

RainCastle

CORPORATE WEBSITE DESIGN:

How to Recognize and Create Brilliant Website Design





How to Recognize and Create Brilliant Website Design

First impressions mean a lot, especially when it comes to website design. It's the difference between someone being drawn into your content and someone who hits the back button after reading a few sentences. This eBook is divided into two parts; Part I is a brief overview of how to make your website into an “engagement tool” and Part II is a survey of some brilliant website homepages that embody these winning engagement characteristics.



Part I

Let's begin by looking at your website. Go ahead, bring it up in a separate browser window. Now, ask yourself, does my website:

Clearly answer “who we are, what we do” and “how you help visitors solve their problem?”

Websites are often thrown together in a hurry, in advance of an event, product launch, infusion of venture capital or in response to encroaching competitive forces. The focus and content on a homepage sometimes assumes more audience knowledge than it should, rather than establishing brand identity, value proposition and a clear sense of what the visitor is supposed to do.

When creating a website, put yourself in the role of your visitors and ask the questions they will ask, “Who are these people? What can they do for me? Where do I go to learn more?” Recognizing that your website is really their website is where the best websites are born.

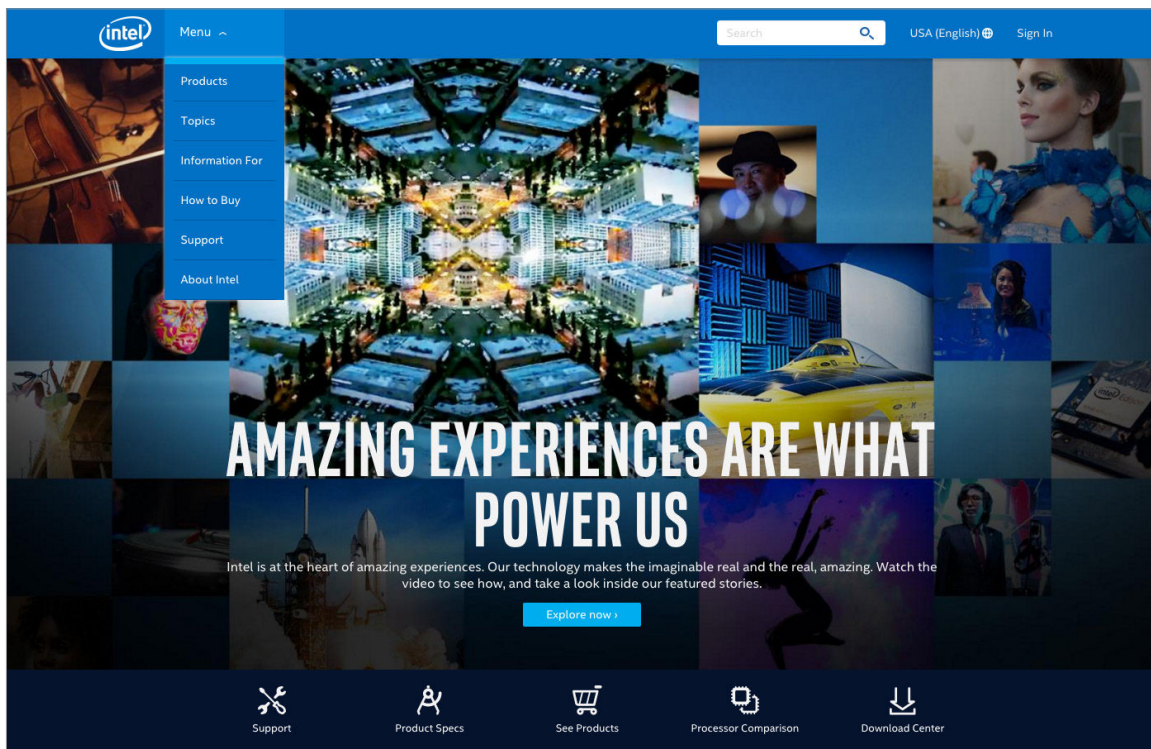
Does my website:

Resonate with our target audience(s)?

