Developing Content for a Cross-Cultural Website: Integrating Web Strategies, Cultural Considerations and Blogging Techniques

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Abstract

Using new technologies to create an online and community presence for diverse cultures requires extensive planning and strategizing. This paper illustrates some of the issues and methods to consider when developing content for a cross-cultural website and establishing a foundation for a novice user to take over. The purpose of the project behind this paper was to promote awareness on a Bhutanese-Nepali refugee group who resettled in Utica, New York and educate the community on their Hindu religion and cultural practices. A group of graduate students who worked with the refugees built a user-friendly website (https://hauny001.wordpress.com), created content that would set the right tone and provide useful information and implemented an effective marketing strategy.
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods</td>
<td>9, 11, 17-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theories</td>
<td>11-17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A. Content written for website</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B. WordPress Guide</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C. Best Practices document</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1: Original Mission and Vision statement</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2: Breakdown of Human-Centered Design process</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3: Breakdown of User-Centered Design process</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4: Inverted Pyramid diagram</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5: Example of website content</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6: Risk chart of poor organization and planning</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7: Hindu Society Facebook page</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Introduction**

Several considerations go into designing and implementing a website. Early on, the development team asks questions such as, how should the site be designed, which host will be used, how will the site be marketed and what content should be included? Knowing who your audience is and what user’s needs are is crucial in the early planning stage. When working for a cross-cultural group, even more considerations and technical factors must be taken into account because of language and cultural barriers. Writing content for a cross-cultural website calls for attention to needs, language that is clear and concise and establishing trusted relationships.

As a content writer, I needed to answer the following questions:

- How do you set content tone that serves purpose and suits the client?
- How do you write effective content?
- How can I help the client feel comfortable using the technologies being presented to him?

**Background**

In November 2012, I began working on a group project with Lee Crisman and Julie DelMedico. Each of us had different roles to help carry out the visions of the Association of Hindu Society of Utica, New York. The Hindu Society is comprised of members of a Bhutanese-Nepali refugee group who resettled in Utica. They want to promote awareness on their culture and Hindu religion. Their goal is to find space to start a temple and become a cultural hub in the community. In order to achieve that they must
establish themselves in the local area by creating an identity, educating others on their religion, culture and history, raising funds, etc.

When this group arrived in Utica, they came with next to nothing. They were Bhutanese citizens of Nepali descent who were exiled from Bhutan without a country to call home. Many of them had never seen a modern car, used a credit card or went without a place to worship. Starting over in a foreign land brought huge culture shock and religious upheaval because they have no place to be spiritual outside of their homes.

As a group, we met with the “face” of the local Hindu group Mukti “Sagar” Rijal four times along with some of his family and friends at the Rijal family home on Taylor Avenue in Utica. On one occasion the group met Sagar and some friends at Panera Bread in New Hartford and once Dr. Stam and I met with him at his house. Sagar had ideas on what he wanted incorporated in website with the goal being to increase overall understanding about Hinduism and the Bhutanese-Nepali refugees. Becoming active and respected in their new community is very important for this group to establish itself. During those meetings Sagar outlined certain features and content elements he wanted incorporated in the site. They included:

- Mission and Vision statements
- History of the Bhutanese-Nepali refugees living in Utica
- Descriptions and dates of important Hindu holidays and festivals
- An explanation of Hinduism, it’s history and core beliefs
- Information on how to become a member and donate
- A contact form that would be emailed directly to an account set-up for the Hindu Society
Each of us assumed a different role in the bringing the project to fruition. Our roles were divided in the following ways:

- I wrote all of the website’s content and maintained a news blog within the site (Appendix A). I also compiled and annotated images and wrote a WordPress guide to be used as a reference for Sagar once the website was turned over to him. It is a step-by-step guide that walks the user through logging-into WordPress and then explains to them how to navigate throughout the site (Appendix B).

- Julie and I also wrote a document titled “Best Practices for Working on Community Projects” (Appendix C) that outlines the best actions and considerations to take into account when working on a community project.

- Lee designed the website, hauny001.wordpress.com, and implemented requests made by Sagar. In addition, he also designed the WordPress guide.

- Julie developed a marketing strategy for the website by circulating post cards and business cards and gave the Hindu Society a social media presence by creating a Facebook page.

**Methods and Theory**

*Gathering information*

Sagar often remarked that he is a “face-to-face person” meaning he prefers to meet with people in-person rather than using technology. In fact, early on in the project the three of us emailed him several times for different reasons and the emails were
seldom answered. He always welcomed us in his home and whenever we spoke on the phone he would close the conversation by saying, “come by and visit.” It was important for me to visit with Sagar and his family as the primary methodology for my information gathering. Initially, Sagar provided Lee, Julie and I with a narrative in his own words that summed up his vision for the Hindu Society. It was kind of him and helpful to get a sense of his grasp on written English, but showed I would have to create everything from scratch. (See Figure 1)

![Image](image_url)

**Figure 1:** Sagar’s original Vision and Mission statements

Meeting with Sagar in person created a better understanding of his cultural and personal environment and added more flavor to my writing and blog entries. I experienced dining on Nepali cuisine on several occasions because Sagar’s mother...
always cooked meals for us. Sometimes additional research was required to clear up any confusion or misunderstanding I had because of language and cultural barriers.

Attending local events that showcased Bhutanese-Nepali culture and religious customs was another opportunity that allowed me to look inside their way of life and watch them enjoy being in their own element. It was wonderful to see them out in the community doing something true to their beliefs and be so proud about it. In March, I attended the Holi color festival at SUNYIT and in April a CultureFest at the Stanley Center for the Arts and a Fashion and Talent show at the Refugee Center. These events were wonderful blog opportunities and it gave me pleasure to see this group so exuberant and joyful. So many of their stories are full of sadness and oppression, this showed them in a different light and it was refreshing.

*Using theories*

Properly representing this group to the community and humanizing them was always at the forefront of my mind. I tested theories that I thought would help steer my part of the project the right way and would garner positive and usable results for Sagar once he took over the website and blog.

First, I looked at human-centered design theory (HCD) because it is known for flexibility and taking cultural considerations into account. “In human-centred design, researchers and designers attempt to cooperate with or learn from potential users of the products or services which they are developing. Their goal is to develop products or services that match users’ practices, needs and preferences” (Steen, 2011, pp. 45).

The majority of Sagar’s needs were similar to what most people look for in a website, but cultural, religious and professional gaps gave both sides different outlooks
on some design and content issues. We needed to develop a website that matched his needs and preferences yet was a product we approved of as designers. HCD rejects the “one way is the best way and sameness of scientific ideas” and puts emphasis on the importance of “diversity, providing a motivation to reflect and enhance cultural, educational and even product diversity” (Jacobson, 2000, pp. 64-65).

I tested HCD based on Mike Cooley’s nine characteristics of human-centered systems. Though devised in the 1980s, these characteristics are still widely regarded as a benchmark for measuring how well something complies with the “human-centered” system (pp. 68-70). I created the following chart (Figure 2) to compare characteristics and definitions with how they worked into my role as content writer:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Was it demonstrated on the Hindu Society’s website?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coherence</td>
<td>The system has clear meanings; it is highly visible what is going on and what is possible.</td>
<td>Yes. Text and menu icons used are clearly presented. Site conveniently links visitors to Facebook page and another link allows them to watch a video.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusiveness</td>
<td>The system should invite you in and make you feel like you are part of a community of activities that are familiar.</td>
<td>Yes and No. Content focuses on events happening in the Hindu and local refugee community and always stresses they are open for anyone to attend. Details of cultural rituals and religious practices are intended to enlighten the reader. Actual design techniques within the site are basic and do not invite the visitor in or provide elaborate enhancements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malleability</td>
<td>The ability to sculpt the environment to one’s need and aesthetic tastes.</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>A sense that one is being invited to participate in the process. Creates a feeling of empathy.</td>
<td>Yes. Site visitors are allowed to comment in the news blog section, which allows for on-going dialog and interaction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ownership</td>
<td>Feeling that you have created and thereby own part of the system.</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsiveness</td>
<td>A sense that you can get the system to respond to your requirements and needs.</td>
<td>Yes. The comments section and ability to connect with people through the Facebook page gives the visitor the chance of receiving a response or answer another person’s questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>The system is capable of responding to the purpose the user has in mind and encourages them to go beyond it.</td>
<td>Yes. This is a very attractive, functional website. Anyone visiting it will find relevant and credible information on Hinduism, Bhutanese-Nepali refugees living in Utica, upcoming events and stories about what they are doing in the community. It may cause the visitor to look further and become a member of the group.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
After analyzing these results, I believe the Hindu Society’s website does exemplify some HCD in regards to site content. Information and blog stories featured offer a wide range of topics that reflect issues important to the Hindu Society and would appeal to someone interested in learning more about them. The website is simple in design, however, there were limitations placed on the project because of a non-existent budget and something too sophisticated in design would be hard for Sagar to maintain. Because its basic design does not offer interactivity or modern web enhancements, it makes some HCD characteristics hard to fulfill.

