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From Library to Knowledge Center: Building a Website to Introduce a New Building to the Community

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Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal). Paper 97.

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From Library to Knowledge Center: Building a Website to Introduce a New Building to the Community

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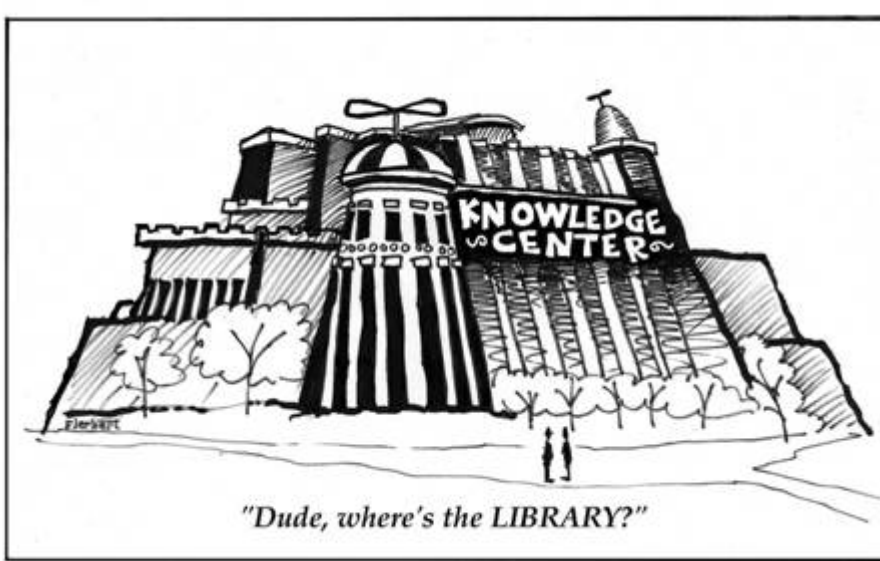
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Introduction

When announced in March 2004, the biggest gift in the University of Nevada 's history was in support of a new library building, to be called "The Mathewson-IGT Knowledge Center." The decision to call the new facility a "Knowledge Center" deliberately calls attention to the expanded role of the institution. Earlier in the fund-raising campaign, a cartoon (Figure 1) was published in the *Nevada Sagebrush*, our campus newspaper, depicting two tiny students silhouetted against the backdrop of a monumental building labeled "KNOWLEDGE CENTER." One student is saying to the other, "Dude, where's the LIBRARY?" Clearly, we had some explaining to do!

This article describes the design and development of a website to tell users about the role and progress of the Knowledge Center, allay fears about books disappearing forever into the great maw of the Automated Storage and Retrieval System (ASRS), encourage feedback, and create some excitement about a beautiful new place to work and collaborate.

Figure 1. Cartoon from the campus newspaper, *Nevada Sagebrush*



Now under construction, the 295,000 square-foot building is scheduled to open in fall 2008. The Knowledge Center is, indeed, a "knowledge working" space, designed to encourage the sharing and creation of knowledge by bringing together existing Library resources and services with technologically advanced tools for the discovery, use, and effective presentation of information. Unlike medieval cloisters, contemporary knowledge working spaces include online access to information and technical support as well as the physical environment (Dove, 2004).

Users of the new facility will be able to work in group areas with large screens for viewing shared projects, consult with librarians and technical support staff at a combined Research and Computing Help Desk, or study in quiet reading rooms. Convenient access to high-tech equipment and support is centralized in a single location that includes instructional design and WebCT services, collaborative media production facilities, "DataWorks" data management services (Aldrich and Stefanelli 2006), an advanced data visualization lab as well as traditional computer labs, and robotic retrieval of older materials from the ASRS.

Who is the Website for? What should it do?

In the planning and pre-construction stages, we developed a website and outreach programs to explain the expanded role of the Knowledge Center to potential donors. As construction became a reality, with a window of two years to completion, we suddenly had much more information to share with our user community. The old website was well-established, but it was time for a fresh look at purpose, structure, and content. Primary tasks for the Knowledge Center website were redefined:

- Inform the University and local community about construction progress.
- Explain how facilities and services benefit potential users, including traditional and returning students, faculty and staff, distance learners, and visitors.
- Provide a way for community members to communicate concerns and ask questions.

