Site maps can be textual or visual. Usually each location is an active link, enabling a user to move directly to that section. Site Maps can also help search engines to find and list all the pages of a website, thereby giving you a better chance of success in getting good listings for keywords appropriate to your subject matter.”

Image File Size

One of the surest ways to make someone press the “back” button on their web browser is to make a website which takes an age to download. One of the most common ways this happens is when the artist either doesn’t know how or forgets to resize an image before inclusion on a page. Resizing in a website editing program is all very well but the large file size will still remain, just the display size will change. This means that it will take a long time to download when someone visits the site. You should always try to ensure that images have been properly resized in an image editing program such as Adobe Photoshop or the (free) Irfanview. It is important to remember that although broadband internet take up has been rapid, there are still people on slow dial up connections. In the interests of not alienating customers before you begin, it makes sense to cater for these people by trying to ensure that the total “weight” or file size for a web page, including all images, does not exceed 100 Klobytes.

Finding Image File Size

To see the file size of any image on a website you can right click on it and choose Properties from the menu that appears. If you don’t see that option, it may be a background image. In that case there should be an option to “view background image”. Choose that then you should be able to right click on it and choose Properties.