A thorough consideration of your target audience will help define the information architecture (IA), navigation, content and offers on your website.

What resonates most with visitors is when you speak a language that addresses the problem for which they came to your site seeking answers.

When designing the IA, consider whether your content should be created and displayed based on audience, i.e. navigation arranged for Private Citizens and Businesses might work best on a tax website; **by solutions, by vertical markets, services offered, or some combination of these things.** By **building audience personas**, essentially profiles of your top visitors, you will be in a better position to create a website that is well organized and elicits engagement.



The Intel home page is an excellent example of an IA providing the “combination” of navigational options, based on understanding of their audience. Note the different drop-down menu options at left, which presents navigation options by product, by topic and by audience.

Does my website:

Say who we are?

Having a clearly articulated brand strategy and message has a positive affect that ripples through your content and also leads to stronger search engine optimization.

salesforce.com has built its “simplicity” brand on the promise of the cloud and lack of complex software. Not only is their logo a cloud, but their product and service nomenclature uses the Cloud in its nomenclature, which is great for SEO in addition to branding.

The screenshot displays the Salesforce website's header and a 'Products' dropdown menu. The header includes the Salesforce logo, the tagline 'CONNECT TO YOUR CUSTOMERS IN A WHOLE NEW WAY', contact information (1-800-NO-SOFTWARE, 1-800-667-6389), a search bar, and links for 'Login' and 'Free Trial'. The navigation bar contains links for 'Products', 'Community', 'Industries', 'Services', 'Customers', 'Events', and 'About Us'. The 'Products' dropdown menu is open, showing a 'WELCOME TO THE CUSTOMER SUCCESS PLATFORM' message and a grid of product categories: SALES (Sales Cloud, SalesforceIQ CRM, Data.com), SERVICE (Service Cloud, Desk.com), MARKETING (Marketing Cloud, Pardot), COMMUNITY (Community Cloud, Chatter), ANALYTICS (Wave Analytics, Wave Apps), and PLATFORM AND APPS (App Cloud, Force.com, Heroku Enterprise). Below the dropdown, there is a section titled 'What is Salesforce?' with a brief description and a 'SEE HOW' link. The footer contains sections for 'New to Salesforce?', 'Popular Links', 'About Salesforce', and 'Social' media links.

1-800-NO-SOFTWARE | 1-800-667-6389 | Contact Search Login Free Trial

Products Community Industries Services Customers Events About Us

Products Overview
Pricing
Mobile Apps
App, Consultant, and Component Marketplace
Small Business Solutions

WELCOME TO THE CUSTOMER SUCCESS PLATFORM

SALES
Sales Cloud
Sales force automation and CRM
SalesforceIQ CRM
The smart, simple CRM to grow your business
Data.com
B2B prospecting and data cleaning

SERVICE
Service Cloud
Fully customizable support and help desk
Desk.com
All-in-one customer support for small businesses

MARKETING
Marketing Cloud
Digital marketing platform
Pardot
B2B marketing automation

COMMUNITY
Community Cloud
Connect customers, partners, and employees
Chatter
Enterprise social network

ANALYTICS
Wave Analytics
Business analytics on any data, any device
Wave Apps
Apps that drive sales insight and customer delight

PLATFORM AND APPS
App Cloud
The #1 Platform as a service
Force.com
Lightning apps for everyone
Heroku Enterprise
Scalable apps for developers

INTRODUCING IOT CLOUD
Connect all your data and devices from the Internet of Things.
See a preview >

What is Salesforce?
We're the innovative company behind the world's #1 CRM platform that employees can access entirely over the Internet – there's no infrastructure to buy, set up, or manage – you just log in and get to work.
SEE HOW >

New to Salesforce?
Why Salesforce?
Explore all products
What is cloud computing?
Customer success stories
Product pricing

Popular Links
Salesforce1 Mobile App
App, consultant, and component marketplace
Dreamforce 2015
CRM software
Salesforce LIVE
Salesforce for startups

About Salesforce
Our story
Careers
Newsroom
Blog
Security & performance
Best CRM software
Sustainability

