Optimizing Digital Collection Navigation for the Law Library of Congress

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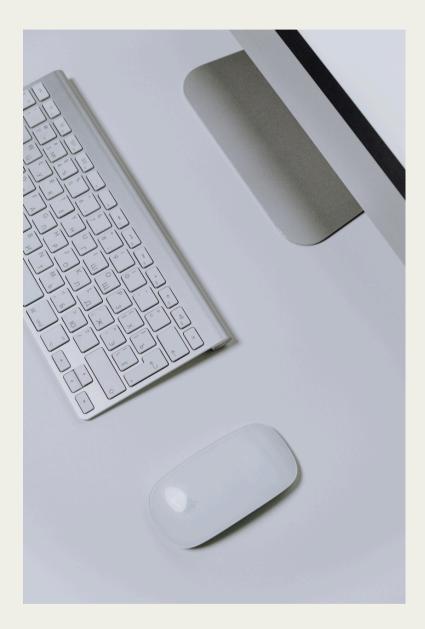Information School
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INFORMATION PROBLEM

To keep pace with the modern world, the Law Library of Congress (LLoC) is digitizing its many physical collections –an enormous undertaking.

The LLoC has limited resources.
It is looking to create an accessible, well-organized, and effective digital document discovery system. Thus far, expectations have fallen short. They need to improve public access to the growing online collections.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- Evaluate the LLoC website layout and design

- Report glitches or access issues at the item level so they can be corrected

- Explore alternate options for public engagement

- Conduct Accessibility Audit

- Communicate findings and provide actionable recommendations to the LLoC

MY APPROACH

Evaluate
the collections

I spent hours deep-diving the collections and became familiar with everything they had to offer. My initial observations were the foundation for my next steps.

Research
alternative layouts

i actively sought out other digital collections that were open to the public to see what worked for them--both internal to the Library of Congress and external (largely university websites).

Test
user scenarios

With a solid understanding of what was there and an idea of where I wanted to go, I created personas to test user experience. I conducted user scenario exercises to see things from the perspectives of a diverse cohort of users (varying ages, abilities, geo-locations, and research experience).

Communicate
my findings

I detailed my user scenarios, observations, key takeaways, and recommendations in a 25 page report to be delivered to my sponsor. I also am presenting my findings directly to key LOC stakeholders in a cumulative presentation.

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KEY FINDINGS

Additional guidance needed

A common thread across all scenarios was that users did not quite understand the "lay of the land" for the Foreign Legal Gazettes collection. Many never made it to the digital documents they were seeking.

Searching difficulties

Even when the text of documents is transcribed, it does not seem possible to search *within* the collection. The search bar searches everything on the Library of Congress website, which is not very helpful given how much the site has to offer. The items are not appropriately tagged/mapped to allow the user to find what they are looking for within a subset of the collection.

Filtering/Sorting inconsistencies

Two different map dashboards (desktop and mobile) have two completely different filtering and sorting capabilities. Both fall short of fulfilling the needs of the user.
Taxonomy is not friendly to filtering in a helpful way. Filtering is not always user-friendly.

Accessibility concerns

The site provides a web site accessibility page that notes, "our web site is compliant with Section 508 and W3C accessibility design guidelines." However, my accessibility audit revealed there were areas where the Library falls short, namely keyboard navigation, map dashboard accessibility, and text-to-speech limitations.

Language limitations, limited audience

These collections are in a variety of languages, however, the site lacks a direct translation feature. User accessibility is limited by the languages they do and do not speak. A translation feature is needed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Research and navigation guidance

Modify the FLG landing page with more visually appealing descriptors and clear guidance, effectively creating an in-page collection research guide.

Filtering, sorting, and searching

Create a "search this collection" option in the search bar dropdown. Continue collection transcription so the items are searchable.

Accessibility compliance

The webmaster needs to modify the HTML code to allow for the keyboard shortcuts to highlight text to actually work, This will resolve many of the accessibility concerns. They also must re-think the

AI Language translation

There are multiple ways to resolve the language translation. The simplest would be to integrate the Google page translation feature to the website Another option that will also assist in other areas, is for the website to integrate an AI chat box. AI translation is the way of the future, and the chatbox may assist in searchability.

Let's put the "digital" in digital collections

A key area of improvement is ensuring that he user is able to actually find content that is readable online when searching the collections. It is not helpful for users outside the DC-metro area to be told a "digital" collection item is only available on-site at the physical location Create a "digital reading room."

BENEFIT

If implemented, my recommendations will: enhance the user experience of researchers seeking specific information from the archives, improve accessibility for users of all abilities, and increase traffic to the Library's digital collections.

Acknowledgements

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