

Flash & Usability

What usability means: Usability means concentrating effort on the ease of use. It means making processes simple, straightforward and as seamless as possible by creating a system that is easily understood and that a user can operate instantly.

Usability makes everything except the developer's job easy. The developer (you) must make the user's experience a priority in the development process.

To avoid the "gratuitous, superficial and annoying" pitfall you must seriously consider what you develop, what it is being used for and how it will accomplish a goal.

Usability Tips for Design

1. Establish a visual hierarchy and stick to it!

Give the user visual cues as to:

- what is content
- what is navigation
- what is everything else

Your user will feel comfortable with the familiarity.

2. Establish Clarity of Navigation.

Navigation should be crystal clear. Users should have no question about what information any button will lead them to. The navigation should tell them where they may go, where they are and where they have been.

3. Apply Fitt's Law to Button Design.

Fitt's Law is: "The time to acquire a target is a function of the distance to and size of the target." Simply, the bigger a button is, the easier it is to click.

4. Don't Overuse Animation.

Animation can be a lot of fun and is a great way to convey information. However, animation can also be one of the more annoying elements of Web design. Repeated animation distracts the peripheral vision and draws the eye away from content. Don't put animation between the user and the information they want.

5. Make it readable.

Text on the screen is inherently harder to read than print. Be sure to not make it harder.

- animated text is harder to read
- Let the reader determine the speed at which they read
- Provide good contrast between the text and the background

- Use good screen fonts like: Verdana, Trebuchet, Geneva or Georgia

6. Macromedia Flash Detection

Users have different levels of capability. Build plug in detection into your project and then provide an easy way to download the plug in.

7. Provide a non-Flash Option

Just to cover that percentage of users who don't have or want Flash.

8. Consider the User's Hardware.

Processor speed and the graphic abilities of the user's computer affect performance. Avoid large sound files, multiple simultaneous animations, alpha blends, high resolution bitmaps and scaling. The movie will download quicker and play smoother on the user's machine.