**CMGT 528: WEB DESIGNS FOR ORGANIZATIONS**

**FALL 2016**

**Instructor:** Freddy J. Nager, MBA, fnager@usc.edu

**Class Time:** Thursdays, 6:30-9:20 pm

**Classroom:** ASC 228

**Office Hours:** on class days by appointment

**Course Description**

Since the first website launched in 1993, the responsibilities of developers, strategists, and managers have evolved significantly. Web professionals can no longer simply repurpose print media to create static "brochure-ware." They now must plan, direct, and manage websites to *perform* as well as inform:

* reducing organizational costs
* improving customer service
* contributing to bottom-line goals.

In this course, you will assess the online needs of organizations and craft web content that achieves specific business goals. This is not a "design" course in terms of art direction, although design principles will be discussed. Nor is it a programming course — no software or programming languages are required or taught. Rather, this course emphasizes *website content strategy*:

* How to research site users and other stakeholders, and gain useful insights into their habits and needs.
* How to use online content to shape, enhance, protect, and promote individual and institutional brands.
* How to evaluate and select website publishing platforms and content management systems.
* How to optimize online content (text, images, video, etc.) for search engines and site visitors.
* How to analyze site traffic and behavior to discern trends and improve the user experience.
* How to promote and support electronic commerce amidst global competition.
* How to create governance policies and standards to meet short- and long-term objectives.
* How to organize and direct multidisciplinary teams to create and maintain websites and other content.

To help you master these topics, this course combines theory, academic research, practical skills, and hands-on experience, while emphasizing writing, analysis, and teamwork. By the end of the course, you will have achieved the following objectives:

1. Demonstrate the ability to develop and direct a website content strategy that serves the purposes of an organization, meets user needs, and fits the latest Google search standards.
2. Show mastery of tools and frameworks to analyze websites for effectiveness, while making recommendations for improvement.
3. Prove website direction capabilities, while acquiring skills in talent and vendor management.

**About the Instructor**

Freddy J. Nager has over 20 years of experience in online marketing. In 1994, he served as Editor of one of the Web's first entertainment sites, AMP: MCA Records Online. He then joined major ad agency Saatchi & Saatchi as Sr. Interactive Copywriter for Toyota USA. Freddy has also worked on sites for Nissan/Infiniti, the National Lampoon, and numerous startups. He currently runs the media company Atomic Tango LLC. A second-generation Trojan, Freddy received his MBA from USC and his BA from Harvard. This is his fourth year of teaching at Annenberg.

**Readings**

**Required Textbooks:** These texts provide fundamentals to website development and analysis.

* Kaushik, Avinash, *Web Analytics 2.0: The Art Of Online Accountability And Science Of Customer Centricity*, 2009 Cybex.
* Krug, Steve, *Don't Make Me Think (Revisited): A Common Sense Approach To Web And Mobile Usability*, 2015, New Riders.

**Recommended Websites:** Since the rules of website design and development keep evolving, students should stay up to date by referencing the following sites.

* MOZ, <http://moz.com> (in particular, subscribe to the MOZ Top 10 newsletter)
* Google Webmaster Central Blog, <http://googlewebmastercentral.blogspot.com>
* Interaction Design Foundation, <http://interaction-design.org>
* UX Matters, <http://uxmatters.com>
* Boxes and Arrows, <http://boxesandarrows.com>

In addition, articles from academic journals will be assigned and discussed. Please see the Lecture Schedule in this syllabus for details.

**Assignments**

These assignments are not reports; they should demonstrate your ability to think critically and apply research, theories, frameworks, and creativity. You will also be graded on the quality of your writing. Please post all papers as MS Word documents (.doc or .docx, not PDFs) to Blackboard by the due date. Without an exceptional circumstance and permission from the instructor in advance, late assignments will not be accepted. The specific assignment guidelines and instructions will be provided in class.

* **Individual Website Evaluation (10%):** Critically analyze the website of any B-Corporation (at bcorporation.net) on the basis of the 3B's:
  + **Brand:** How does the website support the organization's image, reputation, and trustworthiness?
  + **Buzz:** How does the website promote "word of mouth" and press coverage?
  + **Behavior:** How does the website encourage and facilitate desired actions from users?

Length: 500-1000 words (approximately 1-2 pages). Note: This first assignment will be reviewed and graded, then returned to you for revisions. The purpose is to improve your writing skills and clarify expectations for the semester. Revised papers are not guaranteed to receive a grade increase.

