

Web browsing can be frustrating. Apart from connection problems and slow computers, we can often be thwarted by different kinds of computer problems that crop up on specific websites. These browsing problems are often caused by the particular combination of computer hardware and software, and sometimes caused by human error other than your own.



Stating the obvious, computer hardware and software is very complicated and it changes all the time. Sometimes things are just bound to go wrong when one thing doesn't talk nicely to another. Something that worked yesterday may not work today simply because (for instance) you have done what you were told by the prompt that nagged you to update your Adobe Flash Player.

Websites that don't display properly

I recently had a very frustrating experience during an onsite computer session when trying to download a file from Dell. I just could not find the button to initiate the download process. It got so bad that I even checked their help files and wondered whether to ask them for some tech support. The web page kept reassuring me that I had put the file in my "basket" and that I had installed the "download manager" but I just could not find how to start the download. Eventually it dawned on me that the instructions were so straightforward about telling me to "click the download button" that I wondered if the "download button" was just not being displayed. So I went slowly around the white space of the screen, clicking everywhere. It worked. For some odd reason the button was invisible (probably printing white text on a white background).

In retrospect I should have tried a solution that often works with website problems - use a different browser. It's just possible that that would have been the quickest solution. For the first half hour of my frustration, though, I assumed that the problem was my own fault of not being able to see something that should have been right in front of me.

Website that don't compute



Not long ago I was providing some home user support for a client who asked me to help her place an order on a website. Trying to do it on her own, she had been unable to find the “checkout”. Well, when we looked at it together we still couldn’t do it. We gave up in the end. There was just no way that we could follow a path through the website that took us from the stage of “placing the item in the basket” to placing the order. There was some horrible flaw in the design of the website. It wasn’t my client’s fault and it wasn’t mine. We went to Amazon instead.

This brings me to another obvious suggestion. If a website is driving you mad because you seem to be going round in circles then ask someone else to look at it with you. Computer assistance is often as valuable from a family member as a computer support specialist. You may just need someone to confirm that you’re not missing something obvious. My thinking is that if two people looking at it together can’t work it out then it’s a badly designed website rather than a technically-challenged user. It seems to me that a lot of people assume that this sort of problem is “their fault” when, in fact, it’s a badly designed website.

Along similar lines, I recently tried to buy some copyright-free images online. I’d previously created an account and then I spent ages making my selection of images. When I got to the checkout, however, the website detected that I wasn’t currently “signed in” to my account. Instead of giving me the opportunity to sign in at that point it insisted that I either abandon my basket (and then sign in) or create a new account. This is just bad website design. OK, I admit that I have a low frustration threshold coupled with high expectations of other people’s competence. Nevertheless, my main point still holds: the fault wasn’t mine and there’s no reason why I should criticise myself for incompetence (intolerance, maybe, but not incompetence).

Missing add-ons

Another area of frustration can be that you think you should be looking at a video on a website or some other bit of fancy eye-candy and you just can’t see it. This can be caused by not having an important “add on” installed on your computer that the website is trying to call upon. You’ve probably noticed those irritating nags telling you to update Java and/or Adobe Flash Player. Although this is irritating it’s worth doing as this software is needed to run some of the fancier bits of website pyrotechnics. Also, using out-of-date versions could pose a security threat. So, if you think you should be looking at something fancy and it’s not there it’s worth looking to see if there’s a hint somewhere on the screen telling you that you need to install something before you’ll see the fancy web content. Only do this on websites you trust, though: clicking on links that claim to download add-ons like Java can expose you to risk. See my [blog post on download risks](#) for further information.

Printing problems

If you are trying to print a web page and it either won't print at all or prints very badly (eg with lots of white space and different elements printing on different pages) then it's worth looking to see if there's a specific "print" button embedded in the web page (as opposed to starting the printing by using the browser's print command). This is because the website will then send a version of the page to your printer that is optimised for printing rather than displaying as a web page. And if that doesn't help, or if there isn't a special print button, then try a different browser.

Conclusions

- 1) Not all websites are perfectly written or tested. Having a bad "user experience" could be the website's inadequacies and not your own. Ask someone else to look at it with you.
- 2) Try viewing the web page in a different browser. You can have as many browsers installed as you wish. They won't interfere with each other in the way that antivirus programs do. See [my post on browsers](#) for installing more browsers.

Share this:

- [Click to share on Twitter \(Opens in new window\)](#)
- [Click to share on Facebook \(Opens in new window\)](#)