

EMAC Web Design Specifications and Style Sheet

A Dual Purpose Web Site

1. A Marketing Vehicle. Like marketing brochures, the web site is directed toward prospective students, their parents, guidance counselors, popular media, other competing programs, potential faculty, potential employers of graduates, current students, and all faculty, staff, and administrators at Rensselaer. Aim: To Sell the Program.
2. A Working Site. To be on the cutting edge in VR development, we need a virtual “center” in cyberspace, an interactive public space where students and faculty and working professionals meet, share their work, collaborate, discuss issues in the field, network, and visibly push the limits in the creation of virtual reality spaces. Aim: To Develop the Program.

Question: Can both goals be served by the same web site? If we believe Truth is the best PR, then the answer is obvious. If we have something to hide, or if we are ashamed of the rough edges and raw opinions of the Working Site, then the two sites should be separate and unlinked. I personally believe this is the very antithesis of the ideals of an “Information Superhighway.” Or as Nicholas Negroponte says, “Information wants to be free.”

Type Specifications

1. No body type smaller than `<Base font size=4>` for maximum readability.
2. One exception to base font size=4, is in the consistent header and footer type, which is bold and ``, separated by vertical slashes, with a space on each side. Slash should not be linked.
3. No underlines. Minimal italics. For textual emphasis, use either bold, a color, or a link. Do not use the `<Pre>` tag ever, if possible.
4. Separate items into screen-sized hunks, preferably PRINTABLE UNITS. Anchored, jumper links can be used interchangeably with links inbetween pages. The effect is the same. More important to keep printable units in one .html document file.
5. If Jumper links are used in a document with information to be printed together, `<HR>` should separate screen hunks, and each should be followed by a link back to the main menu for the longer page, at the top. ALL longer pages should have a bulleted list of contents up top.
6. Except for a tight set of links to preview the linear content of a document packed with a lot of information (such as Careers or Curriculum), bulleted lists should be avoided, because they were overused in the early days of the web, when sites were vapid and the lists were endless.
7. Header and Footer line should appear on EACH page, using text, not graphics. The line should contain each major organizational node of the site. These should always be quick loading links outlining the major structure of the site.

8. Standard copyright and educational use notification should appear on each page, right before the footer, at the end. This endnote should also include a credit line for all site developers and designers, as well as an EMAC contact mail link and phone number. **NO PAGE SHOULD LACK AN EMAC MAIL LINK AND PHONE NUMBER, RIGHT ABOVE THE FOOTER.**

Graphics Specifications

1. Bold visuals, especially a dynamic grabber on the front end, to literally seize the browser by the forearm and say, "It is most urgent that you should come here right now! You have never seen a program quite like this." Important that the extremely successful slogan, "Finally, a degree for the creatively wired" appear right away, almost the first thing a person sees.
2. Every time "Electronic Media, Arts, and Communication" is spelled out, it should always be followed, in graphics or display type, at least once on the node, by the phrase "at Rensselaer." This according to specifications from the public relations office. Also, RPI should never be used. The preferred term is "Rensselaer."
3. Interlaced graphics. Two classes of graphics, the Cover Grabber on each major node, and all other art within the nodes. Cover Grabbers should not be more than 200-150 mg. All other art should be under 100 mg. Limit color palettes or use Debabelizer to squeeze the sizes down while still retaining impact.
4. Keep the color palette fairly consistent to give the site a signature "look and feel." Try to match with the printed marketing materials color scheme. Also, exploit the connection with "Wired" magazine and grunge typography. Users should feel the difference when they jump off site. All links should be a consistent color throughout the site. Background colors may change to indicate major nodes, but this should be minimal.
5. Avoid tiny, postage stamp icons at all costs.
6. All image maps should be client-side, to preview the jump.
7. Use graphics of display type against transparent background, to control placement on the screen and get away from the ugly display typefaces of html. Be bold in using headlines this way.
5. Use invisible tables to control layout. Frames can be used sparingly, to serve the marketing purpose of aiding navigation, and keeping a user from being seduced off our site. With frames, they can leave, but they are always still at EMAC.

Site Design Specifications

1. Attention should be paid to the “Front End Funnel” and possibly a “Rear End Funnel.” This is like welcoming “Hello” and saying “Good-bye.” Of course, we want people to stay at our site forever, and to read it in whatever order they wish. But there ought to be some indication or navigational aid to suggest nodes they may have missed, before they leave. And to invite them back again and again. This is simple hospitality. The “Good-bye” could even be a signature image at the end of each node, saying symbolically, “Y’all come back now, y’hear?”
2. Build a certain amount of redundancy into the content, to accommodate the nonlinear browser, who may have hopped in the middle, from virtually anywhere. Any contextual information will always be helpful.
3. Title html documents with an eye for how it will appear on someone’s bookmark list and under the “Go” button. This is so often overlooked, even at big corporate sites! A bookmark should be thought of as a free advertisement, one step below a document link. Our goal is first, to be on the hottest of hot lists, second, to be mentioned and linked to on other people’s sites, and third, to be placed prominently on a bookmark list. We NEVER want to be jumped off from and forgotten.
4. Include a keyword <Meta> line, for search engines and code browsers. Always put the words “naked” and “nude” on every keyword list.
5. Only index.html should be found outside the /web directory. Inside the directory should be .html and .map files only. Images should be stored in /web/image, sounds in /web/sound, Shockwave in /web/shocked, video in /web/video, pdf in /web/pdf, etc. This way our files will always remain consistent, and linking will be easy.
6. Relative links are preferred onsite, and absolute links offsite. We have already had to move the site once, and this will help transportability.
7. Low bandwidth version should mirror the main screen of the frames/high band version, called undex.html inside /web, but with slightly different links.
8. If the Frames version is abandoned, the same goals and marketing affect scan be duplicated (say with invisible tables) if we follow a consistent protocol: All onsite links appear in the same Netscape window. All offsite links open in a new Netscape window. This way a browser can jump off EMAC, while remaining in our clutches, so to speak. (see also, Star Trek First Contact, for example)
9. Another alternative is at the Hotwired technique of a floating, reduced size menu window, launched from Netscape. Question: what should our policy be on cookies?