

Riverside Art Center Website Project Report

This report concerns the final website project submission for the Riverside Art Center (RAC). The website has an elementary password-protected page because I utilized and modified the content of an existing, copyrighted website: <http://www.riversideartcenter.org>. The login information is as follows:

User Name: kathryn and Password: prichard.

Introduction

I chose this website to redesign because I believed that it had the potential to be informational, enticing, and aesthetically pleasing to its primary users. The current site however is ineffective at performing these three integral functions. It offers users information on membership, upcoming events, donating, volunteering, newsletters, artwork galleries, and finally, useful links to local retailers & patrons of the RAC. The overall purpose of their website appeared to be to inspire involvement from the users in some way, be it donating, volunteering, or participation in future classes/events. I have closely looked at this website throughout the semester and discovered its major hindrances to meeting its authors' and users' requirements:

- Similar content and information is disorganized and scattered throughout the website, not on the same page,
- Many webpages do not fit the average computer display, forcing users to side-scroll or zoom out so far as to make typeface too small for easy reading,
- The color scheme is dark (black, dark olive, and burnt orange) and off-putting to users,
- The logo is too small and damaged to be read,
- And, it is not obvious that some navigation buttons contain links to other pages.

The RAC, being a not-for-profit organization, very likely depends solely on the physical and fiscal donations. I had, at the start of this project, hoped to receive permission to utilize their website's content for my school project and to possibly even send them the results of it should they ever decide to redesign themselves. I have yet to receive a

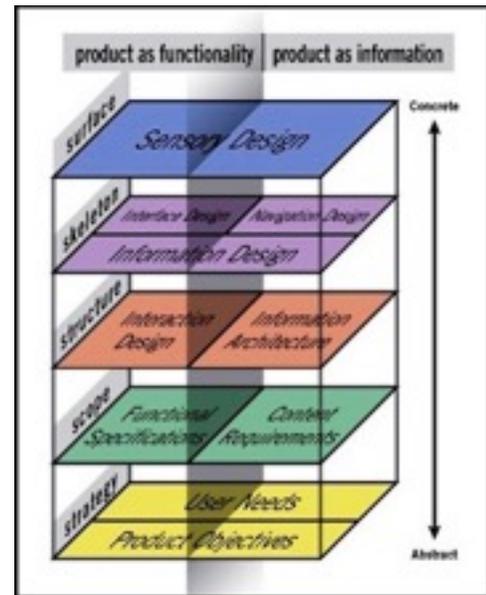
reply, but chose to move forward with my redesign choice anyway. I placed a disclaimer in my footer and made the Index page a login page.

The remainder of my report will apply Jesse James Garrett's *Elements of User Experience* (diagram provided at right) to my final project as I cover and reflect upon my design and rhetorical decisions.

Strategy Plane

In order for me to fulfill the end goal of rectifying the issues of the RAC's website, I had to try to answer both of Garrett's questions concerning the Strategy Plane:

1. What [does the RAC] want to get out of this product?
2. What do [their] users want to get out of it?



Courtesy of Garrett's *The Elements of User Experience* (pg. 29)

To answer the first, I looked at similar websites and the content the RAC had placed on the site because they found it to be of importance. I subsequently determined that the RAC, and the similar [Loudoun Arts Center](#), wants to attract individuals interested in artwork, attaining memberships, volunteering, donating financially, patronizing local businesses, or taking part in activities, classes, & events. Therefore, I know my final product would have to provide a unique webpage for each.

To answer the second, I considered who their audience was and what they needed and would like to find on the site. The primary users of the RAC's website are members,

“The scope is fundamentally determined by the strategy of the site. This strategy incorporates not only what the people running the site want to get out of it but what the users want to get out of the site as well.”

