VAMC upgrade listening sessions

Research Readout

Denise Eisner
denise.eisner@civicactions.com

Suzanne Gray
suzanne.gray@civicactions.com

March 10, 2022

Context

VHA Digital Media led 4 listening sessions with editors involved in Drupal CMS migration in 2021

CMS team merged comments into themes that in turn translated into three opportunities for the content ecosystem

January 2022

February-March

February

VHA DM shared recordings with the CMS team
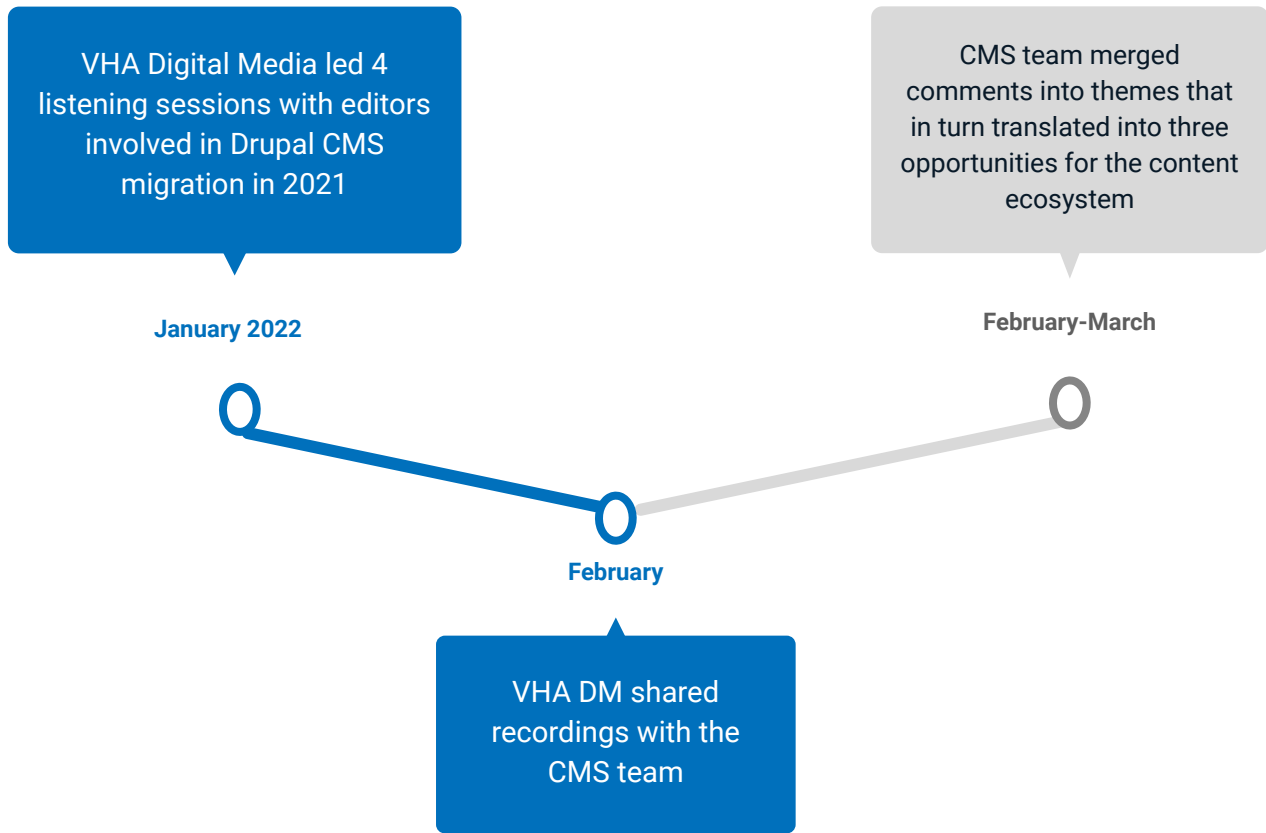
Editor feedback

Feedback: Overall

Editors felt left out of the process before and during the VAMC upgrade in 2021– and they want to be part of making things better in the future.

"Why should we have to pay the price for your poor planning?"

"You've got to see that we're working ourselves to death for you—let us work to death for you in a more positive manner."

Feedback: Planning

Project planning happened at the national level, with little input from editors in the field.

"How about, instead of everyone trying to brainsmith it up there [at national level], ask for a little feedback from the field ahead of time."

Feedback: Planning

Project planning happened at the national level, with little input from editors in the field.

"How about, instead of everyone trying to brainsmith it up there [at national level], ask for a little feedback from the field ahead of time."

Feedback: Communications

Editors' bosses were sometimes unaware of the project, and it didn't become a priority until late in the game.

"If this project is so important, why is it up to us to explain the importance of it to our leadership?"

Feedback: Communications

Some editors are frustrated about the lack of transparency about decisions made at a high level. They often don't understand the reasoning behind strategic priorities.

"I had to change my health center name for SEO purposes, but is that real? There's no one pointing to evidence. … Is the juice worth the squeeze?"

Feedback: Onboarding

Some editors felt ill-equipped to create their content, and struggled to get the help they needed.

"The language spoken was not our language... You have IT people trying to teach IT skills in IT speak to people who are broadcasters, print journalists, and photographers."

"If you want us to do this [project], it needs to be in things we are skilled at doing or in a system that we are familiar with and that talks to us in a way we're familiar with."

Feedback: User support

Many editors appreciated the upgrade team's office hours as a way to address questions and get support in an informal setting.