* **Website Plan (3 parts = 60%):** You will form teams to develop a complete plan for a new blog-based website, which you will then fully develop. This plan consists of three parts:  
  + **Individual Stakeholders Analysis (20%):** Each member of the team will research and analyze a competitor, a community stakeholder, and one site user persona (3 stakeholders total). Team members will consult each other beforehand to assign targets and avoid overlap, then review each other's papers before submission. Length: 1000-2000 words (approximately 2-4 pages).
  + **Team Website Plan (20%):** Based on the Stakeholders Analyses, your team will collaboratively create specific directions for a brand bible (design and voice); a sitemap of all content pages; a wireframe; SEO (keywords, backlink strategy, usage guides); conversion goals and KPI's. You must support your decisions with references. Length: 3000-5000 words (approximately 6-10 pages).
  + **Team Blog (20%):** To simulate a group-managed professional site, all team members will collaborate in creating a WordPress blog based on your plan. Each student will write and keyword-optimize at least three blogposts (approximately 500 words each) over several weeks, evaluating the performance of each one to improve subsequent posts.
* **Article Summaries (10%):** While you are responsible for all readings, you will also be assigned specific articles and textbook chapters to summarize, evaluate, and apply to real world examples. You will then post your summaries on Blackboard for the benefit of your classmates.
* **Class participation (20%):** Teamwork is required by many employers, and even independent contractors must collaborate with professionals to complete projects. Consequently, your contributions to your team project will be evaluated by your teammates and factored into your participation grade.  
    
  In addition, you must contribute to the learning in this class, and will not earn the full score simply by attending classes. In most class sessions, you must speak, ask questions, and debate respectfully. To do so, you must prepare: complete the assigned readings before class, research additional materials, and apply to personal and professional experiences. Staying silent is unacceptable behavior, especially when we have guest speakers, since it conveys disengagement. In addition, **use of phones in class or using computers for non-class-related purposes will count as being "absent."** Here is how class participation is evaluated:
* Is your contribution relevant to the discussion?
* Do you consider ideas offered by the reading and by classmates?
* Do you increase everyone's understanding or merely repeat facts?
* Are your views supported with data, third-party theories and research?
* Do you test new ideas and challenge assumptions, or just "play it safe"?
* Are you respectful of others in the discussion?

**Grading Scale + Course Standards**

A 93.0% or higher (extremely rare)

A- 90.0%-92.9%

B+ 87.0%-89.9%

B 83.0%-86.9%

B- 80.0%-82.9%

C+ 77.0%-79.9%

C 73.0%-76.9%

C- 70.0%-72.9%

D 60.0%-69.9%

F 59.9% or lower

A's and A-minuses must be earned by "going the extra mile" to develop professional caliber work that could be presented to a client or CEO. A-level work is mistake-free, reflects in-depth research, shows creativity and superlative communications skills, and demonstrates a strong understanding of the course material. Personal recommendations will be provided on request to students who earn an A.

* **Attendance:** You must attend every class, arrive on time, and stay for the entire class (missing more than 10 minutes counts as a half absence). Makeup assignments will be given for any excused absences. Should you need to miss a class, notify the instructor in advance (except for illness or emergencies), and obtain what you missed from classmates and Blackboard. Two absences for **any reason** will result in complete loss of participation points. More than two absences will result in a course grade of C- or lower. Also, *be present*: **all computers and phones must be turned off during lectures — no exceptions**. Computers may be used during designated research and writing periods.
* **Critical Thinking:** In communications there are few "right" answers: what works for one company might fail for another — or even for the same company at another time. Your assignments must describe "why" and "how," not just "what," and will be evaluated on the quality of your reasoning.
* **Professional Writing:** Since this a graduate program in communications, **your writing and formatting will be factored into all assignment grades**, so please proofread to eliminate all errors. If you need help with fluency, contact the USC Writing Center: <http://dornsife.usc.edu/writingcenter/>
* **Respect:** Treat classmates and speakers with courtesy. You may certainly question and criticize ideas — that is encouraged in the learning environment — but never criticize the person. You may eat in class, but not in the company of guest speakers.
* **ADA Compliance Statement:** Any student requesting academic accommodation based on a disability must register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Deliver it to your instructor as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301, 8:30 am-5:00 pm, Monday through Friday, phone 213-740-0776.
* **Plagiarism:** Plagiarism is a cardinal sin in academia, with substantial penalties, including a "0" for the assignment and possible disciplinary action. You must understand what constitutes plagiarism, and exercise scrupulous effort to avoid it. Copying even as little as one sentence without proper referencing constitutes plagiarism.
* **Statement on Academic Integrity:** USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one’s own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another’s work as one’s own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. Scampus, the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/> Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The review process can be found at: <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/>

**Calendar**

This calendar is tentative, and will likely change depending on the pace of class discussions and the availability of guest speakers. Final schedules will be announced in class and in the lecture slides. All article readings will be available on Blackboard unless otherwise indicated.

