

EQUIPPING THE ARS VIVA INSTITUTE WITH WEB COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

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ABSTRACT: This contribution presents the results of the project entitled *Equipping the Ars Viva Institute with target communication channels of new media*, co-financed by Public Scholarship, Development, Disability and Maintenance Found, Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia and European Social Fund. The main purpose of the project was the development of clear and efficient online communication channels and accessible web media based on the activities and the pursued goals of the Institute. The goal was to introduce new digital strategies into the functioning of the Institute and to strengthen the already existing online channels. The results of the project were planned to increase the Institute's recognisability in the local and wider environment and to help the disadvantaged groups better integrate into society. Experimental work involved the user-centred design of a new user-friendly website and the optimisation of the use of social networks.

Keywords: web communications channels, website design, user experience, social networks.

1 INTRODUCTION

The Web is becoming one of the key elements of communication and organization in the lives of all people, so it is important that the information and services it offers are accessible. Certain vulnerable groups are faced with many problems in the use of the Internet. The Web allows vulnerable groups access to information and more opportunities for interaction. It is important that the web can be perceived and understood by all, so that they can navigate through it, interact with it, and co-create it (Demšar, 2015). Web accessibility means that people with disabilities can perceive, understand, navigate, and interact with the Web, and that they can contribute to the Web. Web accessibility also benefits others, including older people with changing abilities due to aging. Tips for Web Accessibility introduce some basic considerations for making a website more accessible to people with disabilities. Tips are grouped by activities in Designing tips, Writing tips and Developing tips (W3C, 2018).

The basic concept of user-centred design is: *Take the user into account in every step of the development of the product*. This design approach includes five planes (James Garrett, 2011):

1. The Strategy Plane: involves the understanding of what the users want from the product and how that fits in with the context and other goals they have
2. The Scope Plane: the strategy is translated into scope through the creation of functional specifications and content requirements.
3. The Structure Plane: the scope is given structure through interaction design, in which we define how the system behaves in response to the users and information architecture.
4. The Skeleton Plane: the skeleton plane breaks down into three components: information design, interface design and navigation design.
5. The Surface Plane: here, the finished product (functionality-oriented product or an information resource) creates the sensory experience.

Moreover, while it cannot be denied that accessibility and usability are two qualities that interact with each other it has always been difficult to define the scope and extent of this relationship. In fact, if accessibility and usability are not properly integrated, Websites can turn out to be either accessible but barely usable, or usable but barely accessible (Aizpurua, 2016).

The Ars Viva Institute is a culture centre and incubator active in the field of social issues, integration of disadvantaged groups into society and awareness of local cultural and natural heritage. The Youth Hostel Ars Viva operates within the Ars Viva Institute and is the first accommodation object in Slovenia which is completely adapted for the physically impaired individuals. Due to the remoteness and lack of recognisability of the institute on the national level, there was a need for clearer representation of activities and the Institute's vision through media and visual communication.

2 EXPERIMENTAL

2.1 Website

The website design began with the analysis and evaluation of the current Institute's website at the time. Online communication channels of other, competitive non-profit organisations and providers of accommodation in the region were also analysed. The final step of this phase was the definition of target users. Target users were split into two groups namely locals and tourists. Locals are people who live in the region and are interested in Institute's activities such as workshops and events. This group includes young people, parents, elderly people and people with disabilities who have difficulty integrating into society. On the other hand, the second group includes tourists who prefer different experiences and love nature and culture. The needs of the boughs groups were taken into account while designing.

In the second phase, web-content types, web-functionalities and the needs of the Institute were determined. This was followed by the development of information architecture and interaction design.

A simple card sorting method was used to create information architecture. Content for the new website was written on cards which were then distributed in to different groups. Prior to the design of wireframes, the trends in website graphic design and recommendations for accessibility were examined. It is very important to create a user-friendly and interesting website. After the review, wireframes were designed in Adobe Illustrator. The design of wireframes began with raw schematic models and gradually proceeded to the final form. Graphic design began with the determination of the colour scheme and fonts used on the website. This was based on the Institute's logo which kept the consistency over the entire graphic identity. By upgrading the wireframes with graphic elements and content, final design was gradually reached using Adobe Illustrator, Adobe InDesign, and Adobe Photoshop.