**Distinguishing human-centered design from user-centered design**

After conducting more research, I found that HCD and user-centered design theory (UCD) are often confused and used as interchangeable terms depending on the source. Google and Google Scholar searches on “human-centered design theory” brought up many UCD articles that implied they were the same thing. Two visits with Ron Foster, a SUNYIT librarian, found similar outcomes with different databases. Also interesting,
after doing a Google search for HCD one of the first results shown was the Wikipedia entry for UCD and nothing appeared for HCD.

Despite sometimes being used interchangeably, I treated them as different theories. Steen makes a good point when comparing HCD and UCD, “My preference for using the term human-centred design instead of user-centred design – because the former suggests a concern for people, whereas the latter suggests a narrower focus on people’s roles as users – (is because) the problem with usability based on approaches is that they encourage a limited view of the person using the product” (pp. 45-46)

*User-centered design theory (UCD)*

This theory involves a problem solving process that “requires designers to analyze and envision how users are likely to use a product and also test their work with the actual user or users” (Lai et al., 2010, pp. 304). The essence of the UCD approach is that it provides a structure to assist the developer or designer in assuring that relevant issues have been considered in a user-oriented manner (pp. 304).

The authors suggest that a phase flow should occur for someone using UCD theory and this flow is the exact process I used for planning and writing content for the site and blog: Strategy → Research → Analysis → Design → Production

The following chart (Figure 3) shows the recommended process and how it was executed for this project in regards to my content writing:
Met with Sagar several times to build a trusted relationship, asked exploratory questions to learn about his culture and background, found out what his specific needs were in regards to website content.

Did more in-depth research after obtaining large amount of information from Sagar, his family and others in the Bhutanese-Nepali community. This gave me a better understanding of issues and topics we talked about at his home.

Made a list of content items for the website and stories for the news blog based on information from interviews and research. Assessed what still needed more explaining and met with Sagar again to go over what was planned and gather more information.

Because of my role I applied writing in place of designing: Once I had most site content written I went over some of the main points with Sagar in a phone conversation to make sure he was comfortable with the way some passages were worded because I used very little of the written narrative he gave me.

Posted information and news blogs on the website. Sagar expressed that he was pleased with how the Hindu Society and refugee community are represented on the site. He promoted the site’s cultural and religious stories on the group’s Facebook page by providing the link to the website with an explanation.

Methods can range from large scale data gathering such as surveys, to face-to-face interactions. Designs can be modified throughout the process so that it increasingly matches the user’s requirements (Bowler et al., 2011, pp. 726).

The UCD process followed my methodology for gathering information and content writing strategy because I was always going over information that was appearing on the website with Sagar. As the eventual user/navigator/writer of site, I wanted to set a tone and structure that he would want to continue. Conducting interviews, double checking information and including him in content planning was his part in the UCD process.
Working with a cross-cultural group to develop a cross-cultural website required constant fact checking. It was important that information was accurate, so I was glad to have an open line of communication with Sagar.

*Inverted Pyramid – facts first*

The Inverted Pyramid style of writing was the method I used for writing web content. It is a commonly used for general news writing and is what online readers prefer when searching for information on the web. The Inverted Pyramid puts important information at the top of a story or piece of writing. Then the rest of the information is presented in descending order of importance. (See Figure 4)

![Diagram of Internet reading style and the Inverted Pyramid writing style](image)

*Figure 4:* Diagrams of Internet reading style and the Inverted Pyramid writing style

The Inverted Pyramid matches the “less is more” readership style that online readers require. This kind of writing makes bodies of text shorter and more compact and is preferred by web surfers because they tend to skim text and do not want to spend time reading long passages. “For webpages, give people what they need. Ask yourself, what do my site visitors really care about? Market by giving useful information. This will
increase traffic and your site will become a desirable location for information” (Redish, 2007, pp. 102). Instead of lengthy text, focused was placed on subject areas Sagar wanted explained and what I thought was important.

I tried to write them in a way that would lure the reader and hold their interest (See Figure 5, copies of all website content are in Appendix A).

Since this group of Bhutanese-Nepali refugees are some of the first to settle in the Utica, I wanted to help them build their image in the community and show visitors what interesting, kindhearted and spiritual people they are.

Figure 5: One area of content featured on hauny001.wordpress.com
Keeping content fresh

Updating content is another element that is crucial in generating web traffic and creating a following. From the site’s launch on March 22 until the present, I try to add a blog entry every week so there was something new on the site for visitors. Keeping them engaged with fresh content will make visitors return. As more information is shared around the clock through social media and digital technologies, the greater the expectation to provide updated content.

Content does not have to be updated hourly like a Twitter feed or even daily, but instead consistently. People assume that “if I came to your website today, then came back next month and nothing has changed, I would probably think that nothing is really happening with your business. You must not be growing. You must not be innovating” (Hernandez et al., 2009).

Redish recommends starting a list of topics to write about, then map out how and when you can start writing them. This sets a realistic target and organization system of what you want to accomplish (pp. 80).

Consistently adding something on the news blog after the site was launched was a priority for me whether it was a story on an event I attended or a short blurb on something that was coming up. This makes an impression on site visitors and shows that the Hindu Society is actively involved in the community.
Literature Review

Assessing Client Needs

A major part of the project that we constantly took into account was assessing our client’s needs. We worked with a group of people who are just becoming familiar with American ways of life and many of them cannot speak English. It was obvious from our first meeting with Sagar that too much information or an overly sophisticated site would be hard for him to maintain. Yet having a website that explained who they are and what their vision is will be essential in helping attract attention and build awareness from non-Hindus living in the area.

He was also open to creating a Facebook page for the group to reach out to a younger audience. Essentially our first meeting with Sagar was a “needs assessment” that identified the Hindu Society’s mission and what content he wanted on the site. The goal of a needs assessment is to “design an effective program, product or service that addresses a group’s needs and wants” (Redish, pp. 17).

According to a journal article by Chevalier and Chevalier (2009), web designers must always take the client in consideration because they usually provide a list of their requirements, expectations and constraints for the project (pp. 126 -127). These design issues “involve various cognitive processes such as planning, analogical reasoning or the management of constraints” (pp. 127). The viewpoints of those involved in the project weigh heavily into how the project looks and what messages it conveys. Most of the time, the client knows what information he or she wants the users to find on the site, but “not how to present it to facilitate users’ navigation” (pp. 134).
The authors argue that in the early stages of website design, viewpoints of the client and user must be equally taken into account for the site to be both informative and easy to use” (pp. 134). They recommend that designers switch back and forth between viewpoints in order to develop usable and useful websites.

To better understand the user, developers should think about the site’s mission, what it should accomplish and who it will serve. Other important elements to consider are marketing strategies and interviewing people who will use or might use the website (Redish, 14).

**How to write effective and clear content**

In order for website content to be successful, a writer or designer must exhibit useful writing and usable content specifically intended for online delivery (Halvorson and Rach, 2012, pp. 33). “Content is more or less worthless unless it does one or both of the following: supports a key project/business objective and fulfills your users’ needs” (pp. 6). According to the authors, less content to sort through is more user-friendly. Too much information clumped together makes it is harder for a user or customer to sort through and process.

Before anything is written and posted to a website, the writer or designer must identify what content is needed. It will be more effective and easy to manage if parameters and priorities are set prior to gathering information. Factors to consider when planning include (pp. 104-105):
• Audience – who are you trying to reach

• Messaging – what do you want your users to remember

• Topics – the subjects that matter

• Purpose – every piece of content needs a “job”

• Voice and tone – be mindful of audience when choosing language

• Sources – where the content comes from

**Blog writing**

My previous experience dabbling with a personal blog and following several very good blogs showed me that there is an air of lightheartedness with them. I tried to incorporate a fun tone in the Hindu Society blogs, but so many of the topics I covered were about religious and cultural rituals that were sacred to them that it was hard to stray from the Inverted Pyramid style of writing.

Maintaining the site blog could be useful for Sagar (and even his younger sister Pramila) because it would allow them to communicate openly on anything they wished to address. This would give site visitors better insight into their perspectives and create an even more authentic ethnic feel.

According to a journal article by Siles (2012), blogging is considered a technology of the self because of the way it allows someone to keep an online diary and manage a certain relationship with the self. A person “is offered a privileged opening of their inner world to others, helped to discern new aspects of them, and afforded a new capacity to transform themselves as a result of these processes of public disclosure and self-discovery” (pp. 414).
Blogs are broken into two categories:

- **Diaristic** (diary-like) that emphasize self-disclosure and mutual exchange
- **Informative** that focus on information and knowledge sharing

Sagar and the Hindu Society could benefit from using both styles by informing visitors of upcoming events and holidays or sharing about a topic or issue on his mind. I chose to maintain the blog more as a news source because it will create less confusion once Sagar takes over as site administrator.

**Strategizing**

Once needed content is identified then designers should strategize how it will be delivered. This defines how an organization or project will use content to achieve objectives and meet users’ needs. “The core strategy sets the long-term direction for all of your content-related initiatives – ensuring all activities, big or small, are working together toward the same magnificent future” (Halvorson and Rach, pp. 95).

