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Interface Redesign

Society for Technical Communication
Southeastern Michigan Chapter

STC-SM.org

Jim Isakson
Information Architect

Please note:
The content and structure of this site may have changed from the time this study was conducted.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

STC-SM.ORG is using Jim Isakson as a contractor for creating the revised interface of their new website (http://www.stc-sm.org). User complaints included the feeling of being overwhelmed regarding the tight proximity of the information and links within the structure of certain pages. Other complaints included a feeling of disorientation as a result of the content perceived as either too congested or too fragmented. Users also mentioned that it seemed as though there was too much copy to read on certain pages. The newly designed interface addresses these issues, along with others and presents a solution to the problems.

This report is divided into four key sections including an appendix containing screen shots of the current home page and subpage. The sections are as follows:

Analysis of Current Interface
- The existing interface is broken down into component elements and evaluated based on interface design principles.

Redesigned Interface Wireframes
- Graphic wireframes, indicating placements and arrangement of interface elements, are shown for the home page and the subpage.

Analysis of Redesigned Interface
- Improvements to the proposed interface are mentioned along with how the newly designed interface addresses the concerns in the existing design.

Implementation Options
- Two approaches to implementing the redesigned interface are presented with a consideration of their strengths and weaknesses. The recommended approach is identified.

The new design of the interface presents a number of advantages over the existing interface along with the following improvements:

- More content is visible in the fold.

- Page lengths are shortened, thus reducing scrolling.

- On the homepage, the STC-SM identity is strengthened by placing the About STC & the STC/ SM content at the top of the page and the tagline right below the logo, all within the fold.

- All content is structured in a 3 column fashion adhering to the Gestalt principles of similarity and continuity.

- The global navigation at the bottom of the page is more prominent because of relocating the tagline and placing the address, copyright, and update information underneath the global navigation.

Analysis of Current Interface

Layout

- Layout is centered and designed for 1024 W x 768 H screen.

- The interface of STC-SM.org uses a fixed width approach to the entire site.

- Much of the content structure is in a banded form (rows) running from left to right, parallel to the global navigation.

Color and Graphics

- The colors are muted which makes it easy for long viewing purposes.

- Graphics, however, are excessive resulting in high page weights (file size) increasing the amount of time the pages are downloaded through various internet connection speeds e.g., 56 k modem.

- The graphics are less than standard quality. Many have jagged edges and are blurred to a degree which adds another less than positive user experience and negative impression of the company and website.

Interface Elements

The STC-SM.ORG interface contains the following elements which will be brought to attention including alterations into the newly designed interface.

- Button and drop down menu navigation.
- Footer containing the address along with the global navigation reflected below, including Linkedin, Facebook, and Twitter link icons.
- Graphics
  - Logo and a top horizontal graphic shape containing identification page headers.
  - Global navigation buttons.
  - Images, photos, and graphic elements with headers and links. representing section areas for each page.
  - Linkedin, Facebook, and Twitter graphic link buttons.
  - Society for technical communication logo.

Interface Design Strengths

The main strength of the existing STC.SM.ORG interface is in adhering (to a degree) to the Gestalt principles of proximity, similarity, enclosure, and continuity along with consistent color and placement of some key interface elements.

- The global navigation buttons are close to one another, adhering to the Gestalt principle of proximity, respectively.

- Some of the section headers followed by their links and content fall under the Gestalt principle of proximity. They are located much closer together than most other interface elements that are not contained within a border. (see Appendix A, Figure 1)

- Other section headers along with the content exist within sectioned borders. The headers are mostly to the right of the content and are of similar color contained within similar blue boxes. The gestalt principles of enclosure and similarity are adhered to in this regard.

- The website maintains a consistent location of interface elements such as the global navigation (both top and bottom), the logo and supporting logos from page to page.

