

Calling all Australian web designers

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The organisers of September's Web Directions

conference are encouraging web designers to abandon the eye candy demanded by many clients and focus on the basics.

The inaugural McFarlane Prize for excellence in Australian Web Design shows off the work of the best Australian designers. John Allsopp and Maxine Sherrin, owners of Sydney software development company Westciv, came up with the idea. "We really hope to put best practices front and centre in Australian web design," Mr Allsopp says. "Too much web design focuses on what a site looks like and far too little on how usable a site is. Designers need to work harder to ensure their content can be seen on a range of devices."

The prize is named in memory of Australian web pioneer Nigel McFarlane, who died last year. Mr McFarlane, a Next writer, was a respected computer scientist and programmer, prominent in the open source, web development and Linux communities. He was a regular speaker at industry conferences, and wrote several books on web development.

Nominations, which close on August 31, are open to any Australian website launched or significantly upgraded from August 1 last year to July 31.

Personal sites and blogs are welcome to apply. Judging will be carried out in two stages by four experts: Dean Jackson, Lisa Herrod, Andrew Arch, and Peter Ottery.

The first stage evaluates sites for design, especially accessibility and standards-based coding. The top 20 sites selected will be further assessed in the areas of accessibility, usability, design, and coding. A shortlist will then be announced a week before the winner is named on September 28.

"There are two rounds of judging," Mr Allsopp says. "The first is done using software tools like the W3C's (World Wide Web Consortium) CSS and HTML validators, and online accessibility checking tools. We decided this first round should focus on the use of best practice, as we believe it is fundamental."

The judges will also make commentary available on sites they assess in the second round.

"Websites are technical. And the consequences of the misuse of that technology can be significant," Mr Allsopp says.

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