WRIT 3896: Internship in Technical Writing and Communication

Internship Final Report

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Date: December 9, 2019

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Introduction

The purpose of this report is to explain my internship experience as a Web Communication Intern at Lutheran Social Services of Minnesota (LSS) in St. Paul. This report covers the design and development processes of two projects I completed during this internship - Contact Directory and the Sort Site Website Scanner Tool. First, this report will discuss the organizational structure of the department I worked in at LSS and the constraints that were involved in working there. The planning and software used for this project will be outlined as well as the final review and publication stages. The report also covers general practices I learned while working at LSS and key skills that I practiced from my Technical Writing and Communication education.

Section I: Organizational Structure and Department

Within LSS, I worked in the Marketing and Communications Department. The marketing team consists of four marketing and advertising professionals that primarily work with our designers to create our marketing materials, such as brochures, posters, and campaigns. Our communications team then works closely with the marketing professionals to understand what materials they will need and what other resources they will need from other departments at LSS. They then relay this information to those that need it. For example, when it comes time to print marketing materials, the communications team will provide the finance team with the overall cost of the materials and printing so that they can provide the financial resources to do so.

Moving onto the team I worked on, the web team is a small team within these two departments. The team consisted of myself, a coworker who was titled “Web Strategy Specialist,” and my supervisor, who was our “Strategic Communication and Digital Marketing Professional.” The three of us worked with outside consultants and contractors to do the majority of the web programming and coding.

My position primarily consisted of making updates to the website and assisting the web team on various projects that they had going on. Many of the projects would include updates on specific pages, and they would be coming from outside departments or services. An example would be someone from our Meals on Wheels Service program would email my supervisor saying that one of their meal options needed to be updated on the website. Then, my supervisor would develop a task, or list of things that needed to be done in order to complete this request and then assign that to me to complete. Typically, my workflow would be recorded and assigned with cards on a CRM tool called Trello. Trello is similar to other kanban board tools, but instead of each column just consisting of notes, it consists of separate cards assigned to different people. Each column is then labeled “Not Started,” “In Progress,” “Review,” or “Done” and this is how progress was tracked on tasks (see figure 1 below).

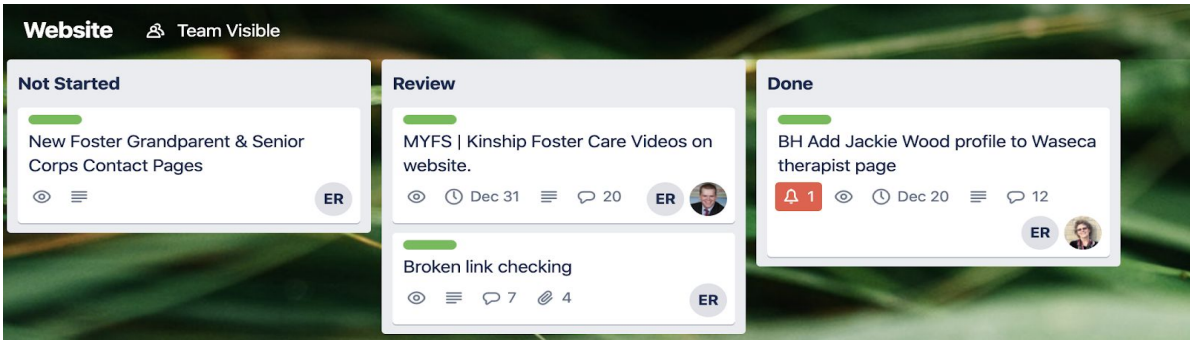


Figure 1: Trello Interface

So, when my boss would assign me a task, he would assign my avatar to the card, and place it into the “Not Started” column. Then, when I was working on it, I would have it in the “In Progress” column, so that he would be notified I had started the task but was not yet finished. Once I was done with task and ready for him to look over my work, I would put the card into the “Review” column and he would get a notification to look over what I had done. There is also a place to put comments on cards, so if I had things to tell my supervisor about how the work had gone, where the work was located, or anything else he would need to know in order to evaluate it, I could put them on the card where he could read them (see Figure 2 below).

