

Different-2 Google AdSense placement Institute and websites

In a recent article I talked about Google AdSense placement based on eye-tracking research. However, research by The Pointer Institute, Eye tools and the Slow Center for Journalism and New Media has a lot to say about more than where to put an AdSense block.

Designing an eCommerce site is more than making it pretty. You have certain desired actions you're looking for from your visitors. You have specific things you want to be sure they see and hopefully act on. Now, there's some research that can guide your design. Certainly you want your site to look professional, but you want it to do its job as effectively as possible too.

People are surprisingly alike in some of their basic visual behavior. It's been argued that our evolution as hunter-gatherers has shaped much of our ingrained visual patterns. Whether you buy that particular argument or not there are still important commonalities.

Typical behavior on initially viewing a site is to do a fast scan of the entire visible screen with short focusing periods around the areas that attract attention. First pass tends to include headlines, the page logo, photo captions, subheads, links and menu items. And the big hot spot is the upper left corner of the screen. I haven't seen any definitive research on whether these patterns also hold for users with native languages that read any way except left to right, but I'm assuming most of you are building sites for left-to-right readers.

The clear message is that your most important real estate is in that upper left area and that the lower right (particularly if it's below the fold) is the least likely to receive much attention.

How you use your words in a headline, paragraph or link can make a huge difference in your success at capturing a visitor's attention. The concept is called frontloading. Wherever you can make sure your critical terms appear at the very beginning of headlines, links and other text. It's still got to make sense, but the first few words are far more likely to be at least scanned than the middle or end of a headline or link or the inside of a paragraph.

The exact same words can have drastically different capture rates depending on their order. You want to maximize the probability that the visitor will read a whole headline or link and then act on it. So put the most significant, enticing words first - the ones that are the best grabbers and convey the subject immediately.

You don't have a lot of time to mess about. It's been reported that a typical surfer may be off your page in well under 14 seconds unless something grabs his or her attention fast. Remember the upper-left? You want to do an especially good job with headlines, link and text in that area.

Drop caps (where the first capitalized letter in a line is in a different, often unusual, font and extends below the normal text base-line), bolding, font changes and color changes can also serve as strong eye-attractors. If you try these techniques you need to be careful that you don't overuse them (your page will look like a mess), and it's extremely important that you test whether or not they're actually doing what you want. Annoying as it may be, running tests is the only way to make sure it's an improvement.

Do you use lists? Have you made sure that they're in-line and as close to the left margin as possible? Don't ever use an outline format with multiple indents. People scan down, not across and they tend to scan close to the left margin. Indent too much and it might as well be invisible.

An interesting testing result that I read somewhere said that somewhere between 10 and 20 percent of site visitors don't even see centered headlines. Sure they look nice and a lot of sites use them, but if they're totally missed by even 3 percent of your visitors, you're paying a major price to look good. Suggestion put those headlines up against your left margin.

This also applies to links. Put those links up against the left margin, not inside a paragraph, centered or off to the right. And if you want any clicks on a link, never put it in that nearly unseen lower right area. Might as well just leave it off your page

How about indented paragraphs? Now there's a great way to start an argument. Some argue that it attracts the eye, it's different, and few sites use it so you stand out. Others insist that you're far better off staying left justified and frontloading each paragraphed. There's only one way to resolve it for yourself, yeah, run some tests and see what works with your visitors on your site.

The bottom line is that once you get beyond the basics of placement, frontloading, and left-justified links and headlines, you need to test if you want to fully maximize the effectiveness of your website design. I wish there were a simpler answer too, but in the end only testing will tell you what works best for your site.

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