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## Technology

Before you can apply your experience to the web and multimedia, it helps to have a basis in the current state of technology.

### Different profile

A computer audience has a different "profile" than a television audience. Namely, they sit upright and close to the screen, filling a large field of vision. In the case of TV your audience sits back, far away, and only lets the screen fill part of their view. Computers are also different than print--the visual resolution of a computer screen is only a tiny fraction of a printed page (therefore only a fraction of the text quantity or image quality is possible).

### Tools

There are many cool new tools and technologies enabling mass communication. During the presentation I take a quick look at the following tools and technologies:

- simple HTML email
- live customer chat
- Flash animation which despite being a very advanced technology is visible in most browsers
- web design tools for average people (such as Dreamweaver) which are a mixed blessing. On the one hand, the ease of such tools suggests anyone can and should become a web professional (which I don't believe). On the other hand, these tools let people do truly amazing things.

### Technology excludes part of your audience

Realize all technology solutions will, by definition, exclude part of your audience. Know that from the start and provide necessary alternatives. Also, try not to spend 90% of your time reaching the lowest 1% of your audience.

### Multimedia is not just "eye candy"

Multimedia isn't just superfluous "eye-candy"--it can do really robust and secure tasks. Just because some people use Flash, for example, for animated logos doesn't mean it's incapable of being used for something like banking.

## People

Presumably, you'll be hiring (or at least working with) others. Consider the following when selecting whom you hire.

### Cost breakdown

If you're doing the work yourself, realize the cost of software (and even hardware) is not as significant as your time invested learning. Some ready-built ("turnkey") solutions are very expensive (and can reduce your learning costs)--but regardless, it's "people costs" which are the biggie. My *rough* estimate of a typical project includes: 40% content acquisition and creation, 40% content development/production, 10% programming/execution, and 10% management.

### Hire people who tell you: "you're wrong"

You want to hire a company or person who is willing to tell you when you're wrong. Why hire people who will just tell you what you want to hear? ("Yes men".) If that's all you're doing, why hire anyone? Hire people who have the experience you lack--and *value* their advice. You may be the expert in PR (or whatever your field)... but realize why you're hiring other talent. You do your thing and let them do theirs.

### Doing it yourself

At first, it makes sense to pay for services rather than try to do them yourself. However, if you do try it yourself on a less than profitable project, there is an easy way to justify the additional cost--consider it a learning experience or an investment in education.

### Avoid clip art and stock images

Avoid clip art and stock images. Amazingly, it's often easier, faster, and cheaper to just hire a graphic artist or musician to create custom media. The obvious benefit is it will match precisely what you want (instead of simply finding something *close* to what you wanted). In addition, you don't risk having another company use the same image for another brand which could either become more popular than yours (making you look like a follower)... or be associated with a product that reflects negatively on yours.

## Design

Good design is always important--but there are considerations specific to computers and web publishing.

### Don't lie

Just because people know "statistics can lie" there's no excuse to let your graphics lie (and probably more reason against it because people are naturally suspicious). Edward Tufte can calculate a "lie factor" on graphics by measuring how much a graphic over or understates the numbers. Be careful not to represent a change in one number by changing two dimensions of a graphic (as in the oil barrels example shown).

### If you can't figure it out... how will they?

If you ever find yourself (or anyone in your team) misunderstanding an interface component, treat this as a sign that you must fix it! For example, if you keep clicking the "Home" button when you're intending to only go back one page (even if it happens to you just once) realize it will likely happen to your users too. Even though the public is becoming more savvy, that's no excuse to expect them work at learning an interface--just the opposite is true, more experienced viewer will be less forgiving of (or patient with) a bad design.

### People don't read

People don't read--therefore use other kinds of communication (visual and, more sparingly, auditory). Also, realize there's never enough screen space. Consider Edward Tufte's "Data-ink-maximization" rule which says to use ink (pixels) only for information and watch out for "Chart Junk". The way I think of it, if a media element is not adding anything, it's probably distracting.

### Net etiquette

Respect your audience! There are three simple ways you avoid alienating your audience (if not more).

1. Email blasts are an insult to begin with--don't add insult to injury by using "CC" (where everyone can see and distribute everyone else's email). Use "BCC" instead.
2. Watch out for software companies' attempts to make their product standards. For example, just because Microsoft "Front Page" makes it easy to embed a Word document in your web page--don't do it! If you can't format your text into HTML, then Adobe's Acrobat (.pdf) format is a much more acceptable (and reliable) standard.
3. The frequency of email blasts should remain low... and include real *value*. Try to keep the content limited to headlines and links to more information if they're interested. Take Northwest Airlines' email blasts which arrive every one to two days as a great example of what *not* to do. They're long and too frequent--their "shotgun approach" is insulting. Apple, in comparison, sends out a few headlines in their email blasts which arrive only twice a month!

### Avoid gratuitous effects

A monumental moment in my web-life came years ago having waited 15 minutes for an animated movie trailer to download. I was expecting a bigtime multimedia experience. What I got was a high quality, stereo sound, rendition of the "CastleRock" lighthouse animation! That's what I waited for! Even more important is to avoid superfluous animations, sound effects, and transitions. They may be cute the first time, but become tedious and cumbersome thereafter.

## Resources and Credits

### Thanks to:

Michael Bierman of Adobe for the SVG example files. ([www.adobe.com/svg](http://www.adobe.com/svg))

### Images hijacked from:

MPIU (<http://mpiu.com>)

LA-Z-BOY ([www.lazyboy.com](http://www.lazyboy.com))

Sony ([www.sony.com](http://www.sony.com))

Home Depot ([www.homedepot.com](http://www.homedepot.com))

Photodisc ([www.photodisc.com](http://www.photodisc.com))

The Oregonian ([www.oregonlive.com/news](http://www.oregonlive.com/news))

### References:

*Edward Tufte books (Published by Graphic Press)*

*The Visual Display of Quantitative Information (ISBN: 0-9613921-0-X)*

*Envisioning Information (ISBN: 0-9613921-1-8)*

*Visual Explanations: Images and Quantities, Evidence and Narrative (ISBN: 0-9613921-2-6)*

### Examples shown:

*And/Or example The Human Element, Inc. (<http://www.thehumanelement.com>)*

Stamps.com "Live Answer" from eShare.com

Northwest Airlines Promotions ([www.nwa.com](http://www.nwa.com))

Apple Computer ([www.apple.com](http://www.apple.com))

Macromedia ([www.macromedia.com](http://www.macromedia.com))

*March First ([www.marchfirst.com](http://www.marchfirst.com))*

### Custom graphics:

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### Suggested User Groups:

Multimedia | Internet Developers Group ([www.oregon.org](http://www.oregon.org))

Portland Oregon Developers Group ([www.refractpoint.com/paug/](http://www.refractpoint.com/paug/))

Computer-Human Interaction Forum of Oregon (<http://info.sigchi.acm.org/chapters/chifoo/>)