

# /makeover kirkwhalum.com

A renowned jazz artist feels his site is in need of a ‘pimp’. Jason Jones, designer at San Francisco agency Otterball, wants it to focus on the man, the music and social networking

## The brief

Site [www.kirkwhalum.com](http://www.kirkwhalum.com)

Site owner Kirk Whalum

Brief Kirk is an American smooth jazz saxophonist and songwriter with seven Grammy nominations. His existing site was functional but definitely needed a ‘pimp’.



## The designer

Name Jason Jones

Company Otterball

URL [www.otterball.com](http://www.otterball.com)

Areas of expertise UI design, imaging and artist marketing

**This site’s owner mentioned it was in need of a ‘pimp’ and I believe a ‘pimping’ is what we’ve delivered.**

**My design takes the site from a slightly dated, informational ‘catch-all’ to something that’s not only refined and sophisticated but also evocative of this artist’s particular style.**

Some of the challenges I encountered right out of the gate were the sheer volume of information and visual elements being displayed. In the existing site, the user is presented with an assortment of banners of various styles, each possessing their own typefaces and graphics. Additionally, there are ads running off the page and many pages with no graphical connective tissue to the others. This can leave the user confused, optically tired and uninterested after a very short period of time. At least, this was my experience after just a few short minutes and I was an invested viewer. Someone visiting the site for the first time would no doubt be less lenient.

This particular recording artist is very passionate on a variety of topics, including his spiritual podcasts, the basement experience of his site, and

his involvement in the jazz community. All of these things are absolutely essential to his persona as a whole, but in my opinion, they don’t need to be crammed into a solitary environment into which they were not initially intended to fit.

The website feels as though it has taken an organic direction over time, adding on various areas as the need arose. I believe it would be greatly beneficial to come back to the master plan of ‘what are we trying to accomplish?’ and ‘what is the message we are attempting to communicate to our fans?’ Answering these pivotal questions is of fundamental importance before creating a single pixel on the page.

I’ve used black and red tones, similar font types and lots of negative space. This way, the connection can be made between the CD art and the website. Holding them side by side, you’d be able to see the resemblance and know they were coming from the same place creatively.

My company, Otterball, works daily with musicians and their ever-changing needs. We’ve found each has a very specific set of requirements when establishing their web presence. But at the top of the list is usually the ability to have a virtual hub to all the social networking aspects of their fan base: it’s becoming increasingly rare for an artist to be discovered through their ‘official’

“An artist wants to get in, communicate with their fans in a meaningful way, and move on to doing what they do”

Jason Jones

I decided that the most important role of the site should be the promotion and branding of both the artist and his music. Everything outside of that, in my effort, would be minimised.

The idea is to focus the attention primarily on the image of the performer rather than all of the noise. Users and fans alike come to a musician’s site to engage in a more personal experience with the artist and his music. We can present them with the opportunity to go deeper, but we should never lose sight of the primary reason they came.

In this particular design, the shell, for the most part, stays the same throughout the site. This is accomplished by using an exclusively Flash environment. The content changes by selecting a menu item in the main navigation bar and is revealed in the section to the left of Kirk’s image. This means the visitor will never lose elements such as the MP3 player, links to the various social networks and most importantly, the Buy Now button for his CD. At the end of the day, if we can draw the user to pick up a copy of the artist’s work, we’ve done a good job.

Another approach we commonly tie into the design is an effort to theme the site around the album art. If budget permits, most artists will try to refresh their site in conjunction with a new album. Just as the album cover of a physical CD package needs to have a graphic standard in all elements (booklet, CD art, tray card, etc), a website is most effective when it fits graphically into the same vein.

website. I myself find new music through sites like Pandora, a friend’s Facebook page or browsing the iTunes Music Store. Being aware of those trends, it’s important for those connections to be tied to the musician’s site in a prominent way.

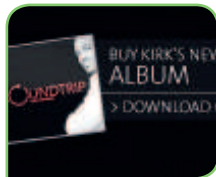
In my design, a list of red logos have been placed in the bottom right-hand corner for users to easily connect to. And just like the ‘Buy Now’ button, they’ll never leave. It’s important for the artist to be able to transcend the destinational ‘www.my-site.com’ and move into the everyday social interactions of this generation of fans.

I was encouraged to see that this site’s owner is committed to the maintenance and update of his site on a regular basis. A move from a primarily HTML-based solution to something exclusively Flash might end this momentum due to the steep learning curve, so it would be useful to provide a CMS that enabled the owner to update the site while maintaining the integrity of the design. At Otterball, we’ve built a proprietary CMS for this very reason. This gives the user flexibility in updating their Flash website, as well as feeding important information for SEO to the browser. Musicians are neither designers nor programmers. An artist wants to get in, communicate with their fans in a meaningful way, and move on to doing what they do best – making music. Providing them with an intuitive, restrictive way to do just that ensures them a relevant web presence for some time to come. ●



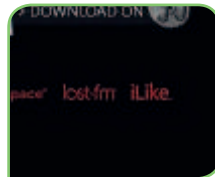
### 1 The artist

I wanted the site to revolve around the artist and his image. The previous site was a mess of different banners, typefaces and colours, with no real focus. When presenting the user with a new site, or one they frequently view, you want to keep them invested into the reason they're there. Along with the treatment of Kirk's name, my intent was to give the user an image reflecting who the artist is. The dark header and footer help to draw the eye into the information section without adding unneeded visual tension.



### 2 Buy Kirk's new album

The most important thing to an artist, obviously, is for people to purchase a copy of their CD. This is why in my design I presented this opportunity as a prominent graphical element that never leaves the site. Its location will never deviate from where it's currently rendered, always prompting the visitor to purchase a copy of their own. I also wanted to present people with the option of a digital download via iTunes that wasn't immediately present in the existing design.



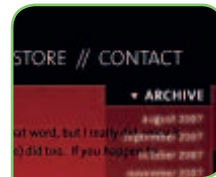
### 3 His network

As fans are increasingly offered multiple ways to find their music and be involved, my goal was to dedicate screen real-estate to providing the ability to 'take' the artist with you into your digital life. This hub consolidates all of the artist's social investments into one central location so that these connections can be easily found by his fans. It also never deviates in location, calling to action the ability to click and add the link to their bookmarks, friend list and so on.



### 4 Branding

Just as the art on a CD should represent the music within it, a website should graphically follow the same standards. This artist had a great CD package already established for his current album, *Roundtrip*. I wanted to tie in the design of this site to the branding he was already working with. The intention was to keep synergy around all of his marketing efforts to assist his current fans, and the fans he's trying to acquire, by relating them to a common visual idea. The marriage of all of these mediums assists the artist in communicating his primary passion – the music.



### 5 Navigation

On the previous site, the menu navigation took you to various pages with multiple graphic representations and layouts. This simple Flash-based navigation structure enables you to access the different information without the need to move to different pages. When navigating, the new content would be rendered in the information section beneath the menu, keeping the shell of the site exactly the same. This window could contain titles, body text, pictures, videos, links and so on, while keeping the graphical standards of the rest of the site.

**Pimp my site!**  
Does your site lack lustre? Could it benefit from a few tweaks? To get an expert opinion, email your URL to [netmag@futurenet.com](mailto:netmag@futurenet.com)