The website would also need to combine visually interesting features of a "brochure" and solid information. The site's look and feel should reflect the welcoming, user-centered ambiance of the "real" Knowledge Center, a poster-child for the requisite "high tech and beautiful" elements of forward-looking libraries (Gilbert, 2000). Since the building did not yet exist, creating a feel for the

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interior features would be a challenge. Moreover, the site must be easy to update as new and more complete information becomes available.

A literature search revealed no publications specifically about creating websites that promote library building projects. The lack of documentation was surprising, given the obvious importance of creating an informed user community before an unfamiliar new building opens its doors. Nevertheless, websites are mentioned as one of the public relations tools for promoting a library's role in local history (Lear, 2005), influencing voters (Gold, 2005), and promoting a successful building project (Davidson-Arnott, 2005). If the success of building campaign events depends on "participation of groups outside the library, including other university departments and community groups" (AmRhein and Sorkin, 1993) and student advocates (Horny, 1999), it makes sense to reach out to these stakeholders after the fundraising buzz has faded. The visible construction phase creates an opportunity to spark interest among users as well as donors. Interested users provide the gift of feedback and suggestions, without which we could not improve communication and services.

To help us conceptualize our redesigned site, we looked at other libraries' new building project websites to gain insight into features that capture attention and encourage exploration, and features that are commonly included. In short, what seems to work well and what doesn't? Many such Websites exist, of course, and are quite easy to find using Google, in spite of sparse documentation on the design process and goals.

What site elements should we include and what should we avoid?

It is easier to spot the virtues or faults of sites developed by others than to be critical of one's own productions, inevitably seen through a mother's eyes. Visiting as many "new building" sites as possible helped sort out our design options and priorities.

Some sites were apparently crafted with care and much work, but appeared to be talking mainly to donors or politicians. The audience for a new building website changes over the life of the project. After funding is secured, the focus shifts to those who will use the building and its services. Matching interesting content to this audience emerges as the top goal. Some sites were chock-a-block with formidable amounts of text, legislation, technical details, and soporific working documents. Others provided press releases or a mission statement and little else. Overall, many sites included common features that provide visitors with interesting background information, introduce them to salient features of the building, or open channels of communication with users. Ten examples of well-executed academic and public library "new building" Websites are listed at the end of this article.

After visiting dozens of new building Websites it was easy, as well as prudent, to compile a list of notable features that might be incorporated into the Knowledge Center site:

- Statement of purpose. What is the site about? What is the new building all about?
- News of construction progress and events.
- Opportunity to send feedback, post comments, or ask questions.
- Background information, history of the library.
- Construction timeline. Timelines accompanied by captioned photographs or drawings work best.
- Photographs and architectural drawings. Those showing people appeal to the imagination more than "cold" drawings or blueprints.
- Frequently Asked Questions.
- Key facts or notable building features.
- What will the new building mean to you? What new services, spaces, and technologies will you be able to use?
- What will happen to the old building?

Some practices seem to discourage Website exploration and should be questioned, if not entirely avoided:

- Heavy reliance on PDF articles for content can turn away visitors. While they have their good uses, PDF files often take longer to load than regular HTML pages. Many users will reach the site from Google or other search engines. If most of the search engine links go to PDF files, will users bother with the pain of waiting for a reader to load?
- Purple prose, ingenuous quotations, alliteration worthy of a medieval epic, and predictable clichés invite smirks. An apt pithy quote can be an interesting or tone-setting tagline for the site. Using the phrase “Heart of [the University, the campus, or you-name-it]” may be too smarmy or downright “needy” for today’s audience. A “heart” is nice, but the electronic “brain” you can tap into from anywhere is what matters in the wee hours before a term paper is due.
- It is a mistake to focus on the exterior of the building. That is what we will be looking at while construction proceeds, but not where users will “live” after the facility opens. Users have more of a stake in what’s inside this wonderful new edifice.

