



Jonathan M. Hethey

Report for 1st semester exam project: Portfolio

Nordic Multimedia Academy - Multimedia Design

URL: <http://jmh-visual.com>

Counsellors: Tina, Malene and Per

Student: Jonathan M. Hethey, dk2

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22896 Strokes

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Introduction

First of all I want to thank the open source community, without which our technological standard would be massively lower than what we are used to. All the developers out there and especially them, sharing their knowledge empowered me to realise this project.

Everything that is really great and inspiring is created by the individual who can labor in freedom.

Albert Einstein - 1950

Background of the Problem

On a market that is flooded with competitors it is important to show off your skills efficiently and try to stand out from the crowd. Online portfolios are there for your customers even when you're asleep or busy, so it has to represent you as good as possible, so you will gain audience or in the best case, get hired.

Problem Definition

How to design a portfolio, that involves both my graphical and programming abilities, makes much content available and also is easy to browse, to maximize the chances of getting hired by the employer of my wishes?

Methods Used

I have used the following methods to achieve my goal:

- Laswell Communication Model
- AIDA
- The SWOT analysis
- Mindmapping
- Writing for Web
- Exploratory Development

Delimitations

I did not include animated elements, as they often are distracting and also I had no specific use for them in my layout. Neither did I include Adobe Flash elements, because I don't believe in this technique in perspective of standard conform web-design. The content will not be complete, which is so, because I don't think I will have the time to transfer all my previously generated graphics, photos and source codes to the new portfolio. This will happen later and when I really will start promoting the site and use it for its purpose. Multilingualism is also cast out until after the deadline, because it requires a different way of writing variables in the theme, which is more time-consuming.

There is no mobile version for smartphones yet, due to a lack of a testing device.

Report Outline

In this report I will deal with the different techniques and strategies we learned in the past months divided by classes in the following order: Communication, Business, Design and finally Interaction. I aim to keep this structure to provide a paper that is clearly structured and easy to overlook.

Analysis

Communication

Laswell Communication Model

In this model there are five pre-defined objects, the communicator, which sends the message, the message itself, the channel through which it is send, the receiver, and the effect made.

Who? - Communicator

Jonathan M. Hethey, me, a young designer looking for places to elide his creative energies.

Says what? - Message

Showing and telling what I can do and what I have done so far and that I am open for work and looking for internship.

In what channel? - Channel

Through the world wide web with an interactive way to either see all or one specific part of my works. The internet is flexible and gives me the opportunity to reach my target group, because I want to work with web-related design.

To whom? - Receiver

My future internship employer, a multi-media agency, design or photo studio will definitely see this site, among other interested and colleagues. As I use English as the primary language, because I am looking for an internship not only in Denmark, but practically everywhere in the world, if I like the company.

With what effect? - Effect

As many offers for internship as possible, to make sure I get the best reputation, portfolio and education.

AIDA

AIDA is well known as the acronym for Attention, Interest, Desire and Action. This process, if completed, will make you reach your goal with users on your site. It is also widely used for commercials and many forms of advertisement.

Attention

I used graphical and colourful elements in order to capture the users attention. Also recent entries are clearly visible on the first page.

Interest

The three first images will probably capture the users interest and let him decide which of these areas he will take a look at first. leaving this choice to the user seemed for me as the most reasonable, also because my abilities are spread a little.

Desire

My highest goal is to awaken the desire to hire me for internship in 2012, as I want to spend my time with great challenges and in a firm that gives me the ability to try different areas and further my standards.

Action

More than one possible action would be positive for me, as mentioned, an internship would be the top, but also building a bigger network with other creatives, collaborations with graphic designers or photographers, regular readers of my rss feed or followers on twitter and friends on facebook would still be a positive responses to my site. As other people interested in graphic design, photography and coding may not be my main target group, they still could lead to my goal, by spreading links about my site.

