

Stakeholder Survey – Alex Cartwright (UB 2020)

Audience/Desired Action

1. Do you have a communication plan?

We don't have an official communication plan, and I'm not sure what you mean by a communications plan. We know what we want to put out there. We've been doing some of that with the Web site, with brochures, with other things.

2. What role does your Web site play in that plan?

For us, everything that we put on the Web is intended for an audience that is looking for that specific information. A number of the things you wouldn't put any other place—informational things—who's involved, what are the topics. Specific things within that get put into media and press in other places. But the Web site is the place where we put all the main information. Basically, the essential components—who's involved, how do you contact those people—that's the kind of information found there. It's mostly for other academics, or potentially if there's anybody—government or grant-related—who may be looking for information. Or people who may be applying. We need to show that we have that effort going on.

3. How well does it accomplish that?

Right now we don't have an overarching site that talks about all the strengths. We have an intro. site. But I don't think we have a site that talks about the overall vision of what this is supposed to do. Why do we have these strengths? What do they accomplish? What's the benefit of strengths in general? That is not there. How do the strengths tie in with other elements at the university? How do they tie in with undergraduate education, with graduate education? That's not in there.

4. How and how well does your Web site reflect your strategic messages?

For the strengths that have gone through the process, I think it does it very well. We've done some of them so far—Information and Computing Technology, and Integrated Nanostructured Systems. Extreme Events: Mitigation and Response to some level—they had some things done a while ago, but they haven't been converted to the new format. But they'll benefit from the same thing. Molecular Recognition in Biological Systems and Bioinformatics is also done. I think [those parts of the site] have done a reasonable job presenting the information and the message of what we want them to portray about the strengths. Again what we don't have is [a part of the site] that talks about what's the motivation for a university going after strategic initiatives: You can do lots of things but why do you want to do it?

5. What is your Web site's target audience? If there is more than one, please rank secondary audiences in order of importance.

I think it changes. The number one thing I would talk about is usefulness for anyone willing to fund us. That means we should really target it to funding agencies, foundations, any government people who might be interested—senators, representatives, anybody who might be interested in knowing about it. It shouldn't be at the deepest scientific level, but it should be at the level where they understand what are the key issues. All the deeper information can be there, but I think it should present the general view of what we're trying to accomplish. Secondly, there's a lot—potential new faculty members, or recruitment of graduate students—all of those are important things. We use it a lot when we recruit people. One of the selling points for UB is the fact that when you come here, you're not working in isolation. You can work with lot of other people and you can get to know people quickly and that we have the infrastructure to allow you to do that.

There are lots of other target audiences. Internally, of course, we'd like to use it ultimately for matchmaking: If I want to go after a grant in an area, it should be easy to find the other key players in that area. For certain people it's easy, for new people it's not. For people from outside who might be interested in teaming with our university, it would be difficult. So those are the main audiences. The public, of course, is an audience. We want to present that we are making good use of their money. We want to say what we're doing. A prime example is Roswell Park; they do a very good messaging job. Whether they do anything useful or not, it doesn't matter, they have a good message. I mean they do useful things, but I think their reputation in Buffalo goes well beyond what it is nationally. That's all about getting the message out. Because they're not that high externally—[their ranking] has slipped significantly. But within Buffalo, everybody knows what Roswell Park Cancer Institute is. That is not the case externally [i.e., beyond Buffalo]; people don't know what Roswell Park Cancer Institute is. But they know SUNY Buffalo, the University at Buffalo. On getting the message out, we need to do more—why we're doing it, that we're good stewards of money. The state has given us money, people are paying us taxes, what are we actually using it for? [We can also show] that we're leveraging that support—we are using dollars coming from the state to actually get additional money from federal and from foundations. That's an important message to get to people because it helps Western New York.

6. Describe a typical user from your primary audience. How often is the user online and what does s/he generally use the web for? (Use as much detail as possible in profiling your target user. Profile more than one type if appropriate.)

Our target audience is people who are giving, collaborators, or those who may be getting ready to give a grant—they are always online. The target audience is always going to be very educated in that area. Typically, they may be looking to see if the institution has the facilities they claim to have. One of things you come up against when doing, say, a center level grant review, is to ask, do they really have the facilities? Are they truly working across disciplines, or is it just lip service? [He notes that granting agencies or centers usually rely on reports and other printed background to make some of these assessments.] However, if the Web site were convenient enough, they would look there, especially if it is linked to essential information. For internal uses, from day one, we have talked about an internal version of all the Web sites for things like scheduling for facility usage. We could have people sign up for use of instrumentation, for shared conference rooms. We wanted [these things], but they've never been put there. The university has plans for campus-wide calendaring, but right now everyone uses Google for calendaring. However, it would be nice to have a university system that everyone could use.

