Currents Task Force

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GOAL

How can we improve our online cultural platform, *Currents*? What are its current strengths and weaknesses? How can we improve the experience for those who use it? The primary goal of this committee is to identify, outline and implement needed improvements to enhance usability and accessibility for users of *Currents*.

OVERVIEW

Currents is designed to be a community cultural platform, showcasing local arts and culture on one site in real time. As a core pillar of AHB, *Currents* is guided by AHB's mission: to connect everyone to the abundance of creativity in our community, to empower and inspire. The improvements should enhance this objective, making it as easy and as pleasant as possible for users to access the arts and culture of Bainbridge Island.

As it stands, the lack of clarity detracts from the content and function. Both design and content clutters the screen and overwhelms the user: too many style elements and too much information compete for attention. Key features, such as the calendar of events, should be more central and easy-to-use. Featured content likewise requires a stronger hierarchy of importance. A simpler, more cohesive theme would better structure the content and serve the user.

METHODS

UX/UI design is a contemporary tech term that refers to the design of both **user experience** (overall feel) and **user interface** (overall function) of a website or product. Applying UX/UI design captivates users, enhances user satisfaction and boosts brand awareness. A few common principles include:

- Know your business and user goals
- Narrow down your number 1 priority
- Maintain brand uniformity in style/content
- Make use of consistent design patterns
- Keep it simple, familiar and easy-to-use
- Must be compatible for mobile devices
- Analyze web traffic for success metrics
- Ask independent users for feedback

ANALYSIS

I. Identify Strengths & Weaknesses

- **Strengths:** Substantial creative content, including captivating photos, videos and features. Clearly a vibrant community to showcase! Online outlets are a great source of creativity and a great way to connect communities, especially during COVID-19. People-focused language, stories and support. A holistic platform, capable of connecting everyone to the abundance of creativity on Bainbridge.

- **Weaknesses**: The lack of clarity detracts from the content and function. Both design and content clutters the screen and overwhelms the user: too many style elements and too much information compete for attention. Where should the user go first? What do users want to find? Users have short attention spans and are prone to make quick judgments, especially with regards to ease-of-use.

II. Outline Improvements

Our primary recommendation is to apply **cohesion** in both design and content.

- Design [Improvements]

  i. **Streamline style elements** (e.g. limit fonts/font sizes, use consistent header styles, stay with brand colors, use simple button shapes, use consistent heights, repeat similar page layouts, keep flow consistent with like-content).

  ii. **Reduce the amount of information offered at once** (e.g. less tabs, less in each tab, highlight hub pages, remove unnecessary links).

  iii. **Foreground the events calendar.** The filter/search bar should be *the easiest, most accessible* function to use (e.g., top of every sidebar).

  iv. **Highlight important content with specific style choices** (e.g. select use of capitalization, boldness, and color; heading hierarchy)

- Content [Improvements]

  i. **Prioritize *Currents'* objective:** to be a community cultural platform, showcasing local arts and culture on one site in real time.

ii. **Adhere to AHB's mission:** make sure content aligns with our mission of connecting everyone to the abundance of creativity in our community, to empower and inspire.

iii. **Use consistent language** when referring to goals, mission and audience in order to solidify *Currents'* (and AHB's) purpose. Clear messaging supports user satisfaction and brand awareness (e.g., happy users continue to come back and tell others to use it, too).

➢ *User* is used throughout this proposal in a technical capacity, but on *Currents* pick one word to describe the audience: "community members" or "creatives" etc.

iv. **Outline specific criteria** for featured content and a hierarchy of importance. Since this is not a news outlet, emphasize how the subject impacts arts and culture, versus a report of facts (e.g. how a new business **connects us to creativity** versus an advertisement about what they do).

III. Implement Solutions

■ Design [Solutions]

i. Masthead

➢ **AHB logo:** At least make it larger to match "Currents" text or move to another spot (opposite side, side bar).
➢ ***Currents* title:** possible to change the gradient to just one color? (Less for the eye to process.)
➢ **Login/Register:** Keep as is or reduce to pic or words only.
➢ Perhaps separate and highlight the **search function**?

