

CHALLENGES OF CREATING ONLINE CONTENT

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OVERVIEW

- WHO AM I?
- THE JOYS OF TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION
- CHALLENGES
 - Web page editors
 - Images
 - Other Types of Content
 - Web 2.0
- TOOLS OF THE TRADE
- QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

WHO AM I?



Source: http://www.websphereusergroup.org.uk/jlp_wug_WASUG/html/meetings/0602/misc/mystery-person.gif

EDUCATION

- B.A. in English with minor in Technical Communication
 - Pseudo-minors in Physics and Math

EXPERIENCE

- Over 8 years working for Missouri S&T as web-content developer
- Oversaw numerous incarnations of IT web site
- Responsible for migration of hundreds of pages from one incarnation to the next
- Designed and implemented a knowledge-map based web site for mathematics (braintrax.mst.edu)
- Created thousands of web pages and hundreds of thousands of graphics for web
- Close to a million pieces of content for the web

EXPERIENCE

Currently working for Educational Technology at Missouri S&T:

- Maintaining EdTech web site(s)
 - edtech.mst.edu: Main web site for EdTech
 - edtechconnect.mst.edu: Blog about Educational Technology concerns
- Working with instructors adding content to web
- Supporting use of Blackboard/Wimba/Other instructional technologies

THE JOYS OF TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION



Source: <http://techcommprojects.com/images/FolderStack.jpg>

THREE IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

1. Audience

- Who will be using your web site?

2. Purpose

- What is the goal of the audience?
- What is your goal for having people visit your site?

3. Organization

- How will readers navigate your content?

AUDIENCE

- Try to find a shared outlook between you and your audience
 - Cultural, social, organizational requirements
- Focus on why the audience needs the information
- The information is for them, not you, so keep their convenience in mind
- Primary, secondary, even tertiary audiences should be considered

PURPOSE

- Address the “So what?” of audience – How is the information meaningful or relevant to the audience?
- Anticipate reader’s questions
- Most communication has both an explicit and implicit purpose
 - Explicit purpose: stated objective in the document/page/site
 - EX: “How to” web pages
 - Implicit purpose: underlying reason for the creation of the document
 - EX: Policy page created due to legal considerations (also could be helpful to audience)

ORGANIZATION

Whitespace is your friend – use it well!

- Helps the reader find the important information
- Separates the information, keeping the message from being “lost”

Use headings to break up information into manageable “chunks”

- Shows relationship between content items on a page
- Heading and subheadings can be linked in online documents to provide another navigation tool

ORGANIZATION

Lists can effectively convey related items

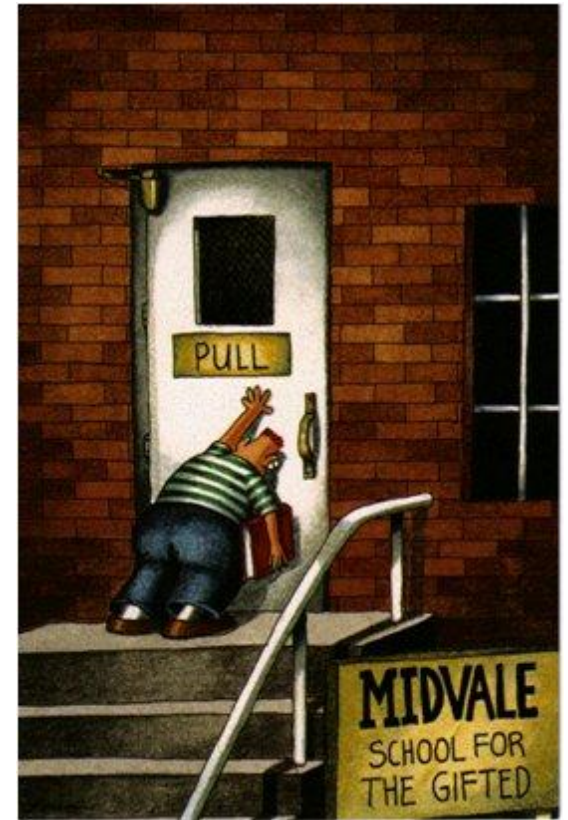
- Use ordered (numerical) lists when sequence is important
- Use unordered (bullet) lists when sequence unimportant

Use “tiers” to arrange documents in a web site

- **Top tier:** Home page
- **Second tier:** Navigation pages
- **Third tier:** Content pages
- **Fourth tier:** Contains supporting files for content pages (e.g. images, printable documents, etc.)

