KNOW YOUR STUFF

GRAPHIC DESIGN & WEB DEV GLOSSARY

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I will be the first to admit that graphic & web design language can be overwhelming! And if you don't have any insight into designer lingo, a conversation with a design pro can be a little confusing.

That is why I have put together this comprehensive glossary to help you nail graphic & web terminology so you can feel confident working with a designer.

Enjoy!

Beth

ps. "Creep" definitely isn't what you think it is 😊

Ascender / Descender
The ascender is the portion of a lowercase letter that extends above the mean line of a font (the x-height). On the other hand, the descender is the portion of a letter that extends below the baseline of a font.

Golden ratio
First studied by the Ancient Greeks in the 5th Century B, the Golden Ratio is when you take two objects, divide the larger by smaller and get the result of 1.6180 (or near it). We could get way more mathematical than that but we'll just confuse ourselves. The most famous example of the golden ratio is the golden rectangle—this can be split into a perfect square and a rectangle of the same aspect ratio. The golden ratio can be used to make designs well formatted and attractive.

Hierarchy
Typographic hierarchy is an essential part of any design or layout and even if you're not familiar with the term, you'll be sure to have seen hierarchy in action on any website, newspaper or magazine.

Kerning
Kerning refers to the space between two specific letters (or other characters: numbers, punctuation, etc.) and the process of adjusting that space improves legibility.

Leading
Leading determines how text is spaced vertically in lines. Leading is used when content that has multiple lines of readable text and ensures the distance from the bottom of the words above to the top of the words below has appropriate spacing to make them legible.

Lorem Ipsum
Lorem Ipsum is simply dummy text used by the design industry. It's used as placeholder text and has a more-or-less average distribution of letters, making it look like readable English, as opposed to using 'Add content here, add content here' within designs when the copy isn't quite ready.

Monospace
A monospaced font, (also known as a fixed-pitch, fixed-width, or non-proportional font) is a font whose letters and characters each occupies the same amount of horizontal space.

Orphans / Widows
Widows and Orphans are lines of text that appear at the beginning or end of a paragraph, which are left alone at the top or bottom of a line. There is some debate about the exact definitions of these terms but as a rule of thumb:

Orphan: A is a single word or very short line, that appears at the end of a paragraph or the beginning of a column or a page, separated from the rest of the text.

Widow: A paragraph-ending line that falls at the beginning of the following page or column, thus separated from the rest of the text. Or the beginning of a new paragraph that starts at the bottom of a column or page.

Rule of thirds
The rule of thirds is a technique that designers use to determine focal point. Using a grid of three rows and columns, focal points are indicated where the lines converge. Designers use this as a guide to determine where to place important elements in their design.

Sans-serif
"Sans" literally means "without", and a sans serif font does not include any extra stroke at the ends of the letters. Though there are no set rules for when to use a serif or sans serif font, it's suggested that sans serif fonts should be used for online body text and serif fonts for headlines and print.

Script
Script typefaces are fonts or type based upon historical or modern handwriting styles and are more fluid than traditional typefaces. A couple of example script fonts include: Alex Brush; And, Grand Hotel

Serif
A serif is the little extra stroke or curves, at the ends of letters.

Slab serif
Slab serif fonts feature geometric feel than traditional serif fonts and feature serifs that square and larger, bolder. An excellent example of a slab serif font is Museo Slab.

Tracking
Tracking is similar to kerning in that it refers to the spacing between letters or characters. However, instead of focusing on the spacing between individual letters (kerning), tracking measures space between groups of letters.

Typography
Typography is the visual component of the written word," Practical Typography beautifully explains. All visually displayed text, whether on paper, screen or billboard, involves typography.

X-height
The x-height refers to the distance between the baseline and the mean line of lower-case letters in a typeface.

CMYK
CMYK is a colour model that is used for print purposes containing Cyan, Magenta, Yellow and Black. CMYK colours begin as white and then get darker as more colours are combined.

Colour theory
Colour theories create a logical structure for colour. There are three basic categories of colour theory: The colour wheel, colour harmony, and the context of how colours are used. Understanding how to use different colours to convey meaning is an important part of both design and marketing.

Complementary
Colours that are opposite each other on the colour wheel are considered to be complementary colours (example: red and green).

Cool colours
Cool colours such as blue, green and light purple have the ability to calm and soothe.

Gradient
A gradient is a gradual change of colours (such as green turning gradually into blue) or a colour fading into transparency. There are two common types of gradients: radial and linear

Hex
A hex is a six-digit number used in HTML, CSS, and design software applications to represent colours.

Hue
Essentially, a hue is a way to describe a colour. And a hue can be any colour on the colour wheel. For example, red, blue and yellow are all hues.

Monochrome
Monochrome is used to describe design or photographs in one colour or different shades of the single colour.

