

# **ontheboards.org**

Visual Design

Research and Recommendations

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## **Executive Summary**

This report focuses on how ontheboards.org can improve its online presence by increasing ticket sales, donation, and showcasing artists' work. Specifically, improvements in the visual design as well as the information architecture will be discussed. The full report features an in depth summary of key findings such as the need for a modern, inviting, and purposeful design, while also summarizing key information architecture issues that can be improved upon.

Reading the full report will allow the organization to better understand what steps it needs to take towards online presence improvement. Each section will feature specific explanations and recommendations for the specified design problem. Although reading the summary gives a quick explanation, it would be wise to understand the problems deeply and that is what this report aims to do. By taking these design and information architecture suggestions into consideration, OTB has everything to gain. Ticket sales will increase. Reputation in the arts community will be improved. Both new and recurring members will be impressed and want to get more involved with OTB and the arts community at large.

Design and IA recommendations will allow the website to feel complete. It will allow for the easy navigation towards older content, and also be set up in a way that best promotes new events as well. By taking this advice into practice, ontheboards.org can better showcase artists work while also selling tickets more efficiently.

By fully understanding ontheboards.org audiences, recommendations given target the business goals from all possible perspectives. My prior research for ontheboards.org which focused on design and IA allowed me to combine ideas from competitors and also improvements for the current ontheboards.org website.

Recommendations for improvement will focus on two main areas, design improvements, and also information architecture and reorganization of how content should be laid out. The information architecture suggestions focus on creating a clear home page template that will aid in current and future design revisions. The reorganization of navigation elements will be a large improvement over the current model. In terms of design, the suggestions aim to make the website more modern, inviting, and purposeful. These suggestions each contain specific examples of how to apply these principles to visual design improvements.

## **Research and Findings**

To better understand ontheboards.org, I conducted research using a variety of techniques.

First, a content inventory was performed. This was an investigation into how web content on ontheboards.org is laid out. A technical analysis followed which allowed the assessment of the effectiveness of content in technical areas such as SEO and user experience issues.

Although both of these first tasks don't relate directly to my design recommendations, they did help establish an understanding of the core and fundamental needs of ontheboards.org, and many overarching problems such as how the content lifecycle is implemented.

Next, a competitive audit was performed which focused on four competitors: Showbox at the Market, EMP, Vera Project, and lastly OTB.tv. This research technique used a ranking system to check through certain design criteria such as image properties, mobile responsiveness, and navigation layout. The intent was to create benchmarks to compare to other organizations. Findings from this research showed that a website with a higher percentage of successful metrics also left me with a better reception for their website.

Another interesting finding showed that carousels were implemented on every website I deemed as successful. This competitive analysis demonstrated the need to analyze competitors and fully understand what features have been accomplished successfully, so designers can implement new designs in a similar way.

Lastly, a content audit was performed which allowed me to analyze a large portion of ontheboards.org and express my thoughts qualitatively. The ability to take notes on each portion of the website showed that many of the improvement areas can be met with general

design and information architecture improvements. I found that the goal to sell tickets and solicit donations was not met on many of the main pages, and in places that were expected to be showcasing artists work, there wasn't a clear demonstration of this. One specific example of this is from the performances section there is no direct way for a user to purchase tickets, no clear call to action designed for this purpose. Issues like this can be found all over the ontheboards.org website. Fortunately, these issues can all be resolved by applying my recommendations that I've detailed below.

