Best Practices of Information Architecture and Website Redesign for Information Professionals

Presenters: J. Jasmine Chmiel, Colleen Funkhouser, Raymond Maxwell
LSC 610 Instructor: Sue Yeon Syn
CRRA Digital Projects Librarian: Pat Lawson

Project Background
Catholic Research Resources Alliance (CRRA) enlisted our team to transform their website from an administrative focus, and shift its attention to meeting member and scholar needs.

Best Practices
Successful web redesign requires:
- Clear articulation of goals, audience, and user needs
- Attentive involvement with stakeholders throughout the process
- Consider improvement to navigation/organization/graphic design

CRRA Needs/Member Needs

About CRRA: A nonprofit membership alliance providing global access to Catholic research resources
CRRA website’s function:
- The Catholic Portal, a knowledge portal
- Access to Catholic Portal and Catholic Newspapers Program
- Member institutions communicate and participate with the Alliance
CRRA’s goals for the website:
- Focus less on administrative functions
- Focus more on delivery of services and resources

Member quotes:
- “It would be nice if the Portal had more of its own identity aimed more at researchers. The search box can get lost.”
- “Redundancy of information, so that users do not have to know the [ontology that the CRRA has employed”
- “More graphical links and buttons. I keep wanting the red rectangle headings for the Portal and CNP on the home page to be links.”

Research
Initial research provides information about three key aspects of a website:
- Context: goals of the organization and specifically of the website
- Content: documents, data and structure of the site
- Users: who uses the site, and for what purposes

The research and analysis techniques we used included:
- Interviews with stakeholders: meetings and knowledge audit to define goals, and determine client’s requirements
- Site analytics: analysis of Google Analytics
- User survey: designed and distributed an online user survey

Usability Assessments
Usability testing helps designers evaluate a web site by testing it with representative users. The goal is to:
- Identify usability problems to determine user satisfaction
- Identify problems before they are coded – the earlier in production that problems are identified, the less expensive the fixes will be

We conducted three separate usability tests to determine different aspects of the site’s strengths and weaknesses:
- Heuristic review: compare site to formal, standard design guidelines
- Task analysis: how ordinary users approach
- Usability checklist: multi-item checklist to test all of the site’s features, and ensure that no essential design criteria are overlooked

We concluded:
- The research phase was integral to the completion of the project
- Usability test and survey results affected our approach to the high-level architecture phases
- Linking between the information-gathering and project management stages was critical
- This linkage demonstrated the emmeshed relationships between project management and knowledge management in the project’s lifecycle

We recommended:
- Global navigation improvements to highlight key resources
- Homepage reorganization to emphasize major functions
- Text and graphics changes to improve overall usability
- Implementing changes to an established website:
  - an information architecture (IA) strategy
  - This provides the bridge between the research, and the written deliverables that will be presented to the client
  - IA strategy should be designed based on the results of research on the context, users and content of the site
  - Tools to develop information architecture strategies include content maps, content models, high level blueprints, and wireframes

Conclusions/Recommendations

Information Architecture

Initial research provides information about three key aspects of a website:

- Context: goals of the organization and specifically of the website
- Content: documents, data and structure of the site
- Users: who uses the site, and for what purposes

The research and analysis techniques we used included:
- Interviews with stakeholders: meetings and knowledge audit to define goals, and determine client’s requirements
- Site analytics: analysis of Google Analytics
- User survey: designed and distributed an online user survey

We concluded:
- The research phase was integral to the completion of the project
- Usability test and survey results affected our approach to the high-level architecture phases
- Linking between the information-gathering and project management stages was critical
- This linkage demonstrated the enmeshed relationships between project management and knowledge management in the project’s lifecycle

We recommended:
- Global navigation improvements to highlight key resources
- Homepage reorganization to emphasize major functions
- Text and graphics changes to improve overall usability
- Implementing changes to an established website:
  - an information architecture (IA) strategy
  - This provides the bridge between the research, and the written deliverables that will be presented to the client
  - IA strategy should be designed based on the results of research on the context, users and content of the site
  - Tools to develop information architecture strategies include content maps, content models, high level blueprints, and wireframes

References: