Unraveling Web Development

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Electronic Publications (EPUBS)

(EPUBS) was primarily responsible for the visual design and content management for the Web Development Site. Electronic Publications is a division of University Relations, and as such, consists of a small staff of one coordinator, one part time programmer, and one part time designer.

The intent in developing the site was to create an online information system that provides access to services and resources of interest to the University community. All decisions made by Electronic Publications were coordinated with the Mason Web Team before implementation.

The Web Development Site was determined to serve as a gateway to information for building a University Community online, that adheres to procedures established for the Community, with consistent web design style. In regard to the design of the site, a decision was made to give an official look for this Web Development Site.

Web Development Logo

An EPUBS designer developed a logo for individual pages of the site. A template was created for the web pages which included the new logo and the University signature. Though the logo was created in EPUBS, the Web Team members were requested to view the logo design submitted to them by EPUBS. The logo was officially approved by the Web Team members.

Content Management

Next EPUBS began to address the issue of how to manage the content for the Web Development Site. The major focus was to create a user-friendly site with information that would apply to all users on campus. The

Design Consistency

In regard to other aspects of the Web Development site, two important types of information were incorporated into the site for the end user to follow: design assistance and accessibility assistance.

One, a style guide and web design basics were provided from links built into the link list to assist in designing a site. These links enable users to preview guidelines for creating sites on Mason's web. These guidelines enable developers to maintain a consistent approach to design for all sites on the University's web site.

There are also links provided to pages that offer resources to be used in these designs, as templates for pages and university signatures in web formats which can be downloaded for individual user use.

Accessibility

Two, accessibility information was provided on the site to assist web designers in their understanding of how to make web sites compliant with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act. In 1998 Congress amended this Rehabilitation Act to include Section 508, which requires government agencies, and institutions receiving federal dollars, to ensure that all electronic and information technology applications are accessible to individuals with disabilities.

George Mason University became a partner with WebAIM in 2001 and agreed to develop a plan for institutional coordination and reform to
content was analyzed in regard to how to organize the information into topics that related to all users. These topics would be designed as a link list on the right side of the pages.

Next we determined the major issues that generate questions from the end users to be:

1. What do you want your web page to do
2. Who will create your web page
3. Who is your intended audience

For what an intended web page would do, we explained a distinction between a simple web site and a complex web site. Next we provided information in regard to how to design for each type of site. In regard to the complex web site design, we offered information in regard to resources, both on and off campus, that could be called upon for assistance.

In regard to who will create the web page needed, we directed users to vendors and facilities on campus that are available to assist with web development, and directed them to the site's style guide, accessibility requirements, web procedures, and downloadable resources, including web page templates, which they could use to develop a site on their own.

Related to who the intended audience is, we described the different types of audiences who would be developing web sites and how their needs would differ, as well as what the university can offer for each category. The Web Team decided to divide the audience into three basic categories: students, faculty, or staff. We provided a server link to explain the server access permitted to each audience category.

Following these decisions, many weeks of effort went into gathering content in regard to these subjects, categories, topics, and link lists. Web Team meetings, that occur once a week, were spent reading and editing written material, and also discussing, editing and re-editing web development procedures for the university.

A difficult aspect of designing the Web Development Site had to do with the fact that content for the site was received in document format. Content for web pages requires HTML layout which is different from the kind of layouts used for printed documents.

Although Electronic Publications, organized the material into categories and made decisions in regard to where links were needed, when the first draft of the site was completed, EPUBS presented the draft online to the Web Team. With all of the team members input a final draft was designed, and the web site completed.

support web accessibility at the post-secondary level. George Mason University made a decision to act as a model for other universities.

With the guidance of Kristine Neuber, the University's Assistive Technology/Web Accessibility Coordinator, we were able to provide web accessibility information from two links on the Web Development Site. These links relate to accessibility aspects of developing a web site on the Mason Web. An Accessible Design Link takes the user to information in regard to making a web site accessible and links to a site where web pages can be tested for accessibility compliance.

The other accessibility link takes the user to information in regard to George Mason's commitment to compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Additional links are provided which allow the user to read about this Act and also to reach the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) recommendations for authoring accessible web pages. Additionally, links are provided for ADA related services and resources available on campus.

Team Work

Most important to the development of George Mason's Web Development Site was the team work and group energy that went into producing the site. Having the collective input from representatives of significant areas of the campus has been of great value in producing a web site that is helpful to the overall University environment.

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