

Communications Committee, Thursday 16 October 2008

Website Update

Executive summary and recommendations

Introduction

This update provides an overview of web activity for both the main HPC website, www.hpc-uk.org and the microsite www.hpcheck.org.

Decision

The Committee is requested to note the document. No decision is required.

Background information

The attached reports sets out the findings of the web evaluation, undertaken by Research by Design, towards the end of 2007 and our resulting work together with statistics for the hpcheck microsite.

Resource implications

None

Financial implications

None

Appendices

Website evaluation and resulting work
www.hpcheck.org statistics

6 October 2008

Website evaluation and resulting work

A research study was commissioned at the end of 2007 to re-assess the main website and also to evaluate the hpCheck microsite to ensure they continue to meet the needs of their target audiences.

The overall aim of this research was:

“To evaluate the usefulness and appropriateness of the HPC’s www.hpc-uk.org website and the www.hpcheck.org microsite with its key audiences and to obtain data that will provide the HPC with the necessary information to develop both sites effectively for these audiences.”

More specifically, the research objectives were:

- To assess the navigability, accessibility and performance of the websites
- To evaluate the content and establish comprehensiveness and comprehensibility of information
- To test first impressions, appeal, branding and design
- To establish strengths and weaknesses of the website, overall satisfaction and
- improvements required

The research was required to include the website’s key audiences, namely members of the public, HPC registered health professionals (registrants), students and stakeholders (employers and tutors for example) on behalf of the HPC and report the findings.

The research and report (conducted by Research by Design Ltd) resulted in an executive summary with key recommendations for the HPC to take forward.

Set out below is the executive summary along with information on how we have acted on these recommendations since the report.

It should be noted that many of these issues were addressed when we redesigned the site and homepage to fall in line with our visual identity.

Section 1: Executive summary and recommendations

1.1. The HPC main site – overall appearance, design and content

- The HPC main website is described as informative and professional and projects the image and feel that is expected from a regulator of thirteen health professions. The content of the site is good, being both comprehensive and comprehensible, and meeting the needs of the majority of users¹. However, accessing some of this information can prove challenging and this is discussed in the section 1.2.
- The overall appearance and first impressions gained from the website are positive, enhanced especially by the extensive use of the colour blue which is often described as conveying calmness and importance and is associated with the medical profession.
- Branding of the site is memorable, the HPC logo being recalled in the top left of each page by the majority of users.
- Appearance of the site could generally be improved by replacing the black and white photographs with colour pictures showing ‘real’ registrants at work. This would improve their relevance and interest.
 - We have now used colour photos on the site and are in the process of creating a more extensive image library
- In a limited number of cases the presentation of information could be improved by reducing the page length, creating second and subsequent pages where necessary. One example is ‘Paying your fees’, which has a word count of 780.
 - Where possible, we have restructured many pages to reduce the page length.

1.2. The HPC main site – accessibility and navigability

- The site is most frequently accessed through Google, with users typically typing 'hpc' into the search engine. This provides the HPC link first in the list of matched returns, which is good, although the link is not accompanied by any page title text and the title does not stand out in the same way as the second link in the Google list which references CPSM. This results in some selecting the CPSM link site over the HPC link.
 - This is currently under development.
- MSN provides HPC as the fourth return in the listing and whilst this is accompanied by a small amount of text, it is again weaker compared to the CPSM listing.
- The majority of users describe the site as easy to navigate. However, in reality, when given a task to find specific information, users often had several attempts before completing the tasks set. Whilst most felt that their lengthier than necessary search for information acceptable and reflective of either their lack of familiarity with the Internet or specifically with the HPC site, we recommend a review of the main menu bar and the contents under each section.
 - As previously mentioned, we have restructured many of the sections to simplify the sub-menu structure
- By way of example, users are unable to differentiate between the contents of 'About registration' and 'Apply'. Similarly, the contents of 'Registrants' are not obvious to users. Rolling the mouse over the menu bar provides no clues, dropdown sub-menus are not available, forcing users into accessing pages and working through the site through trial and error.
- The main menu bar masks CPD, fitness to practise, registration and promotional materials, all very importance topics. Their omission from the main menu bar is questioned by stakeholders. By contrast, 'education' is given space within the main menu bar but consists of only two links, both of which take users to the 'About registration' area.
 - More prominence can now be given to these items on the redesigned home-page
- Navigating through the site should be made more intuitive. Menu and page labelling should be reflective of their contents, and clearly differentiate between sections. Again by way of example, 'UK approved course' within 'Apply' misleads many into thinking that the link will take them to educational information rather than application details for those who have trained through a UK approved course. Similarly, information on fitness to practise is not always immediately associated with the 'Complaints' area.
 - These examples have been reviewed and rectified

- The phrase 'Sample profiles', which provides guidance profiles in preparation for CPD audits, is not readily understood and therefore overlooked. These labelling issues result in users either missing pages or extending their activity (leading to confusion, frustration and delay), and possibly contacting the HPC for clarification.
- Navigability could also be improved by reducing the number of distractions on pages. Currently users are presented with pages that have four or five menu areas to choose from; the main menu bar, a sub-menu bar on the left, news or information menu/links to the right, a menu bar at the bottom of the page and a menu/links in the main body of the page (not forgetting the 'Online register', 'Search' and 'Select a profession' functions in the header). This all creates unnecessary 'noise'. For example, on the Registrants main page there are some thirty one different page links/options available to users (including the main menu bar but excluding the header and footer links).
 - We have now simplified many pages on the site, both in terms of design and clutter.
- These findings suggest that the HPC would benefit from undertaking one or two mapping workshops with stakeholders. These workshops would allow the HPC to explore with its website users an intuitive menu structure that directs users to the site contents easily and effectively and guides the HPC in labelling.

