

SURF

BY BOBBI JO WOODS

When browsing Web sites, I take into consideration the speed of the page as it loads. No one likes a slow-loading site! The latest design trends lean toward bold and graphically intense layouts. Taking advantage of cascading style sheets to separate layout from content, for example. There are also newer technologies to thank for this, such as Ajax, Ruby, the latest developments in JavaScript, dynamic html and of course Flash, the old standby for that "wow" effect. Check out these lightweight, heavy-hitters.

www.vibration.com



Vibration of Troy, MI has a good solid discipline of multiple media. The Web site is entirely in Flash. Sight is the first sense aroused as a strong jolt of red — the color of power, poise, and confidence — greets me upon arrival. Oh great, another sassy and intimidating multimedia site! But I was fooled. The inside of the site is not at all snobby, but instead it is fun yet classy, colorful and never boring. Various striking graphics captioned with smart slogans are featured on the next page. The navigation areas reveal more information before you can even ask for it, offering a slick, intuitive user experience. Overall, the site is livin' large, yet in a neat, effective and tidy little package of a site. Design by Vibration.

www.waxmarketing.com



Wax Marketing is a company with attitude — and not afraid to flaunt it. The Web site reflects this well. The design is laid out entirely in CSS, making for a rich experience without all the bulk of tables and spliced chunks of graphics. Every page has its own stunning header image to convey its concept and message, and each is fun and sassy without being silly. The client list, a who's-who of local and national businesses, does not interfere with the content, which is well written and with an unusually approachable feel. Overall, a fun and easy-to-navigate site that has lots of pop, but is still professional. By Dan Moriarty of Minneapolis, MN.

www.jrgeoffrion.com



This site makes a huge impact with swift and graceful page-loading not often seen on a site comprised entirely of Flash. Then there's the photography. The designer delivers each photo straight to the visitor's immediate view by having it fill the entire browser, then it automatically moves to the next one. This makes for a visually dramatic slideshow, as well as a nice, lazy user experience. The very method in which this site displays images alone, makes it stand head and shoulders above its competitors, but there are some additional great features waiting within. There is a series of articles about photography available for download, plus visitors can learn how all photos are processed using an exclusive technology developed and trademarked by the photographer himself. Design by 7strategy LLC of Olathe, KS.

www.mystricklands.com



The official Web site for the Ohio-based ice cream company is simply tasty. The entire layout is colorful and the graphics are tantalizing. The simple design offers great visual impact and delivers information quickly, thanks to small pages and dynamic content via a ColdFusion content management system. Complete with locations and a "flavor of the day" e-mail list to notify ice cream fanatics when their favorite ice cream will be on special, this site is very informative. One other treat about the site is it's chock-full of stories about the history of Strickland's, which makes for good reading. It's worth a visit just to learn how they got to be the only ice cream company with a specially designed scoop commissioned just for them. Design by Walking Stick Communications of Kent, OH.

BY DANA R. DELAPI

I can't remember the first Web page I ever saw, but the other day I was e-mailed a link to a page that said, "You have reached the very last page of the Internet. We hope you have enjoyed your browsing." How amusing. Whether or not there is a first or last page of the Internet, here is one superb site I found in between.

www.2advanced.com

Now here is a site that says it all in the url. 2Advanced Studios is as advanced as they come in Web design – and truly a cut above the rest. The site draws you in immediately with its fantasy world background reminiscent of video games. Each department is highlighted with vibrant colors, from fiery red to snow white, banana yellow to the homepage's mystical blue.

The site is seamless and smooth, offering a variety of navigation options to view the California-based company's portfolio of work, services, case studies and recognitions. The site also presents an enormous amount of information, which is cleverly hidden behind taps and drop menus. The site maintains a clean page at every turn that is unimposing and intriguing.

Plus, if you are truly impressed with the 2Advanced's fantasy Web world, you can download any of the six wallpapers used throughout the site. My desktop is currently the purple paradise "Return of the Sakura." ★★★★★



www.mnwin.org



This Web site for professional businesswomen in the Twin Cities is built entirely in PHP and dynamic html, clean, easy to navigate, and the look and feel speaks of motivation, achievement and prosperity. Features include a different member interview each month, an online directory of member bios and contact information, a calendar of events, plus several tools that female professionals will find handy, such as an online community forum, member discounts, and access to valuable tips and articles, which are effervescently written with the businesswoman in mind. The overall site is simple but classy and gives the feeling of professionalism to the organization. Design by SaintPaulWebDesign.com of St. Paul, MN.

www.thehouseplanshop.com



The House Plan shop has captured and perfected a refreshing and unique approach to selecting and ordering architectural plans for homes. Simple and clean navigation allows visitors to find their way around the site quickly and easily. The site manages to smoothly deliver a warehouse of information into a neat, fixed-width layout. The effect is done pleasingly through the use of CSS instead of using tables. From the homepage, visitors can choose a house plan and build from there – to the number of bedrooms, square feet, how many levels, etc. There are some very cool tools available in the Resources section, such as a glossary of terms and tip sheets. Design by Thought Process Interactive of St. Louis, MO.



Bobbi Jo Woods is a Minnesota-native with a love for merging efficiency and function with creativity. Her company, B. Woods Design, was established in 2002 and focuses on managed Web site strategies, using what Woods calls a "plain English approach." Woods has seven years of Web experience and her clients include creative professionals, nonprofits, and businesses. She comes from a family of volunteers and has worked in the past with such organizations as the Woodbury High Alumni Association, Degree of Honor Service Club and the St. Paul Jaycees. Learn more about Woods and view her work at bwoodsdesign.com.

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