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Evaluation 4

A website's scope is the set of goals the webdesigner(s) set out to achieve when creating

a website. In some ways, a website's scope is much like its skeleton. The skeleton of a website is,

as the name would imply, the backbone of a website. The skeleton is what holds a website

together and gives it its form, structure, and functionality. Thus, where the skeleton is the

backbone, the scope is the DNA – the set of ideas that makes up what the website is, forming its

skeleton, and guiding the other elements of UX design. Any good UX designer knows that the

key to an effective scope is understanding the website's users and primary target audience; after

all, scope is what helps determine the necessities for the best user experience (Romero).

Understanding one's user base means many things. In layman's terms, it is to understand

what, visually, the audience is drawn towards. It's also the ability to understand the mindset and

attention span of audiences, as well as their expectations. If a UX designer does not know these

things, then they do not understand their users, and therefore cannot set out with the proper scope

needed to fulfill the goals of the website and make it ideal for its audience.

Scope can be divided into two categories: concept and content (Romero). A good

concept, hopefully, will give birth to good functionality. Likewise, one hopes it would also give

birth to good content, though the two can certainly exist individually without the other. To create

content aimed at providing the best user experience possible, one must collect data on both the

intended users and the content that will be featured on the site. Then, that information must be provided to the designers so that the data may be implemented and the website built around it (Romero). Furthermore, the data must be presented on the site in a visually appealing manner, and the site must be designed so that visitors can fulfill their objective(s) in going to the site with relative ease and free of frustration, so that they may leave the site feeling satisfied and accomplished (Romero). If a user does not leave the site satisfied, then more likely than not, the UX designer(s) have failed to work with a sufficient scope.

Another key to setting up an effective scope is ideation, or challenging beliefs and concepts. Sticking to one perspective allows a designer to become stale in their design, and ideation is designed to get around that roadblock (Foundation). Ideation, or collaboration with team members to discuss the scope, allows for the exchange of ideas (GGwriter). In so doing, UX designers can broaden their horizons, build upon ideas with their colleagues, and even detect and remove less sufficient, subpar plans for the design process. Ideation is not without its risks, however; in order for the brainstorming and discussion to stay on topic and not derail the project into outlandish design goals, a structured environment is required, so that the scope may remain within a reasonable set of parameters (Foundation).

The subject of this evaluation is the website for the Public Library of Johnston County & Smithfield, or PLJCS, located in Smithfield, Johnston County, North Carolina. Smithfield is home to a diverse population of people from all races, genders, ages, and socioeconomic statuses. As such, the scope of this library's website must be considerate of its various audiences. Fortunately, there are many connecting factors between these groups that can help make the process easier. Still, for its scope to be considered efficient and successful, it must accommodate the outliers of the community, and not merely a few voluminous sections of it.

The homepage of a website is a keyhole into predicting whether or not a website may fulfill its scope. The homepage for the PLJCS' website is decent, but lacks some qualities that would otherwise enhance its useability. Namely, it lacks a simple search bar, instead opting for a place for users to enter their information – library card number or username, and their pin or password. This is useful for that box of content labeled 'Search & Reserve Books,' though proves inconvenient for anyone wanting to quickly search whether or not an item is in the library's catalog without any obstructions in the way, minor though they may be. Furthering the frustration of the design, clicking the hyperlink tab 'click to log in (no need to register)' takes the user to a page outside the PLJCS to an associated page with NC Cardinal connected to the larger Johnston County library system – Johnston County Affiliated Libraries.

This page is increasingly problematic; the eye catcher is yet another place for users to enter the same credentials from the aforementioned box on the homepage of the PLJCS' website. While there is an option for new users to create an account, it is tucked away in the top right corner of the page, rather than near the log in area, where it could stand out to users. For those with low attention spans, those in a hurry, or merely those who expect ease of access, this is quite inconvenient. While there is an obvious search bar that provides the ability to narrow down searches by format, type, and library, it does not solve the issue of there being no immediate search bar on the PLJCS' homepage.

The "native" search options available through the 'Search' dropdown of the PLJCS, isn't much better; to put it bluntly, there is no truly native item catalog on the website itself. Instead, everything is external. That said, the link to the NC Cardinal catalog is slightly better than that which is available through the previously discussed NC Cardinal page. What makes this one unique is that it has lists of staff recommendations, recently added titles, and popular titles. As

such, credit is given where credit is due, and it is certainly due. One suggestion on improving the scope of this individual page, however, would be to include movie, television, and musical items. While books (and now eBooks) may be the traditional items serviced in a library, more and more audiences come to seek out movies, television, and music, as technology and entertainment continues to evolve.

