To: Webmaster of PDR website
From: Jane Smith
Date: 5/17/07
Subject: Website recommendations

In recent years, people have become increasingly dependent on computers and the Internet. This is especially true for new generations, whose computer skills and knowledge have become second nature. Due to this shift towards technology, it is important for organizations and businesses to have an effective website in order to communicate with the public. As an organization which has the ability to make a difference in young persons lives, it is important that your website is able to reach out to the community and give them the information that they need. In addition to serving the people of your community, the PDR swim team has recently come under the spot light after being featured in the movie "Pride". Many people, such as myself, may visit your website after viewing the movie "Pride" to gain insight into the organization. With a few helpful recommendations, your website can be an effective advocate of your facility and all it has to offer.

I have viewed the website out of curiosity to learn more about the amazing history of the PDR recreation center and swim team. I have also conducted two usability tests on the website by asking two other persons to view and navigate through the website. These usability tests helped me to determine which areas of the website could be improved. After implementing the suggestions that aroused from the usability test, I tested the website once again to confirm that the changes were helpful.

Within this report, I will discuss the significance of usability testing and explain the details of the tests that I performed, including research questions used, demographics of the subjects, and the test procedure. . Following the discussion, I will relay the finding of the usability test. Lastly, I will use the findings listed as well as my own knowledge about website design to make relative and effective recommendations for your site. You can view an example of the recommendations at www.csulb.edu for the home page and www.csulb.edu for the swim team page.

Discussion
Usability Test Purpose
Performing usability tests allowed us to evaluate the content and organization of the website from the users point of view. The test subjects were able to use the website as if they were part of the intended audience for the site and determine which areas or design elements of the site they found to be problematic. The test allowed us to make recommendations and improvements to the site that will help meet the needs of the potential users.

Research Questions
After navigating through the website, test subjects were asked the following questions:
1. What impression do you have of the organization after viewing the website?
2. Do you feel that it was easy to find specific information on the website?
3. Was the text on the website clear and easy to see? (Contrast)
4. Do you feel that the alignment, or organization of the information makes the website easy to navigate? (Alignment)
5. Do you feel that the most important information is readily visible and accessible?
6. Do you feel that the structure of each page is similar throughout the website?
7. Do you have any other suggestions for improving the usability of this site?

Demographics of participants
I chose to test subjects from a variety of different demographic groups. The first subject that I tested was a parent of two children with limited computer and internet skills I chose this subject to represent the opinion of potential parents that might view the site in order to find information about swimming lessons and pool hours for their children. The second subject that I chose was a male college student. The second test subject was able to represent viewers interested in the history of the recreation center or someone from the community looking to find information about the facility. The first subject was tested the website a second time after their recommendations had been implemented.

Test Procedure
Each subject was tested separately in different locations. The first subject was tested in the computer lab at California State University Long Beach. The second subject was tested in the comfort of their own home using their own computer. Both of these scenarios represent real life situations in which the public might access your website.

Each test lasted about 15 minutes and consisted of a given scenario followed by questions. The test subjects were given the URL address of the site and asked to open the home page. After opening the homepage, the subjects were asked to navigate to the swim team page and find information about the different swim teams that are available. After navigating their way through the site, the subjects identified areas of the site that they believed to be problematic and answered a series of research questions. I went through the questions with them and discussed their answers as I took notes on what they said.

Findings
Performing the usability tests allowed me to get input from the target audience of the website about the design of the website. By extracting answers from the research questions, I was able to identify what the users liked about the site and some of the recurring problems that occurred. The following points explain the major difficulties that affected the test subjects while trying to access your site as well as the positive aspects of the design.

- When I asked the subjects about their first impression of the website and the PDR organization, one of the subjects said, "the organizations looks very fun and

friendly." This user liked the catchy headings, such as "Splash back often for the latest in PDR Aquatics news." They also liked that the website was colorful and animated. At the same time, both of the subjects felt that using pictures for the background did not make the website look professional. They also felt that because some of the headings and links were not aligned properly, this took away from the professionalism as well.

- The users were able to successfully complete the scenario within two mouse clicks, which meets the standard for organization and finding information. Even though the subjects were able to quickly find the information about the different swim teams available, they were not sure if they had arrived at the correct location. The headings for each of the swim teams were lost within a block of text and were not clearly visible.

- Even though the users were able to find the information without looking though too many pages, one of the subjects mentioned that he "did not like the fact that he had to scroll through the pages before clicking on each link." The subject also said, "I like to have the links readily available and visible as soon as I open the page."

- The subjects also felt that some of the links were not easy to locate or read. On the PDR swim team page, some of the links are light blue against a dark blue background, which makes them harder to read. Secondly, links are not bolded and are listed in Times New Roman, which does not stand out from the rest of the page.

