Lakeland Heritage Project
FINAL WEBSITE RECOMMENDATIONS

INST490

Restorative Justice for Lakeland has a unique opportunity to draw upon recent trends that have inspired a shift in American political tenor. More than ever, communities are drawing upon the potential of network connectedness and technology access, to facilitate progress and solidarity for victims of discrimination. This has resulted in an invigorated effort and renewed commitment from city governments, seen in other cities such as Asheville, NC; Evanston, IL; and St. Paul, MN.

Activists are indeed raising their voices – but a volunteer, grassroots movement is only as powerful as its reach. With a nuanced approach to information architecture and strategic web campaigning, there is broad potential to motivate supporters far outside the scope of Lakeland. To elevate the cause to the state and national government level, earning justice for millions who lost housing opportunities to redlining or eminent domain, the Lakeland Heritage Project should set its sights high. Through collaboration and modern information sharing with other similar reform organizations, paired with a focus on access, pleasurable user experience and search engine visibility, an effective website can be one of the strongest ways to elevate this topic to the national conversation.

Recommendation 1: Develop a Robust Information Architecture

Managing data effectively is the best and most important way the Lakeland Heritage Project can prepare for an increase in scope and contributors. While ease of use may be a key priority in the early stages, it is important to understand that flexibility is the best way to ensure limited long-term maintenance, data cleansing, and privacy or security concerns. It is paramount to capture limited user attention quickly online as well, with a seamless user interface. Even before considering the design, the first step is plan the data on paper, with effective grouping and a logical browsing flow.

- *Integrate data, don't separate it*

With over 170 different "subjects" in the current dataset, it can be very difficult to know how to categorize a new submission – and the complexity could become a discouraging factor for community participation. While AirTable behaves like an SQL database, the inability to run queries greatly diminishes the ability to host an easy to navigate archive. The number of photos, videos, and other artifacts can grow to a staggering and exponential degree with even a handful of new participants. As discussed with members of the organization, being able to categorize in multiple different ways and group archives based on family, location, topic, or event is ostensibly a primary goal.

Our recommendation is a modern data-driven website designed with object-oriented programming. The majority of the internet operates on JavaScript ES6 and API requests; this means file information is stored in an adaptive way where groups can easily reference each other interchangeably. Instead of a hierarchical structure that forces things to be shoehorned into specific categories, a location can have many associated events and families, and vice versa, families can be grouped themselves. In

addition to being more adaptable, it also allows hosting data on a third-party website, greatly reducing time consuming and costly IT support. A JavaScript program can go from the front end of collecting user data, all the way to the back end and automatically sort data. The overall recommendation here is to migrate data behind the scenes to a public online collection like Archive.org, which can be much more cost and labor effective than hosting an in-house server.

- *Create multiple mental models*

While information architecture can be outsourced and consulted, no technical professional is going to understand the context of the dataset and the best way to organize it as well as genealogists with the project. Although we made recommendations from a theoretical standpoint, great care should be invested in making sure the volunteers themselves will not feel overwhelmed sorting through it. Diagramming multiple different options of organizing the data and comparing them as a group will yield much more seamless results when it's time to migrate the database. There should be more than one in order to truly explore the differences in how to look at the data.

The organization currently is at the mercy of an AirTable architecture that is difficult to maintain for large datasets – less time spent revisiting and re-sorting things is critical. Right now, while the archives are still in early stages, is the time to take stock of the most recurring and significant categories. Any loosely categorized items that don't share much similarity with neighbors in the dataset should be reconsidered, while consolidating any groupable categories. It is also important to reach out to community members themselves to find out how they look at the heritage project and how they would be most likely to search for related data. Focus groups, surveys, and volunteer feedback events are invaluable guidance for assessing the clarity of the mental model before the site is fully developed.

Recommendation 2: An interface with fade-in text graphics and large, interactive media.

- *Understand the context – how will the data be accessed and used?*

The Lakeland Heritage Project is not a law blog; A photo and video archive can only benefit from effective, updated quality and presentation. Ease-of-use is a key goal - people of various ages and levels of technical skill will be accessing the page. However, this is not incompatible with a responsive and forward-thinking website. Internet users are drawn to visuals rather than large blocks of text. As a result, an outdated click through library may not be the most conducive solution, or the easiest – static designs introduce high amounts of cognitive load, particularly for new first-time web visitors.

Both heavy and light internet users, for different reasons, require interactive engagement to spend time and attention on new web pages. While very descriptive content has a certain role in this project, this can be done tastefully on "About" and "Resources" tabs, on one-page that renders large scrollable text in article format on a photo background. Letting the content speak for itself could be the

best way to tell the story in a way that reaches people's emotions. Gentle colors and fonts with smooth fade-in displays should accompany the archives with text as well, curating it almost as though it's an interactive museum exhibit. Some verbiage is necessary; a well-designed header with clear navigation was a feature of the initial Figma prototype, and Search Engine Optimization goals can also conflict here. Generally though, the fewer words static in plain, small font on the page, the better. The initial hook is not from people reading text, but immersing themselves in what a vibrant community Lakeland was.

- *Responsive design is your friend*

Our recommendation here is a collage-style display of large, clickable images, complete with ergonomic displays such as sliding roulettes of media. Being able to turn through the "pages" of the website, like an easy to digest magazine rather than a novel, is an internet priority. Subtle fade-in and screen sliding actions are another reason to move toward JavaScript or React, to maximize screen space and only display prompts when the user wants more information.