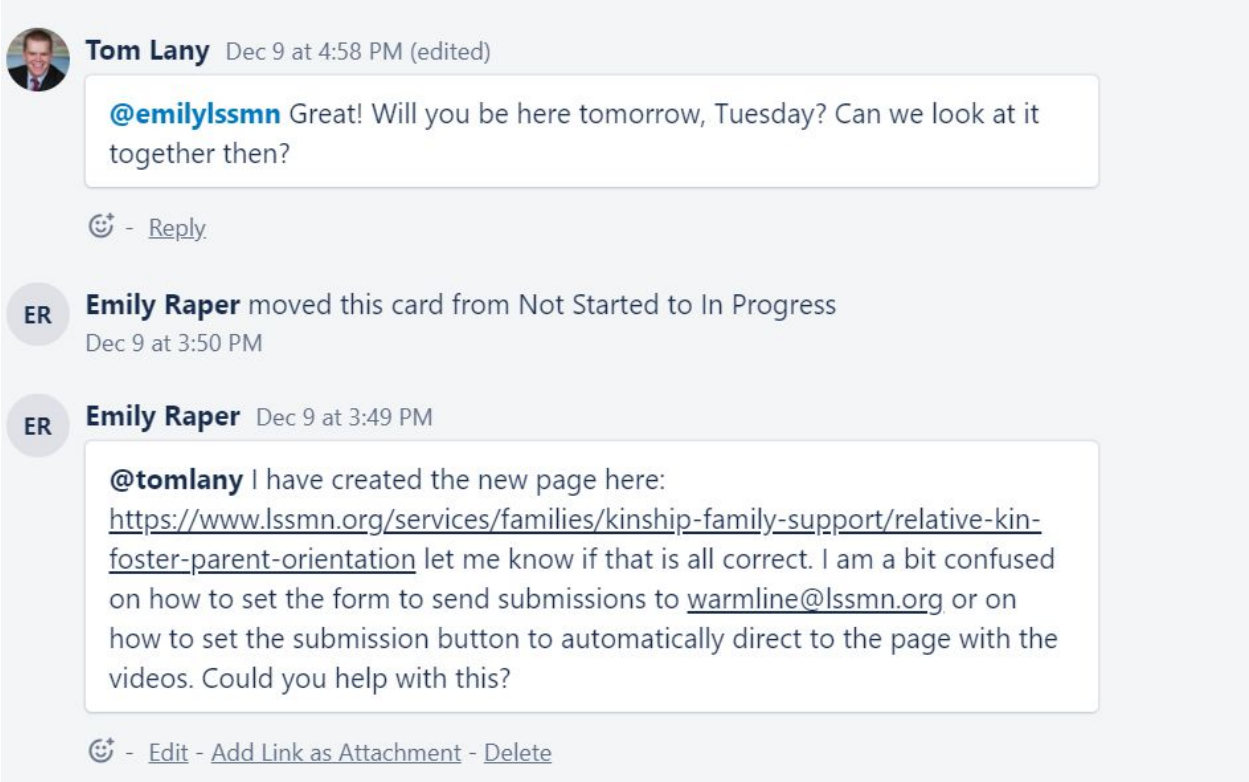


Figure 2: Trello comments

He would also have the same opportunity when looking at my cards, and when if there were more items I still needed to do to complete tasks, he would put notes in the

comments and move the card back to “In Progress.” If he determined that I had finished the task, he would move the card to the “Done” column and I would know to no longer work on it.

Constraints

Overall, there were minimal constraints during this internship that derived from the position or organization itself. I was given twenty hours a week, which was always plenty of time to complete the projects I had been assigned, and I typically worked during the hours that my supervisor was available to answer questions or help troubleshoot if needed. The organization itself was also flexible with scheduling and was willing to let me complete hours from home when I was dealing with health issues or when there during large snowfalls. So, overall, there were minimal constraints involved during this position.

Section II: Genre and Audience

Moving into the two main projects I worked on, I will be discussing the audience and genre behind them.

Contact Directory

The first project I will be discussing is the contact directory, which is a component of the LSS website that allows users to find the services they need and search for these services based on location, keywords, or categories. The need behind this project stemmed from an inefficient method of communication that was currently being used.

Prior to the creation of the project, all contact requests were being emailed to a single person within the communications department and she was needing to handle where they went from there, which was a huge time-consuming task and caused requests to take longer to receive a response.