CHALLENGES

- WEB PAGE EDITORS
- IMAGES
- OTHER TYPES OF CONTENT
- WEB 2.0



WEB PAGE EDITORS – MS WORD

PROS

- Save directly to HTML
- Supporting content packaged into convenient folder
- Ideal WYSIWYG editor
- Also has single-file HTML page option
- Very good for quick production of content

CONS

- Extremely bloated code
- Difficult to add interactive content
- Files are typically much larger due to code bloat

WEB PAGE EDITORS – MS POWERPOINT

PROS

- Save directly to HTML
- Supporting content packaged into convenient folder
- Also has single-file HTML page option
- Very good for quick production of content

CONS

- Inconsistencies across browsers (IE v. Firefox)
- Formatting changes in finished product
- Doesn't preserve transitions or animations

WEB PAGE EDITORS – DREAMWEAVER

PROS

- Easy to use
- Allows Remote and Local view of files at same time
- Supports interactive content
- See pages in Code and Design view
- Very “clean” code compared to MS Word

CONS

- Less-friendly formatting options than MS Word
- Advanced features can be difficult to use

WEB PAGE EDITORS – DOCUMENTUM

PROS

- Good for static web pages that won't change often
- Create many documents in a short time frame
- Manage many different sites
- Impose a global style-sheet on a site

CONS

- Not good for dynamic pages
- Does not handle interactive content well
- Does not do “batch” importing of files
- Requires intensive programming to make global changes
- WYSIWYG editor is flawed

WEB PAGE EDITORS – TEXT-BASED EDITORS (WORDPAD, NOTEPAD, TEXTPAD)

PROS

- Best control over code
- Insert any kind of code desired
 - Style sheets, JavaScript, Includes, etc.
- Offer the best flexibility for pages

CONS

- No WYSIWYG
- Requires A LOT of coding by hand
- Sometimes more difficult to detect errors
- Hard to read code

IMAGES

- Three main types:
 - GIF
 - Flat (8-bit) colors, lossless compression, support for transparency
 - JPEG, JPG
 - Photorealistic (24-bit) colors, lossy compression
 - PNG
 - Most colors available, lossless compression, support for transparency
- Resizing images affects quality and file size

IMAGES: GIF

- Characteristics:
 - Good for images of “flat” color, i.e. few color transitions
 - Good for line art, logos, simple illustrations
 - Supports transparency in images
- Smaller file size due to limited number of colors (256)
- Lossless compression:
 - Every pixel is preserved during compression process

IMAGES: JPEG, JPG

- Characteristics:
 - Good for photographs
 - Complex images requiring significant color depth, transitions
- Many more colors available (several orders of magnitude)
- Lossy compression:
 - JPG files throw out information when resized or saved in different ways

IMAGES: PNG

- Characteristics:
 - Not universally supported (though gaining wide support)
 - Supports transparency
- Many more colors available (several orders of magnitude)
- Lossless compression:
 - Creates larger file sizes than JPG
 - Can create smaller file sizes than GIF

IMAGES: RESIZING

- Easier to go from larger to smaller
 - Use higher resolutions for photographs
 - Larger-to-smaller throws out information
 - Can't add information that wasn't there to begin with
- MS OFFICE NOTE:
 - Word, PowerPoint resize tool preserves information
 - Should use a third-party application to resize images and then import them back into Office

OTHER TYPES OF CONTENT

PDF (Portable Document Format)

- Ideal for sending documents via email
- Can be read using Adobe Acrobat Reader (free) or similar compatible PDF readers
- Can be created directly from Office 2007
- Supports form creation
- Can convert web pages to PDF (full Acrobat required)

OTHER TYPES OF CONTENT

Why use PDF?

