Web Design by Melanie Stewart (Big Picture / Web Design Career Topics)

Cart Questions (advice & story)

Weekly Topic
We remember stories and so I will start each class with a broad-spectrum wisdom I learned along the way. The topic may not feel relevant but I am sure years down the road you will apply it.

1. **Building websites requires many skills that are dependent on each other.** The skills at the core are aesthetic design and technical skills involving coding and working with software and hardware. The next layer includes marketing, research and people skills. Under the umbrella of each skill comes subsets and subsets of skills.

2. **File organization is critical to new web designers.** The very first problems most new designers face is broken links, and almost always the file is there but so poorly organized that when pages moved the link became broken. I am a huge fan of over organizing before I get started. Start with a root folder then add folders for several projects, then add these folders into each project folder, images, css templates, original art, dead pages, text. My site has been developed over decades and now has 40,000 files. I keep everything, from retired sites, artwork, code samples, lesson plans, etc. What might look like a mess to someone looking in, makes sense to me. I can tell from the title when something was made and so have a sense of its relevance today without even opening it.

3. **What is an expert?** Ask twelve people and get twelve different answers. Personally I don't think anyone can be an expert in web-design unless they focus on one specific skill, and even then the need to overlap pulls people away from staying current with that single skill. It would be career suicide to put all your web eggs in one basket. Also keep in mind that vocabulary changes in computer technology over time. It's always important to clarify what someone means without blatantly asking "what did you intent". I have a story about a job advertisement posted on a techy bulleton board in 1997. It was posted by vice president of a fortune 500 company seeking an expert. The wanted 7 years of Windows 95, and then the list went on and on with so many skills that would be unnatural for one person to possess.

4. **Work in a distraction free environment.** Any artist or anyone who works from home knows this problem all to well. Any work environment where multitasking is required is completely unsuitable for the deep focus required to unravel solutions with many complexities. I might be able to "get that website done" but the final work will be pedestrian at best. Maybe that's good enough for the project you are working on, but ask yourself this first, if you want your name on that kind of work <u>before</u> you commit to such work. Know thine self!

5. **I have a client that wants a website that process orders and takes payment, and their budget is $2K.** My advice – RUN! Taking payment is a sticky issue. You, as the person who takes on that order becomes legally responsible for holes that lead to theft (of funds or identity). My advice inflate your budget, use a canned shopping cart from any of the big hosting providers and link it to paypal. Paypal has built consumer trust with a product that is financially viable for businesses, and easy for the customer and website developer to implement.

6. **Take shortcuts whenever possible.** Reuse code, copy code, tweak code, reuse a site that has already been designed, developed and tested. Build websites so you can swap out content easily or point to blogs. Build code libraries so you can reuse at will. That's basically all Dreamweaver is, a collection of instructions to write code, organized in a way that <u>if</u> you are able and willing to ask the question "what problem do you need to solve", you will likely find one of the many different ways Dreamweaver can solve the problem.

7. **ALWAYS think about the user.** What do they want, what do they need, who are they (existing and unknown), can you deliver what they want? Can you give more than they wanted? Can you keep it easy and not get confusing.

8. **The major trap "I just want to build a website".** Translation: All the details are frustrating me. Advice, break it down into bite sizes pieces. Remember it is a multicourse meal. Each element has its own recipe. When you get to a step that doesn't work, figure out the problem - defined the problem, and then define the question. In all my classes every student has come to me discouraged and hung on the stage of defining what the problem is. It is only when they start defining the question that more often than not the answer comes to them. Solving problems is the nature of webdesign. It's OK to walk away from it, but do yourself a favour and define the problem and question before you set it down. Also keep copious hand written notes.

9. **Best Collaborative Practices for new self employed web designers.** Find other people with skills and collaborate as often as you can. Pick people with complimentary skills and enough overlap that you understand and can do each others work when you get busy. Do project by project joint ventures, but don't get into partnerships too early – leads to a very confining space and new designers often over value their own work and undervalue the partners. This leads to a miserable and unprofitable situation.

10. **Best WorkFlow Practices for new self employed web designers.** If you under promise and over deliver, you should be able to build a business - alternatively you will end your career prematurely. Anticipate that your first websites will take twice as much time as you expected. Outline in your contract a timeline and dates when the customer is to provide content and how missing those dates will delay the final rollout of the site. Define who will provide product photos etc and what additional charges will be incurred when the customer changes their mind – and they will. Early on you will misread all the tell tale signs of a problem customer because you will be so enthusiastic about getting the work.

11. **Best "what next – post project thinking" Practices for new self employed web designers.** Before you meet with a customer ask yourself what do they want. Who will be updating their site, what is their strategy for moving forward. Are you capable of delivering, and if not, who can you go to. Build relationships so can collaborate into work and not out of it.

12. **I was hired, now what?** Go to work and be prepared to be bombarded with every possible challenge. Just do the best you can. You won't know their equipment, their fifedom, the software, glitchey stuff, and even the vocabulary that one industry person uses is often different from another person within the industry. Within the experienced set one persons 3 hour work day produces some one else's 12 hour day.

13. **Mobile or desktop?** While it's almost all mobile today, you should ask yourself how many mobiles sites do you go to and then look for the full site link. Ask yourself "why". Usually you just can't get everything you want on the site. Dreamweaver now has a feature (grids) for creating websites that gives codes and serves up a visual for you to see how it will look on mobile phone, tablets and screens. I think this is the way of the future. I think the dumbed down apps of today will have to either get better or just go away. You are a website consumer or user, never underestimate how you feel and how you use sites.

14. **Browsers?** About every six months research the percentage of browsers in use and try to test for the top 80%. Tseting takes time because testing revealing problems that need to be found. A developers biggest headache is handsdown Explorer with 9% of the market in December 2013 http://www.w3schools.com/browsers/browsers_stats.asp . We will NOT test for this browser. Just say that dirty word to a designer/developer and watch them cringe.

15. **Test:** Best thing you can do, and worst thing not to do.