Cornerstone 3 Reports : Interdisciplinary Informatics

The Thinkfinity Center for Innovative Teaching, Technology and Research

10-1-2012

Vox Online Web Site Development

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Final Report: Thinkfinity Grant Vox Online Web Site Development

Goals Outlined

Our overall goal for this project was to create a website that builds an increased awareness of Pace's literary magazine, *VOX Arts & Literary Journal*. Over the years, the paper version of the magazine although somewhat effective, was lacking in certain areas. We wanted to create something that would really get *Vox*'s name out there and generate more involvement from the students as well as faculty and administrators. We felt that by having a website, students and faculty could post and submit their works all year round, instead of twice a year as it is now. With more submission options such as posting poetry, prose, artwork, and other such pieces, more students and faculty would submit original works.

By having a paper issue as well as an online issue, we can offer more positions to our students here at Pace. The paper issue is put together by a group or assistant editors and lead by an editor who is supervised by a faculty member. Our online team, however, employed student positions such as site manager, producer, designer, two programmers and faculty supervision positions.

Not only would this website increase desired awareness, but the entire development process augmented student involvement. Students built the site, and students will run the site. Students will be in charge now of maintenance, accepting/ denying submissions, creating the featured sections on the home page and making other changes as they see fit. Overall, we will be in fact drawing in more interaction between the magazine and the Pace community.

Our second goal was to create a website that is user friendly and sustainable. The user friendly aspect was very important to us going into this project. We wanted students, faculty and even outside users, such as parents and publishers, to be able to view the students' work with ease and to be able to navigate throughout the website in a smooth and transparent fashion. We felt that having a website that was too confusing to use or too complicated would serve as a huge detriment to our overall goals. We wanted to make a sustainable website that could be easily kept up throughout the years long after the initial web team was no longer a part of the editorial efforts.

The third goal was to create a web design that was simple, yet visually appealing. We wanted, as stated above, to really push the V*ox* brand and utilize the classical nature of the print issue in the online space. This way the web site and the printed magazine have uniform characteristics and are equally recognizable as products of *Vox Arts & Literary Journal*.

Progress

As of December 8, 2010, the Vox Online team was able to complete its overall goals of creating a website, including building awareness of Pace's literary magazine, *VOX Arts & Literary Journal.* Since our mid-year report in June, we have continued to excel and work diligently to achieve success.

Communications

Once we had a few months to establish a permanent and effective line of communication standards and meeting times, we knew it would be important to sustain these methods during the summer and into the new school year. Over the summer we had limited meeting, but were still able to communicate via email and telephone correspondence. By using these methods as well as the Blackboard discussion board, we were able to upload photos and ideas and discuss them as group. We then were able to finalize the design not only for the home page but also for the other pages as well. Once the school year started it became apparent that we needed a new weekly meeting time, and we were able to quickly change our meeting time to get our team together. We also continued to send out focus emails and other messages geared towards motivation and direction.

Workflow and Design Specifications

Over the summer months and into the first few weeks of the semester, we were able to finalize our workflow documents. With these in hand, our programmer was able to code and create the different pages of the website and build a fully functional website. The most challenging aspect of finalizing the workflow was formatting the submissions page. We considered many options and different programs that we could use. We chose to use the *Wordpress* software because it offered an affordable price and it allowed us to have a simple system for uploading content while at the same time being flexible and easy to edit the code later. With the workflow in place it took only a few weeks for our programmer to construct the website. We placed a few weeks in the schedule for testing the site and a few weeks to fix the bugs.

Navigation

In terms of navigation, we have created a website that is user friendly and easy to browse. To make things more convenient and user friendly, we placed several links on the top and the bottom of the page. Also, we created a "genres" link that allows the user to browse between art, poetry and prose. We also have a media section where users can watch videos and have access to other media related to VOX. Additionally, we created an archives page that allows users to access content from past issues.

Activities centered towards reaching goals

Overall our main efforts came in the form of weekly meetings and "homework" assignments. Each week before we adjourned the meeting, we would assign tasks to group members to have done for the next meeting. This was quite efficient as we were able to get things done in a timely manner. We broke the project down into phases. The first phase was design and concept. We wanted to create a strong foundation that we could work off of and use to reach our goal. Next was the construction phase in which we actually constructed the website and put all the pieces together. After that came the testing phase. We tested the website and even introduced to it to fellow students and faculty to gain input on what needs to be adjusted. After receiving feedback, we were able to make corrects and have another testing period. After we were satisfied we were able to launch the site for all to see and enjoy.

Outcomes

Overall, our greatest and most worthwhile outcome of this project was the increased interest in the Vox arts and literary experience and the gratitude of the students and faculty who have long desired to see something like this come to fruition. Additionally, we have created a new opportunity for students to get involved on campus and to gain valuable experience. In the future, new students will be needed to maintain the site and add on to it. This website also bolsters the creativity of the students by allowing any student to post approved content for all their peers and the general public to see. Another outcome would be the increased involvement from students and faculty. Now that the project is completed, many people have been visiting the Vox site and have become more aware of the magazine. Environmental friendliness is another outcome we have achieved. By having a electronic version of the magazine, we can print fewer paper copies and limit our consumption.

Website Launch

On December 8, 2010 we had the honor and privilege of introducing the Vox website to the Pace community.   At this event we were able to demonstrate the user friendliness of the website and allow the audience to see how easy it really was to submit their content and share their voice with the world. There were many people in attendance and the website was very well received.

Sustaining the Site

In order to sustain the website we have been working on a set of directions that can be used in transition notes to the new members of VOX. These new individuals will have been trained by those who have come before them and will have complete knowledge of the site and will be able to add to the site as well as fix any problems or issues that arise. As for financial backing, we have been able to secure funds from saving money on our paper issue. By producing 50% less paper issues, we will have enough money to sustain the website each year. Also, we have also worked on a donations system that will allow users to give back to Vox. Through the leadership and the strength of our development team, the Vox online experience has become a highly sustainable and dynamic addition to the Pace experience.

Overall, this project has can be described as a very worthwhile endeavor. Each member of the team has expressed their gratitude that they have been able to work with one another on this project. Each person has learned something not only about creating a website, but about themselves. We are extremely proud to have worked besides such hard working and capable adults. The website is much more to the students and faculty of Pace then a bunch of html code. It is a canvas to which they can express themselves and truly "free their voice."

On behalf of the Vox online team and the entire Pace community, we humbly thank you for all that the Thinkfinity grant has done for us. It is truly an honor to have received such a contribution and the true effect of the impact of this project is immeasurable.

Report prepared by student site manager Matthew Pellegrine and reviewed/edited by Dr. Deborah Poe