Therefore, there was a need for a contact directory where people would be able to contact the services they wanted directly and where they would be able to find online resources about the service. So, the process of creating a contact directory began. This project was primarily created for the users of the site and the clients of LSS. They are the main audience of the project and the ones that will be putting the product to use. The genre of the project falls under user experience or services management because of the purpose it is fulfilling.

SortSite Website Scan

The second project I will be discussing is the SortSite Website Scan, which is a method LSS uses for investigating and identifying broken links, usability and accessibility issues, search engine optimization flaws or suggestions and other areas that may be wrong with the website or the website's content. SortSite is the scanning tool that takes in the website's URL and the proceeds to complete a three to four hour scan of the entire website. This tool will then provide a concise report indicating what issues were found, where they were found, and how to fix them. The genre for this project, again falls primarily under user experience because anything fixed as a result of the report will ultimately benefit those who use our site. However, it will also benefit

LSS overall because users will be more pleased with site and use it as it was designed to be used instead of trying to find workarounds like calling offices or coming to offices in person, which can be time consuming for those involved and inefficient for solving actual problems.

Section III: Planning, Research, and Drafting Stages

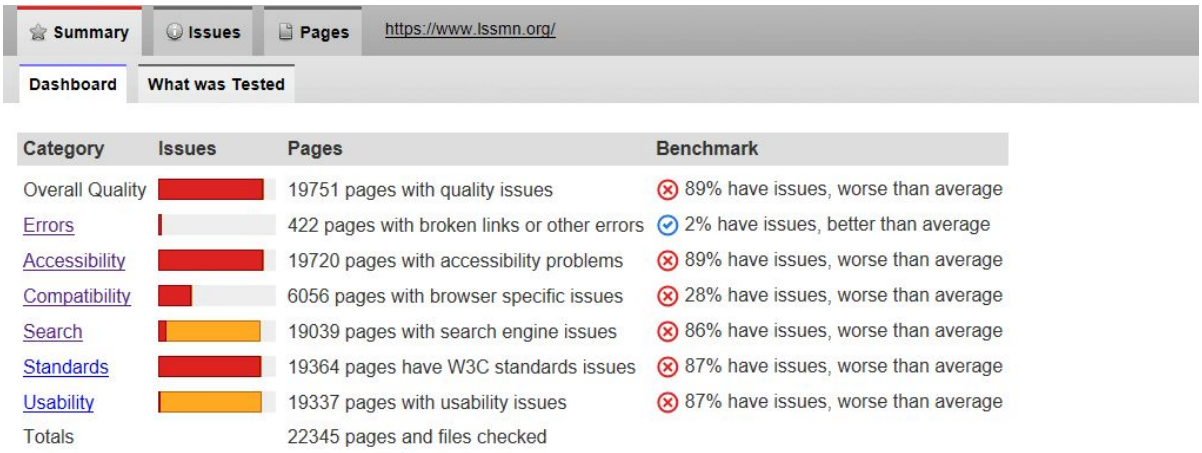
Contact Directory

Much of the planning for the contact directory project took place before I began my internship at LSS. The project was primarily completed through the efforts of the LSS web team and a contract development agency called TEN7. TEN7 worked with LSS to develop wireframes for the project, and then did the majority of the programming that took place during the project. When I got to LSS, the contact directory, had not yet been launched, but it was very close to being complete. The main stages I participated in during this project were the Review, Testing, and Revisions stages and the Publication Stages.

SortSite Website Scan

The SortSite website scan was an individual project that I primarily worked on alone. I had my supervisor to oversee my work and provide help when needed, but the majority of the work, in all stages, was done by me. I started the project, by getting to know how the software worked. The planning and drafting stages mainly consisted of teaching myself the software and deciding what key things I wanted to note. The scanning tool is able to check for website errors in a few main areas: broken links, usability, accessibility, compatibility, SEO/search engines, and standards. In order to setup the test, I needed to decide which of these to test for. First,

the primary reason for running the test was to find the broken links that existed on the site, so I definitely wanted to make sure that the test checked for that. Accessibility and usability are also two areas where LSS really focuses its efforts, so I included them in the scan along with compatibility, and SEO/search engines. After setting up the test, I ran it and watched the tool



compile a report of issues it had found (see Figure 3 below).