In spite of good content, some sites were lackluster because they underused or omitted features that add “sparkle” to a website:

- Photographs on the home page increase visual interest. If the home page is nothing but text, everything looks the same, and the visitor may not see a small link to photographs or other engaging features, particularly if navigation text is very small. Photographs that change on each page load or fade in sequentially are eye-catching. Either approach can freshen an otherwise static page. Rotating photos are easily accomplished by a few lines of JavaScript, and do not deprive users lacking JavaScript support of seeing a default photo. Flash can provide more sophisticated transitions, but there’s a fine line between a touch of fairy dust and annoying movement.
- Virtual tours are fun. Professionally produced virtual tours breathe life into descriptions and create a sense of adventure. We are fortunate to have a School of Journalism on campus, with a faculty member who teaches a course on producing 360-degree virtual reality tours, and is the creator of the stunning *Virtual Wroxton Abbey* tour (“Virtual Wroxton Abbey”). When the building is completed, we plan to enlist his services in creating a tour that introduces users to the new environment.
- New technologies for interactive communication. Feedback forms are good, but there are newer, more popular ways for interactive communication, such as blogs, wikis, and social networking applications such as del.icio.us and [flickr](http://flickr.com). A blog is perfect for posting news because it is easily maintained, automatically displays posts in reverse chronological order, and supports comments.

Starting Out

We already had a well-established Knowledge Center website with a memorable URL (www.knowledgecenter.unr.edu) that focused on outreach to potential donors. The first task, then, was to take a critical look at current content and set new directions and a timetable. The most urgent requirement was a way to regularly add news to the site, which had changed little over the previous year. We also needed to gear up for the start of construction by redesigning the site for a new audience. Since the Knowledge Center would consolidate previously scattered units of the Information Technology Division, we would be mindful of the need to broaden our perspective beyond a library-centric viewpoint. We also knew more about the materials and palette that would be used in the building’s interior spaces and wanted to harmonize the new look with this palette and a new official “UNR blue.”

Basic Design Principles

A common header and navigation tabs are on each page of the blog and Website. A standard sidebar appears on the right side of the two-column page template. We departed from our usual practice of having a different header for the home page and inside pages because the site will be relatively small, with a deliberately “shallow” structure to enable quick scanning by visitors and rapid updating. As with other Library Websites, we would code documents to XHTML and CSS standards and validate them regularly, using the free W3C validators (2006). Pages would also be checked against a Section 508 validator, the “Cynthia Says Portal” (2006).

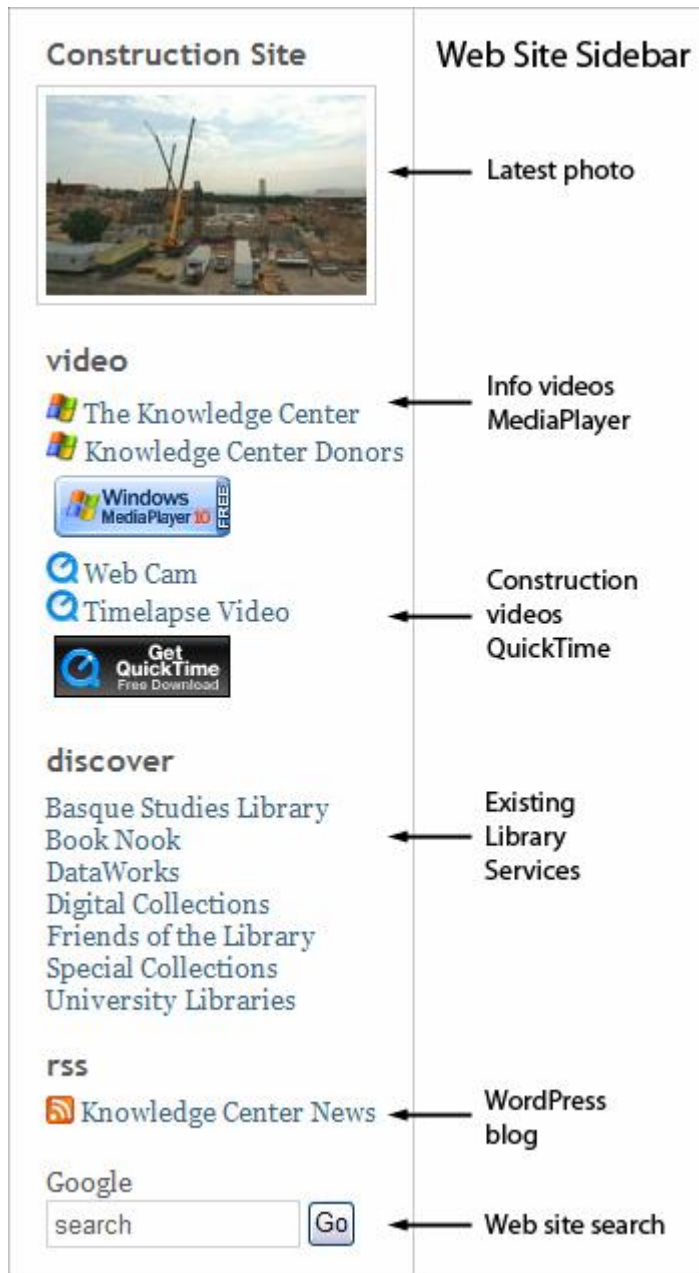
Figure 2. The header illustrates decisions about important elements of the site



