

UNDERSTANDING CS, UX AND UID AND HOW THEY CAN IMPROVE YOUR RESIDENTS' EXPERIENCE

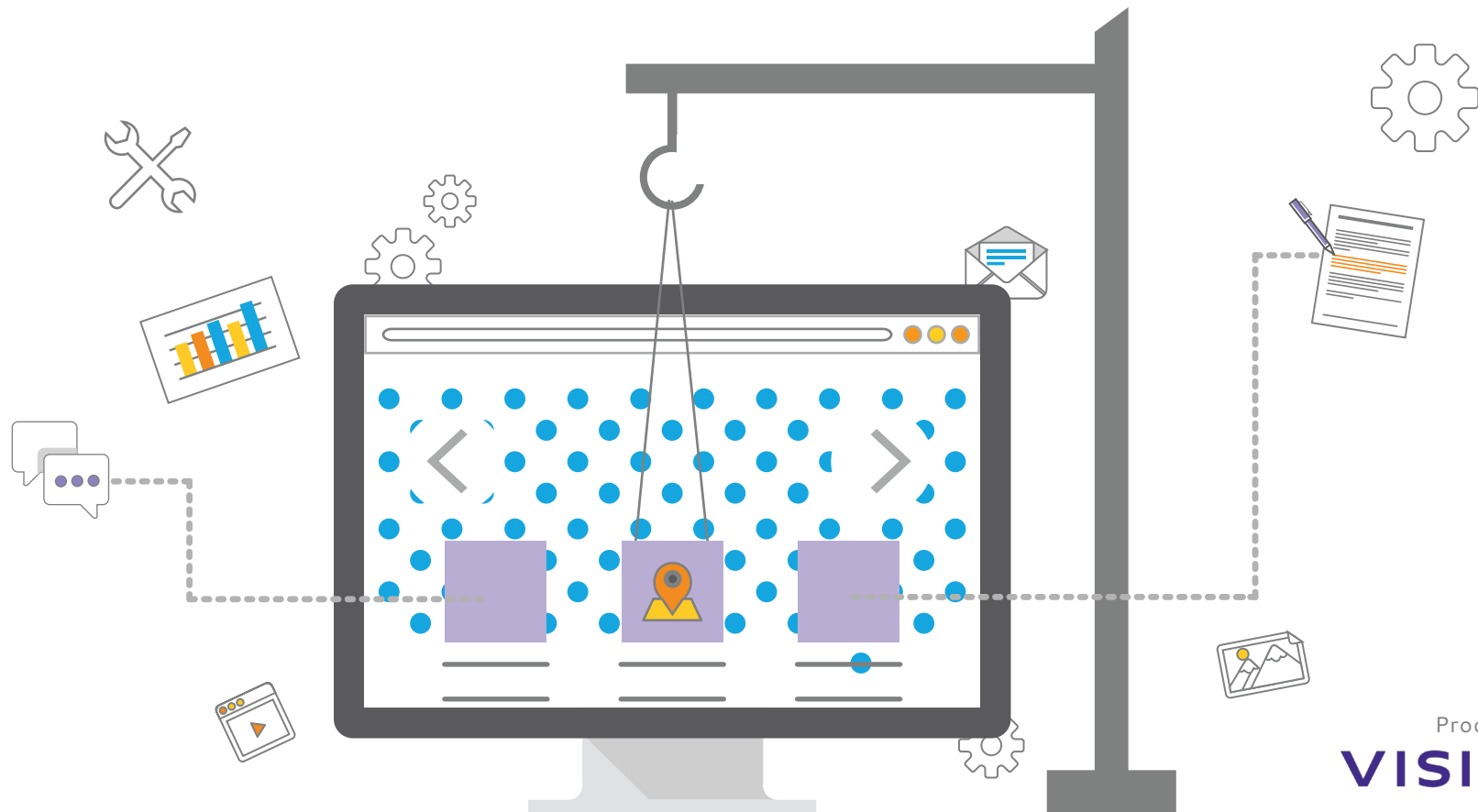


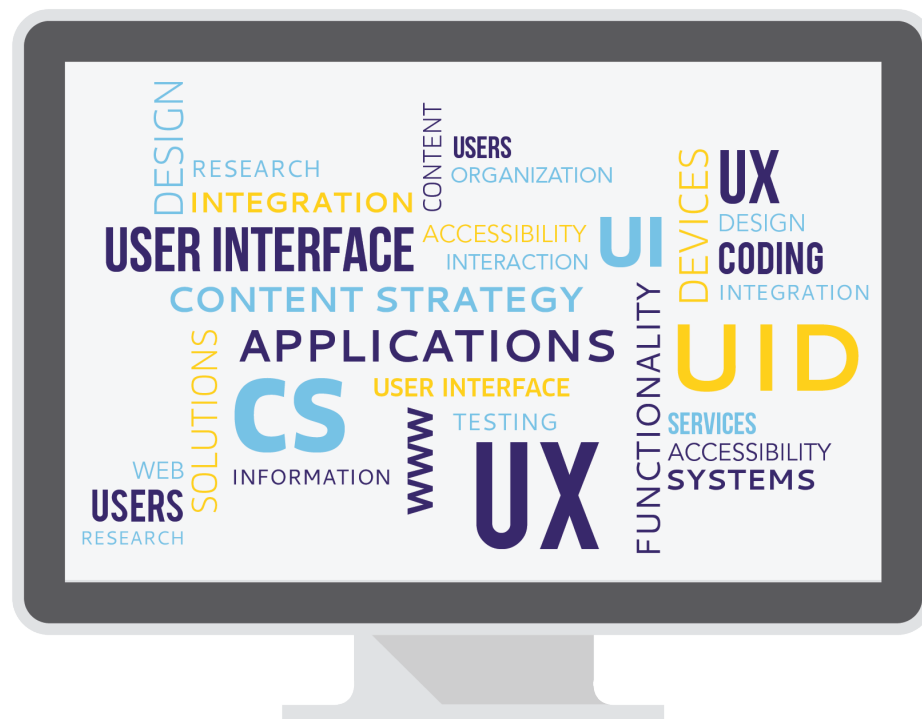
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INTRODUCTION: USABILITY ALPHABET SOUP

Are you ready to overhaul your website's CS and UX ASAP?

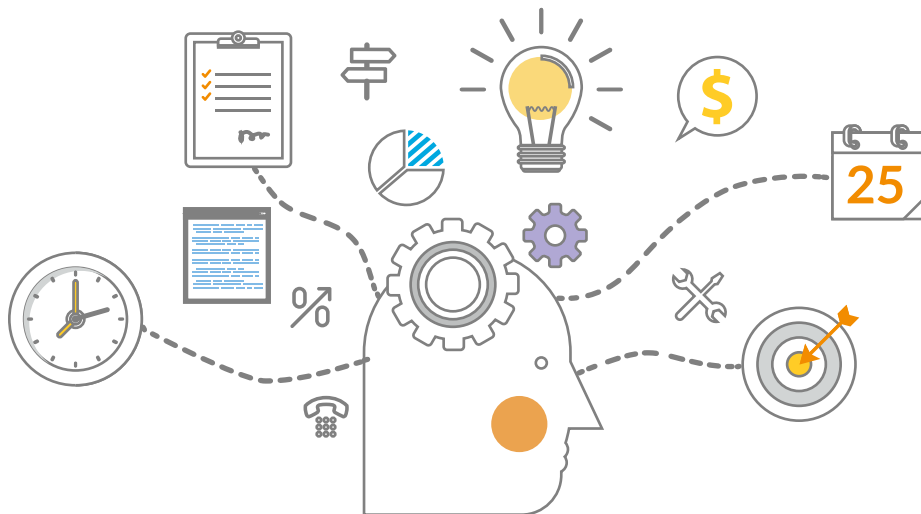
Acronyms are great for simplifying complicated words, but when you're just getting familiar with new concepts, it can be confusing. This guide takes a brief look at three popular usability acronyms, explaining what they are and providing examples of how they can help local government websites serve residents more effectively. As you read through, think about how your agency can leverage CS, UX and UID to improve your residents' experience.



