

PROBLEM

Ottawa Chinatown BIA's (the client) current website is outdated and users are having difficulty navigating within the site to find key information. The client has not updated the site in years and is in need of UX feedback so that a web designer/developer has all the information they need if the client were to hire someone to continue the project.

Project Goal & Constraints

The main goal is to improve the user experience and design of their current website. The design should be modern, user-friendly, and aligned with the organization's brand value. Through an optimized navigation, users can easily find restaurants, shops, and attractions within the business improvement area. Writing and implementing new content is not an option for this project, thus, designing simple and effective layouts for existing content is key. The desire was to integrate a Wordpress business directory plugin where users can filter, sort, and search business listings. Nonetheless, it was not feasible to input all of the business listings within a 2-week timeline and implement all of the desired functionalities without a budget.

PROCESS

As the sole UX/UI designer for this project, my main focus was to restructure the existing content, improve the design and feel, and better implement the organization's branding elements. I utilized the first week of the engagement for discovery, iterations, wireframing, and prototyping. During the discovery stage, I led stakeholder interviews to determine brand attributes, conducted competitor analysis, developed user profiles, and presented a proposed site map. I also created a list of prioritized features for the website ranked by its obtainability based on project scope and its desirability for the client. This helped me create a couple iterations followed by a presentation of an interactive prototype. I also included a design guideline to ensure consistency across all site pages. After a few modifications to the final design, I handed off the design specs to the web developer so that we could build the site pages in Wordpress for the last week.

SOLUTION

The final solution consisted of new parent pages: Home, About, Eat, Shop and Experience. My intention was to guide the user through my designs to eliminate the need for drop-down menus. The home page has clickable boxes, underneath the hero image, that lead to Eat, Shop, and Experience. As you keep scrolling, there is a short description of Ottawa Chinatown BIA with the option to learn more on the About page. In terms of the directory, I kept the business listings from the original website but separated them depending on whether they were a restaurant or a shop. Additionally, I added a banner image at the top of the Eat and Shop page to maintain the same look & feel as the rest of the website. For any child page, my goal was to identify appropriate layouts (i.e. continuous Z-pattern, single column, boxes) that would best fit the existing content while taking advantage of Elementor's free widgets. Therefore, I leveraged tabs and toggles to reduce the number of clicks a user would have to make.

REFLECTIONS

The most challenging aspect of this project was the time constraint and having to work with existing content. While developing user personas, I found it difficult to create solutions that met all user needs due to the limited amount of features that were available. For this reason, I found that the final solution focuses more on the design and appearance as opposed to the usability of the website. If I were to do this project again with more time, I would have developed user flows to predict how the personas would navigate within the new website and include suggestions and placeholders for future content options. With this being my first project working alongside a web developer, I learned the importance of having the developer involved in the early stages of the project and being able to effectively communicate the client's expectations. I'd appreciate any feedback for this project, but more specifically, I am looking to assess the gaps within my design process and how they may have affected the final outcome.