The web isn't what it used to be.

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

- reducing organizational costs
- improving customer service
- contributing to the bottom line

In short, today's websites must solve problems and meet goals. Consequently, this course does not teach "design" in terms of art direction, although design principles will be discussed. Nor is it a programming course — no programming languages will be taught, though online applications such as WordPress will be used. Rather, this course emphasizes website content strategies — how to plan and direct websites with a purpose.

Learning Objectives

This course combines theory, academic research, practical skills, teamwork, and hands-on experience in the process of creating and launching an actual website. By the end of the course, you should be able to...

- Research site users and other stakeholders to gain insights into their web-usage habits and needs.
- Evaluate and select website publishing platforms and content management systems.
- Direct website content to shape, enhance, protect, and promote brands.
- Optimize online content (text, images, video, etc.) for both search engines and site visitors.
- Analyze site traffic and behavior to discern trends and improve the user experience.
- Plan and manage ecommerce content amidst global competition.
- Create governance policies and standards to meet short- and long-term objectives.
- Establish and manage website production processes and vendor management policies.

About the Instructor

Freddy J. Nager has over 20 years of experience in online marketing, and currently runs the media company Atomic Tango LLC. 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, responsible for developing content ideas and editorial for Toyota's award-winning website and online advertising. Since then, Freddy has worked on sites for Nissan/Infiniti, the National Lampoon, and numerous startups. A second-generation Trojan, Freddy received his MBA from USC and his BA from Harvard. This is his fifth year of teaching at Annenberg.
Readings

Required:

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

Recommended:

• Christina Wodtke & Austin Govella, *Information Architecture: Blueprints for the Web* (2nd Edition), Used or Amazon Kindle only
• Chip Heath & Dan Heath, *Made To Stick*

References: Since the rules of website design and development continually evolve, students should stay up to date by referencing the following sites.

• MOZ, http://moz.com (in particular, subscribe to the MOZ Top 10 newsletter)
• Interaction Design Foundation, http://interaction-design.org
• UX Matters, http://uxmatters.com
• Boxes and Arrows, http://boxesandarrows.com
• Content Marketing Institute, http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/
• Annenberg Digital Lounge (for all your how-to/tactical needs), http://annenbergdl.com

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

Assignments

These assignments are not reports; they should demonstrate the ability to think critically and apply research, theories, frameworks, and creativity. They will also be graded on the quality of the writing. All papers should be posted 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 (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 support and 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). The purpose of this paper is to emphasize writing skills and clarify expectations for the semester. It will be reviewed and graded, then returned for revisions. Revised papers are not guaranteed to receive a grade increase.

• **Website Plan (2 parts = 50%)**: Students will work in teams to develop a complete plan for a new blog-based website. This plan consists of two parts:
  - **Individual Stakeholders Analysis (25%)**: Each member of the team will research and analyze a competitor, a community stakeholder, and one 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 (25%)**: Based on the Stakeholders Analyses, the team will collaboratively create a brand bible (design and voice); a sitemap of all content pages; a wireframe; SEO tactics (keywords, backlink strategy, usage guides); conversion goals and KPI’s. Length: 1000-2000 words (approximately 2-4 pages).
• **Team Presentation & Website (20%)**: To simulate an organizational website, all team members will collaborate in creating a WordPress.com site based on the plan. Each student will write and keyword-optimize at least two blogposts (approximately 500 words each). Note that half of this grade is based on teamwork.

• **Article Summaries (10%)**: While each student is responsible for completing all readings, students will also be assigned specific articles to analyze and post to Blackboard.

• **Class participation (10%)**: Students must contribute to the learning in this class, and will not earn the full participation score simply by attending classes. In most class sessions, students must speak, ask questions, and debate respectfully. To do so, they must spend at least 3-5 hours per week outside of class in preparation: completing the assigned readings before class, researching additional materials, and applying theories and frameworks to personal and professional experiences. Staying silent is unacceptable behavior, especially in the company of guest speakers, since it conveys disengagement. In addition, use of phones or computers for non-class-related purposes will count as being "absent." Here is how class participation is evaluated:
  
  o Is the contribution relevant to the discussion?
  o Does it consider ideas offered by the reading and by classmates?
  o Does it increase everyone’s understanding or merely repeat facts?
  o Are the views supported with data, third-party theories and research?
  o Does it test new ideas and challenge assumptions, or just "play it safe"?
  o Is the student respectful of others in the discussion?

**Grading Scale + Course Standards**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93.0% or higher (extremely rare)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90.0%-92.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87.0%-89.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83.0%-86.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80.0%-82.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77.0%-79.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>73.0%-76.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70.0%-72.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>60.0%-69.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>59.9% or lower</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• **Criteria**: 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 communication 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, such as illnesses or athletic commitments. Should you need to miss a class, notify the instructor in advance (except, of course, in the case of emergencies), and obtain what you missed from classmates and Blackboard. Two unexcused absences will result in a complete loss of participation points. More than two unexcused absences will result in a course grade of C- or lower. Note: unauthorized use of phones or computers in class will be counted as an absence, since you are in attendance but not truly present.