Social
Facebook
Twitter
LinkedIn
Google+
YouTube

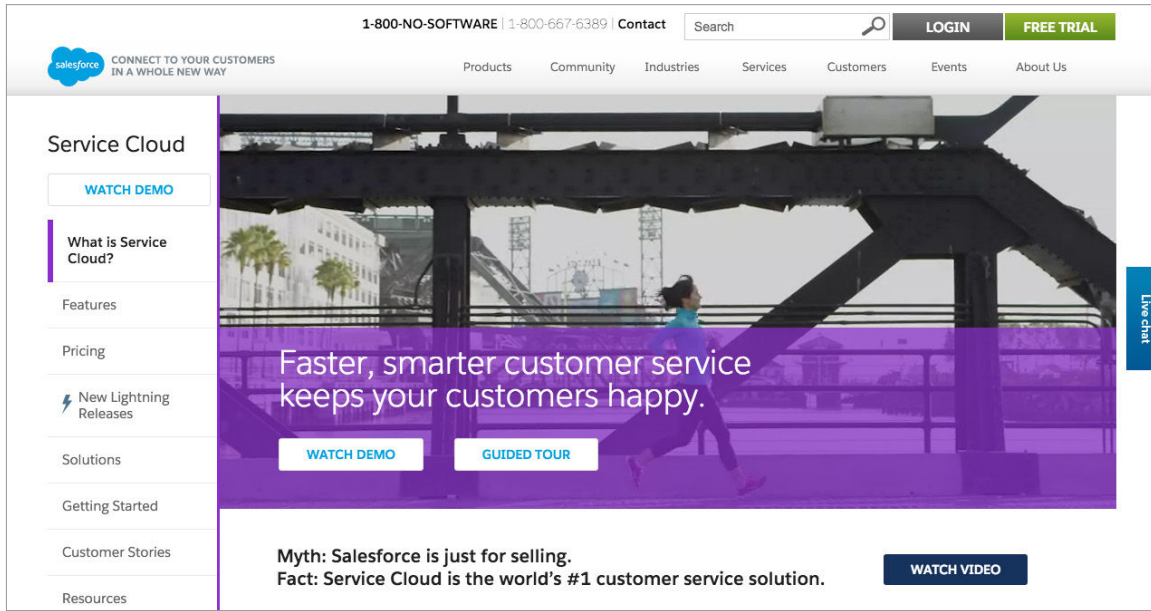
141 RATE THIS PAGE

Does my website:

Show what we do for our audience?

Make sure your website's visitors know instantly "what's in it for them;" this is the foundation that will make your website resonate with your readers.

By providing a clear and compelling value proposition, the copy, imagery and interactivity will flow naturally.



Again, salesforce.com is about helping customers boost their sales productivity, which is stated succinctly and includes a demo "offer," in this case, a video.

Does my website:

Demonstrate great usability? Is it mobile-friendly?

A modern website should demonstrate intuitive usability in all forms: desktop, tablet and smartphone. The web visitor should always know where to go and should not need excessive scrolling or clicking to get there. By using audience personas to determine your IA, and **Responsive Design**, your website can meet the needs of both static and on-the-move audiences. Additionally, Responsive design has been so embraced as the standard way modern websites are developed, that Google now positions non-Responsive websites lower on a search results page for any web visitors using mobile devices to find your site.



Does my website:

Have ubiquitous calls to action (CTA's)?

Every website visit presents a chance for you to engage your audience one step deeper, turning a visit into a sales lead. This is accomplished by including “calls-to-action (CTA's)” on every page. CTA's are strategic lead generation offers that often ask the visitor to register to learn more. Creating a depth and breadth of CTA's on your website enables you to guide the visitor through subsequent content offers until they elect to engage with you and potentially become a customer. A great website makes CTA's inviting, easy-to-use and useful.

