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Written Communications: A Website Control Manual

Allison Gesek

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Written Communications: A Website Control Manual

Abstract
This report details the process of creating a website control manual for The Ark, an acoustic music club in Ann Arbor. My senior thesis project was to meet with the client, establish an understanding of their needs, and generate a useful manual for maintaining the club’s website.

This report is broken up into three sections that describe the process of meeting with the client and creating the deliverable: analyze, design, and build. These sections describe what initial steps were taken to begin this project, how and why I decided layout and design options for this manual, and how and why I built the document.

A section titled Afterthoughts concludes the report with my interpretation of the outcome, as well as some obstacles I encountered during the process.

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WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS: A WEBSITE CONTROL MANUAL

by
Allison Gesek

A Senior Thesis Submitted to the
Eastern Michigan University
Honors Program
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Graduation
With Honors in English

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This report details the process of creating a website control manual for The Ark, an acoustic music club in Ann Arbor. My senior thesis project was to meet with the client, establish an understanding of their needs, and generate a useful manual for maintaining the club’s website.

This report is broken up into three sections that describe the process of meeting with the client and creating the deliverable: analyze, design, and build. These sections describe what initial steps were taken to begin this project, how and why I decided layout and design options for this manual, and how and why I built the document.

A section titled Afterthoughts concludes the report with my interpretation of the outcome, as well as some obstacles I encountered during the process.
With my major being a double concentration in professional writing and technical writing, I decided my senior thesis project would showcase my ability to write a professional instruction guide for a real client. Nancy Allen, my honors advisor, put me in touch with The Ark, an acoustic music club in Ann Arbor. The Ark had recently hired a web development company to design their first website. The Ark needed a control manual that instructed Ark employees on how to maintain and update the website.

I capitalized on many of the written communications skills I learned throughout my program at EMU, as well as skills I acquired at the technical writing internship I participated in by way of EMU. This report details how I applied my written communications skills in approaching and producing my senior thesis project.

Analyze

The first step in the process of writing the website control manual was meeting with The Ark’s marketing director, Colleen Murdock. Colleen was in charge of all components of the website, including certain maintenance aspects. She indicated that office staff needed to have a manual to reference when updating
information regarding musical performances, ticket sales, and special announcements, but that these staff members would only be in charge of updating the site in the case of an emergency when she is not available to make the changes herself.

Colleen granted me access to the website control panel by giving me her username and password. I vowed not to make any permanent changes; I would only use the access to explore for the sake of writing clear instructions.

Next, I met with Colleen and Art Thompson-Shaw, a technical writer who helped Colleen in carrying out the necessary steps to building the website. We established what the manual would be used for and who the users of this manual would be. The users would be staff members who could be considered between intermediate and advanced computer users. Knowing that the users worked with computers daily meant that the instructions would not have to be broken down as much as instructions for novices would be.

The format of the manual was an important issue we confronted at this meeting. According to Colleen, the users would best benefit from having a hard copy of the manual. She wanted each Ark employee who had administrative status to have a hard
copy of the manual at their computer station. I noted that she should also preserve an electronic version of the manual so changes can easily be made if the website is modified in the future.

During the meeting with Colleen and Art, we also discussed security issues surrounding the maintenance of the website. It was decided that only certain people would be granted administrative status, which would allow them to make changes to the site. This was important because I had to know who would be using the control manual and how they would access the control panel to make changes.

After I had met with Colleen and Art, I logged in using Colleen’s username and password and started exploring the website control panel. I followed all the paths provided for making changes and updating the site.

Design

Knowing that the manual would be delivered in both hard copy and electronic formats, I wanted to create the manual in a program that would allow for easy modification. I decided I would provide a copy in MS Word because most people are familiar with the program.
I understood that MS Word formatting functions are not nearly as advanced as an electronic publishing program such as Adobe’s InDesign. If major changes were made to the MS Word document, it was likely that the formatting would be jeopardized. Still, not all users would be capable of making changes to the document if it were in the InDesign format.

The final document would contain many pictures and screenshots, so for design purposes I decided to create the document using InDesign and print the hard copy from this source. I could put all the same information into a Word file for a manageable electronic version.

InDesign is an electronic publishing program that is made expressly for the purpose of creating documents that are a mixture of text and graphics. This program would allow me to easily put together a useful manual without struggling with formatting rules that are meant for all text documents.

Since InDesign is an extremely expensive software program, I downloaded the free 30-day trial from Adobe’s website. Unfortunately, my computer did not meet the program’s specifications and the program would not run appropriately.
I realized that I had to create the document in MS Word, for even Microsoft’s cheaper equivalent to InDesign, Microsoft Publisher, was several hundred dollars. I deliver the electronic copy in MS Word and also in PDF format. Very small changes could be made easily in the PDF format, but more extensive changes would have to be done in the MS Word format.