The first thing visitors will see is the header image, which contains a new logo, interior and exterior renderings of the Knowledge Center building, the University “brand,” and a short “tagline” between the image and the navigation bar. Visitors who cannot view this image will see “The Knowledge Center” in standard large header text, and alternative text for each image. The header text is simply hidden by CSS in image-enabled browsers. The tagline, a usability enhancement for any site (Krug, 103-106), is essential. Visitors cannot be expected to know what “Knowledge Center” means, or that it has anything to do with them. The tagline text, “Information technologies and the resources of the University Libraries,” is short enough to take in at a glance and makes a connection between an unfamiliar phrase and the University Libraries. The emphasis on “information technologies” correctly implies that the Knowledge Center will provide technologically advanced services, but in the context of “the resources of the University Libraries,” a familiar place known for its commitment to high standards of support for all users.

Text tabs were chosen for navigation “buttons” because they are a familiar cliché, a snap to edit as the site develops, degrade nicely in older browsers as bulleted lists, and are easily enlarged by low-vision visitors. The “current page tab” is presented with a contrasting background color to aid navigation. We used the same blue for links throughout the site, in a bold style whenever embedded in blocks of text. Hovered links are underlined and important image links include a title attribute which displays as a “tool tip” to dispel ambiguity. While Internet Explorer always displays “alt” attributes for images, Mozilla browsers, such as Firefox, do not show them in image-enabled browsers, but will consistently display the “title” attribute.

Figure 3. Knowledge Center Website Sidebar



Color is an important element of the site. We do not rely on it to convey essential information, but the palette deliberately harmonizes with the toned, neutral colors of the new building's interiors, except for the dark blue in the header, which is the official "UNR blue." White page backgrounds provide necessary contrast with dark gray body text. The body font is Georgia, a serif font designed for the web, with a large x-height that makes it sharp and legible.

Website and WordPress Blog Sidebars

We want visitors to be aware of several elements of the Website no matter where or how they enter it. These features appear in the sidebar (Figure 3) at the right side of the page, but are not critical to navigation. The WordPress blog also has a sidebar (Figure 4), but it contains elements for navigating within the blog. No one seems confused about the sidebars being fraternal rather than


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identical twins, perhaps because the blog is obviously different than the web pages, and blogs have become familiar.

The Home Page or “What's in it for me?”

The home page currently has two sections that expand on the meaning of the tagline. The first section includes the shortest possible summation of what the Knowledge Center is and a streaming video for visitors who would like a fuller exposition.

Figure 4. Knowledge Center Blog Sidebar

June 2006							Blog Sidebar	
M	T	W	T	F	S	S		
			1	2	3	4		
5	6	7	8	9	10	11	←	Calendar
12	13	14	15	16	17	18		
19	20	21	22	23	24	25		
26	27	28	29	30				
« May								
recent								
Summer hours for Knowledge Center construction							←	Recent posts
Concrete pour photos								
Concrete pour in the news								
Concrete Pour Rescheduled								
KC Construction Begins								
categories							←	Posts by Category
Events (3)								
General (2)								
news stories								
Knowledge Center in the News							←	WordPress "Page" (regular web page within blog site)
discover								
Basque Studies Library							←	Existing Library Services
Book Nook								
DataWorks								
Digital Collections								
Friends of the Library								
Special Collections								
University Libraries								
rss								
 Knowledge Center News							←	RSS feed for blog
Search this blog								
<input type="text" value="search"/> <input type="button" value="Go"/>							←	Blog search

The longer section is a list of Knowledge Center "Features, Resources & Services" that is meant to answer the question: "What's in it for me?" In fact, the first iteration of the site had a tab with this

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label, but it quickly became apparent that “What’s in it for me?” should be focus of the home page. The construction phase will be of interest, given the immense size of the excavation and constant activity of big equipment at the building site, but in the end, it’s what I can do at the Knowledge Center, or what I can do because it exists, that truly interests me and those who will use its facilities and services in the future.