Opacity

Opacity enables us to make an element of a design transparent. The lower the opacity, the more transparent an element is. For example, 100% opacity means an object is solid.

Palette

A color palette comprises of colors that can be utilized for any illustration or design work that represents your brand. The chosen colors should be designed to work harmoniously with each other.

Pantone

The Pantone Matching System (PMS) is a standardized color reproduction system. Every hue is given a number, making it easy for people to reference and reproduce the same colors.

RGB

RGB color is a model in which red, green, and blue light are added together in various ways to reproduce a broad array of colors. RGB tends to be used for on-screen purposes.

Tint

A tint is a variety of a color. Craftsy explains that Tints are created when you add white to any hue on the color wheel. This lightens and desaturates the hue, making it less intense.

Triadic

A triadic color scheme uses colors that are evenly spaced around the color wheel.

Warm colors

Warm colors are made with red, orange yellow and various combinations of these colors. They give a friendly, happy, cozy vibe.

Grid

A grid is constructed from evenly divided columns and rows. The point of a grid is to help designers arrange elements in a consistent way.

Icon

Icons are images used to represent an action or an object. For example, a pen icon could represent someone writing (action) or simply a pen (object). When using, icons think carefully about what you want to signify and how clear it is to your audience.

Logomark / Brandmark

A logo mark generally does not contain the name of the company and instead more abstractly represents that company using a symbol or mark.

Style guide

A style guide is a set of standards for the design of anything related to your brand, whether it's a website landing page, business card or printed document. The reason to have a style guide is to ensure complete uniformity in style and formatting wherever the brand is used to ensure no dilution of that brand.

Aspect ratio
An aspect ratio is the proportional relationship between the width and height of a rectangle (a rectangle is used because the vast majority of screens are wider than they are tall). An aspect ratio is defined via a mathematical ratio, with two numbers separated by a colon. width:height
This means that 4 inches wide by 3 inches high would be a ratio of 4:3

Blur
Blur makes images more unclear or less distinct. Using a blur can be a great way to make text stand out when overlaid onto an image. When you put text over an image, the two elements can form a somewhat competitive relationship, a little blur can make the text stand out more and appear much more readable.

Contrast
Contrast occurs when two elements on a page are different. For example, it could be different colors between the text and the background color or dark vs. light colors. One of the main reasons to use contrast in your designs is to grab attention.

Crop
When you crop an image, you're cutting away and discarding the unnecessary portions of the image. Cropping allows you to change the emphasis or direction of an image.

Flat
Flat design is a minimalistic approach that focuses on simplicity and usability (almost the opposite of Skeuomorphism). It tends to feature plenty of open space, crisp edges, bright colors and two-dimensional illustrations.

Knolling
Knolling is the act of arranging different objects so that they are at 90-degree angles from each other, then photographing them from above. This technique creates a very symmetrical look that feels pleasing to the eye. Images that feature knolling tend to be set against a contrasting solid background.

Pixel

A pixel is a minuscule area of a screen (the word comes from "picture element"). Pixels are the smallest basic unit of programmable color on a computer and images are made up of many individual pixels.

Raster

Raster images are made up of a set grid of pixels. This means when you change the size of stretch a raster image it can get a little blurry and lose some clarity.

Resolution

The resolution of an image determines the quality. As a rule of thumb, the higher the resolution, the higher the quality. A high-resolution image will be clear and crisp whereas a low-resolution image will feel a little pixelated and blurry.

Saturation

Saturation refers to the intensity or purity of a color. The more saturated a color is, the more vivid or brighter it appears. Whereas desaturated colors, appear a little duller. Highly saturated images tend to stand out and draw attention, therefore giving the appearance of carrying more weight than less saturated images. If you're adding a text layer over a picture and would like it to stand out, using a less saturated background can be a great way to do so.

Scale

In design, scale refers to the size of an object in relationship to another object. Two elements of the same size can be seen as being equal. Whereas elements with a clear variation in size tend to be seen as different. When putting together a design, think about how you can utilize scale to help you illustrate the meaning behind your image. Take the below example; the larger circle appears to be more influential and important that the smaller one. You could even say the smaller circle may be a little timid or shy.

Skeumorphism

Skeuomorphism is when a digital element is designed to look like a replica of the physical work. For example, think iPhone's calculator or Apple's newsstand where the bookshelf and magazines look and feel like they do in real life.

Texture

A texture is defined as the surface characteristics of your image. In design, you can utilize textures such as cloth and brickwork to mirror the visual appearance of the actual texture.

Vector

Vector images a made up of points, lines, and curves. All of the shapes within a vector are calculated using a mathematical equation which means the image can scale in size without losing any quality. Unlike rasters, vectors won't get blurry when scaled.

White space

Whitespace, often known as negative space, refers to the area of a design left blank. It's the space between graphic elements, images, copy, and anything else on the page. Even though it's known as white space, it can be any color.

