Sexism and Web Design - of Puce and Men

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A friend of mine (Mike Klostermeyer) made me aware of an article on CNN regarding the aesthetic appeal of web sites to different sexes. The story is on CNN and it's titled "Web site's appearance matters" (story). The story describes a British study that details how men and women differ in their appreciation of web sites. That's no surprise I suppose. You would have to have blinders on to *not* realize that men and women *in general* have different tastes in fashion, decorating, and ... uh... hygiene I guess. That's why my stuffed moose head is in the shed instead of the living room.

In the study, men preferred sites designed by men and women preferred sites designed by women. The study indicated that women like *more color in the background and fonts* and they preferred *informally posed pictures*. Men responded to *straight horizontal lines* across the page (what??) and they liked a *3 dimensional* and *self-propelling* images. I have no specific comment about the idea of "self-propelling", but I did find it distracting.

The really interesting part of the article is that the researchers examined a bunch of web sites in the U.K., France and Poland and found that 94% of the web sites had a *masculine orientation* (and no, that doesn't mean they all had clips of breaking wind).

The truth is probably somewhere between sexism and practicality. There are more IT professionals that are men. Stakeholders who make design decisions are more likely to be men because of the number of them in management and business owner type positions (although that is changing). So the people who design and decide are men. That means the web sites lean toward the taste of men.

Put all these guys in a room and let them choose among "colorful backgrounds" and see what you get. Let's give them a choice of sea green, olive green, forest green, collard green and mustard green and see what they come up with. Then ask, "What color is the background?" I bet most of them say "green" :).