The following chart (Figure 6) shows the risks and negative outcomes that are possible when certain analysis, experience and priorities are not considered for web content development (pp. 24). User Experience is the category on the list that applied to my strategy the most because Sagar’s experience with technology always needed to be taken into consideration.
EVERY ORGANIZATIONAL UNIT HAS AN IMPACT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Business</th>
<th>IF THEY PRIORITIZE ...</th>
<th>AND NEGLECT TO CONSIDER ...</th>
<th>THE RISKS ARE ...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Budget/ROI</td>
<td>User experience</td>
<td>Content doesn’t meet needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Schedule</td>
<td>Actual time to develop</td>
<td>Missed deadlines delay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deliverables</td>
<td>Project risks</td>
<td>project completion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>Talking about key</td>
<td>Audience’s priorities</td>
<td>Content is more promotional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>benefits and features</td>
<td>Customer-facing copy</td>
<td>than educational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Search engine optimization</td>
<td>Maintenance post-launch</td>
<td>Writing suffers from</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Ability to measure response</td>
<td></td>
<td>“marketing speak”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advertisign</td>
<td>Campaign-driven creative</td>
<td>Usability</td>
<td>Content is launched then</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Highly-interactive features</td>
<td></td>
<td>neglected</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Web 2.0 tools</td>
<td>Existing content</td>
<td>Content is more flash than</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CMS restrictions or</td>
<td>substance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>requirements</td>
<td>Content is delivered in</td>
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<tr>
<td>User</td>
<td>Audience needs and</td>
<td>Current state content</td>
<td>animation of graphics that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>desires</td>
<td>analysis</td>
<td>can’t be indexed or measured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research</td>
<td>SEO considerations</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visual design</td>
<td>Planning for content</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>CMS or development</td>
<td>People involved in the</td>
<td>Content may be published</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>requirements</td>
<td>content creation process</td>
<td>with a “fix-it-later plan”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Production workflow</td>
<td>Brand and messaging</td>
<td>Final published content may</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>not adhere to visual or</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>editorial brand standards</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 6:** Halvorson and Rach chart of risks and potential negative outcomes after poor planning
An effective core strategy is (pp. 95):

- Flexible: It withstands the changing content environment, accommodating various tactics and team configurations
- Aspirational: Focusing on what you want to become ideally (not what you can feasibly do)
- Memorable: Used constantly to guide activities and decisions
- Motivational: It’s worthwhile and somewhat exciting, something people want to be a part of
- Inclusive: Leaves room for a variety of individual and team contributions

**Interviewing and understanding other cultures**

Once the right technique is picked for the project, then asking the right questions and listening closely is essential to obtaining good information. “The harder you listen, the better you’ll understand the rationale, politics, emotions, and motivations behind the reasons content-related decisions are (or aren’t) being made” (Halvorson and Rach, pp. 11).

I was introduced to something culturally different whenever I met with Sagar and his family. Whether it was a decorative item in his house or the food on the table, a topic on Hinduism or recalling life in a refugee camp, there was always something to ask about or do further research on. Ultimately understanding was always achieved through conversations and clarifications with him and through my own research of outside sources.

Cultural interviewing “involves active listening more than targeted questioning” (Rubin and Rubin, 2012, pp. 34). These studies require the researcher to combine interviewing with participant observation and then ask about what they just observed. “Cultural interviews often have an exploratory quality, as researchers look for terms,
phrases, behaviors, or choices that reflect the norms and values and then discuss what they found with the conversational partners” (pp. 33).

Studies in the areas of cross-cultural behavioral and cognitive psychology continue to shed light on significant differences in the way people “behave, think, assign value, and engage others. Understanding culture is vital in computer-mediated communication (CMC) research” (Faiola and Matei, 2006, pp. 376). In order to explore culturally shaped cognition styles in Internet communication, the authors suggest that “web design is influenced by cultural factors and understanding the theoretical issues surrounding cultural cognition can enrich web usability research” (pp. 376). As users become increasingly dependent on online communication, researchers should move away from “homogeneous design models and … devise models that can account for cultural cognition and the influence of cultural context on the cognitive style of website designers (pp. 389-390). This creates a need for incorporating cross-cultural web design and usability research, which makes a more “explicit connection among culture, cognition, information production and organization and web design” (pp. 389).

As a group we were faced with a few design issues that were based on cultural differences. One of them being Sagar’s choice of yellow and red as website colors. It is an attractive website, but aesthetically they would not be my first choice for web design. Sagar explained that red is symbolically important to Hindus because it “indicates sensuality and purity and is of significance in ceremonies and important occasions,” including marriage, birth of a child and festivals (Rijal, 2013). Yellow is the color of knowledge and learning and symbolizes happiness, peace and meditation. Once that was
explained to me, then I had an easier time accepting the color scheme because I knew it would make a powerful impression on Hindus knowing their meaning.

**Human-centered design (HCD)**

HCD regards “the social and cultural shaping of technology as central to the design and development of future technological systems and society as a whole” (Jacobson, 2000, 65). This statement is what lured me into choosing HCD because it considers cultural factors essential in the design process.

“HCD practitioners need to combine and balance their own knowledge and ideas with users’ knowledge and ideas; they will have to decide when and how, and to what extent, to be human centred” (Steen, 2011, pp. 47). They also need to balance a concern for understanding current and past practices (a research orientation), with a concern for envisioning alternative or future practices (a design orientation). “Each world has its own knowledges and practices; each world has well-defined boundaries” (pp. 47).

Past experience allowed Lee, Julie and I to acquire knowledge about good practices in web design and web usage, but the need to take cultural and religious differences in account created a boundary. This forced us to evaluate how we would meet Sagar’s expectations yet please our own sensibilities. There were times we compromised on an issue and accepted that it was a “tension” of HCD that created a “gap between worlds of project-team members and users” (pp. 47). Another HCD-related limitation is the “need to be concerned with both understanding current practices and with envisioning alternative practices” (pp. 56). Steen suggested that HCD practitioners cope with these tensions by critically reflecting on their methods and roles in the project. “When conducting ethnographic fieldwork or emphatic design, for example, they can choose to
put aside their own ideas and knowledge, at least temporarily, and focus on users’
experience, knowledge and ideas” (pp. 56).

That coping suggestion helped us work through the few design issues we had with
Sagar. Any discussions over a difference in ideas were always resolved quickly because
we chose to honor Sagar’s reasoning based on his knowledge and experiences.

**User-centered design (UCD)**

The essence of the UCD approach is that it provides a structure to assist the
developer or designer in assuring that relevant issues have been considered in a user-
oriented manner. Needfinding, determining what it is that users need or desire, is at the
core of UCD because it is those needs that make the project compatible with the user (Lai
et al., pp. 303-304). Needfinding is essentially the same concept as a needs assessment,
which was explained in the first part of the Literature Review section.

A researcher or developer applying needfinding using the UCD process must
“look without knowing what they are looking for, trust that our ability to define that
problem will emerge during the needfinding process” (Bowler et al., pp. 722).

According to Lai et al. (pp. 307), practitioners should complete a three-stage cycle
when using UCD:

- **Prepare** (*thoughtful question asking*): “What do I want to get out of this
  interaction?

- **Interact** (*being in the moment*): “How do I best listen to my
  correspondent(s), both in actions and speech?”

- **Respond** (*thoughtful reflection*): “Now what do I do with this information
  that I have found?”
“The point of UCD is not just to create something that works, but rather to create something that works for the intended user, something that is usable” (Bowler et al., pp. 724). The defining characteristic of UCD is that users are involved in the design of a functioning artifact. “The degree to which they are involved can vary, from a onetime, usability test after the artifact has been built to projects where users work alongside designers from inception to creation” (pp. 725).

**Research Questions**

In this paper’s Introduction section I outlined what research questions I wanted to address. The following is a list of those questions and how they were answered:

1. **How do you set content tone that serves purpose and suits the client?**

   Going into the project I realized that content – especially the news blog – was ultimately Sagar’s voice. I had to cover information and stories and present them in a way he would be comfortable following once he took over the site. Highlighting areas of their culture and focusing on events that involved Hinduism, Bhutanese-Nepalis or other refugee events are topics he likely will continue to cover as site administrator. By staying on top of those issues and weaving in timely, cultural features, I set up a good framework for him. Also, it was obvious there were certain items Sagar would not budge on which indicated a certain tone he wanted to keep.

   For example, the Hindu Society’s original name was the Association of Hindu Society of Utica, New York, but once our group starting working on the website it was changed to the Hindu of Association of Utica, New York (HAUNY). We all agreed that HAUNY was a more concise, cleaner title. Sagar liked the new name, but was adamant that the original name be kept despite Dr. Stam and I explaining to him that the
Association of Hindu Society of Utica, New York name was redundant and not as polished as HAUNY. Sagar maintained that in his culture the word “association” symbolizes strength and unity and there was no other right choice in his opinion.

This spoke volumes about the tone Sagar wanted to set. Having an awkward (in my opinion) title that invoked loyalty to his heritage was more important than a neater title that followed better web practices. Meeting with him in person for a needs assessment then following up with subsequent meetings in his home or at cultural events gave me a window looking into the cultural norms that influence his ideals and opinions. Once I witnessed these traits it was easier for me to set the tone for news blogs and other content categories on the website.

2.) How do you write effective website content?