7. What is the primary "action" the user should take when coming to your site? (apply, join, search for information, etc.). Does the primary action differ for secondary audiences? If so, how?

I suppose the primary action is to give money. We like them to leave being impressed by what we've been able to do. It's not an action; we're not selling something or trying to sell something. But we are trying to sell an image and having people respect what we do. So if we leave them with the feeling that they are impressed with what we're doing—if we get that across, then everything else will fall into place [i.e., receiving funding, getting people to come here]. I don't see this being different for secondary audiences.

8. What are the key reasons why the target user chooses your products and/or services? (cost, service, value, etc.)

In our specific case, what scholarship, what research activity is going on here, and predominantly what interdisciplinary research is occurring—who's working with whom and who can they work with. Our main product is putting people together, while delivering the message that we do have the teams to do this interdisciplinary work effectively.

9. Do you measure usage? If so, how many people (as far as you can tell) access your site on a daily, weekly or monthly basis? Do you forecast usage to increase over the next year and, if so, by how much?

Rebecca knows the numbers.

Perception of organization

1. Use a few adjectives to describe how the user should perceive your site. (Ex: prestigious, friendly, corporate, fun, forward-thinking, innovative, cutting edge, etc.) Is this different than current image perception?

You want to be innovative. You want it to come across that it's an easy place to work between areas, that's it's friendly to the user, or to anyone coming here. Some of the things that don't come across are the level of backing we enjoy from the upper administration—that the president, the provost, the deans all support this effort. This doesn't come across in the site. When new people come in, or they're deciding whether or not to come here, it would be nice for them to know that in matters of tenure and promotion [this kind of interdisciplinary focus in their scholarship and research] wouldn't hurt them.

2. How are you currently perceived offline? Do you wish to carry through the same kind of perception through your web site?

Offline, you go to what people think of UB 2020 generally in this area. I think the university has done a good job selling it locally. Where it breaks down is national and internationally. There's a lot of importance to Western New York, but how to convey its importance to the country? The perception depends on location—it really does. I believe that what we really need to convey are that these are strategic *initiatives*. The term *strategic strengths* implies that we are complete and that's not the case. It's an initiative that we're planning; eventually, they'll be strengths. The growth process doesn't come across. We are not growing in all areas, but rather in the strategic strength areas [where we will build and add faculty and resources]. Furthermore, the work of the strategic strength areas must be important not only to the current times, but also to the future. That doesn't come across either. Hiring plans are tied to these strengths. You're building the strategic strengths, making them stronger.

3. Who are your competitors?

Every major research university. Especially the public research universities, which have a slightly different message than the private research universities, because of the role of public money for public research universities, and the money that some private institutions have that we don't. We can pick peer groups: the University of Iowa, the University of Virginia. And we want to look at our aspiration peers, the University of Michigan, for instance. [He indicated that it would be some time—perhaps years—to get to Michigan's level, as they are quite a bit ahead of UB in this respect.]

4. How do you differentiate yourself from competitors? Do you think your current audience differentiates you from your competition? Please list competitor URLs.

The way we differentiate ourselves is to ask, "Do we have the ability to work across disciplines?" This is beneficial to the person and in trying to sell people on what we're doing here. We want to have them think that it's easy for us to do innovative work, that it's easy for us to transform. Yes, we're a large place, but we're also a place where we can easily change. [He likened it to a multi-million dollar company vs. a very small company that can be very "agile." While UB isn't small, the fact that it's not huge either could work in its favor.]

5. List any URLs of sites you find compelling (competitors and industry). What specifically do you like about these sites?

Web sites are not very effective communicators. You generally look for specific information, and so look to many places.

Perceptions of current site

1. Do you feel your current site promotes a favorable user experience? Why? Why not?

I'm not sure. When we shifted over from some of the strategic strengths sites, there was a problem with speed that despite some improvements, persists as an issue. People get very frustrated when it's slow. Some of the things we've done are very slow. Speed conveys that basically you know what you're doing. And there's no reason why it should not be fast. See what Google can do. You start thinking about the amount of information on our sites—it's not that much and so it should never be that slow. It can look beautiful and all that. But most people I know would take speed over that any day. They don't mind, for instance videos or artwork. Even that can be conveyed in a very fast way; you can show a link to that. But if it's slow to load, people will go elsewhere. Some of the best sites are very simple. We want ours to be simple and elegant [and to have the requisite speed].

2. What specific areas of your current site do you feel are successful? Why are they successful?

For the strategic strengths a number of things are very successful, including what we do, what are the research areas, what people are working on, what are the themes of their research, the profiles of the faculty. [The latter are] very effective, because they are more personal.

