April 29, 2008

Website Case Study 1: Museum of Contemporary Craft (Portland)
http://www.contemporarycrafts.org/

Background:

The Museum of Contemporary Craft was founded seventy years ago by women who graduated from the University of Oregon and dedicated themselves to the cultivation of craft in the Northwest. It has recently moved its location and underwent a rejuvenation and new rendering of spirit, but continues to devote and guide itself by the core goals of the organization's founders – "to present excellence in contemporary craft, to support artists and their work, to connect the community directly with artists, to deepen the understanding and appreciation of craft, and to expand the audience that values craft and its makers." Positioned in a much more visible and accessible location, the Museum strives to be a regional hub where people connect creatively, professionally and socially through art and craft. The Museum acts not only as a repository, but also as a community center. It offers space for exhibition galleries, hands-on classes, artist demonstrations, panel discussions, lectures, and performances.

Overall:

The Museum of Contemporary Craft Website has a nice design, with an intuitive navigation system, but lacks consistent functionality. I like that the overall look because it is simple and cohesive throughout the site. It is clean with a contemporary feel. Every page has the same layout and design. The headline/Museum's name is in a san serif typeface that gradually increases in weight from the first letter to the last. It remains unchanging throughout all of the pages with the exception of the homepage where it is slightly bigger and at the bottom of the screen rather than the top. I appreciate the controlled use of color and choice of images, but would like to see at least one image or visual on every internal page.

Design and Navigation:

Every page uses the same layout. A thick, black bar lines the top with the primary navigation listed in san serif, reverse type along its bottom edge. A thin green line separates this top area from the rest of the page, which is left aligned on a dark gray background. The right edge of each page aligns nicely with the last letter of the primary navigation toolbar. Light gray boxes serve as rollovers (the text also changes from light gray to black) for both the primary and secondary navigation. It is a simple implementation, but works well to give the site some dimension. Some of the buttons in the primary tool bar also have

drop down menus when they are rolled over. These menus do obstruct some of the information, but do not seem too intrusive overall. *agree*

The home page stands out with a slightly different format than the interior pages. The middle of the page holds most of the information and has a light gray background. It has a column of green on the left for the first half. This section lists the current exhibitions (image, title, date), and has the museum's name. The bottom part of the page is separated by a dark gray line and has a blue column to the left. In this area, there is a list of upcoming dates and a mailing list application. The page does not include text navigation at the bottom, but you can link to an email address to request more information.

The interior pages have a field of medium gray in the column to the left. On some of the pages, this column lists secondary navigation. It also contains the title of each page, sideways in light gray. None of the pages involve more than a frame or two of scrolling. I think this works well because it requires each page to be concise in its content. The big problem is that pages frequently get cut off. I'm not sure why this is happening. I've tried to navigate through the site on both a PC and a Mac, encountering the same problems on both platforms. Clicking back and forth between pages often fixes it, but can be very annoying and frustrating. I really like the images in the "collections" page. They are nicely cropped and spaced. I wish that there were more images in the *yes.* website. Considering this is a museum for visual art, I believe it is necessary to have enticing visuals on the website.

The website does not mark active or visited pages. I think it would improve the design to do so, but since the site is not huge, it may not be *wasn't an issue for me.* completely necessary. I like that they not only include contact information at the bottom of every page, but also hours of operation.

Prescription:
good point
Generally, I find the site useful, but it seems more like a good start rather than a completely thought out site. The information is grouped well, but it is lacking the excitement of a museum that claims to be on this new forward moving trajectory. The images that are used are great, but the pages with no imagery at all are boring, not only lacking pictures, but also color. The gray palate works well neutrally to display art, but becomes lifeless when there is nothing on it besides text. The loading problem definitely needs to be worked out. I think someone could easily mistake the problem for just limited information (sometimes the page cuts off at the end of a paragraph and it looks like the information just stops there).

Add some pizzazz.

...it does feel somewhat "corporate"! maybe get confused w/ looking sharp/clean: professional. It's not a bad site, but as you noted, it needs some life. 23/30