

The STEM-VRSE

Website



**Emphasizing the Integration of
Information, Interest, and Use**

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The STEM-VRSE Website: Emphasizing Integration of Information, Interest, and Use

Developing an informative, interesting, and useful website characterizes a significant first step for any organization in the 21st century, especially those organizations or websites combining Research, Virtual Reality (VR), and Education (see Figure 1). Since the turn of the century, an increasing number of organizations use websites to deliver organizational updates, provide personal stories, and highlight the role of organization members. At STEM-VRSE, we believe integration, interest, and use of virtual reality in websites designed to inform, draw interest, and serve as a utility for people in research allows those individuals to increase their knowledge about the world. In addition, we believe these individuals are more likely to take an active role in the virtual world of the 21st century. In this white paper, we discuss why integration of information, interest, and use on nonprofit organization websites combining Research, VR, and Education provide opportunities for organizational success.

STEM-VRSE exists as a nonprofit organization to support the incorporation of VR with research in the Life, Physical, and Social sciences. This incorporation generally takes place in both formal and informal learning environments. With a strong connection to technology, stakeholders at STEM-VRSE focused their attention on the development of a website to engage visitors with interests in VR, research, or education and highlight the efforts of researchers, regardless of their area of research (see Figure 2). To meet these two development goals, stakeholders chose to work with both groups in creating the first STEM-VRSE website. At least one researcher from each of the three sciences participated in the review of literature. In addition, visitors were taken from one of the

largest public research universities in the United States. This paper provides discussion on what we learned about the development of the STEM-VRSE website from these two groups; specifically, the discussion centers on the role of three concepts (i.e., information, interest, and use) on the development of the website.

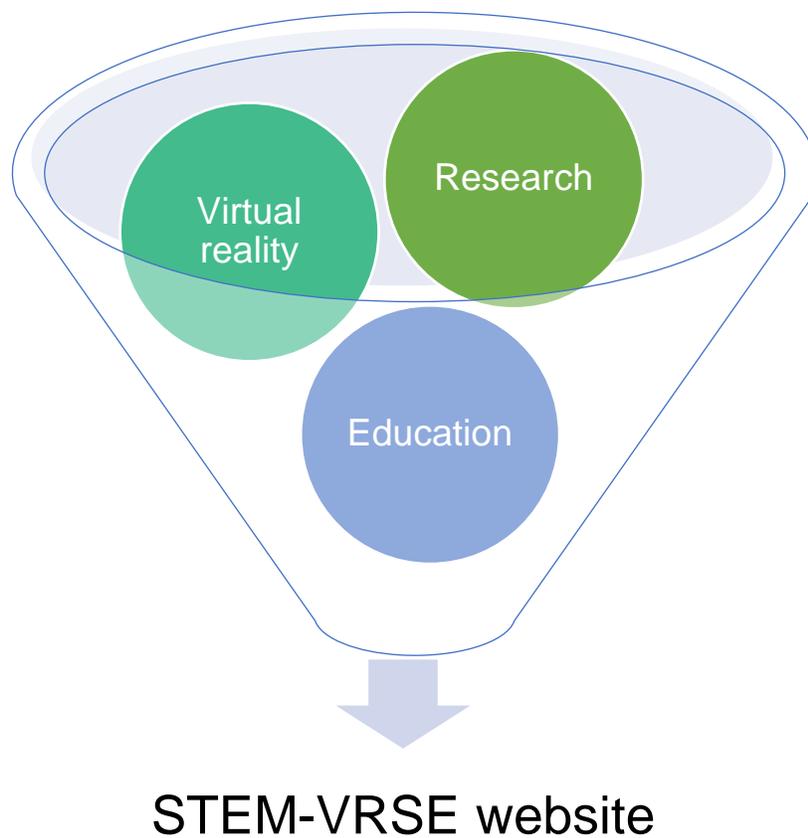


Figure 1. Illustration of three components central to 21st century websites.

