

Mood Board Observations

by Justin Kerr, July 2009

Steve Grothmann, one of our project managers, recently wrote a [good introduction to mood boards](#) and explained how we have folded them into our design process. I'm going to expand a bit on Steve's post since I'm the one responsible for producing the mood boards and, now that I have a dozen or so of them under my belt, I can assess their impact on Newfangled's web development.

Pros

Mood boards are definitely quicker to assemble than fully developed and polished home page layouts. There is more than just look and feel to consider when laying out an actual site page: did I include all the elements outlined in the prototype? how does this form work? what happens when I mouse over this component? You can easily get bogged down in the content, structure and functionality of the page and lose site of the design.

There's also more time for experimentation and pushing designs further. Since mood board elements don't include much "real" content, there's freedom to try several different approaches.

Mood boards provide a "big picture" of design (fonts, color, texture, images) and promote a more holistic approach to the design phase of site development.



Cons

Because clients are real people with real likes and dislikes, the implementation of mood boards has not eliminated the "forest for the trees" syndrome. Some of our clients still focus on small details rather than the whole picture during reviews. As Steve explained in his post, mood boards are meant to establish a direction for a site's look and feel. They are much more like sketches than polished pieces.

Some "Frankenstein-ing" (mix and match elements from different layouts) still goes on, but I have to admit that mood boards have reduced the frequency of this.

We've also had some clients mistake the boards for home page layouts. Thus, when we take the look and feel and apply it to the actual structure and content of their site, sometimes the clients are confused as to why their site does not look exactly like the approved board.



Conclusion

Overall, mood boards have been a great addition to Newfangled's development process. They have streamlined the design phase and allowed us to push design further along without getting caught up in the details of site structure.

A few challenges remain, such as deciding when mood boards are appropriate for a particular job (based on client personality, job scope, budget) and making sure our clients understand what mood boards are (and are not).