● Search function and results pages for 'global' search field needs to be more intuitive (more like google). [JT]

➢ Add **bookmarks**/saved events icon?
➢ Add **donate** icon?
➢ Add **social media** icons here?

ii. Navigation

➢ **Tabs:** CAPS or all lowercase and **BOLD**. Less tabs.
See "Content" for the reorganization of tabs.

iii. Home Page

➢ Less thumbnails; less text.

➢ Content in **three columns** all the way down (except video).

➢ All photos same size/shape? At least same width.

➢ Headers more legible, pronounced. (**Bold**?)

➢ All content up to the edge of sidebar (same width).

➢ Consider no sidebar on home page? Maybe not, since continuity and ads, but the sidebar should be simplified and the same layout on every page.

iv. Calendar

➢ **Simplified calendar or events search bar** in sidebar.

➢ OR place a detailed search/filter calendar **at top of each page** once tabs are opened (like the Boston Artsopolis site) vs sidebar. [GG/NG]

➢ OR possible to pull up **a full screen calendar** (see: Google Calendar widget) where you can click on any day and get the list of that day's online and in-person events? It's still good to be able to set filters for music, dance etc., but LKJ suggests making it as easy as possible to see everything available on a given day.

v. Sidebar

➢ **Simplified and the same on every page!**

➢ **Donate Button:** Move button up to the right of the masthead or at least top of the sidebar. Should be bold, all CAPS. Make all one rectangle/height (no bubble).

*Make only **one link** for donating!* Should all redirect to the same place as to inspire confidence and not create confusion.

➢ **Simplified calendar or events search bar**. Fewer search bars.

➢ List of buttons/functions necessary on every page.

- "**Subscribe**" to the newsletter button. (Subscribe/LogIn can be together and just once on the page).
- "**Submit** a listing."
- Then **sponsored ads**

vi. Footer

➢ Delete first footer or clean up. What is here that cannot be found in the navigation menu?

➢ Clarify how *Currents* is related to **AHB** in the main footer paragraph.

➢ Social media here? Contact link here?

vii. Function

➢ Make sure a **link opens a new window** and doesn't close *Currents*.

➢ **Mobile: Must be super easy to use on a phone!** Most people access their news, events, and calendars on their phone. Must be mobile-compatible to be easy-to-use and relevant. [NG]

- Content [Solutions]

i. Clarify and prioritize *Current*'s objective and AHB's mission.

➢ Where does "*Arts & Culture*" come from?

➢ Primary function: "Connecting Everyone to Creativity"

➢ Number 1 priority: **events calendar**.

➢ Use consistent language and specific criteria.

ii. Navigation, cont.:

➢ *Currents* can't be everything to everyone. Cut down on the number of verticals and on the pulldown navigation lists. We don't need to list every possible form of content. [LKJ]

➢ **Tab reduction & reorganization** (some ideas).

- **EVENTS**: Mix in person and online (no separate tab).
  → Festivals

- → Performances (Music, Theatre, etc.)
- → Exhibits
- → Literary
- → Film
- → Food + Wine
- → Walks + Tours

- **LEARNING**
  - → Classes + Workshops
  - → Lifelong Learners
  - → Arts in Education*

- **STORIES**
  - → Announcements
  - → Reviews
  - → Blogs
  - → Podcasts
  - → Vlogs

- **DIRECTORIES**
  - → Artists & Instructors (this would be for their profiles)
  - → Organizations
  - → Businesses
  - → Venues
  - → Bainbridge 411

- **OPPORTUNITIES**
  - → Calls for Artists
  - → Jobs + Auditions
  - → Volunteering
  - → Grants

- **MARKETPLACE**

- **ABOUT**
  - ✓ Clarify how AHB & *Currents* connect. Then describe and link AHB mission, pillars, and values; staff.

