

Big Ideas

It's common to treat web design as a combination of "usability" and "artistry."

Programmers ask,

"How efficient is the code?"

"How easy is the site to use?"

"How innovative are the techniques?"

Designers ask,

"How original is the concept?"

"How clear is the flow of information?"

"How effective is the branding?"

"How refined is the typography?"

These are important questions. But they don't give us a clear starting point as we build sites.

We need to back up and think about a third kind of question—a “meta” question.

What *philosophies* of web design can guide our development as designers?

1

Design isn't just visual.

Design is interaction, it's plain-English URLs, it's error pages, it's copywriting. As a designer, you need to pay attention to all elements whether you are officially responsible for them or not.

2

Conventions are starting points, not absolute rules.

The logo in the upper left hand corner. Dividing a page into a main column and a sidebar. Thumbnail image, text, and a “learn more” link.

Don't arbitrarily break conventions, but when you break one, break it with confidence. The diversity of the web is a big part of what makes it great.

3

You can't control everything.

Sites will always look different in different browsers, OSs, and devices—this is part of the nature of the web. While a certain amount of consistency is desirable, the web is not print.

We need to accept variability but do our best to ensure that web content remains accessible to as many people as possible.

4

Mobile is a big deal.

The web standards community spent the first decade of the century convincing big business that accessibility, browser independence, and lightweight markup were important. While desktop browsers have improved and broadband has expanded, these values becoming relevant all over again: mobile devices—with their pay-per-megabyte plans, varied screen resolutions, and custom browsers—are m.

5

Typography is an underrated design tool, even on the web.

Typography is one of the few kinds of design where *medium* and *message* occur at the same time. There are opportunities on every website to make typography more effective, even without fancy web fonts or hyper-controlled styling.

6

Share and share alike.

Web design and development communities thrive on sharing, open-source licences, and online discussions. Contribute where you can, don't steal others' work, and acknowledge sources when you borrow techniques—reputation matters.

At the same time, strive for originality, whether in your design or coding techniques. You won't make your work better by isolating yourself or hoarding ideas.

7

Your technical skills are less important than your ideas.

There will always be a programmer who is faster than you. Because technology is constantly changing, don't be too much of a specialist and don't wed yourself to a single platform or language: develop your ideas about design, information architecture, content strategy, and online publishing. Most web professionals do most of these anyway.