

**STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF WDI SITE. RECOMMENDATIONS ON  
IMPROVEMENT.**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to discuss some of the strengths and weakness of the William Davidson Institute website (<http://www.wdi.bus.umich.edu/>), and identify areas for improvement in the website's organizational structure and design.

This report is organized into four major sections. The sections are:

- **Analysis of Information Architecture:** Organizational structure and labeling approaches of the current website are discussed.
- **Analysis of Current Interface:** The current interface is deconstructed into component elements and the strengths and limitations of the existing design are addressed.
- **Functionality:** technical issues of the website are discussed in this section.
- **Recommendations:** Proposed improvements in the information architecture and the interface of the site are presented.

The proposed improvements of the information architecture, functionality and interface design of the site will offer the following advantages:

- Improved usability of the site by creating the consistent navigational structure
- Ability for users faster and easier locate the information they are looking for
- Availability of the navigation from the bottom of the page
- Global navigation links are available from every page
- Balanced page layout that allows for easier navigation
- Overall improved look of graphics and colors to create aesthetically pleasing design
- Page lengths are shortened to reduce the scrolling
- Increased traffic to the site by utilizing search engine optimization techniques
- Top positioning of the site in the search engines

## CONVENTIONS USED IN THIS REPORT

Single quotation marks are placed around the labels for links, to separate them from other terms. Italics are used to indicate the labels for sections (both top-level and second-level) of the website. Double quotation marks signify a page title.

## ANALYSIS OF INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE

### Strengths

- In general, the site provides good labeling system. The main goal of a label is to communicate information efficiently without taking too much space on the page and without overwhelming the user with unnecessary information. The site uses descriptive specific labels that are representative of content under them.
- Consistency in organizational scheme. The website uses mostly topical labels (e.g., *Research* or *Executive Education*).

### Limitations

- Navigational system of the site has some limitations. The global navigation is not available from every page of the site which makes it harder for the user to navigate the site. For example, on *Executive Education* page only local navigation links are available. *Research*, *Global Projects*, *Faculty*, *Rigional Initiatives* and *Institute News* sections are missing.
- The site does not have HTML bottom navigation, which makes it harder to navigate longer pages and requires excessive scrolling to the top of the page in order to get to a different section of the site.
- Some pages are excessively long.
- Some of the links are broken. Clicking on some of the links on “Area Studies Centers” page produces the error – “Page cannot be found”.
- Some pages provide the same information and can be combined into one page.

### Interface Elements

William Davidson Institute website interface contains the following elements, some of which require improvement or possible redesign.

- Text global navigation links
- Text local navigation links
- Graphics that are used mostly at the top of the page

### Strengths

The site adheres to some principles of interface design and to some of the Gestalt rules of visual perception.

- *Consistency*: This site maintains consistency in the location of some interface elements throughout the home page and subpages. As an example, the global navigation and local navigation links and page graphics maintain the same position.
- *Gestalt principles*: Gestalt principles of similarity are applied to organize the global and local navigation bars. The global navigation links use larger font and background color so that they can be distinguished from local navigation links.

### Limitations

Limitations in the current interface center primarily on page layout and quality of graphics. The summary of limitations is provided below:

- *Lack of logo on every page*: Providing the logo on each page ensures a brand identity and reinforces the users that they are at the right site.
- *Inefficient use of screen real estate*: A lot of unused white space on the right side of the screen.
- *Lack of balance*: The elements on some of the pages are not well-balanced. For example, 'Site Map' and 'Contact Us' pages have an empty square at the top of the page. Graphics take too much room on the screen on some pages (e.g., home page).
- *Quality and relevance of graphics*: Some graphics are not well optimized for the web. (e.g., *Global Projects* page). The same graphics appear on different pages and are not very relevant to the content of the page.

- *Long pages:* The excessive length of some pages (e.g., *Home* page and *Working Papers*) provide for necessity of scrolling in order to navigate. This could be too frustrating for the users, since they just want to have general overview of the institute for example, when they go to the *Home* page. Content of the home page can include the information on what this site is about.

## FUNCTIONALITY

The issues of functionality address the quality of coding/programming and search optimization.

### **Strengths**

- A lot of sites link to WDI site.
- Search functionality is available.
- Some global navigation pages (e.g., home page) have correct coding for <title> tag that allows them to be ranked on top in search engines.

### **Limitations**

- Most of the pages are not coded properly to ensure top rankings in the search engines.
- Some coding errors. Errors in JavaScript that courses the JavaScript run-time error window pop-up on the home page.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations offer a number of benefits for the existing site and address the limitations identified in previous sections. One of the significant improvements in the website concerns the improved navigation system. Providing the correct code for <title>, <description>, and <keywords> tags should improve the search positioning of the site.

Recommendations for the site improvement center around four major areas:

- Information Architecture
- Interface Design
- Functionality
- Search Optimization

### **Information Architecture**

- Providing global navigation on every page of the site is essential for good usability of the site.
- Creating the HTML text navigation at the bottom of the screen serves a useful function on long pages. When users have to scroll to the bottom of those pages, the bottom navigation system allows them easier navigate the site without scrolling back to the top of the page to find the proper link. The HTML text navigation is also consistent with top global navigation links. The text navigation is also used here to reinforce location in the site by bolding and unlinking the label for the section on section header pages. Links such as 'Contact Us', 'Site Map', and 'Home' that appear at the top of the home page can be incorporated in the navigation at the bottom of the page.
- Eliminate the links that appear twice on the same page.
- Providing breadcrumbs on each page will allow users more easily navigate the site and be able to go back to the previous page.

### **Interface Design**

- Redesign of the layout can improve the overall appearance of the site and avoid excessive white space on the right side of the page.
- Use of high quality and relevant to the content graphics will create a more aesthetically pleasing and professional looking website.



- Provide search functionality on every page as users no longer have to click every link on navigation bar to find what they are looking for.

## **Functionality**

- Correct coding errors in JavaScript.
- Use variable-width elements on the page. The right column of the table could be fixed-width, while the other column that contains the text can be variable-width, expanding to fill the available window space. The benefit of this approach is that the 'dead space' is no longer an issue; the users with high-resolution screens will be able to see more page content.
- Possible use of a database for better organization of Working Papers.
- Possible handcoding of the pages to clean up the code and gain better control over the code. It will also help with maintaining the site.

## **Search Optimization**

- Rewrite the <title> tag and <description> and <keywords> meta tags to improve search positioning of the site.
- Use good search keywords relevant to the content of each page for search optimization purposes.
- Use JavaScript code in external file to increase the chances for high rankings in search engines.
- Get your own domain.
- Submit site pages to major search engines.