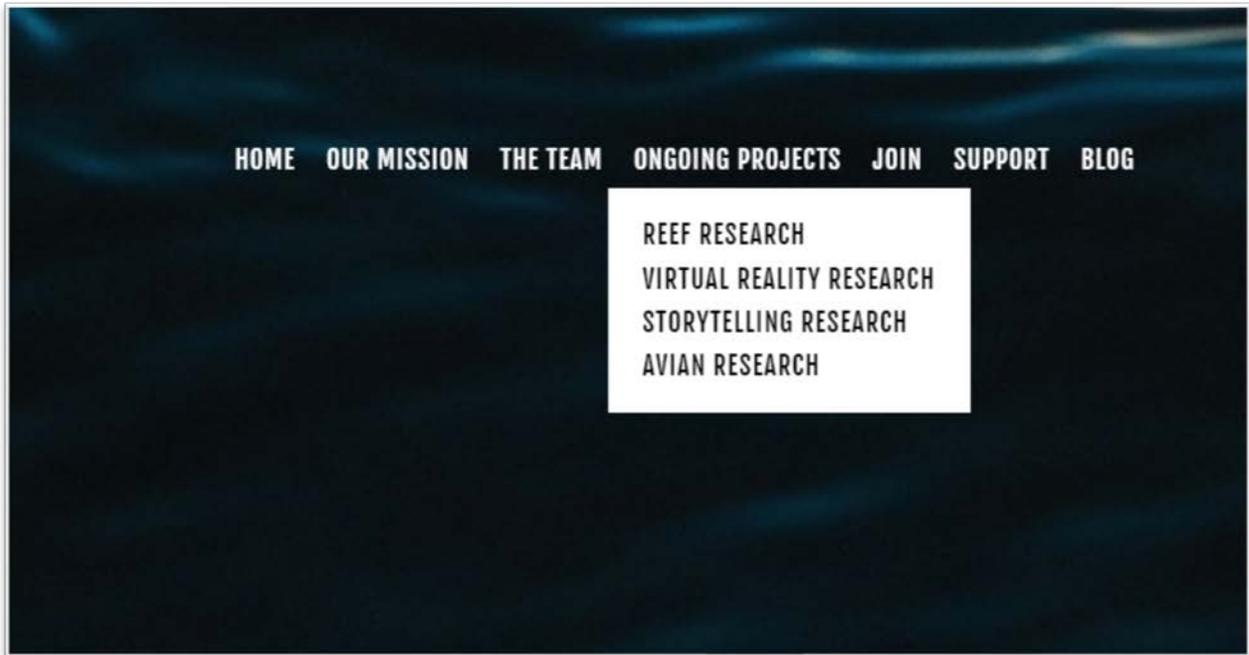


Figure 2. Screenshot of STEM-VRSE website illustrating current areas of research.

Highlighting the Information on Your Website

All websites should provide visitors with information about the representative organization while also reflecting the interests and needs of the intended audience. Profiling members in nonprofit organizations illustrates a common method for highlighting organizational information on websites. Some web designers believe that the humanization of nonprofit organizations through the profiling of individual members leads to greater site traffic by the intended audience. In the development of the STEM-VRSE website, organization members recognized the importance of highlighting profile information related to members of the nonprofit. To highlight these individuals, the

website contains both a team page and blog (see Figure 3). The team page includes general information about the individuals associated with the nonprofit. In addition, these same individuals may also contribute to the website's blog. In reviewing the literature regarding highlighting information on nonprofit organization websites, the researchers associated with STEM-VRSE identified the following additional elements:

- Categorization of data in to manageable pieces,
- Integration of knowledge across website pages, and
- Continuous renewal of material to reduce confusion.

Each of these additional elements informed the current iteration of the STEM-VRSE website. Overall, visitors responded that the website did a good job of informing visitors; female visitors, however, were more likely to identify readability (e.g., understandable language) as a positive attribute of the website. In contrast, male visitors were much more likely to identify connectivity (e.g., relatability to my life) as a positive attribute.

