

WM

23 January 2008
Webmasters Report

It's been "business as usual" in terms of my duties as webmaster. Some recent activities:

- In November, I went into MemberClicks and shifted the color scheme to mirror the redesigned MPLA website. Further, I uploaded the new MPLA logo, so that everything more closely matched the main website.
- I set up the election ballots in MClicks, so that they will allow members to vote from Feb. 14 - Mar. 14.
- Rob Banks asked me to highlight the 60th Anniversary of MPLA by featuring the three part History of MPLA series written a decade ago by Blaine Hall, in conjunction with MPLA's 50th Anniversary. I've also been asked to help update that history. To that end, we've created a wiki for the committee members to use.

A couple of new developments:

I've become much more aware of web usability – that is, how easy is it to find things on the MPLA website. I don't have the time or money to conduct focus groups on the website, but there are some very simple things we can do to make the MPLA website more "usable." For example, a search box prominently displayed is crucial. Our current search function is located on the bottom of every page, meaning you have to scroll down to find it. That will be changing. I'm going to locate that search box up towards the top of every page where it's easier to see.

Another strategy for improving usability is the use of "bread crumbs" – the links across the top of a page that note the steps you have taken to get to that point. We are currently using bread crumbs throughout the Board Report Archive. I'm going to try to see if we can't incorporate those bread crumbs consistently throughout the website.

Surprisingly enough, as I was educating myself on web usability, I found we were already incorporating many of the "best practices" of web usability. It turns out that one of the big tenets of web usability is essentially keeping it simple and not making people think when they visit the website. I'm continuing to explore web usability concepts to see what we can incorporate.

A question for the Board – you can help me create a more usable MPLA website. Is there anything on the website that you have been looking for and been unable to find? What? How did you go about trying to find it? Did you click on the categories from the left side of the website? Did you search the website for it? If you can shoot me an email (dan.chaney@okstate.edu) and tell me what you were looking for, if you found it, and how – that can help me explore where we may have usability issues. Remember, if you have to "think" about where something is, we may have a usability problem.

This will be a summer project, as it involves a lot of staring at html and redesigning. It's not a major redesign, it's a tweaking.

Another project is finding a way to incorporate the ton of photos we have available on the website. I'd like to come up with a rotating image somewhere on the homepage, with a photo from the archive that rotates or changes every time you visit. It's not a hard enhancement to create – but like everything in web development, it requires I sit down with my headphones on, blaring loud music, scribbling snippets of code on a piece of scratch paper, moving junk around, trial and error, etc. As my colleagues here at OSU can attest, when I'm working on web design, concentrating with headphones on, you do NOT want to interrupt me because while you may get my attention, I'll have no idea what you're asking because I've been concentrating on html for hours at a time.

Respectfully submitted,

Dan Chaney
MPLA Webmaster