Website Creation Workshop

With Christina Hills

"DYI Design – Think Like a Designer When Creating Your Site"

Christina: Hello and welcome this is Christina Hills with the Website Creation Workshop. Welcome to this special call on with my expert Michelle Schlup who is a designer. She's going to be talking about DYI Design, Do It Yourself Design and how to think like a designer.

Before I turn it over to Michelle let me give you a bit of background on her. She's an independent background designer in Minneapolis and formerly from Chicago. Her formal education is in design including print, branding, packaging, etc. plus studies in psychology and sociology. How awesome! Together this resulted in a love of how to solve problems.

Lately she's been specializing in WordPress theme development and high end presentations for her clients. Not only does she build WordPress sites she puts together presentations and you're going to love her presentation today.

She loves the open source community and speaks to volunteers and organizers at Word Camps which I do too and how I found Michelle and other events around the country. Michelle and I are both involved in the Word Camp community; we're both WordPress lovers and thrilled to have her today talking to us about design.

Welcome Michelle!

Michelle: Glad to be here. Hi everybody and thank you again for having me on I'm really

excited to talk about design with you from an approachable standpoint everybody can use. I believe design is open to everybody and we're not limited to just designers.

A little about me and hi I'm Michelle and I design stuff and usually WordPress. My title is I'm a designer and front end WordPress developer. What that means is not only can I do the graphics and visuals and all that but I can actually build custom themes which I do for my clients.

Like Christina said I also do presentation design which is why I really like doing stuff like this because I get to do some for myself. But what I do is I work with a lot of clients and have varying degrees of design experience. Some people know a lot of the terminology, they know a lot of the words and stuff and some people don't know much about design at all. Either way we can work together really well and that's because design is actually a lot more accessible than you think it is.

To start I want to go through some design myths and stuff that people might believe about design that isn't actually true. The first myth is that design is what a site looks like and that's not true. Design isn't just about making a website be pretty that would just be decoration. There is a lot more to design then just the way a site looks.

I like to say design is about problem solving. Design isn't just the visuals but how things work and why they work and how everything is put together in a way that makes your site approachable and usable.

Another myth is only designers can design. I went to design school and there was a lot that I learned and designers, in general, have a lot of training in visual communication and problem solving which makes them a very valuable resource,

but pretty much anybody can learn the underlying principles to make your sites better. So no not only can designers design I actually believe everyone can design and it's my hope with this presentation that you'll be able to take away some tips you can use for your website to make it a better design experience.

I want to start out with a super click headline... "You'll never guess this important question that designers don't want you to know!" That's not actually true and I do want you to know about this important question which I believe is the fundamental question behind the entire design process. I'm basically giving you 4 years of design school for free and no student loans right now.

The main question behind design is the question...why? Like why are people here? Why are we using this content? Why did we choose this color? Why did we select this image?

Design is really the art of answering why to every element on your site. If you know why you did something then you're designing and you're a designer. This is your secret weapon for building effective and attractive sites. If you know the answer to this question for all the elements of your site like your content, graphics, your color or navigation you'll be able to build sites that people enjoy being on and achieve your goals.

I want to be able to break this down...Christina go ahead.

Christina: Michelle I never heard anyone say that before and that's amazing. This why...if you have that word "why" plastered on your head you'll do a better job. I've never heard anybody say this before. This is very cool.

Michelle: It's very true and exactly why I believe that anybody can apply design principles

to their site even if they're not a designer. Honestly that is 90% of what we learned in design school, how to really effectively ask why. I believe all of you out there can take that away and be able to make your sites better because of it.

The first element of that here is talking about effective sites. What I mean by that is how well does the site accomplish your goals and how easily people can use it. This is a site that is doing what it was supposed to do.

The first why question we're going to ask seems obvious...why do people visit websites? It seems like a pretty basic question and most people have an answer to it but I've got a fun answer. There is a word for why people visit websites already and that word is "verb," a word that represents an action or state of being. So we're going back to English class for a second but people go to websites to do something that's why they're there.

What are some of these verbs? There are a lot of common verbs and you may be familiar with many of them – buy, join, read, download, contact, donate, subscribe, sign up, share, comment and like and these are all verbs people can do while on your website.

So you want to think about looking at words like this. Why are people visiting your website? Now I've asked this question in person to a lot of people and I've had people try to shout out reasons why people are there. Part of what people think and they might think there's a lot of well someone can buy something on my website or sign up or like my Facebook page or get in touch with me, etc. So yeah there are technically many different things people can do on your website.

But your website actually has a single primary verb that's driving what you're doing. So while people can do many things there's one thing you may want them

to do most. For example, if you're an e-commerce site your primary verb is probably buy and you want people to buy something. If you're an independent professional like myself your primary verb is probably contact and I want people to get a hold of me. That is what I call a win. So you want to know what the win for your website is which means what would be considered a successful interaction by a visitor on your site?

For example, again the e-commerce example your verb is "buy" and so the win is you want someone to complete a shopping cart, you want them to go through it and buy the thing. If your primary goal is to get people to sign up for something then your verb is "sign up" because the win is you want them to enter their name and email into your newsletter sign up form and so they're kind of tied into each other.

What you want to do is really focus on what that number one item…a good way to use why to get to this is there's this thing called The 5 Why's which if you haven't heard of it you ask yourself why are people on my site and answer it. If it's not a super, super simple answer ask yourself why about that answer. If you're like why did people come to my site? Well they came to your site because they want to learn more information about my business. Okay why do they want to learn more information? Because they want to find out what's in the area. Okay why do they want to find out what's in the area? Because they want to find a store they can go to and so we're getting closer.