A very useful format for instructions is the two-column format with heading in the left column and text and graphics in the right column. When printed, this format will look professional and well-designed, but when creating a document with this format in MS Word, the text and graphics flow from the right column to the left. There is no way to lock text or graphics in place – so if someone needs to add a section later, they will find that as text or graphics are added, headings flow into the right-side column and graphics move into the left-side column where headings belong.

The manual’s primary purpose was to instruct users how to maintain the website. Colleen wanted the manual to be used as a hard copy therefore, the formatting problems that MS Word presented when in electronic format were not as important as the final outcome of the hard copy manual.
Once the design program was chosen, I turned my attention towards the layout possibilities. As I said before, the most useful layout for instructions is the two-column layout with headings on the left and text and instructions on the right. I already had a mental image of how the manual would look, so I experimented with how it would actually look. I used 8 ½ x 11 paper turned lengthwise or landscape and divided it into two columns with a ¾-inch gutter. I experimented with many different column widths, but settled on a 2 ½-inch left column, a 5 ½-inch right column with a vertical line dividing the two columns.

Build

I started from the beginning by logging into the site. I documented the actions I took and saved screen captures to a separate MS Word file where I could crop and adjust the pictures before placing them into the manual. I followed this process through all of the functions offered through the website’s control panel.

The website offered control panel links in two places. From the control panel screen, links appeared in the middle of the page for tools such as the e-mail list, newsletter, genres, billboards, etc.
Also on the control panel screen, all the same links were offered in a compact dropdown menu on the far left side of the screen. The font size of this otherwise identical menu was smaller. I wrote instructions for each function by describing both menus.

Graphics are a very useful visual tool to guide users. For every step, I offered a graphic showing the user where to find links and what each screen looked like. I used MS Word to draw a bright red oval around hard-to-find buttons or links. The red ovals capture the attention of the user and show them what they need to do.

To subject me instructions to a usability study, I tested the manual on my mom. I chose my tester because I needed someone I could trust the username and password to, and also someone who was not an advanced computer user. Through this unofficial test, I a few inconsistent instructions where I had told the user to complete a certain task one way and then told the user to complete a similar task in a different way rather than using the same verbiage as the previous instructions. This did not jeopardize the usability of the instructions, but it did stand out to the user as an inconsistency.
When I designed the landscape layout, I anticipated binding the manual along the left 8 ½-inch side. I used a plastic spiral binding for easy navigation by the user.

Afterthoughts

Concerning what functions the manual covered, the deliverable was usable and offered clear instructions with many graphics for quick reference.

The biggest problem I faced in completing this project was not knowing what was expected. After two in-person meetings with Colleen and a few e-mails, she still did not have a concrete idea of how much or how little information she wanted in the manual.

She did say that most of the major website updates were going to be done by herself or someone else who had an advanced understanding of the website. The purpose of the manual was for the rare times when she was not available and an important change needed to be made immediately. The instructions would allow a staff member who normally does not work on the website to make emergency changes.

With this in mind, I documented the main functions that are listed within the control panel. These functions include changing
or adding all the billboards on the site, adding or changing events, adding or changing genres, and sending e-mails and newsletters to members. From talking with Colleen, I grasped that most of the time the manual would be used by Ark staff to announce the cancellation of a show or to send out emergency e-mails to members.

The finished product is a bare bones overview of the most frequently used functions in maintaining and updating the website. The instructions are clear and written so a user with basic computer skills can benefit from them. Appendix A includes a copy of the completed manual. This attached copy of the manual is formatted to fit with this report, but the deliverable to the client was spirally bound on the left edge.
Website Control Guide
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Log In

Open the web browser on your computer, e.g. Internet Explorer, Netscape Navigator, etc.

Once connected to the Internet, type http://www.theark.org in the address bar and press ENTER.

Click CONTACT from the navigation bar in the top right corner. See Figure 1 for the CONTACT button’s location.

Figure 1. Site Navigation Bar
From the CONTACT page, click LOG IN from the menu on the left side of the screen as shown in Figure 2.

![Figure 2. Click LOG IN](image)

Figure 3 shows the LOG IN screen.

![Figure 3. LOG IN Screen](image)
Enter the user’s Ark email address (username@theark.org) in the box labeled EMAIL ADDRESS.

Enter the password in the box labeled YOUR PASSWORD.

Click LOG IN.

