To: Dr. Monske
From: Don Bickley
Subject: Usability Write-Up for the Ishpeming Main Street Program Handbook
Date: November 20, 2007

Introduction

Amber and I created a volunteer handbook for the Ishpeming Main Street Program for use by potential volunteers, committee members, current volunteers who work under each committee, and the program director. With the previously existing information, we edited the data for clarity and conciseness, while we interviewed the chairmen of the four committees in order to write up new data that needed to be included. This new data consists of a combination of active and narrative voice to prevent the reader from becoming bored with a particular writing style. The active voice is useful for lists of information, while the narrative voice's purpose is to summarize and explain while certain policies are important to the person reading the document; in this way, we are able to combine the two writing styles in a way that is consistent throughout the document.

Methods

For testing, we had the Program Director, Dan Mitchell, along with three committee members review the document for clarity, accuracy, conciseness, comprehensiveness, and accuracy. Our questionnaire focused primarily on the organization and usefulness of the document, as it is designed to bring everyone within the Main Street Program on the same page in terms of what needs to be done and how to go about doing that. A copy of the volunteer handbook was sent via e-mail to each person in our usability pool on November 8. One person, Josefa Andriacci, lacked e-mail so Dan presented her with a hard copy and informed her about when our usability test would be conducted. Dan decided that it would be a good idea to send a hard copy of the handbook in advance due to the busy schedules of each usability participant. We met Jesse Bell early Tuesday morning, November 13. I met with Josefa on November 14, and Amber met with David Aeh on November 15. We met with Josefa and David on the thirteenth but they requested more time.

Results

Our results were mixed. While arriving at our meeting with David, he told us that his computer was unable to support the PDF format. Unfortunately, we did not find this out until the meeting, so we granted him two more days to go over the manual as time permitted (he was in the middle of organizing an event for hunting season, which no doubt cut into his time). Amber later returned to David's place of business and found out that he still had not read it due to lack of time. We were thus forced to drop him from our usability test, but include him here in our results because it demonstrates the kind of difficulties the Main Street Program is having in getting their volunteers committed to Main Street goals, either due to scheduling conflicts or lack of time.

Josefa, our other participant, was in a similar situation Tuesday morning, having only read halfway through the document. She also requested more time and I met with her the following morning; her results were positive. She commented on how she was able to

read through the document without getting frustrated by the writing style or layout, a fact she mentioned was "pretty impressive". She gave us the lowest ratings in a few areas—a 2 for "agree"—because she could only agree with what was presented to her in comparison to what she already knew. With areas that she had no experience with, such as the role of the Economic Restructuring Committee (she is on Promotions), she could not give them a 1, but she understood what we had written and it made sense with what she knew, therefore the 2.

Jesse Bell was also impressed by the document and marked each section with a 1 for "strongly agree". He had no written comments on the hard-copy he had printed out. He also mentioned that he intended to show the Ishpeming City Council the handbook as a way to educate them about the Main Street Program, confirming that our goal of creating a handbook that is both a learning tool and a reference was met. Dan Mitchell, the Program Director, has also been a continuous usability participant through this technical critiques and trust in our creative license.

Observations

While going over the document, Jesse was confused about the phrase "business writing". He wasn't sure if we meant writing for a business, such as grants, or a generalized form of business writing. He also felt that the language for the Committee Member Responsibilities and Requirements was too strict, particularly requiring five hours of service a month with an extra hour dedicated to meetings. Since the program deals with volunteers, he felt that it would be better phrased as "committee members are encouraged…" He also observed that the Organization Committee had little information, and that what we had copy-and-pasted was not parallel in tone and style to the other committees. He provided us with extra documentation regarding the Organization committee to help make that section more comprehensive.

Josefa commented that the writing style was "different, but different all throughout in a way that was consistent". Upon elaboration, she mentioned how she was used to documents being written in such a way that a three-year-old can understand, and while she was reading over the document, she kept thinking to herself that a three year old would not understand it. However, she had no problem understanding the content and was therefore comfortable with the writing style. In some respects, she appreciated this new style more because of the "higher writing style".

Discussion of Results and Plan for Revision

Overall, the document has been approved as a final draft. The only difficulty we had in our testing was the one member who refused to communicate with us effectively and who we had to eventually be drop. Dan decided against softer language for the five hour a month requirement, but agreed that the "business writing" phrase was too ambiguous and needed to be clarified.