The MIT community is made up of independent, active, and busy students and researchers with a hands-on mode of learning. They require a wealth of information to do their work effectively, and they expect content that is easy to discover, access, and use. It is important that MIT Libraries staff’s expertise in finding and using information resources from the Libraries and beyond is delivered in a scalable method, and that it is available to students and researchers at their point of need. Self-help documentation serves as a critical vehicle to deliver this type of support and training, and such tools are also a good match for the MIT community's learning style. To provide our users with the most effective support and training, the Libraries should apply processes that maximize the currency, accuracy, usability, and utility of our self-help tools. To this end, the Self-Help Documentation Task Group was charged to determine the MIT Libraries’ strategy for promoting accurate and current self-help documentation on the Web. In this report, we will present some background about current content responsibilities and recommendations for future content management.

For the purposes of this report, self-help documentation is defined as content produced by the library that provides users with direct guidance to help them carry out scholarly work (such as research and publication) or manage information on their own. This guidance includes suggesting, describing, and explaining information resources and tools; providing direction or advice about the effective use of information resources and tools; describing library services; and offering instructions about following library procedures.

Recommendations

Acknowledging that each department’s ability to devote effort to improve the content management of the Libraries’ self-help documentation will be shaped by its capacity and expertise, we make the following recommendations:

- Each department should establish a content management plan that will ensure continued success in maintaining and updating self-help documentation.
- The management plan should include a Content Review Checklist [see p. 3].
- Individual and/or group owners for each self-help document should be determined.
- UIG will:
  - Recommend the most appropriate content management system to departments.
  - Answer questions and offer best practices for web writing, style, and structure.
  - When possible, provide support for transitioning existing content into appropriate content management systems.
- IRS will work with departments to help support efforts across the libraries.
- IRS will be responsible for assessing these recommendations and sharing the results.
Discussion

1. Inventory Summary

We identified the current content landscape by creating an inventory of public-facing web pages that match our definition of self-help documentation. We have also included some pages that are themselves information resources, such as the MIT History site. We have excluded video content because it will be addressed by the Library-created Video Task Group. And we decided not to include the AMPS website, with the exception of the top level categories.

The following types of pages have also not been included:

- Automatically generated content – e.g., Recent Additions to the Collections
- Forms – e.g., Research Consultation Request
- Search tools – e.g., Barton and Vera
- Basic informational pages (quick look ups) – e.g., Library home page, Hours, Staff directory

The inventory is listed in a simple spreadsheet with 6 categories [see attachment – SDTG_Inventory_2012_april16]. We did not list every tab on a LibGuide or every link on a WordPress site or HTML page. We also did not list every course guide listed on the Class guide page.

We included 215 items in the inventory and assigned responsibility across 12 departments [see Table A]. For some pages, the department associated with a page was not obvious, but we made assignments based on an individual owner’s department or based on the subject covered by the documentation [e.g., Information Navigator, Study Spaces]. Pages dealing with content not specific to a subject were assigned to IRS [e.g., Biography]. Because the majority of the self-help documents are LibGuides, we adopted the convention of labeling content contributors “owners” and “co-owners.” We did not attempt to assign individuals where no one had been identified. In some cases, the content of second level pages may not be the responsibility of the owner or department assigned to the top level page [example, About Us].

We categorized each page by the following types [see Table A]:

- LibGuide - easy creation and updating of content.
  - E.g., Aeronautics/Astronautics - http://libguides.mit.edu/aero
- HTML – content that needs infrequent updating and/or includes elements (such as images) not easily handled in LibGuides.
  - E.g., Geographic Information Systems Lab at MIT - http://libraries.mit.edu/gis/
- WordPress – content that includes multiple pages – a mini-site.
  - E.g., Scholarly Publishing at MIT - http://info-libraries.mit.edu/scholarly/mit-open-access/open-access-at-mit/mit-open-access-policy
Table A – Inventory Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>LibGuides</th>
<th>HTML</th>
<th>WordPress</th>
<th>Total Number of Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AMES</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSM</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DO</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IASC</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID&amp;LA</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID&amp;LA/AMES</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID&amp;LA/IT Core</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRS</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LDLC</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RISLT</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCS</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCS/MVP</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UX</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>148</strong></td>
<td><strong>59</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td><strong>215</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Content Management Plan

