

CONCLUSION

THE CHANGING NATURE OF CLIENT – WEB DESIGNER RELATIONSHIPS

“Involving the disenfranchised at every stage of project development will establish social equity of technology, not as isolated phenomena, but as a process that becomes embedded within the encompassing holistic social realities of marginalized users [...] Such a strategy calls attention to the issue of relinquishing roles of traditional experts in research, training and system design. It may entail a slower process and making mistakes along the way; however, the results are more effective in achieving real outcomes in terms of empowerment of disenfranchised users.”

- Mehta et al. (2004: 798)

The goal of this thesis was not to solely prescribe direct recommendations to web designers and nonprofits about how to alter the web design workflow, but to understand the implications of design ethnography, alongside Wordpress, as a means of building egalitarian relationships that expand upon the technical know-how of nonprofits promoting the resolution of greater societal issues through technology use.

UX becoming a popular term and workflow in the design industry has allowed web designers to still function within the logic of their system to produce functional end-products (i.e. websites), simultaneously encouraging them to better relate to their client and website end users. The emphasis on putting the user's experience first and understanding the impact of a social context on the success of any given design, has resulted in the application of new research methods inspired by anthropology in the form of design ethnography.

Design ethnography is utilized by those both inside and outside of academia to study the implications of, current or potential technology development. Here, I found participant observation to be an advantageous method within design ethnography, for its ability to increase communication through the creation of

relations with a greater number of actants - communication allowing for greater collaboration and understanding. By participating in the daily happenings of Druid Cycles and Pedal Power, I was able to recognize their structural makeup; build meaningful relationships resulting in more fluid portrayal of website requests; and was hit head-on with the social and environment constraints limiting their technological access. Participant observation for the researcher also supports the triangulation of data, helping the web designer to validate their own, and the nonprofit's, decisions for specific development features relating to end users' hopeful experience in using the website.

Design ethnography further empowers nonprofits, not only in its research potential, but its ability to support organizations who request technological self-sufficiency, in whatever form that may take. The gradual introduction of the website through a transparent workflow provides the means to educate nonprofits along the way, in technological knowledge and skills. Moreover Wordpress, having created software with greater usability, through CMS functionality, makes available an opportunity for website maintenance that assists web designers in dedicating time to design ethnography. Thus they are no longer required to create a website from start to finish; nor without the support of the Wordpress and free software community who becomes another actant in continuing to sustain the nonprofit through online resources and ideals.

This description is one I have experienced as an anthropologist and web designer, learning about client - web designer relationships in the nonprofit sector. Therefore it would not be complete without a mentioning of the outcome the two nonprofits who participated in my research below.

NONPROFIT WEBSITES

I cannot speak to the whole success of both my website projects. However, in the case of Druid Cycles, the result of my participant observation, which saw a need for a complete content overhaul and restructuring of the site's hierarchy, was

received well by the websites' users. In the week after new content was implemented, the site's visitors moved from 15 visits per day to up to 200, and have stayed in the range of 50 to 150, since mid July. More importantly, the site has allowed Thor to make basic updates; and greater activity on the website, Twitter, and Facebook, have piqued the interest of volunteers of a variety of backgrounds. Due to the busy nature of the shop, I also helped to enlist a new technology volunteer to come one day per week, to complete any major website updates and general technology maintenance. While I am still contacted regularly by the shop, it is not for basic website changes, but for advice on new technological endeavors and simply keeping up to date on movements within the organization.

Pedal Power, not situated on-site as a single organization, had difficulty producing the site's content in a timely manner. As a volunteer based organization, its members are subject to constraints related to their personal and professional lives, often requiring that the Saturday cycling club events are their only time for Pedal Power. However, the site is up and running, providing basic content and scheduling for online visitors quickly passing through. We agreed to put the site on hold for approximately one month while my thesis is being finished and they take care of final summer events relating to the cycling club, and content production will resume in the fall when the Saturday events go on hiatus. At this time, I will input all content in the first instance and then teach one volunteer of the organization, how to continue the processing of updating and input. Regardless of the delay, the site, which has been in their thoughts for approximately six years, has their framework now built, also in a time when they are thinking to expand. Specifically, in that Finsbury Park is attempting to turn their cycling area into football fields, and the website will provide a platform for information about their club in opposition to this change. The Wordpress website will allow for this growth and with the technical know-how of their volunteer will continue to be a resource for their own organization and their audience.

