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Website Case Study  
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**Photographic Center Northwest (Seattle, WA)**  
http://www.pcnw.org

**Background**

Photographic Center Northwest (PCNW) has served both the Seattle community and a nationwide network of photographers with photographic services and opportunities for almost 30 years. Locally, they offer rotating exhibitions, photography workshops, a certificate program, darkroom rentals, and various public programming. Nationally, they are positioned as one of the better-known photography non-profits, and host an annual juried photography competition/exhibition that has discovered some of the most well known photographers worldwide.

**Overall Assessment**

Being aware of PCNW for well over a decade, I have seen both their physical space and website go through many adaptations. The most recent version of their website that is viewable online was launched in late 2010 and presents an enjoyable, refreshed, and energetic update to their old site. The website has a youthful appeal, while still maintaining classic elements that will not outdate themselves overnight. As an organization that hosts a multitude of photographic offerings, each of these categories in which they operate, as well as the services below each banner, are clearly addressed on the website and easy to navigate through.

**Design and Navigation**

The homepage for the website focuses on what PCNW is – the mission, it’s history & future, the staff and board, how to contact & visit the organization, and upcoming events. The main header allows the viewer to navigate through all of PCNW’s departments – education, the gallery, and facilities, as well as links to how you can support them, outreach work, and ways to participate in the latest they have to offer through events and a blog. Each section maintains consistency, with the PCNW logo, page title/introduction, selected photograph, and sub-navigation menu remaining in the same location.
The design elements that appeal to me in this new layout is the bold use of color that highlights which section you are on, as well as the use of an accompanying photograph designated for each section. The website background itself it a simple black and white scheme, but each section is given a bold color choice of green, orange, blue, purple, pink, or yellow. As your role your mouse over the header links, the link of choice lights up in the sections designated color. Once in a particular section, that color is used within for the sections main title, as well as links, and various places within the main body text. In addition to sub-navigation through a drop down menu along the header, sub-navigation is also available within each section on the right-hand side of the screen. Using the sections selected color, you can navigate through the sub-navigation and know which page you are on when it turns to white rather than the sections utilized color.

Each page can have anywhere from two to five frames of scrolling (with the workshop listings page and the blog having more due to the nature of the content). On some websites, this amount of scrolling can become cumbersome, but it does not bother me on this particular website. The site uses its color scheme in addition to the use of regular and bold text to create contrast within the sections, making the layout and information easy to follow as you scroll through a given page. Even with the amount of scrolling, the most important details of each section (the title, initial text, and sub-navigation) never falls below the first frame.

**Prescription:**

One addition that would be nice is making sure all of the past exhibits have a full archive online. Some of the exhibitions have a slide show detailing all of the works displayed in the exhibit, while others just have a single photograph and synopsis. Being able to access a full exhibition archive on the website would be a wonderful addition. I like the fact that doing this creates an online record as well as a way for each and every show to reach a nationwide audience. It would also be beneficial if they utilized a pop-out slide show. For the exhibits that do have slide shows, they are displayed in an area positioned to the left-hand side of the screen, sitting in a frame that is approximately 350x500 pixels. Having the ability to view larger images that are centered on the screen would create a more engaging and dynamic viewing experience.

Overall, I find this website very attractive and appealing. When I saw the changes PCNW implemented on their website late last year, I was impressed. I was immediately drawn to the youthful energy present through this modern design, something I feel more arts non-profit websites should follow. Many of the non-profit sites I have seen as of late are rather
bland and not easy to navigate. Being able to create a site that maintains a simple and classic look, yet adds dynamic elements that speak to our times, is important in attracting the needed younger audiences to these venues. The color choices that PCNW is using are very in the now, and while they may not necessarily stand the test of time, the overall clean site design would allow for easy adaptability once needed.