## **Recommendations**

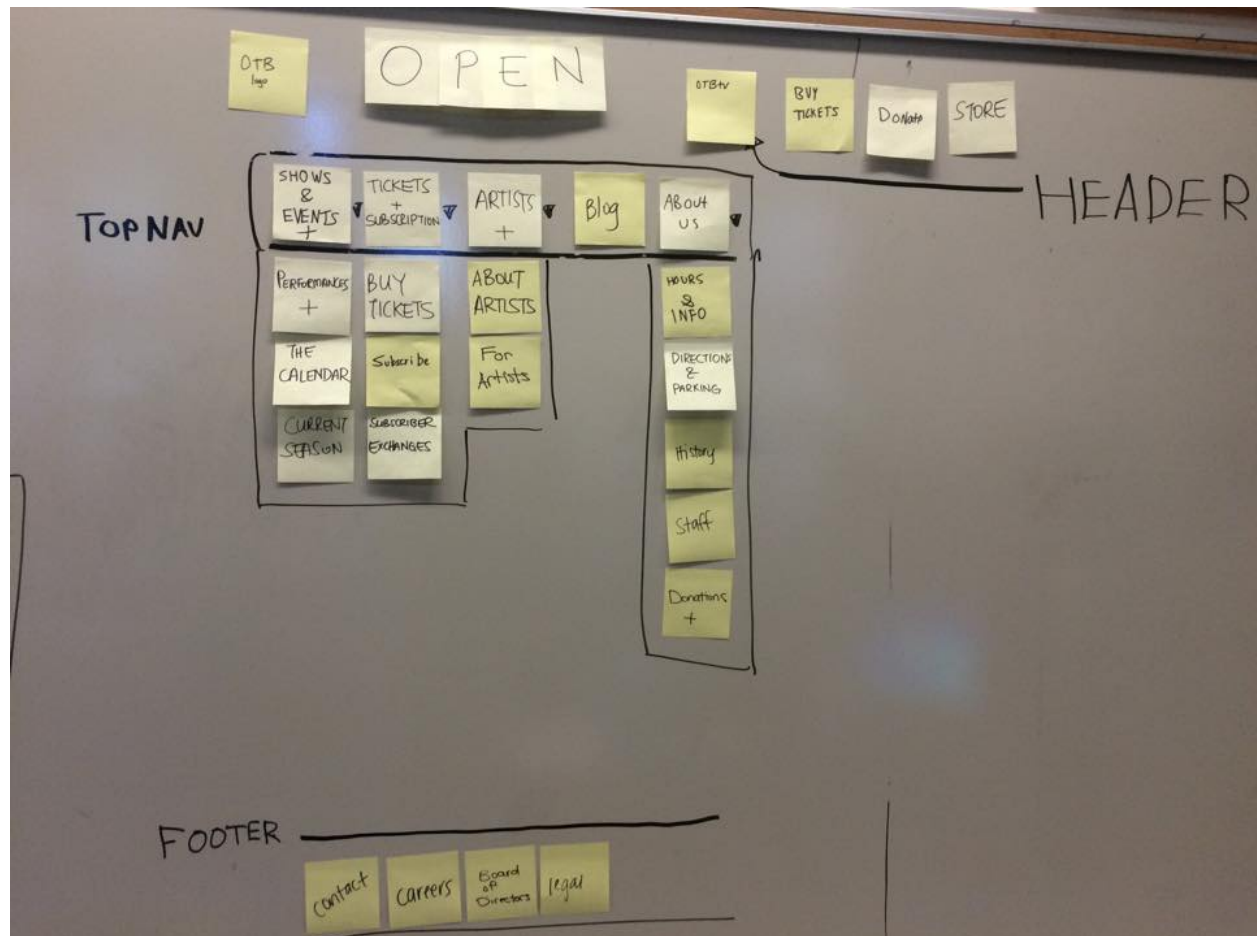
To improve website design, issues of the overall system and content life cycle must first be addressed. The high level information architecture has to be implemented right first, before thinking about design. Regardless of how visually pleasing a website redesign is, if the visual design is not applied in an organizable manner that can adapt to trends, the issues will arise again resulting in lost time and resources. To account for this, it's best to think of a website as a living organism, one that needs to adapt to the ever changing environment of design styles.

To investigate this, I completed a card sorting activity that reorganized the home page layout in a way that is easier to design for. This high level Information Architecture focused on categorizing where the appropriate places for each navigation and containing element are. My Information Architecture recommendation is as following:

**Have a header that contains the elements:** "otb.tv", "Buy Tickets", "Donate Store"

**A top navigation bar with the elements:** “Shows and Events”, “Tickets and Subscription”, “Artists”, “Blog”, and “About Us”

**Footer with the elements:** “Contact”, “Careers”, “Board of Directors”, “Legal”



Card sorting activity that depicted how central content should be organized/reclassified

Setting up the information architecture in this way allows for any new visual design to be implemented in a way that can be shaped in a variety of ways. This allows audiences such as media personalities to get the information they need to get as quickly as possible. This information architecture also relates to the goal of showcasing artist work, because there is more room for content about artists, they can be found easier, and “Artists” sub header is a

main aspect of the site. Furthermore, this page setup allows for the ease of soliciting tickets and donations, because users can quickly find and understand the steps needed to complete these tasks.

