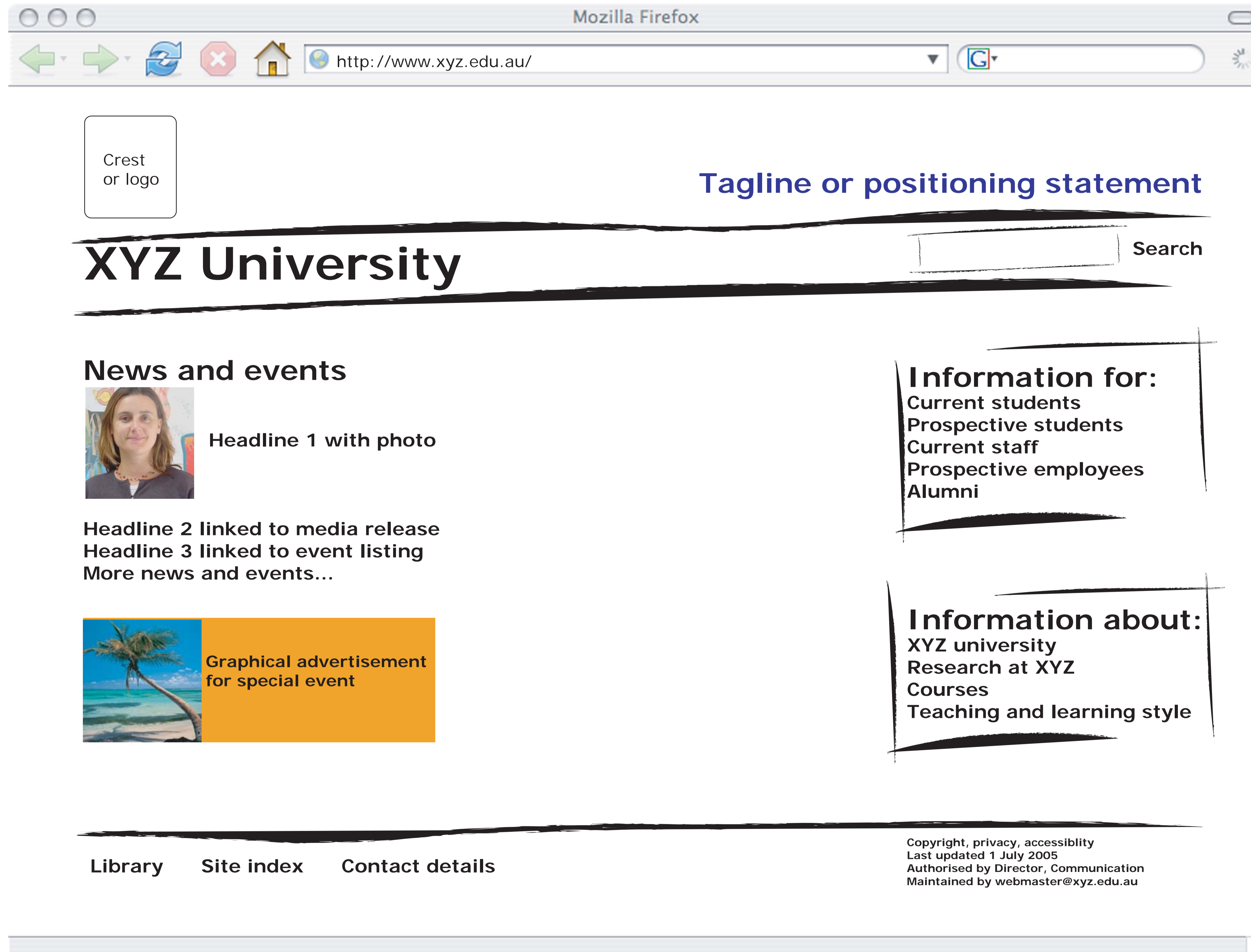


Navigation and content on university home pages



From good practice to excellence:

Clearly indicate when the page was last updated with new content.

Avoid jargon and vague link titles.

Use clear, specific link titles that indicate what users should expect to see when they click.

Focus on external audiences. Move intranet content to subsidiary pages: don't use the home page as a bookmarks file for students and staff.

Don't assume people already know who you are, where you are and what you do. Put a positioning statement on the home page: goals, values, motto, marketing tagline.

Every pixel is precious: use images to support your key promotional messages, not merely as decoration.

Adopt current coding standards and test for accessibility.

Illustration shows common elements of a university home page, based on a 2004 survey of 68 Australian and overseas web sites.

Poster presentation for Ausweb 2005 by Margaret L Ruwoldt and Claire Spencer, University of Melbourne.

Full report available at http://eprints.unimelb.edu.au/perl/search/advanced?title=&title_merge=ALL&authors=ruwoldt

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University home page	Web site design
Content development	Usability

Abstract

The home page is the most visible online representation of a university's style, activities and reputation. We studied the home pages of 68 universities in Australia, Canada, the United States of America, south-east Asia and Europe, looking for emerging industry standards and opportunities for improving our home page's quality and usability.

We identified key audience groups, an emerging standard for the content and information architecture of a university's home page, and some additional features that could distinguish an institution from its competitors. These findings are summarised in the wire-frame diagram and notes overleaf.

Bonus tip: the importance of visual display

To speed up the data-gathering phase of this research project, we printed color A4 copies of all 68 home pages and stuck them to a wall near our meeting room and staff kitchen.

What a conversation-starter!

At one time or another, clients, stakeholders, vendors, consultants and our own staff have all paused as something on The Wall caught their eye:

- Choice of color, font, imagery
- Trends in design and content
- Usability
- Information architecture
- Using the home page as a marketing tool

The resulting informal conversation is a great tool for educating our clients about web design and information architecture.



The Wall has become an instant-access reference kit, a one-glance overview, a source of inspiration. We'll update it annually, to keep up with new ideas and developments.