So we started by asking ourselves why are they on our site…well they want to find my address. Why? They want to go to my store. That primary win is I want people to come to my store. That's a perfectly valid reason for having a website too.

So we want to keep this primary win in the back of our minds as we're doing everything because everything on our site should be geared towards getting people to do the thing we wanted them to do. The way we do that is through having clear calls to action.

I basically say that calls to action encourage people to do the verb so you get a win. A call to action is exactly what it sounds like; it's getting people to do something on your site. We have a few different tools available to us as website builders, designers and developers that enable people to take action.

The first one is buttons and so there are buttons everywhere on your site. To make them the most effective we want to make sure, first of all, that they're clickable. It's sounds really obvious like it's a button so obviously it's clickable but I don't know if you've noticed in some of the trendy designs lately like Flat Design where anything doesn't have any dimensionality. If you're not careful it's really hard to tell what is something you can interact with and click on.

So I believe we may not need the fancy shiny Web 2.0 glossy buttons and more but we do want to make it clear that a button is a button that someone can click on.

Another thing is you want to use plain language and don't want to be cute or clever. So my example here of if you want someone to purchase something clicking Buy Now versus Spend Your Money people are a little more clear as to Buy Now. That is an established language that people are used to. So don't make your buttons or call to action the place where you want to be clever. You want that to be universal language.

Another thing people will be interacting with on your site is forms. We want them

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to be easy to use and not asking too much. Obviously you can see the form on the left versus the one on the right. Granted for different things you want to collect different information, not every form can only be 1 or 2 fields. But you don't want to ask more than you need.

I've gone into great detail in some other presentations and there are actually books and stuff out there just on the art of good form design. Basically the rule is you want to collect only the minimum information you need from somebody and sometimes that might only be an email address and so you might only need one thing or maybe a name and email address. Maybe they don't even have to sign up for an account on something in order to purchase something.

Remember, forms are a barrier and people don't like filling out forms. Nobody likes filling out forms and so the less form they have to fill out and the more they understand why they have to give you that information the more likely they are going to fill it out.

Another big one is your content. We want it to be easily scannable. That block of text on the left, unless you were planning on reading a novel that's way too much and I don't even want to look at it. So we want to break it up and make it direct and precise, make it a lot more scannable. Headlines that make it clear what kind of content it is, maybe some bulleted lists and everything is driving you back towards what is the thing you want them to do when they get there.

So not going off on long tangents and rambling about stuff, but very clear and directing people to that call to action.

Most importantly, on top of everything though, we want our website to be predictable. What I mean is we want it to be intuitive and easy to use. We want to

get out of people's way and let them do the thing they came there to do, which means we don't want to be confusing, we don't want to make them have to stop and not understand where something is or how to do something, we don't want to be clever for the sake of being clever.

There are a number of established patterns in design and layout on the internet. The internet has been around for a while and so there are certain things people expect when they go to a website which I'll go over in a little bit. The point is that unless you have a really good reason you want to stick to these established patterns. Remember we're asking ourselves why we're doing something and if you don't have a good reason for breaking an established pattern of layout or positioning or how something works don't do it just to be clever.

Here are some established patterns I believe everybody should take advantage of...people expect there to be a header on a site and that header usually has your navigation and also the logo. When you click on the logo it usually takes you back to the Home page and that's just common expected behavior.

People also look for a footer and the footer usually has extra navigation like the Terms and Conditions or a link to the Contact page. Often it has your contact info and maybe that's an email or phone number or physical address. Sometimes it actually repeats the navigation from the header as well so you have a list of all your pages. It often has all your social links and all that stuff. People are looking for that stuff in the footer, which is partly why I don't like the infinite scrolling sites. Those are the websites where you keep scrolling and scrolling and never get to the footer because it keeps loading new content.

People actually look for the footer because they expect it's the easiest way to be able to find this stuff. Speaking of getting in contact, usually people want to get in

contact and so make that easy to find; whether that's a Contact page or a form at the bottom of every page, maybe you have a small form in your footer. Make it really easy for people to get in touch with you.

Also Search, I believe that pretty much every website that has more than a little bit of content should have a good search functionality. People sometimes think differently than you and people might have a different way they want to find something and they don't really know where it is in your navigation but if they type it right into the search they'll find it. So let people be able to search on your website and let people find things their way.

In terms of scrolling and swiping, I've been to some websites where you scroll and instead of scrolling down the page normally it does a fancy page transition whatever. In most cases you really don't want to do stuff like that. You don't want to hijack the behavior someone's expecting like if they're on a mobile device and swipe they expect it to switch pages and if it does anything else they'll get confused.

Like I talked about with the buttons making sure people know that something is clickable is important. That is a design principle known as "affordance." Affordance means knowing that an object can be interacted with. We want to make sure that anything you can click on people understand you can click on it.

Also you can make use of the established visual language of icons and other metaphors. The mail icon we all pretty much adopted and we know it means email. Social icons are another one, the Map pins are location and so there are a lot of little icons already existing out there that you can use to help you accentuate your content and people understand what it is.

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Many themes come with icon libraries or there is the font, Awesome Icon Library. A lot of that is available to people without any technical knowledge and you can take advantage of that to make it easier to navigate the content on your site.

That is, in a nutshell, some general rules for making sure your website is effective. It is driving people towards the call to action. Of course, I will say like a lot of the stuff I find super fun is the visual side of things and so making attractive sites. How well does the site match your brand and follow good design principles?

The #1 thing in well designed sites is they have what's known as a "visual hierarchy." That is basically a fancy way of saying a clear notation of how important each thing on the page is relative to each other. A good visual hierarchy of your content, your images, of everything on your site will help guide people to the site to your call to action. So they'll be able to follow this hierarchy of this is the 1st thing, the 2nd thing, this is the 3rd thing and here's my call to action great and they will know what's most important.

