

Web's **Worst** Practices

It starts with a blank canvas...

“White-space” is a term that's not passed around much these days, unless you're in marketing. However, the concept of White-space is not new. Every day you see it in how things are designed: billboards, business cards, pamphlets, fliers, all your basic marketing methods. How about non-basic/non-marketing uses: NASCAR (or *your* car for that fact), textbooks, furniture, even the awards that hang in your office. All of these contain a concept known as “White-space”

What exactly is White-space? To put it simply: it's the space around objects and around text to allow you to see what is really there. There can always be too much white-space, or too little, depending on the item you're designing. Take for example your business card. Most business cards are designed pretty well with white-space in mind (and I bet you didn't even know it). The main text that your prospect wants to see is placed in the middle or on the side with space above, below, and all around it (your name, address, email, website, etc). If you took away the white-space and crammed everything onto one side, it would look pretty awkward (primarily because all of your information is crammed on one side, *and* there is too much white-space). However, if you took away all of the extra white-space and put every single item of text on your business card, people would lose the point of the card because all they would see is text, text, and more text. In case you're a visual learner, take a look at the examples below to see what white-space looks like in comparison.

Tyler Durden
42 Paper St
Anywhere, MA 00123
Sales
<http://www.paperstreetssoap.com>
durden@paperstreetssoap.com

Too much white-space

Tyler Durden, 42 Paper St, Anywhere, MA 00123
Sales, <http://www.paperstreetssoap.com>
durden@paperstreetssoap.com
We deal with specialized soap made from recycled materials. Our unique blend allows for the cleaning materials in our soap to reach deep in the pores and clean all of the grimy gunk out. Think of it like a “fresh start” to your skin.
For a free sample, visit paperstreetssoap.com/sample today!

Too little white-space

Paper Street Soap
Unique Soap Products
42 Paper St
Anywhere, MA 00123

Tyler Durden
Sales

<http://www.paperstreetssoap.com>
Contact us for a free sample!

Just right!

As you can see in the examples above, White-space is very important in designing, and it's used everyday in our lives. The top left example has too much white-space and the card looks “blank.” The top right one has too much information and not enough white-space, so things look cramped and the important stuff

blends in with the non-important stuff. The bottom one has a blend of information and white-space, and is more esthetic to the eyes.

Now, why in the world am I talking about business cards instead of websites? Well, the concept of white-space applies in web design and development as well, but I wanted you to get a good grasp on what White-space is and how it applies to standard items.

White-space is important in web design and development because without it, all of your information would be so crammed into small spaces that nobody would know where to start. In retrospect, if you didn't have much information on your page to begin with, then all of your information would be on about 10 lines sitting at the top of the page. To most people, this looks very unprofessional and looks like you're not serious about your product/service/company.

What you *can* do is take that same information (let's say all 10 lines of it) and spread it out to look esthetic to the eyes. I'm not saying "bold this" and "underline that", but to actually add some "flair" to your site and spread your information in an easy-to-understand manner.

Let's take another look at those white-space examples.

<p>Welcome to my site. We are the Paper Street Soap company. We specialize in unique soap products. Click here to get a free sample. Our company has been around since 1998, when we realized that the soap on the market was just too expensive and needed another brand out there to make a difference in the world. That's why we created Paper Street Soap Company, to bring the unique qualities of recycled soap to you, our customer. We hope you enjoy our product and tell your friends about us! Paper Street Soap Company 42 Paper Street Anywhere, MA 00123 (834) 555-0123</p>	<p>Too much white-space The important information blends in with the non-important stuff and gets lost (and notice the "Click here" text we talked about in WWP 1)</p>	<p>Welcome to my site. We are the Paper Street Soap company. We specialize in unique soap products. Click here to get a free sample. Our company has been around since 1998, when we realized that the soap on the market was just too expensive and needed another brand out there to make a difference in the world. That's why we created Paper Street Soap Company, to bring the unique qualities of recycled soap to you, our customer. We hope you enjoy our product and tell your friends about us! Paper Street Soap Company 42 Paper Street Anywhere, MA 00123</p>	<p>Too little white-space The user sees nothing but the text and gets lost</p>
	<p>Welcome to my site. We are the Paper Street Soap company. We specialize in unique soap products. Find out how to get a free sample! Our company has been around since 1998, when we realized that the soap on the market was just too expensive and needed another brand out there to make a difference in the world. That's why we created Paper Street Soap Company, to bring the unique qualities of recycled soap to you, our customer. We hope you enjoy our product and tell your friends about us! Paper Street Soap Company 42 Paper Street Anywhere, MA 00123 (834) 555-0123</p>	<p>Better, but not perfect In this example, the text is spread out so the user can easily find what they want, whether it be contact information, history, or how to get their free sample!</p>	

The examples above apply the basic principal of white-space to web design and bring everything together full-circle. White-space is important because it separates the important aspects of information and presents them in an esthetically-pleasing manner, whether its on your business card, billboard, newsletter, or even your website. Without white-space, everything would seem cramped.

One last example (just to make sure you get it): think of waiting on a subway. Would you rather enter the car when everyone is packed in like sardines, or would you enter the car when there is nobody on the car (although that seems kinda creepy). How about best-of-both-worlds: enter the car where there are a few people, but you can keep your privacy space nice and clear.

To sum up everything: white-space spreads information out for a better view. Without it, everything would be jumbled and it would get very confusing. Give too much, and your information gets lost in the white-space. Giving "just enough" benefits everybody, so think next time you design something. Will your information get lost, or easy-to-see? *What would your Customer see?*

For more on how to organize your website for easy-to-access items for your customers, view Issue #2: Find my Content!