CS: CONTENT STRATEGY

Your website is comprised of many types of content: pages, PDF documents, charts, tables, and in some cases, social media posts. How do you know if the content on your website is the right content, and if it's hitting its mark? If you're like most local government agencies, the process is less than scientific. Even highly effective organizations can get mired in long, legalese content blocks when trying to communicate policies to residents.

Content strategy (CS) seeks to focus the content development process on the needs of the audience rather than the writer. To do it right, organizations must plan ahead, consciously creating content that makes it easy for readers to access and understand. Part of that process includes putting a governance plan in place to ensure a consistent voice across the website and eliminate duplicate information coming from multiple departments.



When CS is successfully implemented, careful thought is given to how residents will be able to find the information they need, understand the information that's written once they find it, and then ultimately act upon the information they find.

GOOD CONTENT STRATEGY IN MOTION

Think about this common use case: when a homeowner visits the site to renew their home alarm permit, they will commonly be greeted by long paragraphs filled with legal explanations of statutes governing home alarm permits instead of instructions about how to actually get a permit. How do you think the user will feel? Probably frustrated and likely to abandon the website.

Contrast that experience with the City of San Marcos, California's business license page. San Marcos uses a user-centric approach to display links to the most cost common requests, and format their copy so it's easy to scan with bold headers and short, plainly written sentences.

Users are likely to complete tasks online, promoting satisfaction and reducing calls to the office. How processes served up on your website? Are they easy to understand and complete?



UX/CX: USER AND CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Though you may be new to the terms User Experience or Customer Experience, you can probably think about tasks you've performed online that were especially easy or cumbersome. What caused your interaction to be positive or negative? Was the information you were looking for easy to find? If you had trouble, how easy was it to get help?

The entire idea of UX, as defined by Usability.gov, is about a holistic approach to making users' interactions with you seamless:

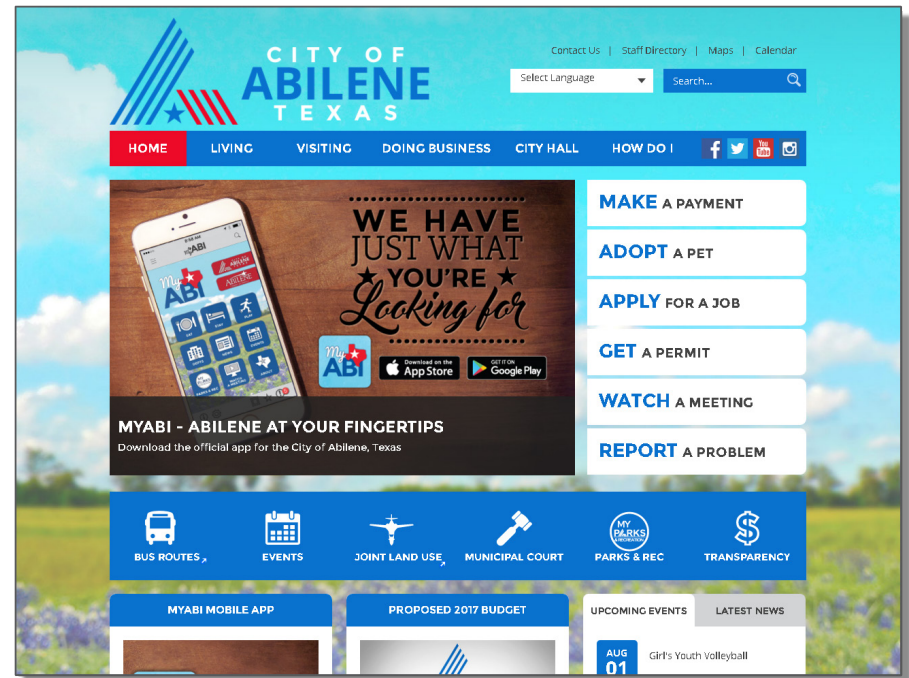
"User experience (UX) focuses on having a deep understanding of users, what they need, what they value, their abilities, and also their limitations."