I've got a couple of examples here. Here is a super basic site and if you're looking at this right now can you tell at a glance what is the most important thing on the page. Everything is all grouped together and it's basically all the same size and so it's really hard to tell which information is most important just by looking at it.

Fixing that a little bit you can see we've adjusted the design a little and now the hierarchy is much more clear. We're going to learn about the specific design tools to do this but you can see the heading is bigger, the information about the offer and date is smaller, the articles on the bottom are separated and you can tell they're not as important as the main article. The article itself is away from the navigation. So just by making some changes between this and this we've made it really easy to see the visual hierarchy of this page.

Here's another example. At a glance, can you tell which story of these 4 is the most important story? You can't tell because they're all the same. Just tweaking the design a little bit the first story is larger and more featured and you can definitely tell there is an order of which is the most important thing and the other 3 are less important. Again, we're just using some design tweaks and now it's really easy to tell which one is the most important.

Now I'm going to talk about the different elements of design you can use to help establish when you are working on your theme, whether that's using a page builder to move content around or your selecting a theme and want to see if it has good design principles out of the box or using a theme that has a control panel to be able to set some stuff.

The biggest impact on your site is Fonts and Typography. Most sites have a lot of words on them and a large part of what a lot of people are looking at and having good fonts and typography is crucial to having a well designed site.

In general less is more. As a DYI person fewer fonts is better. I'd say at most you want to pick one font for your primary headings and one for the body. The most important thing is you want the fonts to be legible, readable. Heading fonts are usually displayed larger so they can be a little more fancy. Your body fonts should be readable in larger paragraphs. They should be able to work well as a block of text and so you don't want to select anything super fancy.

I usually recommend for body fonts picking one of the standard fonts like Arial or Times New Roman, one font that is standard across all computers. Partly for nerdy technical reasons like if you don't have to load another font it loads a bit faster on the page, but partly because they are optimized to be read well on a

screen.

With heading fonts you can have a little more fun and where you can be quirky. Remember it doesn't just mean you only have 2 fonts because each font usually has a bold version and a regular version and maybe a light or super bold version and so you still have some super fun stuff to play with even if you only have 2 fonts.

The other thing is you want the fonts to be different from each other. If you have the first one that is big and chunky then the body font is a normal font. The 2nd one has a really thin font and so the other body font is a little thicker. The last one has what's know as a San Serif font and I'll talk about that in a bit and then the body font is a Serif's font which is a little bit different. You can tell they're different.

A design principle we learned in school is you really want things to be the same or really, really different. It's the make it look like you did it on purpose rule. That goes for fonts, for colors, it goes for lining things up on a page; either make them exactly the same or make them really different so people know you did it on purpose.

If you're using a theme where you have some control over font size and line height, etc. these are some really good typography rules you can follow. So paragraph headings and sub headings in order to make your theme appear generally well designed, I would not go any smaller than 16 pixels for your font size with a line height which is the distance between each line of text of 1.6 and so that's 1.6 times the font size.

You usually want 45 to 86 characters per line which usually means the text won't

be as wide as the page if you're on a desktop or big monitor. You'll usually have some breathing room or multiple columns. It also looks good if each paragraph has a bit of a gap between them. Again, think about each of the paragraphs has a bit of space between them and breathing room between lines, the same thing goes for websites. With headings you want a smaller line height. If you have a really big line height then if you have a 2 line heading it will look like the letters are really far apart and it will be hard to read, so you want a shorter line height for the headings.

With sub headings those are usually found inside your content and so you've got your main title at the top and then a paragraph and then a sub heading. You want there to be a larger top margin than a bottom margin. What does that really mean? It basically means the sub heading is going to be closer to the paragraph below it than the paragraph above it. So there will be a bigger space between the paragraph above it and the heading then there is between the heading and the paragraph below it. That way it's really easy to tell which paragraph that heading goes with.

These are if you happen to have a theme that gives you this level of control follow these rules; otherwise, look through a theme and check is the font readable, breathable, do the headings look good if you have more than one line in a heading. Is it really easy to tell if the sub headings go with the paragraph below it or not? You can look through it and get a pretty good sense of whether it looks good or not.

Here is some vocabulary you might encounter when you're dealing with typography. These are things you might see in CSS or a control panel. The font family is basically which type face are you using? Are you using Helvetica or Open Sans? That is your font family. In CSS there is usually several fonts spelled out

and so you might see Helvetica and then Arial and then Sans Serif and that means hey computer it's Helvetica so display this in Helvetica; otherwise, display this in Arial; otherwise just use whatever generic Sans Serif font there is. That means the text will always show up and it will always fall back to the default ones and so if someone doesn't have the fancy font installed you picked they will still be able to see the text.

Font size is pretty intuitive...how big or small is it? You might see this defined in pixels which is the PX so like 16 pixels you might see it in a unit called "M." Just be aware that a larger number is bigger and a smaller number is smaller. Pixels are usually the ones that are easier to conceptualize.

Font weight is how heavy or light is it. You can see on this page I have a heavy and a light font weight of the same font at the same time and those are available to you. Some fonts have several different weights from very heavy to very, very light. Make sure whatever you pick is legible.

There are also some other ones like font style and font text decoration and these control things like italics or underlines or strike throughs for cross out texts. You don't have to interact with these much but you might so I thought I'd point these out.

Christina: I was going to ask about font weights. I think of it in terms of bold or not bold, would you consider that the font weight?

Michelle: Bold is one version of font weight but you may also see it defined as a number like 300, 400 or 500. A bigger number is a heavier font weight and some fonts have weights all the way to 900. They have a lot of different weights. This font I'm using yeah...

