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Designing Librarians On the Web-What Are the Elements that Every Website Should Have?

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Designing Librarians on the Web

by Anna Belle Leiserson (Vanderbilt University Law Library) <a.leiserson@law.vanderbilt.edu>

For this second column on designing for the Web, let's get back to the basics. What are the elements every Website, if not every page, should have? I've come up with a straightforward checklist I use for the sites I design. With one notable exception, they are all quite simple to include.

1 A bona fide homepage. For sites with three or more pages, it's important that one page clearly be the control center, i.e. home. It's not too common, but every so often I'll happen across a site that where every page is given equal weight. If you have ever seen this, you know how disorienting it can be. It's like chapters of a book thrown across the floor and without a table of contents.

2 Navigation bar. In the previous column we talked about mapping a structure, typically with eight or fewer terms. These generally become a kind of control panel called a navigation bar. Users typically look for navigation aids on the top or left of a page, so unless you really know what you're doing, that's the place for it to be.

3 Date stamp. It's important to indicate when the site or page was last revised. The standard place to do this is at the bottom of the page. It doesn't have to be here, though again that is where most users in need will look for it. Just be sure to have something. An all-too-common scenario is that I go to a publisher's Website looking for their latest titles. First I can't find any update indicator. Then I spend five or so minutes looking around, only to happen on a "Latest Releases" page where all the books have a 1998 imprint. Not only didn't I find what I was looking for, the publisher's credibility went down a notch or two in my eyes. Better if it had simply stated "Last updated: Dec. 1998." Best if it is updated regularly.

4 Phone number, email and street address. It's surprising the number of sites that leave these critical pieces out. In general, the more contact information the better. Many vendors do this quite well, often with a page listing full contact information for each of their representatives and their territories, as well as home office staff.

5 Copyright statement. It's free insurance.

6 Logo. If your company has one, use it.

7 HTML title. All pages need an HTML title element, i.e. <TITLE>Your Company Name</TITLE> embedded in the code of every page. Generally it's good to keep it 60 characters or less. This one tag shows up in three very important places: the display window at the very top of browsers, users' bookmarks, and search engines. On the subject of search engine coding, it's good practice to use other metatags, but these are a little beyond bare essentials, so we'll cover them more in another column.

8 Search engine. This is the one challenging element in this list. If your site is over about 50 pages, you need a good search engine. If you don't have one, the best place to start is the Search Tools site by Avi Rappoport at <<http://www.searchtools.com/>>

9 Site map. Again for larger sites, it's good practice to have the equivalent of an index. "Site map" is a term loosely used. Technically it means a graphed map of the structure, but in practice it has come to mean a directory of the site.

Dreaming of my perfect publisher Website, it would have all of these plus a few other elements. In particular, all books, journals and other products would be listed with full order information—you know: authors and co-authors, a complete and accurate title, the number of pages, ISBN, frequency of updates (if any) and of course price(s). Naturally it would be a breeze to find any title you want (like on [Amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)) and all listings would have a decent blurb. The site would automatically have a page listing new releases, and would offer an option of email updates for those who want it. For extra credit, there would be full backlist information, showing what titles are no longer in print and, in this new day and age, what is available "on-demand."

How many sites measure up to this list? A small percentage in my experience. Publishers are busy struggling with the new economy—in particular what to have available

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electronically, how and at what price. But my theory is if they can do a great job of marketing their traditional products on the Web, they will gain invaluable experience, making it easier to do the harder things, such as migrating to ebooks. After all, we're all still buying their traditional products. The only difference is that a lot of us look to the Web first for quick information

Thumbs Up

A Great Publisher Site

Harvard Business School Publishing
<<http://www.hbsp.harvard.edu/>>

I was looking up Harvard Business School's new bestseller, *Blown to Bits: How the New Economics of Information Transforms Strategy* by Philip Evans and Thomas S. Wurster, when I happened on this handsome site. The book seems apropos, which is why I mention it in passing. It's about how the "new economics of information is blowing apart the foundations of traditional business strategy." The site itself not only loads quickly, it has a modern professional color scheme and design. More importantly it meets practically all the criteria listed above: There is a date, a good search engine, a "support" page, and even

the option of being emailed updates. The only things missing are ISBNs.

Great Information Source: Studio B Buzz

<<http://www.studiob.com/cafenews/>> If you want pointers to the latest news on the commercial U.S. publishing industry, this is the site to see. Studio B Buzz, from Studio B Productions, Inc., is part of the "Computer Book Café." While its focus is the computer book industry, it picks up the larger industry. Almost every week there is some interesting tidbit in the "Publishing, Writing, & Bookselling News" section (near the bottom of the page). It's a particularly good resource for those tracking the latest on ebooks.

A Helpful Utility: C4U

<<http://www.c-4-u.com/>> To monitor Studio B and a few other favorite news Websites, I use C4U, a handy free software tool called a "site-minder." Just go to C4U's Website and download the software. It runs with your browser, planting a button in the upper right corner. You click this button to add a site to your C4U list of pages to monitor. Every day or two I pull up C4U and it compares sites to the last time I used them, showing a yellow smiley face if there are any changes to the text, links, images and email addresses. If there are, I just zoom on over to the site in one click and check it out.

Rumors

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pany. The two companies will seamlessly integrate their respective services. For more information see <www.rove.com>.

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