

ENSE 271: People-Centered Design: RMO Website Project Wrap-Up

June 13th, 2022

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Business Need/Opportunity

The RMO's current website has very little features, and is very unintuitive to navigate. As such, they want to create a new website with more of a focus on music distribution and user communication. This website would be for members only, but allow for easily adding new members. Their primary wants are for ease of use, music distribution and quick, effortless administration work. This project would take place over roughly a 2 month period with a possible extension of work given to the chosen team. The project will have to be made using WordPress.

Reflections on Project Planning

For this project, we decided (based on the information gathered from our first customer meetings) that our Northstar customers would be the Conductor and Section Leads. As such, our carryover customers would be the general member base of the RMO. This assumption stemmed from the discussed purpose of the site. During our initial meetings with the RMO, it was found that the site would be mainly used to distribute seasonal music and as a communication hub for its members. Due to this, the primary users for this would be the sectional leads and conductor, as they would need to upload/update the music selection frequently.

At the beginning of the project, there were some assumptions made. Firstly, we assume that our users would not be very technically inclined. As such our design would have to cater more towards those types of people. Secondly, we assumed that there would be a general administrator for the site. This pairs nicely with our last assumption that a roles system would be required for this project. This allowed us to make a more powerful user role that would be able to control the rest of the users. One additional assumption was that we would focus only on the member's site. Some of the constraints we were given was the use of WordPress, ease of use, and a focus on mobile and tablet development.

From our planning documents (Affinity Diagram and Empathy Map), we were able to find a point of focus: ease of use. This allowed us to really focus/drill down on that one specific aspect. We arrived at this conclusion as most of the RMO expressed difficulties and frustrations with site navigation and general UI problems. This finding would come really into focus in our prototyping.

For our prototyping, we really focused on the ease of use aspect. Ideally, we wanted anyone to be able to understand at a glance what a page does and how to operate it. As previously discussed in other documents, we utilized signifiers in our design such as the arrows on dropdowns which show to the user that it is a dropdown. Emails and phone numbers are also underlined which show to the user that they can be clicked. These signifiers enhance the user experience by giving them clues as to how the website can be used. Furthermore, we also utilized affordances and signifiers through the "Add New" button which clearly signifies the purpose of the button. Finally, we used metaphors such as the push-up pin to signify pinning to the top of the list. This allows the user to easily know the function of the pin icon even if they've never used the site before.

Reflections on Project Results

There were a lot of positive things about this project. For one, we really enjoyed the opportunity to work with a client. It was an important experience that I think would help us all in future endeavors. Second, we enjoyed the fact that we had a project to work in to apply the theoretical design principles we were learning. Having a project made it easier to apply our theory in a way that will leave more of an impression than just lectures and homework would. Lastly, I enjoyed the fact that we had to make a website. Personally, we didn't really enjoy working with WordPress. We found it a bit too hard to get into from a developer standpoint. This could be due to some of our members having previous development experiences and preferring a code-based approach.

There were some things that went well during the project. All the planning and set-up before WordPress was very intuitive and we created good prototypes. Furthermore, we had a solid design idea so work was easy to design. Figma was easy to implement a functional prototype in and will be very helpful in future projects.

Some of the things that went not as well would be the WordPress implementation. WordPress implementation was a little hard to fully implement as a lot of features were hidden behind premium plugins. Furthermore, base WordPress was missing a lot of general functionality that would have helped implementation. More time to explore WordPress could help some of these issues, but in the end, WordPress implementation did not proceed as smoothly as other sections of this project.

A lot of the design principles that were covered in this class fit into our project very intuitively. However, they could also hinder creativity as the nicest looking solution was not essentially the best solution. That being said, I believe that these principles were more helpful to our final product than not having it.

Empathy mapping and affinity diagram is a very useful way to organize user needs and solutions. We would definitely use Figma for the planning of future products. It is a very useful software to visualize and plan the general look of a site/product. Furthermore, it is (or is close) to the industry standard. Being a free software, it is also very accessible. We would not use WordPress again. We think that some of its lack of features and need for user plugins makes it very hard to use for development.

There are plenty of opportunities for future work ideas. Our current user table does not contain search functionality. This could be implemented to help users navigate it. Not all sections were considered with a mobile-friendly viewpoint (like the users table). Improving our design to ensure a more mobile-friendly design would be a top priority. In general, there are a lot of little aspects in our design that could be further improved with more time to tinker with WordPress. There were also a few notes we received from the RMO that did not make it into our current build of the site. One notable feature that we would like to add in the future is the ability to send an email to a whole section without needing to manually type in each member's email address.

WordPress Plugins/Themes

- Code Snippets
 - Rating 5/5 stars based on 373 user ratings
 - Last updated 12 hours ago
 - 600,000+ active installations
 - Code Snippets allow custom php and html code to run on your pages or in the background. We use it to dynamically display the user's first name on the dashboard as well as dynamically generate tables to display members.
- Content Control
 - Rating 5/5 stars based on 361 user ratings
 - Last updated 2 weeks ago
 - 40,000+ active installations
 - Content Control allows for restricting access to specific pages or posts based on login status, user role, etc. We use Content Control to restrict the site to logged in users only, as well as to prevent unauthorized users from accessing the "Post Music" page.
- FooBar WordPress Notifications
 - Rating 4.5/5 stars based on 6 user ratings
 - Last updated 3 weeks ago
 - 3,000+ active installations
 - FooBar WordPress Notifications allow for notifications to be created which appear at the top of the screen and can be dismissed by the user. We use this plugin on the dashboard to display any announcements the conductor may have for the rest of the orchestra.
- Starter Templates
 - Rating 5/5 stars based on 2996 user ratings
 - Last updated 1 week ago
 - 1,000,000+ active installations
 - Starter Templates provides access to hundreds of pre-made templates to act as a starting point for developing your WordPress site. We used Starter Templates as a base which installed a theme and allowed us to begin customizing the website.
- Ultimate Addons for Gutenberg
 - Rating 5/5 stars based on 829 user ratings
 - Last updated 2 weeks ago
 - 300,000+ active installations
 - Ultimate Addons for Gutenberg provides a variety of new blocks that can be used when creating the site. We use a variety of these blocks in our website.
- User Role Editor
 - Rating 4.5/5 stars based on 257 user ratings
 - Last updated 1 month ago
 - 700,000+ active installations

- User Role Editor allows you to create and edit roles on your site. It also allows you to select specific permissions for each role. This extends the functionality of the default WordPress role system. We use this plugin to create specific roles for each section as well as for the admin and conductor. This allows us to use these roles elsewhere to prevent the user from doing unauthorized actions.
- User Submitted Posts
 - Rating 5/5 stars based on 846 user ratings
 - Last updated 4 weeks ago
 - 20,000+ active installations
 - User Submitted Posts allows us to create a form on the frontend that allows the user to create a post. This means that we don't have to give the user access to WordPress's post creator and can pre fill certain fields (such as the category). It also features a markdown editor so users can still have full customization abilities over their posts. We use this plugin to allow the conductor to post new music.
- Astra [Theme]
 - Rating 5/5 stars based on 5072 user ratings
 - Astra is a fast, fully customizable theme which provides a header, footer, and menu creation system.