Christina: The simplest version is bold or not bold. Is that right?

Michelle: Yes definitely. Technically speaking there is a strong element that makes your font appear bold which is not the same thing as font weight. So if you happen to see a thing that says font weight it basically means how heavy or light is it. Usually you encounter that in a world processor with bold or not bold.

The last thing is the difference between Serif and Sans Serif. As you look at the fonts I used here the San Serif font has the little nubs on the end of the letters and those are called the Serifs and the Sans Serif font is without Serifs and so it's a lot more generic and there are no little nubs on the end.

If you happen to hear people throwing around those terms now you know what they mean. Times New Roman, for example, is a Serif font and Arial is a Sans Serif font. You can look through all the fonts you have and can tell which is which. It's kind of a fun way to spend an afternoon for people like me but it's probably not actually a fun way.

A few resources for all of you and you'll also have access to all of these slides after the fact so don't worry about having to write any of this down. The first 2 are a couple of resources on how to pair fonts together, one using the Google Font service and the other using the Type Kit Font service. The Type Kit Font service, if any of you or your designer or developer has an Adobe Creative Cloud subscription they get Type Kit Fonts. Google Fonts are free for anyone to use and include and many themes come with at least one of these embedded options if you have an extensive control panel. But these are fun resources of seeing real fonts that look good together.

There's also a really great article here about balancing line length and font size from Smashing magazine which I highly recommend.

So that is an overall typography rules. Next we get to deal with colors and colors are super fun because the entire world is not black and white. In general again like with typography less is more. You're going to hear me say less is more over and over again during this presentation so get used to it.

Pick no more than 2 to 3 colors plus some neutral colors to go with them. I'd even say just 2 colors to start would be great plus your neutrals but maybe 3. Too many colors before you know what you're doing with them can get really distracting and this is a really good way to focus. I actually do this for my clients. I pick a similar color palette to this and then maybe we have a couple of smaller accent colors as we go. But do this and you can do this too.

When using colors the most important element is consistency and so here is a…

Christina: Can you go back to the other slide for a moment, sorry?

Michelle: Yeah.

Christina: I love this slide. I always thought the neutrals were part of your colors. Basically what you're saying is have a couple of colors and then have your grays. Is that right?

Michelle: Yes and most websites need a lot of different gray colors anywhere from light to dark or highlighting something, the background of a box. I usually have, I think built in I usually give my clients like 7 gray colors to choose from, from the darkest gray color to the lightest color and then 3 colors with a light and dark

version of each of those 3 colors as well.

Christina: Yes this is great and I've not thought of it this way. Could those grays be like a cooler gray or warmer gray? Could they have a little bit of color in it to make it like a warm or cool gray and still count it as a neutral?

Michelle: Yes. I usually try to match...again because I'm a design person I try to match my grays to the colors I'm using. Obviously, these are all cooler colors and so my grays here are a little cooler where I have this little bit more blue in the gray. I've done it with warmer sites where I have a bit more red in the gray. But I still consider them neutrals and they don't have to be exact gray colors.

Christina: Right.

Michelle: It's fine to pick an exact gray color if you don't know much about doing color matching and it will still look great. Obviously if you want to go that bit extra and try to match all your grays to the colors that's fine too, but a straight gray will also work.

Christina: This is great keep going.

Michelle: Here is a really beautiful site and it's using my color palette but it's very consistent. You want to be very careful with your use of colors. Right now by looking at it it's not easy to tell which objects you can click on right? We haven't been consistent at all about how we're using colors. Some stuff that looks like they're all the same are all different colors.

So you want to try to pick a color and pick a single use for it and use it the same way across the whole site. But here is a good example of the same thing and you

can see I took the pink color and made pink my clickable stuff except for the logo. The logo is usually an image.

Other stuff you want to think about other than links and buttons you usually want to pick one color that you use for all your links and primary buttons. Maybe denoting primary content versus secondary content; maybe denoting some kind of call out or special alert is one color and just whatever role you pick for a color be consistent with how you use it across the site. Maybe there are certain colors you tend to use as background colors and then one color you always use as links and buttons.

Again, we're going back to that being predictable thing. Make it easy for people to use your site. Make it easy for people to scan and see what they can connect with...this is a great way to use color to do that.

You can see the difference here and this way it's not easy to tell what you can click on and you might...

Christina: Right you can't tell.

Michelle: Then just changing how you use color it's easy to tell what you can click on, it's easy to tell if those 3 boxes at the bottom probably have something to do with each other and so that's just a way of using color to help make your site easier to use.

Another thing is contrast and so make sure people can read it. This goes with color on gray or color on color or white or black on color. Make sure people can read it. I do have some great resources at the end of this section for color combinations that are accessible. Accessibility has some pretty high standards for

color contrast but the good thing is you know if you pick an accessible color palette it will be legible. So that's a really good place to start.

If your brand colors, like whatever colors are in your logo or whatever are not very high contrast maybe don't use them for text or maybe create a darker version of your brand color that is in the same kind of color family. So if you have a bright red and you can't really write text with it maybe create a dark red you can use if you want to write text in it and it still looks like it matches but it's legible.

So that's kind of important because the stuff on the left might be the best content ever but if no one can read it it's not very useful.

Christina: Do you have an opinion...go back to that slide and while we're on this I happen to dislike very much white text on black. You go to a website and it's all very black and then there's white text. I personally find it hard to read and I was curious of your opinion. I think it's difficult to look at.

Michelle: It is harder to read white text on black in small sizes. I do, however, use white text on black for presentations because you tend to be looking at those in a dark room. But context is really important right?

Christina: Good point.

