Best Practices in Web Content Management

Presentation for E-Gov 2001
July 9, 2001
Introduction

Overview

• The View from Inside – challenges, best practices and lessons learned at HUD
• The View From Outside – challenges, best practices, and lessons learned from the perspective of an international observer of e-government
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- The View Across Agencies – panel of Federal web content managers, sharing personal challenges, best practices, and lessons learned
- The View Down the Road – some thoughts about the future of government web sites
Session objectives

• Plant seeds
• Share real-life experiences
• Present different points of view
• Inspire you to find at least one thing new to try
What we won’t do

• No cookie cutters, magic beans, or guarantees
• There is no “right answer”
• You need to figure out what works for you/your organization
What is “web content management”?  

- Running a web site is much like running a newspaper  
- Content manager = “editor in chief”  
  - Focus, writing, layout, design, marketing, performance  
  - Makes sure the product delivers
One more thing: Federal Web Content Managers Group

• Meetings listed at: http://www.hud.gov/library/bookshelf15/webcontentmgr.cfm
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The View from Inside – HUD’s Story

Intro/Overview

• Our products, roles, services
• What’s next?
• Challenges
• What we did right
• What we learned the hard way
• Keys to success
Our Products

• HUD’s Homes and Communities internet site
  • Audience: citizens and HUD partners
  • Purpose: clearinghouse of information/services about homes and communities
• 2 million unique visitors in last 5 months; 5.4 million visits
• More than 75% are private citizens - most want to buy a home
• 25% return more than once
• More than one million pages, in hard copy
The View from Inside – HUD’s Story

• HUD’s intranet (hudweb)
  • Audience: HUD staff
  • Purpose: communicate; educate; provide services, references, and tools employees need to do their jobs
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- HUD’s Kiosks
• 94 touch-screen kiosks – going to 110
• Located in shopping malls, grocery stores, other public places
• Purpose: bring HUD to the people – reach citizens we wouldn’t reach
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- Offers basic information about HUD programs (about 100 pages of web site)
- 20,000 visitors each month
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• HUD’s Answer Machines
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- Public use computers located in every HUD office
- Purpose: provide free access to HUD’s web site
- 1,300 visitors each month
• **Web Clinics for HUD Partners**
  - Free training sessions for HUD partners
  - Purpose: build bridges to citizens – help partners create sites that deliver services HUD funds
  - 32 clinics: more than 1,100 participants from 800 organizations
Our Roles

• Writers/editors/communicators
  • Editor-in-chief of the web sites
  • Determine focus
  • Decide on look and feel
  • Organize content
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• Write the segues
• Edit content to make it audience-friendly
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- Entrepreneurs
  - Stir the pot
  - Create business for the web
  - Understand managers’ problems and goals
    - Help them figure out how to use the web to address them
Advocates
• Listen to our audiences – citizens, partners, employees
• Conduct focus groups, monitor e-mail, collect the stories
• Learn what they want/need – make sure our web products deliver
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• Marketers
  • Go out/tell audiences what HUD has to offer
  • Distribute brochures
  • Go to public events: state/local fairs, home and garden shows
  • Demo the web site at conferences/trade meetings
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• Teachers
  • Show staff how to use the web in general…
    • …And our web site, in particular
  • Train them so they can help customers use the site successfully
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• Visionaries
  • Look to the future
  • Think about new ways to use the web to serve audiences
  • Inspire creativity in others with our own passion for what we do
Our Services

• Briefings
  • Tell managers/staffs about HUD’s web products and how to use them
  • Explain what it means to be “citizen-centric”
Consulting

- Suggest ways to use the web to accomplish management goals and provide better services to citizens
- Help managers create special pages around special initiatives
- Advise managers on the content of web pages
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• Training
  • Conduct web clinics for grantees/partners
  • Teach staff how to sue and market HUD’s web products
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- Outreach
  - Set up online discussions
  - Conduct focus groups
  - Schedule webcasts
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Goals this year

1. Connect people with people
   • Real time housing counseling
2. Connect people with government
   • Government “of” and “by” – not just “for” the people
   • Citizens as partners
   • Town halls, virtual teams, talk shows
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3. Do what we’re doing – better
   • Make HUD’s site accessible to everyone
   • Make the web site more efficient
   • Expand reach of the web clinics
   • Improve web management
Challenges
• Overcoming organizational culture
  • Do managers value citizens as customers?
  • Do managers value results that can’t be quantified?
  • Do managers “own” e-government?
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- Overcoming fears
  - About internet’s impact on organizational structure
  - About impact on long-standing processes and relationships
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- Overcoming bureaucracy
  - Doing “right thing” takes patience, time, perseverance
  - Staying focused on innovation, in face of laws/regs
- Resources
- Changes in administration
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- Keeping everyone going in the same direction
- Keep efforts concerted – not competitive
What Works at HUD

• Organization
  • Web team structure/roles

• Content development process
  • Content “matrix”

• Management support
  • Mentors and enablers
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• Audience focus
  • Know them
  • Listen to them
  • Organize for them

• Personal customer contact
  • Boilerplate responses to e-mail
• Marketing strategy
  • Go to the audience
  • Leave a calling card
  • Listen to the audience
  • Educate the staff
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• Tell the story
  • Praise contributors
  • Explain “successes” to citizens
• Success begets success
• Boldly go where no one has gone before!
  • Look for voids/opportunities
  • Don’t wait for invitations
  • Be a leader – not a coordinator
Lessons Learned

- Management strategy
  - Consensus didn’t work
  - HUD strategy: gain external validation and use bandwagon effect
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• Consistent look and feel
  • “MacDonald’s approach”
• Use new technologies when they make sense
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- Don’t get distracted by “hot stuff”
  - “Urgent” can distract from the “necessary”
- Deal with them – but keep your eyes on the prize
5 “C’s for success

• Clarity
  • About who you serve
  • About where you want to go
  • About what’s right for your audience
  • About your purpose
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- Creativity
  - Develop innovative products that help your audience do things they want to do
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• Communication
  • Listen
  • Educate your audience
  • Brag about those who help you
  • Share your vision – be a prophet!
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• Courage
  • Risk disagreements/failures
  • Look for flexibilities in laws/regs
  • Don’t be afraid of the unknown
    • Shape it or it will shape you
  • Go out on a limb
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• Commitment
  • Energy, passion, resolve to carry you through hard times
  • Enthusiasm to startle, provoke others
And one more…
...the most important one of all…

...Common sense!