

JUST GIVE THEM WHAT THEY WANT. HOW USER EXPERIENCE (UX) CAN TRANSFORM LIBRARY

WEBSITES TO REVEAL THE LIBRARY RESOURCES AND SERVICES THAT USERS VALUE MOST

Within Tertiary Education Libraries in Australia the web environment has become the single most important gateway for providing access to a constantly expanding number of information resources and services. These library assets serve diverse audiences, and are managed by numerous complex systems and distinct specialist departments. Transferred online this can lead to a confusing mix of overlapping audience based navigation, duplication of content and conflicting agendas. This creates an experience where users are required to give unnecessary thought to which audience category they fit into, where key services reside within the organisational structure, and how one system differs from another. This increase in required effort distracts the users from their key tasks and leads to a frustrating and ultimately negative experience; this contrasts with user expectations developed through frequent use of user focused social media and internet based information sources.

By adopting the principles of User Experience (UX) libraries can arrange their web content in a way that more closely matches the needs of the users to reveal compelling user focused tools and services. UX involves engaging directly with users in order to understand their needs and how they prioritise key tasks, this will then enable the ability to assess, cull and edit existing content and create new content that directly addresses the needs of users. This approach enables libraries to move from a web environment based around internal processes and systems towards a greater emphasis on the needs and goals of their users.

During 2012 the Victoria University Library partnered with the universities Web Futures Group to produce a new library website within the Drupal content management system. This paper demonstrates how techniques such as web content evaluation and analysis, user and business needs assessment, and user testing were used to produce an Information Architecture that provides easy access to key user tasks. The previous website had evolved in a piece meal fashion over a number of years and provided multiple pathways to content for “All library clients”, “Onshore staff and students”, “Offshore staff and students”, “Information for staff” and “Researchers”, this resulted in a labyrinthine information architecture of over 200 pages and as many as 50 links on the home page.

The new information architecture produced from this collaborative project reduces total overall site content and links on the homepage by over 50%. Audience based navigation has been removed entirely and replaced with a hierarchy based on the grouping of common tasks. The most positive feedback from users and key stakeholders came from an innovation that owes more to commercial ecommerce sites than libraries. The “mega menu” enables users to access the entire library site architecture (including the Summon search box and direct links to “top tasks”) from a full page width drop down menu that’s available from across the entire Victoria University website through a persistent toolbar. In addition to making resources and services more accessible through the library website, the reduced information architecture provides the basis for freeing up library content to be customised for mobile applications and social media environments.

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