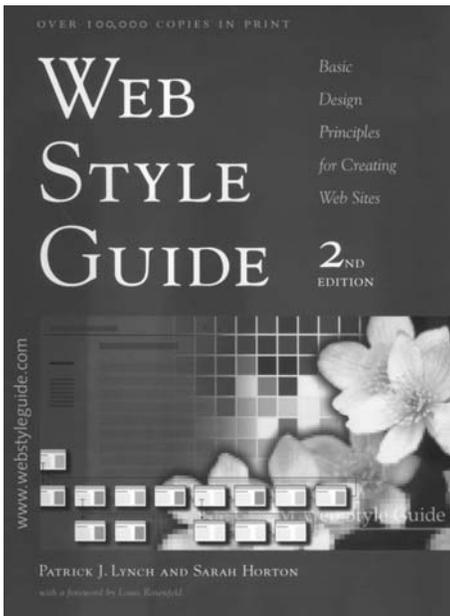


edited by Stephanie Deming



WEB STYLE GUIDE: BASIC DESIGN PRINCIPLES FOR CREATING WEB SITES. 2ND ED. PATRICK J LYNCH AND SARAH HORTON. NEW HAVEN: YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS; 2001. 223 PAGES. SOFTCOVER \$18.95. ISBN 0-300-08898-1.

Although *Web Style Guide* is slanted toward the designer's perspective, the book has practical relevance for those of us who write and edit Web content. Its eight chapters present a cohesive overview of the challenges and constraints that Web designers face and an insider's knowledge of the architecture that makes Web pages go. This information can give you a basis for developing content, evaluating a Web site's functionality, and discussing improvements with the designer.

In the opening chapter of this second edition, authors Patrick Lynch and Sarah Horton stress the importance of strategic planning, which allows you to begin the development process with a clear understanding of your goals, your audience, and your intended scope. This is followed by three chapters that explain how to establish the site's basic structure and function through the interface, site design, and page design. This information will help you understand what makes a Web site easy to navigate, how a consistent design scheme can keep visitors oriented, and how page layout enhances context and clarity. The discussion of page length in chapter 3 includes a comparison of text "chunking" versus scrolling, which can help you decide which technique is more appropriate when you need to present lengthy content.

The next two chapters focus on type and editorial style. The typography chapter amply reviews the mechanics of legibility and provides cogent explanations of such esoteric concepts as antialiasing. The brief chapter on editorial style touches on strategies for effective Web writing, with useful pointers for breaking up and reorganizing text so that readers in the Web environment can quickly scan for information. Writers and editors will not find in-depth information here but may be interested in seeing a designer's take on copy.

The final chapters discuss the judicious use of graphic and multimedia elements so that content is enhanced rather than overwhelmed. If you rely on a dial-up connection, you'll appreciate the authors' firm stance on bandwidth-hogging graphics that slow browsers to a mind-numbing crawl.

The new edition has an increased emphasis on Web-site accessibility, particularly as it applies to those with impaired vision. For example, the authors explain the importance of informative page titles and "alt" tags (alternate text), which provide content information to those who rely on Web-text readers. Material on information architecture, site maintenance, and multimedia has been expanded, and screen shots of Web sites, which are used to illustrate concepts, now appear in color.

Although most of the information is at the basic level, the authors assume that you have at least a rudimentary understanding of hypertext markup language (HTML). You don't have to know how to code a page, but it helps if you're familiar with the concepts; that is, you know what a "tag" is and you're aware that underlying source code defines the pages you see as you navigate the Web. Still, a relative novice will find most of the information accessible, and those who seek additional resources will appreciate the references at the end of each chapter.

The book's principal shortcoming is its presentation. I expect any book on design to be visually appealing, and a book that emphasizes Web-site functionality should be highly readable as well. Inexplicably, this book was set in a very small point size in a very fine serif font, creating a legibility problem that will challenge the presbyopic among us. The page layout makes clunky compromises to accommodate the large illustrations, and this often results in half-page gaps that may be mistaken for the end of a chapter. Figures are not numbered, and it's sometimes tricky to determine which example goes with a block of text.

Despite those faults, the book is worth a read. The full text is also available online at www.webstyleguide.com—where (ironically) you can print pages of interest in highly legible Times New Roman, jump directly to specific sections using navigational links, and visit the Web sites from which the authors drew their illustrations. Perhaps the answer is to buy the text in support of the authors' efforts, but count on the Web site when you want to review

vision-friendly content.

In his foreword to the second edition, information architect Louis Rosenfeld comments (with tongue in cheek) that toting this book into your next Web-development meeting will at least “make you look very smart”. But in fact, knowing what’s in the book can make you a more valuable asset—to clients or to your organization—as you strive to create and

maintain sites that use the Web to its fullest advantage.

Tamia Karpeles

TAMIA KARPELES, a freelance writer and editor, became interested in Web-site design after she volunteered to develop Web content for the mid-Atlantic chapter of the American Medical Writers Association.

Book Note

BATHSHEBA’S BREAST: WOMEN, CANCER AND HISTORY. JAMES S OLSON. BALTIMORE: JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY PRESS; 2002. 302 PAGES. HARDCOVER \$24.95. ISBN 0-8018-6936-6.

Bathsheba’s Breast: Women, Cancer and History is an interesting account of breast cancer research and treatment from about 500 BCE through the end of the 20th century and the scientific, political, and social forces—especially gender dynamics—that have shaped the responses to this disease. Interwoven with Olson’s narrative of medical and scientific developments in breast cancer and the physicians and scientists responsible for them are the personal stories of several famous women who confronted the disease, among them Anne of Austria, mother of Louis XIV, whose doctors’ state-of-the-art 17th-century remedies consisted largely of bleedings and purgatives; the English novelist Fanny Burney, who underwent a mastectomy in 1811, before the introduction of general anesthesia into surgical practice (her first-person account

is shocking); and Rose Kushner, who in the middle 1970s challenged the medical establishment in her own search for breast cancer care and helped launch the breast cancer movement. One of Olson’s major themes is how women’s role in society has influenced the history of breast cancer, and he illustrates how by the end of the 20th century—thanks to sweeping changes brought about by the women’s movement, the breast cancer movement, and other forces—women had gained a position of power in shaping the “breast cancer agenda”. Olson covers a lot of ground in 300 pages, and sometimes his decisions about which topics to cover in detail and which to cover more briefly seemed quirky to me. But that is a quibble. Olson’s writing about breast cancer from so many angles makes for a rich and engrossing narrative.

Stephanie Deming

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