Your Attention, Please

The redesigned CACM Web site will deliver exactly what you want.

HOW DO YOU grab and hold someone's attention? Strategies vary. While polite interjections and attentive gazes work in some circles, they are ineffective on the Internet, where Web sites employ a host of in-your-face, lapel-grabbing techniques in the war for eyeballs.

We're in the middle of redesigning *Communications'* Web site. The plan is to make cacm.acm.org as engaging and as awesome as a summer fireworks display, but without the noise. The new site won't be ready for months, but it's safe to say it will include some long-overdue content, notably news, but will mostly muffle the raised-voice techniques commonly shouted by popular sites, and will avoid these tactics spotted in the last 24 hours (where noted). There will be no blood (NYtimes.com), no fires (CNN.com), no violence (washingtonpost.com), and no Paris Hilton (youtube.com). What's left?

Plenty. "Journalism is so much more than blood and sex," says Erica Stone, the fictional professor played by Doris Day in *Teacher's Pet*, a 1958 film that is both old fashioned and surprisingly fresh. "Your friend's kind of reporting went out with Prohibition," Day tells one of her night-school students, a seasoned newspaper editor played by Clark Gable. "TV and radio announce spot news minutes after it happens. Newspapers can't compete in reporting what happened anymore. But they can and should tell the public *why* it happened. Ask anybody. You'll find that today the average man wants to know *why*."

The scene is funny not because Day is perky, smart, and slightly oblivious (which she is), or because Gable is playing his archetype—the smirking, worldly, leering male (which he is). It's because adding "the Internet" to Professor Stone's roster of fast media has her delivering word-for-word the same lecture that newspaper publishers humbled by the Internet are repeating

50 years later. That's less astonishing foresight than an assertion of the on-going need for change amidst increasing competition for readers' attention, whatever the media du jour.

This redesigned edition attests to that need for change; the upcoming Web site will do the same. Both will hold your attention by providing engaging, interesting, and meaningful content. Web inventor Tim Berners-Lee recently told BBC News that the Web is "still in its infancy." Created "by so many people collaborating across the globe," the world has "only started to explore the possibilities of [the Web]." That spirit of openness, collaboration, and creativity informs the redesign of *Communications'* site. It will provide more than what you see in the magazine, and will have you coming back for more.

No change is being made for change's sake. Every addition, every feature, every design decision is being bounced off ACM members to make sure it meets your needs and interests. The site will serve a rich menu of content that's been taste-tested by members through focus groups, one-on-one in-

terviews, and surveys. If this doesn't sound like what the doctor ordered, it's not. It's what you ordered.

"If it has good content, I don't care" if it's in news, blog, or video format, said one surveyed member. "Content trumps all," said another.

The site will present traditional *Communications* fare plus other computing stories. Development is still in flux, but the site is likely to publish opinion and commentary from readers and invited experts to explain the importance or significance of a work. "Some editorial guidance would be most useful to help readers understand the relevance of and keep updated on the newest research," one member said. "Reader discussion and commentary [are important]," another said, "because in the computer world, there is so much to be talked about. People must bounce ideas off of one another in order to get some kind of understanding and general consensus on anything which has any importance." Roger that.

Advertising is also on the menu. The vast majority of members, 93%, are open to or unruffled by ads on the site. That's an endorsement of ACM's strategy to find revenue to expand the range of services available to members and non-members alike. "Google makes a lot of money out of (relevant) ads," one member said. "They are ok for me. You should consider generating revenue from ads."

Nothing will get onto the site before it gets a thumbs up from members. To that end, ACM is still asking for input and will continue to do so until the site launches, probably in early 2009. It's all being done with an eye on holding your attention by delivering what you want. If you have opinions about the redesign that you'd like to share, go to www.acm.org/publications/cacm/acm-member-feedback.

Thanks for your attention.

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