

KEEP IT SIMPLE: DESIGNING WEBSITE NAVIGATION

With the launch of C. Farrell Johnson Fine Arts in 2005, artist and retired Foreign Service officer Cynthia Farrell Johnson brought her work to a global audience using a different medium—the Internet. Needing only three gallery pages, her original artwork was grouped into creative categories – people, places and things. Pages were also created for fine art reproductions and gifts, and a few were dedicated to biographical and exhibit information.

One year later, the creative categories became a barrier to navigation as Cynthia's collection of original art and fine art reproductions tripled. I needed to find a simple, user-friendly solution that would be easy to modify as Cynthia's collection grew. Creativity gave way to practicality, with categories changed to numbered pages and colors from the main navigation bar adapted into revised secondary navigation bars within each primary navigation category.

Users can easily move through the C. Farrell Johnson Fine Arts site, which includes five gallery pages of original art, two pages of prints, nine pages of cards and posters, and three pages of giclee prints. As Cynthia produces more art and gifts, these numbered navigation bars can be easily expanded. At the same time, although not stated explicitly, the original artwork is still primarily organized in the creative gallery categories.

Whatever format you choose for your website, make sure the design is user-friendly. Ask yourself these questions:

- How many clicks of the mouse does it take for visitors to navigate to key areas of the site?
- Is it difficult to find destinations on the site? Are the hot buttons and links logical? Is the category terminology logical?
- Do the pages present digestible amounts of information? Is the content overwhelming? What are effective ways to break it up and guide the visitor?
- What actions do I want visitors to take? Which parts of the site will be most interesting to my target audiences?
- Is there a sitemap or directory visitors can use to help navigate the site?

Tonight, Cynthia is one of the featured artists in a Black History Month exhibit at the Center for American Progress (CAP). A collaboration with the Parish Gallery in DC, the Center's walls have been adorned with the work of African and African American artists.

For more information on C. Farrell Johnson Fine Arts, go to <http://www.cfjfinearts.com>.

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