

Voelker Orth Museum Homepage Redesign

OVERVIEW: *Background*

It was the 1880s – the Victrola in the living room played soft music, interrupted occasionally by the ringing of the crank phone in the kitchen. A Victorian garden just outside the window beckons for a stroll through nature. Such imagery was the essence of the Voelker Orth Museum, a historic middle-class house and a Victorian garden tucked away in the corner of Flushing, NY. Besides house tours, visitors can enjoy art workshops, educational programs, art exhibitions, and cultural performances (all with free refreshment of juice and crackers in its vintage kitchen!) while stepping into the recent past. An annual celebration of Oktoberfest attracts a diverse crowd, serving both German and Korean cuisine – as an integration of the house’s early German immigrant occupants and the rising Korean community established in the neighborhood. A private non-profit organization, the museum operates through funding from both private and public sources.

PROBLEM STATEMENT: *Increasing Website Usability & Community Outreach*

I decided to redesign the museum’s website because of my previous employment at this institution, and my understanding of its goals; At the time of my employment, the museum was heavily focused on increasing community engagement through surveys, online postings, and flier distribution. Upon recognizing the benefits of an up-to-date website in achieving these goals, I revisited the museum’s and discovered that there had barely been any changes. Based on my experience supporting the museum’s mission and my growing interest in digital design, I became inspired to redesign the website homepage in a personal project with two goals in mind – improve its usability and attract potential visitors.

USERS & AUDIENCE: *Creating for the Potential Visitor and Program Attendee*

The target user of a museum’s website was a potential visitor with various levels of familiarity with its programs. Considering the consistent promotion and popularity of the museum’s weekly recreational workshops among families and children, the ideal user was the caretaker of children residing in the neighborhood.

SCOPE & CONSTRAINTS: *Closure and Research Constraints*

Due to ongoing public health concerns about the pandemic, the museum is temporarily closed. The website redesign will need to incorporate this current closure and its impact on the museum's operations. Another limitation is the nature of a mock project; Without direct collaboration with the museum's administration, there is a consequential lack of access to its archive and quantitative research, such as the visitor log and survey results, and the constructive feedback from the client.

REDESIGN PROCESS

1) *User, Business and Competitor Research:*

The typical website user is either a first-time visitor or a local program attendee, looking for more information about exhibitions and programs. Meanwhile, the objective is to increase the total number of daily visitors and program attendees, generating relevant statistics for the continuation of funding.

To gather ideas for the website redesign, I conducted competitor research on other New York City museums – a similar community museum like the Tenement Museum, and larger, well-known museum like the Museum of the City of New York. Based on the strengths of their websites, I determined that Voelker Orth Museum's own website could benefit from more clear navigation systems, attractive display of featured programs, directed use of buttons, as well as an overall efficient use of spacing.

2) *Creating User Personas: The Local Mother and the City Explorer*

Next comes the fun part – creating user personas to better assess user needs. Let me introduce Anna, the mother of two kids in the surrounding neighborhood of Flushing, of Chinese ethnicity. She is searching for a family-friendly activities for her children, and her priorities are accessible location and minimal financial commitment.

Then there's Mark, the city explorer with a keen interest in community history and culture. He is fond of taking family and friends to one of his many adventures. He will prepare

for the trip by gathering information on the museum's cultural and historical significance, programs offered, and logistics such as transportation and duration, as well as the surrounding restaurants and attractions.

3) *Keeping Up with Modern Times: Adding Usability and Accessibility*

The process of redesigning a website for a long-standing institution should balance the needs of returning users and a new audience, who has familiarity with the modern internet and therefore expectations based on current trends. Ease-of-use, readability, and virtual engagement were standards I kept in mind while creating wireframes.

4) *Building the Experience: Virtual Engagement & Responsive Design*

- The color palette comprises of cedar brown, moss green, and soft yellow to match the museum's vintage and natural appeal
- At the top of the homepage, the museum name and a horizontal navigation bar are clearly displayed to guide the user
- A large picture of the museum gives new visitors a quick view of the museum's exterior
- Content space was optimized through elimination of white space, increased font sizes, and enlarged images
- Closure notices are brought to attention with a change in color, sizing, and placement
- Open hours and directions, with the addition of an embedded Google map, are placed together for ease-of-use while planning a trip.
- A new button featuring a "virtual tour" offers viewer ways to engage with the museum despite the current closure
- The purpose of the "home" button is replaced by the museum's logo
- Finally, a responsive design is added for mobile use; major changes include reducing the navigation bar to a list, and re-organizing content into a single scrollable column

OUTCOMES & LESSONS: *Balancing User & Business Goals with Mockup Constraints*

Through the process of redesigning an existing webpage, I have learned many invaluable lessons, from the importance of research to the implementation of both user needs and business objectives. Especially since this was a mockup project, asking myself "why?" for every

decision was crucial. There was content and administrative constraints to consider in possibilities for the redesign – for example, the addition of a Chinese translation option to cater to the local Asian community would be a drastic new feature that might create potential problems for maintenance and therefore require the director's approval. In addition, any alteration to the homepage might affect the organization of the entire website's content, a factor that was out of my scope for the purpose of this project – to simply redesign the homepage.