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10 ways to ensure a better design for your site.

Creating an amazing website is a collaboration between client and web designer. We should work together to develop a design that is both visually stunning and effective at meeting business objectives.

For this to happen both parties have their part to play. This document shares ten ways that can improve how you and your designer work together to ensure the best design possible.

Focus on problems not solutions.

If you want to get the most from your designer you need to focus on problems not solutions. For example, if you are worried that the color choices he has made won't sit well with your audience, tell him that and why you think it's the case. Let him work out how to solve the problem rather than telling him to change the site to use a particular color.

It is about user needs and business objectives.

Don't get bogged down in the details of the design. It's the designers job to worry about the details. Instead, ask yourself two questions: how will users respond to this design and will it meet my business objectives?

Always explain why.

When people tell you what they think of the design
always ask them why. Why don't they like the colour? Why
do they think the logo should be made bigger? Equally
ask yourself the same questions. Often there are
underlying reasons for a reaction towards a design.
Telling the designer these underlying reasons can enable
him to find the most appropriate solution.

Recognise your personal bias.

Design is a very subjective subject. We all have our personal opinion when it comes to design. What you like, your boss may hate. However, at the end of the day it is not about whether either you or your boss likes the design. The question to ask is whether the user will like it.

If in doubt, test.

If you find yourself unsure about the design direction or disagreeing over the way forward, test the design. There are loads of ways you can get feedback from a bigger group of people and none of them need to be time consuming or expensive. Testing the design will give you the confidence that things are heading in the right direction.

Remember nothing is permanent.

It's important to remember that unlike print design, the web can be changed at any time. Making a design decision doesn't need to be a life or death choice because if you put something live and users don't like it then it can easily be changed.

Listen to the research.

Designing a website is not the same as producing a piece of art. There is considerable science and psychology behind the discipline as well as many years of research. Where possible build on best practice and avoid working from hunches or personal preference.

Resist the urge to copy.

There is nothing wrong with looking at your competition or indeed any other website for inspiration. However, blindly following what other people do is often a mistake. What works for one site will not always work for another and we don't want to simply copy the competition ending up one step behind them.

Context is everything, always present it.

You and your designer will spend hours discussing the right approach for your website and hopefully you will have a firm grasp of why certain decisions have been made. The danger comes when you present work to colleagues who don't have that background. Make sure that you always fully brief anybody you show the design to so they know why it has turned out the way it has.

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Avoid design by committee.

Because design is subjective showing it to too many people can just muddy the decision making process. Instead keep the number of people to a minimum and canvas their opinions individually to avoid design by committee.