Using the “less is more” approach to writing and presenting information made the most sense because it will be manageable for Sagar to maintain. This also falls in line with what online readers demand as they surf the web looking for information. Redish suggested to “give people only what they need” on a website and start by revealing the key point (pp. 95). Using this golden rule for effective web content will help Sagar organize his writing when he posts blogs and information to the website.

Updating information is another key content element that draws visitors to the site and shows that a group or organization is active. Even if there isn’t much happening in the group at a given moment, the administrator should post something pertaining to its organization or company to maintain a web presence. Any fresh tidbit or piece of information will show that the group is trying to grow, be innovative and stay current.
3.) *How can I help the client feel comfortable with technologies being presented to him?*

Knowing Sagar’s needs and what is important to him helped my team gauge what technologies we used and how we presented them to him. Choosing WordPress as the site host was ultimately done for cost reasons. Sagar will pay a very inexpensive annual fee to maintain it, but WordPress is also very user-friendly and fairly easy to navigate. In order to ensure support for Sagar, I wrote a WordPress guide that addresses several “how-to” scenarios and is a step-by-step tool that will walk him through what to do right from the login step. This will be a great resource for him when he needs a question answered. According to Alessi and Trollip (2001), “Although a good program should strive for ease of use as much as possible, a manual or guide is often still necessary. Any reinforcement tool can help the user achieve smooth operation and eventual proficiency” (pp. 542).

A hardcopy of the guide will be presented to him and a digital version is included within the website for quick reference. Links to videos with extensive WordPress tutorials are included as well as my and Lee’s email addresses if he wishes to contact us.

Sagar and I will meet in early May to go over site navigation. He will start right from the log in step and then test different features to ensure he understands what should be done when he wants to add, edit or upload something to the website. I believe that the content strategy of the site was tailored enough to Sagar’s needs and that he will operate the website and its blog smoothly and proficiently.
Results

Sagar has expressed to me he is very happy with the website, its content and the image it reflects to the community. He updates information on the Hindu Society’s Facebook page and recently posted a link from that page to the website promoting the cultural and religious information that is found in the news blog. (Figure 7)

Figure 7: Hindu Society’s Facebook page promoting the news blog on the website

Analyzing the results after testing UCD and HCD theories makes me believe that two kinds of users were satisfied with the Hindu Society’s website and content: Sagar Rijal, who will navigate and administer the site, and the random Internet user looking for credible and relevant information.

After always assessing Sagar’s needs as the user, I also believe the foundation that was set for him to generate content and take charge of the site should ensure a smooth transition. As noted in this paper and in the WordPress guide that was created for his
support, he can contact me whenever he wishes for help with WordPress or input when developing content for the website, (hauny001@wordpress.com).
References


Appendix A

Website content written for the
Association of Hindu Society of Utica, New York

By Mary Christopher

(Please note: This is text only. To look at the complete website, visit https://hauny001.wordpress.com)
Diversity put on display at Fashion and Talent Show April 30, 2013

A packed auditorium was recently treated to the many talents of adult students from the Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees at a Cultural Fashion and Talent Show.

Native clothing, musical arrangements, singing and dancing from around the globe were put on display in front an audience of more than 100 people. From a feisty Dominican dance to a classical Russian accordion arrangement, the audience was wowed by each performance.

“This was a great opportunity for them to showcase their abilities. These are things they don’t want to forget and they want other cultures to see as well,” said Chris Inserra, an adult ESL teacher at the MVRCR.

The event kicked off with students modeling fashions from their native country. An array of colors, patterns and styles were strutted on stage each bringing their own ethnic flair to life. Some of the countries represented were the Burma, Russia, Belarus, Nepal and the Dominican Republic. Song and dance selections from those countries were also performed in the talent show portion.

Tilachan Acharya opened the talent show by singing a heartfelt Nepali song, “Your Love Holds Me Close,” and then moved into a quick dance bouncing joyfully around the stage. Irina Sinkovets, from Belarus, graced the keys as she played delicate Russian and classical keyboard arrangements.

While the audience was enthusiastic with every performance, Nima Tamang, of Nepal, really generated excitement with his interpretive and exuberant dance routine. He started slowly then effortlessly crossed over into fast footwork that proved he has been dancing since he was a young boy.

Phaw Mo danced, sang or played acoustic guitar in several acts during the show. He and his close friend, Myit, performed a dance routine that originated in the Karen region of Burma. It charmed the audience and his singing and guitar playing enhanced other parts of the show. Preserving their heritage is essential for refugee groups to survive in their new country. “I love Karen, the people and showing heritage,” Mo said. “I love songs, music and sharing.”

The show closed with an adult class singing American folk songs, acknowledging appreciation for life in their new country. “It was marvelous – they should be proud of themselves,” said Joanne Russo, an audience member and friend of a few performers. “They should keep (sharing) their diversity with the community because they are amazing.”

The Cultural Fashion and Talent show was held on April 17 at the MVRCR. Other performers participated as well. Visit the Gallery to see more photos from the event.
Bhutanese-Nepali talent shines on the Stanley stage at CultureFest  April 14, 2013

Members of the Bhutanese-Nepali community showed up and showed out at Saturday’s CultureFest at the Stanley Center for the Arts. All who performed brought traditional songs and dances along with live music to the stage with pride and joy.

Many of their unique talents and cherished cultural delights were shared with about 1,000 attendees who passed through the Stanley to experience a variety of international foods, styles of music and crafts.

The audience squealed with glee as Nima Tamang solo danced to the Nepali song “Don’t Burn Your Heart.” While the intended theme is reflecting on how much it hurts to remember someone from your past, Tamang’s interpretation was anything but melancholy. He leapt exuberantly around the stage never stopping full body dancing until the final note.

Tamang was one of four acts in the Bhutanese-Nepali and Asian part of the program. It opened with sweet melodies from the band Bhutanese-Nepali Folk (BNF). The group performed five Nepali songs – all sung in the Nepali language — in front of a cheering audience. The opening song “Jahgah Lamka” celebrated youth empowerment urging young people to make sacrifices for their future. BNF are committed to maintaining their cultural traditions by putting their own spin on old Nepali folk songs.

BNF members Tek Monger and Mon Ranamagar were thrilled to participate in an event that celebrated diversity in the Utica area. The group formed about a year ago and practice regularly at members’ homes. Monger said they look forward to performing in front of large audiences because “we can express our talent and feelings and people can get to know our music.” The ethnic pride shown at CultureFest was an experience he will always remember. “This was wonderful and I hope we come back next year.”

Also part of the program was a spirited Karen-Burmese rope dance charmed the audience as the dancers skillfully braided and unbraided a pole with bright-colored rope. The finale was Tilachan Acharya’s strong performance of the song, “My Heart is a Nepali Heart,” about loyalty to Nepali heritage. The rock and roll-sounding tune was the perfect choice to close the program as some members of the audience danced in their seats right up until he finished.

Many felt uplifted after the program because such a strong feeling of camaraderie was exuded from people they had not met before. Ed and Pauline Donnelly of Clinton were impressed with the entire event, but were truly moved by the “honor” shown by the Bhutanese-Nepali performers and spectators – many of them children.

“It was amazing to see a group of people, young and old, take such pride in their heritage and want to share it with others,” Ed said. “We just don’t see that a lot from a lot of
young people today. This was a wonderful way to learn about different cultures in our area.”

CultureFest was sponsored by Townsquare Media. Earlier in the program, Sen. Joe Griffo presented the Cultural Ambassador of the Year Award to Polish community member Julian Noga.

Hindus will celebrate their New Year on April 14  

April 9, 2013

Like many ancient cultures, the Hindu New Year is celebrated with the arrival of spring. Hindus around the world recognize their New Year on different dates — even having different names for New Year depending on their geography and language.

The Nepali New Year, known as Navavarsha, usually falls in the second week of April or on April 14 (as it does this year). That day coincides with the sun’s entrance into the constellation Mesha (Aries), the first sign in Hindu astrology. But it will not kick off the start of 2013 or 2014. Instead, Hindus will usher in the year 2070 because they follow the lunar calendar that is 57 years ahead of the Western (Gregorian) solar calendar.

A lunar calendar is based on the movement of the moon and is shorter than a solar calendar, which is the 365 days it takes the Earth to orbit the sun. The Nepali lunar calendar is called Bikaram Sambat (an example of the Nepali calendar is at the end of this entry). Lunar days are called tithis. They are calculated by using the difference of the longitudinal angle between the position of the sun and moon. Because of this, tithis vary in length and may or may not have changed by the time the day has ended. A tithi can be omitted or two consecutive days can share the same tithi.

The New Year is welcomed with feelings of optimism and goodwill among Hindus. Many wear new clothes, exchange foods and gifts and extend kind gestures toward one another. Homes are cleaned and decorated with rangoli, bright colored, patterned folk art. A picture of rangoli, also known as kolam, is shown at the top of this entry. Rangoli are decorative designs made on the thresholds of homes and in courtyards. They are meant to be sacred welcoming areas for the Hindu gods and goddesses and are also thought to bring good luck. Design depictions may vary as they usually reflect traditions, folklore and practices that are unique to each area. They are created by using colored rice, colored dry flour, sand or flower petals.
Colgate University hosting Holi event March 30  March 25, 2013

A Holi celebration will take place at Colgate University in Hamilton around 1 p.m. Saturday, March 30. The Hindu students of Colgate University are organizing the event.

