Application for
2009 Larry L. Sautter Award
for Innovation in Information Technology

“UC Riverside Umbrella Web Site”

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University of California, Riverside
Web Development Team,
Office of Strategic Communications
At right, the UCR Umbrella site home page. At left, the home page featuring a special “Green your scene” theme for Earth Week. Specific branding items include the top banner with the UCR logo and the footer with specific contact information.

Submitted by:
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Names of project leader(s) and team members

Team Members (in alphabetical order)

- Robert Bottomley – Senior Web architect – primary programmer responsible for the UCR Web site
- Ross French – Web content manager/web writer – responsible for all written content.
- Ryan Kuchler – Web application developer – maintenance and upkeep since launch.
- Dawn Saenz – Project manager – helps keep the rest of the team on task, talks to clients, etc.
- Luis Sanz – Creative director – responsible for overall design of the Web site.

Project Summary

The objective was to design a new campus “Umbrella” Web site (www.ucr.edu) that helps visitors quickly reach the content they are seeking, while telling the story of UCR, increasing awareness of the university and all it has to offer. The site would be the “flagship” for a complete re-working of all UCR Web sites, helping us create a consistent brand throughout our Web presence.

This process included:

- The implementation of new technological features.
- Creation of a design standard that adhered to World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) and Section 508 of the Disability Act to ensure that all visitors have the best experience possible.
- A complete redesign of the thought and methodology of how content is developed, organized and written.
Project Description

As the only public research university serving the Inland Southern California region, we realized that our home page and Web site lacked curb appeal. Our site did not create a sense of place nor did it underscore what is unique about UC Riverside, its students, faculty or alumni.

As part of an overall campus branding effort, the UC Riverside Web Development team was tasked to create an externally-focused “virtual front door” incorporating our newly developed brand identity, messaging and Integrated Marketing Plan. The Umbrella Web site would allow our visitors to find the information that they were seeking, quickly and logically, while informing them about the story of UCR. The goal was to increase awareness of the university and all it has to offer.

Upon completion, the site would be the “flagship” for a complete re-working of all UCR Web sites, helping us create a consistent brand throughout our Web presence.

The Importance of Content Organization

As an institution of higher learning, we were cognizant of the fact that many visitors come to our Web site to quickly get to specific information. This required us to take a long, hard look at our content and ensure that we were making it easy for our visitors to find the information they need.

Perhaps what is most innovative and unique about our Web site, at least compared to other academic sites, is that we made a conscious effort to put the visitor first. Rather than just putting what we thought should go on the site, we utilized marketing research, analytics, testing, and even first-person discussions to learn what our visitors were seeking when they came to the UCR.edu site. While this may seem to be common-sense, we were surprised at how challenging this was, particularly in an environment with so many great minds with different opinions on how things should be done.

By concentrating on content organization, we put the discovery of information in the hands of the visitor. Each page is designed to provide enough information on a subject so as to allow the visitor to “drill-down” to the content that they are seeking.

While we wanted to help the visitor get to their content, we also wanted to create a branded feel to the site, creating a place where we could get our message out to the audience without ham-handedly hitting them over the head with it. Finding this proper balance was an exciting challenge.

UC Riverside is an ever-growing research and academic institution, and a member of one of the pre-eminent university systems in the world. We believe our Web site now truly reflects our university.

Target audiences

Visitors to UC Riverside’s Web site are (in alphabetical order):

- Alumni
- Community members
- Donors, supporters, partners and friends
- Faculty (current and prospective)
- Industry leaders
- Media
- National and academic thought leaders
- Parents
- Staff (current and prospective)
- Students (current and prospective)

Our experience with our previous site showed that it is impossible to try to be everything to everybody on the front page. To help solve this problem, we put a great deal of thought into the proper organization of our site, getting each section of audience the information that they are looking for as quickly as possible.

In general, we consider our audience for the Umbrella Web site to be external. That does not simply mean non-UCR students or employees, but rather those individuals who are not overly familiar with UC Riverside
as a whole, or perhaps just a specific aspect of the university. For example, a faculty member in the College of Engineering could be considered external to the Department of Dance.

