

The City of Las Vegas Website: A Rhetorical Analysis

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Executive Summary

I believe a rhetorical analysis of a website should be reported on the basis of finding a website that has never been viewed before. I also believe that being able to surf within a site and have a true reason for doing so aids in reporting how well a website works for an individual. With those concerns in mind, I have chosen to write a detailed analysis on the city of Las Vegas website—a site dedicated to offering information about the city and its departments. I credit my choice for this website on the fact that I have never been to Las Vegas and will be visiting there in late October.

The following report will include an in-depth response to my chosen website's content, organization, visual design, and coding. The report will show that the city of Las Vegas website is user friendly and completely functional. The content is specific to individuals with different needs, which are met through a professionally designed and consistent website.

Introduction

I have organized my report in a way that will allow you, the reader, to follow in the steps I went through during the collection of my data. I will begin my discussion on site layout. I feel this was an important starting point for describing what my first reactions to the site were. I will then discuss information regarding the audience specific to the site, the navigation and writing styles, the coding, and finally the graphics. I will finally close my report with any conclusions I have made about the overall design of the website.

Site Layout

First Things First

My perception of a Las Vegas website is a site with lots of glowing colors and images of dancing women who are on a dazzling, golden stage. This was not the case on the city of Las Vegas's website. In fact, the first image I saw was the title of the content, which read, "The City of Las Vegas." I suspect I noticed this first because the title was in the center of the page and in bold. All main headings throughout the site are formatted in the same manner.

From the title, my eyes lead me back up towards the top of the page, where there is a banner that also includes navigation links to the major site categories. From there my eyes followed in a clockwise manner. [See](#) what your eyes do.

Consistencies

The main consistencies I noticed were the use of colors, the typeface, placement of links and images, and the use of white space. Blue seems to be the dominant color throughout the site. The background color is completely blue, and all links are in blue as well.

The font used throughout the site is Arial, Helvetica, sans-serif, and the font size is different depending on what the text is. For example, the headings are a larger size than the actual content. Specifically, the headings are set to a size four, and the content or text is set to a size two. Other text such as the titles of images is set to a size one. I believe the designer chose Arial, Helvetica, sans-serif font for its legibility. Also, a sans-serif, unlike serif, does not have small projections at the end of each stroke in a letter. The small projections on a serif typeface may cause reading to become more troublesome on the web.

Placements of all major links, not including the navigation links, are aligned on the far left of the pages. The navigation links are shown on every page in the site at the top, and again at the bottom; however, the navigation links at the bottom of the page are a smaller typeface size. Images that are contained within the actual content are aligned either to left or right of the text. Most pages have at least one image aligned to the left or right of the text. The images serve more as colorful spices to the site than as informative images to help the reader understand a concept.

Audience

The Readers

The Las Vegas website is a production by the city and for the city. It serves as an informative site for those interested in the latest news about elected officials, (e.g. the mayor, the council, and the municipal judges), the weather, city meetings and agendas, traffic, and city departments. There is much more that this site offers, and I'll mention this later in the report as we get into the site content.

The readers of this site are more than likely citizens of Las Vegas, city workers, new residents, travelers, city officials, business people looking for a place to develop a new business, teachers, reporters, parents, and filming crews. Figure 1 shows a detailed list of the demographic variables for people who are likely to visit the site.

Age	Between the ages of 18 and up
Education	Some high school to post graduates and doctorates
Economic Status	Poor, middle class, and the wealthy
Race	Hispanics, Caucasians, and African Americans
Personal Interests	News, politics, weather, current issues, and paying city bills
Reading Preferences	Newspapers, informative and entertaining magazines
Political Orientation	Liberal, Democrat, Republican, Independent, None
Other	Unemployed, working class and the working professionals

Figure 1

Reader's Expectations

Readers of the Las Vegas site will have many different expectations, depending on their demographics as well as where they individually stand in society. For example, if a 35-year-old citizen of Las Vegas who wants to pay a parking ticket she received earlier in the day heard she could pay the fine online by going to the city of Las Vegas website, then she is going to expect to be able to find on the site where she can pay for that ticket. Or perhaps, a 26-year-old nonresident seeking for employment in the area remembered his friend telling him that he found

his job on the city of Las Vegas website. He will expect to find somewhere on the site a link to employment opportunities. Suppose a traveler is going to visit Las Vegas and wants to know what there is to do in Las Vegas besides gamble. He will expect to find an entertainment page that will give him that information.

