

The Future of Web Design:

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Abstract

Web-design is a technology-related field in which everything from design practices to technology and business are continuously evolving. In this fast-paced growing field it becomes really necessary to foresee the future and its course of development over the years. Despite the fact that no one can foretell for sure what the Internet holds in its future, with current trends unfolding, we are starting to see new ideas sprouting up.

This paper is an attempt to foresee the future of web design based on what is happening right now in that field. The paper discusses the current web-design trends. Then, it declares how those trends are ripe for further developments in the coming few years, and what kinds of impacts that could have on web-design industry. Some people think that web-design industry will be made irrelevant by technologies which will make it easy for anybody to design a website. Others think that those developments are just tools in the designer's hands which will make web design more relevant than ever. This paper tries to find out which of the two opinions will probably happen.

The Future of Web Design

Web design is an ever changing industry. As technology develops, so do the web designers' responsibilities. Weinberg says: "Because our work lies in one of the fastest-paced industries, it's important for us to predict and learn about what's coming up or risk being left in the web development dust"(Weinberg 2010).

So we should try to find an answer for the following question:

"What is the future of web design?"

There are two opinions regarding the future of web design. The first one thinks that web design career will be a dying breed given the developments in technology that make it easy for customers to build their own websites. The other opinion thinks that all the improvements in technology are going to change the way the web-designers work, not going to destroy the occupation. I agree with the second opinion, the web design career will not die, it is just going to evolve and will require more constant efforts from the designers to improve and to stay on top of new developments and changes within the industry.

Of course those are all predictions. Although it is so difficult to read the future, we can make some important conclusions and predictions about where things are going. There are signs and trends that can lead us to the right direction. Web designers who follow these trends will be able to rise above the others and fill into the new era of technology.

Web Design Trends:

Most people think that trends are just fashion which will quickly disappear. But in reality big websites like MySpace, Facebook, and Twitter all started as fun trends and

everyone gradually started using them. Now, they grew up to something huge, they have great impacts on the way people live and work, they also changed the way web designers present themselves online(Knight 2010).

In the following pages I am going to talk about some of the recent trends in web design field trying to figure out how they may affect the future of the field. Trends in web design can be divided into 3 types: Design Trends, Development (Technical) Trends, and Business Trends.

1. Design Trends

Font Replacement

One of the very important features in web design is typography, using artistic fonts can make the site more eye-catching and it can increase user experience as well(McBonio 2010). A site that uses typefaces as a main design aspect can be more attractive to the users than overloading the site with plenty of images, especially if the designer managed to use typefaces in a creative manner by revolving, twisting, or shaping them in a way to reflect certain purposes (J. Thomas 2009). “Since the dawn of web design, we’ve wanted to use any typeface we like. We can in print, so why not online?” asks designer Elliot Jay Stocks(Grannell 2010).

Sifr and Cufon are very popular methods of font replacement, they provides tools to convert font so designers are no longer limited to certain number of fonts. In the future, font replacement will grow to be much easier, and more methods will be available in particular those that do not use Flash or JavaScript. At this moment, @ font-face is the trendiest method of replacing fonts, it is a beginning of clean CSS font

replacement. The only thing that holds it back from progressing is the lack of compatibility which is expected to be solved in the next few years(Knight 2010).

Print Design influence:

Nowadays, web- designers are increasingly using traditional techniques from print design. They are applying ideas from the print media to the web including its distinctive design and its rich typography. If we look at the web, we will find a lot of ideas from print; for example, a lot of user interfaces are designed using newspaper columns, and also the magazine layout is widely used in blogs. In addition, paper-like objects such as bookmarks, notes, and other 3D objects are increasingly being used(Naqvi 2010).

Knight believes that in the future the use of texture in designing websites will increasingly grow and applying multiple backgrounds will be widely used as well. CSS will help designers build amazing realistic interfaces. Furthermore, minimal modern websites are beginning to apply some of the print layout techniques such as texture, letterpress effects and other fashion(Knight 2010).

