

Scrolling along

One of the most common requests from clients early on in the design process is to avoid scrolling on pages. This is a pretty outdated requirement, yet the myth perpetuates.

A (very) brief history of scrolling

Back in the olden days, let's say the early nineties, when the internet was young and new, large percentages of users would not scroll down a long page of text, but instead would invariably pick links from the text displayed "above the fold". People have suggested that this was because we were all used to using thick client user interfaces, which typically used modal dialogue boxes, and screens that were optimised for a 640x480 window, so stuff generally fitted, and pages didn't scroll down.

Because of this, one of the earliest web usability rules was: Thou Must Not Make Pages That Shall Scroll, Either Downwards, Or Side To Side.

This sounds sensible. However, by about 1997 the general user had started to get the hang of this web thing. By December 2007, even the almighty Jakob Nielsen (a well known self-professed usability expert) was proclaiming that users were getting the hang of downwards scrolling. [Here is his original 1997 Alertbox post.](#)

These days, the advent of mouse scroll-wheels has made it even more intuitive for users to scroll down a page. By July 2005, Nielsen was perfectly happy with vertical scrolling, as long as accessibility issues were addressed. [Read his 2005 post.](#) He has concern that people with some motor problems might not be able to manage it, but with a little care you can ensure that scrolling is possible from the keyboard. As long as the page is scrollable using the cursor keys from an initial load, the vast majority of users will be ok, being able to use either the keyboard or the mouse (or any specialist assistive technologies that replicate these devices) to scroll.

What we do

So, FourHats' approach to the issue is to advise customers to prioritise their content so that key messages are above the fold, but not to concern themselves overly if content volume or text size forces a user to scroll. In fact, scrolling is now easier for most users than paging through multiple pages of content (making archiving, printing and forwarding an article a much simpler prospect). For content like press releases, articles, technical specifications and blog posts, we would encourage scrolling over pagination as the most usable and flexible approach to allowing a user to read the content.

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