Arts Audiences
New Media Mentoring Scheme
Mentoring Report

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Mentee: Rayne Booth – Temple Bar Gallery and Studios
Date: 19ᵗʰ May, 2010

This report was written specifically for publication on the Arts Audiences website, and for subsequent discussion on the Arts Ireland group on LinkedIn. If you are reading this in PDF from, you may like to visit www.artsaudiences.ie, where you will be able to click through links which you'll find throughout the document.

<u>Introduction (James Kelly, Arts Audiences)</u>

Considering a new website? Want to optimise the outcome, and keep costs as low as possible? Two important words for you… **ADVANCE PLANNING!**

The more prepared you are in advance of talking with a web designer…

- the easier it will be for a web designer to give you an accurate quote;

- the easier it will be to decide which web designer can deliver on your requirements;

- the faster you will get through the process;

- and of course the cheaper it will be (if you approach a web designer with no preparation, you will need to develop the brief with the designer, which will cost more).

Temple Bar Gallery and Studios realise that a good website is a key element in engaging with audiences, and plan to redevelop their website. Under Arts Audiences' New Media Mentoring Scheme, Aoife Flynn of asquared mentored Rayne Booth of TBG&S as she prepared a brief for the organisation's new website.

Rayne's report will be of great interest to anyone considering building a high quality website on a tight budget, and readers will no doubt find Aoife's additional notes at the end of this report very informative.

If you are interested in discussing this work with those involved please visit the Arts Ireland group on LinkedIn – if you're not already a member, it's free to join (what's this? find out more here).

REPORT OF RAYNE BOOTH

Basic requirements

It's clear that now, more than ever, a website is an important tool in building a relationship with the public. Increasingly people are using the internet as a research tool rather than, or in addition to, visiting galleries, and as such it is possible that TBG&S has a section of it's public that may rarely, if ever, actually come in to the building.

So it is important for us to be able to provide visitors to our site with relevant, up to date information as well as other features such as blogs, newsfeeds, etc. Furthermore, social networking developments such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as other facilities such as blogging, have become an efficient and cost effective way to keep connected with your core audience (as well as to engage with new audiences), and I felt it was important that our website should reflect these developments.

The current [TBG&S website](#) was designed in 2005. The format of the site means every time we wish to update content, we must employ a webmaster. This is more costly and time consuming than is necessary, and I felt that a system which would allow staff to manage content would make more sense for TBG&S. As well as problems with content management, was felt that the website's design could be more dynamic and up to date.

The plan

In the first meeting with Aoife Flynn, I expanded upon my original proposal to the mentoring scheme, outlining the various other features that would be needed on the website. For example, an extensive archive section, a blog, a content management system, integrated to Facebook and twitter.

Aoife asked a variety of questions regarding TBG&S's needs for the website and through these we established roughly what type of features we should think about including.

Aoife suggested that the website be linked in a simple manner to TBG&S accounts on Twitter and Facebook and, if budget was a concern, the site could be built on a wordpress.org template so that it could be easily updated by gallery staff.

Due to the fact that TBG&S are hoping to update our logo in future, Aoife suggested that the logo should not be included as an integral/central part of the design of the site, so that it could be easily replaced in the future should we decide on a redesign. As our current website does not have any analytical features built in, Aoife also suggested that we ensure that the new website is linked to Google analytics so that we can harness statistics regarding how frequently the site is accessed and by whom. [Google Analytics](#) is a free programme that can be added to any site via simple pasting of code.

Preparing for the Brief – 4 stages

Aoife suggested several steps as to how I should go about writing a brief for a web designer:

- **RESEARCH:** Undertake a period of research, in which TBGS staff would each select a number of websites which we either liked or disliked, focusing on quality of design rather than quality of content.

- **EVALUATION:** Evaluate what elements on the current TBGS site work well and what additional elements may be required

- **FIRST DRAFT:** Once that internal research was completed I would then meet with Aoife to draft a brief which could subsequently be evaluated by TBGS management.

- **FINAL DRAFT:** Taking feedback from management on board, the brief would be finalised and Aoife would advise on how best to approach web designers.

1. Research

To guide the internal research Aoife suggested that we focus on three factors:

- The look and feel of the website, ie, the colours, will it be contemporary or classical in style, will it be minimal or combine a lot of text and information on one page?