The screenshot displays the Jim Stengel website. The header includes the logo "JIM STENGEL" with the tagline "Rethink business, branding and life." and navigation links: Home, Blog, Contact Us, Site Map. A secondary navigation bar lists "JIM STENGEL CO.", "IDEAL TREE", "PRACTICE AREAS", and "WHO WE WORK WITH". Below this, a menu for "IDEAL TREE" is shown with options: Overview, Discover, Define, Build, Communicate, Deliver, and Evaluate. The main content area features "The Ideal Tree Framework" with the text: "The secret to exponential growth starts with a question: What higher-order value will you add to your customers' lives?". The framework is illustrated as a tree with roots labeled "BELIEFS", "THE IDEAL", and "SHARED VALUES", and branches labeled "DISCOVER", "DEFINE", "BUILD", "COMMUNICATE", "DELIVER", and "EVALUATE". To the right, there are three promotional boxes: "What Is a Brand Ideal?" with a "READ THE DEFINITION" button, "Schedule a Workshop" with a "CONTACT US" button, and "Have You Heard Jim Speak?" with a "CONTACT US" button. At the bottom right, there is a box for "Read Grow" with a book image and text.

Easy-to-use CTA's — in right column — for increased customer engagement.

Does my website:

Website change regularly, i.e. with valuable content and relevant offers?

Your website increases in value when visitors repeatedly return. Repeat visits indicate that the content you've offered has lasting value. Translating repeat visits into customer engagement requires frequent refreshing of site content and CTA's as well as tracking of site analytics. While larger companies have the resources to update homepage or key secondary page content daily, mid-sized and smaller companies should do this weekly, monthly or quarterly, depending on company and audience size. The general point is that a static site will not generate leads.

Does my website:

Design convey our brand and communicate important concepts?

Are concepts presented visually, using diagrams, infographics or video? Website visitors respond to images emotionally, as well as rationally. An arresting image, engaging color palette or compelling interactive concept is more powerful than a lot of words, except maybe one uses the word "FREE" a lot. A compelling visual homepage is usually the by-product of a solid brand strategy. If the message is spot-on, then the image can bring it to life and motivate your audience.

Does my website:

Copy work for the web? Is it optimized for search and "scalability?"

