L'Europe en Méditerranée
Europe in the Mediterranean

Communication Handbook - Factsheet 6

Version 2 – June 2013

6 Website Communication

- ⇨ What design to use for your website
- ⇨ How to structure your website to make people stay longer
- ⇨ Differences in how people read text on the screen and on paper
- ⇨ Example of the hierarchical website structure

Programme cofinancé par le Fonds Européen de Développement Régional
Programme cofinanced by the European Regional Development Fund

Website communication

Your website will be the first source of information about you for many people outside your project, so it needs to contain the right information in a clear and accessible design and structure.

Design

Many organisations spend a fortune on the aesthetic design of their websites, a luxury that is beyond the reach of most MED projects. If you do have budget to commission a professional web design company, be aware that many will try to sell you a service that is unnecessarily complex and expensive. A simple "brochure" site may be sufficient for many MED projects.

Alternatively, it is relatively cheap and easy to configure and publish a straightforward website using inexpensive off-the-shelf software. Most web publishing programmes include a range of generic website templates that can be personalised easily. Keep the design minimal and professional, avoiding any sound, movement or clashes of colour. Avoid information overload: leave enough empty space. Clarity, accessibility and ease of use are vital.

Structure

Good websites have a system of links among the pages that is intuitive, straightforward, and reflected in a clear navigation facility that makes it obvious to users where in the site they are, and how to get to wherever else they want to go.

The easier it is to use, the longer users will stay at the site and the more they will see. Links to all key pages or sections of the site should be displayed on the front page, and every page should contain a standard set of links to other key pages or sections since not all users will arrive at the front page.

Make your structure hierarchical and as shallow as possible: no page should be more than two clicks away from the home page. (See sample website structure below)

Content

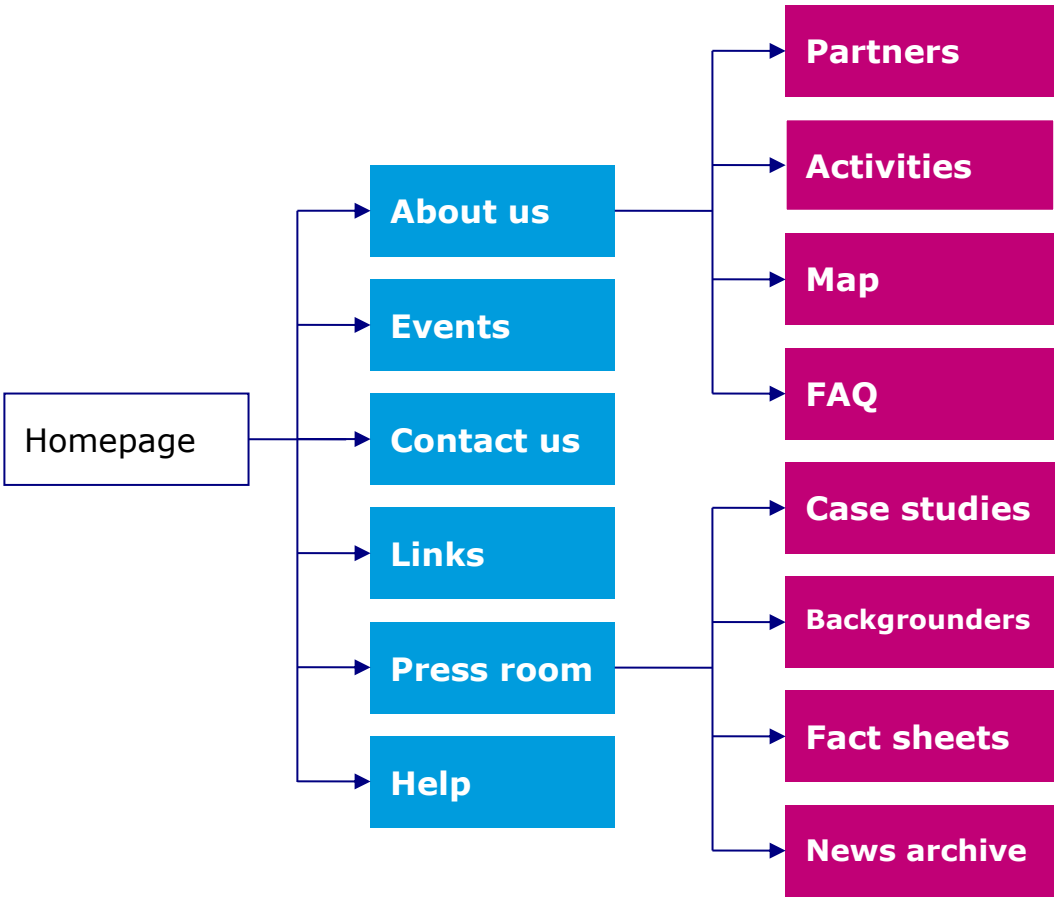
Research has shown that people read text very differently on websites from the way they read on paper. On paper, people read sentences fairly predictably from left to right, and persist through long sections. On screen, people's eyes scan around unpredictably and settle on interesting keywords. On paper, people are more likely to read to the bottom of the page. On screen, people lose interest more quickly and many people do not bother to scroll down.