In addition to the standard subjects that you might find on any university home page (athletics, academics, administration, about, etc.) the home page also provides audience-specific content pages that are designed to anticipate subjects that our visitors might be seeking. The site’s design puts the power of discovery in the hand of the visitor. Content was organized and written in a way that allows the visitor to make educated choices as to what information they wish to receive.

For example, the section for future students provides information on the general campus life experience, then provides links to the Student Affairs Web sites, where a visitor can find more specific information about that aspect of the university. Our faculty page is geared towards both prospective faculty members who are considering working at UCR as well as current faculty who may not know about all the resources available to them.

**Technology Information**

**Omni-Update Content Management Software**
The largest piece of technology infrastructure was the new Omni-Update content management system. Off the shelf, this product is designed to allow for multiple users to create content, routing it through a central editor or publisher. However, the software required quite a bit of customization by both the UCR Web Development team and the team at UCR Computing & Communications.

**Microformats**
Microformats ([http://microformats.org/](http://microformats.org/)) are used on the site where appropriate. For example:

- Using the Operator plug-in allows Firefox understand microformats
- The General Campus Information in the footer is a microformat. The operator recognizes this information and gives the option to add the contact to an address book or to map the address using Google, MapQuest, or Yahoo.
- Find People results are also in the contact microformat. To discourage spammers from harvesting addresses, we rate-limit searches, purposely slowing down and failing to give results if too many searches are done.

**Emergency Notification System**
Southern California is prone to natural disasters, such as earthquakes and brush fires, and recent emergencies on college campuses, such as Virginia Tech, raised the awareness of the need for a campus-wide emergency notification system. A component of the larger, campus-wide Emergency Notification System, this system has the ability to display detailed messages at the top of every page that uses the new design. The system was tested successfully during the Great American Shake-out Earthquake Drill in 2008.

**Implementation of Google Analytics**
Analytical information from the Umbrella Site is gathered by Google Analytics and has been used to make subsequent content and design changes.

**Implementation of Google Search tool**
Replacing an antiquated and extremely unpopular search function, the Google-driven search tool indexes our entire Web site and provides a much greater service to our visitors by improving the site search function.

**New Calendaring System**
The new site also allowed us a forum in which to implement our new Google search tool, which We also implemented a new calendaring system that better promotes events on campus.
Back-End Developments
Several new back-end functions were developed to simplify the management of the site.

The administrative portal makes updating content for the home page and the Happenings event calendar simple. Content can be set up weeks and months in advance.

Scheduling of Content
The UCR home page and “Happenings” calendar of events content can be scheduled to be posted in advance via the Administrative Portal (above). All content can be scheduled to be posted weeks, even months in advance. This allows long term planning for content and the flexibility to make short-notice changes. In either case, this simplifies the process of keeping the home page and the calendar content fresh.

There is also a “preview” function to allow you to see how the page should appear on any given day.

Search Function Augmentation
In addition to pulling up a series of search results, our search function also returns “Suggested UCR Web Pages” (below right) that allow quickly points people towards the content they are looking for. We can modify these suggested pages and other search term results based on data of how visitors use our site. A simple form allows us to quickly add new terms for suggested results and the A-Z list (and its sub-lists).

Campus Map Search
If a search term is a building code (e.g.: INTS), a link to the building on the campus map is displayed.

At left, an example of a search for a building code. The link takes you to the campus map. At right, a search for Chancellor Timothy White demonstrates the suggested page function.
A-Z List Improvements
In addition to a cleaner and re-branded master A-Z list, several sub-lists for the areas of Colleges & Schools, Departments, Programs, Research Resources, Campus Services and Community Resources were also created. These sub-lists are linked to from specific pages, making it easy for visitors to find the content they are seeking. (below)

A look at the UCR A-Z list, with the available sub-lists at right.
Implementation Timeline

The design and the construction of the Web site was the culmination of a three-year project to make-over the entire UCR Web presence and tie it in with the campus’ general marketing plan.

- **April 2006** – Necessity of UCR.edu Web site revamp presented and accepted as part of a campus-wide branding program.
- **June 2006 - June 2007** – A campus-wide task force is developed to help refine and evaluate the architecture, navigation, and look and feel in order to create consistent design standards.
- **Summer 2007** – Preliminary architecture and wireframes established.
- **Fall 2007** – Preliminary content development concepts established.
- **October 30, 2007** – Content development kick-off meeting. Timeline for the development of content for each of 16 sections developed.
- **Friday, June 20, 2008** – Launch of the 250-plus page site at approximately 11:00 p.m.

