

Stakeholder Report: Iowa State University's Robotics Club

Summary:

The Iowa State Robotics Club website needs updating, as recognized by four of its key officers. They all conclude that the site's major problems are its outdated content and lack of functionality. However, they disagree on the site's biggest goal, meaning they slightly differ in what they see as the most important pieces of the new website. Overall, they want to see the site as credible and professional.

Additionally, no current members have experience or interest in website development, so they fear updating the website is a mute point if no one will continue to update the site.

As a result, based on these meetings, I recommend that this site receive a site redesign and update. However, more consideration is needed for how to continue maintaining the site after its update, and confirmation is required for whether the site is at risk of being shut down by the university.

Full Report

(Note: All rankings are based on a scale from one to ten with one being the lowest and ten being the highest.)

Shelby Murray: President

Key Takeaway: This website is a disaster and needs to be completely redone because of its outdated content, functionality issues, unprofessionalism, and lack of user consideration, but how to maintain the site after its update needs consideration.

Major: Computer Engineering

Year in School: Senior

Other Leadership Positions: Vice President and Fundraising Chair

Years in the Club: 5

Current Impression of the Website:

Shelby saw the website as bad because it only included old information. Plus, she described it as “janky” because many of the pages do not work. For example, clicking on any project on the home page does nothing. She complained that required user actions do not match user expectations. For example, she showed me that the button to display the site menu was on the right side of the screen. However, if the user clicked that button, the menu showed up on the left side of the screen, which did not meet the user’s expectations. The user would expect it to show on the right side of the screen because that was where the button was located. Finally, she believed the website looked unprofessional. She said the top home page picture “gave Mike Wazowski vibes” because there was a button covering someone’s face in the center of the photo and that button placement was “reminiscent of Mike Wazowski having one giant eyeball on his face.” She did not like that the first item people see when they go to the website currently gives off the “vibes of a kid’s cartoon movie character.” She saw those vibes as unprofessional and inappropriate for the Robotics Club’s website. For those reasons, she ranked the website as a three.

Vision for the Website:

Shelby believed that this website’s main goal was to be informative. It should inform potential new members, professors, and sponsors about the club’s goals, activities, and initiatives. Specifically, it should focus on providing content that will not constantly change, such as officers or previous projects. In Shelby’s opinion, the website did not currently meet these goals because it was old and outdated, making its information misleading. The officers, sponsors, and projects currently listed on the website were inaccurate. Additionally, people struggled to contact the club through the website.

Concerns for Updating the Website:

Shelby expressed concern about the fact that no one on the club’s executive board knows how to update the website. The club used to have a webmaster position, but no one knew what happened to the last webmaster and no current members wanted to fill that position. As club

president, Shelby was open to having that office again, but they needed to have someone interested in fulfilling that position. During COVID, the club did not maintain good practices for passing records to new officers. As a result, when Shelby first became president, she had to work with Iowa State to access the website's backend again. She did not want that to happen again. Plus, she wanted to guarantee that once the website is updated, they have someone to maintain and prevent it from getting to its current, outdated, inaccurate, and unfunctional state.

Website Abilities:

Shelby ranked her ability to produce the site's content as a nine. As president and long-time club member, she knew a lot about the club and could easily write or create website content. Plus, if she did not have the information, she knew how to easily contact other members to get the needed information. Additionally, Shelby ranked her website development abilities as a two. She had class experience working in website programming languages but would need to do a lot of Googling to work on a website project. Specifically, she learned HTML, CSS, JavaScript, PHP, and Python in classes but did not remember those languages. Also, she knew what WordPress was but had not used it.

Impressive Website:

Shelby suggested Canvas as having good usability but only when the site works.

Jake Eisbrenner - Treasurer

Key Takeaway: A new Robotics Club website must be professional and credible to impress future employers of club members and sponsors because an outdated and poorly-functioning website breaks trust, preventing the club from being able to provide cool opportunities to members.

Major: Mechanical Engineering

Year: Senior

Years in Club: 4

Current Impression of the Website:

Jake described the website as outdated and underdeveloped, making it scary that they were currently sending this website to existing and potential sponsors. He believed that one of the website's uses is for students to show it to their potential employers. However, the website's outdatedness makes the club look not credible, which could reflect poorly for a student trying to use the website to impress a potential employer. Additionally, the lack of credibility would not impress potential sponsors. Jake believed that since the website's credibility and image directly correspond to the success of gaining new employers and sponsors, the website's impression needs improvement. Overall, for these reasons, Jake ranked the website a seven.

Site Maintenance Concerns:

Jake worried that if the site was updated, the site could easily become outdated again. He did not know if any members would be willing to maintain the site. Plus, he understood that club websites like the Robotics Club's website are typically not allowed by Iowa State. As a result, he feared that they could lose the site. He believed that they can currently keep the website because they do not do anything with it, meaning Iowa State is not aware of the site. If they do not use or update the website, they will be allowed to keep it. He worried the university would quit allowing the Robotics Club to have its site if it is updated because they would be aware of it again.