"The video training was good, but the hands-on training is what really works." [referring to office hours]

Feedback: Editor roles

The new website does not support some of editors' tasks around engaging with internal stakeholders and doing the public affairs part of their jobs.

"We're too busy being traffic cops to add feature stories."

"I understand the focus was on Veterans using the website, but Research and Academic Partnerships are an important part of our mission and they were both treated like afterthoughts, frankly."

"I was shocked at how much [content] did not come over [from Teamsite], and then fielding all of the angry calls from within the service."

Feedback: summary

1. **Overall**: Editors felt left out of the VAMC upgrade process.

2. **Planning**: Project planning happened with little input from editors in the field.

3. **Communications**: Editors' bosses were often unaware of the project, and it didn't become a priority until late in the game.

4. **Communications**: Some editors are frustrated about the lack of transparency around strategic priorities.

5. **Onboarding**: Some editors felt ill-equipped to create their content, and struggled to get the help they needed.

6. **User support**: Many editors appreciated getting help through Office Hours.

7. **Editor roles**: The new website does not support some of editors' tasks around engaging with internal stakeholders and doing the public affairs part of their jobs.

The challenge

Engaged and motivated site editors are essential to the success of the VA.gov modernization project.

Engaged editors …
- Have a sense of ownership
- Understand the value
- Advocate for improvements

The challenge

VAMC now

VAMC upgrade was completed successfully …

but it came at the cost of some editors' goodwill.

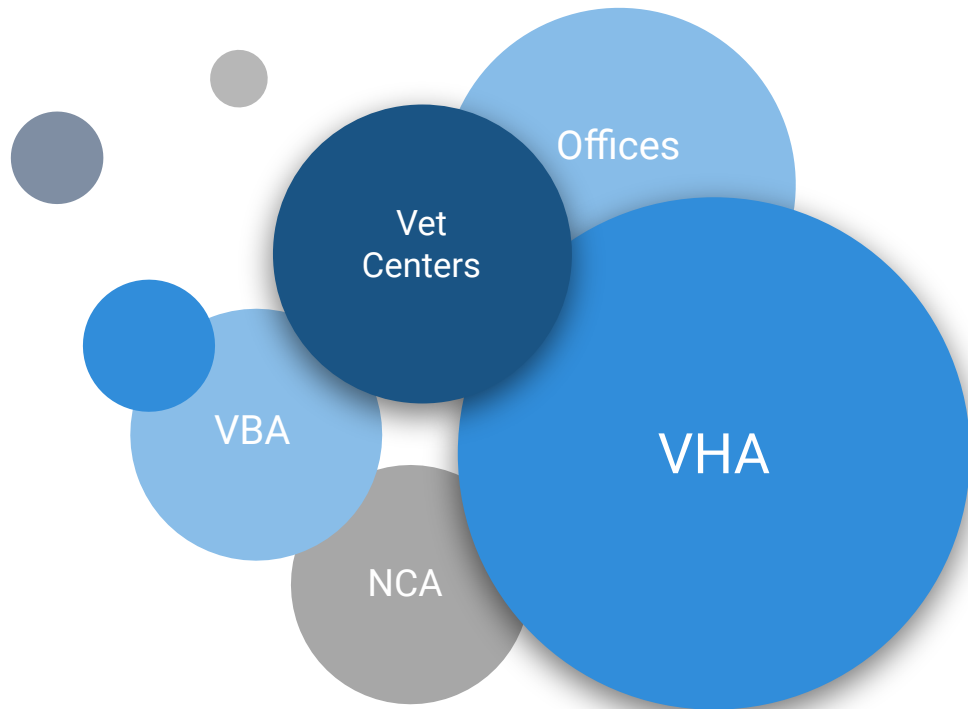This puts the quality of content at risk over time.

VA.gov in the future

Hundreds of new site editors are coming on board …

How will this scale?

Opportunities

Opportunity landscape for our growing ecosystem

Opportunity 1: Empower editors to be content champions

When editors fully understand the "why" behind changes, they will create better content, have better conversations with internal stakeholders, and feel better about the work.

How might we …

- present a compelling vision for the project that is woven into all aspects of the editor experience

- offer more transparency into upcoming features and changes, and the research behind them

- give editors the understanding and confidence to address changes with internal stakeholders

Opportunity 2: Build trust with editors

By understanding how website work fits into editors' lives, we can address problems before they happen. By responding to editors' needs, we can earn their trust.

How might we …

- design our approach to change from a deep understanding of where editors are at

- conduct more rigorous discovery and engagement *before* change happens, to build awareness and buy-in and understand gaps and constraints

- ensure we are supporting the end-to-end experience for all editors, from onboarding to mastery

Opportunity 3: Present a unified approach to content

As we scale, all editors need to hear a single, clear voice on how to create Veteran-centered content. This will make the migration process faster and less painful for everyone.

How might we ...

- make the CMS into a friendly guide throughout the content creation process

- efficiently coordinate the product content ecosystem across teams

Opportunities: Summary

1. Empower editors with "why"
- Share the vision early and often
- Offer transparency into upcoming changes
- Create better advocates through better understanding

2. Build trust
- Research where editors are to see where they need to go
- Support the end-to-end experience
- Connect through two-way conversation

3. Present a unified approach
- Single voice on content creation
- CMS as a friendly guide
- Coordinate across internal teams

Conclusion

More engaged editors = better content for Veterans