REIMAGINING YOUR WEBSITE: WHAT ARE PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS LOOKING FOR AND HOW ARE THEY FINDING IT?

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THE TALK / AN OUTLINE

• The Research
• The How
• The End
THE RESEARCH
E-Expectations 2016: What Do College-Bound High School Students Expect From Your Website and Digital Communications?

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It takes a collection of resources to support recruitment; your website is the hub
Your website is their first stop to answer questions

Does it drive users on in their exploration and facilitate engagement?

- Use the website to find the answer myself: 63% (2016), 47% (2017)
- Email the admissions office: 19% (2016), 25% (2017)
- Call the admissions office: 5% (2016), 12% (2017)
- Complete an online form to get more information: 3% (2016), 3% (2017)
- Chat online with a school representative: 3% (2016), 2% (2017)
- Call my admissions counselor at that school: 3% (2016), 6% (2017)
Their experience with your site is connected to their perceptions of your college or university

- 74% of students believe college websites make a difference in their perceptions of the school.
- 75% of students believe college websites make a difference in their perceptions of the school.
- 26% of students believe their perceptions of a school have no relation to its website.
- 25% of students believe their perceptions of a school have no relation to its website.
- 48% of students believe schools with better websites probably offer higher quality educational experiences.
- 43% of students believe schools with better websites probably offer higher quality educational experiences.
- 55% of students believe the quality of the school has no relationship to its website.
- 52% of students believe the quality of the school has no relationship to its website.
1 How can I attract more prospective students to my website?
Make your site attractive to search engines

Q: How do you find a college website?

- YouTube search
  - Co17 Jrs Spr 16: 7%
  - Co16 Srs Spr 16: 8%

- College planning site
  - Co17 Jrs Spr 16: 11%
  - Co16 Srs Spr 16: 26%

- Bookmarked
  - Co17 Jrs Spr 16: 10%
  - Co16 Srs Spr 16: 15%

- URL in print
  - Co17 Jrs Spr 16: 16%
  - Co16 Srs Spr 16: 16%

- Link from e-mail
  - Co17 Jrs Spr 16: 44%
  - Co16 Srs Spr 16: 39%

- I know the url
  - Co17 Jrs Spr 16: 27%
  - Co16 Srs Spr 16: 41%

- Search engine
  - Co17 Jrs Spr 16: 86%
  - Co16 Srs Spr 16: 88%
Optimizing program pages and highlighting your location will make a difference in search engine rankings

Q: Which of these options reflects the ways you would use a search engine to find college websites? (Select all that apply).
30% of juniors and 24% of seniors were familiar with the college advertised.

Google
Is the leading channel for prospective students to find these ads.

47% of juniors and 39% of seniors have clicked on paid ads for colleges and universities.

Click/Read?
The highest rated activity after their click was simply to read more online.
33% seniors
39% juniors.
How can I attract more users to my website?

- Include links within your site in your e-mail campaigns
- Make your site attractive to search engines
  - Mobile/responsive sites are receiving higher search engine rankings
  - On- and off-page search engine optimization strategies can make a significant difference in site traffic
  - Build out site links. (Here’s a great article about how to do that: http://www.brightedge.com/glossary/building-quality-backlinks)
- Paid interactive marketing campaigns can bring more users to your site who are ready to engage
- Coordinate efforts with leading college planning sites
What content resources add the most value to their experiences?
Content targets: It’s still about academics and cost!

- Juniors are focused on program listings and details; seniors want to know more about cost and affordability

- Both juniors and seniors value the following details in program content:
  - Job placement statistics
  - Program rankings
  - Graduate school placement statistics
  - Testimonials and quotes from current students or alumni
Demonstrate value through outcomes

- Job placement stats: 63% Co16 Srs Spr 16, 61% Co17 Jrs Spr 16
- Program rankings: 50% Co16 Srs Spr 16, 47% Co17 Jrs Spr 16
- Grad school: 49% Co16 Srs Spr 16, 51% Co17 Jrs Spr 16
- Testimonials/Quot: 46% Co16 Srs Spr 16, 52% Co17 Jrs Spr 16
- Program videos: 26% Co16 Srs Spr 16, 28% Co17 Jrs Spr 16
- Accreditation: 18% Co16 Srs Spr 16, 22% Co17 Jrs Spr 16
- Faculty profiles: 13% Co16 Srs Spr 16, 21% Co17 Jrs Spr 16
ACADEMICS / THE RESEARCH

• 72% of our admits ranked academic reputation as “very important” when selecting a school.¹
• While 75% of enrolling students rated us as “very good” or “excellent” for academic reputation only 43% of non-enrolling did.¹
• Eduventures said only 24% of non-enrolling students described WVU as having a good academic reputation.²

¹ - 2013 Admitted Student Questionnaire Plus Highlights Report from The College Board
² - 2013 Survey of Admitted Students from Eduventures
ACADEMICS / THE RESEARCH

