



ādamus®

NEWS RELEASE

Contact: Gary Frisch, director of public relations

Phone: 856.728.6100

Fax: 856.728.6121

University Website Redesign Joins Functionality, Content, Aesthetics, Brand Image and SEO

December 9, 2009

WILLIAMSTOWN, N.J., December 9, 2009 — Redesigning a university's website is a huge task, one that requires a good plan joining multiple components. According to Adamus Media, a Williamstown design, marketing and communications agency, functionality, breadth of content, aesthetic experience, consistent branding and Search Engine Optimization (SEO) are all vital to the process.

"Although our agency has gone through this process before, university website redesign is a challenging task due to the typical website's depth of content and complex, multilevel website architecture," says Sylwia Majewski, Adamus Media's CEO.

The agency is undertaking this daunting assignment for Post University of Connecticut, with the goal of revamping the university's entire web experience. Work involves the main university portal and the institution's three major websites: day campus, online university, and evening and weekend accelerated degree programs.

The five identified components — functionality, content, aesthetics, brand image and SEO — are inextricably related to one another. Universities planning to redesign their websites should pay particular

attention to how all five elements coexist as a whole to get the most out of the endeavor.

Website Functionality

Along with the usual functionality requirements such as quick load time and browser and platform compatibility, the website's architecture design is probably the most important. Since university websites often serve multiple audiences, the website architecture is usually very complex. The challenge is to make a huge site very user friendly and allow users to navigate and access information easily and intuitively across all website levels.

A well thought out university website should:

- strongly market academic programs;
- assist in student recruitment efforts;
- address concerns of parents of potential students;
- serve the needs of current students;
- help develop university alumni relations;
- serve faculty needs;
- help university staff with processes such as admissions, financial aid, course registration, etc.

In addition, certain coding/programming and design techniques enhance the website's functionality by making the site search engine-friendly or easily accessible on other devices such as mobile phones. When it comes to programming techniques, university websites with dynamic content should use static URLs so that search engines understand how to index their pages.

Website Content

University sites usually display a high volume of written content in order to communicate with multiple audiences such as prospective students, parents, enrolled students, alumni, staff and faculty. Organization of such content is extremely important and is strictly related to the website's architecture. Since universities are experts in the subject matter, most of them will write their own content and deliver it to the agency for use on the website. However, content written for a brochure should not be implemented straight onto the website. It's important that the content is reviewed and revised by a SEO specialist as well.

Well-written content may not necessarily be web friendly given the need for on-screen readability or search engine optimization. University website content that is search engine optimized will aid the university's online marketing efforts by boosting organic search engine rankings. In addition, stylizing website content with CSS (Cascading Style Sheet) is an important website design or redesign technique. Appropriate usage of HTML tags that define headings can help improve both search engine rankings and on-screen readability of text.

Aesthetics and Brand Image

Integrating the brand image into the school's online presence is a must.

"Through our work with different schools and educational organizations we found that some — including the very old and well-established institutions — still do not have a branding style guide," says Majewski. A branding style guide, she adds, will help university marketing directors preserve brand consistency across all media channels including print, electronic, outdoor and online.

The look and feel of the university's site is very important. Aesthetics of the university's Internet presence will of course aide in the marketing efforts and enhance the overall experience of today's sophisticated online users. However, the design should not overshadow website's functionality. Appropriate design techniques that integrate SEO and good usability practices should be implemented.

Search Engine Optimization

Search Engine Optimization (SEO), also known as natural optimization, is a technique that makes a website rise near the top when prospective students do a search on the Internet. SEO aids in what's called "organic rankings" — those that appear from a search without paying for any keywords. Three things are vital while optimizing a university's website for search engine performance: design, programming and content.

For SEO purposes, the university website redesign process should focus on design techniques that result in search engine-friendly websites. Use of CSS is highly recommended. Additionally HTML code should be equipped with appropriate key word lists, strong page titles, descriptors and meta tags. Website content should be text based.

Additionally text should be edited and optimized to contain a high concentration of relevant key words in the copy, as well as links.

Another important aspect of university website redesign is the preservation of current organic search engine rankings. Many universities and schools already have strong organic rankings on major search engines. One such example is Drexel University. On Google the keyword "Drexel University" returns more than five pages of organic search engine results. In addition, many general keywords (example: masters degree online) also return Drexel on the first page of search results.

Changes to the website's architecture should be designed to improve search engine rankings, not disturb the current ones. To help preserve current rankings:

- Links to pages and sub-sites that are already well indexed by search engines should remain the same.
- Meta tags containing key words, descriptors and page titles should be transferred from old pages into the new website pages.
- Discontinued pages should use URL redirect links to new pages.

Adamus Media, headquartered in Williamstown, N.J., is a full service design, marketing and communications firm. The agency works with many schools, educational organizations and higher education institutions, as well as nonprofit organizations.

Contact Adamus Media at info@adamusmedia.com or call 856-728-6100.