

LIBRARY HOME PAGE DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT: TISS LIBRARY CASE STUDY

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Abstract

Emergence of web technology has condensed the diversified and distributed world in a compact form creating the concept of global village bridging the information availability at a glance. As a result, hosting a home page especially the libraries has been on the cards and need of the hours to keep pace with time. The authors emphasising the need of library home page elaborates the techniques of designing and developing a library home page. It also strives to answer the structure of web page as to its contents, announcement and maintenance of home page.

Library Home page : A necessity

The World Wide Web, once used by a handful of researchers, now is used by everyone from university faculty members to school going children. Now the trend is everyone wants to have their presence on the web. And libraries are no exception, many libraries have a web site. (Appendix - I)

The Library and Information Centres being the knowledge centres and disseminators of information needs to be on the accessible map by the society at large for want of information. This accessibility in the best interest of users can be met by hosting a web page. Designing a web page for library need not necessarily be carried out by pure computer professionals but an information professional with web page techniques. To start with, think about what you are going to publish. What kind of information are you going to publish on your web pages ?. When knowing what, it's also easier to decide how.

TISS Library Homepage <<http://www.tiss.edu/library>>

The ultimate objective of any information system is to make provision for information to reach the end-user in a short time. The TISS library has designed its homepage. The necessity for it became clear in the light of the university's commitment to making information available electronically to its user community. It provides information round

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the clock about the library. The library home page consists of the following.

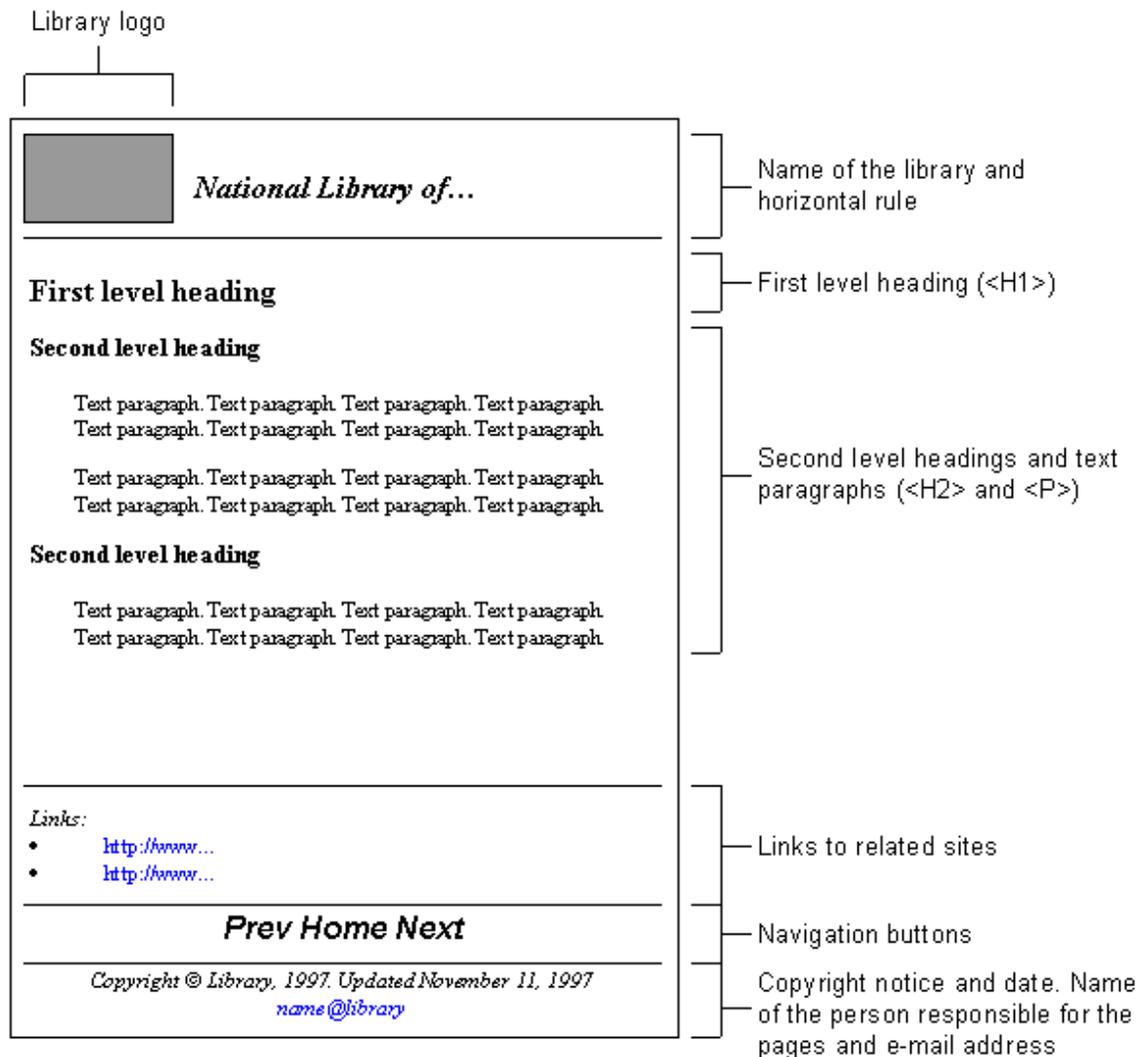
- Information about the library including general information about the library, services offered, information about various divisions as well as staff..
- Information about on going projects in the library ex: training, workshops etc.
- Information about available electronic resources and access to OPAC of library database
- Provision for linking social science library sites.

