



Highlights:

- Design a Spanish language version of your website if your system has a high Hispanic ridership.
- Clearly labeled navigation menus in the same location on each page allow maximum usability.
- Optimize and reduce the size of your graphic files, so pages will load quickly.
- A website must be in compliance with Section 508 standards, which requires that federal agencies' electronic information is accessible to people with disabilities.

News:

Congratulations to the Breeze in Santa Maria, CA for winning a TMCA Compass Award of Excellence for its website, www.breezbus.com, and a TMCA Compass Award of Merit for its Three Benefits Campaign; a three-part series of TV ads emphasizing relaxation/comfort, productivity and cost benefit/savings!

Ten Tips for Designing an Award-Winning Website

What type of website wins a Transportation and Marketing Communications (TMCA) Compass Award of Excellence, a 1st Place AdWheel Award, and stimulates ridership?

As more potential and existing riders turn to the internet for information, a web site functions as both a marketing tool and an important part of your customer service program.

Here are ten tips to make your site a winner.

1. Recognize Your Audience

Visual appeal is important, but transit riders really want to access information about fares, schedules and routes. Fancy flash pages, scrolling text, marquee and animated graphics are unnecessary. Eliminate these elements unless they improve functionality.

If your ridership has a high Hispanic or other ethnic population, you'll want to mirror the site in Spanish or the relevant language.

2. General Design

When you test your pages, view them on the most popular and newest browsers, such as Firefox 2.0, IE 7.0, and Netscape Navigator 9.0. This ensures that the majority of visitors can view the site correctly. But don't forget to include older versions for less savvy users. Also, test pages on both MAC and PC platforms.

Most monitors are configured for either 1024 x 768 or 800 x 600. However, you may still have visitors using a 640 X 480 screen resolution. One way to build a page that looks good in multiple resolutions is to place each page in a centered table.



The Breeze bus' website features include a Spanish version, employer benefits information and a photo gallery of pertinent events.

Design pages to fit in the browser window. Pages that are too wide require the user to scroll horizontally. Long pages are slow to load and harder to navigate. Limit a page to three or fewer screen lengths - or break it into multiple short pages.

3. Ease of Navigation

A clearly labeled navigation menu in the same location on each page allows maximum usability. Design navigation that allows users to find the information easily with fewest number of mouse clicks as possible.

4. Graphics

Reduce and optimize image files so pages will load quickly. Another common technique is to use image slicing—dividing images into much smaller parts. Since each part displays as it loads, the perceived load time is shorter than for a single, large graphic.

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Phone:
(661) 251-2718

Fax:
(661) 251-1877

E-mail: info@majicconsulting.com

Web: www.majicconsulting.com

Award-Winning Website (*continued*)

5. Useful Links

Provide links to connecting transit systems.

Consider putting the Google transit trip planner on your site, which allows users to create their own trip, complete with schedules.

6. Content Presentation

Having current, updated information on the website at all times is essential. Revise when there are route or schedule changes.

Use common fonts such as Arial, Times New Roman or Verdana. Apply web design techniques including headings, bullet points, short sentences in short paragraphs, horizontal lines, use of white space and so on. Provide meaningful, useful information organized in a consistent and logical manner.

7. Functionality

Testing your site at least once per month allows you to fix any broken

links, non-functioning forms and javascript errors. This will prevent the viewer from encountering any problems.

8. Secure Shopping Cart Pages

If you use your site to sell passes and tickets, take steps to guarantee the privacy and security of your riders when transactions are processed.

Third party e-commerce administrators, such as PayPal, provide data encryption, 24/7 transaction monitoring, and Card Security Code (CSC, also known as CVV2) to help prevent credit card fraud.



The Breeze uses a third-party processor to process pass and ticket sales online, ensuring privacy and security for both buyers and sellers.

9. Customer Service Feedback Forms

This is a great way to gather quantitative information from your riders/visitors. Ask riders how they learned about the service, whether from TV, radio, word of mouth or other means.

10. Accessibility

Websites for transit agencies need to be accessible for people with disabilities. Text links are crucial in every page footer, even if graphical links are used elsewhere on the site.

Format tables for schedules instead of a graphic, so that screen readers can read the text.

Additionally, always include <alt > tags in the coding for the images, so that text will display if the browser doesn't support images.

In short, these tips can yield successful results and be well worth the investment.

MAJIC CONSULTING GROUP

27936 Lost Canyon Road
Suite 102
Santa Clarita, CA 91387