The Association of Hindu Society and Hindu students from Utica schools are planning to take a bus that would accommodate around 50 people. Those who can provide their own transportation are encouraged to do so and it would be helpful to offer a ride to others who may need one.

For information, contact Mukti “Sagar” Rijal at (315) 507-2129 or email him at hauny001@gmail.com

Smiles everywhere at SUNYIT Holi event  March 25, 2013

Happy Holi! The Association of Hindu Society of Utica, NY celebrated the annual Holi festival with other local Hindus and community members on March 23 at SUNYIT. The Indian Student Association of the Mohawk Valley and International Student Association at SUNYIT organized the lively event. About 140 people attended. Ethnicities from all over the world participated in the celebration, including refugees and immigrants from India, Bhutan, Nepal, Burma, Sudan, Yemen, Congo and Bangladesh, said David Garrett, director of International Student Services at SUNYIT.

Holi is the Hindu festival of colors. The Campus Center was filled with boisterous participants – and some non-Hindus as well—who joyously threw and smeared colored powder on one another in a custom known for welcoming spring. Many of those in attendance said they were excited for weeks about this festival because of the fun and warmth that always goes along with it.

Pramila Rijal and her friend, Lovely, screamed when their favorite Hindu song, “Tum Hi Ho Bandhu” began to play and hit the dance floor. Manjusha Sahay was happy that her young son Shashwat could experience another Holi event outside of India (their native country).

Watching from a balcony upstairs were many who did not want to get “colored” but still wanted to participate. Holland Patent residents Jason and Jennifer Henninger were interested in learning about the tradition. Jason is an ESL teacher at Proctor High School in Utica and is impressed by his Nepali students. “They are really hard workers and are such gentle and kind people,” he said. “I’m happy for the way they are establishing themselves.”

The room was filled with laughter and camaraderie as Hindu dancing and music, dinner from Minar and an outdoor bonfire continued through later in the evening. The event was certainly a crowd pleaser. Continue to check our website to see what other interesting events and activities are planned.
Nepali cuisine – culturally influenced yet distinctly original

March 19, 2013

Colorful dishes, spicy flavors and fragrant aromas are the savory elements that make Nepali cuisine just as intriguing as the country from which it originates. On a recent visit to the Rijal home in Utica, I was treated to a Nepalese dinner that stimulated all senses.

Set on lace tablecloth was an arrangement of small bowls of achars, Nepali side dishes, next to a large brass plate (thali) filled with white rice. It was a color palette of sorts, a culturally fused meal commonly known as a Nepal Thali. This is a meal of several dishes on one plate. A large space in the center is for rich or a starch food. A standard Nepal Thali is always dal (lentil soup), and baht (rice), but can be accompanied by several different kids of achars. Achar means spicy pickle and can be mixtures of fruits and vegetables with spices.

The Rijal’s version of a Nepali Thali didn’t disappoint – especially if you are a spicy food lover. Achars included radish pickle (mula ko achar), tomato chutney, curried potatoes and tomatoes (aloo tamatar subzi), chili peppers (khursani), lentil soup and homemade yogurt. The yogurt was just the right accompaniment to help cool down when needed. Everything was delicious – Indian flair with authentic Nepali touches.

Nepal’s neighboring countries had an influence on its cuisine as Indian, Chinese, Tibetan and Arab flairs can be tasted in many dishes. Many of the meals and side dishes served at dinner are eaten at breakfast as well. Regular and chai tea are the Nepali drinks of choice.

Here are some other interesting facts about Nepali dining customs:

• While dining, it is customary to eat without using utensils. Usually the right hand is used to mix the vegetables, meats, dals, achars or curries with rice and then quickly bringing them to the mouth. Nepalis use the left hand for personal hygiene and will not accept anything handed to them with the left hand for fear of making the food impure.

• When drinking from a glass or cup, it is important to hold it so that the fluid goes in the mouth, but the lips should never touch the cup rim. This is another example of the Hindu concern for making impure by touching it.

• Any food that has already been tasted, sipped or bitten into is considered polluted – even if you have only touched it with your spoon or fork.

• Meals are traditionally eaten squatting or sitting on the floor.

• It is considered rude to stand in front of someone who is eating, where your feet will be close to the food.

• Women do not eat before their husbands and do not eat along with guests.
Meet Mukti “Sagar” Rijal  March 12, 2013

Mukti Rijal was nicknamed Sagar by his friends when he lived in Nepal. Little did those friends know he would truly live up to that name once he moved to the United States. Sagar is a Hindi word meaning ocean, leader and ambitious.

“They gave me that name because I was patient and friendly,” Sagar said with a big grin on his face. Today, he is spearheading The Association of Hindu Society of Utica, NY. Through this society he hopes to educate and promote awareness on Hinduism. He has goals and visions for his fellow Bhutanese Nepali refugees living in Utica, but needs support from the community to help achieve their goals.

The problem facing Rijal family, and about 25 other Bhutanese-Nepali refugee families like them, is that they have no place to worship now that they have resettled in Utica. The Rijals have made their home their temple for now, but they are not able to congregate in a large group and rituals cannot be fully performed because most of them require building a fire.

The Rijal family home on Taylor Avenue is opened to anyone who wants to share in religious customs or learn more about them. A smile greets you with every entrance. Food is shared and everyone is encouraged to stay. The Hindu relics and pictures dotted throughout the house offer a sense of spiritual pride and religious importance for all who gather there.

Sagar is always happy to help, inform and educate. He works as a translator and Nepali counselor for the Utica City School District and attends classes at Mohawk Valley Community College. Through the association’s website, Facebook page and other events, Sagar hopes the local community grows to accept and become more aware of the Hindu religions and customs.

Life if Bhutan was a happy one for the family until they were forced to leave in 1992. Cultural and religious strife brought on by the Bhutanese government forced the Rijal family and other Nepali-speaking Bhutanese like them to move from Bhutan to India and then finally to a refugee camp in Nepal.

It was in the refugee camp where Sagar learned English and took some classes that helped him become a respected teacher within the camp. His father, Ganga, was a Hindu priest. Now resettled in Utica, they are truly starting over with no religious or cultural outlet outside of their homes. While Sagar and his family are grateful for the chance to start over, resettling in a foreign land is exceptionally difficult. These Bhutanese Nepali families relocated in an area that is predominantly Roman Catholic and does not have a Hindu temple. Their Hindu religion is a huge part of who they are. Without a formal place to worship, they are missing something essential to them. Finding a place to worship is a cultural and religious necessity for this group’s spiritual well being.
Sagar is optimistic about the future for the Hindu group and where they are heading. He knows it might be a long road with a lot of bumps, but feels there are many opportunities to be seized together as a community. He said, “We have each other, we have everything.”

What is Hinduism?

Hinduism is a polytheistic religion that originated in India. Devotees strive to experience the truth from within and then finally reach a pinnacle of consciousness where man and God are one. Today it is the world’s third largest religion. It is a conglomerate of diverse beliefs and traditions, the most prominent themes include:

ν Dharma (ethics and duties)
ν Samsara (rebirth)
ν Karma (right action)
ν Moksha (liberation from the cycle of Samsara)

Hindus believe that there is only one supreme Absolute called Brahma. However, they do not advocate the worship of any one particular deity. The gods and goddesses of Hinduism amount to thousands or even millions, all representing the many aspects of Brahma. The most fundamental of Hindu deities is the Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva – creator, preserver and destroyer respectively.

Hindus also worship spirits, trees, animals and even planets. They believe in reincarnation and accepting Samsara (the law of karma). All individuals accumulate karma over the course of a lifetime. Good actions create good karma and evil actions create negative karma. A God doesn’t regulate karma, rather its earned by an individual and passed down through subsequent lives. While good karma can eventually earn a person in a higher place in the caste system for a future life, the ultimate goal is moksha. This is the salvation from samsara.

For religious rituals, followers gather in a temple or in their own homes. Most Hindu homes usually have a small shrine or ‘puja room’ for daily prayers. Temples are used during religious festivals and joyous occasions, but not always in marriages and funerals.

There are 10 commitments that Hindus follow. They include:

1. Ahimsa – do no harm
2. Satya – do not lie
3. Asteya – do not steal
4. Brahmacharya – do not overindulge
5. Aparigraha – do not be greedy
6. Saucha – be clean
7. Santosha – be content
8. Tapas – be self-disciplined

Sacred texts were written in Sanskrit, the language of ancient India. These texts include:

The Vedas are the oldest, about 3000 years old. They are a collection of hymns, prayers, and magic spells.
The Upanishads are stories and parables told by gurus (teachers) to their students.
The Mahabharata is a story of a war between two royal families.
The Bhagavad Gita is a very popular part of this text.
The Ramayana is a story of the god Rama and the rescue of his wife Sita from Ravana, the evil demon king.

**Hindu Festivals & Holidays**

On any day of the year, it’s almost a guarantee that Hindus from some area of the world are observing a festival or holiday. Traditional Hindus consider anything animate or inanimate to be sacred, so when you combine that with polytheism (a religion that believes in several Gods) – there is much to celebrate!

