

ARTS : People for the Arts

October 26, 2008

Users and how they travel through the site

From the homepage the user is lead to each of the landing pages for the main sections of the site. From there they are presented with text, with the only navigation options to view more section content or to return to the homepage.

From within the sections, it is difficult to see where you are. While each section's main page is consistently the first item in the sub menu, most users will not remain on the site long enough to make this connection. As a result, most people will never go below any of the top-level pages.

The text itself does not provide much relief, since there are few links outside of the section and the text is set in a large impenetrable chunk.



The illustration above is an example of the best-case scenario of the site, where the user has enough interest to ping-pong back to the homepage to see the various sections.

A proper flow allows the user to follow the site down one of many paths, winding across interests, to get a fuller understanding of the offerings of the site. With this type of approach the user is more likely to find something that appeals to them and take action.

Translating the site from the current rigid organization to a more flexible navigation is not difficult, only incurring the cost of revised text and navigation:

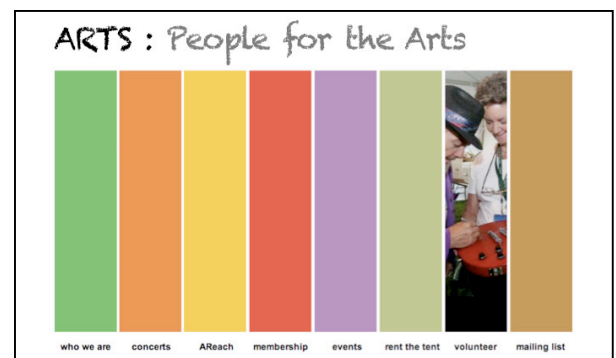
- Break text areas to manageable chunks of two or three sentences each. Most people only read the first few words of each paragraph to figure out the meaning.
- At the bottom of most pages in the section should be a teaser to the next page in the section. This is most important to do on the landing page of each section, where the user may not know there is more section information to view.
- Cross-link between sections from within the text. In places like the "who we are" section text refers to programs and the Arboretum. Links to these sections within the site stir people's interest and should be encouraged.

- Make links visible. Currently, the user only knows if there is a link when they rollover the selection. This does not give the user the chance to make educated choices about where to go.
- Modify the right navigation to include an indicator of where you are, such as a carat next to the text. This gives the user visual cues pointing to additional content.
- Include links to all sections of the site on each page. Forcing visitors to return to the homepage will just make them leave quicker.

Different Audiences and their individual goals

Along with improving the navigation throughout the internal sections of the site, the user needs to have a reason to enter from the homepage.

Currently, the homepage, and the rest of the site, is very nicely designed. Color bars and a clean and clear general navigation leave a positive impression on the user when viewing the site. The problem becomes how to instill enough interest from the homepage without losing the clean and clear design.



The current homepage (seen to the right) is sparse and bold. When the user rolls over the color bars an image appears. The image, as well as the associated text link below the bar leads the user to the sections of the site.

When looking at the various users to the site you need to consider their goals. From this you can deduce how they will react to the homepage, and from there, the site:

Member:

The member is already associated with the organization, and is looking for information about upcoming events, and sign up to attend. They are already converted users, as members and would be familiar with the organization and their offerings, and have a goal for visiting the site.

There are clear links for the member, leading to volunteer and to attend events. As members, this group needs the least amount of handholding, and as such will receive very little benefit from revisions to the homepage.

If the site were purely member based (which it is not), adding a calendar of events to the homepage would be appropriate.

Since this user group is already has a vested interest in the organization, bouncing back and forth to the homepage is not a real issue for them.

Visitor:

This type of user would only have a vague understanding of what ARTS is, having attended a concert, seen an advertisement or followed a link from another site, most often from a search engine.

This is the most important type of user, leading to additional membership, or event attendance – event attendance leads to membership.

Focusing attention to this user group would benefit both the visitor group and the sponsor group, leading to deeper page visits and a higher level of conversion to the “member” group, which is the ultimate goal of the organization.

When the visitor group arrives at the site, they are currently left without any visual cues as to how to proceed. Currently, the site homepage offers them no help. They do not know what the site is, they do not know where to go. If the user was motivated, they would most likely click on “Who we are”. Unfortunately, once they have clicked on “Who we are” they would leave the site, since there is no call to action, moving them to another page or any desired action.

Links from this page only lead off the site to the Planting Fields Arboretum, AReach or directions. Appropriate links would be to the membership or concerts sections.

