

/gallery

Christian Hall reveals this month's hottest new websites

1-10 Snowdin

URL www.snowdin.com
Company Colle + McVoy
URL www.collemcvoy.com

To help relieve the stresses of the winter holidays, Minneapolis agency Colle + McVoy created this winter retreat for company friends. Here, you can frolic with a yeti, pilot a blimp or deliver the evening post to the townsfolk, with no need for an electric blanket. What you will require, however, is a pair of 3D glasses. It's not often you need a physical device other than a mouse, keyboard and monitor to view a website, but here it's brought to life using an old-fashioned cinematic technique.

Inspired by some of the agency's work over the past year, the team came up with a virtual snow-capped mountain retreat where visitors can escape from the hectic holiday hustle and bustle by using 3D glasses – which the agency mailed to its contacts – to play Flash games and download icons and desktop widgets. It's a great example of a unique viewing experience and great marketing, too.

"The look and feel was inspired by traditional train set dioramas," says design director Ed Bennett. "We wanted to attempt something very different, challenging and innovative, as well as being on trend with what other sites were trying. The 3D element provided this."

The focus of rich content to take away from the site brilliantly extends the experience too. "We wanted the site to be fun and interactive for visitors of all ages," adds Bennett, "and the downloadable content is great for this. We also wanted to provide a lot of value."

What's more remarkable than the technical and administrative challenge of creating a 3D site is the fact its creators didn't feel it would put visitors off. Bennett adds that the target audience was small and 1,500 free glasses were mailed out at launch. An additional 850 pairs were sent out upon request via the site while supplies lasted.

"The look and feel was inspired by traditional train set dioramas"

Ed Bennett

In addition to enjoying the site itself, visitors can take away unique content, making Snowdin a social site with a difference.



It all began with the creation of a physical model of Snowdin. The model was then photographed using a special technique so the colours could be separated in Flash to make the 3D effect.





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1-5 Eternal Platinum

URL www.eternalplatinum.com

Company VanGoGh Creative

URL www.vangogh-creative.it

This website brings together some of the world's best platinum ring designers to market their collections and is one of few sites that successfully utilises the web to allow for a tangible experience using a mixture of photographs and 3D models. VanGoGh wanted to reflect that platinum is one of the most precious and rare metals in the world, as well as evoking its pureness. "We had the idea of using images of water, which also has connotations of pureness, eternity and being a natural element," explains designer Enrico Penzo. "We started from the concept of an art exhibition. The online experience was realised around the idea of 23 video transitions where the rings appear to be shaped by the water."



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6-10 For The Love Of God

URL www.fortheloveofgod.nl

Company Skipintro

URL www.skipintro.nl

Art installations have been a two-way process for decades, encouraging viewers to become part of the art itself. This site takes the idea even further to promote Damien Hirst's For The Love Of God exhibition in Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum. It does this by creating one central piece of audiovisual art as the entire site itself: revolving headshots of real people around a skull that features in the real exhibition. But the heads aren't just any heads, they're actual video recordings of real peoples' opinions on the exhibition. It has all the power of user participation sites like We Feel Fine, but becomes much more of a heavyweight marketing tool. Who wouldn't be interested to discover the real exhibition after looking at this great site?



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"The online experience was realised around the concept of 23 video transitions"

Enrico Penzo



1-5 Okayboss

URL www.okayboss.com
 Company In house (Jimbo)
 URL In house

This illustration portfolio extends the website of designer Hazim Abdul Hamid (Jimbo for short) and the army theme represents what Jimbo believes he is – a one-man army. “Basically it was just a fun way of communicating my array of skills,” he says. “An extension of the one-man army idea was to have various different hats and helmets worn by different soldiers throughout the ages.” The kitchen saucepan and Stormtrooper helmet were just for fun: “Humour is a big part of my identity and one of the offerings I can provide with my work.” Illustrator was the tool of choice for the pencil sketches and vectors, with layout and textures being done in Photoshop, Flash for the animation and XML for the work section.



6-10 Samsung Q1 microsite

URL tinyurl.com/9acpea
 Company Designfever
 URL www.designfever.com

The American comic book style of this promotional website for one of Samsung’s latest MP3 players is truly eye-catching. The superhero figures all have special powers that show off different aspects of the Q1’s capabilities. Similar techniques have been tried on many other websites, but what makes it so involving here is the fact that you’re pushed right into the comic strip itself, making it feel like you’re reading the real thing. Not only that, Designfever has managed to incorporate an interactive element that makes the experience look and feel like an interactive PDF. There’s even a desk that enables the visitor to spread out the comic as well as associated content like the photo stills.



“Humour is a big part of my identity and one of the things I can provide with my work”

Jimbo



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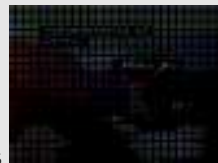
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1-6 Vladimir Jones

URL www.vladimirjones.com

Company SISU

URL www.sisumedia.com

Vladimir Jones is the rebrand name for Colorado agency PRACO. "As we discussed the values and culture that might drive such an agency, we were struck by the duality of our business," says president Meredith Vaughan. "The name Vladimir Jones seemed to express this duality very nicely." The design was executed in Photoshop and Flash. For the dog (supposed to be Vladimir's sidekick, as the client didn't want a Vladimir figure), SISU used layered Flash composites to break body parts so they could be animated independently. "He was initially meant to just be a part of the homepage but as we explored the concept further, it just made sense for him to become the cornerstone of the entire site," says Dave Lippman, VP creative at SisU.



