

Dan Cohen's Digital Humanities Blog » Blog Archive » Design Matters

One of the more uncomfortable truths about digital humanities—indeed, likely one of the reasons for resistance to digital humanities among traditional scholars—is that design matters. Those of us who have chosen the life of the mind like to think that ideas and insights will find an audience and make an impact regardless of such superficial things as the vehicle those ideas and insights are communicated through. Design also smacks of marketing, which most professors consider unseemly.

But good design^[1] for a website, service, or tool means, as Roy Rosenzweig and I put it in *Digital History*^[2], that your resource will be *useful* and *used*. *Useful* because your resource will be structured in such a way that a user will be able to fully explore and learn from it; *used* because the user will be drawn into the resource and highlight its existence to others.

Case in point: Here is the website of the Ringwood (New Jersey) Public Library^[3]:

The screenshot shows the Ringwood Public Library website. The header is blue with white text: "Welcome to the Ringwood Public Library" and "Serving our community, with pride, for over 40 years". A yellow box in the center contains the text: "Piano Concert Series - Clifford Safane", "November 16th, 2008 @ 2pm", and "Admission is free and donations will be accepted". Below this is an illustration of the library building. To the right of the illustration, the address "30 Cannici Drive, Ringwood, NJ 07456" and phone number "Telephone: 973-962-6256" are listed. A yellow button says "Click here for library directions". Below that, another yellow button says "Cancellation Information & Emergency Closing Information". At the bottom right, it says "E-mail the library at ringwoodpl@hotmail.com".

The left sidebar contains a navigation menu with the following items: "Online Catalog" (with sub-links "search for books & place holds" and "view & reserve charged materials"), "My Account", "Hours, Holidays and Travel Directions", "Calendar of Events For Adults and Children *NEW*", "Children", "Art Exhibits", "Online Databases at the library", "Online Databases accessible from home", "Library Association", "Friends of Library", "Important Links", "Reserve a computer", "New Legacy Concert Series", "Piano Concerts", "Staff Email", "Best viewed @ 800 X 600 or better", and "RPL Home Page".

The bottom section of the page is titled "Services sponsored by the NJ State Library, Library Services & Technology ACT (LSTA) and Regional Library Cooperatives". It includes links to "QandANJ.org" (Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week), "JerseyCat Statewide Interlibrary Loan", "www.listeninNJ.com" (A free audiobook download service), and "The Upper Ringwood Virtual Scrapbook and Museum".

A not atypical website for a local public library. And here is [the Ringwood Public Library's site about the history of Upper Ringwood](#)^[4]:



The latter is powered by [Omeka](#)^[5]. Which of these would you rather spend time with?

This entry was posted on Wednesday, November 12th, 2008 at 4:12 pm and is filed under [Omeka](#)^[6], [Web Design](#)^[7]. You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0](#)^[8] feed. You can [leave a response](#)^[9], or [trackback](#)^[10] from your own site.

References

1. [good design](#) (chnm.gmu.edu)
2. [Digital History](#) (chnm.gmu.edu)
3. [the website of the Ringwood \(New Jersey\) Public Library](#)

- (www.ringwoodlibrary.org)
4. ^ [the Ringwood Public Library's site about the history of Upper Ringwood](#) (upperringwood.org)
 5. ^ [Omeka](#) (omeka.org)
 6. ^ [View all posts in Omeka](#) (www.dancohen.org)
 7. ^ [View all posts in Web Design](#) (www.dancohen.org)
 8. ^ [RSS 2.0](#) (www.dancohen.org)
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