Vision for the Website:

Jake summarized the site's goals as communicating the club's accomplishments and projects to parents, donors, possible members, and potential employers. Specifically, students should be able to use it when applying for jobs, internships, or scholarships to promote their work. Also, the site should serve as a more advanced version of the student organization webpage. In Jake's opinion, the website does not meet those goals because of its lack of credibility, professionalism, and current content.

Website Abilities:

Jake ranked his ability to create content as an eight because he felt assured about writing content and obtaining current pictures for the site. However, he ranked his technical abilities as a five. He lacked confidence in his website development abilities because he only knew basic HTML. Jake did not know what WordPress was.

Impressive Website:

He could not think of any.

Ryan Madigan: Fundraising Director

Key Takeaway: A new Robotics Club website needs more information about club projects to impress site visitors.

Major: Mechanical Engineering

Year in School: Junior

Years in Club: 2

Current Impression of the Website:

Ryan's initial impression of the website was that it looked "clean" but "needs functionality updates." He noted that the homepage contains minimal information and the overall site features outdated information. He ranked the website a five because the website's information is broad, outdated, and does not provide specific details about club projects.

Vision for the Website:

Ryan believed the website's goals are to provide the reader with in-depth information about all club projects. The website should present project details such as:

- Goals
- Background information
- Current status
- Technologies utilized

The website should also provide information about sponsors, officers, schedules, etc.

Concerns for Updating the Website:

Ryan stated his main concern about updating the website is ensuring that its information does not often change, meaning it needs updating often. He wanted to ensure that the website is not quickly outdated or forgotten.

Website Abilities:

Ryan ranked his ability to create the site's content as a four because he believed he maintains a general idea of club activities, but he only worked on the snowplow project, meaning he has minimal knowledge of the other projects. Ideally, he saw the website as providing in-depth knowledge of all the projects, but since he does not know about all projects, he did not see himself as the correct person to provide that content. Also, Ryan ranked his technical abilities as a four because he has minimal experience building websites. He worked in and still remembers HTML. Plus, he had experience in CSS and JavaScript, but it was minimal. Ryan had never heard of WordPress.

Impressive Website:

He could not think of any.

Avrom Bailey: Exoskeleton Director and Outreach Director

Key Takeaway: A new Robotics Club website should help the club form connections. Visuals should be enhanced, and content should be updated to complete this goal.

Major: Mechanical Engineering

Year in School: Sophomore

Years in the Club: 2

Current Impression of the Website:

Avrom was initially impressed by the website. He did not think the design looked outdated, but the pictures and information were outdated. Despite being impressed by the website, Avrom wanted to “see the website updated more than he does not want to see the website updated,” which he admitted stopped him from being fully honest with his comments. He said he wanted to persuade me to fix the website, causing him to focus on the negative aspects of the website. I found this comment concerning because I need him to be honest about his opinions. I hoped my response that his comments did not affect whether the website was updated caused him to be more forthcoming about the website for the rest of our meeting. Avrom ranked the website as a five, despite his positive impression of the website. He fears that anyone, specifically potential sponsors, would be unable to find any useful information on the site.

Vision for the Website:

Avrom envisioned the website as an outreach platform. The website should draw potential sponsors. Since the club acquires its money from sponsors, impressing new and potential sponsors is crucial to securing enough money for club projects. Plus, other college robotics organizations can visit the site to learn about projects and activities, which Avrom noted as something to consider within the site’s goals because he had looked at other schools’ robotics club websites for outreach ideas. Overall, the website should help the club connect with high school students, Iowa State students, local robotics companies, other Iowa State student organizations, and competitor robotics clubs. He believed that the website’s design currently meets this goal, but the website’s content does not because the content was incorrect and outdated.

Concerns for Updating the Website:

His main worry about updating the website was that no current club members knew anything about maintaining or developing websites. However, he admitted that someone could learn. Plus, the website’s outdated information caused his concerns about it quickly becoming outdated again after being updated. He thought adding a member directory, officer contact information, and club social media links would help the site better accomplish its goals.

Website Abilities:

Avrom ranked his ability to create the site’s content as a seven. He originally gave himself a ten because, as he put it, he “does not have high standards for the website’s content” and “the website content does not need to be a ten.” Also, he ranked his website development abilities as a zero. He admitted that he had no programming abilities, specifically website development

abilities. As a result, he did not know any website development tools or languages and had never heard of WordPress.

Impressive Website:

Avrom liked anduril.com because of its visual appeal. He found the content boring, but he wanted to read it because of the site's visual engagement. The homepage included numerous large, impressive pictures and short video clips. He believed a Robotics Club website similar to this one would be impressive, credible, and engaging, persuading the audience to read more of the Robotics Club's website content, meaning there was room to improve the site's current visuals.