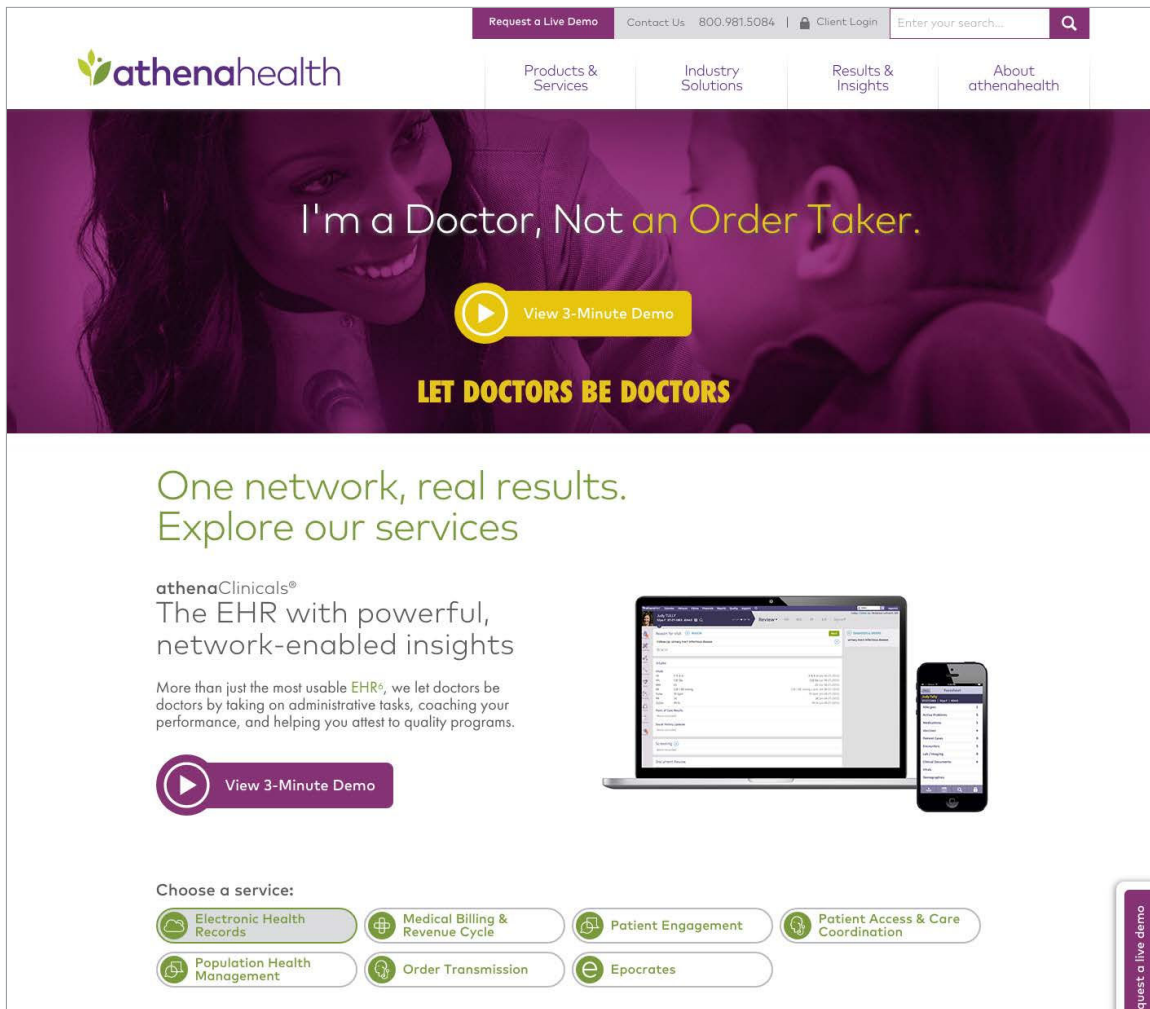
A clear value proposition supported by concise messages to your different audiences, combined with the natural use of optimized keywords, is what will lead to web copy that is engaging. Through the use of sub-heads, bullet points, pull quotes and meaningful graphics, like diagrams or infographics, website copy becomes "scannable," which respects today's readers who often have little time to dig in and want to scan content before making the commitment to "learn more."

By adhering to these recommendations for your website, you will significantly improve the odds that your visitors will engage with you and become repeat viewers.



