Establishing an Online Presence


When students or fellow academics search for your name, what do they discover? A FaceBook page? A blog? Embarrassing references? Or nothing at all?

As the web has become the primary source of information for academics, it has become essential that you have an online presence that is polished and professional.

A well-designed, well-organized homepage serves as your professional face. It can convey your professional identity by describing your research, your teaching experience, your publications, and any honors you have received.

The Top 10 Mistakes in Designing an Academic Homepage

1. Legibility Problems
   Overly dense text, insufficient contrast between the text and background, unreadable fonts and hopelessly small fonts will make your website seem unprofessional.

2. Content That’s Not Written for the Web
   Remember, readers pan and scan websites. Make sure the information is succinct and clearly organized.

3. Browser Incompatability
   Not everyone uses Internet Explorer. Make sure your website looks okay with Chrome, Mozilla, and Safari.

4. Missing Information
   Is your contact information readily available?

5. Sloppiness
   Improperly scaled images, text too wide for the screen, excessive scrolling—all are signs that your site is sloppy.

6. Excessive Glitz
   An academic website is very different from a commercial website. Your design needs to be simple, clear, and professional.

7. Anything that Looks Like Advertising
   This will turn readers off.

8. Outdated Information
   Update regularly. It’s essential that you maintain your website.
9. “Coming Soon”
Nothing says “amateurish” more loudly than a site in which whole sections on your website are left blank.

10. Failure to Update
It is very easy for information to become outdated. Make sure to update your site regularly.

Helpful Hints
Reading online differs from reading a printed text. Most readers do not read websites word by word: They scan.

*The content must be easy to scan:*

1. Keep your paragraphs short
2. Highlight key words
3. Use bulleted lists
4. Include subheadings

*Do not bury useful information:*

1. Make sure your contact information is readily available. Do not simply rely upon an “email me” link.
2. Make sure that navigation links appear on every page.

What to include:

- Contact information
- A brief bio, briefly describing your research and teaching
- Your publications
- Your c.v.
- A detailed description of your research
- Your teaching philosophy
- Your syllabi
- Links to course websites
- Links to useful online research resources