- The users felt that the alignment of the page was not helpful in making the site easy to navigate. One of the subjects stated that, "the content of the pages seems too scattered and I am not able to focus on one aspect of the page." This was apparent on the swim team page in which the pictures were different sizes and did not line up with each other. The text on this page was also not in alignment. The subjects mentioned that they would like to see the information listed in columns or rows at the top or left hand side of the page.

- The placement of the links was another point that the subjects made about the design of the page. With regards to the swim team page, one of the subjects mentioned that the links were not placed next to each other, which made them difficult to find.

- One of the research questions asked if the users felt that the most important information was readily visible and accessible. One of the test subjects felt that the most important aspect of the swim team page is information about joining the team. This link is currently listed at the bottom of the page. The subject said, "there should be a large, emphasized link about joining the team at the top of the page."

- When asked about the uniformity of the site, the test users all agreed that the website was not uniform due to the different backgrounds used on each page. The structure of each page was also different. This might be confusing for visitors of the site.

Recommendations

The information gained from the usability tests indicated that various aspects of the PDR website could be improved. The website does not adhere to some of the basic principles of design, including alignment, contrast, proximity, and repetition. The following suggestions are based on these four principles of design and will help to produce a professional and organized website which will effectively communicate with the public.

Contrast

- The first suggestion that the subjects made about the website was based on appearance and presentation of the website. The subjects felt that the background images took away from the professionalism of the site. To make the web site appear more professional, I would simply use a white, or lightly colored background. I think that the background images are very fun and can be used in other places throughout the site, such as menus or banners. Removing the background images will also allow the content, such as text and pictures, to be the focus of the page. This follows the principle of contrast. When there is a lot of color in the background and in the content, it is not easy for the view to determine where to focus on the page. Without contrast between the background and the foreground, it is also harder to see the information.

- The principle of contrast was also lacking on the page that listed the different swim teams available. The subjects were not aware that they were looking at the list of swim teams because the headings did not stand out from the rest of the text. In order to create contrast between the text and the headings, you could use a different font for the headings, make them bold, make them bigger, and or use a different color text. It would also be helpful to separate the headings from the text by using spaces to make them more visible.

- Another problem with contrast was found with the links on the swim team page. The light blue letters of the links were difficult to see against the dark blue background image. To make these links more visible, it would be helpful to use a lighter background and a darker font for the text. It would also help to bold the text and use a sans serif font, such as Arial or Tahoma.

- In addition to adding contrast, another way to make text easier to read is to use a sans serif font. Even though Times New Roman is easier to read on paper, fonts like Arial and Tahoma are easier to read online. For this reason, I would recommend changing all your text to a sans serif font.

Proximity

- The next set of suggestions made by the subjects was based on the principle of proximity. One of the subjects said that he would like to have the links readily available when he first opens the page without having to scroll down the page. The links are currently listed at the bottom of each page, making them harder to access. I would recommend placing the links at the top of each page on the left hand side to make them more accessible.
- The subjects also had trouble finding the links on the PRD swim team page because they were not placed next to each other. In order for a web page to demonstrate proximity, items that are similar should be placed next to each other. Therefore, all of the links on this page should be placed together in a designated area of the page.

- One of the subjects felt that the most important information listed on the site did not stand out. As a potential viewer of the site, he felt that he would probably want to know how to join the swim team. Information about how to join the team should be presented in a way so that it stands out to the viewer. In order to make this information stand out, it should be listed at the top of the page in large letters.

- Another problem that the test group had with the proximity of the site was that all the information was very spread out. It would help to have all the information together to reduce the need for scrolling and to make searches easier and faster.

Alignment

- When asked about the alignment of the website, the test users felt that the misalignment of the pictures and text on the swim team page made it difficult for them to focus on one aspect of the site. This also made it harder for them to find the information that they needed. They suggested listing all the text information in column or rows at the top or left side of the page and lining up all the pictures.

- The alignment on the first page of the web site could also be improved. The home page is currently aligned at the center of the page. It may be more visually appealing to align the text on the left edge of the page. This will create a straight line of text and make it easier for people to locate information.

Repetition

- The test group noticed that each page had a different background and was different in structure. This can be confusing for viewers because they might not know if they are still looking at the same web site. In order to address this issue, it would be helpful to decide on a background and layout that can be used for each page. As you will see in the example, I have created a layout that is used through out the web site.

Conclusion
As a result of improving your website with the four elements of design, the people who visit your site will be able to quickly and easily find the information that they need. The recommendations given will help to emphasis the information that is relevant to the intended audience of the site. The improved web site will also be a professional representation PDR aquatics, while still emphasizing the character and charisma of the organization. After implementing the recommendations listed above, the usability test showed that the changes were successful in making the site more user friendly. It is likely that public viewers of the site will have the same success after making improvements.