IN.gov

Streamlining Government Website Design: Why IN.gov uses templates for agency websites

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IOT
Indiana Office of Technology
Powering a State that Works

www.in.gov/iot

IN.gov is the official website of the State of Indiana. It serves as a central hub for accessing information and services related to Indiana's government agencies, programs, and resources. The website provides a wide range of information on business, education, healthcare, transportation, tourism, and more. The Indiana Office of Technology (IOT) manages the IN.gov website and associated program for the State.

IN.gov provides a set of standard design templates that provide a unified user experience to serve all stakeholders, internal and external. This whitepaper provides background, insight, and information regarding IN.gov's approach to delivering a common user experience through templates representing the State of Indiana's website branding. The approach IN.gov takes is to provide standardized design options to state agencies and allow them to choose from these options to craft their versions of websites that cater to their constituents while maintaining a user experience across all of IN.gov. This approach of a common design template has many benefits, as outlined in the information below.

Background of IN.gov

The State of Indiana launched its official website in 1995, making it one of the earliest state government websites in the United States. Over the years, IN.gov has undergone significant changes and updates to enhance its functionality and user experience. The website has evolved to incorporate new technologies and design principles to meet the growing demands of its users. These updates have included improvements in navigation, search functionality, mobile optimization, and the integration of various online services.

Overall, IN.gov plays a crucial role in connecting the government of Indiana with its residents and businesses. It continues to evolve and adapt to meet the changing needs of the public, providing a valuable online resource for accessing government information and services.

In recent years, IN.gov has focused on improving accessibility and inclusivity, ensuring compliance with web accessibility standards, and making the website more usable for individuals with disabilities.

IN.gov currently offers three different templates for agencies to choose from. Each has a set of common global elements and a general look and feel but provides customizations of each agency to maintain its unique look and feel within the IN.gov branding.

The Need for Standard Design Templates

Website design templates are crucial to establish trust, consistency, and usability across government websites. They enhance user experience, improve accessibility, reduce costs, promote efficient collaboration, and facilitate future updates. By providing a unified and reliable online presence, IN.gov can better serve our constituents and fulfill their responsibilities in the digital realm.

Consistency and Branding

Website design templates ensure that all IN.gov websites have a similar look and feel. This consistency helps users quickly recognize and navigate IN.gov websites, regardless of the specific agency or department they are interacting with. Maintaining a standardized design allows users to quickly locate essential information, access services, and understand the website's structure. This reduces confusion and enhances the overall user experience.

Website design templates also establish a cohesive brand identity. Consistent branding creates a sense of professionalism and reliability, instilling trust in users. When users encounter a familiar design across multiple IN.gov websites, they associate it with the official authority and credibility of the State of Indiana. This trust is crucial for users who rely on IN.gov for critical information and services.

Efficiency and Cost-Effectiveness

Adopting website design templates can lead to cost savings and increased efficiency. Developing and maintaining individual website templates for each state agency can be expensive and time-consuming. IN.gov can streamline website development and maintenance processes by centralizing resources and expertise. Shared templates also facilitate sharing code, resources, and best practices, reducing duplication of efforts and promoting collaboration among agencies.

User Experience and Accessibility

Website design templates can prioritize accessibility and usability standards. By implementing consistent design principles, the IN.gov team ensures it meets accessibility guidelines and provides an inclusive experience for all users, including those with disabilities. A standardized set of templates also enables usability testing and optimization, as feedback and improvements can be implemented across all state websites more efficiently.

Extensive Research for Government Website Design

IN.gov annually conducts user testing and obtains feedback from Hoosiers around the state about their opinions on IN.gov and State agency websites. Along with this local research, the IN.gov team also monitors other government website trends worldwide to help uncover the next most extraordinary user experience. All research is aggregated, reviewed, and discussed amongst a diverse group to validate the direction of change and to evolve the website into the best communication tool for State government.

Through years of research, IN.gov has concluded that a standard design template best serves State agency and public user needs. Our research has clearly shown a shared template design creates instant trust and validation that the visitor is on a website that is familiar to them. The

data also consistently shows that having a shared design creates a continuous user experience across all state government, regardless of subject or topic.

User-Centric Approach

IN.gov is very aware of the user and their experience when designing and developing a standard template. This approach helps ensure that the shared layouts are intuitive to use and carry a common thread across each template so they can all be related through a set of global factors.

IN.gov presently has three different template designs based on research and analytics collected. Each template IN.gov offers is for a different audience, so agencies can use their historical data to help choose the best template for their user base. This allows the agency to develop targeted sites for their audience and create the best possible user experience.

Stakeholder Involvement

IOT manages the IN.gov program, but it is not the only state agency involved in determining how the design templates are formed and the changes made to them. The IN.gov Advisory Council comprises web content managers and communications directors from over twenty State agencies. The Advisory Council serves the IN.gov program, providing feedback for portal services before, during and after formal deployment.