Nevertheless, these faults are not the determining factors for the overall quality of the site's scope. Visually, it contains a good deal of graphics helpful in showing not just what the library is, but where it is, and what it's for. This is great for all audiences, but parents and grandparents especially, as the slide on the homepage features multiple images of children and adolescents attending programs at the library, which signals that the PLJCS is a space for children to grow and learn with kids like them in their community. Other areas of the website, such as the pages to reserve a meeting space, or checkout electronic devices, provide ample images representing the areas/items to users so that they can make a decision that best suits their needs. Likewise, these images are accompanied by descriptions which aid in that process. In terms of non-collection resources, the UX designers for the website certainly get a point for scope.

Between the lists of services, various catalogs, and patron engagement guides, the site appears to have a decent grasp of its scope – not perfect, but far from bad. The site provides ample information in the form of event schedules, hours of operation, forms, and graphics, though it could do to increase accommodation by adding resource pages with information for patrons of various identities, from race, culture, age, gender and sexuality, etc. In a way, the library is sort of bare bones in that regard. Certainly, this library's website could have benefited from more – or better – usability testing.

Unfortunately, UX testing can become quite expensive, and smaller businesses and organizations often have no choice but to accept the initial product, leading to websites with sub-optimal UX design (Sergio, et al.). However, one group devised a method with the hopes of circumventing this issue, making it possible for those businesses and organizations with smaller fundings to still achieve good UX design for their websites. This method involves five stages, with the first four being covered by a UX expert, and the final stage being the only one to involve actual developers. The process is as follows: the UX expert tests tasks, scenarios, and metrics, after which they analyze the results before applying any necessary improvements, which is followed by user testing of the new and improved tasks, which the expert then reviews after the completion of the tests. The last stage sees the developers receiving the best results and implementing them, before a final test is performed with another group of tasks (Sergio, et al.). By cutting down on the people involved, and by finely organizing the objectives, as though a scientific experiment, a more cost and result efficient UX testing process is made. Furthermore, a unique set of tools were used in the processes, that while not entirely necessary, proved substantially beneficial in helping to successfully apply this new method of testing. Thanks to these tools, the method was made "feasible and practical in the context of an agile development" (Sergio, et al.). By allocating the bulk of the testing to usability experts and decreasing the work done by developers, this method significantly cuts back on the cost necessary to create a user-efficient website, making it an optimal solution for smaller organizations, such as the Public Library of Johnston County & Smithfield.

In regards to the cost of UX design and production scope, there are those in the design community who would critique the common "way of the land," so-to-speak (Leisio).Currently, according to UX critic Tim Leisio, the approach frequently used for determining the necessary

scope of a website goes for the cheapest route possible, which often comes at the detriment of a website's users. This, Leisio suggests, is from a focus on features and functions, rather than a focus on something more "humane" - value. Simply, Leisio feels scope design should focus less on the functionality and features of a website, and more on the value a website provides its audience. Where there is an unhealthy demand for features, design teams, and the designs, begin to suffer; a demand for features leads to service teams pressuring product teams to create features, meaning product teams create a pleasing feature lest they "fail," resulting in a repetitive process that goes on until the product becomes so manipulated that it "bleeds that people use it." In other words, sites are designed not around creating the best user experience possible, but around pleasing stakeholders to merely stay afloat in an ever competitive ocean of designers.

Furthermore, where features can be implemented cheaply, they will, meaning that where the bare minimum will suffice, the bare minimum will be used (Leisio). Building solely around features can also lead to dry products that are merely a series of new, hot technologies, rather than something crafted from a recipe of heart and care for the intended users. Instead, a scope that has the user in mind and which is formulated around scenarios and experiences – the Who, What, When, Where, and Why of the users - allows the designers to build a site based on scopes, strategies, and methods proven to please users (Leisio). Unfortunately, that may not always be the best scenario for web developers, with so much of the design world being run by money and politics (Natoli). Still, keeping in mind what Leisio has to say, it remains ever important to have the user in mind. Clientele are never the same, always having a unique set of characteristics and desires for their commission(s). Designers who want to develop an effective scope that services the purposes of creating a user-friendly experience, must hold to that truth and implement it in their design. What works for one client may not work for another, and where a designer forgets

that is where a designer fails (Natoli). A scope that is not focused on the needs of the intended user base is not a good scope, and a bad scope cannot meet those needs.

It is possible budgeting may have been a concern in the creation of the PLJCS website, as well as the larger NC Cardinal platform; that would certainly explain having a single, joint system between all of the libraries in the state and counties. Budget concerns aside, however, I still find it disappointing that the PLJCS does not have its own unique set of catalogs available on its own website. Still, the PLJCS site does display its resources well enough for its users, while also offering easy navigation in most areas. The website, while by no means perfect, does its job well enough, and earns a passing score in the scope department. Though, if the evolving thought on scope is applied, with the users at the heart of its development, the PLJCS website could truly shine.

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