IMPLICATIONS OF THEORY

Niklas Luhmann's systems theory helped us to understand how nonprofits and web designers function in two different systems, to appreciate what logic exists in both and how systemic meaning can be changed with the implementation of new methods and technology. Comprehending a systems' operation was an integral first step in realizing that the meaning of a website's construction will be different for all parties involved, based on the logic of the individual system. Thus communication as a mode of boundary alteration was essential for determining where collaboration and education could occur.

As the web designer values the completion of an end-product (i.e. website) the overarching goals of the system will not always direct the actions of its practitioners toward workflows that promote technological access for their clients. However, again the more recent trends utilizing user-experience (UX) methods; such as design ethnography to better communicate with nonprofit clients, has challenged the notion of the functioning website as sole measure of success and past standards that valued the technologist as expert.

For small-scale nonprofits, we saw the actants and relations within their system that impacted their acquisition of resources relating to impaired or successful usage of technology. Here it was important to remember that a lack of physical artifacts; computer hardware or software, was not the key issue in enrolling technology to achieve the nonprofit's mission, but its combination with limitations in time, education and social or environment support. For nonprofits striving to achieve technological autonomy, this also means maintaining their own investment in technology use, in combination with new web design workflows. By involving design ethnography and Wordpress, allowing nonprofits and web designer to communicate to achieve integrated organizational technology use, the meaning and logic of either system do not have to be fully altered, but shifted in promotion of more advantageous autopoietic functioning, an outcome of successful technology use.

As both the nonprofit and web design system continue their movement, ANT helped us to define the heterogeneous actants necessary for successful technology implementation. It is not enough, to enroll better technology or workflows; one must also align the interests of various allies to support and makes use of the actants. By unpacking a series of black boxes in the development of the nonprofit website, we were able to observe the number of actants creating the network of relations for technology utilization. So while design ethnography and Wordpress provided a positive environment for the actants, it was necessary for nonprofits to also have: the computer hardware, Wordpress software, Internet access, time/willingness to learn about Wordpress, driving organizational mission, basic technological aptitude and the web designer to teach Wordpress, for the website to be successful. The setting up of a website for a nonprofit who desires to maintain a site on their own, will not be successful unless the time has been taken to ensure a level of technological access that is appropriate for the nonprofit in terms of their own resources and ability to understand the potential use of their website.

In practice, both of these frameworks helped us to conceptualize how client – web designer relationships in the nonprofit sector are able to evolve through systems’ employment of better communication tactics, experiences of new technology and methods, and understanding the individual (and varying) actants required in web design. All of which, working toward the creation of a website for small scale nonprofits desiring technological self-sufficiency and a pushing out of methods that decrease opportunities for overall technological access.

MOVING FORWARD

I hope these theoretical frameworks provide a base for thinking about future projects in the web design industry that shrink the digital divide as reconceptualized for the inclusion of the variety of social contexts and actants necessary for impaired or successful technology access. Those who partake in the Wordpress free software community should take pride in knowing the

expanse of what this software has achieved. For creating a CMS that has become popularized for its ease of access has changed the nature of acquisition of a web presence for many people, in a time when having a website can be essential for supporting any given organization. And for smaller scale nonprofits who want to be capable of maintaining a website themselves, the integration of design ethnography and Wordpress provides an exciting platform that will allow their organization to utilize technology not as an external tool, but an integrated actant in their organization to help them to achieve the good they are working toward. Design ethnographers, I hope, partaking in UX research, will see more opportunities for education in their work, rather than solely working for the goal of increased technical functionality. While not all web designers will be interested in deepened relationships with clients, and not all nonprofits are interested in maintaining aspects of their own site; this work aimed to inspire many to consider the impact of such new actants and to provide an outline for those seeking to begin or improve their own methodologies or technology use. As the workflows in the design industry constantly change and new technologies will arise, I hope this study holds power through its display of the relationships created between humans and technology, capable of changing the way in which people are able to enact their goals and conduct daily life.