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**Effective Restaurant Website Design**  
**How To Virtually Reach Every Customer**

[www.foodservicewarehouse.com](http://www.foodservicewarehouse.com)

Restaurant websites are getting a bad reputation. The customer complaints of just how awful the websites are can be added up in the thousands. Understandably, this is also frustrating news for restaurant owners, who are dealing with the expense or time consumption that building a website requires.

The good news is, most of the complaints are consistent, which makes solving the problem much easier.



The biggest issues surrounding restaurant websites involve the overall design. Many websites overreach and are not compatible with today's mobile technology while others underwhelm and fail to provide the information customers are looking for. However, finding the perfect balance of providing information and promoting your restaurant is not as tricky as it seems, in fact it is nearly formulaic.

When hiring a website designer, building your own website or hiring a friend or family member with tech-savvy know-how, there are two design elements that need to be brought into consideration. These elements include **usability** and **information**.

First let's take a look at what usability is and why it is important to your website's overall design.

## Understanding Usability

When designing or updating, always keep the usability of your website in mind.

In the technical world, the term usability refers to making a product or system easier to use. In short, the usability of your restaurant's website refers to the user-friendly nature of your website. You want your customers to be able to first find your website and then be capable of navigating around the site without difficulty or frustration. To create a user-friendly website, you must take heed of a few style choices.

**Avoid** the following when consulting with a hired website designer or when building your own restaurant website:

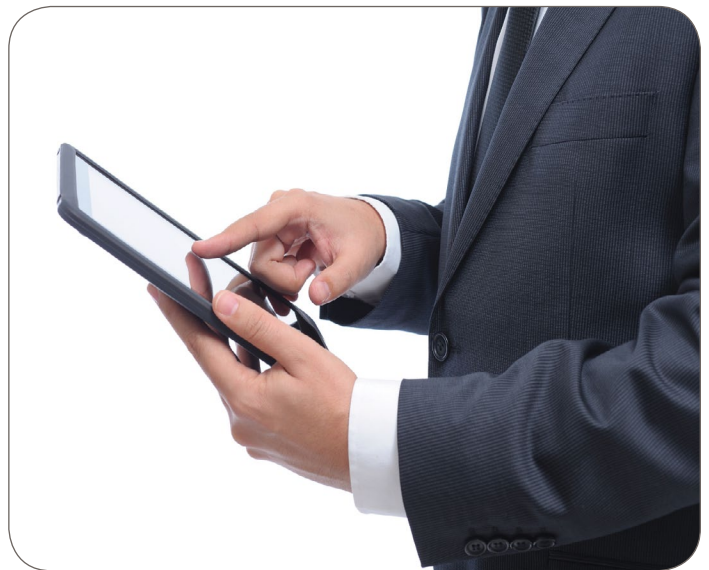
- **Using Adobe Flash or Java applications.**
- **Installing instant and automatic music.**
- **Attaching PDF files for customers to download.**
- **Using flashy introductions that appear before any other information.**

Why would you want to avoid these fun and eye-catching attributes? Simply put, they slow down browsers, annoy customers and distract from information that is necessary to put butts in seats.

Let's tackle each design issue one by one.

### Using Flash or Java based applications.

Adobe Flash and Javascript allow for visually vibrant website design, on a computer. However, they do not work as vividly on mobile devices. This is because most smart phones and tablets do not support either application. What this means is that a customer who is out and about and hungry will have greater difficulty viewing your website during a quick search on their smartphone or tablet. As consumer technology advances, it is increasingly more important to have a mobile-friendly website. In addition to incompatibility, these applications do not provide the ability to copy and paste information, be it your address, phone number or menu items. This is vital information customers want to use and share when making dining options.



51% of people looking for information on restaurants, bars and clubs have reported that they utilize online sources to find what they are looking for - The majority of this group gathers information on mobile devices.<sup>1</sup>

## Installing instant music once the webpage is opened.

It may seem hip and cutting edge to have a musical introduction for your restaurant's website, but if you do a quick Internet search with the keywords "restaurant websites with music" you will find it to be received as exactly the opposite. Providing automatic music or instantly streaming video on a restaurant website is typically viewed as intrusive to browsing customers. Many customers are listening to their own music, podcast or show while conducting an online search and the layered sound is an annoying and instant turn off. Other customers may be at work and the sudden noise will cause them to close the website immediately. For these reasons and many more it is best to avoid playing music or streaming video instantly on your website. The majority of diners are not looking to feel the vibe of a restaurant online, and trying to portray that may just turn them away from ever physically visiting your restaurant.

## Attaching PDF files for customers to download.

It is completely understandable from a restaurant owner's point of view to re-use the restaurant menu that is saved to a PDF file. After all, the menu took a lot of time to create and get just right. However, the problem with this sort of re-purposing is that it doesn't translate as well to electronic media, especially mobile devices. The biggest complaint by diners looking for options online is that the restaurant menu is only available as a PDF file. These types of files have longer download times and create a particularly painful browsing experience for customers using mobile technology. In addition, PDF files are not compatible for search engine optimization (SEO) traffic. Stick to HTML/CSS standards for your menu and keep your website optimized for access on all browsing devices.

**Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is an important element to any website or blog that wishes to be found by potential customers. For example, if you own a pizza shop in Detroit, you would want your restaurant's website to appear when someone types in the search terms "Pizza Detroit." Having an HTML created menu on your website gives you just that advantage.**





## Using flashy introductions that appear before any other information.

Even if your restaurant has a celebrity chef, resist the urge to splash pictures, a short biography or a celebrity endorsed welcome letter prior to offering your restaurant's basic information. This is viewed by customers as an annoying website feature. It is important to include a little something about your restaurant, but showcasing attributes before showing the vital information is frustrating. Consider each potential customer as a person on the go, busy and looking for a quick answer to "where should we eat?"

Finding the quick answer to just that question leads us to the next section. Now that you have a comprehensive list of what to avoid on your restaurant's website, it is time to take a look at what you should include and how to do it.

## Organizing Your Basic Information

The most basic information is exactly what your customers are looking for. This includes your address, phone number, hours of operation, menu, reservation policy and accepted forms of payment.

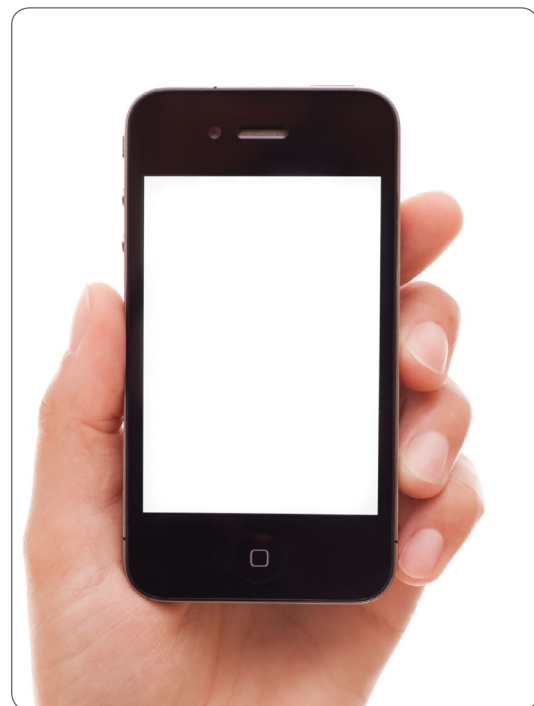
### Provide your address in a prominent and easy to see area.

The emphasis on this point is putting the address in an **easy to see area** of your website. Place it directly on the home page in a clear and visible spot. The next step is to include a link to Google Maps or any other reliable mapping application. This will enable customers to quickly route their way to your restaurant.

### Offer your contact information in an easy to see area.

Input your phone number directly beneath your address. When creating your website, use text to display this information, not an image. This will make it all the more user-friendly for smartphone users who can then tap on the number and automatically dial your business. Design features like this make all the difference for a customer who is running late for a reservation, hoping to place an order or needing extra help in finding your location.

In addition to providing your phone number under the address, you can also include a separate "Contact Us" tab that has all of your contact information in one place. This information can include: your address and phone number (again), email address, Facebook page information or any other social media information. The "Contact Us" tab is also a great place to upload an image of your restaurant's exterior. This way, the customer is provided with a visual of what your location looks like and can associate this with your contact information.



**A note again about using Flash images: Flash sites do not allow for copy and paste, which will frustrate customers trying to use an online mapping application such as Google Maps.**

## Communicate your hours of operation.

Place the hours of operation in close proximity of the address and phone number. Specify if you are closed on a specific day or if your hours change on the weekends. The key is to lead customers happily to your door. If your hours should change for any reason, **update your website**. For example:

Open 5pm-10pm Monday thru Friday  
5pm-11pm Saturdays  
Closed Sundays

## EFFECTIVE RESTAURANT WEBSITE



about



menu



photos

Hours:  
Monday -Thursday 11AM - 9 PM  
Friday - Saturday 11AM -11PM  
Closed Sunday

Location:  
6542 E. Bruschetta Avenue  
Cafe City, CO 83336  
*Directions*

*Online Reservations*  
**333.333.3333**

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## To reserve or not reserve? That shouldn't be a question.

If your restaurant accepts or recommends reservations, tell your customers just that. Place this information and a link to whatever online reservation service you provide or post a reservation phone number directly beneath the hours of operation. If your restaurant has a strict first come first served policy, politely mention this.

## Let your customers know how they can pay you.

If your restaurant only accepts cash or does not accept American Express, let your customers know. Nobody likes surprises when it comes time to pay the bill. Simply stating any payment restriction will save you and your customers a lot of stress.

## Presenting Your Menu

Do not miss out on potential customers and larger profits. Keep your website optimized for mobile technology and overall ease of use and resist the temptation to use an existing PDF file on your restaurant's website. PDF files for menus, particularly large menus can take a very long time to download. Do not overestimate your customer's patience as the average person will grow frustrated after waiting 8 to 10 seconds for a file to appear before moving on to another option.<sup>ii</sup> Remember that you are catering to a hungry customer base, which also translates into an impatient customer base.