Major Hindu holidays vary from region to region, as the faith is practiced slightly differently in certain areas. The lunar calendar determines when holidays are celebrated. Many of these holidays are based on the cycle of nature. They mark the change of the seasons, celebrate the harvest, and encourage fertility of the land. Others are dedicated to deities and gods. A wide variety of rituals are used during the various festivals and holidays, including worship, prayer, procession, magical and mystical acts, music dancing, eating, drinking and feeding the poor.

Two of the most important holidays that are recognized by most Hindus from all over the world are Holi and Diwali.

Holi is a popular festival that celebrates the beginning of spring and bids farewell to winter. The religious significance revolves around old Hindu mythology, but today Hindus consider it a boisterous and fun-filled festival. Devotees throw colored powders and scented water on each other to celebrate the colors of spring.

Holi is a time Hindus disregard their social norms and indulge in the merriment and energy of good humor. Social status, age and gender are not looked at during Holi – a good time is had by all. It is known as the celebration of the colors of unity and brotherhood and breaks the barriers of discrimination so that everyone looks the same and universal brotherhood is reaffirmed.

Diwali is the festival of lights that usually is observed for five days in the fall every year. This is a major Hindu holiday and marks the end of the harvest season where farmers give thanks for the bounty of the past year and pray for a good harvest for the following
year. It is also a time to give thanks to the Goddess Lakshmi, who symbolizes wealth and prosperity, and marks the start of a new business year.

It is known as the festival of lights because candles and lamps are used in homes and often fire crackers on the street to signify the victory of light over darkness and good over evil. Illuminating lights symbolize the awareness of a person’s inner light and firecrackers are used to drive away evil spirits. Hindus celebrate in their homes with family and friends by wearing new clothes and sharing foods and sweets.

Utica’s Hindu Society recognizes other religious holidays and festivals throughout the year. Some of them include:

- Mahashivarati (Shiva Ratri) – usually in March, is a night sacred to the Lord Shiva.
- Rama Navami – usually in April, celebrates the birthday of Lord Rama.
- Dassera – sometime in September or October, signifies the victory of Lord Rama over the demon King Ravana.

Visit The Association of Hindu Society of Utica, NY’s website regularly to see what holidays, festivals and events the group will be celebrating. The community is welcome to observe and participate in these meaningful holidays and rituals.

**Mission**

The mission of the Association of Hindu Society of Utica NY is to teach the rich spiritual heritage of Hindu philosophy and religion to devotees of all ages and nationalities. The association intends to provide the leadership and resources for the Hindu community, including:

- Provide services to devotees and children, promoting the awareness of principles and practices of Hinduism.
- Invite Hindu teachers and scholars to present topics on Hinduism, enhancing the understanding of it.
- Celebrate festivals such as Holi, Mahashivarati, Rama Navami, Dassera and Diwali, and other events.
- Bring all topics, issues and events under one roof to establish a strong Hindu community.
- Seek active participation, guidance and support from local people in our journey to be a cultural hub in our community.

We strive to provide leadership and promote awareness of the Hindu community. Educating the youth on the principles and practices of Hinduism is one of our goals as we aim to be a diverse and peaceful group in the Utica area. Our goal is establish an active Hindu Society so the Utica area can add another cultural and religious congregation to its already diverse list.
VISION

We hope to create a Hindu association that celebrates our religion while educating others and promoting awareness. The Association of Hindu Society of Utica NY looks forward to building bridges with anyone from the local community and beyond.

As our community continues to grow, it is becoming evident we need a facility to accommodate our activities and religious rituals. As we become more familiar in our new home and environment, we miss the sanctity and richness of our own temple or place of worship.

Currently we are practicing in our homes and would like to find a space to create our own temple in Utica. Association leaders would like to rent a house or apartment to start a Hindu temple. Once we have enough funding, our future goal is to build a Shiva Panchyan temple paying homage to Shiva and four other Gods.

Our visions include celebrating religious festivals throughout the year and regular worship ceremonies among a congregation. Along with practicing Hinduism, we hope that Hindu priests and scholars from all over will perform rituals or present lectures on Hindu topics to increase awareness on our culture and who we are. Anyone interested in celebrating religious rituals and or participating in society events is encouraged to attend.

To achieve our vision, we need support from the community. We request a membership fee $20 per family. Those who wish to donate more are encouraged to do so.

HISTORY

The Bhutanese-Nepali refugees living in Utica were forced out of their homeland because of their Hindu beliefs and Nepali culture. Now as they start over in a new country trying to adjust to foreign customs, they have the freedom to practice their religion. To do so they will need to build something from scratch. Keeping their faith and persevering is the essence of who they are as this is a group has dealt with hardships and persecution for several decades.

In the early 1990s, after several years of repressive policies and human rights violations against Bhutanese citizens of Nepali origin, the Bhutanese government expelled approximately 100,000 Bhutanese-Nepali people. One-sixth of its population was gone, creating a new wave of refugees without a country to call home.

Bhutan, hailed as “the last Shangri-La,” is a kingdom in South Asia that is bordered by Tibetan China, India and Nepal. It is predominantly a Buddhist state with cultural traditions similar to Tibet.

As the culturally ethnic Nepali population steadily grew in Southern Bhutan, the Bhutanese government feared that its Buddhist culture was being overtaken by Hindu traditions and cultural practices of the Nepali-speaking Bhutanese. Also, the Bhutanese
elite became fearful when a growing number of the Nepalese received high-level government positions and began organizing demonstrations that called for democracy in Bhutan. The Bhutanese monarchy has always maintained that most of those expelled from Bhutan were illegal immigrants.

These Bhutanese-Nepalese were forced to renounce their homes and homeland and fled Bhutan due to violence. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), more than 107,000 Bhutanese refugees living in seven camps in Nepal were documented in 2008. Since then a resettlement process has moved several thousands of these refugees to Canada, Norway, the United Kingdom and the United States.

The Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees has helped resettle over 300 Bhutanese-Nepali refugees in Utica. They are working and attending schools and colleges in their new community and know it may be a long road before all of their hopes are fulfilled. Transitioning from a third-world country to a first-world one was not easy, yet they are optimistic about building a meaningful life in the Mohawk Valley.
Appendix B

WordPress Guide

Written and Compiled by Mary Christopher

Designed by Lee Crisman
A WordPress Guide for Understanding and Maintenance

By Mary Christopher and Lee Crisman

Questions?

Email Lee Crisman at lcrisman@gmail.com or Mary Christopher at marychristopher13501@yahoo.com
Direction on how to use this guide.

The purpose of this manual is to provide the user with a comprehensive guide for understanding and operating a WordPress.com website and blog. The user is given instruction on what to do from the initial log in step and then how to navigate through different features within the site.

The user will learn:
About the content was created for the website
How to add, edit and delete posts and insert media
How to respond to visitors’ comments
What support services and resources are available if additional help is needed

WHAT IS WORDPRESS?
WordPress.com is a website creation blogging tool and hosting platform that allows anyone to publish online. It is also an open source blogging tool and all of its codes and files are free to use, customize and enhance. WordPress incorporates publishing, editing and maintaining content from a central interface.

![Web address for Log In page](image1)

Figure 1

LOGGING INTO WORDPRESS
1.) In your search bar, type the web address: hauny001.wordpress/wp-admin/
2.) The WordPress.com homepage will appear, enter the email address associated with Hindu Society: hauny001@gmail.com
3.) Then enter the password: SUNYIT123
4.) Once both prompts are entered, select log in. This will bring you to the site dashboard.
Becoming Familiar with the Dashboard

The Dashboard is the main control menu for the website that allows the user to add, edit and maintain contents on the site. The user can move back and forth from the Dashboard to the website. These two figures (Figure 2 and Figure 3) display the Dashboard and website homepage.
Anytime a user wants to move from the website back to the Dashboard, (see Figure 3), they should:

1.) Hover the cursor over the Association of Hindu... link and wait for a drop down menu to appear.
2.) When it does, select Dashboard to be taken back to the Dashboard.

Site Contents

Content within the website can be accessed through the homepage and Dashboard. It is organized into five category tabs on the top of the homepage. They are: Mission, News, Gallery, Hindu Festivals & Holidays and Contact (see Figure 4). Selecting any of these tabs on the homepage will bring you to content saved under those categories. Editing or adding information to these categories can be done under the Pages icon on the Dashboard (see Figure 2) and is explained in “Editing Content on the Website” section in this guide.

Figure 4

Category summaries:
The Mission category is featured right on the homepage and is an overview of the goals, visions and history of the Association of Hindu Society. There is a subcategory under Mission called What is Hinduism? that provides information on the Hindu religion.

News is the blog section of the site where posts or stories about people, culture, events or any information relevant to the Hindu Society should be posted.

Gallery is a section of photos. It has a subcategory called Starting Over Utica that features a video of refugees who have resettled in Utica.

Hindu Festivals & Holidays gives an overview of important festivals and holidays celebrated by Hindus.