### **Design Strategy:**

My visual design strategy is focused on three areas of concern: keeping the page modern, inviting, and purposeful. These are all areas that need proper attention in order to fulfill our specific business goals and cater to our appropriate audiences. I will outline each of these areas of concern in detail.

### **Modern**

My first recommendation for visual design improvement is to keep the website **modern**. By this I mean to put effort into realizing that design is very dependant upon the online trends that rapidly shift. It is essential to recognize this and play by the rules. I recommend a single long home page that is similar to EMP's implementation. Audiences such as the ticket buyer, who need sites with "cool" and "new" visual appeal, will be appreciative to changes in the modern direction.

Similarly, another modern design approach to implement is a top navigation element. In comparison to other competitors in my research, findings demonstrate that ontheboards.org is the only one with a side navigation bar implementation. This gives the impression of being outdated and will not cater to the audiences previously mentioned.

Visual Potential is a design term meaning that information can be displayed in an illustrative form. Utilizing visual potential makes understanding verbose content much simpler for the

audience. To use this technique would be a great way to demonstrate a modern approach as in my competitor analysis research I found that many organizations utilize this technique and use icons, and small images whenever possible to give the user a better understanding of what is trying to be conveyed.

Perhaps the biggest, and most impactful design change to make the site more modern is to use what's known as "responsive design". This is developing your site structure so that the content can be displayed across multiple devices and platforms and still look visually appealing for each display size. Mobile device visitation is now more prevalent than desktop browsing (CNN, 2014), so to stay modern, this is perhaps the biggest suggestion to take seriously. With audiences like the media personality and subscriber, both audience personas use mobile devices at almost every instance possible. There is a serious issue if content on the page cannot be displayed correctly.

## **Inviting**

My second design recommendation is to make the user feel invited and welcomed to the page. This is a design concept that is heavily prevalent in the design community and is referred to as "micro interactions". It is the small, humanizing elements to a page that make the user feel like they should stay and visit the page longer. These micro interactions can be scrolling effects, hover events, color changes, and even small applications designed to spur interest in navigating throughout the page. In a specific example that could be changed quickly, if the navigation bar on the homepage had links that turned different colors, not only does this provide small cues as to what to do, but it also allows the user to feel welcomed and "delighted" as they browse through each piece of content that's displayed to them on the website.



Making the website colorful is also a way to make the page feel inviting. In comparison to other similar websites, research showed that every other website has a multitude of colors, providing users with the feeling that the website has had a lot of time and consideration put into the design, and does not look like plain text. For an arts organization, if business goals are to showcase and act as a thought leader in the arts community, adding a color palette to the final design is a must because there needs to be a demonstration in the interest of pursuing artistic style to this website.

Call to actions are also important to keep the page inviting and to also become more invested in pursuing the business goals. Call to actions are specific areas on websites that are designed to increase awareness of a task or action to be completed. Donation links need to be larger and more apparent that they are calls to action. If the purpose of the page is to invite the user to donate, an improvement can be to make a button colorful and clear that this will lead the user in the next step of the process. The research I completed on qualitative audits of ontheboards.org found that many of these pages that should be clear in what is trying to be conveyed are actually not very clear, and having calls to action would greatly increase how inviting the page feels.

Lastly, be sure to make the design inviting to all potential and current users of the site. A common mistake in design is choosing inappropriate color choices that can make it confusing for those with visual impairments to understand the content they are presented with. For example, do not choose color schemes that have a lot of red and green in them, as this makes the website more prone to issues for those who are colorblind. Similarly text size should scale appropriately across devices. Having all of these ideas become realized in the

final design will increase how inviting the website feels for its users, which will ultimately lead to better conversion rates with ticket sales and donations.