1.3. The HPC main site – functionality

- Given the sheer number of menu areas and clickable links, some users resort to the search facility to assist them in finding information. However this also provides challenges.
- Overcoming ‘noise’ is one challenge; each and every search returns the preceding phrase ‘HPC – Health professions Council -’. This simply creates unnecessary cluster and can distract users from more meaningful text.
- Another challenge is the brevity of some of the returned results; there is often little or no descriptive text covering the contents of links. This forces users into the trial and error process of opening, skim reading and discarding search returns. This can unnecessarily increase the time spent looking for information and lead to user frustration. Section 4.1.4. provides some specific examples.
- Finally, the quality of returned results is often poor, with unrelated results appearing in the first ten returns. Clearly this may have a lot to do with the search term used. However, there is no advanced search option allowing users to refine their search criteria (such as searching only within a particular area, only for documents, etc) or any search help facility (an example is http://www.gmc-uk.org/search_tips.asp).
 - We are looking into improving the search facility over the coming months
- The ‘Select a profession’ area (positioned in the header area above and to the right of the main menu bar) is another distraction to many users. There is a general expectation amongst registrants and students that the website will provide profession specific information and therefore they are drawn to the ‘Select a profession’ function. However, this option only gives a brief overview of the professions regulated by the HPC; it does not give the breadth and depth of information expected, leaving users disappointed. It is our recommendation therefore that this function is removed and access to this information is gained through the main menu bar only.
 - This has now been removed as suggested
- Further, the position of the ‘Online register’, ‘Search’ and ‘Select a profession’ functions cause some confusion. These three separate functions are positioned adjacent to each other in the header page and can appear to be inter-related. The arrow shown on the online register is positioned to the right of the button and points to the search box suggesting to some users that they can use a ‘keyword’ to search the online register. Similarly, the position of the ‘Select a profession’ immediately to the right of the search box suggests that this too can be used in conjunction. Spacing these three separate functions apart may avoid such misunderstanding.
 - Within the website re-branding, we have improved this by changing the positioning of these items

- Many users feel the online register should be made more prominent and suggest moving its link either to the main menu bar or to the main body text of the home page. Users particularly favour the approach taken in the information pane given on the right hand side of the 'About registration' page and the call to action 'Check your health professional is registered', and suggest a similar approach for the home page.
 - The online register now has a very prominent position on the redesigned homepage. We have also renamed the link on each page to help make this more obvious, as well as given it more prominence throughout the site.
- Such an approach is further reinforced when accessibility to the register is considered for the public. This study sought to direct public respondents to the microsite through the use of the latest public awareness poster, which specifies the hpcheck site URL. However, despite having read the poster, only nine (26%) actually typed these details into Internet Explorer, the remaining twenty six respondents chose to use Google, with mixed results. Those who typed 'hpc' into the search engine tended to be drawn to the main HPC website and then were lost within the site. They missed the online register link (not really knowing what they were looking for), highlighting again the need to provide a more prominent link and call to action on the home page.

1.4. The HPC microsite

- The public are generally happy with the design, layout, information provided and functionality of the website, and it is praised for its relative ease of use. 60% or more feel the use of colour, pictures and menu icons are very appropriate. Around threequarters describe the microsite as clear, professional and informative.
- 80% of public respondents feel the clarity of instructions allowing them to check a practitioner's registration are clear and 91% agree that the site provides the image and feel of a regulator of thirteen health professions. Overall, 92% rate the microsite as good.
- Over 90% of registrants and the public feel the HPC were right in creating the microsite primarily aimed at members of the public.
- There are, however, areas of the microsite that the public feel could be improved. One of the key areas for improvement is the provision of a warning message where the information entered into the registrant search boxes is incorrect or missing. Although users are notified that they must enter a surname or registration number when they have only specified the profession, they do not receive a similar message if they provide a registration number or surname but fail to specify the profession. In this instance they are told 'No professionals were found that matched the parameters given'. The same message is given where incorrect details are entered (forename and surname or a misspelt surname, for example). This may lead users to conclude that the practitioner is not registered. A warning message, such as 'please check you have spelt or entered the information correctly', might be more appropriate.
- Another area for improvement is the holding of the profession in the 'Select a profession' field. Both the public and registrants have expressed their frustration at the reversion of this field to 'Please Select'.
- Ensuring that the register labels, such as Reg. No, Name, Town, Status, remain visible at all times and are not lost when scrolling through long lists would provide another improvement (Brown and Smith, for example, are especially long).
- Public respondents suggest that 'Supplementary prescribing' could be removed from the register; currently they do not understand what this means and there is no explanation provided. Alternatively a definition could be provided on the page.
- The convention of underlining hyperlinks is not used on the microsite; where a link is used in the main body of text it is shown in a dark blue font colour. This has led to some of the links being missed by users (particularly where a computer monitor does not provide sufficient contrast between the black and dark blue text).
- A further convention that does not appear to be particularly well known is the use of logos as hyperlinks to the home page. Many users struggled to return

to the home page, also failing to spot the 'Home' link in the bottom left of the footer bar.

- Work is underway to address all these issues with a newly redesigned site which will also fit more closely with the main website.
Functionality of the search is also to be improved as part of this project.