Background:

The John G. Shedd Institute for the Arts, or The Shedd Institute, is a performing arts company, cultural arts center, and community music school in Eugene, Oregon. Located in downtown Eugene, The Shedd Institute has 3 performance venues, various community meeting rooms, and extensive music education facilities. It presents annually an array of culturally-diverse festivals, concert series and educational programs that focus on, but are not limited to, American music in all of its forms and variations (Wikipedia, 2010).

Overall Assessment:

The Shedd Institute’s website is very overwhelming. The layout and design is extremely inconsistent and cluttered from one page to the next. The navigation scheme differs vastly from page to page, and even disappears from two pages, offering only a home button to further explore the site. In addition, these home buttons lack consistency and have a different visual appearance on every page. This has definite potential to confuse users. The website also incorporates buttons to direct users to donate, guestbook, ticket, gift certificate, and payment pages. The location of these buttons change on almost every page.

Content on the website lacks organization, consistency, and structure. It’s completely overwhelming and uninviting to the user. I was unable to locate a complete list of performing arts opportunities that The Shedd provides. I was also unable to find a
mission statement (or even a mission-like statement) on the main page of their website. I had to search through several pages until I finally discovered a mission statement located on the education page, written in very small typeface. Additionally, The Shedd’s website failed to display a list of administrative staff or board members.

There is plenty of content on the site that can be eliminated, or at the very least, less emphasized by using a smaller font or sub-navigation. There is a lack (and poor use) of whitespace on the website, everything is extremely congested. The organization unnecessarily displays contact information in three different places on almost every page of the website.

The design of the site attempts to resemble a newspaper, although this is not clearly defined because each page has a different layout. This is a unique concept which has the potential to be successful, but the proper structure and boundaries need to be provided. The design of the website also lacks aesthetic appeal. Each page should strive to draw the user in by use of an engaging header, headline, or image.

Suggestions:

Continuing the newspaper theme, I would suggest that the website navigation be completely redesigned and each section encompass an overall theme (like an actual newspaper does). The Shedd’s website should have an about page (with a mission statement), briefly describing the programs it offers. From there, the music school, performance opportunities, event calendars, etc., should have their own pages relaying additional details about each service/event. This would allow users to more easily access the information they are looking for. Implementing a gallery or two would also be extremely helpful to provide maintenance and organization of the many images
displayed on the site. Because The Shedd doesn’t appear to have a specific logo or a uniform means of branding themselves, applying a consistent color scheme and design elements to the website would create a more aesthetically inviting experience for users.