There is currently no consistent practice to ensure timely creation and updating of the self-help documentation listed in the inventory. Oversight by department, including content management plans, would provide some structure and make the process for updating content easier and faster. We should allow for flexibility in the way each department carries out this oversight, including how to achieve a content management plan.

Departments’ content management plans may include:

- Establishing ways for owners to fold the creation and updating of content into their job roles.
- Establishing ways to systematically include public-facing content as part of departmental discussions.
- Developing standards for presenting similar types of content to effectively match the needs and practices of the department’s user communities.
- Establishing a process to identify content gaps and duplications.
- Publicizing new and revised content and determining when, how and to whom to market.
- Establishing a process to follow the recommended Content Review Checklist (see below).

Each department’s plan should include a Content Review Checklist:

- Has the content been reviewed at least once in the past year?
- Is the content in the optimal content management system?
- Is the content still needed or can it be deleted? If this page didn’t already exist, would someone bother to create it?
• Does the content duplicate content found on other pages?
• Are the links relevant to the content?
• Are appropriate links included to related pages on the Libraries’ or MIT site?
• Do links work and go to the expected page?
• Are brief annotations included where needed?
• Does the content follow web writing guidelines?
• Are there spelling or grammatical errors?
• Can pages be viewed properly in MIT-supported browsers?

A sample plan that can be used as a template for any other department is provided as an appendix.

Each department should designate individuals or groups as owners of the department’s self-help documentation. Having a designated content owner is crucial to achieving content that is relevant, accurate, and timely. It is necessary to have a thorough review of page ownership, as some of the owners listed may not be the most appropriate because of changes in responsibilities since the reorganization.

A centralized set of guidelines is not suggested because the nature of the content and the needs of users vary from department to department. For example, a page that deals with frequently asked questions about library policies might have a different content structure than a page about RefWorks. Some departments could assign one individual as a coordinator to develop standards, oversee publicity, or communicate out to other departments, while others could decide to use content editors who will deal solely with posting the content and not with creating it. Certain subjects with complicated databases could have web pages with sections that display search tips, tutorials, or chat widgets. Other subjects could have annotated lists and Google search boxes.

3. Content Management Systems

Three tools are currently used to create library web pages:

LibGuides

UIG recommends the following criteria for using LibGuides:

• Pages edited by a large group of users.
• Pages with brief content that is mostly served by bulleted lists.
• Pages that don’t require a unique look and feel.
• Pages where authors have limited HTML/CSS expertise.
• Pages that do not extensively use graphics.

LibGuides allow guide authors to easily create meaningful, attractive, and current web content without knowledge of HTML. LibGuides makes it easy to share and borrow good content throughout our system and with other web sites that are part of the LibGuides Community. Another benefit is the easy way LibGuides allows communication with users through features like chat widgets, interactive polls, and user feedback. The ease of getting usage statistics also provides a method to assess our efforts to help users. There were 540,538 guide hits in 2011 on the Libguides listed on the Inventory [see attachment – LibGuides_Hits_2011].
WordPress

WordPress is well-suited for sites that need to stand on their own and need their own unique aesthetic style. However, UIG is currently creating new generic templates that will make WordPress simpler to use for content that does not require a standalone website, and some content currently in LibGuides could move to WordPress if it would be better presented there.

UIG recommends the following criteria for using WordPress:

- Content that requires a unique aesthetic style.
- Content presented as a standalone website.
- Content that requires a higher level of “design” and more extensive use of images than LibGuides can provide (e.g., virtual tours).
- Content that would benefit from having a blog format with posts, and the ability to categorize these posts.

