

# How To Design Your Own Skin

This guide is intended as a resource to help independent designers create skins for iMinistries websites.

## What Is A Skin?

For our purposes, a skin is an HTML template which controls the look of your site. The skin contains the images and layout of pages on your site. Each site is controlled by a single skin. In order for this to work, each skin contains multiple panels which can be independently removed from a page at any time.

Several features require the designer to provide a location in the skin. Panels hold various components and/or other panels.

It is important to note that not all skins need to have every component or every panel. What Are Panels?

In simple terms, a panel is a defined area in which content sits. Throughout the site, the administrator is allowed control over a number of different panels. Each panel is defined by the creator of the skin. Below, you will read about the various panels that you should design for.

- **Header**

This is traditionally the top of the page. After the skin is in place, the administrators of the site can add as many banners as they want.

- **Footer**

This is traditionally the bottom of the page. Some place their address while others don't use this area at all.

- **Left and Right Panels**

These panels are useful for two or three panel designs. They can hold various components like your menu, ads, children and highlights.

- **Content Panel**

This is the only required panel for any skin. This panel tells the site where to place all of the necessary text that goes on a page.

## Design Tips

- **Keep It Simple**

The best designs are simple and elegant. Many people make the mistake of trying to "jazz up" a website by combining too many design elements.

- **Manage Screen Real Estate**

While the design of the site is very important, the primary purpose of a website is to deliver information. Make sure to leave plenty of room for site content.

- **Imitation is the Purest Form of Flattery**

Find sites that you like and reuse the design elements that you like. Design elements are common and can be imitated. Be careful not to totally copy a site design, but some imitation is acceptable.

## What Are Components?

Components are containers for features and are placed inside of the panels that we just discussed. You should consider where you would like to place the following components that are available to you. You do not have to use all of the components that we outline below.

- **Menu**

This is an obvious component that you will want to design for. You can display a menu either vertically or horizontally. The menu is dynamically created by the system via Site Builder.

- **Banner**

This area can be filled with content that users create through either external applications like Flash, Fireworks and Photoshop. You can also enter in text. If multiple banners have been loaded, a random one will be selected each time the page loads. You can also load banners for each ministry, giving it a unique look.

*You can not specify a banner for a specific page.*

*If a Banner or Ad is loaded at Site Level, they will appear on every page including Ministries. However, if you have a Site Level Banner or Ad loaded and you have a different Banner loaded in your Youth Ministry, you will the Site Level Banner on every page other than pages that are within the Youth Ministry.*

- **Ad**

Just like banners, this is a location where users can place graphics, animations and/or movies. Our system will randomly pick any available ad that has been loaded.

*You can not specify a Ad for a specific page.*

*If a Banner or Ad is loaded at Site Level, they will appear on every page including Ministries. However, if you have a Site Level Banner or Ad loaded and you have a different Banner loaded in your Youth Ministry, you will the Site Level Banner on every page other than pages that are within the Youth Ministry.*

- **Search**

All of our sites are configured for full-text searching. This component places a small search form on the page.

- **Children**

Children are submenu items that appear in your menu. They provide for an alternative method of navigating your site.

- **Highlights**

Highlights are any items that are marked as such. This area displays items administrators wish to bring to the user's attention on a variety of pages. A page can have up to five different highlights.

- **Login**

This component displays a login box on every page or a customized message or image if the user is already logged into the site.

- **Shopping Cart**

You can provide a small space that will indicate that you have items already in your shopping cart.

- **Sliding Panel**

You can have a sliding panel that provides additional navigation. Some choose to place the Quick Menu (see below) while others place a different page entirely. To see the Sliding Panel in action, go to <http://www.harvestbiblechapel.org> and <http://www.harvestoakville.ca>.

- **Quick Menu**

The Quick Menu acts as additional navigation which is controled by your menu. You can place it in the Sliding Panel or you can place it in the footer of your skin. To see the Quick Menu in action, go to <http://www.harvestoakville.ca> and <http://www.iministries.org>.

- **Twitter**

You can embed your Twitter Status as an Ad, or on any page.

## Typeface

If you are a designer, you know how important type face is. It can literally make or break a design. When you design your skin, you will want to be sure to have a Heading typeface as well as the Body type face and line-height style. You might also include how you would like to have URL's displayed.

### Page Title

Body Text

### Article Title (News, Events, Courses, Blog Entries, Photo Galleries, etc.)

Article Text

Hyperlink Text

### Left/Right Panel Title

Left/Right Panel Text

Hyperlink Text

# Examples

The following examples highlight some of the panels and components that can be placed on your skin in order to control the look of the site.