Michelle: So white text on black is actually great for presentations because it's easier to read, it lessens the strain on the eyes in a dark room instead of this bright white screen blaring at you.

I think that a slightly off white screen with dark text is one of the easier things to read on a website. So not bright white but like a very slight gray with dark text is

pretty easy to read. You can do other color combinations. You may have to make your font size bigger or more spaced out to make it easier to read and so don't feel that you have to be limited but it's a good fall back to do a light background with dark text if you're not super good with how to use colors and fonts and stuff yet. That is just a good rule for making it look nice.

Christina: Right. So you're concurring with me for websites? It should…

Michelle: Yes and I've seen it done effectively other ways but you have to be able to probably increase your font size and increase your spacing, make sure your contrast is really good. If you're just trying to do normal generic whatever but switch the colors so it's white text on black it won't work very well, you have to make other changes as well.

It's easiest to make a good looking site with a white background and dark text. That is true yes.

Christina: Cool.

Michelle: Yeah. Here are some vocab words for you. A hue is where is it on the color spectrum? In less fancy language is it red, blue, yellow or green and that's your hue. Saturation is basically how vivid or dull is the color? A high saturation would be a very bright colorful color and where the low saturation would be starting to turn gray but zero saturation is a gray color and the highest saturation is the most bright vivid version of that color possible.

Contrast again that was something we were talking about with legibility but this is how much do they stand out from each other. Now certain colors like opposite colors on the color wheel kind of have really high contrast like red and green or

blue and orange or purple and yellow, they have really high contrast but if they're really high contrast and super high saturation they might start creating this visual vibration and be really hard to read. So unless your goal is to have a crazy visual vibration, ridiculously bright site maybe you don't do that.

Opacity just means how much you can see through it. Is it solid or transparent or somewhere in between? These are all things you might encounter when you're dealing with color.

I usually, for the most part, do not pick super highly saturated colors in websites because you already have a back lit screen and it's already going to be really bright. So I usually do a slightly less saturated color, not the brightest version of red I could find but like a slightly toned down version of red or toned down orange. It's just a good rule of thumb because we're already using bright screens and looking at it on a screen.

Here are the resources and the first 4 are different things you can go to play with color palettes. The first one is Adobe Color which is really good for learning about different types of color combinations like analogous or triad or other design words you can learn about and different ways colors can be combined. It's kind of a fun way to play with color theory. The other 3 are color palettes that are accessible and legible and have a high contrast.

The last one is a really good article about the psychology of color and how it relates to brand perception which would be really fun if you want to learn how colors are perceived and why you should or shouldn't use certain colors to mean certain things.

Now we're getting into alignment and spacing and alignment and spacing is how

the different elements on the site relate to each other and where they are on the page. Again my favorite phrase less is more, fewer elements with more breathing room.

You want to have space around your elements so people can scan the content better. Which of these 2 images is easier to read? The one on the right because we have less stuff. Now I understand different websites have different amounts of content. Some of them are going to have more complicated content and they're not all going to be a basic image with some text, a button and a short paragraph. No some of them have a lot of stuff.

Many people out there need to have ads but even if you need to have ads and complex content and a lot of things you can still give it breathing room. Like the design example right here, it's got an ad that is even showing up before you scroll too much but there's still breathing room and we haven't tried to pack a lot of that space full of stuff. So let it breathe and give it space.

We also want to make sure we create clear relationships between objects that are supposed to go together. So if we're looking at this example...what goes with what here? What do you think that button goes to? What do you think the controller goes to if you had to guess? It's kind of hard to tell and maybe it goes with that paragraph but I don't know. Maybe the button might go with the controller but I don't know.

If you group things together visually to make it clear how they go together...oh okay that controller goes with that slider, the button goes with that paragraph. The menu is its own thing and those 3 things are its own thing. You can see the difference just by giving things more breathing room and grouping them together. So we made it clear how they go together. And that's stuff like headings

with paragraphs or controllers with a slider or buttons with the thing they go with or a menu with the header or similar types of content so maybe an archive of articles can be grouped together with the main article as its own group. And so how things are next to each other is really important.

As a default rule, when in doubt align top and left. Obviously I'm talking about an English or left to right language where we read from the left side to the right side and down the page. It would be different if you had a right to left language but I'm speaking a left to right language and so align top and left. We don't want to be aligning center and then aligning right and then it gets really hard to read as you can see in the example. We're kind of mixing alignments all over the place versus just align left and top.

Obviously I don't top align and left align every single thing in all my designs, but I have many years of experience of knowing when to do it and when to not do it. You can basically guarantee you'll make something look good if you are consistent in your alignment across the whole document. It's a very easy way to do it.

I want to leave you with some vocabulary that you'll probably hear about. The first thing is called White Space which is how much breathing room each element has. If you remember in this slide here we've got a ton of white space on the right hand side and not very much white space on the left side. It doesn't necessarily have to be the color white it's just space that doesn't have content in it and maybe there is a background color or maybe it's an image with a tiny bit of text on it. White space is just the space you have not filled up with stuff.

The Grid is basically an underlying structure that determines how everything lays out. Now you're not probably going to be dealing with grids too much if you're

purchasing themes and even Page Builder themes. But you can think of a grid as kind of the rebar under your theme.

Usually I build things with a 12 column type layout and so if you look at something like this you can see how this breaks into 3 pretty clear columns right? There is this big thing that takes up 2 columns and the other one on the right takes up one column and you can divide those each into a couple of columns if you wanted smaller stuff.

But then the grid is basically the thing that's controlling how stuff lays out. You're not going to be interacting with it that much or changing it but again you can see the alignment here, the right column lines up all the way down and this lines up all the way down and it's just a nice way of looking at that stuff.

