The Rhetoric of Web Design

Website Strategies for Writing Centers

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ABOUT ME

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ABOUT THIS PRESENTATION

• Topics:
  – User-centered web design
  – Methods for strategizing and developing a user-centered website
  – Web design best practices

• Application:
  – Analyze and discuss existing writing center sites
  – Consider methods for redeveloping a site

• Goals:
  – A new perspective on your website as a communication tool
  – Ideas for improving the usability of your website
  – Ideas for better engaging target audiences on your site
CAVEATS: INSTITUTIONAL LIMITATIONS

- Required branding
- Required boilerplate or template
- Content limitations or restrictions
- Technology limitations
- Maybe you can’t build your dream site, but you can apply principles of good web design to improve what you have.
- Web design is more than visual—it’s about connecting your audience with the information they need.
USER-CENTERED DESIGN

• Design that keeps primary users in mind throughout the design process, from beginning to end.

• Design that is research-based to identify...
  – Users
  – Users’ needs, tasks, and goals
  – The most effective design for users to accomplish their goals

• All design decisions should be made with regard to user experience.
Strategizing a User-Centered Site

Research
Goals
Users
Tasks
STRATEGIZING: RESEARCH

• User Testing
  – How do users *actually* interact with your site? (“You’re doing it wrong.”)
  – What are users trying to do?
  – What are they seeing, and what are they ignoring? (you’d be surprised)
  – How to do user testing? Devise a task, ask user to complete it, watch and listen to how they interact with the site (use think-aloud protocol)

• Surveys, questionnaires, and focus groups: Just get feedback!

• Benchmark against peer sites

• Site Analytics (DEMO)

Don’t assume.
STRATEGIZING: **GOALS**

• What are your communication goals?
  – Provide and/or advertise a service
  – Inform, teach, share resources
  – Gain support (student, teacher, administrator, public, etc.)
  – Increase standing or visibility in the academic community
  – Innovate (or share innovative ideas)
STRATEGIZING: **USERS**

- **Who are your primary users?**
  - How do you know?

- **Who are your secondary users?**
  - How might they influence your design decisions?
STRATEGIZING: TASKS

• Why do people come to your site? What are they trying to accomplish?
  – Learn what services are offered
  – Make an appointment
  – Find operating hours
  – Find resources

• What tasks are they less likely to be doing on your website?
  – What content exists for you, and what content exists for the user?
  – Justification for content is fine, but user-testing is better.
Web Design Best Practices

Techniques for improving usability and engagement
BEST PRACTICES: CONTENT

• Streamline
  – Remove unnecessary, unused, and unimportant content
  – Remember your audience!

• Simplify language
  – Avoid jargon
  – Use meaningful navigation labels and page headings (meaningful for users)
  – Label testing: Show users labels, ask them to predict what they’d find.
BEST PRACTICES: LAYOUT

• Three clicks deep
  – Keep important content shallow. Don’t make users dig.

• Keep important information “above the fold”

• Visual Hierarchy
  – Arrange important information left to right, top to bottom
  – Where does the eye go first?
  – What information is “hidden” or ignored? (Confirm through testing, not just instinct.)
Application

Analyze and discuss existing Writing Center websites
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• Sample user tests
• Sample reports (user analysis, user testing, benchmarking)
• Resources for user testing and web design