

## Web Design Trends: monkey see monkey do.

Communication Arts INSIGHTS Article | By Kevin Airgid (May 2002)

Ever wonder what happened to the wonderful days when you could find a site that was truly original. I'm not saying that the sites don't exist they do, but it is harder and harder to find sites that are truly original. One of the benefits the Internet has brought to designers is the ability to collaborate and share ideas around the world. The down side to this advance in global communication is the powerful influence popular sites can have on web designers. I'm not sure if designers view design styles and trends and follow them because they are considered "in". Or do web designers view many web sites and then later unconsciously play out the design styles stored in the deep portions of their creative minds?

I believe that the trends we see in web design are a result of both of these observations. Unfortunately I feel that many web designers especially the impressionable young designers see a site receive fame and praise in the design community and infer that this is the measure of success. A good example of such a site is 2advanced.com. This is possibly the most copied Flash site in existence. I have run across many sites that copy this style and animation. The fast moving animation and sharp sounds have been ripped off around the world. This style has been ripped off so often that one could almost call these sites the 2advanced style of web design.

Another site that has influenced web design trends is egomedia.com When Ego Media launched their site for weeks later many web design firms started to produce the 2D vector video effects found on the Ego site. Launching your web site into full screen mode also became strangely popular after this site launched. I wonder if people ever stopped to consider that while these design techniques work for EGO Media, maybe the home town law firm site is no the most appropriate avenue for vector video effects? I think this is the biggest problem with these types of design trends. Many web designers see talented people like Ego Media win design awards for their site and think this is the correct way to execute their next project. Even large professional agencies fall into this trap; it's not just the individual designer. I have witnessed first hand how large agencies review a popular web site and then request the same style be applied to a project.

While I am not opposed to design trends, as this what helps designers grow and expand by learning from others. I am concerned about the stagnation of design style of many mainstream sites. Often a large e-commerce portal will launch a stylized navigation system and soon after many other sites will copy this style exactly. Take Amazon.com, the tab system is the most copied system in the world. Some would counter that this is a good thing, that this tab system is user friendly and thus made the Internet a friendlier place. While I firmly on the side of usability (as I just authored a Flash Usability book: like to <http://www.flash99good.com>) I must disagree, tabs are not the only way to make a site easy to use, and truly they are getting to be rather boring.

Sometimes when I watch TV I feel like I'm watching a Flash movie. Many art directors are now following Flash animation techniques for their broadcast video effects. One of the most frustrating things I have ever had to do is try to produce a video effect in Flash that some creative director watched on TV. It's nice for a change to watch the influence swing in the opposite direction. It is rather hilarious to watch a national commercial use a technique that is obviously influenced by Flash animation.

If I ever get some free time I would like to start up a gallery for web design trends. I would create categories like 2advanced-neo-style, and Egomedia-orange-period. This gallery would be a warehouse for the web design trends that come and go. It would also be an excellent place for art historians to catalog our bursts of creative streaks that are soon to disappear.

**Tell us about the company you work for.**

I am a self-employed freelance web designer. I have a network of freelancers that I use for resources. My studio site is <http://www.Airgid.com/>. I work from my home studio in Amherstburg, Ontario, Canada.

**What do you do?**

I have extensive experience designing web sites for various Fortune 500 companies, using Macromedia, Flash and Shockwave. I have created multimedia projects for the Detroit Tigers, Siemens, Toyota, Bell Canada, Marriott Hotel, Amnesty International and GM including Cadillac and Chevrolet.

I am the recipient of several national design awards and has been featured in the Macromedia Flash Showcase. I am also a contributing author in Flash 5 Studio, Using Flash 5, and is the co-author of Flash 99% Good: A Macromedia Flash Usability Guide published by McGraw-Hill. I hold a degree in Visual Arts from the University of Western Ontario.

**How did you end-up in the role you're in today?**

After working for big and small agencies I decided it was time to go out on my own. Since I have gone freelance (less than a week ago) I have had more interesting and better paying freelance work than my full time job could ever provide. Besides being a freelance web designer I am also a contributing author for several Flash design books including my most recent book:

Flash 99% Good: A Guide to Macromedia Flash Usability.

**What's the most useful piece of hardware or software that you own?**

The most useful piece of hardware I own is my 21 Inch Sony Trinitron monitor. Ask anyone who spends hours sitting in front of the box all day. This monitor rocks, no LCD, no Plasma screen can ever touch it's brilliant crisp colors. God love Sony for creating such an amazing piece of hardware.