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Final Report

Communications Comparison
With Florida Climate Institute

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Center for Public Issues Education
IN AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

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Contents

Background	3
Methods	3
Results	4
FCI Website	4
Logo and Mission.....	4
Homepage.....	4
About Tab	4
Events Tab.....	5
Projects Tab	5
Resources Tab.....	6
Opportunities Tab	6
Affiliates Tab	7
Newsletters.....	7
Printed Materials.....	8
Brochure: Florida Climate Institute: Cross-disciplinary climate research in service of society	8
Findings	8
Logo and mission	8
Marketing and communications.....	8
Relevancy.....	8
Organization	8
Recommendations.....	9
Overall.....	9
Logo	9
FCI Website	9
Homepage.....	9
About Tab	10
Events Tab.....	10
Resources Tab.....	10
Affiliates Tab	10
Contacts Tab.....	10
Brochure- Florida Climate Institute: Cross-disciplinary climate research in service of society	10
Newsletters.....	10

Background

The Florida Climate Institute (FCI) approached the Center for Public Issues Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources (PIE Center) in July 2012 regarding an interest in creating a new FCI website. In August, FCI and members of the PIE Center team met to discuss project options.

Currently, FCI is a joint partnership with Florida State University (FSU) and the University of Florida (UF), with FSU hosting the FCI website. Recently, FCI has become a consortium of six Florida universities, with each university expected to operate a separate FCI branded website. Each website would concentrate on climate-related activities within the individual university and its surrounding geographical area.

Important information for the UF FCI site includes the ability to update climate change data, news, events and publications, as well as a location for stakeholders to sign up for an electronic mailing list and display partnerships.

Based on the needs of UF's branch of FCI, the PIE Center recommended a communications audit of FCI's current web-based and electronic communications materials as well as a comparison to what UF FCI would want to place on the site as well as avoid. Following the communications audit, the PIE Center will develop a website specifications document. The website specifications document outlines and prototypes the structure, layout, design and content of the web site in a form that can be utilized by a web developer to create the actual site. The specification document ensures every stakeholder of the project has the same understanding of the final product. In addition, the document serves as a continual reference point for future additions or edits to the website. In addition, the PIE Center could assist the UF FCI formalize the specifications document into live website, which is explained further in the research and development section.

Methods

A communications audit is a systematic assessment of an organization's capacity for, or performance of, essential communications practices. The audit determines what is working well, what is not, and what might work better if adjustments are made to ensure their communication strategies and materials were reaching their audiences effectively.

The PIE Center requested and received a representative sampling of materials used by the FCI to communicate with both external and internal audiences. FCI's website was also reviewed. These materials were reviewed and analyzed for design, consistency, usability, messaging strategies, and effectiveness. The following communications materials were reviewed and analyzed:

Website:

- Florid Climate Institute: <http://floridaclimateinstitute.org/>

Printed Materials:

- May 2012 Newsletter
- September 2012 Newsletter
- Brochure: Florida Climate Institute: Cross-disciplinary climate research in service of society

Results

FCI Website

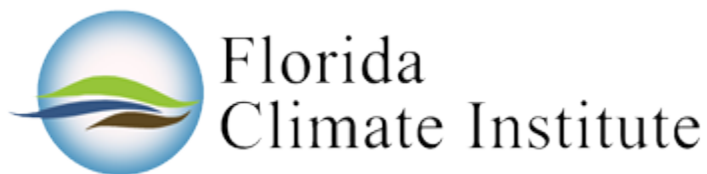
<http://floridaclimateinstitute.org/>

Logo and Mission

Strengths

- The FCI site uses high quality images and contains a lot of content.
- Looking at the logo, it is difficult to tell that it is supposed to represent climate. It does not help paint a picture of what the Florida Climate Institute is about. (See Figure 1).

Figure 1: Florida Climate Institute logo.



- The mission statement tag line is too confusing for a mixed target audience.

Weaknesses

Homepage

Strengths

- The slideshow of lively pictures and captions is very interesting and draws in the visitor. The visitor can learn about the FCI highlights and news featured in the slideshow without moving beyond the homepage.
- The clickable University logos give the homepage credibility. However, with the links at the bottom of the page, visitors may or may not be guided to the correct FCI branch without traveling beyond the homepage.

Weaknesses

- Upcoming events, papers and publications, and news sections create clutter, which becomes overwhelming. There are links to these sections at the top of the page on the menu bar that gives a better representation to why they are connected and useful within the FCI.

About Tab

Strengths

- The landing page for the tab includes descriptive text, which gives a strong overview of the institute.
- The text on the landing page offers cross-linking to other pages, simplifying navigation within the site.
- Each section of the vertical menu has the same pictures. The second picture used under each section does not look climate-related (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Images under the about tab.