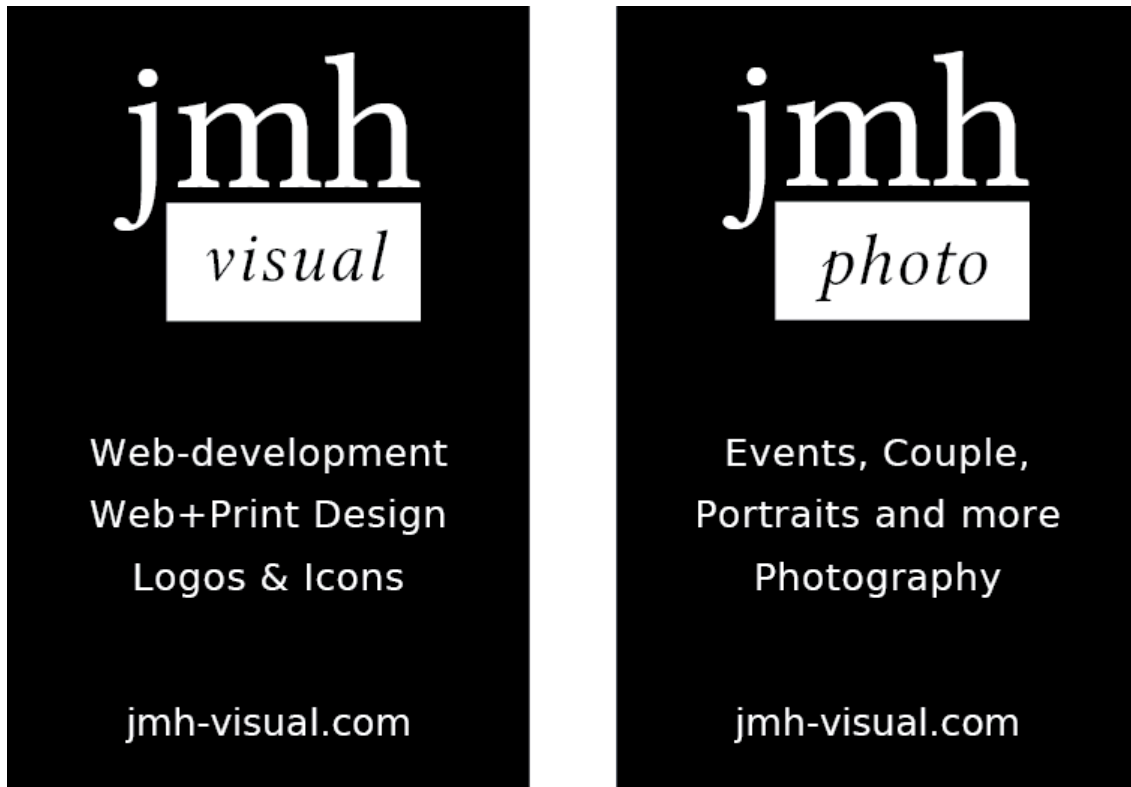
Writing for Web

Keeping it short and pack as much information in the text as possible was my objective, since I don't want to bore or waste time. I kept the texts short and also very few, because my writing skills are not part of this portfolio and I don't want to be hired on them. Important information is places as far ahead in a text as possible.

Use of Images

I use different kinds of images on my website, which is a pretty important topic for a designer.

First: an indispensable image, my logo on top, helping to user to remember me and what I do a lot better. Also it will be on my future business card. Example below:



The big three boxes are eye catching and attract the user attention through the use of saturated colours and they also establish the basis for future images as a hold in the same position.

Supportive images are used on my *code* page, they are icons which are associated with the different programming languages.

Images as a hold appear on top of pages or posts of a certain category, the *about me* page has no such holder, which makes it stick out from the rest. The favicon I assigned, which appears when you bookmark a page from jmh-visual.com is my logo, white on black, as it appears on my portfolio.

An image for atmosphere can be found on my *Me* page, where I had a picture of myself taken in clothes I usually wear, with a camera in my hand, as I am often seen. It should help people to establish a connection to me, how I really am, without a too sterile or artificial look.

Business

Exploratory Development

I decided to go with the exploratory development, because I have taken no challenges which rules could apply to this project. Especially when getting into a new area there is a higher risk that something goes wrong, which in the exploratory development is not keeping you far behind, because you just re-do the step that seemed to go wrong. As an example I want to talk about the three top boxes.



This is the final version. I first came up with three graphics, that had the text on them. I decided that this would conflict with my approach on SEO¹ and took only the background of the pictures, placing HTML elements on them. Since I am familiar with coding, constant debugging and looking for errors, is not bothering me, but goes along well with my workflow.