HTML/CSS

27% of the pages listed on the Inventory were created using an HTML editor such as Dreamweaver. UIG recommends the use of HTML only for content that doesn’t need frequent updating by non-UX staff. Since most pages need frequent updating, LibGuides and WordPress are generally better options.

4. Support from IRS

IRS should assist departments in order to help facilitate the implementation of our recommendations. The department’s responsibilities may include:

- Working with departments to develop a plan for handling their self-help documentation and consulting periodically during the initial phase to act as a resource and to review progress on the plans.
- Creating a shared space on the staff web that would include resources such as department plans, content review checklist, inventory, etc.
- Coordinating initial efforts to keep a central inventory up-to-date.

5. Additional Points to Consider

- Departments may wish to set dates to meet the following goals:
  - Clarifying page ownership.
  - Drafting a content management plan.
  - Implementing plans.
- Departments may wish to work with the Assessment Librarian to assess progress during the first year of implementation. Progress could be measured using simple targets such as:
  - Departments develop plans and assign responsibilities for documentation.
  - Departmental documentation is reviewed and updated.
• We suggest UIG run Google Analytics and LibGuides statistical reports monthly during the first year of implementation and post them on an easily accessible platform. Statistics could be used to track hits on class guides, identify lesser used guides, and track usage of links to databases.

• We offer the inventory as a work in progress. Each department could review it to help finalize decisions on departmental ownership and content responsibility. We believe it is a useful document that should have a stable location and format and be updated annually.

• Certain index pages need improvements:  
  Research Guides Index Page – This page includes a list of guides by title and subject categories. Students often have difficulty navigating the page because they don’t know the title of the guide they need so the long alphabetical list might seem distracting. The page is connected to Vera through the title banner and menu choices and these options can be confusing. Perhaps the page could be reworked into a LibGuide or other format that stands on its own (apart from Vera) and would enhance the finding of an important section of our self-help tools.
  
  Class Guides Index Page – Every class guide created during a semester is not listed on this page. Students are often confused about this page if a librarian presents a page in class but the student cannot find it later in the semester. A link to the Information Navigator is included; however, information about reserves and circulation might prove to be more useful.

• It would be helpful if announcements about updates to resources in Vera could include a wider audience, as some page owners are not subject specialists. Content might not be updated if some individuals are out of the loop. We suggest that announcements include lists such as libguides@mit.edu and all-desks@mit.edu.

• Staff training on the most commonly used features of various content management systems has been offered as refreshers and to new hires. Training on web content writing could be offered as well.

• Link-checking plays an important role in the accuracy of web pages. Links can be checked in LibGuides through an embedded tool; however, guides must use a prescribed format. Broken links can also be found with a report produced by UIG. UIG could investigate an automated link checker tool and a process to use the tool to improve web content accuracy.

• Departments, along with IRS, may wish to discuss whether the support provided by IRS during the initials stages should continue over a longer period of time.

SDTG
Michelle Baildon Courtney Crummett Georgiana McReynolds Carol Schweigert
# IRS Content Management Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference Sub-Group</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
<th>Time Frame</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Review and maintain inventory for IRS.</td>
<td>2 meetings/year – Fall and Spring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Determine ownership status of pages assigned to IRS.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Identity content that is outside the scope of IRS and identify possible departmental owners.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Identify content that requires special attention</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRS Members</td>
<td>Review assigned pages and create new pages/content as needed.</td>
<td>1 time/year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Determine level of effort needed to manage assigned pages – eg update vs. redesign vs. delete/consolidate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Follow Content Review Checklist as described in the SDTG report (4/2012) when managing and creating pages.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRS Department</td>
<td>- Discuss and review its documentation (determined by work within the Reference Sub-Group).</td>
<td>2 meetings/year – Fall and Spring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Discuss and develop strategies to improve the quality/usefulness of its documentation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>