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Staff Intranet - Focus Group

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Project Cover Sheet

Project	<p>Library Staff Intranet</p> <p><i>Focus Group</i></p> <p>The Library Staff Intranet is a gateway to various library staff administrative information and tasks. It suffers from usability, findability and accessibility problems.</p>
Committee & Members	<p>UM Library Web Systems</p> <p>Ken Varnum, Kat Hagedorn</p> <p>Saurabh Koparkar (student intern)</p>
Report Info	<p>Report Author(s): Saurabh Koparkar</p> <p>Contact Information: lws-usability@umich.edu</p> <p>Report Date: July 2008; Last Revised: August 2008</p>
Objectives	<p>The goal of the focus group was to determine staff opinions and problems, get their perspective on navigation and labeling, and see if participants have ideas of new features and content.</p>
Methodology	<p>Method – Focus Group</p> <p>Dates of study: July 2008</p>
Results & Analysis	<p>Intranet usage characteristics, frequently used features and recommendations for changes and additions were identified.</p>
Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Determine ownership of sections, and make it easy for staff to understand how to update the intranet.• Keep the staff intranet more up to date.• Add a calendar function and a footer.• Update the newsletter area and create RSS feeds.

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Introduction

The University of Michigan Library Staff Intranet website (<http://lib.umich.edu/staff/>) is used by the library staff. The Intranet website is a gateway to various library staff administrative information and tasks such as library committees, departments, newsletters, documents etc. The Intranet gateway suffers from usability, find-ability and accessibility problems. The website home page needs to be redesigned from a usability and information architecture point of view. A focus group was conducted for understanding the library staff's views and opinions about the current website home page. This report describes the focus group activity with respect to methodology, findings and conclusion.

Methodology

Conducting a successful focus group requires proper preparation. A focus group helps in eliciting users' attitudes and expectations from a system or service. The Staff Intranet has a large library staff user group. One way of approaching the Intranet's redesign is finding out the user populations' needs and desires from such a system; the best way to accomplish this is a focus group.

The goals of conducting a focus group were first established. These goals can be listed as:

- Determine staff's opinions and problems about the current Intranet website.
- Find out the staff's perspectives on Intranet information architecture features such as navigation, labeling and content.
- Get an idea of any new interface features and functionality that the Intranet should have.

After setting the goals, discussion topics were created to achieve these goals. The focus group participants were asked a number of questions which would bring out their views and lead to discussion about the topic. These questions are:

- How often do you currently use the staff intranet?
- What features of the staff intranet do you use?
- What do you like about these features?
- What do you dislike about these features? OR What is difficult / hard / disagreeable about these features?
- What do you want to change in the intranet?
- What new features do you want to see in the intranet?
- Do you want to change current content or add new content to the intranet?

It was decided that the focus group would be conducted for one hour. Participants were recruited by sending an invitation email to the library staff. A total of seven participants responded. Food

was chosen as an incentive for the participants. Two note takers were present for the entire discussion. We audio recorded the group, but the recording equipment failed to record the discussion.

The participants were debriefed about the focus group activity, explaining what the activity was comprised of and how it would be useful for the Intranet redesign (Appendix A). The participants were also informed about their rights and they had to sign an Informed Consent Form (Appendix B) that explained clauses regarding the purposes of conducting this activity and that personal information about the participants would not be revealed under any circumstances. During the Focus Group, the participants were asked the questions and encouraged to discuss the question topics. If the discussion wandered from the topic, it was brought back to the topic at hand.

Focus Group Findings

Intranet usage characteristics

Intranet usage was diverse and varied considerably among the participants, from seldom to frequently used. A new staff member used the Intranet very frequently, likely a number of times in a day. Other participants said that they used the Intranet several times in a week depending on the need or even as less as just a few times in a month, depending on the nature of the use.

Frequently used Intranet features

- The *Library Newsletter* is a frequently used Intranet feature by the participants.
- *Training and Documentation* is another frequently used feature. Most of the participants had the complaint that this feature was never updated and was out-of-date.
- *Library department directory* and *Library Staff Directory* web pages were often browsed by the participants. The participants expressed their frustration about the confusion they faced when they tried to update or edit their personal information in the *Library Staff Directory* because of the lack of proper instructions to do the same. They also said that they were confused about the difference between the University of Michigan Directory and the *Library Staff Directory*.
- The *Committee Directory* web pages were also visited frequently by the participants but they commented that the committee memberships were incorrect while the committee chairs were shown correctly.
- The *Search* function was a frequently used feature that helped the staff to find what they were looking for in the staff Intranet.

- The *Library Technology Support* feature was used by one of the participants to learn more about Library technologies or to send a request to technology support.
- The *Library Programmatic Review* section of the Intranet was often browsed by a few participants.
- Another frequently used Intranet section is “*Documents you might want to read*”. This section was liked by most participants. A few thought that the label of this section was not very appropriate.