While most of the community of Lakeland itself may not be accessing the page through a phone, a responsive design using modern flexbox-oriented CSS is key to accessing broader populations. Many prefer to swipe through photos and upload media with a few simple finger gestures. The use of cell phones as primary internet devices is recently prevalent, particularly among working class communities. A clunky website that lacks compatible flexibility reflects poorly on organizational preparedness. Appealing design is a sign of professionalism, a means to being appropriately perceived as a legitimate movement of progress-focused genealogy experts.

Recommendation 3: Search Engine Optimization and Public Relations

Perhaps our most important recommendation is to focus on what makes websites expand. Today, 92% of the search engine market is cornered by Google. In essence, establishing a presence on the search results is the single determining factor in the exposure any organization receives. Effective data architecture and design are the first steps. However, this is not a late-stage goal best reserved for organizations with resources – the true value of Google is the simple way it is operationalized.

- *Link to Other Organizations to Improve PageRank and SimRank*

There are two primary algorithms guiding the prioritization and classification of Google search results. PageRank is simply a measure of how many reputable web pages link back and forth to each other. In the context of restorative justice, this is some of the groundwork that non-technical members of the organization can contribute. There are a number of political action groups in other major cities, as well as community heritage projects, volunteer organizations, and eminent domain or housing malpractice. Reaching out to these groups to develop mutual "Links" and "Additional Resources" pages can make a large difference for both parties' exposure, and help bridge the gap to make widespread activism and awareness a reality. It cannot be stressed enough that collecting these sorts of

connections, perhaps with larger organizations and web pages, is the single greatest way to increase online visibility. A high PageRank score could mean the front page of search results.

This can be as simple as getting an entry on Wikipedia. SimRank, while more sophisticated, is another algorithm that can be leveraged in a very similar way. By employing a "hub and spoke" method, disambiguation pages that link to many similar resources and draw traffic are also given a higher score. In that sense becoming a resource for restorative justice in general rather than simply an archive to browse may be a serious consideration. In this way the plethora of Washington Post articles and publicity Lakeland's community has recently earned could be a major asset.

The potential here is limitless. Although not a technical recommendation, if related anti-discrimination and community heritage organizations collectively formed a one-stop resource, it could create booming momentum for the cause. An ideal version of this would be complete with nationwide restorative justice news updates and exhibits on various African American communities. Embedding networks of links to related groups may seem obvious and simple, but a concerted effort toward this can really launch a website, provided quality Information Architecture, accessibility, and responsive design.

- *Keywords, Phrases and a Moderate Social Media Presence*

SimRank also cross examines websites for not just keyword similarity, but similarity of writing pattern as well. This is where important HTML tags and keywords come in; the keywords in the headers of HTML are the driving force behind appearing in as many related searches as possible. Specific locations and phrases are ideal; Terms must be broad enough to be a common denominator in queries, but specific enough to draw limited results. Below are a few examples that we user-tested and confirmed to be common "desire paths" among users seeking information – words and phrases that could benefit to make themselves comfortable multiple times throughout the page:

- Lakeland
- Restorative Justice
- Eminent Domain
- Maryland Redevelopment Plan
- Redevelopment
- Housing Discrimination
- Heritage
- Archives
- Lake Artemesia
- Black History
- College Park

FINAL WEBSITE RECOMMENDATIONS

As illustrated above, granular terms that require deliberate typing and refer to very specific contexts are good bets for keywords. In addition, with the outstanding searchability, succinctness, and influence on public opinion that Twitter possesses, it is difficult not to suggest that a daily or semi-daily posting schedule is mandatory for political activism. An embedded Twitter news ticker coded to share Restorative Justice – related news to the page on a sidebar is one of the simplest and freest ways of keeping an online audience engaged. This can be accomplished either through social media-connected volunteers or via a Twitter automation bot such as Meet Edgar, while automated resharing is as simple as connecting the easy-to-use "searchTweets" API with the front end page with a small amount of code.

Recommendation 4: Login Form, Upload Form, and Account Data

Effective form design can go great lengths toward assisting volunteers with data management and genealogy. This holds participants to a modicum of accountability for uploading files with the necessary metadata. Most preferable is a form that is designed to gather all the information in a way that automatically filters the submission by category, owner, and the people or locations featured within. This way, the pipeline straight from archive submissions directly to an online hosting database could greatly reduce technical load on volunteers. Additionally, any missing information or fraudulent, unauthorized contributions can be followed up via email, improving the sense of two-way conversation between the project's curators and the community. Tampering or security concerns are more easily dealt with via authentication requirements as well. Collecting metadata at the source, and the associated account data of the user, is key protocol for any online data driven archive.

Recommendation 5: Prioritize Accessibility

This final recommendation is certainly not an afterthought. The website should be an effective website for everyone, regardless of challenges with visibility or motor skill. This is not only true for older generations who may have lived in Lakeland – it is demonstrably a modern priority of the internet as disability advocates raise their voices. From alt-text for Amazon screen-readers, to accessible color palettes for the colorblind, to light text on dark backgrounds, there are a wide range of principles that can aid the website's usefulness for the impaired. We recommend using the World Wide Web Consortium's Accessibility Guidelines as a benchmark, and keeping this goal in mind throughout the process is the best way to ensure it is not overlooked when making design decisions.

Conclusion

Perhaps the most important recommendation we can make is to view the website as a process rather than a finished product. The internet and its trends have incredible potential to spread awareness and crowd source support, but these waves pass rather quickly without the necessary flexibility, engagement, and limited mental effort of a well designed web page. While our prototype illustrates a

sense of direction for the page, accessibility, security, and data management will continue to be key priorities that could amplify the organization's message.

We express sincere gratitude for the opportunity to work with the Lakeland Heritage Project, and are honored by the community bond and trust we shared, cooperating towards a strong cause.

Mercy Akede
Jasmine Okebugwu
Randall Mentzos
Maham Sohail
Shrey Thakkar