White Paper

# Website Aesthetics?

| Author | Todd Kasenberg, Director of Marketing, Sandbox Software Solutions Inc. |
|---|---|
| Published | 2012 |

# White Paper

## Introduction

When you choose an apple from a pile, what do you look for? You'll find a lot of reasons are aesthetic - whether it's shiny, it's colour, it's shape...

How we choose what to buy is a key question that should be asked when designing an ecommerce website. While we all like to think we all make rational decisions, considering the functional nature of products, **aesthetics clearly influences people** and their choices.

But why are we so easily influenced by aesthetics?

## How aesthetics influence us

How a product looks certainly seems to influence our judgment - how many times have you bought a mobile phone that you liked the look of, only to realize upon using it for a few days that it didn't offer all the functions you wanted?

There's been a lot of research demonstrating that aesthetics affects perceptions of a product and its usability. When asked to judge the usability and aesthetics scores of a series of ATM screens, one study found peoples' perceived usability scores were more closely related to the perceived aesthetics scores than the screens' actual usability. Further studies were able to replicate these results across cultures.

The results imply **people aren't able to distinguish usable and less usable objects**, believing the aesthetically pleasing ones to be most usable.

But why does this interference occur? It's believed the main reason for this effect on peoples' judgments is what's known as a "halo effect". This is where the aesthetic aspect of the design directly influences the perception of other aspects. For example the perception that a well fit suit or stylish dress makes the wearer seem smarter.

## How does usability come into this?

Research has found that usability has a strong effect on people's judgments after using the object. But during the early stages of interaction with an object or system, aesthetics is clearly the major influence. This "halo effect" doesn't hold for long, if you wait 15 minutes to be served in a plush restaurant your opinion of the restaurant goes down, no matter how good the service afterwards.

**Usability becomes an important factor after a limited interaction** with a product. A study found pleasure (closely related to aesthetics) and ergonomics (closely related to usability) both had a strong influence on the appeal of a product, but at differing levels at differing times. Appeal was strongly influenced by just aesthetics before use. But after use, both usability and aesthetics had an almost equal influence.

## Aesthetics on the internet

So, aesthetics influences us when looking at physical products, but does this influence carry over onto the internet?

It's been found that aesthetics can be a deciding **factor in whether a customer trusts a website** enough to make a purchase. Another study found that people made "far reaching inferences about the qualities of online banking websites on the basis of simple screen shots, or very short interaction sequences."

Aesthetics will influence decisions anywhere people are given a choice.

## What does all this mean?

It means you need to integrate your aesthetic design more closely with usability.

People appear to use aesthetics to judge appeal and perceived usability. So should you ignore usability and focus on aesthetics? Of course not. This "halo effect" appears to fade after initial use.

The research studies highlighted show the power aesthetics can have, but **design on its own doesn't make a complete site**. A product's design can ensure the initial attraction but only usability and aesthetics working in combination will ensure consumers will keep using it.

In many site redesign/construction processes the website aesthetic or user research is completed before the other is started. There is no interaction between the creative and user experience teams. This doesn't lead to integrated processes. How can a designer know what restrictions they are working with until user research has been conducted? At the same time, how can you ensure that the most relevant user research findings are integrated into a design without a dogmatic insistence that all guidelines are followed?

There needs to be a closer working relationship between design and user experience. Aesthetics and usability support each other and when they work together they can be the difference between a good website and a first-rate one.

**SANDBOX**
software solutions

## About the Author

Todd Kasenberg is Director of Marketing and Chief Relationship Officer for Sandbox Software Solutions. He has a 20 year career in sales and marketing, and is paradoxically both charming and a geek. His web expertise includes web marketing strategy and tactics, search engine optimization, online community development and client engagement tactics via the Internet.

## Sandbox Software Solutions Inc.

Established in 2004, Sandbox Software Solutions provides timely and focused technological solutions that improve efficiency, expand customer/stakeholder reach and solve business process problems.

## Contact Information

**Sandbox Software Solutions Inc.**

147 Wyndham St. N., Suite 206
Guelph, ON  N1H 4E9

Web:  www.sandboxsoftware.ca

Phone:  1.866.929.7263

For additional information on Sandbox Software Solutions or to have an information package sent to you by mail, please contact Todd Kasenberg.

**Todd Kasenberg**

Director of Marketing
519.821.8866 x. 226
todd@sandboxsoftware.ca

**Devin Gauthier**

Business Manager
519.821.8866 x. 225
devin@sandboxsoftware.ca

**Sandbox Software Solutions Inc.**
Guelph, Ontario
Toll Free: 1.866.929.7263
www.sandboxsoftware.ca