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And you don't have to take our word for it, we'll show you a lot of research findings and articles by design and usability gurus.

PEOPLE READ ON THE WEB

People only read word-by-word on the web when they are really interested in the content.
They usually skim the pages looking for highlighted keywords, meaningful headings, short paragraphs and scannable list.
Since they're in a hurry to find the very piece of information they're looking for, they'll skip what's irrelevant for them.

So don't expect people to read content that seems neither easily scannable nor relevant for them, therefore long text blocks, unnecessary instructions, promotional writing and "smalltalk" should be avoided on the web.

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ALL PAGES SHOULD BE ACCESSIBLE IN 3 CLICKS

Usability tests have long challenged the so called three-click rule.
Contrary to popular belief, people don't leave your site if they're unable to find the desired information in 3 clicks. In fact, the number of necessary clicks affects neither user satisfaction, nor success rate.
That's right; fewer clicks don't make users happier and aren't necessarily perceived as faster.

What really counts here is ease of navigation, the constant scent of information along the user's path. If you don't make the user think about the clicks, they won't mind having a few extra clicks.

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PEOPLE DON'T SCROLL

Although people weren't used to scrolling in the mid-nineties, nowadays it's absolutely natural to scroll.
For a continuous and lengthy content, like an article or a tutorial, scrolling provides even better usability than slicing up the text to several separate screens or pages.

You don't have to squeeze everything into the top of your homepage or above the fold.
To make sure that people will scroll, you need to follow certain design principles and provide content that keeps your visitors interested.
Also keep in mind that content above the fold will still get the most attention and is also crucial for users in deciding whether your page is worth reading at all.

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DESIGN IS ABOUT MAKING A WEBSITE LOOK GOOD

Many people regard web design as decoration; the art of making a website look good.
However, design is more about how something works than how it looks. Design is about both form and function. In contrast with art, good design is not only visually and emotionally appealing but is made for use.

The goal of design is to efficiently solve problems.
Design is based on the understanding of how users see the world, how they think and behave. And the toolset of the designer is broader than just colors and font-styles, as it also includes user-research, prototyping, usability testing, and more.

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ACCESSIBILITY IS EXPENSIVE AND DIFFICULT

To make your website accessible, you don't need to add extra functionality or to duplicate any content. The key is simply to assess the requirements of those with different skills and limited devices when designing the user interface and your content.
To build from scratch a website that's accessible therefore, costs virtually the same as to develop one that isn't.

Correcting an already inaccessible site, however, might need extra effort but is always beneficial on the long run since accessible sites are easier and cheaper to maintain.

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ACCESSIBLE SITES ARE UGLY

Accessibility on the web means making your content available to users with different skills and devices. A key requirement of web accessibility is to separate content (HTML) from visual appearance (CSS) in order to allow those preferring - or requiring - to use their own specific style sheet to access the content.

Since the visual appearance of a site is defined by style sheets, accessibility in itself should not have any impact on visual design.

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GRAPHICS WILL MAKE A PAGE ELEMENT MORE VISIBLE

A common pitfall in web design is to emphasize an important piece of content with a graphic-heavy and flashy presentation. This approach, however, often makes it less visible.
When people look for something specific on a website, they search for text and links where they assume the information would be found. Very often people mistake visual, colorful page elements for ads and avoid them altogether.

It doesn't mean though that you can't use any emphasis. Contrast does work well and is essential for prioritizing content and thus creating effective web design.

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STOCK PHOTOS IMPROVE THE USERS' EXPERIENCE

Usability tests and eye-tracking studies show that stock photos and other decorative graphic elements rarely add value to a website and more often harm than improve the users' experience.

Such images aren't related to the topic of the website and don't hold useful information. Users usually overlook stock images and might even get frustrated by them.

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DESIGN HAS TO BE ORIGINAL

Many designers would rather attempt reinventing the wheel than to adapt conventional user interface design patterns. It should be considered, however, that such design conventions are well-working because they've already been introduced and tested for usability. Since the users know them well, you don't need any explanation or instruction manual.

As users appreciate usability over novelties, standard patterns will eventually benefit your audience. It might occur that a new approach is needed, but you must be 100% positive that your solution is better than the existing pattern.

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IF YOUR DESIGN IS GOOD, SMALL DETAILS DON'T MATTER

"The details are not the details. They make the design." said Charles Eames. Fine details, such as an informative error message, a reassuring piece of microcopy, or the orders in which products are shown on a category page, strongly impact the user experience and the bottom line.

Small details go a long way. This is what Apple is all about: obsessive attention to details down to the smallest bits.

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YOU NEED TO REDESIGN YOUR WEBSITE PERIODICALLY

To many, a redesign means revamping the look of a website in the hope that it will increase conversions and attract new customers. In fact, such projects are often counterproductive as user feedbacks on numerous redesigns proved that users hate change, even if the new design is clearly superior to the original. For a redesign (or realign) to be effective, it must stem from the understanding of what does and what doesn't work on the current website, and how user needs have changed since the last redesign. In most cases, it is sufficient to make minor changes in the user interface. Google, Yahoo, Amazon and a bunch of others follow this strategy with great success: you can hardly see significant changes on their websites though they're perfecting their design constantly.