• **Critical Thinking**: In communication there are few "right" answers: what works for one company might fail for another — or even for the same company at another time. Assignments must describe "why" and "how," not just "what," and will be evaluated on the quality of the reasoning.

• **Professional Writing**: Since this a graduate program in communication, your writing and formatting will be factored into all assignment grades, so please proofread to eliminate all errors. If you need help with fluency or simply polishing your work, contact Annenberg's Graduate Writing Coach: [http://cmgtwriting.uscannenberg.org](http://cmgtwriting.uscannenberg.org)

• **Research and References**:  
  o Your work must be supported by research from authoritative sources, such as academic journals, major journalistic outlets (e.g., newspapers), and credible subject-matter experts. Please vet your sources.
o If you use Wikipedia, do not cite it as a reference. Rather, refer to the sources listed in the Wikipedia article, and cite if applicable.
o Do not limit your research to whatever Google turns up. Use the USC Library, and contact experts directly. You may also conduct focus groups, interviews, and surveys; just make sure to include all contact information (dates, medium, etc.) and any disclaimers about statistical significance.
o Bibliography entries must include complete source information — a URL alone is never enough. This includes the name of the source, article titles, author names, dates of publication, and (in the case of websites) the date you accessed the source.

• **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. Also, **be present: all computers and phones must be turned off and put away during lectures — no exceptions**. Computers may be used during designated research and writing periods only. 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 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: [https://policy.usc.edu/student/scampus/](https://policy.usc.edu/student/scampus/). Should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty, students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review: [https://sjacs.usc.edu/students/](https://sjacs.usc.edu/students/)

**Schedule**

This schedule may change depending on the pace of class discussions and the availability of guest speakers. For final requirements, please refer to the lecture slides, which will be posted to Blackboard.

**Class 1, August 23: Defining Content Strategy + The Role of Professional Strategist**
- What is website content strategy, why it's important, and how it's evolved
- Readings for next class:
  - Scott, "The Gobbledygook Manifesto"
- Assignment: Introduce Yourself on Blackboard, bring paper copy to class

**Class 2, August 30: Purposes and Platforms**
- Company (client) objectives + integrating organizational departments
- CMS platforms
- Readings for next class:
  - Krug, *Don't Make Me Think*, Introduction and Chapters 1-2
  - Altimeter Group, "Content: The New Marketing Equation," 2012
- Assignments:
  - Pick Team & Topic
  - Explore Wordpress.com
  - Website Evaluation, due before the next class

**Class 3, September 6: Users and Personas**
- Defining and analyzing your key site users, creating personas
• Readings for next class:
  o Krug, *Don't Make Me Think*, Chapters 3-5
• Assignments:
  o Website Evaluation due Class 4, September 13
• Class 4, September 13: Stakeholders Beyond Users — Community and Competitors
  • Competitors: think different... and better
  • Community: Google, regulators, advertisers, complements, collaborators
• Readings for next class:
  o Krug, *Don't Make Me Think*, Chapters 6-8
• Assignments:
  o Stakeholders Analysis due before class 7

Classes 5-6, September 20 & 27: Design and Creative Direction
• Style guides: look, feel, voice, tone
• Globalization vs localization
• Readings for next class:
  o Krug, *Don't Make Me Think*, Chapters 9-13

Class 7-8, October 4 & 11: Content Planning
• Structure: Hierarchy, Taxonomy, Site Maps, and the Purchasing Funnel
• Regulations: from privacy to accessibility
• Content sources: UGC, original, licensed
• Readings for next class:
  o Kaushik, *Web Analytics 2.0*, Chapters 1, 3 & 4 (Skip 2)
  o Dean, "How to Create a Squeeze Page That Converts at 21.7% (Step-By-Step Case Study)," Backlinko, 5 June 2014 (updated 12 January 2017), http://backlinko.com/social-squeeze-page
• Assignments:
  o Stakeholders analysis due
  o Team Website Plan due before class 11

Class 9-10, October 18 & 25: Search Engine Optimization
• Creating "Linkbait": content that inspires backlinking, sharing
• Keywords and formatting
• Blackhat techniques: short-term tricks that hurt in the long run
• Readings for next class:
  o Kaushik, *Web Analytics 2.0*, Chapters 5, 6 & 7
Class 11, November 1: Analytics and Auditing
- Website integration in marketing campaigns
- Statistics that matter: KPI's, bounce rate, conversions, gap analysis
- Site audit requirements (qualitative criteria)
- Readings for next class:
  - Kaushik, *Web Analytics 2.0*, Chapters 8 & 9
- Assignments:
  - Team Website Plan due
  - Presentation on Class 14; Website launch on Class 15

Class 12, November 8: Website Revenue Models
- Ecommerce design and management
- Affiliate Programs
- Readings for next class:
  - Kaushik, *Web Analytics 2.0*, Chapters 10 &11

Class 13, November 15: Governance and Workflow
- Editorial calendars and page tables
- Approval processes and client management
- Readings for next class:
  - Kaushik, *Web Analytics 2.0*, Chapters 12 & 14 (Skip 13)

No Class November 22

Class 14, November 29: Class Presentations

Class 15, December 6: Website Due
- Meeting on Blackboard