SWOT

SWOT stands for Strength, Weakness, Opportunity and Threat. It is a model to evaluate your abilities and what could effect them positively or negatively. First I will outline what I think fits in the different fields and after that how I dealt with it during this project.

	Positive	Negative
Internal Factors	Strengths: - experience in web projects and Content Management Systems - lone wolf, able to work on my own	Weakness: - not familiar with WordPress internal functions - not ideal at estimating time for objectives
External Factors	Opportunities: - gain reputation, find internship in international design agency - possibly reach future employers	Threats: - very high skilled competitors - code from plugins used could not be valid - assigning time on too many other things

Strengths

My strengths are clearly that I have worked on web projects before and that I have used WordPress, without really developing for it for years. I chose this to further my knowledge and be able to invest it in

¹ Search Engine Optimisation

future projects. My ability to work alone and just read until I know how to accomplish everything I want to is one of my biggest advantages. I don't need feedback frequently, but I appreciate it. I enjoy working on my own and undisturbed. Working from home did not bother me and also not being in touch with many people. I can strip from my mind and focus on the current project, when I want to achieve something.

Weakness

Not knowing everything about what I was going to do, was not as bad as it sounded in the start. I had many pages to read and I had a stable testing environment, which I could use as much as I wanted to. I did not feel threatened by not knowing so much about the internal functions, because it just required a lot of reading in the function reference to find out. The problem, that I am not yet able to precisely estimate time for objectives, I solved to just assigning more time on the different areas of my working process than I actually used. To my initial suggestion I just added some time and that gave me some time to work on other features or optimise more.

Opportunities

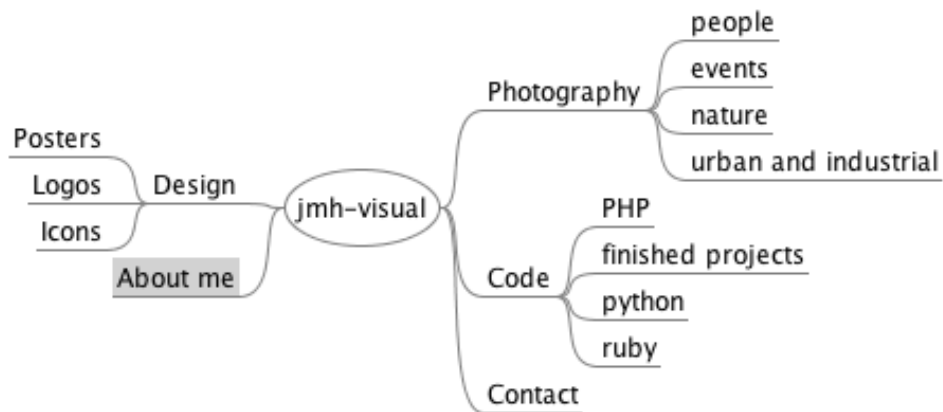
The opportunities in this project are reaching my target group and establish a connection that enables me to have an internship of my choice. Further I can establish a network with other designers, programmers and photographers, that could be useful for business purposes or for collaborations. Exchange of opinions and knowledge is important to me.

Threats

Advertisements in graphic design mags offer an education as a graphic designer in 3 months, the market is full of semi or fully professional designers who don't rest in educating themselves and practising night after night. Compared to their abilities mine could diminish and look unimportant, which is why I have to be very sharp about my concept and not use any elements that do not fit it. Using plugins for the CMS is a usual thing for me and if any of their output would result in invalid code, I would have to fix it in the plugins source code, which didn't happen.

Mindmapping

I used mind mapping to plan the structure of my site. It was important for me that the content does not appear mixed or unordered, apart from the index page, where recent posts from all categories are gathered chronologically. With mind mapping it is incredibly efficient to visualise an abstract seeming problem. Through this I got a better picture of how to realise the website and achieve my goal of a good structure that can carry a good amount of content, without making the site more complex or disables the visitor from getting what he is looking for fast.



Design

Colour

On my index page I used colours for the different areas that easily can be associated with the colours of the according programs from the Adobe Creative Suite. Not very surprisingly, the colours already fit the different areas of expertise.

