

HOME PAGE DESIGN

Most home pages present a sprawling mix of material: headlines, text, car ads, photos, promos, restaurant ads, blogs, videos — and furniture ads.

Yes, virtually *everything* on your Web site wants a spot on your home page. (Your publisher wants big ads there, too — prominent, profitable ads — to pay the bills.)

For online news sites, home pages are directories. Digests. Mega-menus. You'll rarely see full-length stories there; instead you'll browse a collage of links, with short blurbs and small photos laid out like a postage-stamp collection.

Most newspaper home pages consist of:

◆ **News content.** The lead story gets bigger play and bigger art; secondary stories and briefs are usually grouped by topic (Sports, Business, etc.). Headlines provide clickable links; small photos link to bigger photos, slideshows or videos.

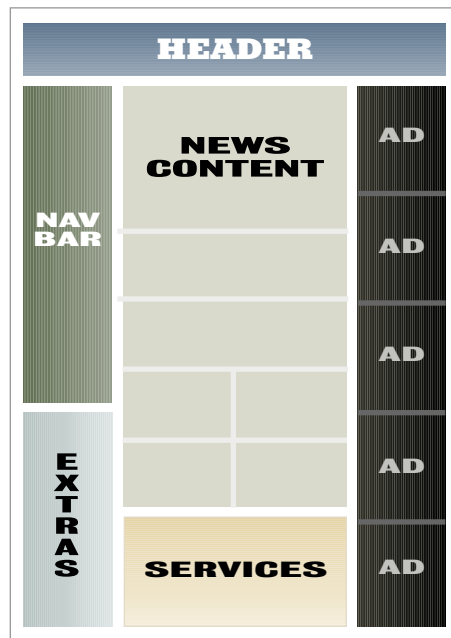
◆ **Web extras.** These are often an assortment of standalone news features such as blogs, polls, podcasts and photo galleries generated by the newsroom.

◆ **Navigation bar.** This may be the most crucial element on the page, so it's got to be easy to find, easy to use, and displayed in the same identical place (along the top? Down the side?) on every page of the site.

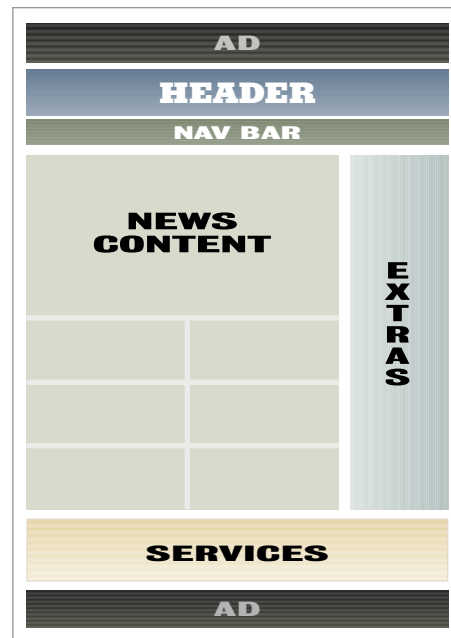
◆ **Service menu.** This is where you promote all the *non-news* features your site provides: classified ads, subscription information, newsroom contacts, reprints, contests, etc.

◆ **Ads.** Decisions about advertisements — how big, how intrusive, how many — will shape your home-page architecture. In a perfect world, ads would be organized to provide impact without dominating the news content.

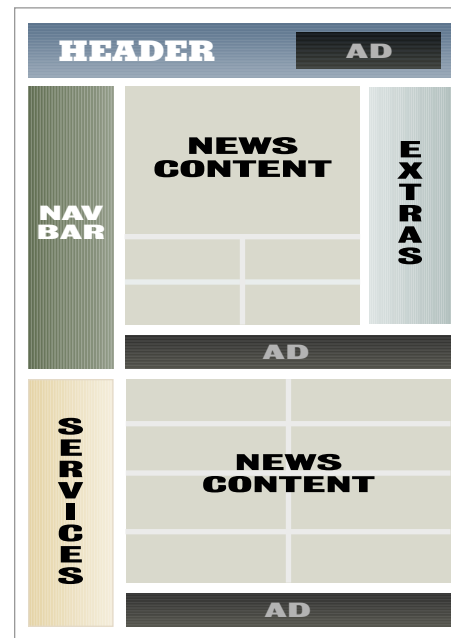
Juggling all these different elements isn't easy, which is why many home pages become chaotic jumbles. Smart Web designers *group* and *grid* related elements, developing a dependable architecture that organizes material consistently from day to day. Designing a home page is like decorating your home; the furniture stays in the same place while the guests come and go. For example:



Here's a common way to group and grid home-page elements: two vertical columns of indexes, ads and extras run alongside the news content.



If you provide navigation in a horizontal "tool-bar" at the top of the page, you can then use the full width of the page for news content and ads.



This page architecture allows ads to interrupt the news content without causing too much confusion or intrusion.

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◆ **Guidelines** for using grids effectively on Web pages **262**

Here's the home page for a typical edition of savannahnow.com, the Web site for the Savannah Morning News.

Four color-coded icons (staffers call them the "four food groups") help users navigate the site:

◆ **KNOW** links you to news stories and videos, which are also accessible from those menus in the middle of the page.

◆ **SHARE** links you to blogs and reader forums where you can discuss issues, post news and upload photos.

◆ **SHOP** links you to classifieds, ads from the paper, homes from realtors, cars, etc.

◆ **DO** shows you what to do in Savannah, from movie trailers to travel tips. It's also where you subscribe to the paper, place an ad or contact the staff.

In addition to the color-coded navigation, color is also used to organize the page. A blue frame provides a buffer between those modules in the main section at right.

Notice the big lead story near the top of the page. That's one of five large horizontal images that rotate in a constant loop — a mix of local news, sports, ads and promos.

Notice, too, the grid this page uses. The central section of the page is designed on a 5-column grid. The far left-hand column is used primarily for navigation; the far right-hand column is used exclusively for ads.

Downpage, the design shifts to a 3-column grid for navigation; the far right-hand column is used exclusively for ads.

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