Learning Technologies Strategic Marketing Plan
for their Web Presence.

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Executive Summary

Learning Technologies has reached a crucial place in its development. New departments are being created, educational opportunities are being developed and our entire mindset is undergoing an overhaul. This is the perfect time for a change. The new LT site will be an example of the LT family, exploration, individualism and simplicity. Using trusted forms of information discovery during the entire redesign process, we will develop a site that serves as a hub of information for all of the LT sites. Each department and its staff will contribute to the LT site via social mediation and blogging. The efforts placed towards the LT site will also permeate through all of the LT subsites creating a massive hub of collaboration. In the end, a term which will be constantly redefined, we will have created our own Learning Technologies Internet.

Overarching Goal

Our goal is to create a dramatic web presence through a means different than what we have currently. Our current web presence is in desperate need of change. This plan seeks to bring about a dynamic and bold statement about what Learning Technology is currently and what steps we will take to facilitate our growth as well as the university's as a whole.

Our Current Mission

The mission of Learning Technologies is to provide a learning infrastructure that meets modern needs for integrating technology across content areas.

We seek to create and support robust environments for learning, discovery, and engagement for faculty and students that are grounded in sound principles of learning, and in a thorough knowledge of integrating technology for effectiveness and efficiency of effort. We seek these aims in several ways:

- Through comprehensive development of programs and training activities in the appropriate use of emerging technologies;

- Through systematic application of appropriate resources to design, develop, implement, and evaluate technology-assisted instruction; and

- By providing highly responsive services that advance and support network-assisted learning, discovery, and engagement.

Thoughts

The mission statement perfectly conveys the direction that Learning Technologies seeks to travel down the long road ahead. This mission should not only be put on paper but should also be reinforced in everything we do.

Key Concepts

Creating a website is not as simple as putting together HTML and CSS. It should take into account its users and their mindsets. Just as a tailor alters to fit the body, a website should alter to fit the public. Over the years the body changes and the tailor keeps up with the need. The webmaster is no different. The web and its audience change as so should their site.

Applying this to our cause has led me to the following concepts and interim goals that I wish to see:

- **Family**

  Learning Technologies should be seen as a family. We are not just a department or keeper of the masses. We are a set of scholars brought together for a cause. Training, support, innovation and new ways of thought are only a few roles that we play. Each of us should take pride in what we do and enjoy even a simple thank you. We are the matriarchs of the family, those that everyone looks to for advice.

- **Exploration**

  The need to explore is never ending. There is always something new to see. The newspaper, an open box, even a child playing are symbols of this. For our mission to be true, we must create a sense and drive of exploration.

- **Individualism**

  To foster growth, we can't follow the herd. Being an individual inspires each of us to develop our own way of solving problems and create new ideas. Providing avenues to encourage individualism will lead us to more innovative ways of using technology to enhance the learning experience.

- **Simplicity**

  Engaging in simplicity is far easier than complexity. Everything above will mean nothing if it isn't carried out. To assist in this, we must make the task as simple as possible. A small and simple task may be seen as trivial but can make a huge difference in the long run.

Execution Plan

Introduction

The first step has already been taken; we realize that there is something that needs to change and that our web presence and public appearance are not in sync. Taking this into account, we need to play catch up with our market segment, other departments within the university and similar ones outside. Each topic below is in the order of ideal completion; the next step follows. I envision a rolling execution as oppose to a hard transition. The first two points can happen immediately; those afterwards will require additional planning and preparation.   The necessary details are defined in each topic below.

Social Media

As I began my research, the first thing I noticed is Learning Technologies as a whole severely lacks any social media presence. There are only two sites that display links to popular social media sites. The first being the FDI site which recently joined the social media game and prominently displays links to Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. The second is the InnovationSpace site which displays "like" buttons throughout the site; however, they lack a link to direct visitors to a group or fan page.   Our second step is to correct this. All of Learning Technologies sites, including Learning Technologies as a whole, need to be present on at least Facebook and Twitter. Part of our plan is to reach out to as many consumers as possible and by joining two of the most heavily used social media sites ensures an increase in exposure.

The Current Site

I conducted a small focus group to gain a better understanding of what our consumers want, to confirm my suspicions and justify their resolutions. Each person in the focus group mentioned that it either "took too long to figure out what we do" or "what we are about." The easiest way to correct this is to just tell them. I propose that we redesign the mass of links on the homepage and more importantly add our mission statement as the most prominent feature.   This should be the first thing that visitors see when they visit the Learning Technologies website.

Below the mission statement we will retain the various links to the LT subsidiaries though titled and organized in a cleaner state. The example below displays my recommendation:

Professional Development	*Learning and Discovery*	*Technology*
• Faculty Development Institute (FDI)	• Scholar	• InnovationSpace
• Graduate Education Development Institute (GEDI)	• ePortfolios	• Assistive Technologies
• Self-Paced Software Tutorials	• Imaging and Archiving	• Discovery Commons
	• Testing and Data Services	• Computer-Integrated Learning Spaces
	• Online Course Evaluation	• Computer-Assisted Teaching Stations

Following the redesigned content presentation of the homepage, additional alteration of the interior content should be made. I propose that we remove the Programs & Services link from the navigation. This is a redundant navigation item as it simply replicates the information displayed on the homepage and on the Services A-Z page. The navigation should also be changed to a horizontal scheme to avoid the feeling of emptiness due to the small number of links within it. Finally, Services A-Z should be renamed to "We Provide…" to begin the creation of a personified view of Learning Technologies.