	Foreground	Background
Logo and top-menu	#ffffff	#000000
holder design	#ffffff	#f28300
holder code	#ffffff	#61ab00
holder photography	#ffffff	#0052cd
General content	#000000	#f7f7f7
Links	#666666	#f7f7f7

Orange represents creative energy and activity.

Green is for renewal, safety and rest, which is fitting the coding, because I want to stay at the cutting edge of security and web standards,

Blue for trust, which is a huge subject in photography, because often very personal details are revealed on shootings and a healthy relation

For the content I decided to decrease the usual black on white or white on black contrast, through using a slight gray. It's more relaxing for the eyes and will make users stay longer on my site, due to no stress symptoms while reading.

CRAP

C.R.A.P are four design principles, that are used in many areas, not only web. They are used to enhance the look and also the usability. Following these four principles was important for me to achieve a result I was satisfied with. Planning ahead in the phase of conception can keep you from rewriting a lot of your layout afterwards, when you realise, that maybe this is emphasising the wrong elements or decreasing the readability.

Contrast

I have used a very strong contrast between content area and background, to make the user focus on the content. The black in the background tells the visitor immediately to focus on the middle of the page. Also there is a contrast between headlines and content text, through the different fonts.

Repetition

Since I have divided my page in three different categories, design, code and photography, it made a lot of sense to me, to keep the colours I introduce on the first page, (orange for design, green for code and blue for photography) throughout the whole site. Whenever a user comes to a post or a page that is of specific content, there will be a graphic at the top that will indicate in which category the user is. Also I repeat the three boxes at the bottom, telling a little about who I am and how to reach me on every page. The menu at the top stays the same and also the searchbar never leaves its place.

Alignment

I reserved a very big area for the content, but I made the space the text actually may fill smaller and centered it, so it is more comfortable to read, but also allows me to show big areas with pictures or source code. Elements of same kind always are aligned in the same manner, which helps the user to navigate quicker and without confusion.

Proximity

What belongs together should be put together so I grouped the objects on my page to appear in a commonly sense making matter. Starting at the top, there is my logo, which also is a link to the index page and nearby the links to my portfolio pages. In the middle is the content and at the bottom I have placed possibilities to contact me.

The Logo

Development of the logo was ended shortly before I started working on this project, I chose it because it is versatile for my fields of creative activity. The **jmh** is written in serif letters, to not make it look too clean or faceless. Inside the box under the letters there is an exchangeable word, written in italic letters, that carries information about what I am doing. Example: for the (web)design part it is: visual, for photography: photo. This concept offers me the opportunity to add more fields to my portfolio, without confusing the user too much, because structure and look of logo will always be similar. An archetype for me in this matter was Google's use of their logo combined with the names of their services.

Typography

Contrary to many websites I consciously chose to use a serif font (Linux Libertine) for the headlines, both for individuality and also making pages easier to scan. Through the different font, headlines, new entries or sub-categories are easier to identify. Scanning is frequently used when browsing and I want to enable my users find what they are looking for as fast as possible. For the content I use **DeJaVu Sans**, which is a very clean and easy to read sans-serif font.

Interaction

I used valid HTML and CSS markup on my website. The content area is at no point any broader than 960px. I have also defined alternate fonts for older browsers, that are not able to load fonts from hosts. I aim to show that I am able to do barrier free and nicely useable web design.

WordPress

The CMS below my portfolio is WordPress a widely used Content Management System, which I enjoyed working with before. I wanted something for my portfolio, that helps me to manage my content and saves me time in the long end. Even if it would have been easier to create static pages, I felt that I rather wanted to improve in the CMS-area and it also shows that I am able of using this kind of software for web projects.

Writing the Theme

Instead of writing the whole system myself, I decided to style the CMS and make use of its functions. Doing that, I don't have to take care of many security issues, such as mysql-injections, database management, online-editor, generation of syndication feeds and many more. Though I had to write a theme that met my expectations. I found good resources on the web and the most powerful of them, was the WordPress function reference². I started out digging resources, until I had the files I had to use covered. I at this point am using the following:

404.php - for showing the area when user follows a wrong link to my side or other removed content

header.php - in the header repeating elements on top of pages are defined, as also stylesheet, syndication feeds, javascripts and so on

sidebar-top.php - the top sidebar area, to have the elements easily customisable from the backend (drag & drop)

footer.php - repeating elements on the bottom of pages, as also the second widget area (three boxes, about me, contact and quick contact)

index.php - includes the other files and displays content, loaded from database

style.css - central stylesheet for theme elements

functions.php - functions, right now only for calling sidebars

sidebar-footer.php - three widget areas, also customisable from the backend

The files can be found on the CD which was handed in with this report in */wordpress/wp-content/themes/jmh_visual_theme/*.