Beyond the home page

The Knowledge Center website has six sections containing as much information as we can provide at this stage of building construction:

- News

Fortuitously, a centralized campus installation of mySql and WordPress became available just as we began work on the revised Website.

A blog was the logical solution for presenting and managing Knowledge Center news. The building Project Coordinator could easily contribute posts and moderate comments using a WordPress administrative login and web forms. The Library webmaster obtained a mySQL database and user account from the University’s Information Technology (IT) Division Unix server administrator, installed WordPress in the account folder, and selected a theme for the interface. Customizing the theme and creating sample pages was easier than expected and took about a week. The blog interface worked so well, we adapted its header and templates for the revised Knowledge Center web. Users would access the blog by clicking the “News” tab on the site home page.

Figure 5. News Item from the WordPress blog

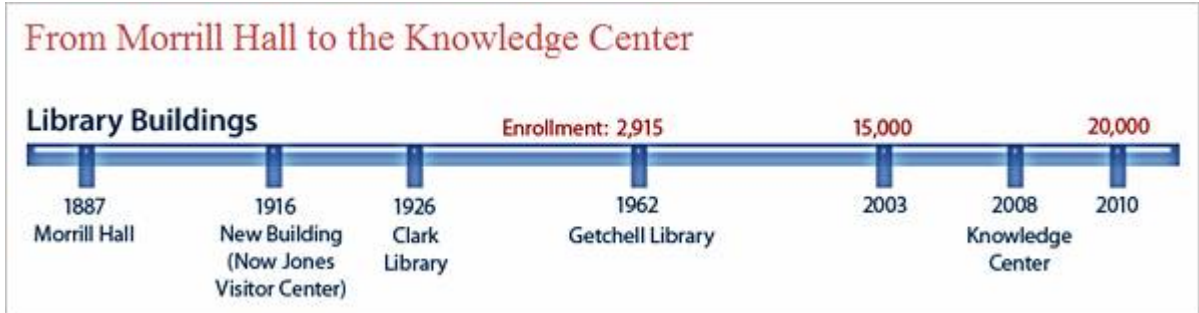


Realistically, more publicity is needed than making a blog available. Our IT Communications Specialist wrote stories for the University’s *Nevada News* site, and our Knowledge Center Project Coordinator gave an interview to the local newspaper when construction began. The University’s Development & Alumni Relations Website profiled the building project for potential donors with a link to our website, and the Events Department created publicity for events such as the Knowledge Center’s 12-million pound “Concrete Pour” in June 2006.

History

To appreciate where we are going, it helps to see where we have been! The history page includes a Library history timeline, University enrollment figures, and historic photographs of the building.

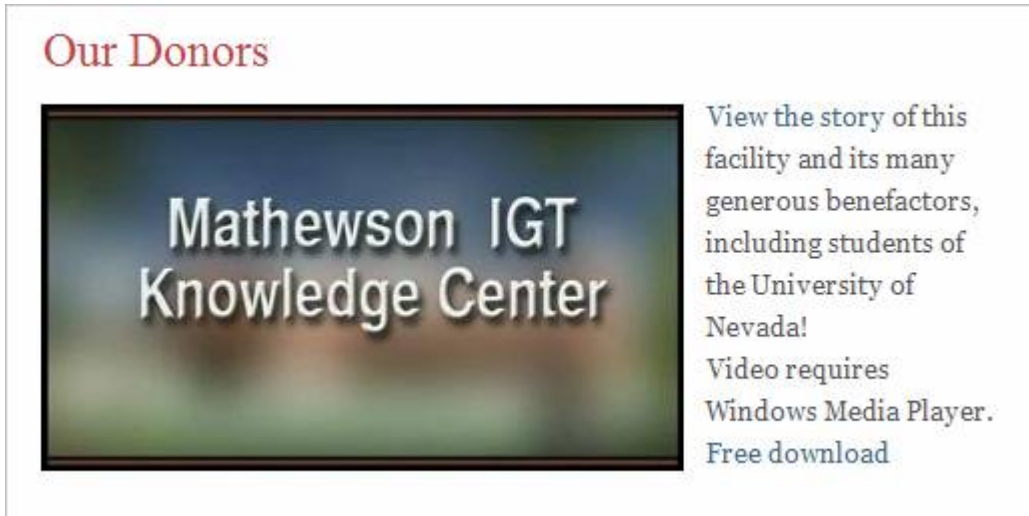
Figure 6. Main Library Building Timeline



- Donors

Without donors, the Knowledge Center would not have been possible. In this section a video tour of building plans highlights named spaces and acknowledges donor contributions.

Figure 7. Donor Recognition Video



- Images

The Images and Media page gathers photographs and videos of current construction and events. It also includes exterior drawings and floor plans of the building's five levels. Links to the lead architectural firm and design firm logically appear here and on the Facts page.

Figure 8. Photo of Concrete Pour Event



- Facts

This web page lists statistics and factual information about the size and features of the building. The succinct format is easily scanned by visitors.

Figure 9. Facts Page

Facts about The Mathewson-IGT Knowledge Center

Location: University of Nevada, Reno campus, east of the Brian Whalen Parking Garage and north of the College of Education.

Construction cost: \$75,300,000

Size: 295,000 square-foot five-story building.

Exterior surface: Red brick

- FAQ

A Question and Answer page addresses concerns and general questions drawn from feedback visitors have submitted via the Contact page. We implemented several helpful suggestions for our FAQ page from UNR's Marketing and Communications Office.

Figure 10. FAQ Page

Knowledge Center FAQ

- When does construction begin?
- What is the projected completion date for the Knowledge Center?
- Why is the Knowledge Center being built on the north end of campus?
- Will all the books be in storage so we won't be able to browse anymore?
- How will I get a book from the storage area?
- What will happen to the Getchell Library building?

Q: When does construction begin?
3/15/2006

A: The initial excavation was completed during summer 2005 to reduce inconvenience to staff and students on campus during the fall and winter semesters. It was also done to get a head start on the project and move the completion date up by several months. The

- **Contact**

The Contact page offers an e-mail feedback form and more information about the Project Coordinator and University Vice President for Development & Alumni Relations, who may also be contacted directly. Personally-identifying information is not required so that concerns may be freely expressed. An anti-spam filter prevents the form from being submitted unless the correct answer to a simple question is checked. If all answers are checked, the form also fails.

Figure 11. Comment form

The image shows a web form for submitting comments. At the top, it says "Your comments are appreciated!". Below this, there are three input fields: "Name" (Optional), "E-mail" (Optional), and a large "Comment" text area (Max 3000 characters). Below the comment area, there is a character count showing "3000 characters left". Underneath, there are radio buttons for "I'm a" with options: "UNR student", "UNR Faculty/Staff", and "Visitor". Below that, there are checkboxes for "Anti-spam" with options: "Dog", "Cat", "Box", and "Rat". A note says "(Check the item that doesn't belong)". At the bottom, there are two buttons: "Send Comment" and "Start Over".

Keeping the site fresh

Site administrators and publishers can post to the WordPress site using simple web forms that incorporate a basic HTML editor. For the main Website, there are Dreamweaver templates for Contribute users to create new pages or add content to existing ones, such as the FAQ page. For either the main Website or the associated WordPress blog, contributors need be concerned only with content, since all presentational formatting is handled by CSS style sheets.

One caveat is that content providers need to understand that pasting content from other HTML or word processing sources, including HTML e-mail, will also paste the source's styles into the code. In the end, the web developer will need to validate and review page code periodically to keep it clean and standards-compliant. Even with the best of intentions, non-standard markup will creep in if authors write content to the production server or paste news into WordPress. Validation of new and revised pages helps keep the Website usable and easier to maintain.

Part of the planning process for the new building was to provide current photographs and frequently updated videos of the construction process. The Teaching and Learning Technologies unit of the University's Information Technology Division produces these critical elements of the site:

- Current still photograph
- Web Cam streaming video
- Time lapse video

Library faculty who are involved in particular areas of the site will also contribute new content as the building project proceeds. For example, our Distance Education Librarian is currently working on an informational page about the Automated Storage and Retrieval System (ASRS). Some of this content will migrate to the new Knowledge Center site after the building opens. Meanwhile, it's a priority to inform our students, faculty, and staff about important changes in how services are delivered before the changes are implemented.

If the site is fresh and nobody knows, effort is wasted. A great idea for publicizing a new library building project is the *Harrison/Small Library Press Kit* by the University of Virginia, which provides press releases, fact sheet, and photographs in appropriate resolutions and formats for the media. (University of Virginia, 2004)

Conclusion

Building a new Website on the foundations of an established one forces purposeful rethinking of design principles, content, method of presentation, and maintenance. Creating this site was an opportunity to incorporate a new WordPress blog, which in turn, led to experimentation with Dreamweaver templates and Contribute. Offering streaming video and frequently updated construction site photographs meant coordinating updates with other Information Technology Division personnel who have expertise in media production. Work on this introductory site is a source of ideas for the future metamorphosis of the Library Website into a future Knowledge Center site, as well as a framework for looking at services in new ways.