Recommendations for changes and new additions in the Intranet

- All the participants felt that the Staff Intranet home page should be given a Web 2.0 look and feel. The Intranet should also be better architected by creating more understandable labels and categories of links.
- The participants expressed the opinion that a large amount of Intranet content was outdated and that they would like to see the content updated regularly.
- Currently, the Intranet gateway web page does not show any ownership, which is essential from a credibility point of view. It was suggested that a header or label describing the Intranet ownership should be displayed on specific pages.
- The participants suggested that the *Library Newsletter* section should have different categories than the current categorization based on monthly sub-categories. Some participants thought that the Newsletter should be changed to a blog. The suggestion for a Newsletter blog was informed due to a similar discussion in a previous staff meeting.
- The current Search and Advanced Search functionality should be improved and made more Google-like with better search results and also the ability to refine search results. Advanced Search should have better filter options.
- An appropriate footer for the Intranet main page should be created which would include links to CTools, Wolverine Access, Library Human Resources and other commonly used external University of Michigan web portal links.
- It was suggested that RSS feeds should be included in the Intranet. These feeds should be set up for the entire Intranet or for specific sections. For instance, by subscribing to “*Documents you might want to read*” a staff member would get a regular feed of important documents that are added to this section.

- The “*Documents you might want to read*” section should include different types of documents like current decision reports, agendas, summaries of what was discussed in staff meetings, calendar information, how the library operates, etc.
- A suggestion was made regarding customizing and personalizing the Intranet home page for each staff member with respect to how the page would look and what content the page would have. In a similar way, frequently used links by a staff member would appear more prominently or on the top of the page for easy navigation.
- A calendar that would show various staff related events should be introduced in the Intranet. Some participants also suggested that this calendar could also show schedules of some important people in the library.
- A Chief Documenter should be appointed who would manage the interaction between the staff and the Intranet. The Documenter would handle reports and documents related to the library and would ensure the proper management of the same for pushing such information to the staff.

Conclusion

Redesigning the Staff Intranet is an activity that involves understanding the users’ opinions and expectations from the Intranet website. The focus group that was conducted served this purpose in a useful way. A number of issues about the current Intranet were brought into the open by doing this activity. These issues would not have surfaced if only a usability perspective would have been employed for redesigning the Intranet website. The focus group activity serves as a useful starting point for performing further analysis on the Staff Intranet re-design, now that the core problems have been identified.

References

1. Kuniavsky, Mike. “Observing the User Experience: A Practitioner's Guide to User Research”, San Francisco, CA: Morgan Kaufmann Publishers, 2003.

Appendix A: Focus Group Debriefing

Warm-up and Introduction

Hello, welcome. I am Saurabh, a graduate student at the School of Information. I am working as an intern at UM Library Web Systems. Ken Varnum is my mentor and guide. As an intern, my work consists of performing usability reviews and tests of UM Library web tools and services.

What we are going to do today is talk about your experiences when you use the Library Staff Intranet website. The objective of this group activity is to gather your opinions and perspectives when you use the intranet so that the intranet experience can be improved. The discussion will be as candid as possible. Please feel free to say whatever you think is appropriate regarding the discussion topics. We want your opinion, no opinion is right or wrong as it is just an opinion, so please do not hesitate to agree or disagree with someone's opinion, we want to hear from everyone and all your opinions are of equal importance.

The focus group discussion will be recorded as an audio recording to help in transcription for analysis purposes. We also have a note taker to record the comments and quotes.

I would urge the participants to speak one at a time, avoiding interrupting each other as much as possible. Since we have a limited amount of time, I may have to ask you to wrap up a thought or put it aside so that we can move on.

Informed Consent

The informed consent clause sets your rights as a person who is participating in this focus group. As a participant,

- You may stop at any time.
- You may ask questions at any time.
- You may leave at any time.
- There is no deception involved.
- Your answers are kept confidential.
- Any personal information about you will not be disclosed under any circumstances.

Focus Group Questions

- How often do you currently use the staff intranet? (5 minutes)
- What features of the staff intranet do you use? (5 minutes)
- What do you like about these features? (10 minutes)
- What do you dislike about these features? OR What is difficult / hard / disagreeable about these features? (10 minutes)

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- What do you want to change in the intranet? (10 minutes)
- What new features do you want to see in the intranet? (10 minutes)
- Do you want to change current content or add new content to the intranet? (5 minutes)

Appendix B: Consent Form

We are assessing the functionality, usability and satisfaction you have with the UM Library Staff Intranet. We would also like to understand your opinions of this web service. The whole session will take an hour of your time.

We are collecting this information on behalf of the developers, a group of library professionals here at the University who are working to determine how to use the application to best serve the needs of the university community.

You are not required to participate in this evaluation and you may discontinue your involvement at any point in the interaction. Your participation in this group activity is voluntary. Even after you sign the informed consent document, you may decide to leave the focus group discussion at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled.

We will collect your name at the outset along with contact information if we have any follow-up questions, but the report we will produce at the end of this process and submit to the developers will not contain any identifying information. Instead, we will be reporting opinions and demographics in the aggregate. We will be recording the session so that we can check back with some facts in case we miss them in our note taking. Like the identifying information, the recordings will not contain any personal information.

One copy of this document will be kept together with the research records of this study. Also, you will be given a copy to keep.

If you have any questions, please contact us at:

Name: [name removed]

Title: [title removed]

Email: [email address removed]

Phone: [phone number removed]

Should you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact the Institutional Review Board, 540 E. Liberty Street, Suite 202, Ann Arbor, MI 48104-2210, 936-0933, email: irbhsbs@umich.edu.

I am 18 years or older: ___Yes ___No

I agree to participate in this study, and to have the session recorded via audio:

Signature: _____ Date: _____ Uniqname: _____

Print your name: _____