Accessibility

Accessibility refers to the practice of making sure your website can be used and accessed by all people, with all abilities and impairments. Some examples of accessibility include ensuring the contrast between your font and background is clear enough for people with visual impairments, that the videos on your website all have captions for those with hearing impairments, ensuring that you can tab through forms without a mouse for those that are mobility impaired, and ensuring your content is written using plain language standards for those that are cognitively impaired. A good place to start to check your website for accessibility is the Website Content Accessibility Guide (WCAG).

Back-end

The back-end relates to how the site works, updates and changes. It's basically everything the user can't see from the front-end. Back-end development is essential for any dynamic site that includes features that need to change often and update regularly, e.g. blogs, news sites and aggregate websites.

The back-end consists of databases and servers – all things concerned with security, structure and the manner in which content is organised. A database is required to store all information such as user profiles, images, posts, text, and keep them categorised in a way that makes sense for the site. Back-end developers work with programming languages like PHP, Java, Python and Ruby.

Backlink

Simply put, a backlink is a link from one website to another. Backlinks are used as a ranking signal by Google to determine the authority of a website. The more backlinks your site has from credible websites the better your chances are of ranking, with websites with high numbers of backlinks typically seeing greater organic search rankings.

But not all backlinks are considered valuable. Domain authority describes the relevance of a website in regards to a subject matter or topic. It is important that the majority of backlinks pointing to your website have a good domain authority and are ideally similar or connected to your industry. Otherwise, Google will find the link to be low quality or irrelevant and will penalise your site.

Bounce Rate

Bounce rate represents the percentage of visitors who enter the site and then leave ("bounce") rather than taking an action, such as clicking on a link, filling out a form, or making a purchase. An average bounce rate range is between 41 and 51%.

A bounce rate in the range of 26%–40% is excellent. 41%–55% is roughly average. 56%–70% is higher than average, but may not be cause for alarm depending on the website. Anything over 70% is disappointing for everything outside of blogs, news, events, etc.

CMS (Content Management System)

A CMS, or Content Management System, refers to an online platform in which end-users can create, change and edit website content through the use of an editor that doesn't require HTML knowledge. These systems are often built by developers and used as a program so that non-developers can edit their content more easily. If a website did not make use of a CMS for content editing, any changes to text, images, or other content would have to be made through editing the code for a particular web page. WordPress is one of the world's leading CMS for its ease of use and compatibility with other tools such as plugins to create better user experiences with limited coding knowledge.

Code

Computer code is written for a variety of purposes, from web pages to computer desktop software to app development. Each purpose is associated with a different programming language. In order to write in a language that the program can understand, developers need to write code.

Cookies

HTTP cookies (also called web cookies, Internet cookies, browser cookies, or simply cookies) are small blocks of data created by a web server while a user is browsing a website and placed on the user's computer by the user's web browser.

Cookies serve useful and sometimes essential functions on the web. They enable web servers to store stateful information (such as items added in the shopping cart in an online store) on the user's device or to track the user's browsing activity (including clicking particular buttons, logging in, or recording

which pages were visited in the past). They can also be used to save for subsequent use information that the user previously entered into form fields, such as names, addresses, passwords, and payment card numbers.

CSS

Think of HTML as the skeleton/backbone and CSS as the looks. CSS, which stands for Cascading Style Sheets, the most common way of setting a look and feel of a website. While HTML tells the browser what goes on the page, CSS will tell the browser how it should be presented, for example: colours, fonts, layout and more.

Developer

A web developer works to write in a variety of programming languages of different functions in order to create digital products. A web developer will either write code in programming languages designed for the purpose of the front-end or back-end of a website (see Front-End & Back-End).

A web developer who has the expertise to take a project and see it through from conception to completion can also be called a full-stack developer, someone who is well-versed in all the layers of computer or web software/product development.

Domain

A domain, or domain name, is your website address. Typically this looks like 'yourcompany.com' but could also end with country specific options like .com.au, .co.uk, .co.nz or hundreds of other variations.

Just like your physical address, it's just an address on the internet that specifies where your browser should go to look for information. Some people confuse their domain with their website.

Think of the domain as your house street address. It's an easy way for people to find your house. Then think of your website as the house itself, contents and all. The domain is just a simple way for people to be able to find you.

When you register a domain name on the internet (and pay the registration fees), you are buying the right to use that domain name for a year (or whatever term is specified).

Front-end

The front-end is what appears in your browser when surfing the web. It refers to the part of the web that your users interact with. A front-end developer is someone that uses the programming languages of HTML and CSS, possibly with the addition of languages like JavaScript to create what you see in your browser.

A front-end developer will use these languages to write code that the browser will translate in order to show you a website. So in short, all the features that you see, including fonts, colours, menus, images, forms are all specified by the languages of HTML and CSS.

