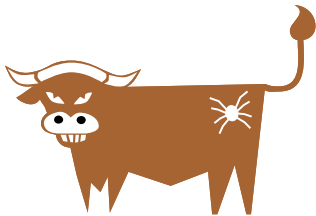


Just round 'em up and brand 'em!

or, Consistency is the guiding light of the Web developer



You often find yourself in a bizarre twilight zone on the Web—you're at a page you reached through a search engine, an index, or someone's hot-links page, and there's no name, no logo, no contact information, no way of knowing where you are.

In the real world, we use signposts and markers to identify where we are. Without these, people feel lost and disoriented. An American friend living in Milan recently described driving through Italy on the *autostrada* as this kind of experience—plenty of markers to tell you what's far

away, but nothing to tell you where you are.

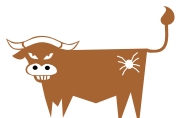
The Web is littered with “Italian autostrada” sites, and unjustifiably so. As with any kind of design in which the goal is get someone from one place to another, you have to provide signposts and wayfinding aids.

These can take the form of site **branding**, navigation bars, and ownership information.

Branding

Every page of a Web site should be branded with a company logo or other identity for two important and often overlooked reasons:

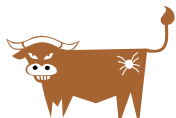
Starting points. People don't always navigate to locations on a site through aids you provide, like indexes, section heads, or home pages. A fairly large number of visitors come directly to a page—which serves as their first experience of your site—via search engines and indexes such as Alta Vista and Yahoo. On sites that my company manages, we often see one-quarter of the **visits** originating on pages other than the home page or section heads.



Appropriation. Branded pages are harder to steal. Several of our clients and colleagues have had bits of their sites stolen—but not by having the material appear at a different location. On poorly branded pages, it's been possible for ne'er-do-wells to simply *link* to those pages and claim them as their own. This is bad, and puts the true owner of the material in a less obviously defensible position legally. Fortunately, it's also easily dealt with through appropriate branding.

More obvious considerations are that good branding gives a sense of continuity throughout a site, and helps promote the brand or mark itself—important for real-world products or companies trying to further embed themselves in the public consciousness.

The brand shouldn't vary too much across a site. Large corporations might spend hundreds of thousands of dollars to define a corporate identity, while smaller companies might spend a few hundred or make something themselves. At either extreme, or any point in between, the company's investment in that identity should be built upon—not torn down and ignored. The same rationale



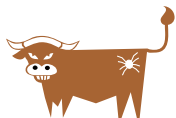
that created an industry out of corporate identity governs the Web.

The limiting characteristics of the Web make it even more important to use something simple and identifiable, such as a logo. With products and services in the real world, the logo might be used as part of packaging, on billboards, and on letterhead and business cards. On the Web, generally speaking, the logo or identity will be a small fragment of a 475-pixel-wide page.

Designers working on Web sites should always include a budget item, or at least an item to consider, on adapting and extending a company's existing identity into the medium so that it's not a last-minute, slap-it-on-the-scanner-and-throw-it-on-the-site effort.

Navigation bars

Along with the identity and branding should go a constant attention to navigation. On most sites that are designed with some thought to navigation, you'll see a vertical or horizontal bar (or both) that runs the length or depth of the screen displaying a variety of choices. This is definitely acceptable, but it's



not the only method.

The key elements in developing a navigation system or bar are the following:

Showing the users where they are. In a site divided into sections and subsections, there should be a clear visual indication of the current area of the site. As the user goes from page to page in that area, a consistent way of identifying where he or she is makes the material that's in the area seem more coherent. The visual reminder reinforces the text.

Some simple methods for identifying sections include a distinct color, typeface, or icon. Speaking as someone who's worked through the development of navigation schemes for dozens of sites, though, I can say that choosing icons is a tricky approach unless you have access to a vast array of photographic images or have a large budget with which to employ a talented illustrator and/or digital artist. It's not always possible to find an icon for each possible division of information on a site. Typographic and color treatments shouldn't be underestimated.



You can emphasize a location in more than one way, as well—a custom graphic coupled with an emphasized piece of type on a standard menu showing all areas of the site can provide reinforcement without being overwhelming.

Showing the users where they can go. Almost as important as identifying the current location is showing the user a simple approach to reaching the other main areas of a site. This is often accomplished through a navigation bar listing the site's various areas. As noted above, you can often use the same bar throughout the site and bring some additional attention to the area of the site you're in at the moment, without modifying the entire bar, through highlighting or color.

Although the majority of users surfing the Net now do use a browser that displays graphics, many folks don't wait for them all to load before clicking. A duplication of the graphical navigation bar in text makes the site instantly accessible to text-only, don't-autoload-images, or impatient visitors. (There's also still a significant minority of users who use Lynx, a text-only browser; others use AOL's slow browser or have slow connections and choose not to



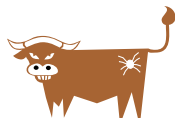
display images. Finally, making sure everything is duplicated in text allows ready access to your site by sight-impaired users.)

Copyright information

A brief point: make sure to include a clear copyright statement about the information on *each page* of your Web site—both in regular text, which appears on the page, and in comments inside the HTML file. When possible, attach comments to the GIFs used on your site as well (the GIF89a specification—the most recent—supports comments that, though invisible to the casual reader, are stored as a part of the file).

The information should be straightforward and short, and include contact details as well. Here's an example (though please note our disclaimer that this is not intended as legal advice, and we don't warranty any use of this text):

"Entire contents copyright 1996 [or "Entire contents (c) 1996"] Acme Diaper and Beer, Inc. All rights reserved. No portion of this site may be used



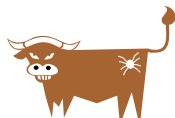
without advance written consent of the copyright holder. Contact us at frogstar@beebleshox.com or at Zaphod, Inc., 555 Union St., San Francisco, CA."

This notice alerts every visitor to the site that the material cannot be used without approval, and negates the "I didn't know" argument fielded by many. To protect your material, you are certainly not *required* to put a copyright notice next to it; however, it's highly recommended.


To protect yourself further and increase your ability to recover damages, you can register your copyright with your respective government. In the United States, violation of a copyright registered with the government results in vastly increased damages; otherwise, you can recover only actual loss of income or real costs.

Copyright information that you put inside your HTML files—the notices that users see once they look at the code you used to create your HTML pages—goes on comment lines, which start with `<!--` and end with `-->`. A valid comment line in HTML would be:

```
<!-- Thanks for Viewing Source on this document -->
```



Clear thinking

Using clear and straightforward navigational tools, and clearly identifying yourself, your products, and your company will result in better identification of the site material with your brand and identity. This is just as useful for creating a strong presence on the cyber-plane as it is in the material world. 

Go to glossary 

Glossary entries

Branding. This is an advertising-world term. The brand is the mark, logo, or identity of a product or company. To brand a page is to clearly identify it through graphic or other means as being part of that company or related to that product. The clearest method of doing this is to stick a logo on the page or product. [Back to article](#) ▶

Visits. There's a lot of unclear thinking on this subject. A visit is a unique user spending a finite and bounded period of time at a site. A visit takes place over a certain period of time bounded at either end by a first and last request to the site. Also defined as a "unique visit over time." [Back to article](#) ▶