A thing that can be confusing when you open and close html elements across different files is that you can lose track of which elements are child to which and if everything is closed properly and in the right order. To eliminate these issues, I validated my site and used Chromiums developer tools³ while developing.

Plugins

Plugins are an easy way to enhance the abilities of WordPress immensely. I chose the following to install to my blog:

² http://codex.wordpress.org/Function_Reference

³ <http://code.google.com/chrome/devtools/>

- NextGen Gallery⁴
- Tiny Contact Form⁵
- SyntaxHighlighter Evolved⁶

NextGen

I used this gallery script because it handles its image archive very professional and gives me the ability to show it in a javascript plugin of my choice. I used the included shutter plugin for showing the images full-screen, because it shows the pictures perfectly in every resolution.

Tiny Contact Form

This very simple plugin I could have left out, but it is a ready-to-use solution for a very small contact form that can be placed in WordPress widget areas. I had to modify the source to make the textarea fit the size of its desired dimensions though.

SyntaxHighlighter Evolved

When people work with any kind of programming or markup, they will be used to have syntax highlighting on their code. This is the reason, why I included this javascript based library. It colours source code I mark as such, so it is a lot easier to read. SyntaxHightligher Evolved is covering the languages important to me such as HTML, CSS, python, ruby and PHP. This, makes it a lot more appealing to actually read the code and understand it, because the selective colouring of elements is a great aid.

Validation

Validation is a very important topic for me, since standard-compliant web design is one of my main goals. Using elements in the right order and encapsulation minimises the risk of having different results in different rendering engines⁷. Both generated source (HTML) and CSS files are validated with the w3c validation tools. (<http://validator.w3.org>)

Cross Browser Compatibility

<http://jmh-visual.com> has been tested in Microsoft Internet Explorer 8, Mozilla Firefox 3.6 (current verion), Mozilla Firefox 4 (beta status), Google Chromium (6 and 7), Apple Safari 5 and Opera 10. The site looked either exactly the same or varied a little bit. As Internet Explorer does not support the @font-face attribute with TrueType fonts, it falls back to similar fonts, that are pre-installed with Microsoft Windows, as I order it too.

Conclusion

This website has become a portfolio I want to use and extend. It both shows my skills in creating functional websites and also follows a concept which is easy to understand. The way I can handle my content now is much better than linking people to a certain category of my blog⁸ and really focusses on my skills and creativity.

This project improved my skills in dealing with CMS, especially the used of course. Second I now have more experience with a Document Object Model that has to be maintained across several files and put together by the system. I learned more about the advantages but also how time-consuming it can be. PS: I really learned loving VIM.

⁴ <http://alexrabbe.de/wordpress-plugins/nextgen-gallery/>

⁵ <http://www.tomsdimension.de/wp-plugins/tiny-contact-form>

⁶ <http://www.viper007bond.com/wordpress-plugins/syntaxhighlighter/>

⁷ for example: Firefox= Gecko Engine, Safari/Chromium= Webkit

⁸ <http://geronimo89.dk>

Perspective

As mentioned already, I will use this portfolio to gain reputation, keep others up to date of what I currently am working on and show the progression of my skills in public. In future I will actively maintain this website and add content like case studies, logo design processes, articles about the tools that I am using like code editors, image editing software, photo shootings and processes of retouching images.

Technically I still have a lot of opportunities to improve my site, currently I am not very satisfied with the implementation of the comments feature. I will make the content area expand on click, so it also shows the comments and gives the user the ability to comment, without making it visible constantly. The user should not have to read other users comments unless he or she likes to. Further I will take care of handling tags. I am tagging my posts and pages, but it is not visible yet. Probably on top I will have a mouse-over effect that makes the tag cloud appear and the user can browse different tags by clicking on them. When more content is added to the site then there is listed on the reference pages, I will add a link to the according category there, where my projects can be viewed one by one.

Sources

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