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MORE CHOICES AND FEATURES RESULT IN HIGHER SATISFACTION

Having choices is considered a good thing. We are used to choices and we value dearly if we can be in control.

However, the more choices a website or web application offers, the harder it is to understand the interface. Studies show that having too many options often leads to decision paralysis and frustration. As a general rule, people only value an abundance of features before they actually start using the given product. After they have started using it, the simpler solution wins with higher satisfaction.

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ICONS ENHANCE USABILITY

Many researchers have shown that icons are hard to memorize and are often highly inefficient. The Microsoft Outlook toolbar is a good example: the former icon-only toolbar had poor usability and changing the icons and their positioning didn't help much. What did help was the introduction of text labels next to the icons. It immediately fixed the usability issues and people started to use the toolbar.

In another study, the team of UIE observed that people remember a button's position instead of the graphic interpretation of the function.
In most projects, icons are very difficult to get right and need a lot of testing. For abstract things, icons rarely work well.

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YOU ARE LIKE YOUR USERS

When designing a website, it's easy to assume that everybody is like you. However, this leads to a strong bias and often ends in an inefficient design.
You evidently know a lot about your services and your website; you're passionate about them. Your users, on the other hand, are likely to not care that much. They have different attitudes and goals, and just want to get things done on your website.

To avoid this bias, you need to learn about your users, involve them in the design process, and interact with them.

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USERS MAKE OPTIMAL CHOICES

In an ideal world, users would scan through your entire page to find the very piece of information they're looking for, but research shows this is not the case. Usability tests prove that people tend to choose the first somewhat reasonable choice that catches their eyes.
That is, once they come across a link whose label refers even a little to what they've come for, they'll click it.

This is due to their experience that guessing wrong and hitting the back button is still more efficient than reading a whole page to find an exact match. This behaviour, known as satisficing, is a well-known decision-making strategy in psychology.

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SEARCH WILL SOLVE A WEBSITE'S NAVIGATION PROBLEMS

On a website, people usually scan for trigger words first and only use the search function when they're unable to find a good enough navigational link.
This holds true for most websites, though people habitually search by default for books, DVDs and CDs, computer games; that is, products whose title or author they know.

People are better at recognizing things than recalling them from memory. It's much easier and faster to click on a link than to enter a search term: you don't have to spontaneously come up with the proper search expression, or worry about synonyms and spelling.

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THE HOMEPAGE IS YOUR MOST IMPORTANT PAGE

Usability experts, including Jakob Nielsen, have long argued that your homepage is the most valuable real estate of your website.
As a result, lots of web designers and developers still spend most of their time on the design of the home page.

This, in fact, is no longer the case, as users' browsing and searching behavior has significantly changed over time.
Website statistics convincingly show that on many websites the homepage gets less and less share in pageviews.

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FLASH IS EVIL

In the earlier years of the internet, many web designers preferred overusing Flash animations, ignoring users with slow internet connections or without Flash player. These early implementations often neglected basic usability principles, too, therefore the whole technology was criticized for being unusable and inaccessible.
Flash technology has improved a lot since: it is now SEO friendly, has rich accessibility features and even supports the use of the browser's back button. Most users have no problems with Flash itself, suffice to mention the popularity of online video sharing sites. However, there are still a lot of poorly designed Flash sites and the technology has several limitations, so you should always consider whether it's the optimal choice for your design.

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YOU DON'T NEED THE CONTENT TO DESIGN A WEBSITE

Many designers create wireframes and comps with “lorem ipsum" filler text. Using dummy text often results in an aesthetically pleasing but unrealistic design. What’s worse, it creates the illusion that content is secondary.

The fact is that users come for the content, not the design. Content is by far the most important element in user interface design.
A webpage with a simple structure but quality content performs much better on usability tests than a nice layout with subpar text.

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IF IT WORKS FOR AMAZON, IT WILL WORK FOR YOU

Although Amazon has features that are both excellent and well-proven, they won't necessarily work on any e-commerce website. Let's take their customer reviews for example.
Target.com bought Amazon's customer review software. Jared Spool demonstrates that, despite using the same exact software and interface,

Target.com doesn't receive any reviews at all: in the first month after Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows came out, Amazon got 1 805 reviews, whereas Target received only 3 (both retailers sold about 2 million copies).
It doesn't mean that you shouldn't copy the design of others - by all means do. But make sure you also understand why it worked for them and how it will work for your company and your users.

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PEOPLE CAN TELL YOU WHAT THEY WANT

Many organizations still rely on asking people what changes they'd like to see in their website or service, neglecting historical research failures like the New Coke or the Aeron chair.
When asking people, you have to be aware that people make confident but false predictions about their future behavior, especially when presented with a new and unfamiliar design.

There's a huge difference between imagining using something and actually using it. In addition, human preferences are rather unstable.
That's not to say you should quit listening to your customers. But make sure you know what to ask and how to interpret the answers.

