



AWARD-WINNING WEB SITES PLACE VISITORS FIRST

What does it take to have an award-winning Web site? According to the Web Marketing Association, it takes a combination of qualities.

Since 1997, the Web Marketing Association's Web-

Award Competition has set the standard of excellence for Web site development.

Here are the seven criteria on which Web sites are judged in the annual competition.

- * Design. Many people judge a book by its cover and the same goes for Web sites. If a site looks old and unsophisticated, it will lose much of its credibility.
- * Content. "Content is king" has been the mantra of most award-winning Web sites. People visit a Web site for its content. If the content they are looking for is missing, they will leave the site disappointed.
- * Innovation. Sometimes called the "wow" factor, innovation is something new and attention-getting that adds value to the site and enhances the user's experience. It could be a new technology, new search method, new navigation system, new content or a new design.
- * Technology. Use of technology could either enhance or hinder a Web site's usefulness. If a site uses too much technology, users may have to work harder to get what they are looking for. No matter how impressive a new technology is, if it slows the site or hinders the user's search for information, it's not an enhancement.
- * Interactivity. Some Web sites are designed only to supply information. Other sites use calculators or tools to make the site more interactive. Some sites also offer games to improve the online experience.
- * Copywriting. Oftentimes, thousands of dollars are spent designing and programming a site with little attention paid to the words used. The best sites are well-written and use simple language, short sentences and bullet points to convey their messages. And, most importantly, they are carefully proofread to eliminate any typos.
- * Ease of use. In the early days, some of the "coolest" sites were impossible to navigate. Today, Web sites are much better at showing users how to find the information they are looking for. The best Web sites make sure that users can get to any other area on the site in three clicks or less.

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