Websites provide a valuable opportunity to allow residents to complete tasks and learn information on their own. But, doing this effectively requires first developing a deep understanding of their needs, values, abilities and limitations. There are a lot of ways to discover the unique requirements for your community, including site analytics, surveys and usability studies. This data-driven approach is then used to build experiences that cater to the needs and wants of people using your website.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

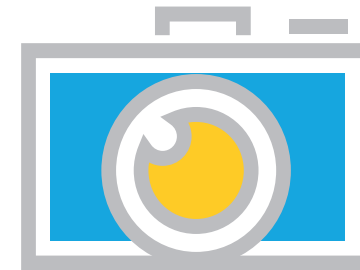
Using a analysis-focused methodology, researchers can uncover the information and processes that users seek most, and build a layout that guides visitors to those areas. Simple navigation can provide quick pathways to other less requested areas of the site. An effective homepage can become a gateway to content rather than a filing cabinet full of data points.

It's clear from looking at their homepage that the City of Abilene, Texas knows just what their residents are looking for. Using analytics, Abilene discovered what tasks the majority visitors sought out and then highlighted those items – like making a payment and adopting a pet – with bold calls to action in the middle of the page. Do you know what the top 10 tasks users on your site want, and are they easy to access?



UID: USER INTERFACE DESIGN

User Interface Design (UID) focuses on the visual aspects of creating a site that meets the user's needs. UID incorporates traditional design questions such as color, dimension, texture and size, but puts them in service of creating a product that functions well. If a user can't find the elements they need, than a design isn't doing its job.



When you look at your organization's website, do the design elements feel unified? Do important elements stand-out through the use of contrast and hierarchical design? In addition, try thinking about the culture and personality of your community. Does it shine through in the design? Current design styles tend to rely heavily on photography, so having beautiful, hi-resolution images of your location can make a big difference.



LOOKING GOOD, WORKING WELL

When thinking about design, people often think about “making things pretty” but effective UID uses visuals to guide users and convey meaning. As Ray Sensenbach, a User Experience Designer, explains, “The power of great design lies in its ability to solve real problems and overcome challenges.” For local government, where multiple stakeholders can hold conflicting opinions about design elements, going back to the user experience can be a critical guide to making a functional but beautiful design.

The Racine County, Wisconsin website stands out for creating a beautiful site that conveys the attractions of their area, without giving short-shrift to the demands of the organization. Racine County limits the action buttons and relies on a central search bar to let the user find their way. The county seal becomes part of the design, emphasizing

the county’s identity, while the central image demonstrates the natural attractions of the area. Does your website represent your community at its best and let residents find their way easily to their destination?



THE USER COMES FIRST

As you navigate your way through these three acronyms of usability – CS, UX and UID – always remember to start with your user. As you look at your site processes, layouts and content ask yourself if there are ways to make them easier to find, understand and complete. Leverage an analysis-based approach to gain the understanding needed to set direction, then use surveys and site analytics to test assumptions. Improving your mastery of CS, UX and UID will encourage residents to engage more frequently with your website, reduce calls and increase satisfaction with your agency.





ABOUT VISION

Headquartered in El Segundo, Calif., Vision is a national leader in government website development with more than 700 government, non-profit and education clients in U.S. and Canadian communities with populations that range from less than 1,000 residents to more than 5 million. The company creates cost-effective solutions that increase government efficiency, transparency and interactive communications with citizens. For more than 20 years, the company has earned hundreds of prestigious awards for its unique websites. Vision's CMS is a powerful, easy-to-use content management system developed with feedback from hundreds of municipal clients. For more information about Vision's transformative government website technology, please call 888.263.8847 or visit visioninternet.com/inforequest.

info@visioninternet.com
www.visioninternet.com

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