

Новое поколение библиотечных веб-сайтов

Next Generation of Library Websites

Нове покоління бібліотечних веб-сайтів

Сьюзен Бенз

*Национальный Университет «Киево-Могилянская Академия»,
Американская библиотека, Программа Фулбрайт, Бруклин, штат Нью-Йорк, США*

Susan Benz

*National University of Kiev-Mohyla Academy, American Library,
Fulbright Program, Brooklyn, New York, USA*

Сьюзен Бенз

*Національний Університет «Києво-Могилянська академія»,
Американська бібліотека, Програма Фулбрайт, Бруклін, штат Нью-Йорк, США*

Интернет изменил способы реализации миссии библиотек и характер общения библиотек с их читателями. Сегодня библиотеки обслуживают удаленных пользователей, в том числе, осуществляют информационное и другое инновационное обслуживание через Интернет. Однако удовлетворяются ли при этом действительные потребности читателей? Такая читательская группа, как студенческая аудитория, вообще склонна игнорировать библиотечные ресурсы, обращаясь за ответами на свои вопросы к поисковым системам типа Google. Библиотеки не должны останавливаться на достигнутом, а напротив, должна обеспечивать релевантность предоставляемой информации в соответствии с реальными потребностями пользователей. Само по себе наличие в библиотеке веб-сайта и предоставление доступа в онлайн-каталог не является достаточным. Необходимо сосредоточить усилия на управлении качеством информационного наполнения ресурсов, обеспечивая при этом четкую навигацию и эффективно выстраивая их структуру.

The World Wide Web has changed how libraries to reach out to their audiences and fulfill their missions. Libraries are empowered to reach out to remote users and many libraries are striving to provide information and innovative services via the web, but are they really meeting the needs of their users? Students in particular are bypassing library resources and turning to web search engines such as Google for answers. Libraries need to move forward and meet user needs in order to remain relevant. It is not enough to simply create a web presence and provide access to an online catalog. An emphasis on creating and managing high quality content, providing clear navigation and efficient information architecture is needed.

Интернет змінив способи реалізації місії бібліотек та характер спілкування бібліотек із їх читачами. Наразі бібліотеки обслуговують віддалених користувачів, зокрема здійснюють інформаційне та інше інноваційне обслуговування через Інтернет. Однак, чи задовольняються при цьому потреби читачів? Така читачка група, як студентська аудиторія, взагалі схильна ігнорувати бібліотечні ресурси, звертаючись за відповідями на свої питання до пошукових систем типу Google. Бібліотеки не повинні зупинятися на досягнутому, а навпаки, забезпечувати відповідну до реальних потреб користувачів релевантність інформації, що надається. Лише наявність у бібліотеці веб-сайту та надання доступу до онлайн-каталогу не є достатнім. Необхідно сконцентрувати зусилля на управлінні якістю інформаційного наповнення ресурсів, забезпечити чітку навігацію та ефективну інформаційну архітектуру.

A Website is a library's public face. Plus it is our regional, national, and even international presence. The importance of having a good quality website should not be underestimated. It is not enough to simply create a web presence and provide access to an online catalog and electronic resources. An emphasis on creating and managing high quality content, providing clear navigation and efficient information architecture is needed. Most importantly, we need to ask ourselves whether or not we are really meeting the needs of our users?

Looking library websites in general (not just in one country), I am often struck by how poorly developed they are in comparison those developed by other types of organizations. Some common mistakes and problems include the following:

1. Out-of-date content such as old announcements, links that do not work, schedules for events that happened in the past. When a user notices that the content is not current, he or she knows that this is not the place to come for up-to-date, accurate information.

2. Too much emphasis on who is who instead of what materials are available in the library. I often see significant space of library websites given to photographs of staff or staff rosters (telephone numbers etc.) rather than space given to library materials and services. It is of course okay to have some information about the library staff, but should it take priority? Which do you think is of more interest to the users of the website?

3. Confusing architecture. By architecture I mean the hierarchical structure of the site. When a website grows over time often the hierarchy becomes sloppy. Try asking users to find specific information and see how long it takes them. It should not take several clicks into a site to find important information.

4. Confusing navigation. By navigation I mean how users find their way around the site.

5. Lack of consistency of look of web pages across an institution. I often see this when leaving a main web page to go to pages featuring collections or branch libraries. The user should not question whether he or she has left the website of an institution because the appearance of the website changed drastically.