Part II

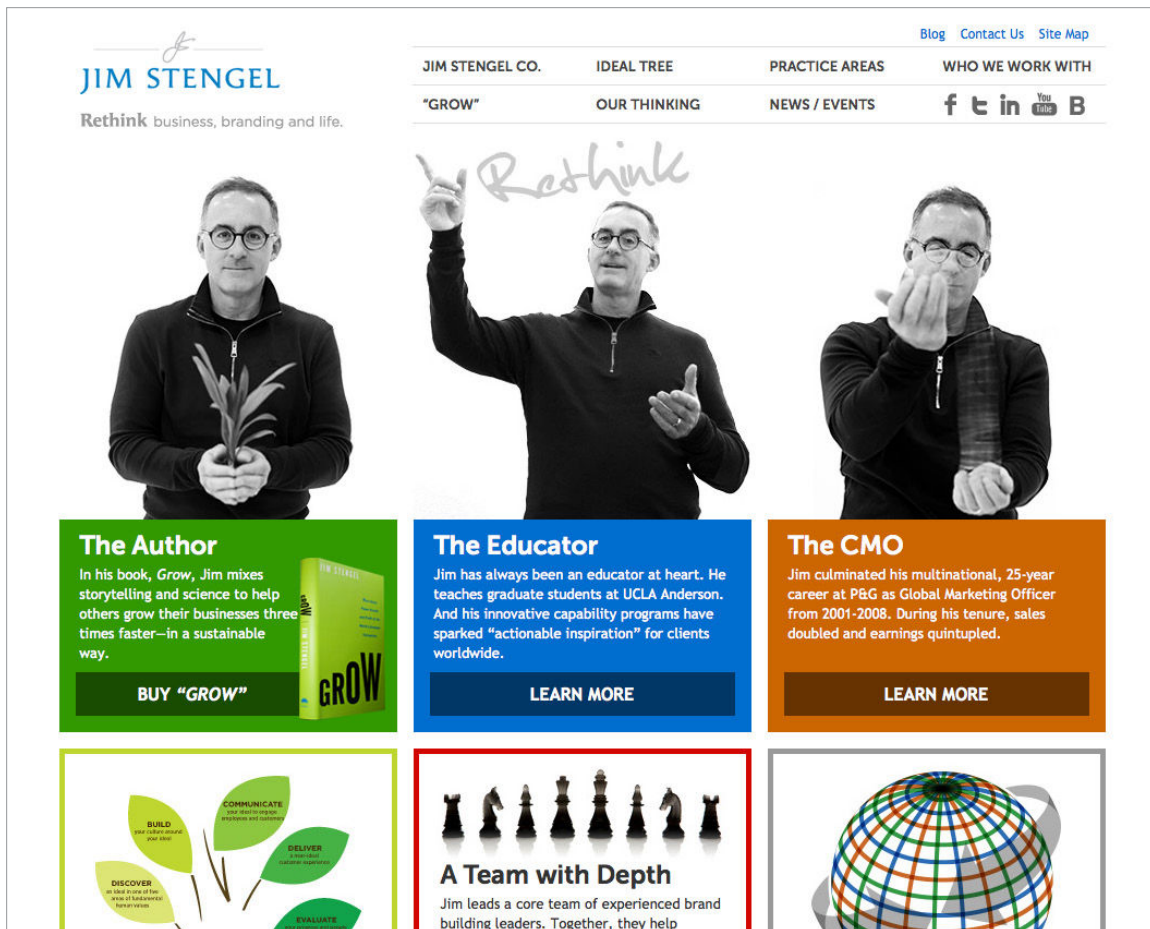
While many corporate websites have not yet taken these fundamentals to heart, below are five websites that are doing a fantastic job of engaging with their audience for all of the reasons discussed in Part I. Take a look!



www.athenahealth.com

What's great about this site:

- **Athena Health** takes a strong “persona-based” marketing approach and directly addressing doctors, their primary audience.
- There are two separate calls-to-action (CTA's), one is a persona-driven video that evinces their understanding of their audience and the frustrations they may feel about the increased administrative workload brought on by electronic health records (HER). The second video is about how EHR will improve their lives and that of their patients.
- The imagery is large, powerful and intimate. The color tint lends modernity.
- The rest of the site is full of rich interactive content and tools to demonstrate their value in terms meaningful to the audience.



www.jimstengel.com

What's great about this site:

First, to be transparent, jimstengel.com is a RainCastle designed site.

- The homepage displays a provocative layout that shows three key perspectives about renowned marketing guru, Jim Stengel, i.e. Author, Educator, and CMO. The style reflects the brand persona of a visionary who is both thoughtful and playful.
- Below the main image area are a set of CTA tiles representing key offers or events and which can be changed over time, giving the site a flexibility and modularity that is decidedly modern.
- The site is "Responsive," which means it is native to the desktop, tablet and smartphone and automatically reconfigures itself depending on the user's device.
- The design uses contrasting black and white, silhouetted photography in conjunction with a bold, friendly color palette allowing one's eye to easily navigate.