Incorporating Best Practices

The IN.gov team incorporates best practices from websites across multiple industries in our design templates. Research is conducted on all types of websites, including larger corporations that have multiple brands or products under their umbrella – similar to state government and its separate agencies – to study how they leverage common branding and design trends to accomplish the same goals. Our program strives for continuous improvement by scouring the web industry to bring the best possible user experience to IN.gov.

Standard Design Template Components

IN.gov utilizes common design template components to create a cohesive and consistent user experience. By incorporating these common design template components, IN.gov ensures that users have a familiar and consistent experience across different pages and sections of the website. This helps users easily navigate, find information, and interact with the government's online services, fostering trust, usability, and efficiency.

Header and Footer

IN.gov employs a standardized header and footer across its website pages. The header typically contains the IN.gov logo, providing a visual identifier for the official government website. The header also includes elements such as the agency's logo/seal, a search bar, and a navigation menu. The footer has standardized global elements across all websites for a common user

experience. It contains links to essential information such as contact details, privacy policies, terms of use, and accessibility statements. It may also include custom social media links and additional navigation menus.

Navigation and Menus

IN.gov employs a consistent navigation system to help users quickly navigate through the website. This usually includes a main navigation menu, often located in the header or left side of the page, which provides access to different sections and categories of information. Sub-menus and dropdowns may be utilized to organize and present more specific content. Depending on the design template and the resolution of the viewing device, the navigation may differ slightly.

Typography and Color Scheme

IN.gov uses a consistent typography style throughout the website. It selects specific fonts, font sizes, and font weights to ensure readability and maintain a cohesive visual aesthetic. Typography choices are designed to be accessible and legible across different devices and screen sizes.

IN.gov adheres to a standard color pattern across all templates to establish a unified visual identity. Each agency can choose its own set of colors, but they are all applied similarly across all websites. The color schemes often reflect the colors of the state agency, incorporating primary and secondary colors that align with the agency's brand guidelines. These colors are applied consistently across the website to enhance recognition and maintain visual coherence.

Content Templates

IN.gov utilizes content templates to present information consistently. These templates provide a structured layout for different types of content, such as promotions, long-form information, multi-topic content, and resource listings. Content templates may include common web design layouts like accordions, tabs, image cards, carousels, galleries, multi-column layouts, tables, maps, and more. Each content template is standardized to behave the same across every state website. This consistency helps create an even more intuitive and memorable user experience for repeat visitors.

Responsive and Mobile-Friendly Design

Having a standard design template that is responsive and mobile-friendly is crucial for IN.gov to provide a consistent user experience. By providing a shared responsive and mobile-friendly design through templates, IN.gov provides consistency in user experience across devices. Each template is responsive to resize automatically to the user's screen resolution while still providing the same excellent user experience. This familiar responsiveness promotes accessibility, engagement, visibility, and cost efficiency, ultimately enhancing the website's overall effectiveness in serving the public.

Keeping Up with Modernized Industry Practices

A standard template provides scalability and flexibility for future updates and enhancements. As technology evolves, IN.gov websites must adapt to changing user needs and emerging trends. A standard template allows for quicker implementation of updates, new features, and design improvements across all state websites, ensuring a consistent and up-to-date user experience.

Regular Evaluation and Iterative Upgrades
IN.gov evaluates the website design and feedback daily through user surveys, support tickets, feature requests, and other available application upgrades. IN.gov does quarterly updates for compliance issues on all design templates to ensure they stay fully accessible to all visitors. IN.gov also continuously develops new content templates and iterates, updating existing ones to ensure that all agency websites have a fresh and up-to-date selection of user-friendly content containers.

Bi-annual Refresh
To ensure that the shared content templates stay updated with design trends, accessibility standards and provide the most optimized user experience, IOT redesigns templates every two years. This refresh includes updated drawings and prototypes based on extensive research and polling. The designs are typically an evolution of the current look, leaving breadcrumbs of past iterations to maintain familiarity for repeat users. The goal of the refresh is to continuously gather feedback from local users, state users, and internal stakeholders to maintain progress on a standard look and feel that remains relevant in design and experience.

Conclusion

IN.gov's research-based approach and adoption of standard design templates made Indiana a leader in digital government. The Center for Digital Government, a national research and advisory institute on information technology policies and best practices in state and local government, has named Indiana as a top 5 state government web experience each year since 2015. A significant part of that acclaim is due to IOT's approach to templates and keeping sites up-to-date on the latest customer experience. IN.gov aims to promote the creation of efficient, user-friendly, and visually appealing government websites that effectively serve the needs of all stakeholders.