**Part I: Planning**

**Class 1, August 25: Defining Content Strategy + The Role of Professional Strategist**

* What is website content strategy, why it's important, and how it's evolved
* Goals, roles, and responsibilities of the modern strategist
  + Brand: perpetuating and enhancing the company image and reputation
  + Buzz: generating word of mouth
  + Behavior: motivating customer actions that meet organizational objectives
* Readings for next week:
  + Altimeter Group, "Content: The New Marketing Equation," 2012
* Assignment 1: Website Evaluation, due before class on September 8
* Introduce Yourself on Blackboard

**Class 2, September 1: Purposes + Platforms**

* What do you want your website to do? An exploration of the possibilities
* CMS platforms
* Blogging
* Innovation Tactics
* Reading:
  + Krug, *Don't Make Me Think*, Introduction + Chapters 1-5
  + Kelleher & Miller, "Organizational Blogs and the Human Voice: Relational Strategies and Relational Outcomes," Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 9 August 2006, http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2006.00019.x/abstract
  + Swire, “The Art of Thinking Sideways: Content Marketing for Boring Businesses,” Moz, 8 April 2014, http://moz.com/blog/the-art-of-thinking-sideways-content-marketing-for-boring-businesses
  + Walther & Jang, "Communications Processes in Participatory Websites," Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 10 October 2012, http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2012.01592.x/abstract

**Classes 3-4, September 8-15: Personas and Other Stakeholders – Who Exactly Does Your Website Serve?**

* Defining and analyzing your key global stakeholders, their needs, and their potential impact:
* Customers: site users, customers/clients, job seekers, news media, investors
* Competitors: direct and indirect
* Company/Client: CEO/owner, finance, marketing, legal, IT
* Community: other agencies/vendors (PR, social, etc.), government, referrers, browsers
* Readings for next week
  + Kaushik, *Web Analytics 2.0*, Introduction + Chapter 1
  + Hermeking, "Culture and Internet Consumption: Contributions from Cross-Cultural Marketing and Advertising Research," Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 9 August 2006, http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2006.tb00310.x/abstract
  + Hinton, "Personas and the Role of Design Documentation," Boxes and Arrows, 27 February 2008, http://boxesandarrows.com/personas-and-the-role-of-design-documentation/
  + Kastner & Stangl, "Mapping Segments Accessing User-Generated Content and Website Applications in a Joint Space," International Journal of Culture, Tourism, and Hospitality Research, 2012
* Withrow, "Competitive Analysis: Understanding the Market Context," Boxes and Arrows, 7 February 2006, http://boxesandarrows.com/competitive-analysis-understanding-the-market-context/
* Website Evaluation due
* Assignment: Stakeholders Analysis due before class September 24

**Classes 5-6, September 22-29: Optimizing for Search Engines**

* SEO
  + creating "Linkbait": content that inspires backlinking, sharing
  + keywords and formatting
  + Blackhat techniques: short-term tricks that hurt in the long run
* Readings for next week:
  + Kaushik, *Web Analytics 2.0*, Chapters 3-4
  + Moz.com, "The Beginner's Guide to SEO," http://moz.com/beginners-guide-to-seo
  + Singhal, "More Guidance On Building High-Quality Sites," by Google Webmaster Central Blog, 6 May 2011, googlewebmastercentral.blogspot.com/2011/05/more-guidance-on-building-high-quality.html
  + Anderson, "The Long Tail," Wired, October 2004, http://archive.wired.com/wired/archive/12.10/tail.html
  + Lambert, "The Way of the Blockbuster," Harvard Magazine, January-February 2014, http://harvardmagazine.com/2014/01/the-way-of-the-blockbuster