From March 2008 through February 2009, the UCR home page had approximately 4.1 million visits. The new home page launched in June, 2008.

Customer satisfaction data

It can be difficult to quantify the level of customer satisfaction with a new Web site. Analytic data can tell you how often a page is visited, how much time a visitor spends on a page, and where they go from there, but nothing to tell you how satisfied the visitor is with the experience.

The new UCR Web site was designed and built for an external audience. But what does it mean to be external? We look at this in two ways. First, there is the clear delineation between “People who work at or attend UCR” and “Everybody else.” But we have also kept in mind the fact that just because someone works on campus, it doesn’t mean that they are aware of what is happening in other departments or divisions. It is very possible to have an external audience among the people that call UCR home.

The UCR.edu home page is a front door, a lobby, a gateway to allow our visitors to reach the content they are seeking quickly and logically. A good portion of our visitors are newcomers to the university, prospective students and/or their parents, external faculty, etc. For them, we have created logically laid-out content that helps them make educated decisions about what path of information to choose.

But we also have many visitors who are internal to the campus, who are simply looking to quickly move to a site somewhere in the UCR.edu domain and who do not need or want any tailored content. For these people, we have created a simple A-Z list of sites as well as provided a simple Google search box. Both of these resources allow visitors who know what they are looking for to find that content quickly. We have also created some more refined A-Z lists, such as departmental and program lists, which strive to simplify the navigation path.

Evaluating feedback

Receiving and evaluating customer feedback can be difficult, because it is often the “squeakiest wheels” that take the time to write, that is, those people who have a negative reaction, get angry and want things to be fixed.

It is noteworthy that the majority of customer complaints we received were of the “Who Moved My Cheese” variety: people who were upset with the fact that we had changed the Web site at all, who weren’t willing or able to explore the site and see what it had to offer. In fact, the first complaint came just hours after the new site was launched, from an individual who was angry that he could no longer get to the campus’ Webmail system from the front page.

Our approach to addressing these comments and concerns has been to examine them all fairly and equally. This can be difficult at times, depending on the amount of logic and vitriol in the comment, but there have also been instances where even though the user was in error, we made a change to provide a better customer experience: Some examples:

- A faculty member complained that he could not reach the Academic Catalog through the Web site. He stated he had tried the search tool and had still not been able to find it. It was later determined that he had not tried to use the A-Z list, and further determined that when he had searched for the
catalog, he had spelled the word “catalogue”. We went into the search tool and added the spelling “catalogue” to ensure that others would not have the problem.

- Several faculty members wrote to complain that they could not reach the Academic Calendar through the site itself or the search tool. In each of these cases, it was determined that the faculty member was incorrectly spelling the word as “calender”. As a result, we added the misspelled word to the search database.

Overall, the response to the new Web site has been overwhelmingly positive. Some sample comments:

- “It gives the UCR Identity a complete makeover!”
- “The new UCR home page and related new pages are bright, clean, and simplified for much easier navigation.”
- “The photo headings are engaging and remarkably positive. The text related to arts and culture is focused and upbeat.”
- “I am writing as an alum to thank you for your excellent work on the redesign of the UCR homepage. I feel that the new design of the homepage will attract the right type of interest in the campus and the UCR community.”
- “Being that this is a digital age, websites often serve as a first impression of the University. If I were a perspective student, even before planning to visit the school, I would visit the website for insight to what UCR is all about. Marketing is everything. I feel that UCR is finally being marketed as the jewel that it is.”
- “I don’t know when it launched, but the new site looks great! Give my congratulations to all those involved- it may have taken a long time but the results are outstanding!”
- “Just wanted to let you know...I love the new design. It's gorgeous!”

**Awards and Recognitions**

- 2008 CASE Gold Award Winner - Web Sites (Institutional Home Page or Special Pages) or CD ROMs
- eduStyle.net Noteworthy Site of the Month – August 2008
- Featured site in *The eduStyle Guide to Usable Higher Ed Homepage Design*