

THE NEW GRAND RAPIDS ART MUSEUM WEBSITE

A Simple Communications Tool Designed to Solve a Complex Communications Problem

THE CHALLENGE The Grand Rapids Art Museum was faced with this challenge: How to effectively use digital tools to fulfill their mission and keep people connected and engaged. Sound familiar?

Because of previous work we have done with GRAM and other arts organizations, we were uniquely positioned to be able to help solve some problems from the inside out. Internally, information flow was inefficient and was causing external issues. Externally, the website was outdated and lacked even the most basic content management capabilities. When combined, these challenges created a digital presence that was frustrating, uninspiring and often inaccurate.

THE SOLUTION **Information Architecture**

We partnered with the Communications Team to understand the intricacies of how information flows around the museum and met with other departments and staff to determine their needs in order to build a platform that would serve the entire museum going forward. The core of this solution was an intelligent content management system. As a result, the website became the catalyst for gathering and distributing information, and has become a much more effective and accurate communication tool.

Data as Driver

By studying the current website traffic, we put a plan in place to highlight and focus on the information visitors were seeking most: 'Hours and Admissions' information and the 'Calendar'. By giving those links prominence in the navigation and organizing high level landing pages with the most relevant information, we built a more user-friendly site, designed to answer questions quickly. The traffic data also confirmed the growth trend of mobile viewing and we built the site to be as comfortable on your phone or tablet as it is on your desktop computer.

Connecting the Unconnected

We understand that not every user journey through a website is linear, nor does it follow a predictable path. So we pulled apart the rest of the site navigation and re-organized it to create a truly connected user experience. Information 'capsules', which can be placed on any related or unrelated page, are used to present relevant but unconnected information and links. This connecting illustrates a creative and holistic approach to providing the information that a visitor is interested in.

It's Alive!!

Another issue (opportunity) we addressed was turning a cold and stale website into something that felt 'alive'. We achieved this by connecting site visitors with what is happening at the museum 'today'. This was done in 2 ways: 1. The simple display of 'today's hours' in the header on every page. The hours update themselves throughout the week and give site visitors an accurate and timely window in to today. 2. We created a 'Today at GRAM' capsule that lists information and happenings relevant to today. This capsule is repeated frequently throughout the site to keep that information front and center.

Built for Now (and the future)

The new site serves GRAM's current needs but has also been built as a platform for future growth. As storytelling, interactivity, and opportunities for learning online become more and more important to the arts, this site is ready! The structure of the site, both behind the scenes and the visitor facing design, are flexible for whatever ideas GRAM can come up with to engage visitors. Technology is no longer the barrier to engagement online.

THE RESULT The result is a fully dynamic website that is intuitive and easy to navigate, with key information readily available throughout. A thoughtful use of visuals to direct users to what they are most interested in creates a balanced approach to moving a site visitor along their journey through the content. The powerful content management system ensures that the information will be accurate, timely, and enables the site to take care of itself. This tool is as effective internally for collecting information as it is externally for presenting it, and the benefits will be exponential as the staff fully implements the processes going forward.