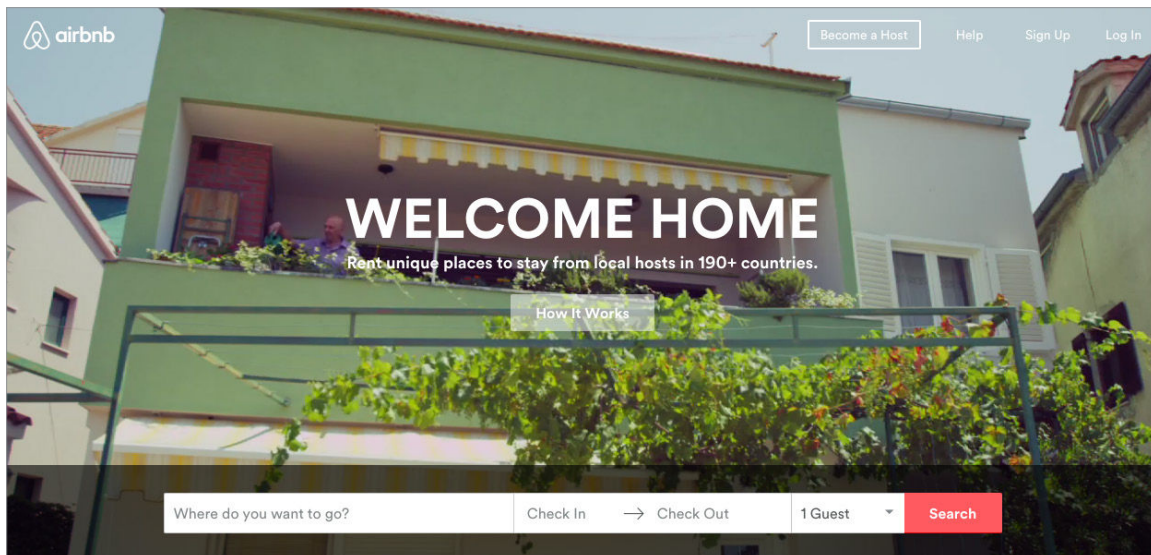


www.ourwatercounts.com

What's great about this site:

This is essentially a PR site for GE to demonstrate social responsibility regarding global water usage.

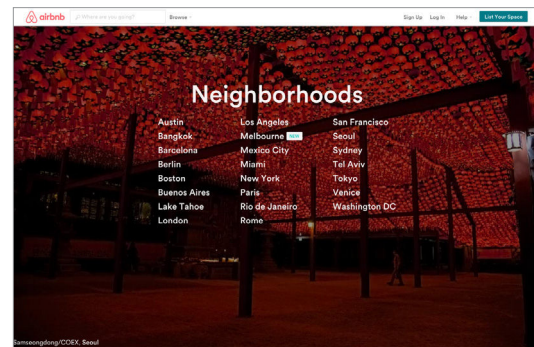
- GE does a masterful job of first introducing the home page concepts, Our Water is Life, Our Water is Growth and Our Water is Money.
- As one scrolls down, the site morphs into a fascinating example of visual and interactive storytelling. The three concurrent stories about water are told by means of a water pipe (Our Water is Money) that morphs into city streets (Our Water is Growth) and then into a tree (Our Water is Life). In each phase of this illustrated story, interactive faucets, signs, and leaves, when clicked, bring up videos or relevant statistics.
- The idea that everything is connected and that all depends on water, is shown, not told. This puts the “experience” in user experience.
- The site is part of GE’s Eco imagination brand and supports the promise of imaginative ideas to effect ecological and economical change