Figure 3: SortSite Report Summary

You can see in the figure, that the SortSite tool lists all of the issues it found, gives you the overall quality of the issues and lists how many pages are impacted by each issue both in numbers and percentages. Then, each issue is available to click on for more details.

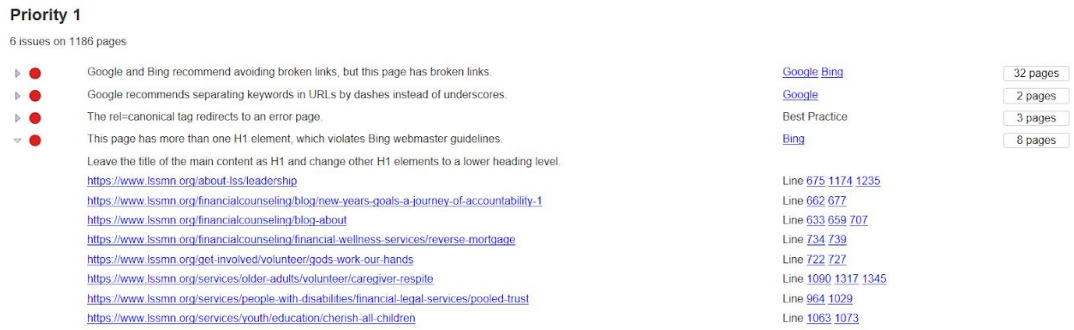


Figure 4: Broken Links Issues Expanded

As seen above, expanding this issue gives you an exact list of the specific issues, or in this case links, that are impacted by the issue. This makes it easier to fix and resolve the issues.

Following the completion of the SortSite report, I began to compile a report of my own. On an Excel spreadsheet, I outlined each of the issues found within the main categories that we were focusing on for the project. After this, I began tracking down the specific pages that the links or issues were located. After this, my supervisor and I went over the spreadsheet together to ensure that everything I had written was correct, and then I began to actually make the corrections to the issues in the SortSite scan.

Section IV: Hardware and Software

In this section, the hardware and software used throughout the internship will be discussed. As expected in any web-related position, the majority of my work used a computer. I used the Windows computers at the office to do the majority of my work, which was a change for me considering I have always used a Mac for homework and work. LSS is a Microsoft dominated company as well, meaning that they primarily use tools such as Outlook, Word, PowerPoint, and Excel to complete their work, whereas I am more used to using Gmail, Google Docs, Google Slides, and Google Sheets. So, given that I had less experience with these tools, I did need to learn how to be efficient when using them. While I came in to the internship with a very clear understanding of what each of the products did, I still needed a refresher on the small tips and tricks that make each tool efficient.

In addition to the mental switch from Mac to Windows and Google to Microsoft, I also had some new software products to learn. For certain parts of the contact directory project, SharePoint was a heavily used tool. While I knew what SharePoint was and familiar with similar tools, I did need to learn the software in order to edit the data we had in stored in the database.

SharePoint turned out to be a very useful tool for editing and organizing and then exporting to Drupal in the end. Another new piece of software was the SortSite tool. SortSite was a product that I had never heard of before, but greatly enjoyed using after learning it. It is a great way to scan a website and to find and correct issues quickly, without needing to put in an excessive amount of grunt work.

The biggest tool used throughout the internship was of course Drupal. Drupal is the CMS which LSS hosts their website on, and one of the most powerful CMS's out there. Coming into the internship, I had extensive Drupal experience because I had used it when working for CLA web and for the Minnesota Historical Society over the past summer. However, because Drupal is so customizable, it is used differently by every company and every website is hosted and organized slightly differently so there is always a bit of a learning curve with the CMS when you start at a new company.

Section V: Review, Testing, and Revision Stages

Contact Directory

The contact directory was launched just a few weeks after I began at LSS.