-Garrett (pg. 21)

artists, and art patrons in the Wapakoneta, OH area. Also, individuals seeking a volunteer opportunity and those ignorant, but curious about the services the RAC can provide (e.g. Parents who need to find an activity for children). The audience in general is likely to be composed of those adolescent-age and older. I did a small amount of polling as to what a similar panel of users look for in such a site and then showed them the site and asked them to tell me what they liked/disliked, wanted/did

not want, and needed/did not need. I received responses similar to what my own impression of the website had been and enacted my strategy thusly:

- **Goal 1: The site must give information clearly and concisely.** I looked through the site carefully and noted items that must be easily found on every page (logo, location, contact info, & hours of operation). I also looked at the site in order to sort all of the material into basic categories.
- **Goal 2: The site must sell the RAC.** The site must inspire a desire within users to donate, take part in activities, and recommend the RAC to others. Potential patrons should be pleased and intrigued rather than confused and annoyed.
- **Goal 3: The site must display the RAC's art.** There are many photographs of past events, exemplary works, and children works throughout the site. These should be a positive aspect to the website but the over-sized, cluttered layout combined with the poorly chosen and dark color scheme leave users noticing and remembering things that are not artistic. The site should take on a more neutral design in order to allow the art to speak for itself.

In order to accomplish these three goals, I had to collate pertinent information and images and find a better way to have them represented in my final product.

Scope Plane

This website is primarily informational and therefore did not require a large amount of functional specifications. It was important to make the images on the website more accessible to the user. I had initially wanted to make an image gallery that utilized javascript, but it performed poorly on my website in its early stages. Therefore, I had to find another method of conveying the images in an aesthetically pleasing manner. Playing upon the idea of an art installation found within an actual gallery, I chose to limit the size of images initially by creating thumbnails that will return to full size when hovered over. This functioned very well and was pleasing to the eye.

“The structure defines the way in which the various features and functions of the site fit together. Just what those features and functions are constitutes the scope of the site... Whether that feature—or any feature—is included on a site is a question of scope.”

-Garrett (pg. 21)

Otherwise, I focused on fulfilling content requirements. Specifically, incorporating all of the RAC's informational content (e.g., Upcoming events) along with anything my polled potential users demanded (e.g., Hyperlinks to outside sites) or requested (e.g., Links for mobile devices to call cell phone numbers).

Structure Plane

At this point in my conception of the new RAC website, I began to form the definite categories by which all of the site's content would be organized. I determined that the

optimal navigation buttons would include: Home, About, Upcoming, Galleries, Newsletters, Members, Donors & Volunteers, and Local. These categories seemed to

“The skeleton is a concrete expression of the more abstract structure of the site... The structure would define how users got to that page and where they could go when they were finished there. The skeleton might define the arrangement of navigational elements allowing the users to browse categories of products; the structure would define what those categories were.”

-Garrett (pg. 20)

be the most logical means of sorting and dispersing the website’s information compared to the original site’s decision to use: Home, Schedules and Events, Around the Bend, Donors, Volunteers, Members Galleries, Monthly News Letters [sic], Links, Contact Us, Area Art Organizations, Children’s Art, and Photo Gallery. Further, some of these main navigation buttons contain sub-navigation menus that do not appear until after the main button is clicked

and the user redirected. It was important to me that the site be very straightforward and minimalistic, meaning no sub-navigation menus and the ability to navigate to every page of the website on every page of it.

Skeleton Plane

When I began to plan my skeleton plane, I went through several drafts until I found one that I, for the most part, used in my final product. In the end, I again went for a very straightforward and minimalistic layout

strategy. I want users to find information quickly and easily, without guesswork as to where they would have to navigate. I had initially hoped to form a non-traditional, contemporary layout, something exhibiting a lot of creativity (to have the user unconsciously associate the RAC website with artistic expression). However, I and my polled users later agreed that this layout should be secondary to the imparting of the information, which I never could get to harmonize.

“Beneath that surface is the skeleton of the site: the placement of buttons, controls, photos, and blocks of text. The skeleton is designed to optimize the arrangement of these elements for maximum effect and efficiency.”

-Garrett (pg. 20)

The layout in the end included, from top to bottom, a fixed navigation bar, the logo/contact information, the main content, and then the footer. Some of the individual pages incorporated minor additions (e.g., An announcement bar on the homepage). It proved to be effective at conveying the information and organizing it into a little-to-no-guesswork layout.

Surface Plane

“On the surface you see a series of Web pages, made up of images and text.”