Then you might hear some stuff about padding and margins, this is again if you have a theme that's giving more granular control and a control panel or if you start interacting with CSS. If you have an object, padding is the space inside that object and the margin is the space outside that object. If you want to learn more about this obviously you can start digging into CSS and learning more. But in case anyone talks to you about padding and margins, padding is inside and margins are outside.

Some resources for learning about this stuff, these are all articles really talking about the importance of white space and the bottom one is a basic guide to web design with some of the stuff from everything we talked about.

I wanted to go over a quick summary of your take aways from this and this way the stuff that I think that you can remember when you're going forward.

Remember, design is problem solving. It's not just what things look like its how it works. And you want to be able to explain why you made a decision whether it's a decision about the content you wrote, about the way something looks, the image you chose or the thing you put in your menu...every decision you make be able to explain why you do it. Then you're designing.

Know what your win is and know why people are on your site and what you would consider a successful visitor on your site. And make sure you have clear calls to action that get people to do that thing.

Follow established patterns for ease of use, whether that's in the wording you use or the places you place content or how people interact with that content. Again, less is more all over the board. Don't have too many colors, too many fonts, don't have too much extra content that you don't need and really refine that and be deliberate about it.

Then, of course, make sure that you are using the visual hierarchy to guide your audience so they know what the most important thing is and what they should be doing.

Some general resources for you and these are some really great articles that talk about designing websites successfully in general. They touch on all the different principles we talked about here and the last article especially is pretty cool because it has some very specific actionable advice you can take kind of similar to what we went through here. I highly recommend you reading all of these if you're getting into tweaking your website looks.

That is it for the formal part of my presentation. This is how you can reach me it's my email. I'm on Twitter a lot and that link that Bit.ly link that is a link to these

exact slide that you can go look at any time you want, if you want to grab resources or just check something out.

Christina: And we'll email that out to everybody because I know they're going to want to get access to these slides Michelle because this was absolutely fantastic. You did a great job of putting this together and making it really clear and explaining things in a way that everybody can understand. So this is awesome!

We have a lot of questions coming in and people are saying how fantastic this call is.

Is italics considered the same or different? You talked about making things different. What would you say about italics?

Michelle: If you have a font and then the same font in italics I've definitely done that to show a difference. For example, all my paragraphs are a normal font and then the author information is italics but that's a good way of showing something is supposed to be different. I agree with that.

Christina: How do point sizes relate to pixel sizes for text? The person asking says sometimes they only see fonts in point sizes. Can you talk about point versus pixel size?

Michelle: Point size is a print thing and that obviously came first and that's talking about you probably see that in your word processors or anything that deals with print. Roughly they're about the same and there is a lot of technical jargon on why they're not exactly the same. Roughly on a standard screen 16 pixels is about what you expect 16 points to be but pixels is a digital measurement and points is print measurement is the difference.

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Christina: That makes sense. You mentioned the Font Awesome Icon Library. Can you repeat that resource again once more?

Michelle: Font Awesome is an icon font and it's a font that is full of icons and free to download. You have to know a little bit about CCS to include it in a theme but I think there are also some great plug-ins for WordPress that will let you include Font Awesome in your site without having to know code. But it's a whole bunch of standard icons you'd expect. All the social media icons, there's a bunch of different brand icons, accessibility icons, animated icons like spinners and loaders and pretty much everything.

              I highly recommend just going to the Font Awesome site and looking around they keep adding new stuff. It's pretty great.

Christina: I can get that resource out to everyone. One person was a little confused and maybe you can go over this again about the body of the paragraph should be closer to the heading or further from it. So there was a bit of confusion, you had talked about the heading and the sub heading and I don't know...

Michelle: Yeah let me see. It's like a little typography principle but you can see here there is an equal space between the sub heading and paragraphs and it's floating in the middle.

Christina: Right.

Michelle: There should be a little more space between the top of the heading and the paragraph before it that way you can tell what paragraph...this is like one of those things where you have control over this and it's that extra 10% to make it

awesome. It basically makes it easier to see that this heading goes with this paragraph and not just sitting in the middle.

Most themes you may not have control over that but you can look at the theme and see if they have good typography practices.

Christina: That makes sense now when you show it here. This is great. Everybody can review this presentation again. Another person is asking about the colors. Do the neutrals have to be grays or can they be variations of tan?

Michelle: I'd say they could be…I mean tan is like a red gray. I think also some of my neutrals is usually where I'm drawing my font color from and so usually one of the darker neutrals is my body font color. If you going to use all tans make sure you have one that's a high enough contrast that you can use it as your font color, so like a really dark brown.

Generally I'd recommend again if you don't know that much about what you're doing with color you stick with gray but if you want to get adventurous and play with other colors just remember to think about contrast and legibility.

Christina: While we're on this topic can you say a couple of things about accessibility for the visually impaired in terms of picking colors? I think you gave a resource for that but if you can talk about that one more time.

Michelle: Yeah let me see if I can go to one of these. This is one resource and it's called Color Safe and you can…I did a basic here's Helvetica background color and now I get to do live internet things which always takes forever.

Christina: Right.

Michelle: This website will let you play with different color combinations that will work with that kind of background. The other one that I think is fun is Random Accessible Color. This is fun because it randomly generates some color palettes that are accessible.

So there are lots of resources to read about accessibility standards and a lot of people who are a lot smarter than me that are working on that specifically. Basically there are very specific levels of contrast that need to be met for something to be considered accessible. On this page showing right now that AA 5.22 is an accessibility rating and everything on this site...this one literally just does random accessible color palettes. But everything that shows up on this site meets those color standards. Not every single color palette on here is beautiful but it's fun to play with.

Christina: That's very cool. How do we make things most printable? Are there settings for clients to make? For example, green for type, black for printing, not for printing background colors. Can you address that for making your website and when the person prints it the colors look good?

Michelle: Sure and I'll say there are a couple of elements to this. One, a lot of the browsers actually have some cool support for this now. I know I'm using Chrome on a Mac and I have options of showing the header and footer or not and like inside the printing dialogue box and whether to show the background image or not.

As a person who is not coding there isn't a lot you can do. But if you do work with someone who is building a theme or you're looking at themes there is a thing in CSS that specifically targets printers and people writing the theme can write special CSS to make it look a certain way when it's printed out.

So there isn't a lot you can do as a non-coder with stuff you've already got. But like I said a lot of print dialogue boxes in the browsers have gotten kind of smart and not necessarily going to print every single thing on the page. They have some pretty good simplification tools. But for people writing themes and you do happen to work with a developer or designer who is building a theme you can ask about this there is CSS that specifically targets how it should look when it's printed which is cool.

Christina: Great and I don't know how many theme designers or off the shelf themes automatically put that in. I mean one thing to do is when you're looking at the site or the theme demo print it and see how it looks.

Michelle: Yeah. I will say that's another good argument for the light background with dark text if you're not sure. If you think people are going to be printing your thing a lot that's a good reason to do it that way.

Christina: Since we're talking about themes many people have asked questions about themes. Are there theme companies you like? I have the ones that I like but I'd love to hear are there specific theme companies you like? Most of my students because they're doing it themselves buy off the shelf themes and so I was curious of who you liked or maybe how to...your take on how to evaluate a theme.

Michelle: I myself do everything custom but there are certain theme companies doing some good stuff. In terms of how to evaluate a theme I understand it's hard if you don't know code to evaluate a theme because all you have to go by is what it looks like.

I'd say the fewer bells and whistles it promises you the better. If you can get a theme that does what you want it to do and doesn't promise you the entire world

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like 5 sliders and 12 things and 14 SEO plug-ins...the more focused you can be when picking your theme the better off you'll be because you won't have a bunch of extra codes you don't need that will make it slow.

Obviously Page Builder situations are a little different and so if you're a Page Builder person that's a different conversation. But if you're just trying to buy a theme you want to try and buy a theme that just does the thing you want it to do. You don't want to buy a theme that promises the whole universe because you'll probably have a billion options and it will be hard to use.

In terms of specific theme companies all the ones I worked with are people that I know and it really depends on specifically what you want to do. I do recommend trying to find a company that specializes in the theme you're looking at rather than going and buying something cause it looks pretty.

I know it's hard but I think that's one of the things that the WordPress community really needs to address is making it easier for non-developers to figure out what themes are good.

Christina: I can give you my take on that one. I'm not a coder and I personally can't look at the code but I look at how committed is that person to their theme. I measure commitment by how well it's documented. So companies that have lots of good documentation, they have a good demo, their site for showing off the theme is intuitive that's what I look for because that says to me that person is committed to that them and that business they're building because they've taken the time to document it.

Now sometimes I'll find a company that coders told me this theme is really good and I'll go look at it and there's not too much documentation. So I'm like okay

maybe they're just getting started with their business so I'll come back again in a few months and see where they're at. But that's what I look for is do they have a good demo and do they have good documentation.

Michelle: Documentation is great and developers look for that too. I definitely agree. Also, if you have a way to tell how well supported it is like if you have questions about it will they get answered, whether it's on WordPress.org and you get it there or whether they have a support forum or ticketing system or call them. If you know you can get support for your theme that's pretty useful too especially if you're trying to do it yourself and don't have someone to help you.

Christina: Right and I also want to make a comment, free themes and hopefully they have support but part of why designers put out free themes is to let you experience their theme. I always think it's a good idea to upgrade to the paid Pro version of the theme if you like the theme. That helps support the designers and also covers the cost of their support. Themes are most of the time under $100 and so it's not like you're paying a ton of money.

Michelle: Yes especially if you want to make money off your site right? It makes sense to spend a little money at the beginning. I will say there are 2 companies that I think do beautiful themes and also built well and they follow the simplicity principle. Again, different conversation than the people that are doing Page Builder type stuff but if you want to get a theme that does what you want it to do there is a company called Array Themes. They are very attractive, very well built themes that do one thing well. Also Press 75 is a really good company.

Christina: I've heard of Array Themes but I never heard of Press 75. I will take a look at that.

Here is a great question. Can you talk about Home pages and how much content

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should be on the Home page?

Michelle: How much content should be on the Home page depends on what your website is. I would say a design portfolio website versus an industrial machinery site versus and e-commerce site would have very different needs for their Home page. There are some who can fit all their content on one page and there are some where you need a lot of pages and the Home page is an intro to all of it.

So with stuff like that we're going back to the Why principle. I think if you can really answer why something is there and point to how it achieves your sites goals then it can belong there. Obviously everyone can come up with some kind of reason to cram some stuff onto a page and then you end up with these really crowded pages. But if everything has breathing room and you can say this definitely supports my primary call to action and this definitely makes sense to be here there isn't any hard and fast rule as to how much content is too much.

I will say there isn't such a thing as above the fold versus below the fold anymore. If you ever heard of anyone talk about above the fold it's like an old newspaperism where the most important stuff has to be above the fold on the front page of a newspaper so people see it. But we all look at everything on our phones with tiny screens and random things and we're all used to scrolling now. Almost everybody scrolls at least a little bit. It's been proven and they've done studies.

So don't feel that you have to have a really short page if you feel more content would be helpful. But don't put in a bunch of random content that doesn't actually do anything either. It really depends on whether you can say each piece of content on there is actually supporting a goal of yours and if it is then awesome. Good for you! That was a really long non-answer.

