Client Statement

Introduction

London South Bank University (LSBU) has been providing professional opportunities for young people for well over a century.

It was established in 1892 as the Borough Polytechnic Institute, offering young men and women courses in industrial and trade skills.

It has evolved in recent times into one of the UK's leading modern universities - known for its professional links and graduate salaries - and aims to become London's top modern University by 2020.

Issue

With nearly 18,000 students and 1,700 staff, LSBU has naturally developed its communications to reflect it's growing size, stature and importance. The University's digital team has been working hard over recent years to transform their web presence to an enterprise level site that meets stringent compliance and governance policies.

Joe Hoyle of LSBU is only too aware of the pressures required to manage an ever growing website with a limited team.

He said: "We are always on the lookout for tools which improve governance and make the task of governance and quality assurance that much easier. Without the right tools, methods and processes, a large scale website can unravel rapidly."

He added: "To this affect, we set out to audit our site, catalogue any issues and define priority fixes. Why? To improve compliance with coding standards, device and browser compatibility, site performance, search engine optimisation, usability and accessibility.

Our site was only a couple of years old, but we were beginning to notice an increase in issues. We wanted to undertake a thorough clean-up and future proof our code."

Following a huge leap in rankings on the Sitemorse Universities Index, moving from 179th place to 10th in terms of function and compliance, the dedicated LSBU Digital Team were keen to further advance their standing and look at where they could specifically improve across HTML and accessibility.

Having tried other reporting including Siteimprove and some free tools, LSBU wanted a more comprehensive view and approached Sitemorse for a solution.

Service & Benefits of using Sitemorse

To pinpoint where specific issues lay, LSBU first implemented a very targeted check on key pages from their Analytics, the top 20 most frequently viewed pages. This type of staged deployment is favoured by Sitemorse, (Smart Content) assessing first of all what corrections will have the biggest impact to visitors, before looking at the rest of the lesser viewed pages / content.

The level of detail reported by Sitemorse astounded the digital team as for quite some time they were unaware of many of the issues that were highlighted. What they discovered was that key broken links were being missed due to simply not knowing they were there.

'How did you find these issues' was Joe Hoyle's first question to Sitemorse. By starting from the clients' front-page, for example, Sitemorse 'spiders' a website, following the user's clickable links and assessing each page found. This way, an automated examination of the top pages is carried out first - assessing for accessibility, HTML code quality, broken links, SEO and metadata, performance and spelling. The client is provided with ongoing intuitive reports of any issues found and where to locate them and a list of priorities to help them efficiently manage change to their website.

From here, smaller weekly tests and a full monthly base line was set up to continually assess content, as well as online workshops to provide the best experience possible for Joe and his team to understand what they had to fix to improve.

It became evident from the Universities INDEX results that LSBU wanted to be even more thorough in fixing issues on their website and gain a higher ranking.

As Joe Hoyle takes up the story, "Despite our fondness for other products like Siteimprove, we wanted to know why we were getting low scores on the Sitemorse ranking for some QA criteria, so we arranged to trial Sitemorse to see if we could get a deeper insight into our governance."

Following the trial, they were pleasantly surprised by what Sitemorse discovered, as Joe Hoyle explains:

"We had been using Siteimprove for over a year, it was a great product.The interface is very user-friendly and we have always been happy with its capability. Overall, the capabilities of Sitemorse are broader in scope and the QA analysis is deeper. There is a lot of crossover between the product feature sets, and a few differences. In summary, Siteimprove is easier to use – it has a nice interface that is easily navigable and intuitive. You have to invest more time in getting familiar with Sitemorse and a bit of technical knowledge helps, but the rewards are greater. Because Sitemorse analysis goes deeper, it reveals issues not found by other products and sometimes a bit of technical knowhow helps in defining exactly what is causing an issue."

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How has Sitemorse fitted in and helped LSBU further improve?

With a small digital team at their disposal and limited resources to manage their highly complex, enterprise level website, they were asked how they saw Sitemorse fitting in with their priorities?

Joe Hoyle stated: "Sitemorse has proved to be key in helping us achieve the goals we set ourselves.

Cleaning our site of any issues related to coding, compatibility, performance, SEO, usability and accessibility and ranking highly in the Sitemorse index was the first step.

The next stage is to set up processes and routines that ensure we maintain high quality assurance standards. We are now working on weaving Sitemorse into our workflow and approval processes for content creation and development, and the Web Team use it to audit the site weekly."

What does LSBU consider to be Sitemorse's best feature?

"Compared with other products, it is its level of rigour! The criteria for Sitemorse assessment is broad in scope and the analysis is deep. Sitemorse found issues in sections of our site we didn't even know were exposed to external traffic," said Joe Hoyle.

"Additionally, we've found the Sitemorse Snapshot feature to be extremely useful as part of editorial workflow and access to an immediate, comprehensive report on any webpage has proven instrumental in confidently assessing the quality of new and refreshed pages,", he added.

What does LSBU want to achieve going forward?

As Joe Hoyle explains, University websites tend to be large in scale and highly complex.

He believes that maintaining any kind of quality assurance across thousands of pages that are updated by an extensive array of contributors can be a nightmare. Throw into the mix multiple integrations with internal and external systems, which are more often than not poorly coded, and the task becomes almost impossible.

He said: "Take a look at the Sitemorse ranking scores of any sector...retail, HE, whatever…and you'll notice that web managers find it really hard to score highly, particularly if they manage a large scale site. We knew that improving digital governance was going to be hard, but we kept the faith, put our heads down and used Sitemorse to help us push through our obsessive approach to web standards."

Result

Lawrence Shaw, CEO of Sitemorse notes:

"Siteimprove is a useful starting point for any organisation to be able to understand the basics. But often we find clients grow out of Siteimprove, probably the most common upgrade being Sitemorse. One of the most important comments we receive from clients when they move over to us is 'the level of confidence achieved when using Sitemorse'."

Sitemorse is seen as offering a more thorough service with scalability. A service that grows as they grow.

There is room to improve, and for first time users simplify the Sitemorse interface. This is something we have recognised – our challenge being the sheer breadth of assessment we carry out. Q3 '16 will see the launch of a completely new interface, for the first time allowing us to make full use of SMART Content™

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