• **Over 50%** of both enrolling and non-enrolling wanted undergrad research opportunities.¹

• In addition to “academic reputation” WVU rated lower in categories like “reputation with employers” and “quality of faculty and facilities.” Both rated as very important to making a decision.²

• Statistics that highlighted the quality of the institution resonated with prospects.³

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1 - 2013 Survey of Admitted Students from Eduventures  
2 - 2013 Admitted Student Questionnaire Plus Highlights Report from The College Board  
3 - Understanding WVU’s Brand from the Inside from Widmeyer Communications
GET ON A STUDENT’S LIST:
COST / THE RESEARCH

• **82%** of our admits ranked cost as “very important” when selecting a school.¹

• **68%** of our enrolling students said aid or cost was significant when they chose WVU. **75%** for those who received aid.¹

¹ - 2013 Admitted Student Questionnaire Plus Highlights Report from The College Board
MESSAGING / NOTE

Reflecting the audience’s preferences, messaging is most convincing when it exists in an academic context, an economic context, or, ideally, both.

“Understanding WVU’s Brand from the Inside” from Widmeyer Communications
86% of prospects ranked “provides high-quality education at an affordable price” as “very important” versus 74% ranking “cost” on its own as “very important.”

“Understanding WVU’s Brand from the Inside” from Widmeyer Communications
MESSAGING / VALUE FORMULA

Academics / Cost = Value
LIFE / THE RESEARCH

• Enrolling and non-enrolling students share the same perceptions about life on campus. 89% and 82% respectively agree it’s “fun.” 82% and 74% feel it’s a “‘spirit’ school.”

• 73% of enrollees were positively impacted by the campus “social environment” but only 30% of non-enrollees shared their sentiments.

• These large differences in perception extend to “diversity.” 58% to 32% respectively.

1 - 2013 Admitted Student Questionnaire Plus Highlights Report from The College Board
2 - 2013 Survey of Admitted Students from Eduventures
What content resources add the most value to their experiences?

- Answer their top questions early and with compelling evidence:
  - Program listings, details, outcomes data and testimonials
  - Cost, scholarship, aid and overall value
  - Process, deadlines, events
  - Location, sense of place
  - Personal fit

- Engagement and multi-media play a role, but can’t carry your value proposition and fit messages on their own.

- Looking for more adult students? They may be more comfortable (and perhaps appreciative of) live chat resources.
How can you use E-Expectations to get more support from your leadership?

Their digital recruitment marketing assets play an important role in their exploration of your campus, influence perceptions and support engagement.

Their preference for optimized/responsive experiences is increasing.

They are using mobile devices to not only access your site, read e-mails, engage with social channels and text. Resources should perform seamlessly on mobile as well as desktop/laptop views.

Data strongly suggests forms to support enrollment must also be responsive.

What images will be most appealing to prospective students?
Photos are the top-rated types of social posts

63-64% of juniors and seniors using Instagram daily

- Photos: 76%, 79%, 78%
- Videos: 53%, 52%, 51%
- News stories/features: 50%, 48%, 47%
- Event invitations: 38%, 39%, 42%, 37%

Co16 Jrs Spr 16
Co16 Srs Fall 15
Co16 Srs Spr 16
Co17 Jrs Spr 16
They're looking for a sense of campus now: Feature current students and campus views in your posts
Interest in specific images (top two boxes)

- Photos of student life or non-academic activities
- Candid photos (not staged)
- Images of students working in labs, using equipment
- Photos of faculty teaching or engaging with students
- Overview of the campus setting like an aerial show without students
- Campus view of buildings with students
- Photos of buildings with students
- Photos of students representing different age groups and ethnicities
- Photos of specific buildings without students
- Photos with just one or two students
- Staged photos showing happy students

- Co17 Jrs: 75% 67%
- Co16 Srs: 76% 67%
- Co17 Jrs: 62% 65%
- Co16 Srs: 61% 63%
- Co17 Jrs: 58% 62%
- Co16 Srs: 57% 62%
- Co17 Jrs: 56% 55%
- Co16 Srs: 48% 48%
- Co17 Jrs: 45% 48%
- Co16 Srs: 20% 21%
- Co17 Jrs: 17% 22%
What images will be most appealing?
(Images ranked by percent of all students as most interesting)
IT STARTS NOW.

So let's go. Release the Mountaineer spirit inside of you. Reach the limits of what you can do and then keep on going.

Continue Reading
How can you use E-Expectations to get more support from your leadership?

