

Michigan's 2009 Best of the Web Submission

Provide a project overview: ** **WORD COUNT = 147**

Michigan's cutting-edge website, www.michigan.gov, was further enhanced to incorporate design, usability, accountability and navigation best practices made possible by new generation technology. Improvements were recommended as part of a multi-dimensional usability research study conducted by Michigan State University. By engaging and acting, Michigan.Gov has been transformed to include:

- Enhanced content display using our new "carousel widget". Graphics of our most popular web-sites can be "scrolled" giving users a "fun" approach for locating services.
- A new web 2.0 navigation category aggregates all of Michigan's social network offerings, including Twitter, Face-book and You-Tube.
- Adoption of new navigation techniques ("tabbed" and "collapsible accordion" display) gives the site a less "cluttered" feel, while offering more content.

These usability improvements are key as Michigan's economic difficulties have driven unprecedented traffic to the portal. Michigan's 12.9 % unemployed population is turning to Michigan.Gov to access our growing web-based assistive services.

INNOVATION: How well does the entry meet the criterion for innovative use of technology and/or innovative approaches?

**WORD COUNT = 497

Michigan is expanding our base of services as citizen reliance on the internet continues to grow. Average monthly page views has grown to 52 million in 2009. We see this growth as an indicator that our popular cluster of web 2.0 services continues to provide value to citizens. Some notable additions include:

- Social networking technology to engage citizens is being "institutionalized" across state government. Our front page has a dedicated website for social networking.
- Increased transparency – Michigan uses social networking tools to keep citizens informed on spending for the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Our new website (<http://www.michigan.gov/recovery>) includes Twitter, Face-book and You-Tube as a mechanism to answer citizen questions, create vignettes showcasing projects and to keep communities engaged on local spending.
- Michigan continues to add geo-locational services to applications, giving customers familiar with Google Earth similar experiences with government information. Examples include:

- Travel - select a location in the state and get information on tourist points of interest at that location. (www.michigan.org)
 - Recreational Boating - select a region and identify possible boating opportunities in the area. (<http://www.mcgi.state.mi.us/MRBIS/>)
 - Swimming – select a region and find information on lakes and streams in the area. (<http://www.mcgi.state.mi.us/miswims>)
- Our wireless capacity continues to grow. Our dedicated wireless version of Michigan.Gov has seen monthly page views double to 500,000 over last year’s level. We add new features monthly, with our text messaging alerts being the most popular. <http://www.michigan.gov/som/0,1607,7-192--136436--,00.html>.

The single biggest effort undertaken in web development this past year was the addition of our business one-stop portal. The entire design was driven by far-reaching requirements gathering that included visits with business leaders across the state. The project established a cross-agency design team that included dedicated staffs from 11 state agencies, working together for 13 months. This effort resulted in the business portal launch in March 2009. (<http://www.michigan.gov/business>). Our portal is more than aggregation of content and fillable .PDF documents. We offer new features enabled with the creative use of data sharing technologies:

- 10,000 business rules are built into a decision tree giving business the ability to simulate business creation with information on all state start-up requirements, costs and timelines.
- “My workspace” allows business to create a profile. Web services and XML technologies are used to provide status messaging between the user profile and legacy systems used for business fulfillment. This allows business to apply for multiple permits, licenses, and registrations, in one place, and, return to their profile and check on filing status.
- A Wiki contains regulatory and processing requirements for all licenses, permits, and registrations. This Wiki serves as the help area for the application.

Since launch, over 11,000 businesses have created a profile and over 31,000 license, permit and registration processes have been accessed online – all using web serves to share data between the one-stop portal and agency systems of record. Individual websites dedicated to agency business fulfillment are being taken down, with customers routed to the business one-stop.

FUNCTIONALITY: How well does the entry meet the criterion for creating intuitive, easy-to-use transactions that are integrated end-to-end in the back office? **WORD COUNT = 494.

In Michigan, we focus on the end-user experience. We prefer a proactive approach to making sure our portal and all supporting websites adhere to quality and usability best practices. Two important initiatives this past year have helped us make significant improvements to our website.

Project One: The Michigan State University Usability and Accessibility Center was hired to perform a three part evaluation of www.michigan.gov focused on:

- Usability heuristics. Systematic inspection of the website user interface, with recommendations for improvement.
- Customer satisfaction report. Gathering user input about current site experiences and expectations using focus groups.
- Competitive analysis. Judging Michigan's website with nine highly rated state government sites, as identified by the Brookings Institute study and the Center for Digital States Surveys of 2006 and 2008.