Any user irrespective of location and time, can search the information pertaining to TISS the library holdings. This is the best means and cost-effective method of disseminating information about their products and services to reach the user group.

Design the structure of the web pages

Divide the information you are about to publish into subdocuments (individual HTML-documents). Don't put too much text and images in one document. Reading on the screen is different from reading on paper. The less readers have to scroll documents on the screen, the better. Very large documents with sizable images are also slow to load.

Draw a chart of subdocuments and linking between them. Drawing a chart would help you to visualise the structure of your pages. Don't make the tree of documents too deep, because the readers usually read just the few top documents, unless they are really interested in the information you have to offer.



Picture 1. Example chart of documents and linking between them

Some readers may want to print your pages, but printing page by page is slow. You could provide a version for printing, i.e. one big file with all the documents, but without the fancy graphics.

Give a name to each document (file). The name of a document should describe the content of that document, like in the picture above. First document (i.e. home page) is usually named index.htm. When writing a document, remember to use a descriptive TITLE element at the beginning of the document. The chart you have drawn is your guide when writing documents, so use it.

Notice that there should always be a link from every subdocument to the index or home page in order to avoid the "lost in hyperspace" phenomenon. The reader of the document should always know where he or she currently is and where to go next. Don't create links just for the fun of linking, links should always point to a relevant document.

For a large collection of documents, create a table of contents (usually index.htm) with links to individual subdocuments. If the documents are meant to be read in some specific order, use links to "next" and "previous" documents.

Think about the directory structure

You could save your HTML files and images into one single directory on your WWW server, but if there are going to be lots of files, maintaining the files could become quite difficult.

Check out the structure you just have designed, and look if there are files that clearly belong together, such as images, forms and so on. For example, images to be used with a number of documents (library logos etc.) should be in one directory. This way it is easy to update the images, and you always know where to find them. Images belonging to only one document should be placed in the same directory as the document file itself.

When writing HTML documents and creating HTML links between them, it is essential to know where the target documents are located. In other words, you have to know the path to the document, i.e. the document URL (Uniform Resource Locator, e.g. <http://www.tiss.edu>).

The library home page

The library home page should contain name of the library, a logo or a scanned photograph, if such exists, and a list of library activities. It can also contain a short description of the library. The activities can be presented either using "buttons" or as text links. Buttons are small images (often in gif format) and they act as links to subsequent web pages. It is recommended that if the library pages contain images, there should be a text version available for those who use slow telecommunication lines and/or older microcomputers.

The buttons or text links on the home page:

- What's new
- Services
- Collections
- Databases
- Contact information
- Link to the home page of the parent organization
- Links to other libraries
- Home page without images

Note: Each library page should be dated and signed to show when the page has been created or updated and who is responsible for it.

The content of the library web pages in detail

What's new

The latest library news is presented on this page. Each news item should be dated and the older ones should be removed as new items are added

Services

A short description of the services provided by the library may be given here. Information on user limitations should be included.

Buttons or text links on this page may be:

Borrowing instructions

This page contains information about who is allowed to borrow material, which material and on which terms.

Renewal of loans

This page is needed if the renewal of loans may be done using a web interface to the library system. Otherwise the renewal procedure can explained in Borrowing instructions

Interlibrary lending

Procedures for interlibrary lending are explained on this page. A web-based interlibrary loan request form can be provided. If the service is fee-based, there should be a link to a price list.

Information retrieval

If the library offers information retrieval services they should described here. The page can be simple as this or more elaborate as this. It is important to mention in which fields the services are provided, which resources are used and how the services are priced.