NOTE
The user must be activated as an administrator before access to the control panel will be granted. If you cannot log into the control panel, see Colleen Murdock.
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Control Panel

After logging into the website, the first page that loads is the website control panel. This page provides links for modifying many of the main components of the website.

Figure 4 shows the website control panel.
The EVENTS category on the control panel provides links for adding or changing events. The control panel provides two ways to add or modify an event:

1) Click either ADD or CHANGE, COPY, OR DELETE directly from the EVENTS category on the website control panel page as shown in Figure 5, or

![The Ark - Website Control Panel:](image)

Figure 5. EVENTS Option 1

2) Click EVENTS from the menu on the left side of the control panel screen, then choose either ADD EVENT or CHANGE, COPY, OR DELETE EVENT as shown in Figure 6.
Add Event

Using either option 1 or option 2 as listed above, click ADD EVENT. The add event screen will appear as shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7 on the next page shows the event form provided when adding an event.
Change, Copy, or Delete Event

Using either option 1 or option 2 as listed above, click **CHANGE**, **COPY**, **OR DELETE EVENT**. The change or delete event screen will appear as shown in Figure 8.
Select the appropriate fields for changing, copying, or deleting an event and click SHOW LIST. The change event screen will appear as in Figure 9. Follow the instructions on the change event screen.
E-Mail List

The E-MAIL LIST category prompts you to send e-mails and pre-populate the weekly newsletter.

Click SEND E-MAIL TO LIST and the e-mail form prompts you to enter all pertinent information such as subject, title, recipients, genre(s), message, and URL links.

Figure 10 on the next page shows the e-mail form provided for sending emails.
Figure 10. E-mail Form
Fill in the provided fields of the e-mail form. Below the e-mail message body, is a box called PUSH-TO URL TITLE and another box called PUSH-TO URL LOCATION. If you would like to include a link to an artist’s website or a link to purchasing tickets online, enter the title of the link in the PUSH-TO URL TITLE BOX, and the website address in the PUSH-TO URL LOCATION box.

**EXAMPLE**

If tickets for the RFD Boys are sold online at Ticketmaster enter *Buy tickets for the RFD Boys online at Ticketmaster* in the PUSH-TO URL TITLE box.

Go to www.ticketmaster.com and search for the RFD Boys at The Ark. Copy the URL from the address bar of that page and paste the URL into the PUSH-TO URL LOCATION box.

When the e-mail message is ready to be sent, make sure dates, times, and links are correct and proper recipients and genres are selected. Click **SEND MESSAGE** to send the e-mail.

Click Pre-populate weekly newsletter. You will be prompted to enter a start date and an end date. Click **show pre-populated message**. Directions will prompt you to send the pre-populated weekly newsletter.
Billboards

Billboards are boxes of various colors that showcase different pieces of information throughout the website.

Figure 11 shows a sample of what billboards look like and where they are typically located.
The BILLBOARDS category on the control panel provides links for adding, changing, and deleting billboard content. The control panel provides two ways to add or modify a billboard:

1) Click either ADD or CHANGE OR DELETE directly from the BILLBOARDS category on the website control panel screen as shown in Figure 12, or

![The Ark - Website Control Panel](image)

Figure 12. BILLBOARDS Option 1

2) Click BILLBOARDS from the menu on the left side of the control panel screen, then choose either ADD BILLBOARD or CHANGE OR DELETE BILLBOARD as shown in Figure 1.
Using either option 1 or option 2 as listed above, click ADD BILLBOARD. The add billboard screen will appear as shown in Figure 14.
Change or Delete Billboard

Fill in the appropriate information in the fields provided on the ADD BILLBOARD screen. Click ADD.

Using either option 1 or option 2 as listed above, click CHANGE OR DELETE BILLBOARD. The change or delete billboard screen will appear as shown in Figure 15.
From the CHANGE OR DELETE BILLBOARD screen, select the billboard you want to change or delete and click CHANGE or DELETE. By clicking DELETE, the selected billboard will be deleted.

By clicking CHANGE, the CHANGE BILLBOARD screen will appear as shown in Figure 16.
On the CHANGE BILLBOARD screen, fill in the correct information in the appropriate boxes and select a new color. Click CHANGE. The color will be changed.
Billboard Color

The BILLBOARD COLORS category on the control panel provides links for adding, changing, and deleting billboard colors. The control panel provides two ways to add or modify billboard color:

1) Click either ADD or CHANGE OR DELETE directly from the BILLBOARDS COLORS category on the website control panel screen as shown in Figure 17, or

![The Ark - Website Control Panel]

**Figure 17. BILLBOARD COLORS Option 1**

2) Click BILLBOARDS from the menu on the left side of the control panel screen, then click either ADD BILLBOARD COLOR or CHANGE OR DELETE COLOR as shown in Figure 18.
Using either option 1 or option 2 as listed above, click ADD BILLBOARD COLOR. The add color screen will appear as shown in Figure 19.
Change or Delete Billboard Color

On the ADD COLOR screen, type the HTML color code for the color you wish to add. Click ADD.