Weaknesses

- No need for a “Contact Us” like under the sidebar that leads to the contact tab under the main menu because it’s repetitive.
- The purpose of an expertise section under the projects tab is unclear.

Events Tab

Strengths

- Gives a good list of upcoming events.

Weaknesses

- It is not clear why there is an “All Upcoming Events” section under the sidebar menu if there are sections for both upcoming “Florida” and upcoming “Other” events.
- “Join Our Email List” is not placed in a highly visible location and is several tiers within the site, so visitors may miss the option.
- “Become a Member” section directs to a page with “Join us” making it seem too similar to the “Join our Email List” link.
- “Become a Member” within the “About” tab just directs to the “Affiliates” tab, which is confusing because each is a distinct area of the site and neither relate to “Events”.
- On the landing page of the “Events” tab it is not clear that the text below the image is clickable and contains more content.
- There is only information on upcoming events, but no information on important events that FCI has attended or held in the past. This information could be beneficial to show FCI’s network and examples of what the FCI has accomplished
- In the “Events” drop down menu, from the main tab, only “2011 Annual Event” is listed, there is no information regarding an 2012 or 2013 annual event. Even if there was no event in 2012, the 2011 event’s information is outdated.

Projects Tab

Strengths

- The sidebar menu on the landing page is very helpful for finding projects topics. By dividing the projects into “Ecosystems,” “Natural Resources,” and “Human Resources,” a visitor could quickly find a project in which they have interest

Weaknesses

- The “All Projects” section has a lot of content to scroll through, making the page cumbersome.
- There is a horizontal menu as well a vertical sidebar menu on the landing page with the same information. Duplicate menus are not necessary.
- On the landing page of the “Projects” tab, there are nine different thumbnail images, which correspond to a topic. However, each image is very small and so is the corresponding text. Also, it appears as if each picture should be clickable, and take the visitor to projects with in the topic, but none of them are clickable.

Resources Tab*Strengths*

- The publications are current and updated regularly.

Weaknesses

- There are two vertical menus on the landing page of the “Resources” tab. Duplicate menus are not necessary and become redundant.
- The purpose of the “Resources” tab is not clear.
- It takes several clicks to reach the data sets within the tab. In addition, to reach the data, the visitor is directed to a site outside of the main FCI webpage.
- It is unclear that the headings on the “Data Sets” page are clickable. Therefore, a viewer may never reach the data
- The purpose of “Links” section is not clear.
- “Newsletters” and “Data Sets” do not seem to be related and it is unclear why each is included under the “Resources” tab.
- The “Headline News Archive” takes several clicks to reach and may not be found by a viewer looking for that type of information.
- The title of the tab “Resources” does not accurately describe the contents of the tab.
- The pictures used are the same pictures under “Projects” tab. This could confuse the visitor if the pictures are examples of projects or examples of resources or the viewer may not know they are on a different page.

Opportunities Tab*Strengths*

- The “Employment” section is very informative and helpful for visitors looking to get involved with FCI careers and jobs.
- Information is short, simple, and to the point.

Weaknesses

- There are two vertical menus on the landing page of the “Opportunities” tab. Duplicate menus are not necessary and become redundant.
- The same photographs used in “Projects” and “Resources” are used again.
- The purpose of the “Funding” section is not clear and does not connect to the tab title “Opportunities.”

Affiliates Tab

Strengths

- FCI clearly explains who and what the affiliates are in easy language and makes the information easily accessible for visitors who are interested in an affiliate program,
- The map is useful in finding regions in which the affiliates are located.

Weaknesses

- The login could be confusing to a visitor.

Contacts Tab:

Strengths

- This tab clearly outlines the contact information for every FCI University location.

Newsletters

May 2012 Newsletter

Strengths

- Online, the information for the newsletter is very accessible. Clickable, the sidebar menu makes it easy for online visitors to find the topic they are interested in learning about.
- The pictures are a good size for a newsletter. They are small enough to see and interest the reader but not too small to the point where they are unclear.

Weaknesses

- The paragraphs/articles are very long, making the newsletter six pages when printed. Generally, a subscriber would not want to read through six pages of content to find the topic they are looking to read.
- Publications and FCI Recent Presentations are boring to the average visitor and do not serve much a purpose for an interesting read.

September 2012 Newsletter

Strengths

- Shorter than the May 2012 newsletter with current and interesting articles.

Weaknesses

- Font is really small and hard to read while the paragraphs are extremely long and still give a link to read more on the article.
- The pictures are too small and unclear.
- The links for upcoming events, publications, and opportunities take up half of the newsletter, so the newsletter may not reach a broader audience.