- The colors are subdued making the pages somewhat easy to read and remain consistent on elements and sections throughout the STC-SM.org website.
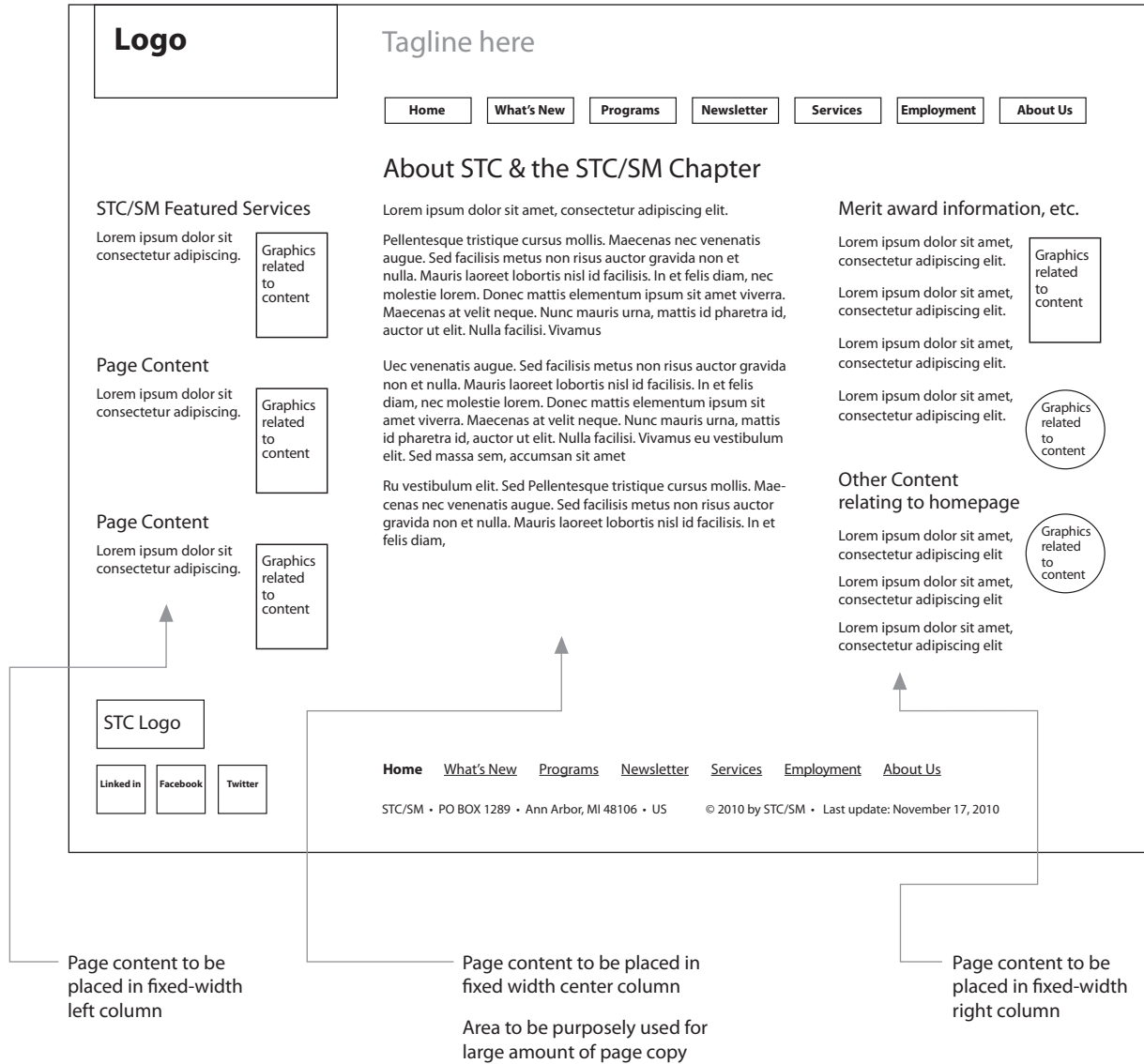
Interface Design: Areas for Improvement

Disadvantages in the existing interface include inefficient use of page space, issues with the quality of representational graphics, lack of visual composition, and white space.

- Graphics are distorted and fuzzy. A blurred photograph on the home page gives the rest of the website a poor first impression as well as the arbitrarily placed community of merit graphic and other related item. (see Appendix A, Figure 1) The oval-like graphics behind the larger section headers tend to be distracting and hinder the reading of the content.

- The header, followed by the right aligned logo presents the pages as awkward and unbalanced in accordance with the mostly left aligned content that follows. Placing the logo to the far right, and located the page headers closer to the content area would help to alleviate the uncomfortable sense of disorientation. This would also take the gestalt principle of principle of proximity to a further level of meaning (see the Home Page wireframe).

- Space is limited between the global navigation buttons and the beginning of the content on most of the pages, especially with the pages containing the headers on top of the large blue oval-like graphics. This tends to make some of the pages seem overwhelming which distracts from the focus of direction (see Appendix A, Figure 1).

