

# Top Five Web-Site Mistakes

**THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS A PERFECT WEB SITE**, but one would think that experienced companies would have the basics down. That's not the case, says Jakob Nielsen, co-founder of Web-site consulting firm Nielsen Norman Group, former distinguished engineer at Sun Microsystems, and author of "Designing Web Usability: The Practice Of Simplicity" (New Riders Press, 1999).

Nielsen has been compiling lists of egregious Web-site design mistakes for years. This year, he asked readers of his Alertbox newsletter what irked them most. Their complaints are strikingly similar to what he's found in the past, once again focusing on the lack of simplicity. "Some of the basic things we need aren't glamorous," Nielsen says.

## Alertbox readers' top 5 complaints:

**1 POOR LEGIBILITY** Frustrations with font sizes, text-versus-background contrast, and general text readability were by far the biggest pet peeves among users.

**2 BAD LINKS** Too many sites don't offer easy-to-find links. They don't underline clickable text, distinguish it with a separate color, or provide adequate information on what a user should expect to find after clicking on a link.

**3 FLASH MISUSE** This isn't a problem with Macromedia Flash itself, but rather how it's used. When it's applied to lend interactivity to a static page, it works. When it's used to power multimedia content that's either pertinent to the site experience or offered only as a user-controlled option, it's helping. But when it's the basis of an unsolicited introduction to a site, or presents content that's irrelevant to the user's task, it gets in the way of a good experience.

**4 INEFFECTIVE CONTENT** Users want their online content short, scannable, and to the point. They want it to be conversational and to answer their basic questions. If content leaves them unclear of what to do, or if there's too much of it, or it's full of jargon, they'll move on.

**5 WEAK SEARCH** This is the one area that, while fundamental to any site's success, isn't so easy to fix. Bad search is usually the result of poor—or poorly deployed—software, ill-defined taxonomies, or bad content-tagging practices. **-TONY KONTZER**