Contact provides a phone number for Mukti “Sagar” Rijal and a question form that will be emailed to hauny001@gmail.com.
Adding A New Post Under The News Tab

1.) Be in the Dashboard (see Figure 5)
2.) Hover cursor over Posts
3.) Select Add New
4.) This will open a page called Add New Post (see Figure 6)
5.) It is here where the user will name the post by typing in the Enter Title Here box.
6.) Then text for the story should be typed in the large area of white space under the bar of small icons (see Figure 6).
7.) The post can either be published by selecting the Publish icon or saved as draft by selecting Save Draft (see Figure 7).
Publishing a post on the WordPress site means it can be viewed by anyone who visits the page. Posts are arranged in reverse-chronological order.

If a post is saved as a draft, others cannot view it. Only a site administrator (someone with the email/username and password) can see the draft and it will be listed in reverse chronological order with other posts.
Adding Media

1.) Be in the post where the image will be inserted (see Figure 8).
2.) Have the cursor in the desired location where the image will be inserted.
3.) Select Add Media
4.) Another page will open and select Upload Files (see Figure 9).
5.) Then choose Select Files (see Figure 10)
6.) Select the photo from its saved location and select Open (see Figure 11).
7.) The photo will be put in an Insert Media Library, select the desired image so a check mark appears in the corner (see Figure 12) and then select Insert Into Post (see Figure 12).
8.) The post will appear with a code for the image in the spot where it will be inserted (see Figure 13). Select Update for the image to appear in the post.
Inserting a Video

1.) Like inserting a photo or image, have the cursor placed in the post where the video will be inserted.
2.) Open another window or tab and find the desired video. YouTube is used as an example (see Figure 14).
3.) Find the Embed code and select it (Figure 14).
4.) When the Embed code appears, copy the code (Figure 14).
5.) Go back into the post where the video will be inserted.
6.) Paste the code into the post (see Figure 15).
7.) The video can be viewed before being published by selecting Preview (Figure 15).
8.) Then publish the post by selecting Publish (Figure 15).
Editing Website Content
All content on the website can be edited and found through the Dashboard.

1.) Hover the cursor over the Pages icon on the Dashboard and select All Pages when it appears (see Figure 16).
2.) This brings you to a menu of site content. Choose the category that needs editing and hover the cursor over the link (see Figure 17). A small menu bar will appear underneath the title, select Edit.
3.) Now you are in the page or post that needs the editing. Make the necessary changes, but leave coded text exactly as it is within the content (see Figure 18).
4.) When finished, select View Change to see the changes made.
5.) Then select Update to refresh the content (Figure 18).

Figure 16

Figure 17
Deleting a Post or Image

This is similar to the Editing process in the above section.

1. Choose which item needs to be deleted and hover over the title until the small menu bar appears (Figure 19).
2. Select Trash
3. The item will be removed from that list of content and put into the Trash.
4. Images are done in a similar way, but start by selecting the Media icon and then select Library (Figure 20).
5. A list of images stored in the Media Library will appear (Figure 21). Hover over the item that will be deleted so the menu bar appears and choose Trash.
Figure 20

Figure 21

Hover over desired image for small menu bar to appear and choose Delete Permanently.
Commenting on a Post

Any user (unless blocked by security settings, addressed in the section below) can leave comments under blogs in the News section by:

1.) Selecting the Leave a comment link at the end of the blogs (Figure 22).
2.) The administrator can comment on any post left there by selecting the same Leave a comment link and then responding in the Leave a Reply box (Figure 23).
3.) Then select Post Comment and it will appear as a response.
Comments throughout the site can be viewed in list form by:

1. Selecting the Comments icon in the Dashboard.
2. A grid will appear (Figure 24) that shows all comment types and allows the user to respond, approve, remove or block to visitor comments.

Figure 24

**Additional Support and Resources**

There are additional WordPress.com support resources online if this guide does not address questions and concerns a user might have. Some resources include:


WordPress.com forum where staff and experienced peers answer user questions posted in the forum: [http://en.forums.wordpress.com/tags/help](http://en.forums.wordpress.com/tags/help)

Several online videos demonstrate how to navigate the many features of WordPress.com. [http://sunyittechnologist.wordpress.com/2013/01/17/creating-a-wordpress-blog/](http://sunyittechnologist.wordpress.com/2013/01/17/creating-a-wordpress-blog/)
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R2aKrmA7mCg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R2aKrmA7mCg)
Appendix C

“Best Practices for Working on Community Projects”

Written by Mary Christopher and Julie DelMedico
BEST PRACTICES FOR WORKING ON COMMUNITY PROJECTS

By Mary Christopher and Julie DelMedico

Summary:
This document was created to outline and identify the best practice or course of action to consider when working with groups on a community project. Articles and professional opinions from the sources used in this document address how to handle meetings, set priorities, present options, compromise on different issues and devise effective marketing and social media campaigns.

Two areas of community projects are addressed: projects that are business structured and require general planning and projects that include cross-cultural considerations for working with diverse groups.

Language barriers and cultural differences must also be taken into account when working with cross-cultural groups. We found that as a group we needed to demonstrate intercultural communication competencies in order to accommodate the needs of a community that is still grappling with how to adjust in their new environment. Some of intercultural communication competencies we exercised were: effectiveness, changing perspectives, empathy, open-mindedness, communication ability, tolerance, sensitivity and flexibility (Penbek, Yurdakul and Cerit, 2009).

It is important to note that all projects are different and while this document offers solid suggestions that have generated proven results, those suggestions may not work for every community project. Sometimes the advice of others can be a starting point for someone else, who then creates (from experience or through trial and error) their own system and process to accomplish a project successfully.

Introduction:
Issues and topics covered in this paper were addressed by SUNYIT graduate students, who worked with the Association of Hindu Society of Utica, New York, and make good business practices for anyone planning and strategizing a project. Mary Christopher, Julie DelMedico and Lee Crisman worked with Bhutanese-Nepali refugees to design the website, develop content and create a marketing campaign to help the Hindu Society gain attention. While assessing and compiling information for this Best Practices document, we often asked, “What was the best way we provided services for this project?” and then asked others in similar situations and researched similar projects.
Findings and Best Practices to consider when working on community projects:

1.) Organize tasks and delegate responsibilities to the appropriate parties

One of the first steps to take that almost always ensures project organization early on is splitting up work based on who is experienced in certain backgrounds or who has an interest in specific topics (Reilly 2013). A painter would not want to do plumbing work so “it won’t be effective – or make for a happy team member – if a technical person is put out on display to do marketing or for an illustrator to generate code for a website” (DeLore 2013). Traci DeLore is a media and public relations strategist who recently worked on planning and promoting a Hurricane Sandy Relief charity event last fall in Albany. It involved working with several local agencies, businesses and families to get the job done. According to DeLore, if she hadn’t tasked her team correctly the project probably would not have run as smoothly, which then would have created more stress and work for others involved.

Katie Reilly, a marketing professional and SUNYIT graduate student who worked on two significant community projects: Refugees Starting Over in Utica and created a website for a Buddhist temple in Utica, suggested using project management tools, computer applications designed for managing projects and can include task, team and goal-management features some even offer time tracking and invoicing. Reilly recommended Google Docs/Google Drive because it allows users to create and edit documents while collaborating in real-time with other users. Having a shared workspace for a team creates a home base so sharing and updating can be easily accessed.

As a group working on the Hindu Society project, we used Dropbox and Google+ as our collaborative spaces. We also shared documents back and forth using email and would “meet” weekly via Google+ to check-in with each other, plan, ask questions, etc. Work was assigned based on our professional backgrounds, but we all helped each other with different aspects of the project when needed.

2.) Meetings should be flexible so the client feels comfortable with the location and setting and visualizations should be presented

Meeting with a client is a two-fold process because there are priorities and needs of the client and priorities and needs of the professionals performing the job for them. Meetings (in most cases) should always revolve around the client and make them feel more at ease. If a situation occurs where the client needs to brought somewhere outside of their own surroundings or choice of location, then transportation should be offered or arranged in order to get them there. Meetings or gatherings that are community-based often require a more personalized touch because “you are dealing with real sometimes grassroots people, not corporate CEOs” (DeLore 2013).

Information presented at meetings should be clear and as visual as possible. Prototypes, maps, diagrams, slide presentations and short videos are all good examples of visualizations someone could use to depict what is being proposed or conceptualized (Abudi 2010). “This allows question asking, clarification and overall better understanding
for everyone involved in the project in the event something needs to be enhanced or edited” (Abudi 2010).

Since our clients were resettled refugees still becoming familiar with the area, we met at the primary client’s home. Once we met the client and his friends at Panera Bread in New Hartford and they were very out of their element. From that point on whenever we met it was on his terms in his environment.

3.) Set priorities and needs

It is important to do a needs assessment to “design an effective program, product or service that addresses a group’s needs and wants” (Redish, 2007). A needs assessment sets the stage for the project and allows the organization process to start because ideas, goals, priorities and needs are made clear. Reilly said it is important to know what a client absolutely will not budge on and what you have to work with right from the project’s infancy.

Principles and goals outlined by a client generally align with their overall business model and industry ideals (Gerson 2007). What someone wants or does not want in a project can give a lot of insight on client/company culture and overall visions and ideals.

Other ways to ensure that client’s needs are adequately being taken care of is establishing communication links and providing contact information for the person designated to each task. Open communication and dialog -- especially in community projects -- is key in building trust and establishing good business relationships (Gerson 2007).