Personalization:

Personalization has been a very important attribute for many websites since 2007. While the web is getting wider and wider, the need for more uniqueness is becoming essential for the website to be more noticeable and prominent. This trend is being used in many web 2.0 companies; such as MyStands, last.fm, Yahoo and more. Many people think that Google is aggressively pushing personalization; the company uses this trend as a new method to keep attention. Sep Kamvar, Lead Software Engineer for Personalization at Google, says “As we move forward, personalization will

continue to be a gradient; the more you share with Google, the more tailored your results will be." It is going to be interesting to follow how personalization is going to be presented by Google in the upcoming few years, so let's wait and see (MacManus 2007).

Knight says "While consistency is a key in some areas, it is definitely not required in others". In the future the trend towards individuality is going to be more pronounced. Many websites used to have similar layouts with ordinary business images, but all that is going to change, each website will try to use images, illustrations and color schemes to create its own personality (Knight 2010).

Web3.0 Design:

A few years ago, Web 3.0 began developing. There is no stable definition of what stage three of the web will be, but the majority of the propositions centers around a user-centric approach (Bijl 2007). Knight states that "Things like iGoogle, the portable web (mobile, iPad, etc.), pick & choose content, smarter user interfaces, etc. are all coming about under the new definition of web 3.0".

In the time of web 3.0, Web design will dramatically change. User-centric will be the main aspect of all designs. Designers will try to implement new ideas which support more user engagement. In addition, more customizable features will be involved as well. In the future more web designers will specialize in User Interface Design and will learn how to take the users' perspectives into consideration while building websites (Knight 2010).

2. Development Trends

Similar to design trends, there are some technology trends which are expected to continue into the future and grow further. Here some of those trends:

HTML5 over Flash

The importance of Flash in web industry has been questioned in the last few years. Some people think that Flash started to be an old fashioned, and it is being replaced with things like jQuery animation, CSS, and nevertheless HTML5 which can do what Flash used to exclusively accomplish(Knight 2010). HTML5 is expected to have an increasing impact on the way we mark up our web pages, it strongly support multimedia (both video and audio) by having many new syntax features. It also gives us more interoperable implementations. HTML5 is bringing in ways to develop a much more semantic look (Sparks 2009). Although there are advantages of HTML5 over Flash especially in displaying video, it still has some compatibility problems with some browser-operating system combinations (Perez 2010).

But, Flash will not disappear entirely; it will continue to be used on some level, such as Full-Flash sites and custom animations. On the other hand, using Flash to show video or display small navigation and effects will be declined. Sooner or later HTML5 and other technologies (JavaScript, CSS, and more) will be preferred substitutes for Flash(Knight 2010).

Mobile Design

Mobile Design market is growing rapidly since the first Internet and multimedia-enabled Smartphone (iPhone) was introduced in 2007. And it will continue to develop

and grow more especially after the emerging of Smartphone that support full CSS and JavaScript(La 2010). But designing for mobile devices is a very challenging situation. The lack of space on the screen forces some designing decisions such as the necessity of simplicity, lack of images, and taking care of white space. Martin states that “Designing for mobile devices is not just about shrinking an existing web site down to size, but redefining the user interface to accommodate the habits of the mobile user” (Martin 2010, Snell 2009). One of the main issues with Mobile Web has always been usability. But efforts are continually being made to increase usability; the iPhone has a revolutionary UI that makes it easier for users to browse the Web, using zooming, pinching and other methods. (MacManus 2007).

Since the mobile web design is kind-of new, it is still facing a lot of compatibility issues. There is no standard programming language, old devices only support WML and do not support HTML and XHTML. On the other hand, there are no best design concepts yet. But all that is expected to change in the next few years, the trend is growing every day and will develop its own concepts and practicing techniques. In this year 2011, SmartPhones are expected to sell more than the personal computers. This indicates that web designers need to develop new skills to design for different kinds of mobile devices(J. Thomas 2011, Knight 2010).

