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## The Top 10 Most Ludicrous Things You Can Do on Your Web Site

By Courtney Heard

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We have a running joke in our office that one day we'll load a page and it will say "You have reached the end of the World Wide Web" and it will be the truth. I've visited so many web sites in my time, it's unreal. There are a few web site features and practices that keep popping up, in spite of their highly detrimental nature. I find myself, day in and day out, advising clients to remove something or other from their web site, as it is stunting their online business potential. But cleaning up the World Wide Web one client at a time isn't very efficient, so I'll share with you the Top 10 most ludicrous things you can do on your web site, and hopefully we'll get this mess cleaned up.

1. Frames – Most of you are probably rolling your eyes right now, saying "I know, I know" but there not only still is a large amount of sites that use frames, there's actually a very dangerous counter-argument to this going on.

Frames section off your web site, making multiple smaller windows within one page. It sounds harmless enough, but the code behind a page with frames is very short, only referring to the pages that fill in the smaller windows. This hides any text you have on the page, any headings, any links, image names and alt text, comment tags, and a lot more from search engines. In short, frames hide 99% of your site's content from the view of search engines, fooling them into thinking your site is virtually bare.

Now, recently Google has announced that their search algorithm is newly able to see past frames and find all of your site's content. Problems remain, though, in that the algorithm does not yet index pages with frames well. This also doesn't fix the problem with other search engines.

There's some kind of Rebel Frames Force or something that use Google's new indexing ability as an argument for frames, among other even less valid points. "But what about this and what about that?" they argue. I say to you, rebel framers, why bother? I really don't understand why this inane argument continues. You can easily avoid any potentially harmful side-effects of frames by using tables. It looks exactly the same, if not better, and we know for sure that all search engine robots can decipher the uncomplicated table code. A smart site owner would simply not take the risk.

## The Top 10 Most Ludicrous Things You Can Do on Your Web Site

2. Keyword-rich Text Embedded in Images – Another fabulous way to shoot yourself in the proverbial foot. Search engines can't read text in an image, so if most of your web site's textual content is within images, you're pretty much done for. Come on people, keywords are what make the Web go `round! The idea is to have as many applicable keywords as possible within your site visible by search engines, right? So it really doesn't make much sense to take some of those keywords and hide them. There is no counter-argument to this. It's simple, if you want traffic, get your keywords out of images.

3. Entrance Pages/Flash Intros – This practice will not just have a negative impact on search engine optimization, it also subtracts from your site's user-friendliness.

Search engine robots want to find out what your site is about as soon as they can. In other words, they want to find content on the front page. This means that there absolutely must be keyword-rich text on

your opening page. It is fairly easy to comply with this while having an intro page, but it doesn't solve the user-friendliness issue.

Think, for a moment, about how you surf the web. If you're like the majority of surfers, you're looking for information and you want to find it fast. Simply put, an intro page is one more step that has to be taken before getting to the good stuff. Speaking from personal experience, if a site has a flash intro or an entrance page and I'm in a rush (which defines my life), I'll leave and find another source of the info I'm looking for. Essentially, I feel that sites with such opening pages, have little respect for my time and I don't want to venture into the site any further to find out how many other ways the site owner has found to elongate the simple act of supplying information. It's simply easier to find another site. Really, what exactly is the purpose of an entrance page? Try as I might, I just can't think of one.

4. Music – O.K., This is my biggest pet peeve. There is nothing more annoying than sitting down on Sunday morning, steaming cup of coffee in hand, opening iTunes to listen to the latest R.E.M., starting to surf the web and suddenly hearing a midi version of Greensleeves turn Losing My Religion into something that sounds more like a cat dying.

With the growing popularity of mp3s, you'll be hard pressed to find someone who doesn't listen to their own music while they're on the web. It is absolutely guaranteed that you'll turn some visitors away from your site if you insist on having music load with it.

"But, what if I offer a button that will turn the music off?" some people ask. Most web site visitors who are listening to music won't stick around long enough to find your off button. In my case, as soon as I hear one note, I hit the back button. There is always another site to find the information I'm looking for.

5. Large Media – Java applets, video media and images can be a real pain in the you-know-what when they haven't been optimized. There are so many poorly written java apps out there that will actually crash browsers. Large videos and images will cause your site to load slowly and visitors to leave before they even see the fully-loaded page.

Make sure you test any java apps across several browsers. If there's any delay in loading, trash it or fix it.

## The Top 10 Most Ludicrous Things You Can Do on Your Web Site

Optimizing large images is also necessary. Adobe ImageReady will significantly cut down the loading time of your image while saving it's quality and dimensions.

Video should be an option. Never have it load with your site. Most people don't have the time to sit around watching videos on web sites, let alone wait for videos to load. Pictures and text will tell your story just as easily.

Internet users still use dial-up accounts and with the rise of people accessing the internet from their mobile devices, shaving every second possible off the loading time of your site will ensure that visitors do not get impatient and leave.

6. Limited ways to contact – Believe it or not, I've actually come across commercial web sites that have absolutely no way to contact anyone associated with the site. Unless you hope your web site visitor's reaction to the online representation of your business to be a string of profanity, I wouldn't suggest taking this route. In fact, I've always urged clients to offer as many ways as possible to contact them on their web sites. Phone, fax, e-mail, contact form, mailing address, etc.

