November 5, 2015

Request for Information
Princeton University Website Redesign

What Is This Project About?

Princeton University will design and launch a new website in 2016. This site will replace the one now at princeton.edu, and will serve as the University’s digital public face and front door. This project is critical to the University’s reputation as a world-class research and teaching institution.

Why This RFI?

This RFI is the first step in our process of choosing a vendor to help us design the new website. We anticipate a large number of vendors will compete for this project. We wish to respect the efforts of competing vendors and create a manageable evaluation process for us.

To that end, the process begins with this RFI. We will evaluate responses and invite what we think are the best qualified vendors to submit a proposal. We will be in close contact with the qualified vendors ahead of the proposal due date so they are familiar with our requirements.

What We’re Looking for in a Response

Please mind these ground rules:

• We’re looking for straight talk about your approach based on your experience. We’re not looking for strategies, paradigms and the like.
• Use examples from your company’s recent projects and experience.
• We’re not looking for long answers (shorter is better unless a long answer is the only way to address the question). We’re not looking for a stylized report (we prefer a business letter format). Please send us just your answers to these questions.
• Our team probably looks a lot like your team, so speak to us as colleagues.
• If we make a statement or suggest an idea that you don’t agree with, tell us and tell us why.
• If a question doesn’t make sense, ask us to clarify. We will post the clarification to our blog at re.princeton.edu if we weren’t clear.
• Include a single contact person with their email address and phone number in your response.
• This process is open and competitive. There is no incumbent and no internal group is pursuing this project.
Contact and Project Updates

Address your questions and response to:

Christian Knoebel
Digital Manager, Princeton University Office of Communications
cknoebel@princeton.edu

We'll post updates and clarifications to our project blog at re.princeton.edu.

Deadline

Please email your response by 12:00 p.m. Eastern time on November 23, 2015. We will confirm your submission by email.

Questions

Please respond to these 13 questions about your experience with our industry, technology, design and project management.

Our Industry

1. Have you been engaged with clients in higher education in the last two years? If yes, discuss the projects you worked on.
2. Higher education’s goals are not profit driven, standard metrics don’t always drive decisions, and its products include services that are intangible. For-profit companies are in many ways the opposite: they are profit-driven, judged through metrics and provide products and services that solve discrete problems. Have you applied your design, UX, development or other experience working with for-profit clients to your higher education projects? If yes, discuss what you did.

Technology

3. We will develop this project in Drupal. Have you done any project work in Drupal in the last year? If yes, discuss the projects you worked on.
4. When it comes to developing in a framework or platform, some people consider themselves platform agnostic, others prefer a specific technology. What do you consider yourselves and why?
5. No technology, however highly regarded, comes without quirks and attributes that drive developers, designers and site managers crazy. When it comes to Drupal, what are your top dislikes (in other words, what do you hate about Drupal that you wish you could change)?
6. Drupal’s modularity makes feature development easy. If there’s a problem “there’s a module for that.” Sometimes more than one competing module can solve a problem, and sometimes a custom module can solve it. What’s your philosophy for choosing and using modules on a Drupal-based site?

Design

7. What one website have you produced in the last year that best represents your design approach and why?
8. One current web design trend emphasizes photography, illustrations and icons over text to drive the user experience. Uber.com is an example. The other end is an approach that emphasizes text over images, though it will contain images. An example is whitehouse.gov. Where do you place yourself on this continuum?

9. User-centric design aims to create an experience for the people who use the site, not the company’s org chart. However, a university department or office’s identity may come from its organizational chart because the group can have many disparate responsibilities or be an association of like-minded people without a clear brand. How would you resolve these two opposing demands on information architecture? Would you create a user-centric IA only and ignore the inertia of the org chart, would you focus more on the org chart, or would you approach it some other way?

**Project Management**

10. Describe the ideal client and where most clients fall short of the ideal.

11. What is your design and development methodology?

12. Some projects come with many stakeholders who hold different views and have different goals. Sometimes those goals are at odds with each other and the site’s home page is the battleground. Have you experienced this? If you have, how did you resolve the issues? (An example with a higher-education client helps us, but is not required.)

13. Have you ever had a web project go off the rails? If so, what went wrong and how have you adapted to avoid similar problems in the future?