- When looking at other websites as a visitor, consider why they work, why they don't work and use this to inform how we want our site to work for a visitor

- The back end. How will we use the website, what do we need in terms of archive, who will be able to update the website, how many users, what logos and links we need, how will the blog function and how many people will be updating it? How will we access statistical information, what is achievable within the budget, search engine optimisation

I began by asking TBG&S staff to each select 5-10 websites they liked or disliked. These did not necessarily have to be 'arts' websites. We then met internally and discussed the various elements of these websites that could work for TBG&S and which elements we were sure we did not want.

Example websites included;

The Irish Museum of Modern Art (http://www.imma.ie)
We found this site easy to navigate but a bit more 'museumy' in style than what we were looking for in our site. We like the Artist residency programme info which was well presented and clear with past, present and future artists – each have a page with image and info about their work

Smart Projectspace: http://www.smartprojectspace.net/
We really liked the use of a strong lead image on front page but would prefer a less complicated design.

Palais de Tokyo: http://www.palaisdetokyo.com
We liked simple the black on white text which dominates the design but felt it would be important for us to also include more images.

Whitechapel: http://www.whitechapelgallery.org/
We really liked the format of large image on front page with minimal text, then going into another front page with more text and options.

Through looking at other websites we then established that we really wanted the look and feel of our website to;

- have a clean, simple feel,

- use strong images sourced through the TBG&S programme,

- and focus on images more so than text.

2. Evaluation

What we like about our current site is that it presents important information about the programme for the visitor on the first page. We like the immediacy of having an image on the front page as we feel that presenting artists work should be the most important aspect of the site.

In relation to our back end needs we then determined that some of the following should be included in the draft designers brief:

- The website should have an easy to use content management system so that staff can update the website themselves.
- Items like logos and images should be easily changeable by staff.
- The website should allow for multiple users to update.
- Website should have excellent search engine optimisation
- Some sections will be updated more regularly than others-eg, exhibitions and events will be updated regularly whereas studio artists will be updated with less frequency.
- Blog: This could be linked to a wordpress or similar blog page and not built in to the site as it is less costly
- Current Studio artists should be able to update their own pages, and only their individual page. They should be given a password for this.
- Current/upcoming events should automatically be archived by the system once the closing date has passed

3. First Draft

During the staff meeting we discussed the layout of the website. How we would like pages to connect with each other. We decided that the front page of the website should have a large, striking image from the gallery programme, which would change every six weeks or so. Users would click on this image to access further options and to get into the website.

We identified three sections for the website; gallery, studios and Info. Both the gallery and studios sections would have an archive section where users can access information on past and future exhibitions, and current studio artists can update and maintain their own pages as a 'mini website'. I drafted a diagram of how these three sections could link into each other and added details such as how many images we would expect per exhibition/artist.

I sent this draft document to Aoife and we arranged a second meeting to discuss and finalise the draft. At this meeting, we went into further details regarding how the website would function and Aoife suggested some changes to the structure of the brief to make it clear for the designer. This included giving more details on the exact needs of the back end (outlined above) and flagging which aspects of the design were set, and which were open to discussion. We also looked at some suggestions for web designers and discussed how TBG&S could make better use of our facebook page to promote our activities.

4. Final Draft

The final contact with Aoife was done through email. I emailed her the updated brief and she made some suggested changes to the language and layout. Following this, we confirmed a final brief that we were both happy with. At present we are experiencing some changes with regard to funding & budgetary structures at TBG&S, and I am now awaiting approval from the board to go ahead with the new website. I hope to begin speaking with web designers in the coming weeks. We now have the brief in place so that the process can begin quickly when funding becomes available.

Learnings

The mentoring process was extremely helpful in providing me with the tools and language to be able to provide a web designer with a clear brief, and in doing this, save time and money for TBG&S. I now understand what information a designer needs in order to fulfill a brief. The process also helped us to establish exactly what we needed and wanted from the website, and to focus on what formats would work best for us. I now feel that I have a document that I can send to several designers and be confident that they will be able to understand our needs.