- Your digital recruitment marketing assets play an important role in their exploration of your campus, influence perceptions and support engagement.
- Their preference for optimized/responsive experiences is increasing.
- They are using mobile devices to not only access your site, read e-mails, engage with social channels and text. Resources should perform seamlessly on mobile as well as desktop/laptop views.
- Data strongly suggests forms to support enrollment must also be responsive.
THE HOW
AKA

STEPS FOR BUILDING A USER-FOCUSED UNIVERSITY WEBSITE
Documents are at:
go.wvu.edu/reimagine-web
STEP #1: DOCUMENT USER NEEDS
“We must begin digital projects by exploring and pinpointing the needs of the people who will use the service or website, and the ways the service or website will fit into their lives.

- US Digital Services
Discovery Worksheet

University Relations – Digital Services
Updated: February 12, 2016

The Discovery Worksheet will help University Relations – Digital Services (UR-DS) and the unit better understand what people need to access on their website. This document can be filled out before a meeting with UR-DS but we recommend sharing the results in person with UR-DS so that everyone is on the same page.

1. List Goals for New Website

Use this area to list and prioritize the overall goals for the website. What specific things are you trying to accomplish through the website?
STEP #2: USE DATA TO REVISE USER NEEDS
RESEARCH / GOOGLE ANALYTICS

Overview

Sessions

5,000

Friday, September 23, 2016
Sessions: 2,266

Sessions

86,155

Users

57,287

New Visitor

Returning Visitor

43.8%

56.2%
RESEARCH / SITE IMPROVE
Dashboard for Undergraduate Admission...

31.42% Search Visibility by rank on Google en-US

- You: 31.4% (prev. 2%)
- Pennsylvania: 0.53% (prev. 0%)
- Virginia Tech: 0% (prev. 0%)
- University of ...: --

Next scheduled update: Oct 13, 2016 PST

20.5k Total Visits (prev. 5%)

- Organic Visits: 7,288 (prev. 4%)
- Social Visits: 75 (prev. 11%)

Domain Authority: 82

Desktop vs. Mobile Search Visibility

Next scheduled update: Oct 13, 2016 PST
Competitive Analysis

What are our peer institutions doing? How do they compare to the research?
STEP #3: CONTENT INVENTORY & AUDIT
AKA

STEP #3: DOES OUR CONTENT ANSWER THE NEEDS?
A content inventory is a decidedly human task. In fact, we find that the process can often be as valuable as the final spreadsheet. If you invest the time in scouring your Web site and deconstructing every page (or at least a good selection of pages), you will end up as the uncontested expert in how it all goes together. And that’s invaluable knowledge to possess when redesigning your site.

- Jeffrey Veen
Understanding the Content Audit & Inventory Worksheet

University Relations – Digital Services
Updated on: February 1, 2016

The Content Audit Worksheet is split into eight tabs which are explained in detail below.

NOTE: Your worksheet may have more tabs if we determined that there were peaks of activity where it would be beneficial to take snapshots of web traffic for review.

1. Evaluate Current Content

Where you will describe your existing content, how it matches up to the user’s goals and actions you’ve identified and its strategy.

Use this tab to list the goal, audience, strategy, and any notes for the existing, crawl-able content on your website. It’s ok if you find content that doesn’t fit a particular goal or audience. This most likely means that the content should be removed. Be critical. If you don’t know why something exists on the current site ask
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*Note: The table continues with more data.*
INVENTORY / TOOLS

http://content-insight.com
http://urlprofiler.com
STEP #4: IDENTIFY CONTENT GAPS
STEP #5: DEVELOP AN INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE
Information Architecture Worksheet

University Relations – Digital Services
Updated on: April 19, 2016

The purpose of information architecture (IA) is to organize, structure, and label the sites content in an effective and sustainable way. The goal for your IA is to create a system that allows users to easily find information and complete tasks. When completing your IA it is important to make decisions based on the site goals, user needs and content audit results that you have established in the previous steps.

Frontpage

Explain what a frontpage is. Need to highlight goals and user needs that are most important for the homepage. Explain what the most important user needs are.

1. Home (Additional Notes: Target Audience - Needs being met)
   a. Page Content
      i. Home Content Item
      ii. Action Item
STEP #6: CREATIVE BRIEF
Creative Brief

The purpose of the creative brief is to provide an overview of the goals for your IA. The goal is to create a system that allows users to easily find information and complete tasks. When completing your IA, it's important to make decisions based on the site goals, user needs, and content audit results you have established in the previous steps.

Name: 
Start Date: 
Contact Info: 
Office: 
Due Date: 
Project Title: 

Overview

Explain what a frontpage is. Need to highlight goals and user needs that are most important for the homepage. Explain what the most important user needs are.

1. Goal One
2. Goal Two

User Needs
STEP #7: WIREFRAMES
STEP #8: CONTENT
STEP #9:
WEBSITE DESIGN
Yes, we wait until step #9 before we talk about graphic design.
WVU Brand Patterns is a theme for making WVU-branded websites. It is built with Sass and works with WVU’s CleanSlate content management system.
STEP #10: LAUNCH!
STEP #11: MONITOR & REFINE
SUMMING UP
THANK YOU & QUESTIONS

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