-Garrett (pg. 20)

When I finally made it to having my primary focus be the Surface Plane of the RAC website, I still had many decisions to make. I thought using black and white exclusively would take away from the content because it is *supposed* to be promoting an

art center. In the end, rather than settling on one to few different colors that would ‘pop,’ I made the decision to use them all in a subtle manner within the logo, the navigation button for each webpage when the user has it open, and the hyperlinks (which, in some browsers, appear with a rainbow gradient stretching the entire width of the link). Otherwise, the only color comes from the select pictures of artwork on some of the pertinent webpages.

Moving to my text and image appearance, I chose to use sans-serif because the majority of my content is composed of typeface. The only place on my site that had stylized fonts was in the logo and that was to again instill within the site’s users that the RAC is a place to “let your creativity flow.” I also worked to limit my use of center aligned text to small chunks of non-prose only. And, after my inability to create a well-functioning slideshow, I stuck with the concept of realizing my idea of a physical art gallery installation made digital. The most difficult part was managing to balance image integrity and viewability with my intention of having a minimalistic website. I was luckily able to find some simple open-source HTML and CSS code that, after some stylistic size and color manipulation, made the process quite simple. I think that this was the best choice in the end, because I was able to accommodate the varied image sizes without compromising on visual appeal.

Final Reflection On the Process & the Results

I had major issues with some parts of my project, just as I did with trying to finagle an image display solution:

- **The Logo:** I tried really hard to just revamp their current logo rather than completely redesign it. However, I could not manage to do so in a way that included the image and text combined as they have it. I did have to redesign it in the end, but I tried to keep to a similar concept with the flowing, brush-stroke lines, the slogan, and the name of the RAC. I had also hoped to fix the logo to always have it at the top of the window and just have content scroll up behind it. I was also unable to make that code work properly until I applied it to the navigation bar instead.
- **The Two-Column Divs:** It was difficult to get the alignment as nice as it is now. I had the worst time trying to get them to break only when an h1 tag was at the top. In the end, I had to modify the content as well as utilizing ‘break-before:

always' in the h1 CSS and 'break-inside: avoid' in the ul CSS. It still is not quite aligned though.

- **The Login Page:** This was difficult purely because I had the worst time trying to find a simple, free code to run through javascript. I did eventually and then modified its appearance heavily. Another difficulty arose the more I used the webpage; you could not submit the login form by pressing 'enter.' Over time, that somehow became the most infuriatingly minor annoyance and I could not let it be. I finally found the query code and then modified some of the original javascript in order to make them work together. So now, after my presentation of my website, users can trigger the 'Login' button by pressing 'enter' while the cursor is still in the 'Password' text box.

I am extremely proud of what I did accomplish with this website redesign because I was able to accomplish all of my goals despite my limited schedule and abilities. It gives out all the vital information, it seems the RAC, and it displays the RAC's artwork, all while looking like a lovely but professional website. Every step of the process, I made sure to keep both the RAC's and the potential user's wants/needs in the forefront of my mind. I didn't want to include anything

on the website that would hinder the user's experience, like the sheer amount and size of images on the first site. I had even considered trying to add in a webpage for kids because they are an integral part of the RAC's organization. I looked for some simple gaming code that could be put onto the site but soon decided that would actually take away from the RAC mission.

Their website functions mostly as a conveyor of information and images meant to convince users to come to the physical location or interact with the humans behind the RAC. In a way, I didn't want to make the site so interesting that it would come to divert attention from their actual work.

There are of course still some kinks to work out: the Google calendar does not work in all browsers (most ironically, Google Chrome), the pages that contain two-column divs usually display as one-column in all but Safari, and my image code is effective on the surface but clunky under the surface. I actually hope to keep working on this site, to hopefully perfect it in case the RAC should ever reply with interest in my project. As it is, I feel that I accomplished the assignment and pushed myself to fit my own aspirations and expectations for the redesigned RAC website.

"The biggest reason user experience should matter to you is that it matters to your users. If you don't provide them with a positive experience, they won't use your product...you must set out to provide them with an experience that is cohesive, intuitive, and maybe even pleasurable—an experience in which everything works the way it should."

-Garrett (pg. 17)

Works Cited

Garrett, Jesse J. *The Elements of User Experience: User-Centered Design for the Web and Beyond*. 2nd ed. Berkeley: New Riders, 2011. Safari Books Online. 16 Dec. 2010. Web. 7 May 2015.