Because the main purpose of the building site is to inform and prepare users for a big change that will benefit them immensely, it cannot succeed without determined public relations efforts and University-wide support. Fortunately, we have a dedicated IT Communications professional and the University Events office to create news stories and publicize Knowledge Center events. The Library supports not only its own goals, but the University's strategic plan by developing this public Website for the huge building project. In turn, UNR's Development & Alumni Relations office links to our site as part of its outreach to donors. The Marketing and Communications office offers invaluable experience in public relations. The Library's history of cooperation with University policies for web publication, adherence to web standards, and previous successful projects helped us proceed quickly, without any significant conflicts.

Collaborative projects like this one tend to improve communication and mutual appreciation between the Library and other IT units that will soon share the same building. A head start on working together will surely result in a collegial environment that benefits users even more.

References

Examples of New Building Websites

"Building a New Central Library." 31 Jan 2006. Seattle Public Library. 23 June 2006 < <http://www.spl.org/lfa/central/buildingnewcentral.html> >

An extensive site, with "information about construction, the architect, the design process, community meetings, the art selection process, and many other reports."

"Building: What's New with the Project." 19 June 2006. Laramie County Library. 23 June 2006 < <http://www.lclsonline.org/building/index.html> >

News releases, a construction timeline, many photographs, and a suggestion form are among the inviting features of this modern looking site. Building project pages are linked from a tab on the Library's home page.

"Library Building Project." [06 Jan 2006] University of Houston Libraries. 23 June 2006. < <http://info.lib.uh.edu/building/index.html> >

Nice organization of information with a clean layout and no excess verbiage.

"The McHenry Library Addition and Renovation Project." 07 November 2005. University of California, Santa Cruz. 23 June 2006 < <http://library.ucsc.edu/mcadd/> >

Demonstrates that a site does not have to be huge and complex to be inviting. The striking picture on the home page can't be ignored, along with the visual created by the opening text: "a setting of terraced reading gardens, redwoods, and cherry trees."

"Minneapolis Public Library: New Buildings and Capital Projects." 07 June 2006. Minneapolis Public Library. 23 June 2006 < <http://www.mpls.lib.mn.us/newcentrallib.asp> >.

Captures the excitement of a new library and offers opportunities for interaction. The order of items on the page is noteworthy: The "Opening Moment" is featured first, with a great photo; an archive of documents is listed last. In addition to the site itself, media coverage of the building project kept popping up on Google, demonstrating that effective public relations efforts resulted in coverage by local television, public radio, and other media.

"New Frank P. Doyle Library, Santa Rosa Campus." 12 May 2006. Santa Rosa Junior College Library. 23 June 2006 < <http://www.santarosa.edu/library/newlibrary.shtml> >

A good example of an all-in-one page site that includes many facts about the building, FAQs, photographs, and a video.

"New Library at Queens." 2004. Queen's University, Belfast. 23 June 2006 < <http://www.qub.ac.uk/newlibrary/index.html> >

This site has a cohesive theme as a "library for the 21st Century" that "respects the past." Layout and colors are dignified and pleasant. The Q and A page adds an informative and casual element to the site.

"New Library Construction Update." 23 June 2006. University of Florida, George A. Smathers Libraries. 23 June 2006 <<http://www.uflib.ufl.edu/pio/construction/>>

In addition to construction updates, photos, and FAQ, this site has a page for "Locations and Relocations" as Library units move into the new building.

"What's Happening: The New Main Library Project." 25 August 2006 Champaign Public Library. 11 September 2006. < http://www.champaign.org/about_us/construction_news.html >

This nicely laid-out site has architectural drawings, a colorful chart of features and statistics, news, and a web cam.

"Your New Look Library." 15 July 2004. University of York Library. 23 June 2006.

< <http://www.york.ac.uk/services/library/newlook/> >

Well organized, with menu choices geared to users' interests, such as FAQs, Access & Parking, and Quiet Study Space. The photo gallery features "before and after" images of the Morrell Library refurbishment project, and images of the new Raymond Burton Humanities Research Library.

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