**Part II: Development**

**Class 7, October 6: Content Planning**

* The Purchasing Funnel
* Hierarchy, Taxonomy and Site Maps
* Structure conceptualization
  + message purposes and prioritization
  + charting a desired path
  + microsites vs subsections
  + nomenclature
  + media format (text, photos, videos, gamification)
* Content sources: UGC, original, licensed
* Readings for next week:
  + Krug, *Don't Make Me Think*, Chapters 6-9
  + Kaushik, *Web Analytics 2.0*, Chapter 5

**Class 8-9, September 13-20: Developing Content Substance**

* Creative Direction
  + developing the style guide
  + voice and tone
  + globalization vs localization
  + imagery and design
* Mobile browser issues
* Readings for next week:
  + Kaushik, *Web Analytics 2.0*, Chapters 6-7
  + Kaushik, "7 Incredible Web Design, Branding, Digital Marketing Experiences," Occam's Razr (Kaushik.net), 28 January 2013, http://www.kaushik.net/avinash/web-design-branding-digital-marketing-experiences/
  + Kuzic, et al, "Web Design and Company Image," Issues in Informing Science and Information Technology, 2010
  + Bashford, "Masterclass: Web design," Revolution, 16 September 2010: 32 (via *Business Insights: Essentials*)
* McNeil, "Print to Web Series: The One-Page Site = The New Poster?" How Magazine, 14 February 2013, http://www.howdesign.com/design-creativity/one-page-web-design-new-poster/
* Stakeholders Analysis due
* Assignment: Website Plan due before class November 5

**Class 10, October 27: Launch Day**

* Because of the USC football game on campus, we will conduct this class online.
* Post your website, comment on classmates' sites
* Readings for next week:
  + Kaushik, *Web Analytics 2.0*, Chapter 8

**Part III: Governance + Analysis**

**Class 11, November 3: Conducting Analytics + Auditing**

* Segmentation according to usage statistics
* A/B testing
* Statistics that matter: KPI's, bounce rate, conversions
* Site audit requirements (qualitative criteria)
* Business Goals and Gap Analysis
* Reading:
* Readings for next week:
  + Kaushik, *Web Analytics 2.0*, Chapter 9
  + Dean, "How to Create a Page That Converts at 21.7% (Step-By-Step Case Study)," Backlinko, 5 June 2014, http://backlinko.com/social-squeeze-page
  + Christian, "The A/B Test: Inside the Technology That’s Changing the Rules of Business," Wired, 25 April 2012, http://www.wired.com/business/2012/04/ff\_abtesting
* Weill & Woerner, "Optimizing Your Digital Business Review," MIT Sloan Management Review, 19 March 2013, http://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/optimizing-your-digital-business-model/
* Website Plan due November 5

**Classes 12-13, November 10-17: Integration + Ecommerce**

* Social media's role in content strategy:
  + sharing
  + sign-ins
* Press Releases
* Content strategy for ecommerce sites
  + cross-selling/upselling
  + customer-relationship management (CRM)
* DIY vs outsourcing (Amazon)
* Affiliate Programs
* Assignment: Add affiliate ads to your site
* Reading:
  + Krug, *Don't Make Me Think*, Chapters 10-13
  + Kaushik, *Web Analytics 2.0*, Chapters 10-12
  + Shannak & Qasrawri, "Using Web Analytics to Measure the Effectiveness of Online Advertising Media," European Journal of Economics, Finance and Administrative Sciences, December 2011
  + Ariely, "Gamed: How Companies Get You to Share More and Spend More," Wired, 20 June 2011, http://www.wired.com/magazine/2011/06/ff\_gamed
  + Bell, Choi & Lodish, Leonard, "What Matters Most in Internet Retailing," MIT Sloan Management Review, 18 September 2012, http://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/what-matters-most-in-internet-retailing/
  + Laseter, et al, "3 Critical Issues in Internet Retailing, MIT Sloan Management Review, 1 April 2007, http://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/critical-issues-in-internet-retailing/
  + Kumar, "Making 'Freemium' Work," Harvard Business Review, May 2014, https://hbr.org/2014/05/making-freemium-work/

**Holiday: November 24**

**Class 14, December 1: Establishing Governance and Workflow**

* Editorial calendars and page tables
  + page objective and key messages
  + content sourcing
  + phases of development and maintenance
  + content ownership, approvals
* Regulations: from privacy to accessibility
* Managing website clients
* Reading:
  + Kaushik, *Web Analytics 2.0*, Chapter 14

**Class 15, December 8: Final Blog Presentation**