Pittsburgh Queer History Project

Executive Summary

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Background

The Pittsburgh Queer History Project (PQHP) is an archival and community-based initiative founded in 2012 by Dr. Harrison Apple. The PQHP documents Pittsburgh's LGBTQ+ history through oral histories, event records, and photographs. The project's mission is to preserve and share this history through community engagement and home preservation education. The PQHP also hosts interactive events like Miss 89 and maintains an online archival platform for people to view. The organization's technical infrastructure is currently undergoing a transition as digital archives are being migrated from Omeka to a public GitHub repository.

Project Description

Project Opportunity

At the beginning of the project, the Pittsburgh Queer History Project (PQHP) faced challenges with disorganized information management and a lack of distinction between public and restricted archives. The client was transitioning archives from the Omeka platform to GitHub and a backup system, but needed a more effective way to manage sensitive, private content. Meanwhile, the public-facing website also required improvements in information architecture, as its previous layout made it difficult for users to navigate and access event details.

Project Vision

The project's vision was to create an integrated and user-friendly digital infrastructure that would support both archival preservation and community engagement for PQHP. This involved improving the layout of the GitHub repository for public archives, recommending a secure platform for private archives, and redesigning the website for better accessibility and intuitiveness. The proposed solution offered a strategy that prioritized ease of maintenance, long-term sustainability, and inclusivity. With a clear GitHub contribution workflow, a responsive website, and a "Get Involved" page to mobilize volunteers, the project empowered community members to participate more actively while reducing the administrative burden on the client, Dr. Harrison Apple.

Project Outcomes

- Empowered the community to engage with historical preservation through clearer website pathways and GitHub contribution guidance.
- Created workflows for digital archive contributions on the public-facing GitHub repository and included a demonstration video.
- Redesigned site architecture, optimized GitHub content structure, and recommended Google Drive for restricted archival access.

Project Deliverables

The Pittsburgh Queer History Project's final deliverables fall into three key areas: a public-facing GitHub repository, a private archive storage recommendation, and an updated WordPress website. The GitHub repository was reorganized to be more user-friendly, with a revised README, standardized file names, and clear contribution guidelines to support future community involvement. The team also recommended Google Drive for storing sensitive, private archives due to its security features, ease of use, and alignment with best practices, providing an evaluation of several alternatives. Finally, the WordPress website was redesigned with improved navigation, new pages like Events and FAQs, and detailed documentation to guide ongoing maintenance. The site is now live and responsive across devices.

Recommendations

We recommend that the PQHP:

1. Automate volunteer follow-up by triggering a personalized email from the interest-form spreadsheet to sustain momentum and set clear next steps.
2. Create a centralized onboarding kit in Google Drive, with guides, videos, and a first-task checklist, to let volunteers start contributing independently.
3. Revisit launching a moderated community forum after 6–12 months, once an active volunteer team exists, to foster peer support and broaden PQHP engagement.

These steps will help PQHP sustain its mission of preserving and sharing Pittsburgh's LGBTQ+ history while reducing administrative burden and enhancing public engagement.

Student Consulting Team

Meghna Chityala served as the project liaison. She is a senior majoring in Information Systems (Data Analytics concentration) and Technical Writing minor. She completed software engineering and consulting internships and is looking toward a career in technology strategy.

Michael Li served as the lead designer. He is a senior majoring in Information Systems and Architecture with an additional major in Human-Computer Interaction. He completed internships in UX design and aspires a career in product design and product management.

Cornice Wang served as the head of development. She is a junior student majoring in Information Systems with a minor in Game Design and Development, with a background in both the technology and art fields. She is looking forward to a career in software development.