## **Purposeful**

Whatever design implementation that is chosen, it needs to have a purpose. Prominent designer Charles Eames spoke on this topic by saying, “Design is a plan for arranging elements in such a way as best to accomplish a particular purpose.” Basically, make sure the design aids in the business goals and helps all audiences to accomplish their tasks on their page.

My first suggestion is large banner images at the top of the home page. Competitive analysis research results indicated this is standard and needs to be taken into consideration. This would be a clear strategy to meet this business goals, as what better way to increase awareness of artists and increase ticket sales than make the central design focused on the current even that is happening with the organization.

Next, if ontheboards.org is trying to receive more donations, place this element in a highly visible area with a colorful call to action, so apparent that it becomes an affordance on its own to click the donate button.

Lastly, to make design purposeful, the concept of visual hierarchy needs to be internalized. This idea states that the most important content should be presented up front. I’ve previously mentioned the need for banner images at the top of the page, but this concept also applies to the individual blog posts and performance pages as well. As further research I conducted doing what is known as Page Display Diagrams, information is ordered upon what is most

relevant to the current page. My results from doing these diagrams indicated that the current set up of many of the popular pages, such as contact, performance pages, and donation pages have important elements at the bottom when in reality they should be at the top so the user sees this information first. Results of this process also indicated that there was a large amount of content that didn't need to be there in the first place. In terms of visual design to help with this visual hierarchy problem, my recommendation is to put information into separate distinct sections, perhaps each with different shades of colors so that the user can see there is contrast between important, essential chunks of information, and information that is less so.

All of these ideas focus on visual improvements. Although there may be an impression that design can be an afterthought, I strongly believe this to be untrue. There needs to be an ongoing collaboration with the content creators about how to best shape and form a website to best fit the needs of different audiences and meet goal requirements. Keeping the website modern, inviting, and purposeful will position ontheboards.org to stay afloat in an industry that is extremely competitive. A clean and well thought out design is possibly one of the most important aspect to building interest in websites, as users only take several moments upon visiting a site to determine if they can identify with it (nielson, 2011).

## **Deliverables:**

### **Best Practices Check Off List**

These principles will be important with whatever design OTB decides to go with.

#### **Visual Hierarchy**

The order in which things should get processed when viewing an image. Proper way of viewing content. Most important content at top, least important at the bottom

#### **Unity vs variety**

Use variety to make web pages look dynamic. Changing color, shape, size, can create interest in something otherwise bland. Contrast draws interest to the pages.

#### **Negative Space**

Intended to let the viewers eyes rest, don't try to fill in all available space

#### **Colorblind capability**

When using color, make sure to be considerate to those with visual impairments.

#### **Interactivity**

Animation, hover events can all help the user navigate and create a more friendly viewing experience.

#### **Visual Potential**

If there are things that can be represented visually, do so. If naming statistics, locations relationship or, appearance, try to do so by use of images.

#### **Color harmonies**

Evoke, red for alerting user, could be used effectively for donations or other calls to action

Home Page Wireframe

				OTB.TV	Donate	Buy Tickets
Large Banner for Current Event						
Shows and Events	Tickets and Subscriptions	Artists	Blog	About Us		
Room for Content						
Contact	Careers	Board of Directors	Legal			

Home Page High Fidelity Mockup


OTB

Buy TicketsOTB.TVDonate


Spectacle

THE MUSIC VIDEO

Shows & EventsTicketsArtistsBlogAbout us



Experience three of American choreographer Tere O'Connors works over three evenings. *BLEED* (Thu & Fri) three dance pieces into one singular masterpiece of movement; while *poem* and *Secret Mary* (performed only Sat), both shorter works, allow the audience to see some of the source material that informed the larger work.



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ContactCareersBoard of DirectorsLegal

The wireframe and high fidelity mockup feature a variety of the design suggestions in my report. There's a large banner image, the information architecture is consistent with my recommendations, and there are inviting colors, images and carousel features. This home page mockup will serve as a good basis for designing a website that will please target audiences and meet important business goals.

## Citations

Nielson, Jakob. "Nielsen Norman Group." *How Long Do Users Stay on Web Pages?* Web. 17 Mar. 2015.

"Mobile Apps Overtake PC Web Usage in U.S." *CNNMoney*. Cable News Network. Web. 17 Mar. 2015.