

This article originally appeared in Splash – The Addison Magazine, 1998

When Robert Fulghum's All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten was published in 1988, the simplicity of his message elicited many a snicker and snide comment. But, in today's complex technological world, sometimes going back to the basics can bring things into perspective and make obvious the most difficult circumstances. Here's how you can apply Fulghum's philosophy to the content, design, and construction of your website.

Share everything. Play fair. Don't hit people.

If your website firm designed only one section of a larger site, only lay claim to that which you did. Don't overstate your contribution. It's tacky.

Put things back where you found them. Clean up your own mess. Don't take things that aren't yours.

Your website content is scattered about like a bunch of LEGO blocks on the floor. Some pieces have six holes, and naturally connect to others. Others aren't so obvious. Decide up front whether you prefer complete documents or lots of pages with very little text. The former requires scrolling; the latter requires clicking through many levels. Everyone has his or her own preference, and your opinion may change after the site comes together. Good navigation is seamless, intuitive and user-friendly. Site maps are only necessary if your website is very large. Your viewer shouldn't have to pull into the gas station to ask for a map.

Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody. Wash your hands before you eat.

Build process mechanisms into your website plan as you would any print project. Follow good project management basics (e.g., project plans, schedules and milestones), and stick to them. While print and online projects have their own set of problems, at least print projects are finite; new product roll-outs require new literature, and shareholder meetings require distribution of the annual and/or 10-K by a specific time. Web projects, on the other hand, have a self-imposed "personal best" deadline, which everyone knows is a moving target. Unless properly managed, designers and clients alike will want to tweak to death every last detail.

Flush.

Change your site's content regularly. Website firms are notoriously delinquent in keeping their own sites fresh. Why? Because it's very hard, and costly to provide content. Dear, dear client: If you commit to developing a website, be sure to commit enough staff resources and budget to keep your site fresh, long after the launch is but a fond memory.

Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you.

Comfort food tastes good and makes you feel better. When the fruit plate would be the smart choice, there are times when it's okay to choose the more fattening foods. Likewise, if your company is running lean, and you don't have the available staff, time, or skills to actually build your website, hire a firm that can do it all for you.

Live a balanced life – learn some and think some and draw and paint and sing and dance and play and work every day some.

Your website should look and feel like your company. It should be as tailored or trendy as the image your other marketing, advertising and investor material projects. If your website doesn't look related to its brothers and sisters in print, you have a problem. Fix it before the neighbors begin to talk.

Take a nap every afternoon.

Just don't let your website put your audience to sleep. There's nothing worse than long-winded, wordy mission statements on the corporate home page. Your Web audience can only handle two sentences, tops. Good editing goes a long way on the Web. Radio copy is not print copy; Web copy is not brochure copy. Need a good analogy for writing for the Web? Think "billboard."

When you go out into the world, watch out for traffic, hold hands, and stick together.

Websites are scary propositions. In print, you gear the content for a predetermined audience and control distribution. A website, however, is like a public library open 24 hours a day. Visitors read your content, make copies and freely distribute. So, take control over who can access specific parts of your "library." Use forms to get info about a visitor before you let them read extra info. Track your visitors. Buy low-cost website traffic measuring software, or, if the site traffic warrants, subcontract with a Web-analysis firm for more complete data. Then, reassess your site's effectiveness, and change your site's content, design or navigation.

Be aware of wonder. Remember the little seed in the Styrofoam cup: The roots go down and the plant goes up and nobody really knows how or why, but we are all like that.

My friend Dorothy worked for one of the big banks in something called "telecommunications" in the early 1980s. At that time, I was an agent for photographers and illustrators. For years, we'd each try to explain our respective professions. Just as Dorothy couldn't understand why the rights to photograph needed to be licensed, I struggled to figure out just how electronic fund transfers worked. Data passing through phone lines? No way! Today, the Web delivers data, voice and graphics with such ease that even the "technically challenged" can get it.



Goldfish and hamsters and white mice and even the little seed in the Styrofoam cup – they all die. And so do we.

If your website isn't working, change it. Don't be afraid to admit that the first version of your site didn't draw the way you thought it might. Lord knows how many failed advertising campaigns are quickly replaced by better ones. Remember Reebok's UBU campaign?

And then remember the Dick-and-Jane books and the first word you learned – the biggest word of all – LOOK.

Look at how quickly the Internet has slipped into our lives. We're seeing Web addresses on business cards, packaging, and at the end of most television commercials. If the fifties were the early days of television, then surely the nineties will be remembered as the early days of the Web. We're all pioneers. Enjoy this time.

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