Headless CMS

With the proliferation of digital platforms, enterprises are often crippled by a proliferation of CMS (Content Mangement System) instances — dozens, or even hundreds. As a result, they have to duplicate content from a website CMS to an app CMS and then to a digital display CMS. This is where Headless CMS solutions really shine.

A headless CMS is any type of back-end content management system where the content repository "body" is separated or decoupled from the presentation layer "head." Content that is housed in a headless CMS is delivered via APIs for seamless display across different devices.

The term "headless" comes from the concept of chopping the "head" (the front end, i.e. the website) off the "body" (the back end, i.e. the content repository). A headless CMS remains with an interface to manage content and a RESTful or GraphQL API to deliver content wherever you need it whether that be a website, iOS app, Android app or any other platform, and another advantage is that if you ever want to change your technology stack you don't have to worry about your content.

Some headless CMS options you might like to assess to find your best fit: Contentful, Prismic, Sanity.

Hosting Provider

Understanding the role of your hosting provider is a hugely important part of running your own website. A hosting provider provides space on their server to

host your website so that other computers can access it live.

Generally, hosting providers charge a fee for the service which is charged either monthly or annually – plans differ in the level of support they provide, security features, speed etc. Plans can range from limited and low-cost to high-level business plans. As a general rule, you get what you pay for with hosting plans.

HTML

HTML stands for Hyper Text Markup Language. It's an essential language for developers to use in order to specify content for a web page. It consists of tags and attributes that tell the browser what content the web page contains.

Having basic knowledge of HTML is extremely handy if you have anything to do with entering content into a site. Things like images and text are all specified with HTML.

Javascript

Javascript is a programming language that can create dynamic and more complex features on web pages. Its features are used to enhance web pages and make them more engaging and can include things like interactive maps, animated graphics and live content updates.

Pixels, Snippets and Tags

These are words most likely to be thrown around by digital marketers and website developers. The terms can be used somewhat interchangeably, but all refer to short lines of Javascript code that are used by website managers to install functionalities like Analytics, Heat Mapping, Chatbots and a whole range of other web features.

Analytics and heat mapping tags enable marketers to better understand how users behave on a website, while a tag can be used to quickly install functionality that would otherwise require website developers to redeploy the entire site with the updates.

SERPs

The Search Engine Results Page (SERP) is, as the name suggests, the first page of results you see when searching on Google, Bing or any other search engine. The SERP will show a list of results that the search engine deems most relevant to your search query (taking into consideration your past searching behaviour too!).

Typically the SERP will display 1-3 paid ads at the top, before showing a list of 10 organic search results, sometimes followed by additional ads at the bottom of the page. When looking at users coming to your website from the SERP, the traffic will fall into two categories: Paid Search and Organic Search. Paid Search refers to the ads at the top and bottom of the page, where companies are bidding against each other to achieve the highest rankings in an effort to acquire your click to visit their website.

Organic Search refers to all the other non-paid results that are displayed. While these results are not paid, there is still heavy competition to appear as high on the SERP as possible, as the vast majority of clicks will go to the results listed first. The process of ensuring your website lists as high as possible on the SERP is known as Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) – but that topic needs an entry all of its own!

Server

Put simply, your web server is a big computer that exists just to host and run websites. The more powerful the computer, the more powerful the server. The server exists to fulfil requests from clients – it stores, processes and delivers web pages to users.

When you type in a URL, your browser requests a webpage from the server. So it's like your browser is making a phone call, through the line which is HTTP, to reach the web server of that website. The server relays the information back to your browser which displays the information in HTML and CSS.

SEO
SEO stands for Search Engine Optimisation. Since the rise of the Internet and the complete saturation of web pages on the world wide web, it has become more and more important to optimise your web page for search results. This simply means, getting your website found through search engines like Google, Yahoo, Bing, etc. However, Google is the main search engine to target, being the world's most popular search engine by a long run.

A range of procedures can be executed to make sure you are following best SEO practices. Whilst site ranking factors are solely up to Google, who are free to change their algorithm at any time, it is important to follow basic optimisation exercises when building and updating your website – allowing your business to be found.

SEO generally refers to the entire practice on and off-site actions that will lead to a higher or more targeted ranking on a Google web page.

URL
A URL is different from a domain in that it contains the 'hypertext transfer protocol' (HTTP), which basically tells the browser that you're using a domain name instead of an IP address. HTTP is the underlying protocol that allows users to exchange information. If 'test.com' is your domain, 'https://www.test.com' might be your website URL.

You might also find HTTPS as a prefix to some web URLs, instead of HTTP. This just means that you have a secure connection to the server and no other computers can listen in on the conversation! Look out for this when entering personal details on any website, it is designated by a green 'lock' symbol in the address bar of your browser.

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