Improving this flow would only require text changes and a revised way of thinking about servicing this audience. Below are some suggestions:

- Implement the suggestions in the user flow section of the document, chunking text, and leading the user to other sections of interest.
- Add a USP (unique selling proposition) to the homepage. This will focus the user about the type of site they are on, and why it is beneficial to them to continue through the site and get involved
- Consider including a few words in the color bars before the user rolls over the selection. Positioning text can help the user travel deeper into the site. This can be done small and tastefully to not interfere with the ascetics of the site.
- Add the mailing list directly to the bottom of the homepage. Mailing lists are a good way to stay in touch with membership, raising attendance to events and providing additional value. Signing a visitor up for the mailing list can turn visitors into members.

Sponsor:

Users with a sponsorship focus are evaluating the membership, offerings and presentation to make the difficult choice of allocating sponsorship dollars.

This user group is looking for a robust user population with offerings that are aligned to their corporate goals.

Currently there is no clear way to get to the sponsorship section. There is a lot of good sponsorship information, but it is located under the concerts section. This should be located right from the homepage.

Navigation options

Most of the navigation options available are clear. Each of the sections, most containing additional pages are focused and relevant to the site. Aside from the aforementioned modifications the structure of the site is sound.

The current structure includes content for all three user groups. There are areas that do not seem to be focused at any user group, illustrated with question marks (?) below.

	Member	Visitor	Sponsor
Who We Are		✓	✓
Concerts	✓	✓	✓
AReach			?
Membership		✓	✓
Events	✓	✓	✓
Rent the Tent	?		
Volunteer	✓		✓
Mailing List	✓	✓	

The sections AReach and Rent the tent appear to be random on the homepage and most likely should be located at a lower level under “events”, “who we are” or “volunteer”.

Of the available items, mailing list can be treated differently, raising the level and perceived importance by adding mailing list entry fields to the bottom of the homepage. This would increase mailing list participation giving the organization a directed way to communicate to users.

The mailing list specifically, can have an email address field with an activator to a fuller profile. Great attention should be paid to how much information you are requesting of the user. The more information requested the less likely the user is to give you this information.

By requesting simply the email address with the expectation of receiving event information the likelihood is high the user will continue. If on the next step of the mailing list process the user is requested to enter non-required information they may or may not do so.

Since they already entered some information, they most likely will enter some more, if the request is reasonable. This is called the “foot in the door” method of sales/marketing that has been proven to have success.

Search Engines, placement and attracting visitors

Search engine placement is reasonable for the most used keywords including “Arts Long Island”, “friends of the arts long island”. “Friends of the arts”, “li concerts arts”, “planting fields concerts” there was no listing for “Arts LI” or “AREach li”.

The AREach page specifically has no title tags, making bookmarking and search engine placement difficult.

Coding throughout the rest of the site looks clear and clear with keywords and appropriate tags.

The best way to drive traffic to this type of site however is not through search engine traffic, but through relationship building with community organizations and the public attending events.

All communication with the public should include the URL of the organization. It would also be suggested to build a mini-site, which would be page targeted to concert-goers, accessible through a separate URL. This one page site would be specific to signing up members and only be included on ticket stubs and programs. Focusing on this type of user group would maximize Internet signups.

Developing reciprocal link arrangements with other long island arts organizations would allow ARTS to increase its audience with visitors already predisposed to supporting and attending long island arts functions.

Below are some site examples:

- Long Island Arts Alliance (<http://longislandartsalliance.org>)
- Long Island Arts Council at Freeport (<http://www.liacfreeport.org/>)
- Art League of Long Island (<http://www.artleagueli.net/>)
- Long Island Arts (<http://www.longislandarts.com/>)
- Long Island.com (<http://events.longisland.com/>)
- Long Island Connection (<http://www.longislandconnection.net/>)

In addition to reciprocal linking paid online advertisements through google adwords, targeted to specific keywords and paid advertisements on newsday.com and some of the websites listed above would also increase online awareness and visitorship.

Another way to easily inform your users of upcoming events is to enhance the calendar using a micro-blogging technology called twitter (www.twitter.com), which allows users to receive sporadic messages to the twitter application, iPhones and other cellular devices.

Newsday has recently begun “tweeting” top stories to their visitors and currently have over 250 people following the updates. This is an upcoming free technology.

Tweeting only requires setting up a free account, promoting it on the website, and having someone from the organization enter relevant texts such as upcoming events days before they occur.