Using either option 1 or option 2 as listed above, click CHANGE OR DELETE BILLBOARD COLOR. The CHANGE OR DELETE COLOR screen will appear as shown in Figure 20.

![Figure 20. CHANGE OR DELETE COLOR Screen](image)

From the CHANGE OR DELETE COLOR screen, select the billboard color you wish to change or delete and click CHANGE or DELETE. By clicking DELETE, the billboard color will be deleted.

By clicking CHANGE, the CHANGE COLOR screen will appear as shown in Figure 21.
Enter the new html color code and click CHANGE.
The GENRES category on the control panel provides links for adding, changing, or deleting genres from the website. The control panel provides two ways to add or modify a genre:

1) **Click either ADD or CHANGE OR DELETE directly from the GENRES category on the website control panel page as shown in Figure 22, or**

   ![Figure 22. GENRES Option 1](image)

2) **Click GENRES from the menu on the left side of the control panel screen, then click either ADD GENRE or CHANGE OR DELETE GENRE as shown in Figure 23.**
Add Genre

Using either option 1 or option 2 as listed above, click ADD GENRE. The add genre screen will appear as shown in Figure 24.

![Add Genre Screen](image)

**Figure 24. ADD GENRE Screen**

Fill in the appropriate information in the field provided and click ADD.
Change or Delete Genre

Using either option 1 or option 2 as listed above, click CHANGE OR DELETE GENRE. The change genre screen will appear as shown in Figure 25.

![Figure 25. Change or Delete Genre Screen](image)

Select the appropriate genre and click CHANGE or DELETE. By clicking DELETE, the selected genre will automatically be deleted.
By clicking CHANGE, the change genre screen will appear as shown in Figure 26.

Fill in the appropriate information in the field provided. Click CHANGE.

![Change Genre Screen](image)

**Figure 26. Change Genre Screen**
The *FRONT PAGE QUOTATIONS* category on the control panel provides links for adding, changing, or deleting artist quotations that appear on the front page of the website. The control panel screen provides two ways to add, change, or delete a front page quotation:

1) Click either *ADD* or *CHANGE OR DELETE* directly from the *FRONT PAGE QUOTATIONS* category on the website control panel screen as shown in Figure 27, or

2) Click *FRONT PAGE QUOTATIONS* from the menu on the left side of the control panel screen, then click either *ADD QUOTATION* or *CHANGE OR DELETE QUOTATION* as shown in Figure 28.
Using either option 1 or option 2 as listed above, click ADD or ADD QUOTATION. The add quote screen will appear as shown in Figure 29.

Fill in the appropriate information in the fields provided. Click ADD.
Change or Delete Quotation

OR DELETE or CHANGE or DELETE QUOTATION. The change or delete quote screen will appear as shown in Figure 30.

Select the quotation you want to change or delete and click CHANGE or DELETE. By clicking DELETE, the selected quotation will automatically be deleted.

By clicking CHANGE, the change quote screen will appear as shown in Figure 31.
Figure 31. Change Quote Screen

Fill in the appropriate information in the fields provided. Click CHANGE.
The WEBSITE PAGES category on the control panel provides links for adding, changing, or deleting website pages. The control panel screen provides two ways to add, change, or delete a website page:

1) Click either ADD or CHANGE OR DELETE directly from the WEBSITE PAGES category on the control panel screen as shown in Figure 32, or

2) Click WEBSITE PAGES from the menu on the left side of the control panel screen, then click either ADD PAGE TO WEBSITE or CHANGE OR DELETE PAGE as shown in Figure 33.
Add Page

Using either option 1 or option 2 as listed above, click ADD or ADD PAGE TO WEBSITE. The add website page screen will appear as shown in Figure 34.

**Figure 33. Website Pages Option 2**

**Figure 34. Add Page Screen**
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Change or Delete Page

Fill in or select the appropriate information in the fields provided. Click CONTINUE and follow the instructions provided.

Using either option 1 or option 2 as listed above, click CHANGE OR DELETE or CHANGE OR DELETE PAGE. The change or delete page screen will appear as shown in Figure 35.

