Website Case Study: Portland Center Stage

http://www.pcs.org/

Background

Portland Center Stage (PCS) is one of Portland's largest and most well known arts organizations. It was founded in 1988 as OSF Portland, the northern version of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. In 1994 it became an independent company. Their seasons are diverse and include plays off all different styles and genres. PCS moved into its own theatre in the Pearl District in 2006 after a two-year capital campaign. The new theatre is built into the old armory building in the Pearl and is platinum LEED certified.

Overall

The PCS website is mediocre. It is very large and may contain more information than necessary. The aesthetic of the design is not ugly but is too bland and does not convey any sense of the organizations identity. The navigation system is not horrible, but could be more intuitive. Certain pieces of information are difficult to find and some of the information chunking is not logical. Its most positive attribute is making ticket purchase easy. I also like the discussion board that appears below the synopsis of each play, which allows for audience feedback. Overall the site is disappointing and a large organization in a major city should be able to do better.

Design and Navigation

Portland Center Stage's website has a white background with straightforward sans serif fonts in black, brown and red. This design theme is consistent throughout the site. The primary navigation called "Resources", blog, web 2.0 links and online box office are always present on

the right of the screen as the content changes. Its pictures are often excellent but the overall design is weak. *They keep the "usell" forward mind!*

The plain design results in the site being too monotonous. It falls into the trap of the paradox of consistency because there is no real differentiation between sections. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that some page titles have the first letter of each word capitalized and some do not, and this practice is not done with a consistent logic. For an example look under the Resources section of the primary navigation and click the Armory Café link, then click the Casting link and look at each page title. Armory Café is capitalized, casting is not.

hmm...

This also points to a problem in navigation. The only reason I can think of for casting not being capitalized is that the casting page can also be accessed from the sub navigation of the About Us link. As a result, casting is both a primary and secondary destination. All secondary destinations are not capitalized; but not all primary destinations are capitalized, only the ones that are not also secondary destinations. There are other examples of this and it makes navigating the site a confusing process. *good point.*

really!?

The way that they group their information is also problematic. For instance, if I want to learn about the capital campaign to build the theatre, or about the organizations four pillars of Theatre, History, Community and Sustainability, I need to go through the Armory Café link. That does not make any sense. Why would anyone who wants to know about the four pillars think to look under the Café link? They need to simplify their navigation and chunk their information more intuitively so that people can more easily access the information they want.

Even though there is a small Portland Center Stage logo in the top left on every page, the brand is weak and often swallowed by the gigantic adds for the current show. This is not a

Huge problem

problem on the content pages, but the homepage needs to convey the organizations image. When the homepage pops up it is obvious what is showing, but not obvious who is presenting it.

The last major problem with the site is its lack of style. It does not need to be flashy, but it should be interesting. There is nothing interesting about this site. A site can be simple and still be engaging; this site fails at walking that line. Arts organizations in particular should have a good aesthetic image, even if they are performing arts institutions. Creative institutions should find ways to represent themselves in a creative way. I have seen this theatre, it is GEORGIOUS, the website should communicate that but it does not.

Prescription

The site needs an overhaul. First it needs a more interesting design. It does not need to be flashy, but it does need to be interesting and convey an identity for the organization. Simply using a more interesting font for titles, a different background color and having the Theatre's brand more prominent would go a long way towards making the site look better.

Most importantly, the navigation needs to be simplified and the information needs to be chunked better. The user should not have to play a guessing game to find the information that they want. There should be clear paths through the site that make sense and do not needlessly cross each other. Having links to certain pages at multiple levels of navigation makes the site confusing.

agree - no hook

tends to be a problem w/ larger sites when not implemented well.

good observations and suggestions,

20/20