The possibilities are endless, and this site can fulfill a large number of those possibilities.

Navigation and Writing Styles

Navigation Style

This site is one of the easiest sites I've surfed through. The navigation style is organized in a way that the reader is likely to find what she's looking for quickly or even see where she's currently at within the site. Breadcrumbs and opaque links aid in the organization of the site. The breadcrumbs are located at the top, left part of the page. They are useful for readers who go deep into a specific category and then want to go back where they started. The links on the site can be easily identified. As mentioned earlier, all links are blue. They are also underlined and placed in the same place on every page. Figure 2 shows how the breadcrumbs are arranged as well as the blue and underlined link formatting. Figure 3 shows the link placement.



Figure 2

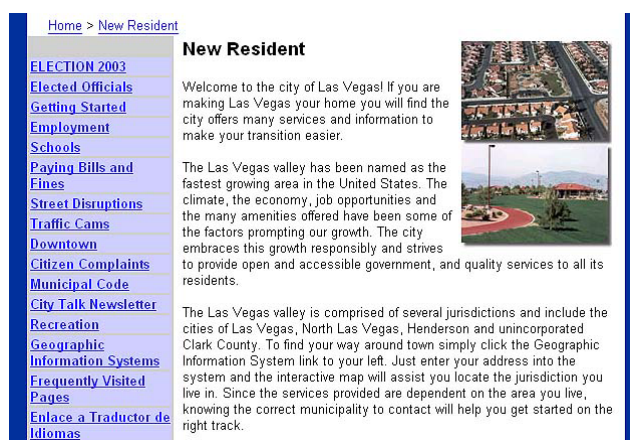


Figure 3

As a test to see how quickly someone else besides me could find their way through the site, I did a small experiment. I asked a 56-year-old man without any previous knowledge of the site and who is a nonresident of Las Vegas to try and find where he might go to pay for a parking ticket. It took him under a minute to find the correct page. I then told him that on the site there

was a traffic cam, which allowed viewers to see what the traffic is like at major intersections in Las Vegas. I asked him to try and find where that may be. It took him two minutes to find the correct page.

The only major page I had a hard time finding was that of web accessibility. The only information I did find, after some time, was on the main page towards the bottom. Actually, it was a link that read, "ADA Compliancy Status." I really just guessed and hoped that the link took me to a page regarding web accessibility; however, it was merely a PDF file that explained what the standards were based on the Rehabilitation Act, Section 508 amended by Congress in 1998. The file also listed the services and features of the website that were not currently compliant with the Rehabilitation Act, Section 508. After all that searching I still was unable to find anywhere on the site where to go for web accessibility for the hearing impaired and the blind.

Writing Style

While reading the content within the Las Vegas website, I noticed the vocabulary being at a mid-level. In other words, a student in the fourth or fifth grade would be able to read the content. As for actually understanding the content, I would suspect that anyone who had at least some high school would be able to easily understand what he was reading.

Sentence structure is not complex; however, the writing style is formal. The formality of the writing is designed to portray a professional setting around the city and its workers. While there is a sense of formal professionalism within the site, there is still a sense of feeling welcome. The first sentence on the main page reads, "Welcome to the city of Las Vegas website!" And the last sentence reads, "The city of Las Vegas website is always open for business, 24 hours a day." Reading those sentences made me feel confident that there was time taken to build this site and furnish it with current information relative to the city of Las Vegas.

