

8 *Making a Website Accessible*

introduction:

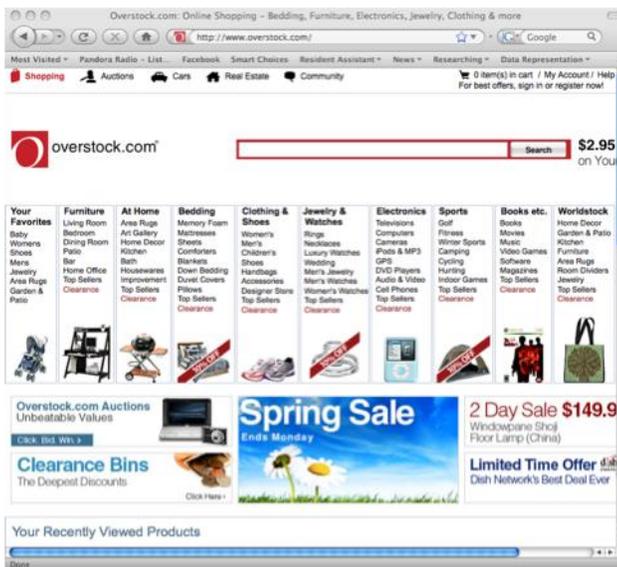
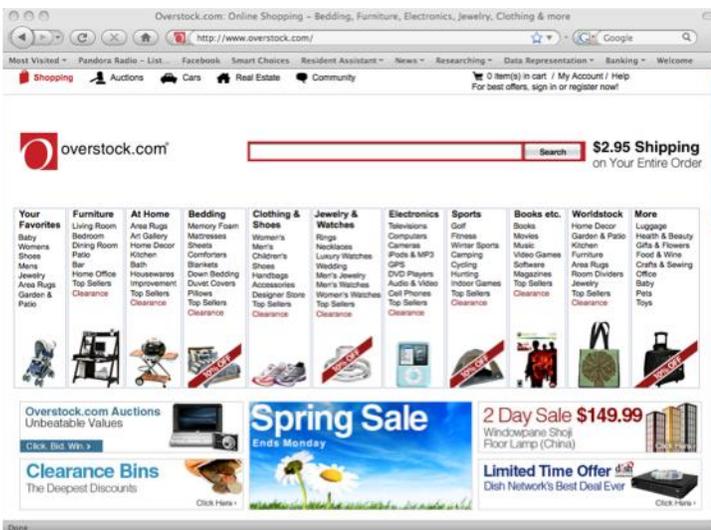
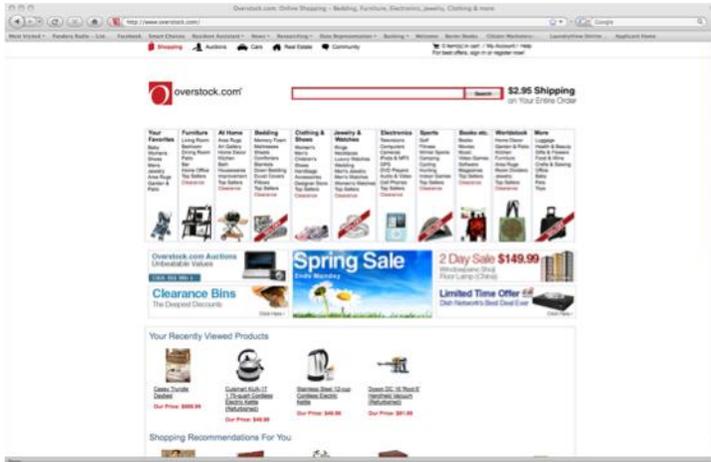
an accessible website

This chapter will discuss the considerations that should be made in regards to a website's "accessibility." There are two primary considerations issues attached to ensuring a website's accessibility. First, there exist accessibility concerns in the technical sense; literally, are users able to gain access to the website? Second, website creators must consider issues of accessibility in regards to the abilities of its users; is the actual content of the site widely understandable?

MAKE SURE USERS CAN ACCESS THE SITE A website meant to help a community is useless if the community members do not have adequate access to it. Chapter 5 discussed the importance of considering a community's Internet access when determining whether or not a Google™ mashup website it a practical option to fit the needs of the community. However, even after concluding that members of a community have adequate Internet access, there are other critical factors to keep in mind regarding Internet accessibility, such as users' screen sizes, Internet speed, and browser types.

SCREEN SIZE Screen size is an often overlooked consideration when creating a website. Designers often neglect to consider the screen size of the average Internet user, which can cause many viewers to miss important information on a website. Take a look at the three displays of the *overstock.com* homepage. The first screen shot is shown in the aspect ratio of a Mac computer with a 20-inch screen, the second is the same website shown on a 13-inch screen, and the third is the website shown on a 10-inch screen (screen sizes are measured along the diagonal).

CHAPTER 8: MAKING A WEBSITE ACCESSIBLE



Overstock.com, in Three Screen Size Ratios

These three screen shots are taken from a 20-inch screen, a 13-inch screen, and a 10-inch screen (from top to bottom). The 20-inch screen shows the entire page width with some room to spare, and allows viewers to see that there is more content further down the page by showing some of the section below. The 13-inch screen also displays the entire page width, but hides the bottom portion of the page because the page cuts off at what appears to be a natural endpoint. The 10-inch screen also hides the bottom of the screen, but also hides the last section on the far right side of the page (labeled “More”). Users with 10-inch screens may end up missing a lot of information as a result of their screen size.

INTERNET SPEED It is also important to design a website that allows users with a wide range of Internet speeds to access it. In other words, although a complex website with many detailed graphics and other additions can be attractive, you will want to make sure that you do not sacrifice efficient page loading. Do not use many large photos that will make the page take a long time to fully load, as many viewers with slower Internet connections may become frustrated and give up.

BROWSER TYPES Given the many options available for Internet browsers, it is a good idea to test a site on a few of the more frequently used browsers. Internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox, Chrome, Safari, and Opera are some of the Internet browsers commonly used by the public, and it is a good idea to design your website in a way that allows it to be viewed and used by most browsers.

MAKE SURE THE SITE, ONCE ACCESSED, IS UNDERSTANDABLE The other way in which a website can be inaccessible is in its content. If the information on the website is presented or explained in a way that is not clear to members of the target audience, the site's accessibility is not universal. As discussed in Chapters 6 and 7, it is important to explain things in ways that all viewers can understand. Specifically, a website that presents its viewers with unfamiliar and unexplained terminology will alienate individuals who are not already familiar with the subject, instead of inviting them to learn more. As the individuals involved in the creation and development of a website are likely to be quite familiar with the terms used on the website, it is a good idea to get feedback from external sources, ideally individuals who do not know much on the subject of the site.