Christina: I like the Home page, for me, to quickly know what the site is about. I should be able to go to a site and on the Home page get a sense of what the site is. Is it a portfolio? Is it a consultant? What is the site about? What is that business about? Then have places to click to then go deeper.

Michelle: I agree.

Christina: But like you say it's all depending upon the business and the goals and wins and the why's like you talked about.

Michelle: Yes and whatever that first thing is it's probably the most important thing. So like you said that's why a lot of websites nowadays you're seeing this big image with some text and a button because a lot of sites can be like…hey here's what we're all about go do this thing. That works for many people because it clearly communicates what's going on right away. It doesn't mean it works for everybody and again if you can come up with something else that makes a lot of sense for you…I mean if you look at the difference between the Apple site and CNN.com they look really different and have very different amounts of content at the top but both are really clear why you're there and what you're doing.

Christina: That's a great example. Following up to this one person made a comment and it's a bit long. It says I guess there are sales letters that overpopulate the content with lots of references to other content. I find myself; this is Jeff scrolling down all kinds of stuff to find the offer. I'm not sure if that helps clarify…let me keep reading this.

Does she have a better idea of what would be a better approach from design side versus what the sales guys say? I think he's referring to long sales letters where

someone is making an offer and you're scrolling forever and ever. It's a traditional direct marketing technique. Do you have any thoughts or comments on that?

Michelle: Sure. I dealt with that before. The option I always give as a good compromise is kind of not to leave your call to action to the very end. If you want to…I've done some work with Modern Tribe on their events calendar and some of that is helping to lay out some stuff on the website. If you go to a page on their website like you could scroll forever and ever and learn about all the different features of the events calendar but you don't have to scroll all the way to the bottom to get to the Buy Now button.

I believe if you want to talk about a whole bunch of information about something talk about all the features and how great it is and show testimonials that's fine, but then have your call to action in several places in the middle of that. So then as soon as I decided I believe you I don't have to keep scrolling to find how to buy your thing and I can do it right here. So maybe you have a bunch of Buy Nows interspersed in your content, maybe you have a sidebar that is sticky and you put the Buy Now in the sidebar so it's always sitting there waiting for someone when they decide to buy.

You can have long content that explains things and shows features and does lots of stuff, but if you want someone to buy something make sure that they're never far away from that button that lets them buy it or contact you or sign up.

Christina: That's a good point and something that I sometimes forget to do is intersperse these Ready To Go – Click Here so the person doesn't have to scroll to the bottom.

This is awesome Michelle! I'm loving this so much. I have a question for you because you mentioned Page Builder. What do you think of...are you familiar with the Divi theme? I'm curious what you think of it. I've been using it for a while and really like it a lot and I was wondering what your take was on it.

Michelle: I know about it and I know the people who built it and actually I just saw they're going to be coming out with a new version of it that's even more interesting and has some front end interaction with it. I think you'll find that cool.

Page Builder in the developer community is kind of a contentious topic, like nerd arguments we have about code and stuff. But the concept of Page Builders is extremely useful. I don't use a Page Builder theme but I've constructed Page Builder like things for my clients that they can use.

Generally, me personally, I recommend plug-in based solutions rather than theme based solutions but that's just a personal...either way I think having Page Builder functionality is going to become more common because websites have to be able to keep growing and changing with you they can't be stuck at what they are.

I totally get what Page Builders are doing and I think we'll see more and more of that in the future.

Christina: Here's my take on Divi and Page Builders and for anyone not familiar with Page Builder when you go into WordPress and write your blog post or page instead of just writing it the normal WordPress way there is a drag and drop whiziwig that helps you design the page.

The way I'm approaching it with Divi and Page Builder is my blog posts don't use

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it at all. So all my blog posts, if in the future I decide I don't want to use Divi and I know they've come up with solutions for it but to me it's easier to keep my blog content pure WordPress and then other individual pages us the Page Builder so if I switch off this theme it's not that much labor.

I know Divi has addressed that and I hope I'm not going everybody's heads and you're not sure what we're talking about. I know it was an issue in the beginning when Divi and Page Builder came out and they have some solution but I actually never looked into it.

Michelle: Yeah I think they have a plug-in version so you can use it like the Divi Page Builder with...the biggest problem is if you use a Page Builder it's great but if you switch themes then all that work is gone, right?

Christina: Right.

Michelle: Again there's a lot of nerdy philosophical arguments developers have about Page Builders, but I think the most important thing is there will be more options for being able to be flexible with how you layout your content which will only get better for the end user.

Christina: Yeah and that's what's nice for the do it yourselfer who isn't classically trained. You can use these Page Builders and they have grids and it helps you design well. But what you taught us today is information our brains need to know. It's not technology which is why this call is so awesome. It's just about...you talked about design principles and so no matter what theme you're using or whether you're doing a presentation or making a website everything you said applies which is great.

I'm getting tons of thank you and what an awesome webinar this has been. I'm not seeing any other questions and so I think we're good. Any other comments Michelle that you want to make? People are saying yes bring her back, terrific webinar! Thank you so much.

Michelle: No but if anyone has any questions, like I said, on the screen is my Twitter handle and my email and again the link to the slides which you'll all get. I'm happy to answer questions and glad to be here it was fun.

Christina: Yeah it was very cool. We will mail this out with your contact info and slides to everybody afterwards. Michelle thank you so much and I can't tell you how long I've been looking for somebody like you to give a presentation like this. This is awesome! It's probably one of the best ones we've had from my guest experts. I think everyone is typing in many thanks, outstanding presentation and so awesome.

All right I think we'll end it here and thank you Michelle and thank you to everybody else on my team. I will see you all next time. Bye-bye everybody.