The information within the site does not become too deep as far as levels in a website are concerned. At top level, the information is shallow; however, the designer uses links to go deeper within a particular category.

Categories are represented by a navigation menu, which is at the top of every page on the site. This menu can be clearly seen and gives the reader a sense of where to go and find information that is relative to their specific needs.

Coding

Behind the Scenes

This particular part of the data was the most interesting to me simply because I enjoy reading code and figuring out what it essentially does. The major thing I noticed about the code was that it was well organized. The code is mostly written in HTML and the generator tag tells the reader that the site was generated by RedDot 4.5 (SP3). There were several comments in the code to help the reader understand when a Figure or template began and ended. I couldn't see anywhere in the code where CSS was used. I believe Figures and templates were the underlying source for providing consistent layout within the entire site.

Another Piece of Code Understood

There was a specific piece of code that I thought was worthy of noting. From what I could understand by reading the code, the designer took a graphic and used a “map” tag. Apparently this tag helps produce a navigation map on top of the graphic itself. Figure 4 shows what the code looks like. I have also included the graphic used in the code.

```

<map name="MainNav">
  <area shape="rect" coords="1,2,59,21" href="/index.html" alt="Home">
  <area shape="rect" coords="66,4,124,23" href="/visitor/default.htm" alt="Visitor">
  <area shape="rect" coords="128,4,186,23" href="/citizen/default.htm" alt="Citizen">
  <area shape="rect" coords="193,4,309,23" href="/new_resident/default.htm" alt="New
Resident">
  <area shape="rect" coords="318,4,441,23" href="/doing_business/default.htm" alt="Doing
Business">
  <area shape="rect" coords="449,4,517,23" href="/search/default.htm" alt="Search">
  <area shape="rect" coords="521,4,590,23" href="/contact/default.htm" alt="Contact">
</map>
```

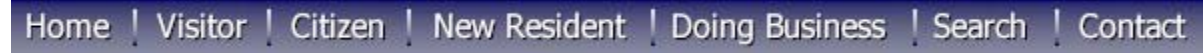


Figure 4

Graphics

Implementation of Images

I really like this particular site because the images are not extremely fancy, yet fancy enough to make the site look nice and give it more character. For instance, take a look at the images below, which can be found on the [“New Resident”](#) category within the site:



The images are created in a simplistic manner, probably downsized from their original size and given a small drop shadow effect to them. The images were probably manipulated in Adobe Photoshop or Fireworks. I am assuming that most of the images such as the ones above were scanned in first rather than taken by a digital camera. The graphics, such as the navigation menu, were probably created in a program like

Fireworks. There are no traces on the site or in the code where the designer gives credit to sites from which the images and graphics may have been borrowed. Perhaps the images and graphics are city property.

Conclusion

The Las Vegas site is overall, a well designed site. Its organization is well structured, and it's extremely easy to navigate around the site. There were a few aspects about the site that I thought stood out from the rest of the websites I have visited before. For example, if I clicked on a link that happened to take me to a totally different website, a new page would prompt me and let me know that I was transferring outside the city of Las Vegas website. I don't know how many times I've clicked on a link and have been transferred to a completely new site and didn't know I had even changed sites.

Another aspect that stood out was the live support availability. Live support is just a few clicks away from the main page. It can be found by going to the search category page and clicking on the icon that says, "Live Support." The live support, or online help desk was created to allow users to ask a member of the city staff questions during regular business hours and get a live response. The online help desk helps make the city of Las Vegas website user friendly and even somewhat of a dynamic website. Figure 5 shows what the "Live Support" icon looks like.



Figure 5

The other aspects I liked were the FAQs page, the search page, and the traffic cam page, which allows users to view live traffic at different intersections in Las Vegas.

The city of Las Vegas website was a fun site to analyze. I was lucky enough to come across a well thought out web design, which included some of the most important ingredients for making a website work with its readers. I will definitely use the site in the future as a reference for my own site.