Depending on the needs and the knowledge of the representatives of the Institute a decision was made for the website to be managed in Content management system WordPress. This makes it easier for administrators to manage content and the website in general.

Furthermore, the new website was tested with the founder of the Institute, who is disabled. The feedback obtained in this way has helped us improve the accessibility of the website.

2.2 Social networks

The workflow for social networks optimisation involved the analysis of social networks in which mistakes that affected attainment of target groups and consequently, the recognisability of the Institute were discovered. Optimisation was based on the needs of target groups and focused on social networks, such as Facebook, YouTube and Google+. On Facebook, the main problem was the improper posting that did not reach target users. For this purpose a model was designed for targeted promotion. Interesting, informative posts and posts with local content were created to teach the representatives of the Institute how to properly prepare the posts and how to communicate with the target users through social networks.

The model contained ten posts featuring mascot Bruno the bear, which was developed as part of the project. Bruno helped inform about the region and the Institution. Promotion started with a post announcing that the Institute, in cooperation with students, is working on a project within which the mascot is being developed. The following posts were of informative nature, containing interesting content about bears (behaviour, eating habits, bear encounters in the wild), local sights and events organised by the Institute. In the end of targeted promotion the new website was presented. All the posts were evenly distributed over a period of two months to obtain as many followers as possible.

The goals that were set during the planning of the strategy were for posts to trigger responses (comments, likes and shares) and to increase the number of followers.

Throughout the targeted promotion action, responses to each post were monitored and compared with responses to other posts that were not part of promotion action.

3 RESULTS & DISCUSSION

3.1 Website

Analysis of the old website revealed poor user experience due to badly structured information architecture. The Institute and the hostel had two different websites which were badly connected and confusing to the user due to their poor organisation and visual layout. Other design flaws were also found, such as typography without caron letters, various typography in news, small images and fonts, overlapping images and text and poorly visible typography due to inappropriate colours. Photos in the photo gallery were small and opaque. Furthermore, there was no link on the website leading to the Institute’s social networks.

The competition was analysed from the aspects of the Institute and the hostel in which the competition of the Institute was represented by other non-profit organisations with similar activities in the region. The analyses was based on online communication channels. Two thirds of the analysed organisations did not have websites or did not have user-friendly websites. The rest had websites with good user experience. Almost all of the non-profit organisations in the region were present on Facebook. The analysis of the hostel was done in a similar way. The competition of the hostel was represented by other accommodation providers in the region. About 80% of analysed accommodation providers did not have websites or did not have a user-friendly websites. The rest had modern and user-friendly websites. The competitive advantages that can be highlighted are the presence on the web, an inspiring story, the enthusiasm of all generations and interesting events such as workshops, exhibitions and concerts. A big disadvantage was the unclear connection between the Institute and the hostel and poor information structure.

The main need of the locals as a target group was clear announcement of the events, as well as the ability to view those events online in a gallery of pictures and videos. The possibility of accommodation is the most important information for tourists, so it was necessary to establish a clear link between the Institute and the hostel.

The information architecture, presented in Figure1, displays clearly divided content on the website with all the features and touch points. In this part of website design it was important to create a link between all social networks and the website and to create networking. The needs and wishes of the Institute regarding the content and functionality were taken into account.

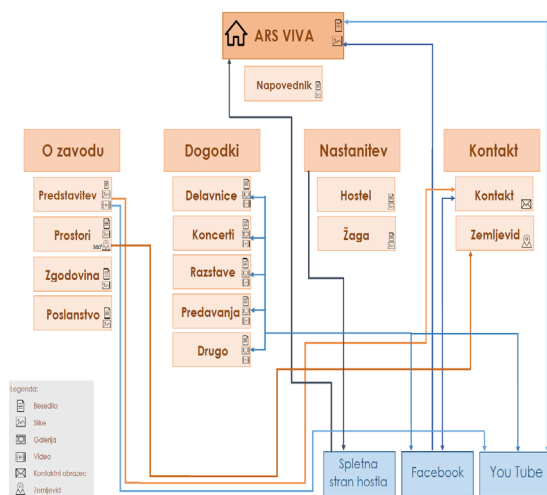


Figure 1. The information architecture.