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7-11 Santa Helena

URL www.santahelena.se/english.html

Company Scholz & Friends & Music Bay

URL www.s-f.se/start.html and www.musicbay.se

This stylish site enables you to design your own unique wine box of Chilean brand Santa Helena, which will then be delivered to your home. It's a neat marketing ploy, and the site is so well crafted that it manages to capture your imagination even if you thought you weren't the artistic type. The design applet uses a mouse and keyboard combination with a library of images to make designing a doddle. Drag and drop and various effects sliders make it a joy to use and genuinely stunning results can be achieved within minutes, making Santa Helena a masterpiece of marketing – capturing the imagination of its visitors and never frustrating you with painful loading times or tools that need a lot of explanation.



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"At first the dog was just a part of the homepage but he became the site's cornerstone"

Dave Lippman



1-6 Auditorium

URL www.playauditorium.com
Company CIPHER PRIME
URL www.cipherprime.com

Auditorium is an interactive web puzzle game centring around the processes of light and sound. "Coding this little guy was not exactly the easiest task," says designer William Stallwood. "Flash really wasn't meant to do this kind of particle math or rendering. So as you could imagine, we made all kinds of little tests to see what we could produce." After testing with friends, Cipher Prime redesigned the game a few times until they were satisfied. "We were really going to need a good development framework. We had looked around for a while, but there just wasn't anything that fitted the bill. So we created our own MVC-based framework called Tricycle." A public beta was then released at the GXL 400 Man LAN gaming event.



7-12 Iceman Fashion

URL www.icemanfashion.com
Company JaHallo
URL www.jahallo.dk

Image manipulation has become a big part of web design, largely with the aid of Papervision3D. Here the glossy fashion stills become pliable to allow for a bit of fun and some interesting navigation where you can flip the photos with a mouse gesture and move on to the next in the collection. Double-clicking on a shot opens up the full image. This not only fills the screen, it goes off the edges, and you just need to move your mouse to each edge to shift the image steadily in that direction. Coupled with a friendly navigation bar that fits neatly at the top of the collections page, and interestingly slopes on the homepage, the sense of style goes way beyond what the models are wearing – it's in every aspect of this site.



"Coding this guy wasn't easy. Flash wasn't meant to do this kind of math"

William Stallwood



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1-6 Patisserie Nachtschikultur

URL www.patisserie.de
Company Zum Kuckuck
URL www.zumkuckuck.com

What's always made cake shops so appealing is their shop windows, stuffed with sumptuous delights to attract passers-by. That concept is adeptly applied on this German site, which takes the form of an interactive dessert trolley for around 200 high-quality desserts for the catering industry. The products can be sorted according to topics (tags) such as size, taste, season and property, with a free-text search in any combination. Reducing the typographical elements of the design is essential to the overall impact, and the zoom effect when clicking one of the products is an effective way of focusing the visitor's attention. A great example of why supersized photographs of products aren't always necessary to generate interest on the web.



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7-11 Celestial & Solstice Productions

URL www.celsolinc.com
Company In house
URL In house

Oregon-based Celsol Inc has brilliantly taken the essence of pop-up book fun and instilled it on its site. "All the elements of the main page were taken from our studio (office), right down to the couch, rug and even the Superman and Batman figurines," says co-founder Jason W Christman. The site reflects Celsol's combined skills pool, from film to web work, in the presence of a Mac (web), theatre (film) and copy room (print). "The biggest challenge was compression and quality of the site when it animates. We wanted it to load quickly but didn't want to lose the quality. It was a struggle and we had to compromise on both ends to make it work for everyone."



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"All the elements came from our studio, right down to the superhero figurines" Jason W Christman

Want to see your work here? Think your work should be in Gallery? Tell us about it at netmag@futurenet.com



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1-5 NVIDIA Speak Visual

URL www.speakvisual.com/#/spotlight

Company Odopod & Cutwater

URL www.odopod.com & www.cutwatersf.com

The Speak Visual campaign for graphics company NVIDIA is encapsulated in this brilliant site, which forgoes the obvious wow factor of mind-blowing animation in favour of some inspiring testimonials from NVIDIA's customers. "The central theme, speak visual, is embodied in the speech bubble, which is always seen superimposed over the mouths of creative people in similar, striking compositions, acting as a container for their creative output," says Odopod's Allison McCarthy. The site was created using Flash, Papervision3D and Five3D. "Five3D was used in the gallery search page to allow for a greater number of objects to be displayed on screen compared to Papervision3D, which is a framework with a greater overhead."



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6-10 The Great Equation

URL equation.laptop.org

Company Taxi

URL www.taxi.ca

Following on from the highly successful adverts featuring a digitally reborn John Lennon, the One Laptop Per Child project has been given a new impetus with this stunning piece of web design. The Great Equation shows just how simple the concept of the OLPC scheme is through its minimalist approach and emphasis on basic mathematics in a social context, by having the sum of two feelings equal a 'Change The World' concept. "This project rallied amazing talent around our shared belief that communication can also change the world," says Paul Lavoie, chief creative officer at Taxi. "The XO Laptop is a symbol of that, and inspired us to make its message a clear and emotional wake up call to action."



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"Communication can change the world. The XO Laptop is a symbol of that"

Paul Lavoie