Working On the Library's Homepage: Troubles and Tribulations

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Introduction

As an academic reference librarian at East Carolina University, I have opportunities to work on a variety of projects. This past summer I found myself in the position of working on our library's Internet homepage — alone. The purpose of this article is to share with you some of the troubles and tribulations that I encountered along the way in developing our library's homepage. Fortunately, I did not have to start from scratch. We already had a Website, but it was outdated and it needed to be reworked.

HTML

There are several factors involved in trying to develop a Website. First of all, HTML (hypertext markup language) is the computer language used to create the site. HTML is needed for browsers, such as Netscape, to be able to read, interpret and display what the site is supposed to look like. Of course, there are many books and even Websites available to help you learn about HTML.

There are several different computer programs available that can be used to help you create your document. These are called "editors." I tried a couple of different editors, but I ended up using a program called Microsoft Front Page. This program allows the user to create a Website without having much knowledge of HTML. The program itself can be difficult and time consuming to learn, but overall, I found it to be very useful. Of course, any knowledge of HTML is highly desirable since there are times that the program is not perfect and you will have to make changes manually.

Content and Arrangement

Content and arrangement are all-important in creating a Webpage. You must know what your library wants to have included, and in what kind of order. The arrangement of the items on the Website can be just as important as the content itself. What items do you and/or your library want on your homepage? If you will work this out beforehand, it will make the work much easier. If you have a committee, they can help you.

Use of Committees

It is my opinion that a committee needs to make the major decisions. It is not a matter of distrust of the creator, but it will save a lot of hurt feelings and aggravation if a committee can take responsibility for the creation of the Website. Of course, there are situations where one person is responsible for the entire project, but in most cases, this is probably not desirable. It is not possible to please everyone, especially in a large organization. Even if a committee can reach a consensus as to what should be included and in what order items should be arranged, it should then be shown to the faculty, or to a larger group in the organization for clarity's sake.

One problem that can arise within committees is that the members will not agree on every item suggested. Resolving these issues can take away valuable time that could be spent on designing the homepage. If members of a committee have to argue and fight over every little item, then the overall project could take months to complete. Ways need to be devised to help in avoiding potential problems. For example, for every issue that creates a problem, the committee should vote. If there are five members, then at least three of the five should agree to make the decision final.

Details

The above items are broad areas of concern. Overall, there are many details that need to be considered when developing a Website. Some of these details include things such as text, links, headers, backgrounds, graphics, fonts, colors, consistency, and time, to name just a few. These potential problems can be very time-consuming and frustrating to deal with.

Backgrounds

For example, backgrounds. Do you want backgrounds at all? If you do, then you need to ask yourself what kind of background do you want? There are more backgrounds available on the Web than you will want to look at. Will you use the same background on each page? What colors do you want? What about shapes, styles, textures, pictures, and designs. How do you make your choice?

Text

Text is something that needs to be decided on right away. It will save you time and grief if it is decided on before the project starts. In working with text, you need to determine what font type and size you want to use. Will there be differences in text size for headers as opposed to the body? There is also a matter of consistency. Will you use the same size and style of fonts on each page? How much text will you use or a page? When is too much text too much? When is there not enough text on a page? How do you create balance on your pages? What color of text do you want? Will links be different than regular text? Will your links be of a different color, font or size? Will you bold, underline, italicize your links, or any other part of the text?

Links

Links are obviously very important elements in all Websites. You need to ask yourself some questions about links. To what are you going to have links? What kind of order will you have for your links? How do you want them arranged? If you are going continued on page 65
to use text for your links, as opposed to icons, then what font style and size do you want? What color should they be? Should they be in bold? Italic? Underlined? What about having your links change color after they have been clicked on? This will help the users remember which links they have already visited. You need to have your links look different from the rest of the page. You want them to stick out so people will know to click on them. Do you want to have text with each link that describes what each link does and where it goes? You don’t have to use text at all. You can use icons. If you do, then what kind of icon will you use? There are thousands of icons available out there on the Web that you can copy and use. The choice is yours. Again, will you be consistent about your decisions? Also, will you have links going back to the original site, or will the user have to rely on the “back” button? Before you go “live” with your Website, make sure that all of the links work.

Graphics

Graphics are a big part in most Websites. There are many different kinds of graphics, such as gif, jpeg, java, active x, counters, icons, pictures, drawings, and animation. With thousands of different graphics available, how do you decide what to use, where to use them, how much should they be used, and will there be any consistency?

It is my opinion that the last major concern that should be dealt with in the creation of a Website is the graphic art. What kind of graphics and pictures you want to place on your homepage is not as important as the content and arrangement of items. My experience showed me that I needed to focus on what was to be included on the homepage and how the items were to be arranged. This is what I call building the base to the Website. For me, building the base was the most important aspect of developing a Website. The graphics can always be added later.

Conclusion

As you can imagine, developing a Website can be a challenging experience. It takes time to do, but it doesn’t have to be painful. With preparation and careful consideration of some of the issues listed above, it can be a fun experience. I do believe that the more you prepare for the project, the easier it will be. Make your plans on paper. If you are working with a committee, have the committee discuss each of the issues before starting the actual work. You may need to start the work, and then make adjustments as the project progresses. As I said above, my experience has led me to believe that if you start with the bare-bones of the project, then the artistic parts can be added later. Have fun out there.

Other Side of the Street

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that he could help an institution that he loved. He presented Black with an oversize check in the amount of two million dollars.

The Chronicle of Higher Education's subsequent edition carried a picture of Levitt, Black, Ainsley, and Huxley shaking hands and holding the check. The rest of the media carried a different shot, one of Ainsley sprawled out on the floor surrounded by his staff. Despite everything, when Levitt explained some of the new directions that he thought the Press should be involved in instead of publishing only poetry and scholarly minutiae, Ainsley became noticeably agitated when Levitt boasted about his desire to be the editor of a new journal that he was going to call Swine Time: Pigs in American Culture. However, the blood rushed rapidly to Ainsley's head when Levitt announced that he was so pleased that the university was going to build a new facility for the press that would double as a pork research center and be called the Levitt Institute.

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