Printed Materials

Brochure: Florida Climate Institute: Cross-disciplinary climate research in service of society

Strengths

- The language is easily laid out for the general public. The idea of FCI and organization's information is directed towards all different types of people.
- It is short, and to the point. It is folded cleanly and there is enough blank space, give a good summary of FCI.
- The pictures are very colorful and explain the different aspects that the FCI deals with regards to climate.
- There is a goal-oriented call to action. The brochure clearly states the goals of the FCI and gives the reader a website to visit to learn more.

Weaknesses

- The brochure seems like it is developed for the general public to read but the cover has that scientific mission statement again that does not match the language of the rest of the pamphlet.
- There are only logos for the University of Florida and Florida State University represented at the bottom of the cover.

Findings

The language used is very complex for a mixed target audience. The data tables and jargon used throughout the site assumes that the viewer is already informed and knowledgeable about the activities and research subjects areas of the Florida Climate Institute.

Logo and mission

The current logo of the Florida Climate Institute clearly shows the name of the organization. However, it does not represent the purpose of the FCI or incorporate any climate-related icons or pictures. In addition, it does not articulate that the organization has six-member universities. Mission Statement slogan is very complex.

Marketing and communications

Overall, FCI has developed and produced many communication goals, objectives, and strategies. The marketing plans are geared toward the knowledgeable and data-oriented audience. The abundance of contact information and opportunities shows the focus FCI has on communication.

Relevancy

FCI presents an abundance of current events and opportunities for people to get involved with the organization. However, some of the information has not been updated.

Organization

The information FCI presents is simplistic however the website organization makes it complex. The excessive use of photos and repetitive links and menus can make the site look cluttered.

Recommendations

The recommendations below are based on the current FCI website, but directed towards the development of the new UF FCI website.

Overall

The new UF FCI website should ensure that the number of redundant menus and navigation is reduced so that the flow of the site is smooth and information is easy to find. The new site should also strive to keep the language simple and easy to understand in order to keep the target audience satisfied. In addition, if possible, the tagline and mission of UF FCI should be changed to something that viewers will understand and not have to read multiple times to understand the meaning. A mission statement should be simple to read and understand. Lastly, the new site should strive to make the photographs used throughout the site are interesting and relevant to the information as well as the audience

Logo

Based upon an examination of other states' climate program logos, other logos have climate-specific pictures and elements on their logos, such as plants and animals that are affected by climate change. Using an "umbrella brand" logo that represents the FCI under UF would be beneficial.

Since FCI is a state institution, adding a picture that represents the state would also be effective in branding. This provides an iconic focal point that adds brand information to the logo that may assist in recall/recognition of the logo itself. We recommend considering the use of state specific elements in the new FCI logo, such as the outline of the state of Florida or sun because we are the sunshine state (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Examples of program logos that represent climate missions more efficiently.



FCI Website

Homepage

To take away from the clutter, the new UF FCI site should limit the content on the homepage. Most of the information that would be used is can be reached through navigation and will enable visitors to search the site and increase the viewing time of the overall site. Therefore, there is no need to repeat information that is already presented. This way, the site will be cleaner and easier to read.

About Tab

The “Who We Are” could explain a summary could explain the UF FCI expertise instead of adding a link to “Projects” tab.

Events Tab

When making an events tab for the UF FCI site, avoid duplications of the section “All Upcoming Events” and just use “Florida” and “Other.”

In addition, distinctly separate the purpose of joining the email list and joining to become a member for clarity with visitors and users of the site, so that the location of the content is clear.

Resources Tab

An explanation of what exactly resources are in regard to the FCI would be helpful. Make sure the viewer knows what you are talking about.

Change the pictures throughout this page and make sure they are not the same as the pictures used in Projects.

Affiliates Tab

The new UF FCI website should avoid creating a login for affiliates.

Contacts Tab

Reduce the number of tabs by eliminated the “Contacts” tab and combining with “About” tab. By doing this, the menu bar will look cleaner and no information will be repeated.

Brochure- Florida Climate Institute: Cross-disciplinary climate research in service of society

Make sure the brochure reflects all six of the universities that are affiliated with the FCI. Add Florida Atlantic University, University of Central Florida, University of Miami, and University of South Florida to current brochure (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: All six university logos that should be presented on the brochure.



Newsletters

Keep newsletters consistent in formatting and easy to look at. Make sure pictures are not low resolution or too small. Keep them short and to the point. For some readers who may want to go in depth, leave the links to read more on each article. Try to leave links and publications to a minimum; they only make the newsletters look unorganized.