

Implications of Audience on Web Development

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Importance of Audience

- As with any communication medium, the web requires a good understanding of those with whom you want to communicate
- All of the technological and multimedia options available for web development share one important feature
- They are all used to communicate with an audience
- But which ones work best? How do you make sure you're reaching your audience properly?

So Who and What Are Your Audience

- On the web, an audience includes both real people and robots
- Though robots are relatively predictable, they view the web very differently than people, so they are an important consideration
- How do we see the web through the eyes of a robot?
- The closest approximation is Lynx
- Let's look at a couple of examples

Real People

- Then there are the real people
 - ▶ Primary audience
 - ▶ Other audiences
- There are 2 major types of people when it comes to a web audience
 - ▶ The visitors you have
 - ▶ The visitors you don't have

Identify Your Primary Audiences

- This will either come from your intuition, your business plan or the website owner
- Consider the Primary Audiences of
 - ▶ www.webmasterworld.com
 - ▶ www.google.com
- Important to really understand the primary audiences because subtle differences can turn into significant design choices.

Related Sites Still Have Different Audiences

- Even when very closely related
- www.cs.dal.ca vs www.dal.ca
- www.cs.dal.ca vs www.medicine.dal.ca
- Consider the sales vs. support portions of an e-commerce website

Current Visitors

- Now that you know who you're trying to reach with your website, you can investigate how closely your current visitors match the profile
- We can gather a great deal of information on our current visitors from Apache logs
- Use one of the many stats packages out there to get a broad overview
 - ▶ Awstats
 - ▶ Webalizer

Problems with Statistics Packages

- Many statistics are interpreted and as a result aren't 100% reliable
- Won't always get very detailed information on your audience (unless you spend a lot of money)
- Can't tell you anything about people who aren't coming to your site

How To Get Specific Details On Your Users

- Your favorite Unix tools
 - ▶ grep, tail, gawk, sort, uniq, etc...
 - ▶ Ultimate in flexibility
 - ▶ Cumbersome and limited to data in the log file
- Can use cookies
 - ▶ Unreliable
 - ▶ Can gather more information than you can get from log file
- Session Variables
 - ▶ More effort to develop
 - ▶ Can get very accurate path analysis data and more

Visitors You Don't Have

- If you want your website to grow, ultimately you'll have to draw more visitors
- One of the biggest mistakes a webmaster can make is to think, "I don't have to design for browser X, none of my visitors use it"
- Like saying nobody in wheelchairs use a building when there's no ramps to allow entry
- So what's the answer?

Accessibility

- In a nutshell, it's about making your website so that anyone can use it.
- This is the one major technique that will make your website's content available to as large a potential audience as possible.
- Good accessibility practices will ensure that people with disabilities will have the opportunity to access your site, but it helps more than the disabled...

Accessibility Helps Others Too

- There are people who are partially or temporarily disabled
 - ▶ Poor eyesight
 - ▶ Sprained wrist
- Hardware issues as well
 - ▶ Fuzzy monitor
 - ▶ PDAs and Cell Phones
- Software
 - ▶ Lack of plugins
 - ▶ No support for client based scripting