- **CONTACT**

➤ *Should "**Public Art**" & "**Arts in Ed**" be featured in the navigation bar? Could it be placed under a "More" tab? How do these two pillars relate to *Currents*? [GG/NG]

- LKJ suggests that instead of "Learning" we label the tab **ArtsEd** that includes Arts in Education and lifelong learning opportunities etc. LKJ also favors a separate tab for **Public Art** that features all kinds of public art on the island, not just PAC's work.

- Response to LKJ's note above: Is **ArtsEd** different from Arts in Ed? Seems potentially confusing if pillar only means Arts in Education for K-12 schooling. [NG]

➤ **Arts in Ed:** Why is this it's own site? Would this be better nested under AHB website, redirected from *Currents*? If stays under *Currents* format, should mimic styles of home page; same organization, too.

iii. Theme/Topics:

➤ Who decides what content is listed on the website? [JT]
➤ Don't allow event images with much text (for thumbnails). [JT]

iv. Copy & Editing:

➤ More time to edit features and higher bar for what we publish. Rather than being desperate for fresh content, be choosier. Align all content with the AHB mission. [LKJ]

■ Outreach

i. Newsletter

➤ **Streamline graphics** to match updated *Currents* graphics. (Consistent branding: fonts, colors, shapes, language, etc.)

➤ **Photo credits/links:** Make it easier to see whose art is featured in thumbnails?

ii. **Branding**

➢ Does it make sense to manage two sites (AHB and Currents)? Does it make sense to merge them together? [JT/GG/NG]

- What is (read: define) the link between AHB and *Currents* and how can we most effectively show?

➢ Ensure both AHB and Currents have **clear goals**, achieved through **consistent language and design**.

- As AHB grows and continues to respond to community needs, perhaps the staff/board should regularly **reevaluate** the mission statement, values, and pillars (annual basis?) to ensure specificity and inclusion.

- An **effective strategy** starts with a clear vision to achieve consensus, rally support and accomplish tangible goals together. [NG]

- Below are a few helpful **tools for strategic planning** from The Community Tool Box service from the University of Kansas:

  → Your **vision** communicates what your organization believes are the ideal conditions for your community – how things would look if the issue important to you were perfectly addressed. It is important to make the beliefs and governing principles of your organization **clear to the greater community (as well as to your own staff, participants, and volunteers)**.

  → **Mission statements** are similar to vision statements, but more concrete: concise, outcome-oriented and inclusive.

  → **Specific objectives** outline achievable goals for both short-term (e.g., this year) and long-term

(decade) to inform community, staff, and volunteers of progress markers.

→ **Strategies (or pillars)** are the "how" to the "why". Strategies explain how the initiative will reach its objectives.

iii. **Social Media (!!)**
  ➢ Feature more on website--need icons in header or footer.
  ➢ Promo *Currents* content on each platform, consistently.

iv. **SEO**
  ➢ Ensure that as many other area websites are linking to *Currents*. [JT]

v. **Contact/Feedback**
  ➢ Ask users for **feedback**! (Survey via Newsletter?)
  ➢ Prominent "**Contact**" link, either a submit form or link directly opens a new email message.

CONCLUSION

By streamlining both design and content, we can improve the user experience of *Currents*, boost brand awareness for AHB and ultimately bolster fundraising efforts.

Design should be uncluttered, simple, and easy-to use. Content (language and criteria) should reflect the objective of *Currents* and the mission of AHB. Most importantly, through both design and content, the events calendar should be foregrounded.

Cohesion inspires clarity, reliability and usability. Satisfied users will return regularly, share with others, and understand our mission, ultimately helping us achieve our goals.

Ultimate goals: Attract a larger audience. In both content and outreach, be diverse and inclusive. Support the island's creative community. Become a go-to site that adds value to living on, or visiting, Bainbridge. Make Currents a reliable revenue stream for AHB. Support Public Art and Arts in Education. [LKJ]