- ⇨ **Break up your text with sections and bullet points**
- ⇨ **Highlight key words in bold**
- ⇨ **Be concise. Avoid long texts that require users to scroll down**

Hosting

Your website can often be hosted directly by your web design company or they can suggest another company for you. If your project is part of a large organisation or local authority, there might also be an opportunity to host your website internally. Look around to find the best hosting option for your project.

Example of a hierarchical website structure



Website monitoring

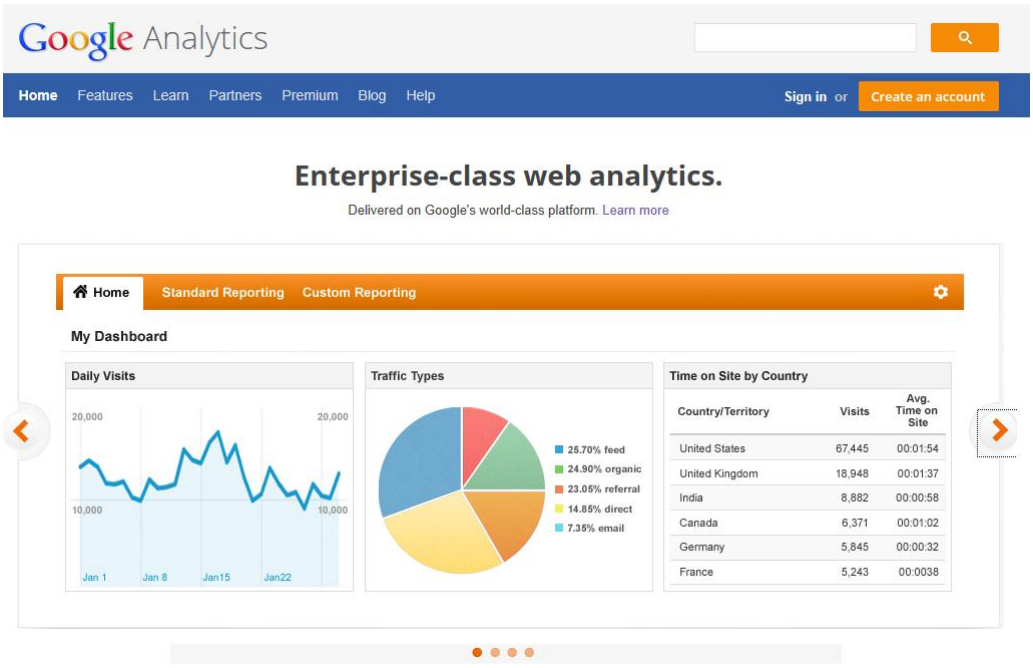
Google Analytics I

Is one of the most used online free services from Google. This tool enables to know how many visitors use the website and how they access to it through different collections of data classified under different sections: "Analysis tools", "Content Analytics" (most reliable parts, most viewed pages, etc.), "Social Analytics" (interaction of visitors with share functionalities of website, content on social networks), etc.

You need to create/have a Google account such as xxxxx@gmail.com to use and administrate the Google service. Administrating means that you also define who is entitled to consult the statistics of your website.

