

Rethinking & Reworking The Web @ Northwestern University Library



Stu Baker

[<mailto:stubaker@northwestern.edu>](mailto:stubaker@northwestern.edu)

[<http://staffweb.library.northwestern.edu/staff/stubaker/>](http://staffweb.library.northwestern.edu/staff/stubaker/)

Overview



- Problems to be solved
- Objectives and Goals
- The Team
- The Plan of attack
- Some Solutions
- What has Worked
- What was Unexpected
- Future Directions

Problems to be solved



- The web site had grown significantly in terms of pages, traffic and stature in 6 years
- The distributed authoring environment was becoming increasingly ineffective
- Information was out of date & not being maintained
- Site was structured around the organization not the patrons

...and more problems



- The site had no cohesive visual identity
- The staff had ineffective tools for web authoring
- Staff turnover made it difficult to maintain consistent work flow, training and support

The Players



- **Web Development Group (WDG)**
 - Oversee and coordinate the Library's web services and publications
 - Representation from throughout the libraries
- Media Center and IT staff in the library are primary support and development units
- Director of Public Relations in the library, creating an identity for print and electronic publications

The Playing Field



- Over 12,000 web documents (HTML, PDF, TXT)
- Running on three different systems
- With 9 different web servers
- 30-60 active web developers
- 40 departments
- In 3 libraries

The Blueprint



- After months of planning and brainstorming...
- WDG created a “blueprint” for a web site redesign initiative
- Submitted to AULs for approval (March 1999)
- After approval the plan was presented to the entire staff (May 1999)

Prime Objectives



- Implement a new information architecture that will be more logical and useful to our patrons and our staff
- Create a consistent design and identity for all of the library the web sites
- Define an infrastructure to allow for easier maintenance and coordination of web publishing

Goals



- **Focus site on patron use**, not staff or organization structures; offload other information to intranet site and cross-reference.
- **Focus staff on Content and Information Structures**; free staff from burden of designing pages and doing HTML layout.
- **Reduce redundant information** on site
- Create a **Broad and Shallow** site structure
- **Provide a unified presentation** to our information, resources and services, within and beyond the libraries

Goals *(continued)*



- **Create a cohesive visual identity** consistent with emerging library print publications.
- **Centralize staff support:** Webmaster and Director of Public relations, programmers in Library Management Systems, staff in Media Center, student consultants
- **Standardize tools** and implement library wide training on new work flow models

Goals (continued)



- **Create a technical infrastructure** which will allow staff to:
 - Share common assets (images, sound, animation, QTVR, etc.) instead of copying them to their site.
 - Easily access/link other published information on the site around the libraries
 - Have easy desktop access to content and design tools, servers, web sites
 - Avoid many of the technical barriers to web publishing

Establishing the project team



- Created three working groups within the WDG
 - Site Architecture Group
 - Design Group
 - Technical Deployment Group
- Invited specialists throughout the library to join the three groups
- Eventually added a fourth group to create technical and design specifications for the “Electronic Resources” site

Site Architecture Group



- Largest group in team (9 members)
- Created information architecture for the sites
- Reviewed usage on existing site
- Reviewed and examined hundreds of web sites
- Site inventory to identify redundant, useless and overlapping content on the web sites
- Online patron surveys

Site Architecture Group *(continued)*



- Defined labels, terms and rules for content creation and interface
- Developed metadata usage rules for site
- Decided who would stay on public site vs. intranet (staff) site

Design Group



- Worked closely with University Relations to mirror emerging print identity
- Established specifications for standard use of colors, layout, fonts, style sheets, navigation
- Created complimentary identity elements
- Built Dreamweaver templates for deployment based on specifications and elements
- Developing standard style guidelines for web publishing

Technical Deployment Group



- Established desktop/server environment for web publishing
- Leveraging existing network account management
- Creating training modules and documentation
- Prototyped systems and test templates
- Building tools and applications as needed
- Coordinating data migration path for the new site

The game plan



- Kickoff and Brainstorming sessions with staff
- Refine major concepts, primary goals and timelines within WDG
- Research and development
- Assemble resources and build prototypes
- Get more patron and staff feedback
- Make some midstream adjustments
- Implement the new site on the staging server
- Launch it – “Flip the Switch”

Some things that have worked



■ Desktop Tools

- Dreamweaver
- Fireworks

■ Server infrastructure

- Staging file server for web development
- Staging web server for review of site
- Production servers

■ Consolidation of redundant information into centralized pages or databases

- Circulation Services
- Electronic Resources

More things that have worked



- Stressing content creation vs. publishing content
- Anticipating the needs of the staff
- Individual meetings with departments to review the process and get their ideas and feedback
- Providing help at every step
 - Customized training
 - Student assistants
 - Project consultation
- You will be assimilated; Resistance is Futile...

What was unexpected?



- Less training needed than anticipated
- Little resistance to style guidelines and identity elements
- Historical “laggers” are becoming the leaders

How are we doing so far?



- Met the target for an early September rollout
- Electronic Resources site has replaced 1300 static web pages
- Reduced site bulk; down about 75%
- Technical environment makes it easier & faster to publish content
- Sites are more cohesive visually
- Public response has been predominantly positive

The good news



- Staff are concentrating on writing good content
- Staff are focused on creating good web sites
- Staff are not focused on creating web pages

Not so good news?



- Timing was not good for some faculty
- Did not estimate “physical moving” of library would effect process
- Found some major bugs in Dreamweaver
- Need to make adjustments for Proxy and Virtual Private Networking access.

What did we learn?



- **Timing is everything**
 - Virtual library
 - Physical library
- **Never underestimate inflexible learners**
- **Stick to your guns, but be flexible**

What do we have left to do



- Finish building the public and intranet sites
- Scrutinize statistics and error logs
- Do live observation of site use
- Monitor maintenance and growth
- Complete documentation and style guidelines
- Review the process
- Evaluate the results

Creating a better environment?



- Maintainable work flow for developers and support staff
- Sustainable infrastructure for the organization; and most importantly
- Useable and useful information, resources and services for our patrons

Future directions



- More Database and XML driven content
- Consolidation of information and access through data relationships and interoperable systems
 - More interoperability with our vendor systems
- Better tools for content management
 - Markup tools which are template driven & web based.
 - Search engines that can deal with active content
- More media based content to describe and deliver
 - Video, Animation, Images, Audio
- Patron portals (“My Library”)

More information...

■ Northwestern University Library Redesign Site

- <<http://staffweb.library.northwestern.edu/redesign/>>

■ Stu Baker

- <<mailto:stubaker@northwestern.edu>>
- <<http://staffweb.library.northwestern.edu/staff/stubaker/>>