The Redesign
The majority of the sampled focus group stated that the current site was bland and visually boring. The pictures on the site, though relevant to the subject matter, don't create an emotional commitment. To counter this set back, I recommend that the site be completely redesigned using a Content Management System other than Ensemble. Wordpress is readily available and provides a simple user interface, which will make my later points easier to implement.

Creating the new site in Wordpress will be the crucial piece of the marketing plan. Not only do we need to setup the site; but also need to create a design that is:

- Visually appealing
- Synonymous with our mission
- Easy to navigate
- Serve as a hub of information

Once the site is setup and designed, we will begin the rollout in a sequential design. We'll keep the current site up; all new links and information will be posted on the new site, similar to the strategy that is currently being used on the Center for Innovation and Learning site.   After sufficient content has been added to the new site, the old site will be retired. The majority of the new information added to the

new site will consist of updates and new events published by its subsidiary sites. The Learning Technologies site will become a hub of information. I propose that the link to the new site be a redirect from the old site and its homepage link be http://www.lt.vt.edu/thenewlt/.

Outside Contribution
A Wordpress site will be setup for each of the Learning Technologies subsites (i.e. FDI, GEDI, Scholar, ePortofilo, etc.) while the current site is undergoing modification. The purpose is to create a network of contribution between each of the subsites and LT as a whole. Blogs will also be setup by each person in the department. The design of the blog site is not crucial to this implementation plan. They only serve as a means for each individual in the organization to contribute.

The posts should ideally be short akin to what you would find in a Twitter feed or a Facebook status update. It could be as simple as "I taught my first class today; it was a rewarding experience." Those internal and external to Learning Technologies would comment on posts from the others in the department. This creates a feed that can be displayed on the LT site and the subsites. LT is a family of individuals brought together for a common cause. Displaying the blog feed on the LT site, fosters the notion of a family. This gives those related to the organization an avenue to talk to people, creating a relationship with both the organization and those within it. The subsites will also benefit from the same by displaying their departmental feed on their respective sites.

After the completion of the personal blog setup, each of them will be linked from the LT contacts page directly to their blog. This should inspire those in the organization to keep their blogs up to date and presentable to the public. It also gives those visiting the LT site a view into the individual's life and hopefully benefits each through the tear down of walls, allowing them to be themselves with their clients.

Exposure
A masterful portrayal is nothing without someone to notice it. In this case, the LT site suffers dearly. In my small focus group session many of the respondents asked why they would ever go to this site. It currently just serves as a series of links to other sites and a holding well for a few important documents. This must change in order for this plan to be successful.

Our initial exposure will levy our current downfalls. Since the majority of our audience bypasses the LT site and goes directly to the subsidiaries' site for information, our advertising should begin there. I propose that on each of the LT subsites we place the LT logo and just the LT logo, no text surrounding it on the right side bar. The rational of this act is to foster exploration by our users. A single image linked to the LT site, our passageway to brilliance.

In accordance with our newly honed social media presence, we will also use this a roadway. We can begin posting news items, interesting posts from the sub-blogs, and opportunities for the use of new technologies and learning platforms as soon as the social media exposure has begun. Just as we're doing with the current site, linking all new items to the new site, the same will be done with our social media presence.

Plans for a promotional video are also underway. This video will display our whimsical side. Not only will the public see that we are professionals but also people with a creative side. I'll begin consulting with key personnel in the InnovationSpace to start developing the production.

Information Discovery

Multiple avenues of information can be discovered in many ways. I've placed this towards the later part of the strategic plan since it will be a never-ending process. Not only will these items occur before, during and after the launch of the new site but also in conjunction with the long term efforts described below.

The following methods will be used to confirm and devise new strategies during the site redesign and continued operation:

Focus Groups
A small sample focus group was used to confirm and cement the proposals suggested in this report. I would like to increase the sample size to a number that is statistically significant. I feel that a sample size of no less than 20 people would satisfy this request. The focus group selected would consist of members internal and external to the organization. Ideally, the same members would remain through the current evaluation of the site and the future site development. Since this may not be a possibility, having a consistent number of internal and external members will suffice.

During the focus group, questions will be asked about the site layout, initial impressions and the members will be tasked with finding specific items on the site. This will become more relevant as the content of the site increases.

Heat Maps
Heat maps are typically used to denote areas of interest within a site. The use of this tool will be no different; however, I would like to add this tool to each of the pages of the LT site. A free tool is currently being used on the Virginia Tech homepage and has been very useful. I plan to do the same with the LT site.

Awstats, a web trafficking tools, is already available for the LT site. I'd like to also add Goggle Analytics to the LT site for further exploration into how our users are navigating the site and how they arrived.

Long Term Prospects

After the main Learning Technologies site design and content stabilizes, we should then look towards our subsidiary sites. A uniform look and feel should be present among all of the LT sites. However, this does not mean we limit the web designer's creativity. How we implement this will be devised at a later point. In the mean time, I suggest leaving the sites in whichever platform and design that they have chosen. Our plan, design and implementation will be the inspiration for the others to follow.