![Figure 35. Change or Delete Page Screen](image)

Follow the directions provided at the top of this screen.
Images

The IMAGES category on the control panel provides links for changing the front page image, updating images, and viewing the catalog of images. The control panel screen provides two ways to change, update, or view images:

1) Click CHANGE FRONT PAGE IMAGE, UPLOAD IMAGES, or VIEW CATALOG directly from the IMAGES category on the website control panel screen as shown in Figure 36, or

```
Genres · Add · Change or Delete
Front Page Quotations · Add · Change or Delete

Website Pages · Add · Change or Delete
Images · Change Front Page Image · Upload Images · View Catalog

Cooking · Recruit Website
Statistics · Search Logs · Genre Popularity
```

Figure 36. Images Option 1

2) Click IMAGES from the menu on the left side of the control panel screen, then click CHANGE FRONT PAGE IMAGE, ADD IMAGES, or VIEW CATALOG as shown in Figure 37.
Using either option 1 or option 2 as listed above, click CHANGE FRONT PAGE IMAGE. The change front page image screen will appear as shown in Figure 38.
Select the new front page image. Fill in appropriate information in the boxes provided for ticket URL and event information URL. Click UPDATE.
Using either option 1 or option 2 as listed above, click **UPLOAD IMAGES** or **ADD IMAGES**. The upload image screen will appear as shown in Figure 39.

![Figure 39. Upload Image Screen](image)

Fill in the appropriate information and click **UPLOAD**.
View Catalog

Using either option 1 or option 2 as listed above, click VIEW CATALOG. The images catalog screen will appear as shown in Figure 40.

Figure 40. Images Catalog Screen
The COOKING category on the control panel provides a link for re-cooking the website. Cooking refers to refreshing the website to incorporate new changes. The control panel screen provides two ways to refresh the website after changes have been made:

1) Click either RECOOK WEBSITE directly from the website control panel screen, and the website will automatically be refreshed, or

2) Click RECOOK WEBSITE from the menu on the left side of the control panel screen, and the website will automatically be refreshed.
The STATISTICS category on the control panel provides links for viewing search logs and genre popularity. The control panel screen provides two ways to view statistical information:

1) Click either SEARCH LOGS or GENRE POPULARITY directly from the STATISTICS category on the website control panel screen as shown in Figure 41, or

![Figure 41. Statistics Option 1](image1)

2) Click STATISTICS from the menu on the left side of the control panel screen, then click either SEARCH LOGS or GENRE POPULARITY as shown in Figure 42.

![Figure 42. Statistics Option 2](image2)

The appropriate screen and statistics will appear.
The USERS category on the control panel provides links for changing or deleting users and reading member files from an Ark computer. The control panel screen provides two ways to access these user functions:

1) Click either CHANGE OR DELETE or READ MEMBER FILE FROM ARK COMPUTER directly from the USERS category on the website control panel screen as shown in Figure 43, or

![Figure 43. Users Option 1](image)

2) Click USERS from the menu on the left side of the control panel screen, then click either CHANGE OR DELETE USER or READ MEMBER FILE FROM ARK COMPUTER as shown in Figure 44.
Change or Delete Users

Using either option 1 or option 2 as listed above, click CHANGE OR DELETE or CHANGE OR DELETE USER. The look up users screen will appear as shown in Figure 45.

Figure 44. Users Option 2

Figure 45. Look Up Users Screen
Read Member File

Enter keyword information in the field provided. Click SHOW USERS. Follow the instructions on the screen.

Using either option 1 or option 2 as listed above, click READ MEMBER FILE FROM ARK COMPUTER. The member file screen will appear as shown in Figure 46.

Follow the instructions on the screen.
The MY ACCOUNT category on the control panel provides links for changing your account information and logging out. The control panel screen provides two ways to access these account functions:

1) Click either CHANGE MY INFO or LOG OUT directly from the MY ACCOUNT category on the website control panel screen as shown in Figure 47, or

![Figure 47. My Account Option 1](image)

2) Click MY ACCOUNT from the menu on the left side of the control panel screen, then click either CHANGE MY INFO or LOG OUT as shown in Figure 48.

![Figure 48. My Account Option 2](image)
Using either option 1 or option 2 as listed above, click CHANGE MY INFO. The change my information screen will appear as shown in Figure 49.

![Change my information screen](image)

Figure 49. Change My Information Screen

Fill in the appropriate information in the fields provided. Click SAVE CHANGES.
Log Out

When you are finished changing the website it is imperative that you remember to log out.

To log out, simply click LOG OUT from the menu on the left side of the screen and wait for the site to confirm that you have successfully logged out. See Figure 50.

---

**Figure 50. LOG OUT Screen**

**REMEMBER**

Always log out when you are finished updating the site. Always wait for the site to confirm that you have successfully logged out.