The results of this 60-day study were instructional and led to the following website improvements:

- Increased overall screen resolution from 800X600 (740 pixels) to 1024X768 (900 pixels) – thus accommodating end-user migration to newer monitors.
- Implemented ADA compliant AJAX features to improve the user experience by limiting the number of times the page has to “refresh.
- Reduced the number of main navigation items and incorporated “pop-out” and “tabbed” menu structures to simplify our look and increase white space (visitors can access 5 times the amount of information without leaving the home page).
- Incorporated a “carousel widget” to display popular online services in a sliding graphical format. We opted to use J-scripting language instead of “flash” technology. This achieves the same visual effect, while accommodating those users’ still using dial-up or DSL.
- Incorporated “collapsible accordion” widgets to support multiple levels of links without making the home page look to busy.

Project Two: Michigan established a usability lab to test all new websites and online applications to ensure a positive end-user experience. A trained usability moderator observes volunteer “testers” from an observation lab, located in a different room from the tester. The moderator watches live audio and video feeds, and uses analytic software (Morae developed by TechSmith) to track every mouse click, keystroke, page change. We learn from testers

body language and can set “flags” inside our testing software to make note of errors or confusing navigation.

Accessibility - Our design also includes strict adherence to the Americans with Disabilities Act and the World Wide Web Consortium content accessibility guidelines. All of our websites are tested for compliance with screen magnification software, screen-reading software, and text-only browsers.

Security - Our rigor in designing for our customers is paralleled with our focus on ensuring citizen information is secure. Users have a high expectation that data they share with government, online, is secured. To that end, all online applications undergo security assessments throughout the development lifecycle. Additionally, all sensitive data that is stored must be encrypted while at rest. Our privacy and security policies are accessible from the home page. No customer data has been compromised, even though the portal experiences 915,000 monthly internet launched intrusion attempts.

EFFICIENCY AND ECONOMY: How well does the entry meet the criterion for realizing financial and operational efficiencies?

**WORD COUNT = 498

The state website has been a tremendous resource in the operation of government. We have a 99.9% availability rate, and adoption rates continue to climb, with 52 million average page views in 2009, up from 43 million in 2008.

The state internet has been key in preserving and enhancing delivery of services to help citizen’s cope with the nations highest unemployment rate (12.9% in April). Despite a reduction of \$413 million in general fund dollars over 2008 levels, Michigan has forged ahead with deploying several improvements to expand the use of web technology to help citizens access and apply for services to provide some measure of economic relief. Significant measures taken in the past 12 months include:

In the fall of 2008, our unemployment insurance agency telephone systems were in a perpetual “busy status” as hundreds of thousands of first-time claimants were calling to determine the status of a claim. Michigan responded by adding more online features in a new website called the Unemployment Service Center <http://www.michigan.gov/uia/0,1607,7-118-52610---,00.html> . The website was designed in conjunction with our usability lab, and includes several new features:

- Internet-based re-certification. Returning unemployment filers no longer need to use the telephone to re-certify a claim. Rather than waiting in a “hold-queue”, they can use the internet. We now have 115,000 monthly users - representing a like reduction in phone traffic.
- First-time and returning filers don’t need to call the unemployment insurance telephone “hot-line” to check on the status of a claim. They can

- create a web-based self service account and track filing status on their own. In the past 12 months, over 205,000 accounts have been established – representing reduced demand for operator assistance.
- Usage statistics are impressive. In September 2008, monthly page views for our service center averaged 721,000. In April 2009, we exceeded 1.8 million.

Further economic relief to families was advanced in May 2009 with the launch of our new web-based child support self service center. This site (www.michigan.gov/micase) provides custodial and non-custodial parents access to individual child support account information, while reducing the state's costs for providing this information. Parents can view online payment summaries, amounts owed, child support case information and more.

Both applications noted above assist families in obtaining financial assistance. Our parallel goal is to use web-technology to assist families in securing and maintaining employment. To that end, Michigan launched our new “jobs portal” on labor-day 2008 (www.michigan.gov/jobs). This included major enhancements to our jobs search tool, called the Michigan Talent Bank. We added a new RSS subscription service allowing citizens to automatically receive notification when new jobs are posted within a geographical location. A complimentary component to our jobs portal is our No Worker Left Behind portal (<http://www.michigan.gov/nwlb/>). This website gives citizens access to information about high demand jobs and allows citizens to apply for financial assistance for college.

Surpassing citizen’s high expectations for a best-in-class government website, using limited staff and financial resources characterizes Michigan’s “do-more-with-less “ approach these past 12 months.