Website Case Study: Long Beach Museum of Art, lbma.org

Background
The Long Beach Museum of Art is a medium-sized museum in Long Beach, California. According to Wikipedia, it was established in 1950. The museum administrative offices, classrooms and café occupy an historic 1912 house and carriage house. Collections and exhibitions are displayed in the much newer two-story pavilion.

Overall Assessment
Overall the website is static and not very exciting. There are also some pretty major problems that should be fixed so that the site appears more professional. For example, there are some inconsistencies across pages as far as font selection is concerned. The Online Collection is not integrated into the main site and is not very interesting, so it does not invite visitors to make use of it. They do not prominently display their social media information; it is hidden at the very bottom of one single page in the entire website, which makes it unlikely that they will actually get any new followers. Valuable information about the history of the organization is not included on the site, and neither is their mission statement.

UI
The user interface is pretty simple, but there are quite a few inconsistencies and major flaws in the design. When you click on “Online Collections” in the navigation menu a page in a new tab opens instead of navigating directly to that page. The Online Collections are clearly designed very differently from the main website, and to be quite honest, they are poorly done. These pages are left-aligned instead of being centered, and the header stretches across the entire screen instead of only being as wide as the page content. The navigation menu is blue, which is unlike the navigation menu on the main pages. It does not make sense for the online collections to be so completely not integrated into the main website. The interface on these pages is not inviting; I wanted to leave the page immediately upon opening it because it was very dull. The pages are meant to allow the user to explore the collections, but I have to click through too many steps in order to look at anything. First I click “browse the collection” in the navigation menu. Then I can choose how to browse by clicking on an icon for “Artist”, “Medium”, “Region”, etc. Once I click on “Artists” I again have to choose another way the collection is subdivided. I have to choose a section of the alphabet to look at i.e., A-D, E-H, etc. Once I click on an item to look at it, I have to use the back button to go back to the list. If they were in a gallery, I could click to see the next image instead of constantly having to click the back button. Overall the Online Collection is frustrating and poorly designed.

Back on the pages within the main website, there are quite a few inconsistencies from page to page. The “Wedding and Special Events” page uses a script font that is found nowhere else on the website. This page also has a slideshow of different pictures that it rotates through. This is dynamic and interesting, but I think it seems odd that this technique is not used on any other pages.
In general, a title for each page appears in blue, and then subsections within that page are labeled with brown. However, two pages (Claire’s Café and the Museum Store, and Exchange and Evolution) have their own logos displayed instead of the blue title font. The “Weddings and Special Events” and the “Fundraising Events” pages are not titled with this blue font, which is inconsistent design-wise and should be fixed. When you click “Visit” on the navigation menu, the title on the page that appears is “About the Museum” instead of having the same name that is indicated on the menu, as the other pages are. Likewise, when you click “Contact” the page that appears is titled “Address”.

Navigation
The navigation menu is located on the left side of the screen. There is no sub-navigation available, which seems odd. Instead each page that opens is often jam-packed with information, and you have to scroll down to see everything.

One of the menu items is for “Exchange and Evolution” which is a collaborative event taking place in the fall. It is unclear to me as a user why this is named this way on the navigation menu. I feel like it should be under “Events” or “News” or something else that is more general. People don’t know what “Exchange and Evolution” is without clicking on it (and even then, it’s confusing, but more on that later).

As mentioned previously, clicking “Online Collections” opens a new tab, and the navigation on this page is not at all integrated with the main website. Clicking on the header brings you to the “Home” screen for the main website, but clicking “Home” in the navigation bar returns you to the Online Collections welcome screen.

Content
LBMA should really include more content about their organization. They are missing information about how long the museum has existed, how they began, why they began, and what their current mission is. The exhibition pavilion was built sometime in the past 10 years or so, and it is a beautiful building, but the website doesn’t say when it was built or who designed it.

On the “Exchange and Evolution” page, the bottom has information about Pacific Standard Time, which is the name of the collaborative program which multiple southern California art organizations will be involved with, and is the program associated with “Exchange and Evolution”. This is not clearly expressed in the content of the page. The page is full of text, but it does not clearly explain what “Exchange and Evolution” is, or how it’s connected to the Pacific Standard Time program. The whole page needs to be rewritten to be more clear and concise.

The content is not always well organized. For example, when you click “Visit” the information at the very top of the page is a paragraph of about-the-museum-type information. This information is out of place because it wouldn’t be expected under the “Visit” section.
Prescription for Improvement

**Fix Inconsistencies**
All of the inconsistencies need to be fixed. The web designer for this site needs to start using CSS to ensure that all of the pages are using the same headings and sub-headings. The title on each page should match the item listed in the Navigation menu.

**Add an “About” Page**
An “About” link should be added to the navigation menu that brings the user to an “About” page. The information about the museum on the “Visit” page should be added to this new “About” page. The “About” page should also include more of a historical background for the museum and their mission statement. The Board of Trustees is listed on the “Contact” page; this information should also be moved to the “About” page. The “About” page should also include the historical information about the museum buildings.

**Integrate the Online Collection**
The Online Collection pages should not be on a separate website. Clicking the “Online Collection” link in the menu should open a page that is still on the main website, this way it still maintains the same look. None of the navigation on the Online Collections pages is necessary. The Online Collection page should have the same categories that are currently available on the “Browse the Collection” page, but the giant block of text should be removed. Clicking on one of these links, for example, the “Artists” link should bring the user directly to a list of works alphabetized by artist. The extra step of choosing a section of the alphabet should be eliminated. The works should all be listed with a thumbnail image beside it, and clicking on a particular work should open a gallery viewer to view that item. The user should be able to view each item in a gallery, so that they can navigate using the arrow keys instead of having to click the back button and viewing each individual item separately. This is a simplified version of the current design, which is too clunky and requires too much clicking.

**Make Home Page Less Static**
The Home page shows a static image of the current exhibition. It does not encourage the use to spend any amount of time on the Home page. Instead, the picture should swap out every few seconds, as it does on the “Weddings and Special Events” screen. The pictures could switch between the current exhibit(s), upcoming exhibit(s), upcoming event(s), an ad encouraging the user to follow them on Twitter or Facebook, an ad for hosting a special event at the museum, etc. Clicking on any of these rotating pictures would open the corresponding page for that item on the site.

**Highlight Social Media Devices**
LBMA uses Facebook and Myspace, but the only place this is listed is at the very bottom of the “Contact” page. They should display these links more prominently, for instance on the “Home” screen. On the “Contact” page it should be listed higher up on the page, so that the user doesn’t have to scroll to see it.

**Add Sub-Navigation Menus**
Each page is too cluttered, and you have to scroll to see all of the content. The information on these pages should be broken up more by using sub-menus. For example, clicking “Exhibitions and Collections”
should open a sub-menu that lists “Current Exhibitions”, “Upcoming Exhibitions”, “Past Exhibitions”, and “Permanent Collection”. Clicking on one of these items will open a page with just that information.