Document delivery services

If the library provides a service to obtain materials such as books, journal articles, conference papers etc which are not available in the library, the service can be described here. The page can be as simple as this or more elaborate as this. For online ordering, a document delivery order form can be provided.

User education

It is an advantage to the librarians to have well trained users. The training provided by the library should be explained on this page. Here is one example of the user education provided and here is another one.

Service price list

On this page a price list of fee-based library services should be given. Here is one example of a library price list.

Collections

Library collections can be described by using either plain text or floor maps. An example of the former type can be found here and a clickable floor map type here. If there are reference databases online for the collections, there should a link in the text to the relevant database.

Databases

If the library allows users to access online databases via this web interface, the list of databases should be given on this page. The name of a database acts as a link to the database. A short description of the databases together with access rights should be provided.

Contact information

This page could contain the following information: address information, opening hours, staff of the library and information about how to get to the library.

Address information

It is important to give both the mailing and the street address of the library together with telephone and fax numbers plus the email address. This information may also be presented on the home page. If the library has several service units with different addresses, the list of addresses may be rather long. In such a case, it is suggested that the address information is placed on a page of its own and a link to that page is placed here.

Opening hours

Brief information about the opening hours can be presented here. If there are different opening hours for different months of the year and/or for different service units of the library, a separate web page should be used, such as this.

Staff

This should be a link to the page listing the library staff, their job title, telephone numbers and email addresses. If the staff members have personal home pages, their names could act as links to the corresponding pages.

E-mail addresses of the staff can be linked using mailto in hypertext link (e.g.).

How to get to the library

To help new users find the library and its service units a separate page should be provided to give the instruction both for public transportation and for driving by car. A map showing the location of the library can also be provided.

Create images

When inserting images into your documents, they should usually be in GIF (Graphic Interchange Format) or JPG (JPEG, Joint Photographic Experts Group) format (see also "Image, video and sound file formats"). If you have images in some other format, you need to convert the images into GIF or JPEG in order to be able to show them as inline images (i.e. an image that is shown on the browser window instead of showing it with an external viewer).

GIF images can have max. 256 colors (1-8 bit) and JPG's are 16,7 million color images (24 bit). In GIF images you can select one color to be transparent and a GIF can also be saved using the interlace method. Again, all the software you need can be downloaded from the Internet, as shareware or freeware. Some of the shareware software is mainly for converting and saving files in different formats, but many have real image processing capabilities, so you can create images from the scratch without buying expensive software.

Always use the ALT tag and a relevant explanatory text in HTML code when inserting images to HTML documents. Many users with slow connection have the "Show Images" option set off.

Image maps

Image maps are ordinary GIFs, but associated with a map file, so that the image can have active hot spots, i.e. links to other documents.

Map file defines upper left corners and lower right corners of the active areas and target document URL for each of the active areas. Finding appropriate corners manually could be difficult, but fortunately there are many shareware image map editors. In shareware collections image map editors are usually in the same category with normal image editors. The format of the map file depends on the server software, so you have to

know what kind of server is in use at your site. You can also use client-side image maps, but not all browsers can understand them, so be careful.

Announce your pages

After you have designed, written and tested your documents and you think that they are ready to be published, you have to let the world know about your publication. By submitting your site's URL to some announcement service, your site is added to many lists and search engine catalogues. You can also write an "advertisement" to newsgroups that are meant for announcing new sites and documents. Remember the etiquette when writing to the newsgroups.

Eg. (http://www.yahoo.com/Computers/World_Wide_web/Announcement_Services/)

Maintain your web pages

If you don't maintain your documents, you will probably lose your readers. It's as simple as that. Check that your links work, remove outdated information. Tools for maintaining links etc. can be found in many shareware collections. Try to add something new to your documents every now and then. Don't change the look of your site completely or the layout of your documents too often, the readers will get confused.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to examine, the content of library web page front-end design and to describe a typical library home page. Web masters can create or improve their own library home pages, combining uniformity with originality so that visitors to library home pages can quickly find the information they seek.

References

1. Mark Stove & Steven D Zink, "World Wide Web Home Page Design: Patterns and Anomalies of Higher Education Library Home Pages," Reference Services Review 24 (fall 1996). pp. 7-20.
2. Levine, Guide to Web Style, available at <<http://www.sun.com/styleguide/tables/Graphics.htm>>
3. McFedries, The Complete idiot's Guide to Creating an HTML Web Page, 164

Appendix - I

1. TIFR : <http://library.tifr.ernet.in>
2. IISC : <http://www.iisc.ernet.in/library>
3. TISS : <http://www.tiss.edu/library>
4. IGIDR : <http://www.igidr.ac.in/lib>