More Options and Easier Editing for Clients

The last few years have seen a lot of technical methods that made editing so much easier than what it used to be. Content Management Systems (CMS) are software systems that offer tools to help users with little knowledge of hypertext markup languages to build and develop websites’ content with relatively less effort. In addition to

the three most famous CMS; Drupal, Joomla, and WordPress, there are many other Content Management Systems that offer variable features. CMS save developers a lot of time that can be used to focus on other issues such as enhancing usability(Alex 2010).

WordPress has been extremely progressed in the last two years. It is turned from a simple blogging system to a CMS that offers so much more to the users through its wide variety of themes with so many options. For example, the custom admin panel that comes with all WordPress themes allows users to change logos, background, and more(Knight 2010).

3. Business Trends

The type of business web designers do will change as the Internet gets larger.

The Growth of Freelancing

Working as a freelancer has a lot of advantages, it allows a web designer to work independently by his own standards, set his own schedule, and gain unlimited salary. On the other hand, for organizations, hiring a freelance web designer to do a specific design or task is so much cheaper than hiring an in-house designer or getting a design agency to do the job.

Knight expects the freelancing web designers to continue to grow. Web designers can start working as freelancers early in their careers or they can start later. It is not so hard to begin, but to make it a full time job, web designer needs to develop fine skills, gain excellent experience, and build a good brand to make it as profitable as a salaried job(Knight 2010).

Pre-designed Websites vs. Custom Websites

Nowadays, most organizations (especially small or start up businesses) are looking for faster and cheaper solutions. Therefore, there is a great trend toward using premium themes and templates. In the future, web designers' job may mean only working on premium theme for sale, or customizing a premade website instead of building a website from scratch(Knight 2010).

The growing use of readymade templates may affect the demand on the custom web design but it is not going to wipe out the entire web design industry. People will still need web designers to customize their readymade templates. They will still hire freelance web designers or design agency to do that job for them(Ades 2008).

Some people think that there will be some drag and drop technologies to create websites in the future. If so, I believe not everyone will want to use them. Because businesses do not like to have the same website as their competitors, they always want to be unique.

Personal Projects

It is always a good idea for web designers to work on their own personal projects. A personal project could be a wide range of things; it could be as simple as building a blog or a portfolio, or it may go further and turn into creating something huge like Google or Facebook. Blogging is the most common side-project among web designers these days. Blogs, either separate blogs or included in portfolios, can be so beneficial. Because of the way the search engines work, blogging can help increase

visibility and ranking of the web designers' portfolio, it also can be a good resource of extra income(Gube 2010).

Creating web apps is a good way to turn your free time to a creative one. Nowadays, building web apps is becoming much easier than before. Coding a web app from scratch can take only few months and can be done by only one person. Creativity will always be prized, and it is always so wonderful to come up with your own creative ideas(Knight 2010).

Weinberg thinks that working on one's own apps is much more fun than working on clients' sites. On the other hand, creating the next twitter is becoming more possible with the availability of all new powerful tools and techniques in our growing industry. She also believes that "Since the Web evolves so much; you'll end up learning new things that can be incorporated into client work"(Weinberg 2010). So it is always great to have personal projects on the side, they help keep the creativity flowing, and they can generate multiple income streams as well.

Conclusion

Web design has changed significantly during its brief existence. Among all that changes, the role of web designers is evolving, not dying. New media never replaces old media, it extends it. Apps will not render the web irrelevant. There is a time and a place for mobile apps just as there is a time and place for full websites! What we can be certain of is that no matter what the communication medium, design and designers are necessary.

In the future, web designer will not just refer to websites, but also mobile app-design as well; that why, web designers do not need to worry so much as this opens the

prospect for more work! Not less. And as for templates, I don't think they will be in use by anyone who is trying to be credible. Unique design leaves unique impressions, and expectantly that will be the case forever.

Also, if you are a Web designer, you will have to stay up to date with the quickly changing technology in the field. New standards and techniques are constantly being developed in an attempt to meet the ever-increasing demand for more exciting web designs and functionality. Regularly, people who attach with what they know are the ones finding themselves out of jobs.

As a conclusion, trends and developments are signs of the upcoming era of Web design in which designers can use new methods and techniques to their fullest potential. Web designers should be excited and look forward to the promising years to come.

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