Prior to meeting our client about this website project, a WebSphere analysis was done on similar not-for-profit websites. By conducting the WebSphere it allowed us to present the client with a “menu” of options. We approached the client with a “less is more” method because of the knowledge gap in web development and design. By giving options we were able to establish the client’s needs and wants without opening the floodgates with all of the options out there.

4.) Compromise is essential

Almost inevitably compromises will have to be made somewhere. Both sides might have an issue they are adamant on and an understanding must be reached to achieve a successful outcome.

A professional looks at a project much more critically and based on good business practices that are related to their profession. The client usually is concerned with image and the message it will send to customers, followers, etc. When a decision conflict comes up more often than not the client has the upper hand, unless there is a truly unethical issue the professional cannot bend from (DeLore 2013).

“Ultimately, it’s (the client’s) image and message that they must maintain. If they know the draws their following then their wishes should be honored” (DeLore 2013).

When working with the Cambodian group on their temple website, Reilly and her team members swayed the group from using a graphic they did not feel was a good choice for the site. It was replaced with something that everyone was happy with, but then another
option issue arose that she was forced to compromise with in order to be balanced (Reilly 2013).

This was a particular challenge in some regards because of cultural differences. For example, the project’s web developer, Lee Crisman, felt pretty strongly about using a paid site for web development but the clients had a very limited budget and we needed to compromise on the quality and options allowed on the site to keep costs down.

Similarly, as a group of English speaking Americans, we all had a slight issue with the name - the Association of Hindu Society of Utica, New York. We collectively suggested the Hindu Association of Utica, New York. The clients, however, would not bend and therefore it was our responsibility to compromise in order to maintain the client’s wants, needs and mission.

5.) Present options with ample information on differentiating features, costs and knowledge requirements

Knowing the budget you have to work with sets the course for what projects will entail. Different services may provide different features that affect the price. When cost is a factor for your client, have all options clearly labeled so different features are outlined. If training or specialized knowledge is needed, then point that out as well so the client is aware.

Working in public relations for over two decades has provided DeLore the chance to work with a plethora of clients that range from small community projects to larger corporate accounts. She said one rule that applies to any client is a vital one: do not present too many options because it creates confusion.

Being selective with what is on the table to work with is one way to alleviate confusion. Reilly said when her group was working on the temple website they did not provide options for layouts but did modify designs based on specific requests such as integrating cultural elements.

According to Rivera (2011), too many choices can:

- Paralyze your customers and prevent them from choosing anything.
- Indefinitely lengthen the decision-making process and cost you time and money.
- Confuse your customer and send them off to do a lot of research, price shopping and service comparisons, perhaps driving them to a competitor.
- Show your lack of confidence in a solution by forcing the customer to decide.
- Foster a sense of regret and uncertainty as your customers consider whether they’ve made the right decision.
- Provoke a sense of dissatisfaction because it creates the illusion of an unobtainable perfect combination of options.
- Create the unrealistic expectation that a “perfect” solution actually exists, if only the proper combination of options could be discerned.

Again, by conducting the WebSphere and providing a list of applicable web options and characteristics, we provided the client with features that are currently working for some
not-for-profits. From this list, the client then customized his site on what he believed would be most beneficial for his individual needs.

6.) Provide training or supplemental materials to support client learning

When additional support is needed – especially with technology related projects or products– providing supplemental materials that help train or prepare a client can be helpful. After working with Cambodian refugees on developing a website for their temple, Reilly wrote a step-by-step guide for maintaining the website through WordPress and then met with the group in-person to review.

At the conclusion of our work with the client we provided him with a step-by-step instruction guide on how to update the blog and website. A meeting has also been scheduled with a member of our team so the first time he navigates the site he will not be on his own.

7.) Working with different cultures requires extra handling and more one-on-one connections

Reilly and DeLore shared similar advice to think about when working with diverse cultures. Demonstrating sensitivity is imperative to gain trust and bridging a gap between ethnic and religious differences. “In working with diverse groups, you have to be careful not to offend or misinterpret what a person means” (Reilly 2013). When she met with Cambodian refugees, it was often on weekday mornings to accommodate their schedule and everyone sat on the temple floor per their culture.

According to Hernandez, Brown and Tien (2007) consider these actions when working with immigrant or refugee groups:

- Coordinate with other agencies that provide services to diverse and immigrant or refugee communities to get better insight on how a group might like to handled, how business is usually done and if specific modifications should be made based on cultural or religious differences.
- Meetings may need to be more neighborhood based. Start with casual meetings to establish trust.
- “Breaking bread” together by providing food or snacks at meetings often helps warm the atmosphere and foster bonding.
- Provide childcare if necessary.
- Hire or develop a system for translation services.

The group attended several cultural events in order to truly get to know the culture we were working with. Also, we met with the client on multiple occasions and did not move forward until we had his approval.
8.) Know your audience

It is important to know the community you are investing in. Some important things to know include the how the community prefers to consume their information, how they want to participate and the main purpose of your outreach (Hibbets, 2010). Also, by knowing your audience you can understand your purpose and what your message will mean to them (Calder and Malthouse, 2006).

In terms of marketing be sure you ask specific questions that would be relative to your community group. Provide value to your message by making it relative to your audience and their needs. Don’t spend or exhaust your energies on topics and methods that won’t be useful to your specific community (Hibbets, 2010).

In addition to attending cultural events, we spent one-on-one time with our client in his own environment where he was comfortable. It is common in Nepali culture to share meals and our group was always fed whenever we visited his home. We also gave a lot of consideration to our client’s voice – even if it went against our better personal judgment. It is by compromise and learning who your client is and who they serve that allows an effective product to be developed.

9.) Keep it simple

Not only should your message be simple and easily understandable but your marketing strategy should be relatively straightforward in order to scale it up if need be. When dealing with community projects you may encounter a variety of people and you want your idea and strategy to encompass everyone (Wilson, 2005).

It’s always a good idea to brand your idea. By branding your group, purpose, and/or mission you gain connectivity between marketing sources (Calder and Malthouse, 2006). Branding allows for a way to focus the audience back to your main idea – especially when you grow your campaign.

We developed the website and its marketing campaign so that the transfer from us to the client was easy. Traditional and viral forms of marketing were created because of the difference in age and ability of our audience.

10.) Be patient

Although they say news travels fast, people within communities are busy with other aspects of their lives. Community involvement takes time. Be sure that your message is not time sensitive. Day by day, person-by-person, your network will continue to grow (Hibbets, 2010).

Network growth and popularity comes with marketing, time and a commitment to your community outreach program. Also, keep in mind community size when assessing web traffic. If the community needs the information you are spreading it will happen – time may just factor in.
Over the course of this project, we were fruitful in the audience span that we reached but it’s not always that simple. We created a package plan that can continue over time with very little effort. Our marketing – both viral and traditional – will be able to reach an audience far after our work as a group of SUNYIT students is done.

11.) *Don’t reinvent the wheel*

Utilize pre-existing resources to get your message across. There is nothing wrong with piggybacking your ideas with others that are similar. Use existing organizations as a platform to advertise your message. For instance, if there is a venue that promotes a similar message or attracts high traffic from your community, have information available for them to pick up and read more about.

Collaboration and creating partnerships with other community groups provides a catalyst for advertisement. Community alliances benefit individual groups as well as the community at large (National Harbor Community Outreach Grand Fund, 2007).

Specifically, we dispersed marketing material in specific areas that attract refugees and like cultures. In addition, we piggybacked some of our “news” on the Starting Over Facebook page, which, again, appeals to a similar audience.

12.) *Be diverse*

While it is important to know how your community prefers to receive its information it is also important to be diverse with your delivery. Having a multi-media approach to reaching your community will help reach a variety of audiences – even if a preferred method is stated. For instance, posters and flyers may work best for traditional members of the community but social networking sites like Facebook can capture a wider, perhaps younger demographic. By expanding your efforts you in essence expand your audience and make the material more meaningful (Bolotaeva and Cata, 2011).

Katie Reilly concurs, “I would recommend a comprehensive approach in integrating as many tools as possible, this way you will get the largest reach.”

It is cautioned, however, not to spread yourself too thin. If you don’t have the resources to keep all of your marketing efforts up to date, you may actually deter popularity. Keep your information relative otherwise you compromise the validity and authenticity of your community project (Eppler and Muenzenmayer).

Our approach to this project was very diverse. We created an avenue for traditional Hindus and more modern Hindus’ alike to access information regarding upcoming events. By establishing a paper campaign along with the social media and web development we intended to encompass both the technologically inclined as well as a more traditional audience.
Conclusion

The best practices outlined in this document highlight a suggested course of action when starting to work on a community project. While this compilation of tips has proven effective in the past on very specific projects, it is merely a starting point for your efforts with community outreach. These results have not been formally tested.

That being said, the above tips offer a wealth of information when thinking about or beginning to work with a community group. There are many particular details that need to be addressed when working with community groups – especially in terms of culture. When working with groups of people sensitivity weighs heavier than it might in the corporate world. While all projects are different, keeping in mind the tips highlighted in this document, one would be on the right track for establishing a successful community project.
References


