

Web Design Options

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What is the purpose of tampabaywater.org?

Information

1. Inform the general public who Tampa Bay Water is.
2. Help fulfill FIA (Freedom of Information Act) requests.
3. Encourage and educate the public into more responsible water use.
4. Provide the public with ways of contacting Tampa Bay Water with their questions and comments.
(Maybe provide two-way communication via forums, contact form?)

What are the goals of tampabaywater.org?

Self-promotion

1. Make an identity that people can recognize and remember.
2. Let them know we're the good guys.

Deliver on the Promise of Agency Transparency

Deliver meeting agendas, policy documents and other administrative information to members of the public who might wish for it.

Deliver on the Promise of Logistics Transparency

Describe operations and procedures related to water resources management and use.

Water Conservation Advocacy

Empower the general public on water conservation.

How is tampabaywater.org seeking to reach its goals?

1. Making freely available meeting agendas, press releases and other such documents of interest to the public. Seeking to be comprehensive in our collection.
2. Giving the public a behind-the-scenes look at operations and procedures at Tampa Bay Water.
3. Providing information and linking to resources advocating responsible water use.

Issues with tampabaywater.org as it exists today:

Scrolling/Long Pages

Users report pages involve a lot of scrolling because they're too long. On further examination they indicate that there's a lot of text to read per page.

Observations

It seems to me that pages are only as long as they need to be to accommodate the text they're burdened with, all of which I'm assuming is essential. However, this results in relatively long, dry passages of text.

Suggestions

1. This seems to be a problem that can be solved with some judicious editing down for conciseness. Also, break up longer passages to span more than one page. It's conceivable that some content may be done away with altogether if it can be shown that it is "more information than the user needs."
2. Long text could also improve by breaking it up and editing the voice into a less formal, more conversational tone. We could design pages that collectively mimic the experience of reading a good instructional book. This implies extensive text editing, custom redesign of multiple pages (which would deter the use of a template-based solution) and the acquisition of a large number of photos.
3. Longer expositions could be lent additional interest by incorporating other media. Diagrams, illustrations, photographs. Sparing use of animation and/or interactivity could further add variety and enhance the message.
- 4.

Search

It's difficult to find information on a given topic.

Suggestions

1. Present a consistent, site-wide **navigation** solution that clearly declares the topic discussed and avoids the use of vague or overtly technical terminology as much as possible.
2. Create a **site index**, link from the main navigation. The index displays concepts alphabetically by topic, rather than by location on the site. One could further augment its usefulness by turning it into a **site glossary**, wherein popular topics are enhanced with definitions and explanations at the layperson level. A **site map** also might be useful in the sense of helping one see their chosen topic-page within the context of the site. This presumes that all information on the site will be organized strictly by topic and not, say, chronologically, as in the case of press releases and news reports.
3. Spider the entire site's content (especially including PDF and other deliverables) for keywords. Install a **search engine** to provide access to those keywords. Search results should be as concise and conversational as possible.

Aesthetics

The site's design is dated and difficult to maintain.

Suggestions

1. Create a page design based on a larger, 800x600 screen size.
2. Make judicious use of white space (makes pages/screens easier to read and assimilate).
3. Use a consistent page grid (six columns at 125px wide each = 750px) site-wide.
4. Use consistent navigation from page to page.
5. Avoid use of nearly-empty "landing" or "entry" pages: go directly to content. This is especially true of pages whose sole purpose it to link to deliverables (PDF, ZIP).

6. Use CSS techniques to separate site style aesthetics from content.
7. Use dynamic site technologies (.NET framework) to store and serve site content.
8. Create a **content management system** for internal use in which edits to existing content may be implemented by personnel outside the development team. (Macromedia Contribute and similar solutions only allow one-way content editing on static webpages and thus are insufficient for our purposes. Content updated in Macromedia Contribute couldn't make it back to the database in a site built upon dynamic technologies.)
9. Leverage Flash for use with explanatory maps, processes and diagrams, if they can be made active in a useful manner.
10. Avoid using maps as main interface to other pages: many people aren't spatially-oriented, and map-interfaces don't make sense to them.

Turnkey Resources

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|----|-------------------|----------------------|-----------|
| 1. | aspnetmenu.com | ASP.NET menu tool | \$199/299 |
| 2. | webconcerns.co.uk | VB.NET search engine | \$35 |

Design principles in use:

White space

Aids legibility and interest

Non-white background colors

Aids legibility of long passages on-screen

Use of naturally-occurring color harmonies

More pleasing to the eye than use of full-saturation artificial colors. Harmonizing with colors consistent with Florida's ecosystem strengthens identification of Tampa Bay Water with Florida and its waterways.

Consistent, versatile layout grid

Allows for a variety of ways of displaying content. Adds visual interest to each page, aids legibility, allows for variety in content. Preserves design unity. Helps to make it understood that the user is within tampabaywater.org.

Typography for emphasis and information design

Prioritizes information. Facilitates comprehension. Enables users to get the gist of the message merely by skimming section titles, for instance.

Discrete placement and prioritization of navigation and content

Enables user to concentrate on one task at a time: reading or navigating. Makes site navigation more intuitive when navigation is all in one place.