

OWL Website Development

A SIPTECH CASE STUDY

Version: 1.03

Created Date: 13.Dec.2004

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1. Background

OurWorldLive (OWL) is an emerging-technology company based in Orange County, CA, which is developing a middleware platform for delivery of digital assets. OWL wanted to redesign their website to reflect their ideals, to showcase their products and to share their technology with their customers and associates.

2. Problem / Challenge

The redesigned OWL web site was to have the following features:-

- ❖ The website should have dynamic navigation bars with URL masking. The number and contents of the navigation bars should differ depending on the page. Each button of the navigation bar should support four states - (on, down, up and parent). As the user navigates, a contextual relationship should be maintained between the navigation bars.
- ❖ The appearance of the web site should be consistent on different browser types and versions on different platforms.
- ❖ The user should be able to change his default font size without affecting the general layout of the page.
- ❖ User with a larger screen should be able to use their screen size as an advantage by resizing the page to preferred size.
- ❖ The website should support other features like customizable mail templates, security for documents and downloadable files, a welcome page after every successful login, extensive customer survey page, administrative page and providing more than one account for a user.
- ❖ Have separate database for demo license keys, banner recycling, user profiling, sweepstakes and user authentication.
- ❖ The website should be maintainable by the content providers without the need for any code level changes from developers.

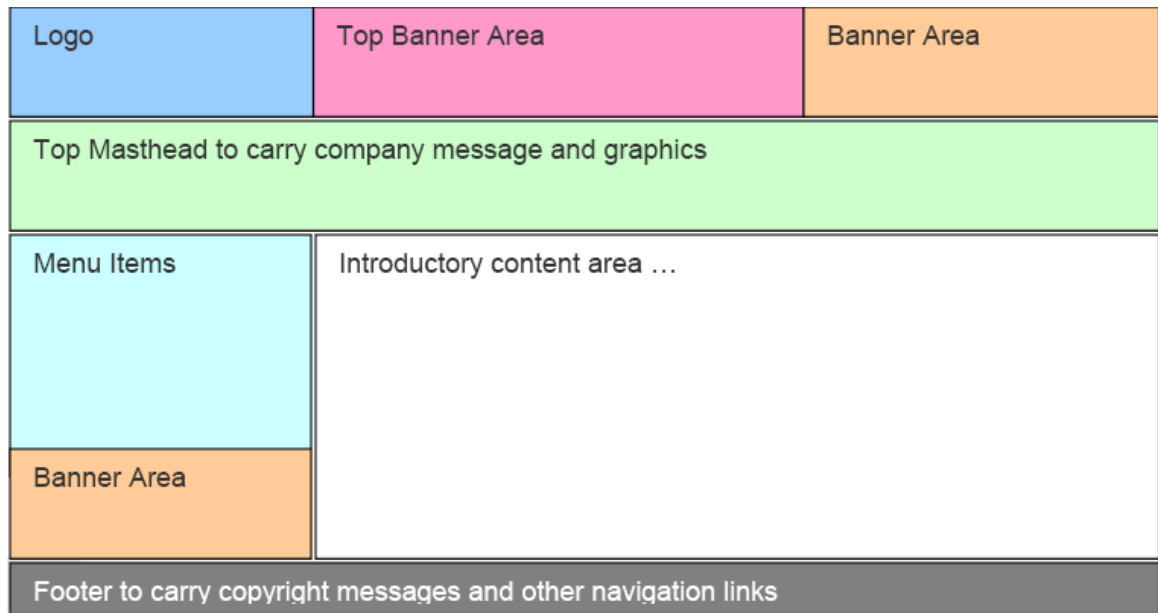
3. Method / Intervention / Solution used

A prototype driven approach was adopted. Prototypes were developed with several variations. Based on these prototypes a final design was chosen.

A PHP based template having global style files and configurable XML files was used to produce a consistent, dynamic and easily maintainable website. PHP script was used because of its simplicity

and its support for XML parsing, connectivity to different data sources, sending emails, downloads, etc. Filemaker was used as the database.

The template handles the page layout used for the entire site. This makes the site highly flexible and scalable. The maintenance overhead is reduced as the focus is only on the creation of content and defining navigation hierarchy.



An exhaustive and self-explanatory technology report was prepared to facilitate easy maintenance of the website. This report provided detailed information about the framework underlying the web solution. All aspects of PHP, apache, JavaScript and html were covered in detail. The report answered the following questions:

- ❖ How does the server need to be set up?
- ❖ How can we scale, enhance or change the existing solution?
- ❖ How can we use the framework for a different web solution?
- ❖ How can we add users and trees displayed only for registered users?
- ❖ How can we password protect directories for read and download protection?
- ❖ How can we trigger emails by specific downloads?

The website was subject to extensive feature testing on various browser / OS combinations with varied font sizes and screen resolution.

Target Environment	Test Environment
Browsers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Netscape Navigator (NN) 3 + - Internet Explorer (IE) 4.5 + 	Browsers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NN 3, 4.x and 6 - IE 4.x and 5 - Opera 5
OS / Hardware: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Windows 98 / 2000 / XP - Mac OS x (BSD Derivative) running Apache 	OS / Hardware: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Windows 98 / 2000 / XP - Linux RH9 - Mac (Only Style Inspection)

4. Results Achieved

The result was a fast and flexible website that had a consistent look and feel across several browsers and on several platforms and one that would retain its layout across different browsers, font sizes and screen resolutions.

5. Lessons Learned / Conclusion

The OWL website redesign project was a major challenge that brought out the subtle yet significant differences in the various browsers and operating systems. The website had many rich graphics and the process of achieving the perfect balance between speed and look and feel was a valuable lesson in itself.

The other experiences gained were installing and configuring the SSL certificates and hosting the mirror and live websites. The site was to be hosted on a MAC OS X based system running Apache. SIPTECH did not have expertise in MAC OS X. However since Mac OS X has a UNIX lineage and since SIPTECH had enough expertise in UNIX based environment the risk due to a newer operating environments was minimized. An implementation of Mac OS X for x86 systems (Darwin) was used during the development phase.