

Fusionbox: Denver Usability Consulting

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Usability - The Thirty Second Rule

By Ivy Hastings

According to the renowned usability expert Jakob Nielsen, there are three key questions a user must be able to answer within the first thirty seconds of viewing your website:

- Who are you?
- What do you do?
- What should I (the user) do next?

If you aren't able to answer these three questions in thirty seconds or less, it's time for a web site redesign. Let's look at the first question: Who are you? Eye tracking studies show that the first place users look is at the top left area of your site. This is why most well-designed web sites have their company's logo placed there. At Fusionbox, this is a commandment of [web design](#), as well as the initial step to answering this all important first question. The placement of the logo in the top left also helps orient the user while building brand awareness.

Now, the second question: What do you do? This is always difficult for companies, especially when the company itself is not focused on a core product or service, or is having trouble internally defining what it is they really do. When you throw in target audiences who are very different, it becomes even harder. Users don't want to try to glean what your company does from some clever tagline or marketing speak. The best way to handle this is to come right out and say what you do, simply and immediately. If you are selling a product, include that right away with an image on the homepage.

Finally, users want to know what to do next. They want to get off your homepage as soon as they can, and get to the good stuff - the information, the products, the entertainment, or the service. Again, you may have different target audiences with different needs. Speak to each of them with calls to action such as "Contact Us for a Free Evaluation." Your designer should know how to draw the user's eye to these calls-to-action.

If you currently pass the thirty second rule of website usability, congratulations, you are well on your way to having a usable web site. If you don't, it may be a good time to reconsider your web strategy.

Ivy Hastings is a Project Manager at Fusionbox, a full-service [Denver interactive agency](#) specializing in web design, development, and [search engine marketing \(SEM\)](#). A graduate of UC Berkeley, Ivy has published many articles about Web Design, Development, and Usability Best Practices. She currently sits on the Board of Directors for Arts Street, a local non-profit that teaches at-risk youth the craft and business of the Arts. Ivy can be reached at her email: ihastings@fusionbox.com or at 303.952.7490.