- Platform independent (Mac, PC, Linux, etc)
- Browser independent
- Great for printed documents that need to be distributed online (manuals, product specifications, how-to-guides, and much, much more).
- Maximum portability
 - Small-medium file sizes, even for very long documents
 - Fit easily onto USB flash drives

OTHER TYPES OF CONTENT

Flash Video

- High-quality video content streamed through web browser
- Viewable on most operating systems
- Requires a media plug-in for web browser
 - Available for free on the Internet

OTHER TYPES OF CONTENT

Why use Flash video?

- When created using screen-capturing software, can deliver an animated “how-to” guide (e.g. Camtasia)
- Flash player is easy to install, takes up very little space, initializes quickly
- Flash movies can be streamed over the Internet from a dedicated server, making them play quickly

WEB 2.0

Encapsulates the idea of the proliferation of interconnectivity and interactivity of web-delivered content

- Blogs
- Wikis
- Podcasts

WEB 2.0: BLOGS

- Easy to create, often free
 - Blogger.com; WordPress.com; LiveJournal.com
- Express yourself
 - Also invite commenters to share their thoughts on a topic
- Can be topical (e.g. politics) or general interest
- Usually have a WYSIWYG interface to make it easy to create posts

WEB 2.0: BLOGS

What's the catch?

- Need to have something to say.
- Can be difficult to use for complex linked articles
- Different ways of handling images
- Owner of the blog engine can make site-wide changes and affect your blog against your will (or knowledge)

WEB 2.0: WIKIS

Create collaborative content online using a wiki-space.

- Anyone can author the page
 - The owner of a wiki-space can create privileges for users
 - Community tends to police the content
- Can lead to greater breadth and depth on a given topic
- Topic-driven wikis created by dedicated group of users
- Simple interface suitable for novice users

WEB 2.0: WIKIS

Why use a wiki?

- Class projects on a specific topic
 - Igneous and Metamorphic Petrology
- Internal policies and procedures that may change frequently
 - IT Relationship & Asset Management
- Consolidate resources on a single topic into one web page
 - Wikipedia

WEB 2.0: WIKIS

What's the catch?

- Controversial topics can lead to flame-wars in the wiki-space (e.g. politics)
- Requires some oversight to ensure content quality
- Should NEVER be used as authoritative source
 - However, can lead to productive research through use of external links

WEB 2.0: PODCASTING

Downloadable audio files created by individuals.

- Can be music, conversation, even video files
- Created using off-the-shelf recording software and a computer.
- Available “on demand” through RSS feeds and through web sites such as iTunes
- Can be played on a variety of devices

WEB 2.0: PODCASTING

Why should I podcast?

- Offer audio content for people “on the go”
- Capture a lecture for later review by students or as an alternative for distance students
- Link a podcast to other web 2.0 technologies (e.g. a blog) for an integrated experience

WEB 2.0: PODCASTING

What's the catch?

- Requires time and energy to produce a podcast
- Depending on desired quality, can cost money for equipment
 - A standard computer microphone is sufficient, but has lower sound quality
- Downloading files requires time and disk space

TOOLS OF THE TRADE



TOOLS OF THE TRADE

- Computer
 - At least 2 GB RAM
 - Good video card
 - Large monitor (20" or bigger)
 - Large hard drive (150 GB or more)
- Multiple web browsers
 - Mozilla Firefox, Internet Explorer, Apple Safari
- Image-editing software
 - Photoshop, Fireworks, Paint Shop Pro, Illustrator
- Adobe Acrobat for creating PDFs
 - Can use Office 2007, but full Acrobat has more options
- Office 2007



QUESTIONS

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