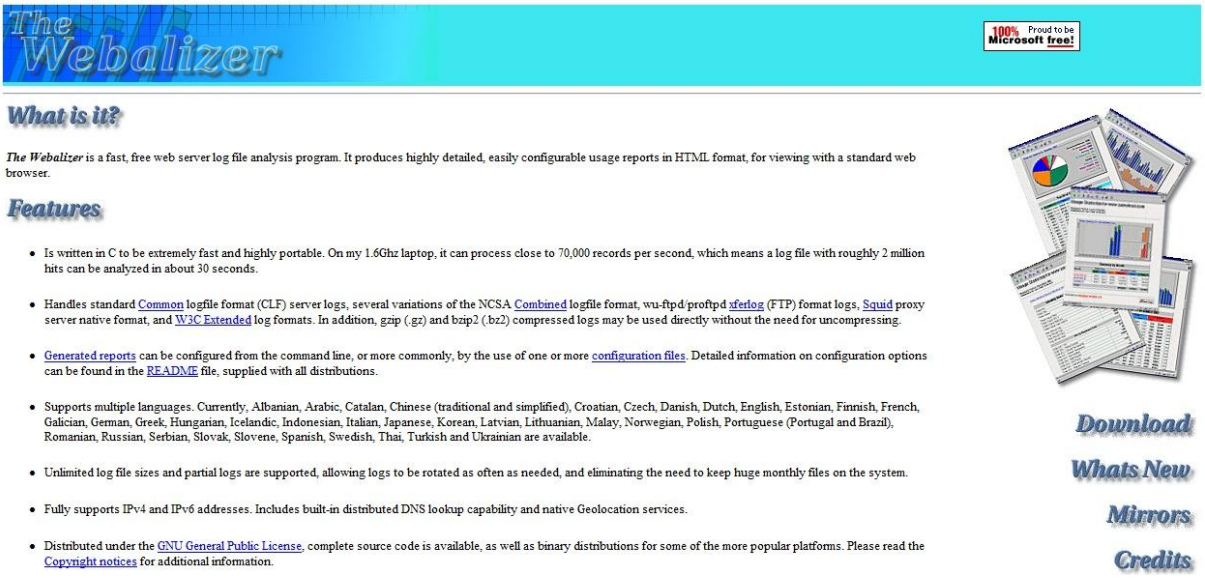
In case you use Google Analytics, please enable the following address to consult the data.

Gmail account of the MED programme JTS: stc.programme.med@gmail.com



Open source alternative solutions to Google exist. Here are two examples:

It is a software making it possible to analyze the use of the Web servers. It produces highly detailed reports in HTML format from server logs. It is a free software distributed under the GNU General Public License. It is one of the most used free services at the moment for statistical analysis. Data include number of hits and visits, countries, http referrers, quantity of downloaded information, etc. These data can be presented in monthly, daily or hourly charts. Other options have been developed from the source code.



AWStats

It is free a software distributed under the GNU General Public License. It analyzes web logs and generates web, streaming, ftp or mail server statistics, graphically. It collects data on number of visits, and number of unique visitors, visits duration and last visits, authenticated users, and last authenticated visits, days of week and rush hours (pages, hits, KB for each hour and day of week), domains/countries of hosts visitors (pages, hits, KB, 269 domains/countries detected, GeoIp detection), hosts list, last visits and unresolved IP addresses list, most viewed, entry and exit pages, files type, etc.

Pitfalls

Some MED projects websites were analyzed to find out about pitfalls and improvement potentials.

- Websites are often not enough user friendly and adapted to audiences.
- Contents, structure and even formulations are oriented towards the application form (copy/paste!)
- Websites are not linked with other relevant websites, thus not well referred and generally not enough promoted.
- Websites are not well connected with projects' social networks.
- Websites and social networks are not regularly updated.
- Websites contain information in various languages, but not systematically structured.
- Website statistics are not analyzed and used to improve.
- Websites only used for pure information, but not as multi-dimensional communication platform.
- Websites not running long enough for proper dissemination!

When designing or commissioning design of a website ask yourself these questions:

- ⇨ What is the aim of having a website for your project?
- ⇨ Who will use it?
- ⇨ What does it need to do?
- ⇨ How interactive does it need to be?
- ⇨ What features does it need to have to achieve your aims?
- ⇨ What features are not necessary?
- ⇨ How important is a website for your project communications
- ⇨ What impact will the website have on your project?
- ⇨ How will evaluate the effectiveness?
- ⇨ Are you going to outsource or try to design in-house
- ⇨ What is your budget?
- ⇨ What new social media features are going to be useful?
- ⇨ How to monitor and improve?
- ⇨ How long does it have to be online to be really 'sustainable'?