- Different treatments of content headers adds a further level of distraction.

- Use of positive space becomes more of a hindrance than a complementary element to the content because of the way some items are arbitrarily placed, lined up or stacked on top of one another. Positive space in turn loses its purpose.

- Tagline is devalued because of the placement at the bottom of the page within the footer and below the fold.

Redesigned Interface Wireframes

Home Page

Logo

Tagline here

| **Home** | **What's New** | **Programs** | **Newsletter** | **Services** | **Employment** | **About Us** |

About STC & the STC/SM Chapter

STC/SM Featured Services

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Graphics related to content

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Merit award information, etc.

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Graphics related to content

Graphics related to content

Other Content relating to homepage

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Graphics related to content

STC Logo

Linked in | Facebook | Twitter

| **Home** | What's New | Programs | Newsletter | Services | Employment | About Us |

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Page content to be placed in fixed-width left column

Page content to be placed in fixed width center column

Area to be purposely used for large amount of page copy

Page content to be placed in fixed-width right column

Redesigned Interface Wireframes

Sub Page

Logo

Tagline here

| Home | What's New | Programs | Newsletter | Services | Employment | About Us' |

What's new with the STC/SM Chapter

STC/SM Chapter Announcements

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STC/SM Winter 2010 Undergraduate Scholarship

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STC/SM Chapter—Professional Association for Technical Communicators...

Graphics related
to content

Other content relating to subpage

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STC Logo

| Linked in | Facebook | Twitter |

Home   **What's New**   Programs   Newsletter   Services   Employment   About Us

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Page content to be placed in variable-width left column

Page content to be placed in variable width right column

Analysis of Redesigned Interface

The redesigned interface for STC/SM includes a number of advantages over the current interface design and addresses the drawbacks identified on the existing website. One of the more significant improvements concerns the rearrangement of content in a more structured, contained, and meaningful location (proximity) while adding more spacial separation and composition.

- On the homepage the content copy (About STC & the STC/SM Chapter) which appears at the bottom of existing interface is now readily visible within the fold and given more emphasis to what the organization is about through the principle of proximity.

- On the homepage all of featured services and merit award information are placed at the top becoming more prominent and contained within the principles of continuity and proximity.

- The tagline is moved from the footer to a more substantial area just right of the logo. This improves the users perception of the identity and understanding of STC-SM.org. It's relationship to the indentity of the logo is now apparent.

- The aligned column approach makes content to feel more synchronized and interrelated with enough spacial separation allowing information to still be set apart. The principle of continuity is used.

Implementation Options

The redesigned STC/SM website can be implemented in a few different approaches. Each one with advantages and disadvantages.

Approach 1: Homepage: (Three column) Fixed left, center, and right columns. Subpages: (Two column) Left and right fixed width approach.

- The homepage would be coded so that all three columns are fixed width with the center setting the stage for the About STC & the STC/SM Chapter information. The left and right columns would contain STC/SM Featured Services to the left, and the merit award and other pertinent information within the right.

- The subpages would be coded as two column variable width as the amount of copy/content is plentiful. This would give the content adequate space for comfortable viewing/readability while allowing enough separation and positive space to flow around the content. With the variable width approach, scrolling will be minimized.

Approach 2: Three column fixed left, center, and right columns for the home and sub pages.

- Besides the home page, the sub pages would be three column fixed as well.

- The disadvantage to this approach is that with the amount of copy on some of the subpages, three columns can still seem overwhelming and more scrolling would be nessesary.

Recommended Implementation

Of the approaches analyzed, the first approach is recommended. This approach is logical for the amount of varied content contained with the STC/SM.org website. Structuring the content within a 2 column variable width approach will allow for enough content separation and a room to create a coherent compositional arrangement for each of the pages. This was the main goal of the redesign.

Appendix A

Figure 1: Home Page Top

Figure 1: Home Page Top (1024 x 768 resolution, 17 inch monitor, window maximized)

Figure 2: Home Page Bottom

Figure 2: Home Page Bottom (1024 x 768 resolution, 17 inch monitor, window maximized)

Figure 3: Sub Page Top

Figure 3: Sub Page Top (1024 x 768 resolution, 17 inch monitor, window maximized)

Figure 4: Sub Page Bottom

Figure 4: Sub Page Bottom (1024 x 768 resolution, 17 inch monitor, window maximized)