

Brain spots web flaws in milliseconds

High speed assessments

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"First impressions last"... or so the adage goes... But now we have our very own internet to prove this point.

A study conducted by Canadian researchers, published in the journal "Behaviour & Information Technology," says it takes but a blink of the eye for an internet user to make up his/her mind about the quality of a website.

The researchers were pleasantly surprised by their findings that the human brain takes about a twentieth of a second to decide on the appeal of a website - they seriously thought it would take at least 10 times longer to form an opinion.

The Canadian team wrote that visual appeal can be assessed within 50 milliseconds, which means that web designers have only 50 milliseconds to create an impact on users. Significantly, the research proved that the age-old maxim about first impressions still very much holds good.

Under the guidance of Dr Gitte Lindgaard, Carleton University, Ottawa, the team showed volunteers 50 millisecond glimpses of Web sites, and asked them to rate the sites basis their aesthetic appeal. Users were then asked to examine the site carefully, and provide a second rating. The researchers found the 2 ratings closely tallying.

Dr Lindgaard expressed surprise at the results, adding that her colleagues believed it would be impossible to really see anything in less than 500 milliseconds.

And just why do first impressions last? According to the researchers, it is due to what psychologists would call the "halo effect". This translated in common terms means that if people believe a website looks good, then this positive quality will spread to other areas such as the website's content.

Also as people like to be right, they will carry on using the website that made a good first impression - further confirming that their initial decision was correct.

Lindgaard warned on basis of the study that unless first impressions are favorable, visitors will ship out of websites even before they can get to know what the website has to offer vis à vis its competitors.