

**CASE District II**  
**1999 Accolades Awards Program**  
**Period covered: July 1, 1998 to August 31, 1999**

**Category 7: World Wide Web Sites**

**a) Entire Site**

**The University of Maryland, Baltimore County**

**<http://www.umbc.edu>**

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**Program Description**

When UMBC first appeared on the World Wide Web five years ago, home pages were more often technical playthings than communications vehicles. Now, organizations are developing web sites: dynamic, complex information clearinghouses for multiple users with diverse needs.

The launch of a redesigned UMBC web site on August 31, 1998, followed by a refined version just under a year later reflects a more sophisticated approach in how the university's online presence is produced. Starting with a working group of designers, editors and programmers from the Office of Institutional Advancement and University Computing Services, the UMBC site was benchmarked against more than 25 award-winning university web sites. It has also been critiqued at a national summit of higher education web experts.

To seek user feedback, two online user surveys in April 1998 and May 1999 showed what worked (or didn't) on the current site at the time. More than 300 users completed each survey and results were summarized and then incorporated into redesign and refinement goals, with guidance from a broad-based campus web advisory group of faculty, staff and students. A subset of the advisory group, known as the UMBC Electronic Media Team (emedia for short), completely restructured the entire web site and developed new content for key audiences.

Specific tools such as a web design style guide with html templates as well as background research and survey results are available online at [www.umbc.edu/website](http://www.umbc.edu/website).

**Goals and Objectives**

With a better understanding of competitors' web design and our own users' needs, the redesigned 1998 site and refined 1999 version reflects three main goals, each with corresponding objectives:

*1. Focus on information needs of users*

- Created tailored web pages for key constituencies including alumni, parents, businesses and members of the campus community (1998)

- Created a "What's New" section on the home page, to provide current information. Sources include news releases, links to news coverage, key events and announcements and new web sites (1998).
- Created an online calendar of events with distributed content maintenance by "calendar masters" throughout the campus. The group has a listserve and meets once or twice a year (1998)
- Revised news & events site with cgi forms for creating news releases, as well as UMBC Newswire, a user-defined email delivery system for news releases (1999)
- Provided a new academic departments & programs table that provides direct links to departmental pages as well as relevant degree information in the graduate and undergraduate catalogs, both of which are online (1999).

## *2. Improve ease of use and navigation*

- Provided a prominent navigation and searching bar on all top-level pages of the site (1998)
- Provided multiple paths to key information between the home page and secondary/tertiary pages (1998)
- Improved the search engine's effectiveness; made it and online directories more prominent (1998)
- Instituted a PHP3 database approach to web development. For example, all main pages have dynamically generated HTML "navigation footers" at the bottom of each page. Page attributes and style sheets also allow us to change the color, fonts, images and some content "on the fly" (1999).
- Revised the navigation toolbar on the homepage and all secondary pages to include the online campus calendar, library and university computing (1999).

## *3. Improve and maintain a consistent UMBC identity throughout the site*

- Created a design that highlights the faces of UMBC throughout the top levels of the site (1998).
- Provide html templates available from the UMBC web style guide for anyone developing new pages: see [www.umbc.edu/Styleguide](http://www.umbc.edu/Styleguide) (1998).
- Began work on a photo gallery for others to use in creating UMBC pages (1999)
- Opened the monthly Emedia design meetings to other campus web developers to discuss design and content quality standards (1999).

## **Audience**

From the start, understanding that our users had distinct and sometimes competing information needs was key to the redesigned 1998 site and the refined 1999 version. In the past, we simply imposed our internal organizational structure on the site and assumed external users could find what they needed. Instead, for the redesigned 1998 site we created distinct resource sites for alumni, parents and businesses, and put a premium on the content needs of external users (e.g., admissions, academics, news and sports).

By contrast, the 1999 refined site reflects feedback from internal users to serve their needs, too. In addition to adding new images and tightening the navigation and structure, over the summer of 1999 we developed the *myUMBC* web portal for students, faculty and staff, and made this a link off of the main site (see separate entry for specialty web sites). The result, we hope, is a flexible site architecture that can balance the needs of external and internal users, and give us a platform on which to build relevant functionality and content in the future.

### **Budget & Staffing**

For the redesigned 1998 site, about 12 staff members collectively spent more than 900 hours on the project. This includes market research, planning, content development, programming, design and testing. The refined 1999 site required nearly 500 hours (excluding the *myUMBC* web portal project). Consequently, the primary budget cost for both projects was salaries, conservatively estimated to be about \$24,000. An additional \$10,000 in new hardware and software, which is used throughout the year, would bring the total project cost to about \$34,000.

### **Response and/or Results**

After launching the redesigned 1998 site, the emedia team was swamped with requests for web services. Web templates in the online style guide ([www.umbc.edu/Styleguide](http://www.umbc.edu/Styleguide)) helped, but could not meet the demand. The Office of Instructional Technology agreed to take on faculty requests for web development, while the University Computing Services agreed to take on departmental and administrative projects, and incorporated the web templates into its existing training courses in Microsoft Frontpage and Netscape Composer.

Additionally, the May 1999 user survey suggests that the 1998 site was a success and also gave us good feedback on where we could improve. Results of that survey included the following:

- 287 respondents said the overall design and layout of the web site was a good representation of UMBC.
- 42 did not think it was a good representation.
- Frequent comments: more images throughout, especially of the campus, design should better reflect UMBC as a ‘technology school’

On a scale of 1 - 5, with 5 being the highest, respondents were asked to rate the site in terms of overall navigation, design, layout and structure.

- 57 respondents chose 5
- 178 chose 4
- 79 chose 3
- 20 chose 2 or 1

#### 1998 Site Traffic (monthly averages)

- 330,000 page views each month
- 1,000 downloaded applications each month
- 200 email inquiries each week

**Note:** A completely redesigned Admissions & Financial Aid site debuts in November 1999. While the site will launch after the August 31 deadline for the 1999 CASE District II Accolades Awards Program, a majority of the work (more than 500 hours) did occur before the deadline. UMBC intends to submit the admissions site for the 2000 CASE District II Accolades Awards Program.