NOTES FROM AOIFE FLYNN

There can be a lot of confusion around the costs of websites, which prices seeming to vary wildly for what appears to be the same "thing"- a functioning web site. Often this can arise from the perception within an organisation that they lack the specific knowledge around web design and thus plan to ask the web designer what they need.

This is a little like not knowing what you like to eat, and then expecting a chef to cook you something you will like. You don't have to be a chef to know what flavours you enjoy, and if you do tell a chef the sorts of things you love to eat you will be sure they'll cook a magnificent meal specifically to your taste. Web design is not so dissimilar.

As a user of the web you, and others within your organisation, know what you do and don't like as a visitor to other websites. You know how you want your organisation to be perceived online, you know about your brand, and you know what information you want to prioritise for your visitor. If you can gather all this knowledge through internal conversations you will get a much clearer picture of what you want your site to feel like for other visitors.

So, now that you know what tastes you like, you are significantly more likely to get the website you actually want. By going through this process you've now determined the front end; i.e. the visitor experience of your site.

If you have a statistics programme on your site (it comes free with many webhost accounts) this is a good opportunity to check how visitors are using your current site- what pages are most popular, where are they spending the most time, how do they find your site? This information can inform the layout of your new site.

The next step is to discuss what you want the website to do for you internally- how often will it be updated, and by whom? Take into consideration time constraints and the tech ability of your staff. How many sections need to be updated? Do different people need different levels of access? Start with your ideal, you can always work back if the final budget doesn't allow it. Once you lay this out you will have determined the back end.

This information, when gathered together into a design brief, will give any prospective designer the material they need to develop an accurate quote, and to determine whether they are the best fit for your project. The more accurate the quote from the beginning, the less likely it is to inflate during the process due to unforeseen design needs. Additionally, not all designers are the best fit, some will not be able to deliver what you need, and others will be too complex. A clear brief will allow them to opt to quote for your project.

A couple of other things to consider. There are a lot of free programmes available now, such as wordpress.org (which is different to the free wordpress.com blog platform), which incorporate a content management system. If your design needs are reasonably straightforward you can opt for a designer that knows how to manipulate these templates to suit your needs, which may provide a cheaper alternative.

Social media networks like facebook and twitter are prevalent now, but may not continue to be so popular in the future, think about where bebo and myspace are now. If your budget is limited it's best to simply provide links from your homepage to your facebook page/twitter page rather than integrating it throughout the site. Similarly with blogs, I would suggest setting up a blog as a separate page or section on your site that is easy to remove if you find that you are not posting it regularly, or it is not working well for you.

Once you have your brief together you should gather a list of 4 or 5 designers whose work you like and send it to all of them, asking them to specify a quote and a timeline. If you have a fixed budget you can specify this, and determine what they can deliver for that amount, but if it is the first time you are tendering work in this area it might be more useful to leave the quotation open ended to give you a better idea of the range of prices in the market.

To gather a list it is useful to note that many websites will list their designer at the footer, or you can contact the company behind a website you like and they will give you contact details. Ideally you should shortlist the quotes to a list of three and then interview/meet these designers. It's important that you can establish a personal relationship with the successful candidate, and that you feel confident they have understood your brand and your needs, and can work with you on the project to deliver the best site your budget will allow.

The final step in a redesign process is to install an analytical programme on your site (Google Analytics is very comprehensive and is free) so you can monitor how people are using your site. Are they accessing information the way you thought they would?

What pages are most popular, how long are they spending on the site? How are the finding your site? If you monitor this on an ongoing basis you can adjust your site to better meet their needs.

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About Temple Bar Gallery and Studios

Temple Bar Gallery and Studios is a publicly funded visual arts organisation located in Dublin City Centre. TBG&S was established by artists in 1983 in response to the increasing demands for affordable studio spaces in Dublin city centre. In the mid-nineties a new gallery and studio complex was custom designed for the company by leading Irish architects McCullough / Mulvin and today the building that houses TBG&S integrates a gallery with on-street access, an atrium space and 30 artists' studios. The use of these studios reflects the broad-ranging developments in contemporary practice as artists working with photography, video, sound, sculpture, print and painting all currently occupy spaces at TBG&S. The ground floor gallery space hosts a wide ranging programme of Irish and international art, including the work of both established and emerging artists working in a variety of media.