The site is designed to be simple and easy to use with alternating layout which makes the site dynamic. The main elements on the site are images through which the Institute narrates its story. The design was derived from the elements and colours of the overall graphic identity of the Institute. The logo of the Institute is included in the website’s navigation, as home button. The image of old house, which is also an important element of the identity, is included in the footer. The primary colour used is orange, which is combined with gray, white and blue. Two fonts are used, linear font Open sans and serif Playfair Display for titles. On the left side of the site are buttons with links to the social networks of the Institute. In Figure 2 a wireframe and a design of subpage is presented.

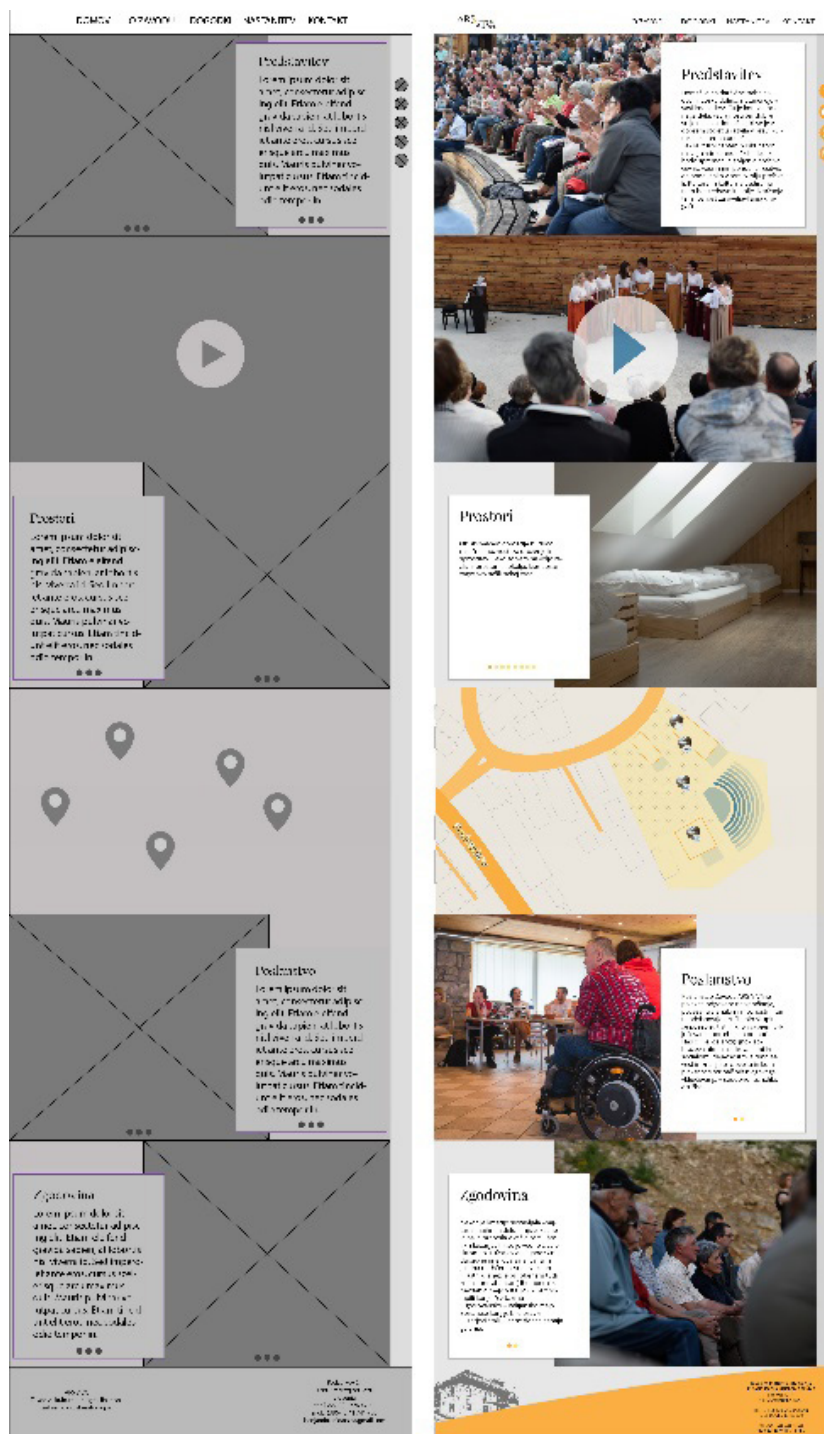


Figure 2. Wireframe and design of subpage About the Institute.

