

Improving the effectiveness of your online annual report.

At its core, the web is a user-centric medium. Today's sophisticated Internet users want a personalized, interactive and easy-to-use online experience. Unfortunately, many companies overlook these critical needs when designing their online annual reports, and the end result is unnecessarily limited and inherently flawed.

The most successful online annual reports take advantage of the web to create an engaging user experience. It is no longer enough to post a modified version of the printed book on your website. You need to treat the online version as a separate entity with unique strategy, content and design requirements, optimized for the medium.

This document will outline how to improve the effectiveness of your online annual report and discuss key considerations before the design process begins.

THE ADVANTAGES OF AN ONLINE ANNUAL REPORT

The online environment brings the printed report to life by combining copy, imagery, video, sound and two-way interaction in one location. It provides a unique opportunity for you to tell your company's story and for a user to understand and interact with that story.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

The most important thing to remember is that the widest possible audience must be able to access an online annual report quickly and easily. This need impacts both design and functionality:

- Navigation must be clear, easy to use and detailed.
- Design must enhance functionality and usability by doing what users want in the ways that they prefer.

- Design must accommodate different connection speeds, screen resolutions and browsers.
- Layout, color palette (particularly background colors), graphics and typography must be web-friendly.
- Technology should not be used just for technology's sake. Only use it when it can promote greater understanding and enrich the user experience in a meaningful way.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR INCREASED FUNCTIONALITY AND USABILITY

After meeting the basic requirements, look for opportunities to leverage the power of the web to tell your story in a richer, more engaging way. Below are potential enhancements you can add to the typical online annual report:

- Include a video introduction from a top executive.
- Offer a podcast of the Chairman's letter.
- Ensure all charts and graphs are interactive in some way to promote greater understanding.
- Recognize that the web reaches a global audience, and offer the same information in multiple languages.
- Where and when appropriate, include external links to relevant corporate content.

Additionally, ensure that users can navigate the report on their own terms. You can improve online functionality and usability in the following ways:

- Provide robust search functionality within the report so that users can quickly and easily find the exact information they want.
- Offer Excel downloads of all financial information so that users can review and analyze the data offline.

- Allow users the ability to compare the same sections of the report, side-by-side and from year-to-year.
- Offer PDF downloads of each individual section so that users can save the areas of the report most interesting to them for later use.
- Ensure that each HTML page can also be printed in a printer-friendly version for those users who do not like to read information on screen.

CONCLUSION

Forward-thinking companies are taking advantage of the interactivity and personalization the web offers and are no longer “force-fitting” their printed annual reports on their websites. By looking at appropriate ways to translate and enhance their annual reports online, companies are able to engage multiple audiences effectively and tell their story in ways that will best resonate.

Baker is a brand
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