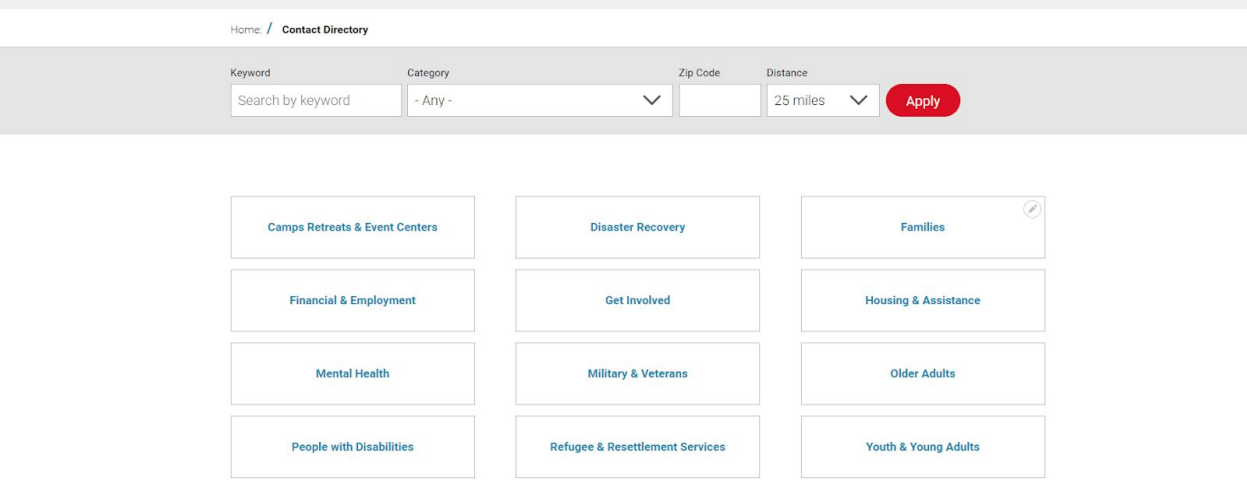


Figure 5: Contact Directory

The tool is created so that users can search for LSS services and get into contact with the specific service they need. Users can search for services by keyword, category, zipcode, and distance from zipcode and can view a variety of results depending on what they search for. Below, is pictured an example of what a result would look like.

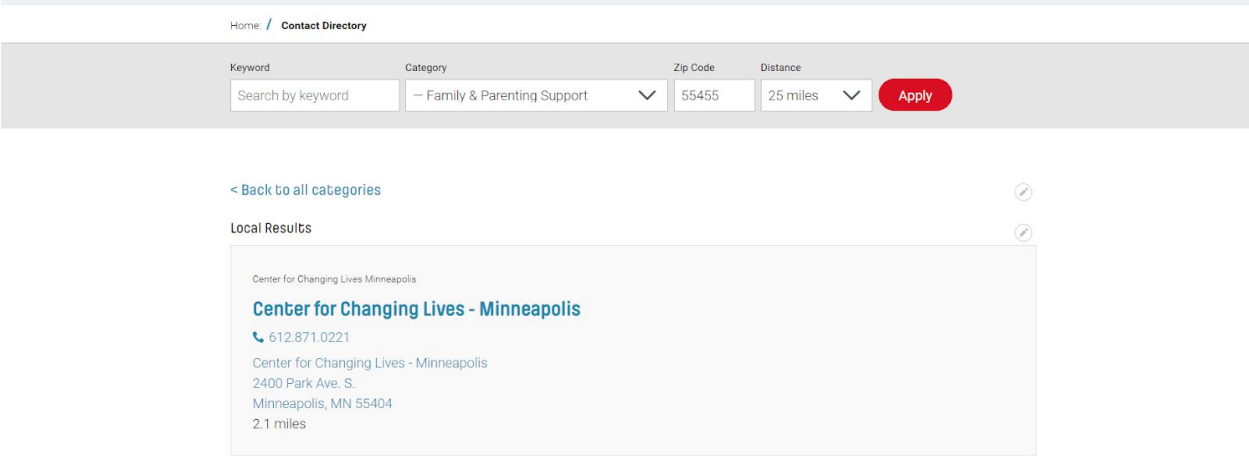


Figure 6: Search Result in Contact Directory

As you can see in the figure above, the user has searched for the category of 'Family & Parenting Support' within 25 miles of the 55455 zipcode. The result then appears below. After this version of the contact directory had been launched, it needed to be revised and tested, which was primarily my job. My supervisor created a spreadsheet with various tasks that I needed to complete post-launch on the contact directory, and I communicated my progress on that document. A few of the tasks I accomplished are as follows:

1. Correcting the display of the results on mobile versions and smaller screen sizes
2. Revising the categories of certain services
3. Changing long titles to shorter titles with descriptions
4. Removing excess phone numbers of repetitive contact information from results

These changes were all made using Drupal, as I needed to edit the actual results and contacts within the contact directory to make the changes. The figure below shows the Drupal interface in which I did this.