6. And last but not least, where is the library catalog? Items which your users frequently go to should be up front and center. They should not have to click deep into a site, if what they are seeking is popular.

Background

Before coming to Ukraine as a Fulbright scholar I worked for the Brooklyn Public Library. It is a large institution made up of 60 buildings which serves approximately 2.5 million residents. It is a separate system from New York Public Library and Queens Public Library. BPL has approximately 1,000 employees. I worked in the main central branch (pictured on the slide) and oversaw the development of web content and digital collections. There were approximately 5 people working on actual building of the website and there was a political struggle over the control of the site. In order to approach this in better and more efficient way, the Brooklyn Public Library administration had to first change its philosophy.

We needed to differentiate between content, delivery (information architecture and design) and infrastructure (network and servers). Content it was decided is the responsibility of many library departments and especially the librarians. Delivery it was decided is the responsibility of those who are web developers and know html, asp, php and other web scripting languages. And infrastructure, it was decided is the responsibility of the IT department and network administrators. Also committees of subject specialist librarians were formed so that they could provide content aimed at various age groups or on special topics.

CMS systems

It should also be noted that we purchased a special software system, called a content management system. Some pages are controlled by this content management system. The librarians can add their own content, the web team approves it and it goes live to the site. Other pages are designed and developed by the team based on content provided by librarians.

There are many content management systems available. Some can be purchased and customized by software companies and some are open source and can be customized by programmers. For example, Drupal is the name of Content Management software that can be used to create and manage large websites. It is open source and information is available in the Russian language.

Web Content

When writing for the web keep in mind that it is not the same as writing for a brochure or journal etc. Users that come to a website are generally hurrying and scanning large quantities of text.

Therefore I suggest the following:

- Put most important information at top of page
- Omit unnecessary words
- Use concise wording
- Use simple sentences
- Use bullet points
- Do not include phrases like “click here”

Information Architecture

Often library websites have confusing architectures which is strange because librarians have a good understanding of hierarchies since they are used in subject headings in cataloging.

What I mean by Information Architecture is the structure of the site or how each page relates to another within a hierarchy. Very simply put, the most important information should be emphasized, front and center and lesser information should be lower in the hierarchy and deemphasized.

Navigation

Navigation tells the user how to get around the site and what is available. It could be the links or buttons which users click to go to another page. Persistent navigation (global navigation) is a term to describe the set of navigation elements that appear on every page of a site.

Navigation should include

- Site identification (could be logo or banner)
- A way HOME (start page)
- A way to search site
- Main sections (catalog, research help, library services etc.)
- Utilities that you offer (site map, help, etc.)

Web 2.0

The phrase Web 2.0 was coined in 2004 and is used to describe a second-generation of web-based services that emphasize online collaboration and sharing among users.

The emphasis is on participation, publication, socialization, sharing, and the Web as Platform. The end result is that users are much more involved in the web. A number of technologies fall under this category including blogs, photosharing, social networking, RSS feeds, Wikkis, online games and others.

Since this is a brief presentation I will just give a few examples of web 2.0 technologies used by libraries.

RSS ("Really Simple Syndication") is a tool that delivers frequently updated digital information - such as news headlines, blog entries or podcasts - directly to the subscriber. As new information becomes available, it is automatically sent. As you may know, news websites are offering RSS feeds so that articles of interest are sent straight to the user. Libraries are also using RSS feeds to send news about library events and services. Just look for this symbol for RSS feeds and more information.

Blogs are another popular web 2.0 tool used for self publishing and providing a forum for discussions. Blogs on every topic imaginable are being created. Blogger available at www.blogger.com is just one way of creating a blog. Owned by Google, it is free of cost and very easy to use. The interface is available in a number of languages including Ukrainian and Russian. At the Brooklyn Public Library, Blogger was used to create an online book discussion. Librarians post a summary of a book and patrons can post comments or questions about the book. This blog supports a free discussion open to all.

Usability

All this being said, what we are really striving for is usability -- in other words, we should be working to make our websites USABLE. Usability is a term for making sure that something works well and that the average person (your audience) can use the web site. This is what we should be striving for in our library websites.

You do this by making it obvious to users. In order to make site obvious to users I suggest the following:

- Using buttons instead of hyperlinked text when possible
- Using intuitive names/terms for labels rather than internal jargon
- Determining a clear Information Architecture

User Feedback

Whenever possible involve your users in redesigning your website. Getting user feedback can be done using an online survey, holding focus groups and other ways. Be sure to incorporate this feedback in order to make a more usable website from the user perspective.