Once you have your HTML/CSS optimized menu in place, follow the rest of these easy steps for a spectacular online presentation:

- **Include the prices of your main entrees.**  
Big spenders and frugal customers alike want an idea of how much the tab will be.
- **Update menu changes.**  
If the menu changes nightly or weekly, have a sample menu available along with a range of sample prices.
- **Provide access to additional menus.**  
This includes children's menus, cocktail menus or happy hour menus.

*Budget too limited to get your menu coded to HTML? Work with an online menu website to get your restaurants selections out there and easy to see. All you need to do is create a link on your website and you're done!*

*Websites such as [allmenus.com](http://allmenus.com), [www.allmenus.com](http://www.allmenus.com), will work with restaurant owners to get the right information up and available for customers to see.*

## Create an About Us tab

This is where you can introduce your restaurant's (brief) story, talk about your award winning chef, or the chef's personal approach to cuisine. This is also where you can list awards or links to any positive press that your restaurant has had. If your restaurant has received a high amount of positive public attention, consider creating a separate "Press" tab.

## Toot your horn with a Press tab

Potential customers love reassuring information when looking for a new place to eat. Give them all the good stuff with your own "Press" tab. This is an excellent way to neatly compile all of your restaurant's positive buzz and accolades. This can include awards for being voted "Best of" in your town to reviews given by happy customers on Yelp or any other social media platform.



## Use Clear Photography

Post a picture of what your restaurant represents on the home page. This could be your logo, your interior, a signature dish or perhaps a bartender working a cocktail shaker. Whichever image you select, make sure that it is clear and cleanly represents your business. Consider hiring a professional photographer or photo editor to enhance the quality of your website's appearance.



### Photos of your interior

Pictures of your restaurant's interior should display the characteristics that make it special. Whether it's contemporary fine dining, street cart fare or a friendly neighborhood café, consider this picture as a first impression for new customers.



### Photos of your food

Food photos are great, but only if they are done properly. When it comes to photographs of food, lighting and editing is everything. It is particularly beneficial to hire a professional photographer who can stage and capture your entrees in the perfect light.



### Photos of your staff in action

Highlighting a staff member hard at work portrays the vibe a customer can expect. Tell a story with the picture, such as a "fun place that only takes its drinks seriously" or "family friendly and welcoming" or whatever type of hospitality your business provides.



## Add a Photo tab

If you have a lot of great photos or if you have private dining or banquet space options, this is a great place to give customers a feel for the setting. Display the same clear photography that puts your business in the best light.

## Promoting your brand with your website

The font, colors and overall concept of your website should match the overall design concept of your restaurant. Treat your website as an extension of your brand. This will assist in fusing a visual memory for customers to recognize.



**Take a look at some of the bigger chain restaurant's websites to get an overall feel for how this works. Notice how their brand is consistent and recognizable. You won't have to put your logo on every page, but the style of your website should match the style of your restaurant.**



Remember that your website is a source of quick information for your customers, not just a source of entertainment or showcasing. Less is more and the clearer the better. If you want to keep a dialogue with your fan base, consider starting a Facebook page or restaurant blog and provide links to such outlets on your main website.

i "Where People Get Information About Restaurants and Local Businesses." Journalism.org. 14 Dec. 2011. [http://www.journalism.org/analysis\\_report/restaurants\\_bars\\_and\\_clubs](http://www.journalism.org/analysis_report/restaurants_bars_and_clubs) Accessed 21 Mar. 2012.

ii "The Psychology of Web Performance." Websiteoptimization.com. 30 May. 2008. <http://www.websiteoptimization.com/speed/tweak/psychology-web-performance/> Accessed 22 Mar. 2012.

## About FoodServiceWarehouse.com

FoodServiceWarehouse.com was founded in June of 2006 with a single business goal in mind: empowering food service operators to make their own businesses more successful. At FoodServiceWarehouse.com, we offer step-by-step assistance throughout the entire process of learning about and shopping for restaurant equipment and supplies. Our vast selection and educational resources create an incredibly comprehensive yet straightforward online shopping and learning experience, especially directed toward the bar and nightclub owner and operator.

When it comes to learning tools and resources, our one-of-a-kind Education Center is a great place to start. A library of free online articles, buying guides and downloadable tools gives you a comprehensive look at the food service industry from the inside out, and our Bar Specialty Store provides in-depth focus on the beverage industry specifically. When you need supplies, look no further than our Web site, where we offer over 100,000 items from nearly 300 manufacturers. To date, over 7,000 bars have come to us for supplies.

Our combination of comprehensive research materials, extensive product selection and customer-focused support process make FoodServiceWarehouse.com a one-of-a-kind experience for anyone in the food or beverage industry. For more information, please visit our website at [www.foodservicewarehouse.com](http://www.foodservicewarehouse.com).



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