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USABILITY TESTING IS EXPENSIVE

Many organizations still believe usability testing is a luxury that requires an expensively equipped lab and takes weeks to conduct. In fact, usability tests can be both fast and relatively cheap. You don't need expensive prototypes; low-tech paper prototype tests can also bring valuable results.

You don't need a lot of participants either, even 5 users can be enough to test for specific tasks, and the recruiting can also be done guerilla-style.
For many projects, you can even use remote and unmoderated tests.

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CHOICES SHOULD ALWAYS BE LIMITED TO 7+/-2

Limiting the number of menu tabs or the number of items in a dropdown list to the George Miller's magic number 7 is a false constraint. Miller's original theory argues that people can keep no more than 7 (plus or minus 2) items in their short-term memory. On a webpage, however, the information is visually present, people don't have to memorize anything and therefore can easily manage broader choices.

For example, research shows that broad and shallow menu structures may even work better than deeper menus. Also, link-rich e-commerce homepages, like that of Amazon with 90+ product category links, are found to be more usable than homepages with only a few links.

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PEOPLE ALWAYS USE YOUR PRODUCT THE WAY YOU IMAGINED THEY WOULD

Even if a product was designed to fulfill specific and known user needs, customers don't always use it the way and for the purpose the product was originally intended. In many cases, users don't care or don't understand how a product works, and once they find a way to use it, they'll stick to it. Many people, for example, type URLs into the Google search bar instead of the browser's address bar.

You should, therefore, never take your design for granted and always collect feedback on how your product is actually used to reveal the real user needs and to get ideas of innovation.

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AESTHETICS ARE NOT IMPORTANT IF YOU HAVE GOOD USABILITY

There are usability practitioners who completely dismiss the importance of aesthetics, often citing unattractive but popular websites such as Craigslist. However, aesthetics do have a function.
Attractive things work better. Studies show that emotions play an important role in the users' experience.

If a website has a pleasant visual design, users are more relaxed, tend to find the website more credible and easier to use.
A positive first impression - usually based on looks rather than interaction - determines the value of the website on the user's behalf.
Aesthetics also tell a good many about your brand, product or service. They show that you care.

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USABILITY TESTING = FOCUS GROUPS

When it comes to collecting feedback from users, usability tests and focus groups are often confused although their goals are completely different.
Focus groups assess what users say: a number of people gather in order to discuss their feelings, attitudes and thoughts on a given topic to reveal their motivations and preferences.

Usability testing, on the other hand, is about observing how people actually use a product, by assigning key tasks to users and analyzing their performance and experience.

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UX DESIGN IS ABOUT USABILITY

Designing for the user experience has a lot more to it than making a product usable. Usability allows people to easily accomplish their goals.
UX design covers more than that, it's about giving people a delightful and meaningful experience.

A good design is pleasurable, thoughtfully crafted, makes you happy, and gets you immersed. Think of games, they usually have these characteristics.
Or think of the iPhone that makes even failures "more enjoyable than succeeding on a Blackberry".

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WHITE SPACE IS WASTED SPACE

White space or “negative space”, referring to the empty space between and around elements of a design or page layout, is often overlooked and neglected. Although many may consider it a waste of valuable screen estate, white space is an essential element in web design and “is to be regarded as an active element, not a passive background,” Jan Tschichold wrote in 1930.

Not only is white space responsible for readability and content prioritization, it also plays an important role in the visual layout and brand positioning

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PEOPLE ARE RATIONAL

People don't make purely rational decisions based on careful analysis of cost and expected utility, despite what classical economics taught us.
Research findings confirm that our decisions are driven more by our emotions than logical and conscious thinking.

However, our irrationality is predictable.
Good designers, therefore, can learn about human decision making and go beyond usability to create products that effectively influence our behavior.

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IF YOU ARE AN EXPERT, YOU DON'T NEED TO TEST YOUR DESIGN

When it comes to evaluating the usability of an interface, user testing is often considered unnecessary if an expert has already reviewed it.
Since people rarely behave the way you expect, an expert can find major usability problems, but usability tests always reveal surprising issues.

Usability testing and expert reviews are both useful and tend to have different findings, therefore it's usually recommended to combine the two in order to get the most comprehensive analysis of the interface.

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UX DESIGN IS A STEP IN A PROJECT

Many think that user experience design is confined to sketching the interfaces. However, UX design is a much broader process that - ideally - starts at the strategy level and affects the whole lifecycle of a project or a business. UX design begins by learning about the business model, doing user research and understanding how a service can fit into the users' lives in a meaningful way.

Thus UX design has a crucial part in defining the business strategy, providing baselines for business decisions with such design deliverables as personas or user stories.
A UX-driven process doesn't end with the UIs either, it's also about testing with people, supporting development, making ongoing adjustments even after the launch.

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SUCCESS HAPPENS OVERNIGHT

The Apple iPod instantly turned the MP3 player market upside down, right? Amazon changed the book selling business like a shot, didn't it? Well, in fact they didn't. No matter how it may seem from the outside.

The fact is that it takes many years to be an overnight success even for internet entrepreneurs. Years of hard work, endurance, learning, experimenting, and many failures along the way.
And sometimes pursuing a project almost everybody dislikes, like developing Gmail with its "crazy Javascript stuff".

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