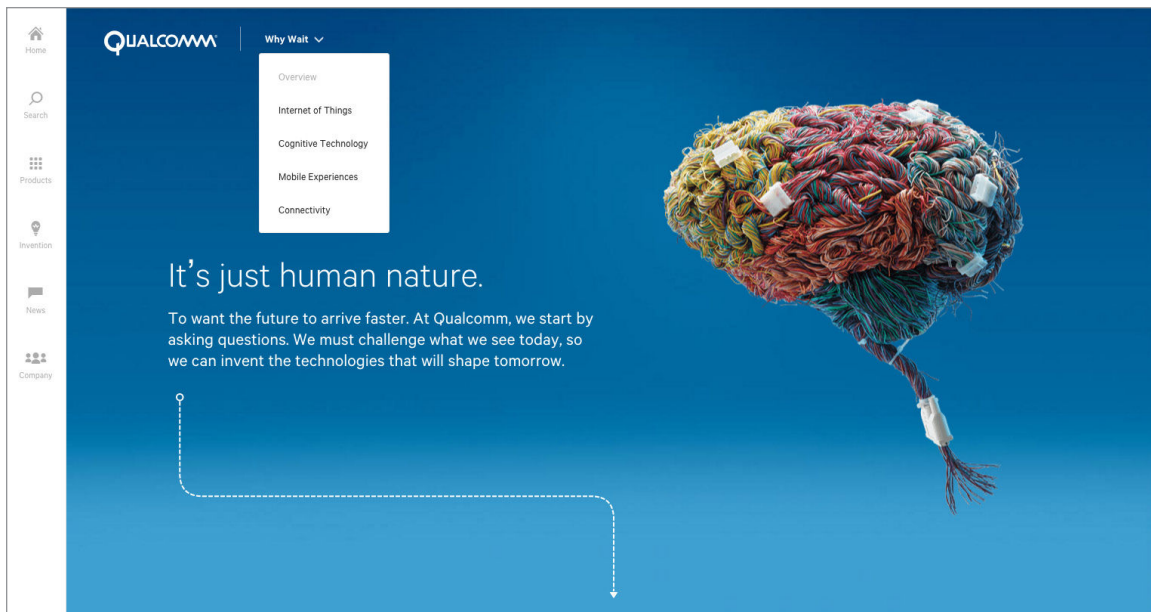
www.airbnb.com

What's great about this site:

- This site is simple to use but deep in content and clean in layout.
- Although **airbnb** is a disruptive business model, the site is anything but. The simple line, “Welcome Home” says it all, and is accompanied by a simple form. Behind this is a carousel of enticing rental spaces.
- airbnb took user data and turned it into an intuitive concept called “**Neighborhoods**,” which allows visitors to pick a city and then select the specific neighborhood they want to be in. Each neighborhood is accompanied by a host of photographs and descriptive key words like, “dining, trendy, shopping, loved by locals,” etc.
- The site is a perfect example of the social economy in it’s use of tools like “what locals love,” and “what locals complain about” buttons, which is almost like having a built-in Yelp site.



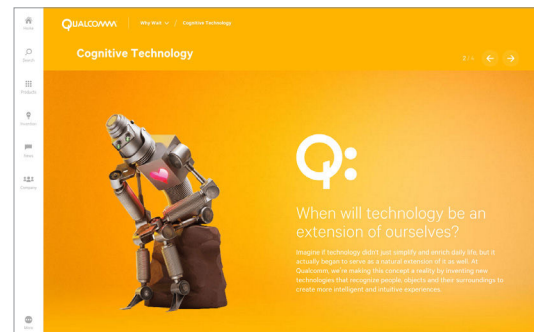
Locals Love	Locals Complain About
 <p>Keeping it weird, SXSW, music in every attic, bar, and backyard, UT Football, tacos, tall boys, food trucks, 300 days of sun, escaping to the Greenbelt</p>	 <p>Local “secrets” being “discovered,” noise ordinances disturbing music venues, lack of public transit, traffic, paying for parking after 5 Downtown</p>



www.qualcomm.com

What's great about this site:

- For such a huge company, this site dares to be a little provocative with its copy and imagery. There are several prominent illustration styles on this site such as this brain made out of string. It lends depth and imagination to the user experience and the whole presentation suggests the company has a larger view of its role than merely technology vendor.
- The simplicity of this layout allows **Qualcomm** to lead the visitor along a path.
- The navigation is spare, choosing to be “an inch wide and a mile deep,” unlike many corporate websites that try to tell the entire story on the homepage or push product before addressing need.
- The interior pages follow this simple, bold approach through the posing of questions and ensuing scrolling stories, which lead to an understanding of their solutions in the context of the world in which they live.





Underlying all of these sites are the basic characteristics that always work:

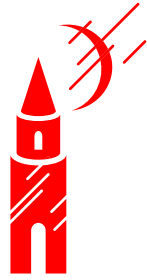
Maintain simplicity of design and user experience.

Keep clarity of purpose.

Think like a user, not an insider.

Only offer valuable content.

Be thoughtful and interesting and when possible, provocative.



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