

WEBSITE REVIEW

WIA is presenting this new section as a way of examining how new media technologies have changed the way non-profit organisations, women's organisations in particular, move their information. With this regular feature, we hope to highlight women's engagement in information work and its importance to the women's movement. By featuring these websites, we hope to encourage the continued improvement of women's information work, particularly in new media. We also hope to contribute to the critique of the "information society" that emphasises merely the commercial and entertaining, and to underscore how information work goes into movement building and in the service of social justice efforts around the world. If you would like your organisation to be featured in this column, please write us at communications@isiswomen.org.

More Could be Better

A review of the Center for Women's Resources Website <<http://www.cwrweb.com>>
by Aileen Familara

The Center for Women's Resource (CWR, Manila, Philippines) describes its goal as "popularising knowledge on women and development through research and publications in order to effect change in the consciousness of the larger public." It is involved in research, publishing monographs and serials on women's issues for grassroots women's organisations, providing training on women's issues, as well as developing modules and courses that can be used by other organisations. The monographs and serials cover topics and titles directly relevant to the constituencies they serve such as "Women as Commodities," "Women Centers," "Women and Environment," "Women in Fisheries," "Women in Fishing," and "Women's Health."

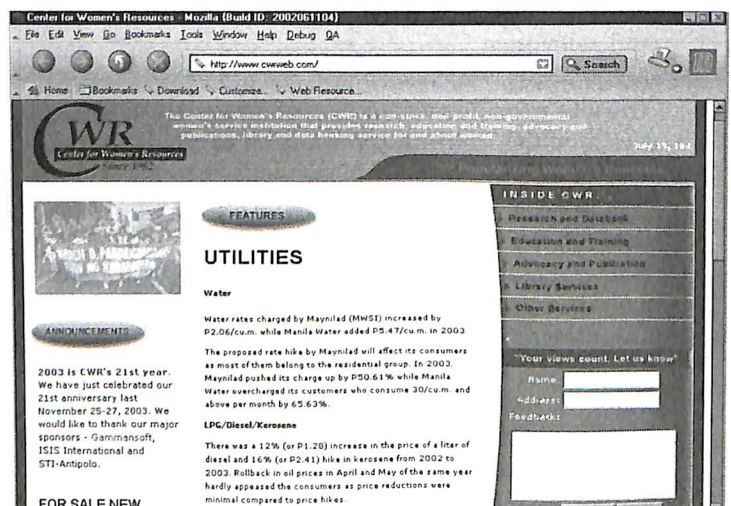
Content

The CWR Website reflects the organisation's advocacy focus well because the bulk of its content is on its publications and resource centre materials. The publications are promoted as print copies only—the contents are not available online—but the site does offer subscription information and titles of previous issues. Meanwhile, the resource collection is listed by call numbers, probably as a reference for those who will actually visit the office and browse the library. The materials are extensive and listed by topic.

The pages are concise and direct, very appropriate for viewing and reading online. There are short

paragraphs on CWR's services and activities such as its Education and Training programmes. However, in some cases, the information is lacking, i.e., no information on how other organisations can avail of the programmes and services is provided.

Unfortunately, the site does not seem to have been updated at the time of the review. On the front page, the visitor will find some facts and figures on prices of utilities that are a year out of date. Newer information can be found on the Press Releases section, which can only be found by clicking on a link not so prominently placed at the bottom of the page. We cannot emphasise enough the importance of updated information on a website. Online viewers rely on the web for updated information, which happens to be among the measures of a site's credibility.



Some references for organisations putting up or maintaining their own sites:

For tips on writing and designing for the Web and some basic pointers from an expert on usability, go to Jakob Nielsen's site at <http://www.useit.com/>

More style tips from the Web Style guide at <http://www.webstyleguide.com/>

Online training on Web design, written specifically for non-profit organisations, at ItrainOnline, <http://www.itrainonline.org/itrainonline/english/design.shtml>

For inquiries into Isis International-Manila Web Hosting and Web Development Training Services, e-mail us at communications@isiswomen.org.

Site Architecture

The page has a relatively simple architecture. Visitors can move easily and frequently between sections, and links to major pages are featured prominently and consistently at the top left. The simple information hierarchy removes the need for elements such as site maps or search functions.

Unusual for this site is that it does not link to any other site. This is a disadvantage since most sites on the Internet rely on linking and being linked to for greater visibility, not just to people looking for information, but also for directories and third-party search engines such as Google or Yahoo. This concern is borne out when one searches for the words "Center for Women's Resources" and cannot find links that go directly to this site.

Use of Technology

The Website is rendered in simple HTML, the basic authoring language of the Internet. This makes it easy to display on most computers, or older browser¹ versions. It also makes the pages easier to load, even on slow connections. Perhaps for aesthetic reasons, the Website also uses some elements of Flash² animation, such as buttons and banners. The animations are done tastefully and do not distract from the main contents. Flash animations have proliferated on the Web because

this is an effective way of creating multimedia. However, it tends to be overused in other websites, and forces viewers to keep updating their browsers unnecessarily. If your browser is not Flash-enabled, you can still view the CWR site since the bulk of the important content can still be seen without Flash, and one can still move through the site using the links.

Another simple use of Web technologies is the Java³ script that appears at the top of each page. This is just a small programming instruction that tells each page to display the current date. Similar to Flash elements, Javascript works with browsers, and overuse could be a burden to site visitors. In the CWR site's case, the Javascript is a minor element and will not be missed even if it doesn't run at all. One more use of Java is the images that display in slow animation at the top left of the home page. On a browser that does not support Java, only one image will be displayed, which means the page retains its layout without losing much in terms of design.

Other elements

It is always important for site owners to solicit feedback on their site. The CWR site does this through a prominent feedback form at the side of the home page. However, this feedback form is only visible from the home page, and cannot be accessed from any other page. It might be a good idea to add a link on every page to a separate feedback page. Similarly, contact details such as addresses, telephone numbers and email are available only from the home page.

All in all, the CWR Website does a good job of putting out its most relevant information on its site. As any site developer knows, a site must have a goal before it is even built. One can easily see that this site's goal is to highlight and promote its publications and resources, and in this it succeeds. If CWR can continue to keep updating the site, it will become more useful to its audience and work as well as their publications in other media formats. ↷

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Footnotes:

¹ Browsers refer to the programmes used for opening and reading webpages. These include the popular Internet Explorer, Netscape Navigator, and open source browsers such as Opera and Mozilla