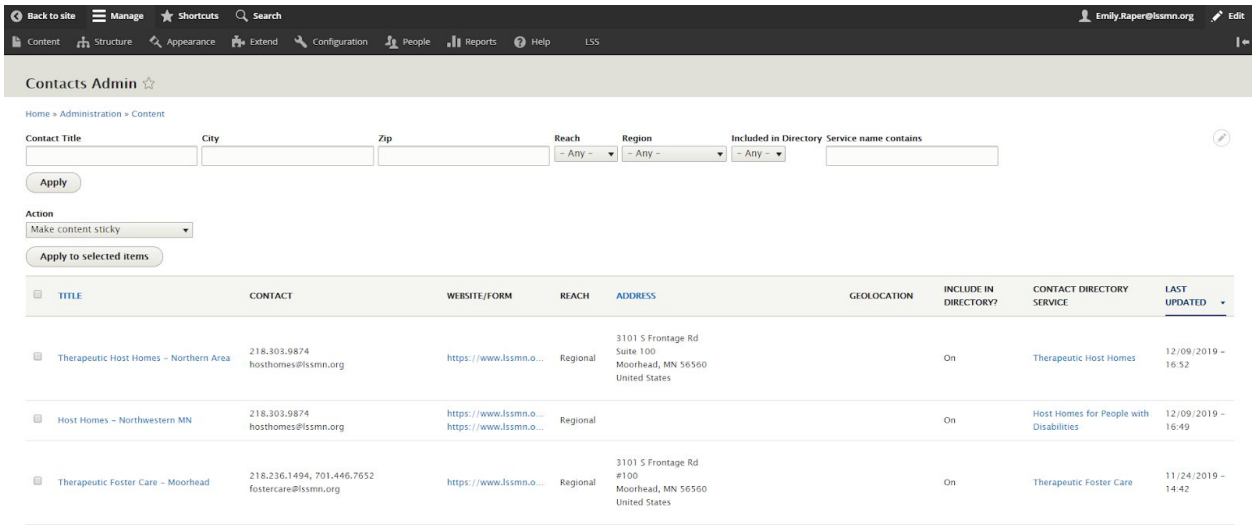


Figure 7: Contact Editing in Drupal Interface

After these changes were made, we were able to move onto the final publication stages of this project.

SortSite Website Scan

After getting through some of the initial changes that I made to the issues found on the website, I re-ran the SortSite Scan and it confirmed that many of the issues had been solved. One of the last revisions I made on this project was the changes to the usability issues found (see figure below).

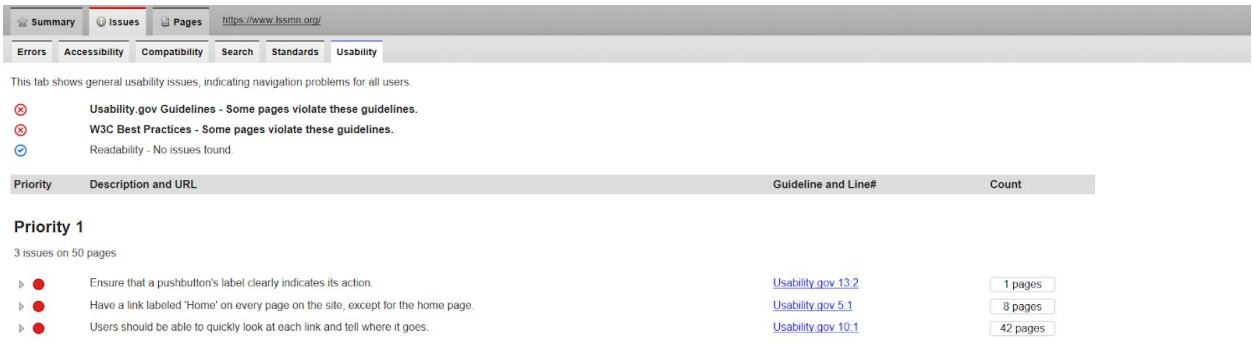


Figure 8: Usability Issues Found

The majority of these issues were caused by issues I had discussed in past Technical Writing classes and I was able to use the resources from Usability.gov to fix many of them. After these were fixed, I was able to move onto the final stages of the project.