3. What shortcomings exist with the current site and what three things would you change on the site today, if you could?

4. Have you conducted usability tests on your current site? If so, how long

What's lacking are databases that could update news stories or grant applications—if it were easier to link to things going on. This should be somewhat automated. For instance, if a specific grant comes in to Sponsored Programs, why can't it be [immediately] flagged and linked [to the site] directly? All the information on the granting agency could be on the site; people could add additional information, if they wished.

ago? What did you find? (Please ask for copies or reports, findings)

No official usability tests; just our own direct observations.

Planning change

1. Do you have plans to change your site? (Only proceed with remaining questions in this section if the response is "yes")

Yes.

2. When will changes be implemented? What stage are you at?

We're part of the WCI so the dates coincide with that project.

3. What are the main reasons for are changing your site? (New business model, outdated site, expanded services, different audience, etc.)

What we're putting up is an upper-level site. Not the strategic strengths sites, but an umbrella site, which allows us to connect the strategic strengths and those efforts to everything else going on with UB 2020. We would like to see an entrance place: Why did we undertake this planning process? The idea would be to give some history: Why the president and the provost think we needed to go through the planning process, that it wasn't haphazard. We went from no strategic planning to strategic planning across the schools with shared resources. I give them a lot of credit for trying—this is a lot in five years. We've done a lot in a short period of time. Not everything is perfect, but at least something has been done.

You only come to perfection through iterations. It's okay to have problems; this should have been expected. At least we're trying to fix things. I give them a lot of credit. It's hard to make changes; people are unhappy with change. Sometimes we make mistakes with our changes. [Indeed, he says, continuous review is part and parcel of UB 2020 and always has been.] But this is not outlined anywhere. We do ask information from all the people at the university, so we can make a better decision. But this is not conveyed in the site and it is useful to know. Everything in the UB 2020 process has an evaluation process built into it. If we do this, people will understand that it's not a static environment—that [research itself necessarily involves] change and we have to change. [He points to shifts to more environmental themes, for example, within the strategic strengths.] This is an important topic now.

4. What are your primary online business objectives with the site redesign? What are your secondary objectives? (Increased applications, marketing/branding awareness, operational efficiency, etc.) Please discuss both long- and short-term goals.

We want to convey information and to be recognized for what we're doing. It's not a true business case—it's not easy to quantify what we're doing.

5. What is the main business problem you hope to solve with the site change? How will you measure the success of the solution?

We skipped this question, it not being as pertinent as the others, and essentially answered in the previous responses.

6. What existing strategy (both on and offline) is in place in order to meet the new business objectives?

We skipped this question, it not being as pertinent as the others, and essentially answered in the previous responses.

7. How do you envision the content of this site, as well as functionality and navigation, expanding or differing from your current site?

Security would be useful. Being able to select whether they're part of the university v. community-at-large, i.e., internal or external. They may wish to show different things to different people. And even to show different things to different people within a strength would be useful. You might wish to put up things that you might not necessarily wish to share, for example, a lunch invitation just to people in a strength. Being able to update content more rapidly—how to get to the point where it's very easy to add things to the site?

8. Do you have an existing sitemap for the current site structure? Do you have a sitemap or outline for the proposed redesign?

No.

Technology

1. What is your target audience platform and browser (if you know)?

Rebecca should have this. Firefox is a big one that people use.

2. Are there specific technologies (Flash®, DHTML, JavaScript, video, social media, etc.) you are currently using in the site? If so, how do they enhance the user experience? Please describe in detail.

Social media is becoming a big deal. It's a way to disseminate information rapidly. People are posting or blogging within a site—this is interesting to a lot of us.

All technologies are wonderful, but most of us don't want them. I don't need all the fancy stuff; to me it's a delay in getting work done. Most of our audience is like that, except the public. If it could be adaptive to where most of our audience is coming from—that could be really useful. We're looking for information, not the fluff. Though we have a broad range of people coming to the site, so it's difficult to know what route to use. Some sites offer choices [which he briefly described as something possibly to pursue, since once you make the choice things happen faster, i.e., getting back to the speed issue which he indicated is paramount.]

3. Do you currently have database functionality (dynamic content generation, search capabilities, personalization/log-in, etc.)? Do you already have a database in place? Please describe in detail, including specific information R existing programs and software.

Everything on our site [check with Rebecca to confirm, he says] is all in databases.

4. Will you have a need for secured transactions (e-commerce)? Do you already offer transactions online? Please describe in detail.

It would be nice to have security. We could share data as part of the strategic strengths sites; we could have group pages where data is shared, where security would need to be there. We want to have data stay within the university. We don't want to transfer out to some outside company and find that data has been given out or is missing.

5. Does your site currently integrate with other sites? Will it need to in the future? Please specify

Yes. Mostly, this is through linking. With faculty it's missing, however. If we have faculty who identify themselves with a strength, somehow that linkage should be there automatically.

Additional Notes/Comments

Please take as much space as you wish.