Everyone has their own preferred method of contact. A lot of my clients prefer talking on the phone and probably wouldn't be my clients if all I offered as a contact method was e-mail. Me, I hate talking on the phone and filling out forms. If you don't offer a link to your e-mail address on your site, you probably won't hear from me. But what about spam, you say? Well, you'll just have to decide for yourself what's worse, losing potential paying customers or getting more spam.

7. Long Pages/Entire Site in One Page – When loading a site, finding a page that seems to go on forever can seem daunting. The same amount of information, organized into several pages will seem a lot less scary to your visitors. Labeled pages and sections will lead your visitor to exactly the information they're looking for as opposed to making them search lines and lines of text to find it. Well organized content on several pages is also something that pleases the search engines.

8. No Link Exchange Policy – A lot of web sites out there don't exchange links as a rule. This will not only stunt the growth of your link popularity, but potential traffic that could come directly from those links would be lost. You don't have to exchange links with every interested site, but turning them all away is a dangerous practice.

9. Cross-Browser Compatibility Check – Always, always, always check what your web site looks like and how well it functions on other browsers. Do this whenever you update, make new pages, or new versions of browsers come out. I've seen some pretty funky stuff around the web that's been caused by non-compatibility. Title images on the bottom of the page, invisible links, missing images, even some sites that cause browsers to crash.

Here are some of the more popular browsers:

Microsoft Internet Explorer (IE)

Netscape

Opera

Mozilla

## The Top 10 Most Ludicrous Things You Can Do on Your Web Site

### Apple Safari

Download a copy of each of these and check your site! I realize most of you use Windows and can't check your site on Safari, so find a friend who has a Mac. Mac users are growing in numbers and can be some of your web site's visitors. Make sure what they see is what you want them to.

10. Free Web Space/No Domain Name – This one is all about professionalism. To avoid having your business seem about as serious as little Sally's lemonade stand down the street, don't host it on free web space like Geocities, Angelfire, etc. Get your own domain name. It costs an average of \$30/year and you can find good hosting for \$10/month, sometimes less. If you can't afford that, I suggest you turn off your computer and sell it for food. Free hosting is straight cheese, and your visitors will get the feeling you're not taking your business seriously.

So, there you have it. The top 10 most ludicrous things you can do with your web site. I've heard some web site owners argue that their site visitors have complimented their videos, java apps, music, etc. Just keep in mind, the visitors who don't like this stuff leave and you probably won't hear from them.

The goal of your commercial web site should be to soak up every last potential paying customer from the web. Any of these 10 points can turn paying customers away. Respect your visitors' time, try to make their experience on your site as quick and full of information as possible. Be organized and professional and let your audience see that you know what you're doing.

Courtney Heard is the founder of Abalone Designs, an Internet Marketing and SEO company in Vancouver, Canada. She has been involved in web development and marketing since 1995 and has helped start several businesses since then in the Vancouver area. More of Courtney's articles are available at [www.abalone.ca/resources/](http://www.abalone.ca/resources/)

### **web page building for beginners 4**

#### **By Ted Dupuie**

Page ranking by search engines such as Google are not only overrated but unusually explained by "experts" in the SEO field. SEO stands for search engine optimization and is needed to get your website placed at the top of a web search. I have no truck with someone wanting to get their pages placed in the number one or two spot from a search, but page ranking has nothing to do with that whatsoever and I can assure the reader that I can prove this to anyone with a computer. In fact, if you will just do a search for "writing critic" you will find

near the top and since I own

that site, I can explain to everyone how it got there and why. But at one time, I had four out of the top five spots on Google for this very same search. And by the way, my pages had no rank at all when they were first placed in the top positions by Google and Yahoo!

## The Top 10 Most Ludicrous Things You Can Do on Your Web Site

Let me explain that first of all, nobody ever does a search for the keywords writing critic, and getting a top position isn't all that hard because the ranking Google uses just doesn't count the keywords as anything very important. Next let me explain that if you do a search using the one keyword "online" that the competition is out of this world with over a half a billion pages coming up on Google or Yahoo. Then let me tell you that to be listed at the top of that search you will have a ranking of ten, the top ranking Google has to offer. It doesn't take a genius to figure out that the ranking numbers you have are classification numbers based on competition in the field for the keyword and it is the way Google, and I'm sure other engines and directories, weed out the pages that need not be brought up at the time of the search. My point is, that it is useless to try and get a ten ranking on a website that sells toilet paper, because first of all there is no competition, and secondly Google wouldn't waste their time ranking your site that high just to mess up their indexing methods.

So forget ranking unless you know what the rank of the competition has and use that as an ultimate goal for your perfectionist ideas, but do not count on it meaning everything I hear it is supposed to. Most of the thinking on this subject is ludicrous, and can be proven by doing some simple searches. I find that many searches bring the number one site in with a seven ranking while the next site down is ranked five, then a four, then a zero and the next a six, five, seven, etc. Google is famous for mixing in small players with big boys and African sites with Chinese to give the researcher the best shot at satisfaction. And I like that, as apposed to Yahoo's last five hundred URL's being owned by one company. I have written complaints of spamming to Yahoo, but have never seen anything done about it, while Google does a fair job of weeding out the bums that try to ruin it for the rest of us.

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Ted Dupuie owns a home based publishing company that only publishes his work, which includes diets, an investment strategy, and 8 websites, plus a family newsletter. He is also a writing critic with top ten placement on Google and Yahoo!

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