Section IV: Publication Stages

Contact Directory

The contact directory's final stage is the currently launched stage on the LSS website. This version, compared to previous versions is entirely mobile friendly, does not contain excess contact information, and features none of the issues it previously did. The contact directory is now making a huge difference as services are being contacted directly by clients instead of one marketing professional receiving all of the client requests and having to forward them on to the correct people.

SortSite Website Scan

The final version of the SortSite Website Scan project consisted of running a final website scan to ensure that all of the issues had been resolved from the original scan. Having the scan show clean, meaning no issues, was a successful end-version of this project. Having these issues fixed means a more usable site for those with disabilities, those using mobile screens, and anyone using the LSS website.

Conclusion

Through completing this internship, I feel as though I accomplished several things as I progress towards a professional career. First, I had the experience of using tools I previously knew partially or completely in a different setting and using them to successfully completely

different tasks than I am used to. Second, I also feel as though learned how to interact in a new organization and company and how different people accomplish different tasks and work together. In regards to technical communication, I learned that bits and pieces of nearly every course I have taken so far go into this industry. I used a variety of technical writing and communication skills in this internship, and none of them were less important than others. I also learned that communication comes in a variety of methods, as I spent time creating web communication, social media communication, marketing communication, and written communication.

In regards to the culture of LSS, I would have to say it is a very welcoming community where everyone serves a role they are given fairly closely. In contrast to some companies where certain roles sometimes bleed into others, LSS seemed to stick fairly close to the individual's job description and the organization functions as a machine with many parts. LSS being organized as it was created a positive atmosphere to work in.

One of the highlights of the internship was the SortSite Website Scan project and getting to work with the technical side of the website. I also enjoyed the UX/UI discussions regarding the contact directory project and the few meetings with TEN7 that I was able to sit in on. Getting to see how developers and contractors work with full-time employees and organizations was a positive experience and a great takeaway from the internship. In contrast some negatives of the internship included issues with scheduling and remote work. I had some health issues come up this semester, and it impacted my ability to be in the office all of the time. My supervisor was willing to work with me and my schedule, but I would have enjoyed being in the office more than I was. I also would have liked to have more group projects and meetings to learn more about other departments at LSS.

I enjoyed the type of work I did at LSS, and would definitely apply for similar internships. While I would appreciate a bit more technical projects compared to what I did, I think that this as a field is a broad one and always willing to incorporate interests. Therefore, I feel positive about my future career in this field based off this internship. I learned that I am passionate about certain parts of this field, while others are passionate about different areas. I learned that I enjoy group work and presentations and meetings, while others prefer to work quietly and more individually. I learned that people can work together yet still not be interacting, and I think I realized that some of my strengths and weaknesses come from these realizations. I am strong in the areas of oral communication and presentation and I can pitch my work well to my supervisor or those who may be critiquing it. I think my TWC coursework prepared me well for this because I have had many classes with presentations and group projects where we are needing to show off what we have accomplished to a professor or other classmates. So, considering this, I think this strength area shines because of that practice and repetition of those kinds of courses. In contrast, the TWC major is also a very individual one in terms of managing time and progress. Many courses have projects that are announced a few weeks in advance, and then not checked up on until the due date. In this way, I am used to managing my own time and not giving others status updates on my work or schedule. So, when it comes to written communication and letting coworkers know of my progress on projects or daily schedule, I fall a bit short and can use this as an area to improve before graduation.

Appendix

Figure 1: Trello Interface
Figure 2: Trello comments
Figure 3: SortSite Report Summary
Figure 4: Broken Links Issues Expanded
Figure 5: Contact Directory or View the Contact Directory on the LSS Website

Figure 6: Search Result in Contact Directory
Figure 7: Contact Editing in Drupal Interface
Figure 8: Usability Issues Found