During the whole planning, design and programming of the website, recommendations for accessibility were taken into account. At each stage of website design, representatives of the Institute were consulted. The ultimate site also included the ability to adjust the contrast for the visually impaired and a side slider, for those who cannot scroll with the mouse.

As a result, the Institute was equipped with a freshly developed, responsive and accessible website that enables simplified communication between the representatives of the Institute and target users and high level of online communication. Finally, the sustainability of the project results was achieved with the transfer of knowledge from web developers to the representatives of the Institute.

3.2 Social networks

Facebook page analysis revealed that the page had a relatively small number of followers. It was also found that the founder of the Institute posted content from his private Facebook account instead of the Institute’s page. Content was then shared on the Institute’s page which is the reason why posts could not reach a larger crowd. The results of the target promotion showed that Bruno’s posts and Bruno himself were well received (Figure 3). Responses to Bruno’s posts were on average better than responses to other posts, when sponsored posts are not included.

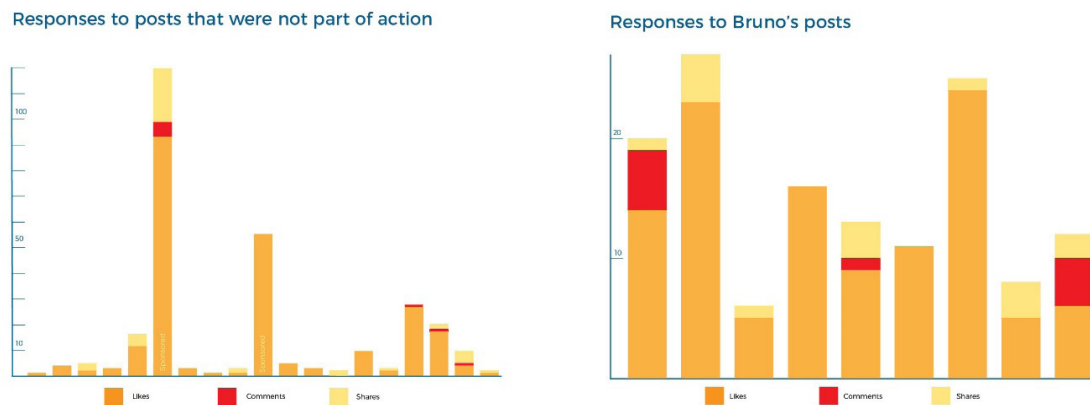


Figure 3. Responses to posts target promotion.

With the optimisation of the Facebook page and implementation of a model for targeted promotion of this network, the number of followers was increased and the informative and engaging level of content was improved.

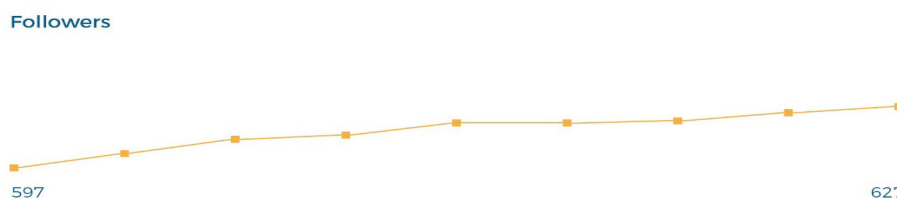


Figure 4. Numbers of followers target promotion.

YouTube channel review and analysis revealed that the Institute had an inoperable channel due to problems with access (problems with the e-mail administrator). The YouTube channel of the Institute was therefore transferred to another e-mail from which the representatives can access the YouTube channel. Video data was also optimised by editing it with descriptions and keywords.

4 CONCLUSIONS

When it comes to website design it is important to include target users and their needs at every step. That is the way to provide an interesting website with good experience for all users. Most websites are designed without the consideration of disadvantaged groups and other minorities which is why they might struggle when navigating online. Our website design was based on the needs of all groups including the disadvantaged. Analysis and constant communication with the target users was the key to reaching our final goal. The results of the project were of a great importance and a benefit for the representatives of an Institution Ars Viva and also for local and regional environment. The project results’ dimensions included networking, informing, introducing and especially connecting target groups with disabilities. Moreover, the sustainability of the results were achieved with the transfer of the knowledge to the representatives of the Institute that through accessible web media can continue with transparent, modern and engaging communication.

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