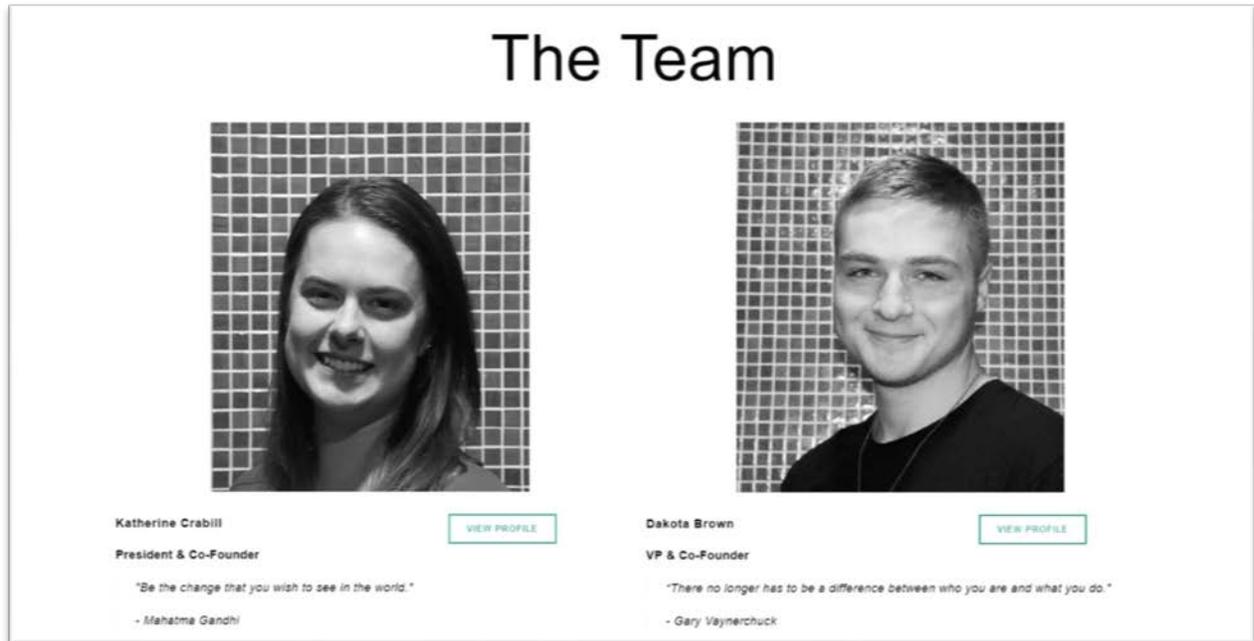


Figure 3. Screenshot from the "The Team" page with images of two team leaders.

Sparking Interest in Your Website

Websites should emphasize the interests of the desired audience and provide answers for any questions they possess. Linking to social media represents a common method for drawing interest to an organization's website. For example, some web designers suggest linking content from your website to social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, or Snapchat). In the development of the STEM-VRSE website, organization members acknowledged the need to spark interest in the website through connectivity to social media platforms. To that end, web designers provided members of the organization with the option to share material on the blog page to Facebook,

Instagram, and Snapchat pages associated with the nonprofit. In completing the review of current literature, members of the organization found four additional elements:

- Accessibility to important topics,
- Adaptability to changes in routine,
- Informality of language, and
- Integration of professional and personal lives on the website.

Each of these additional elements provided structure for the current STEM-VRSE website. Once again, visitors to the website responded that the website did an adequate job of sparking their interest; however, older students (i.e., juniors, seniors, and graduate students) were more likely to emphasize greater interest in the information offered by the website. In contrast, younger students (i.e., freshman and sophomore students) were more likely to value the connection to their personal lives.

Making Your Website Useful

Most websites attempt to exhibit a useful purpose by providing information in an interesting manner. Creating categories of organizational information demonstrates a common method for making websites useful. Some web designers suggest that categories immerse visitors, while promoting their learning of website content. In the development of the STEM-VRSE website, organization members worked to ensure visitors to the website could easily identify categorized information (see Figure 4). In doing so, the designers created multiple pages (e.g., Mission, The Team, and Ongoing Projects) outlining important parts of the nonprofit. In completing the review of current literature, organization members uncovered four additional elements:

- Accessibility to members,
- Integration of product across the website,
- Measurement of informative outcomes, and
- Understanding through generalizable language.

Each of these additional elements contributed to the STEM-VRSE website. In reviewing the website, visitors determined the website did an adequate job of providing use to their lives; however, students in the Physical sciences (e.g., Astronomy, Chemistry, or Physics) were more likely to identify with the website as a useful connection to their own efforts. In contrast, students in the Life sciences (e.g., Anatomy, Biology, or Physiology) were more likely to value the ability to digest the website through passive reading.



Figure 4. Titles to categorized information on the STEM-VRSE website.

Why Integration

Creating categories of information increases the success of websites and highlights a common result from developing an informative and useful website. In addition, ensuring accessibility of interesting organizational outcomes promotes your knowledge to visitors and likely describes an interesting and useful website. In developing the STEM-VRSE website, reviewing the current literature, and speaking with visitors we found integration to be a common theme. For example, many writers find the

integration of knowledge, professional and personal lives, and products across web pages to greatly benefit the success of nonprofit websites. To that end, the current STEM-VRSE website provides visitors with opportunities to access knowledge across different pages, identify with individual members of the organization, and follow the work of specific members (see Figure 5). Although the current STEM-VRSE website will change over time, members of the organization believe the integration of information, interest, and use on those organizational websites combining Research, VR, and Education provide opportunities for organizational success.

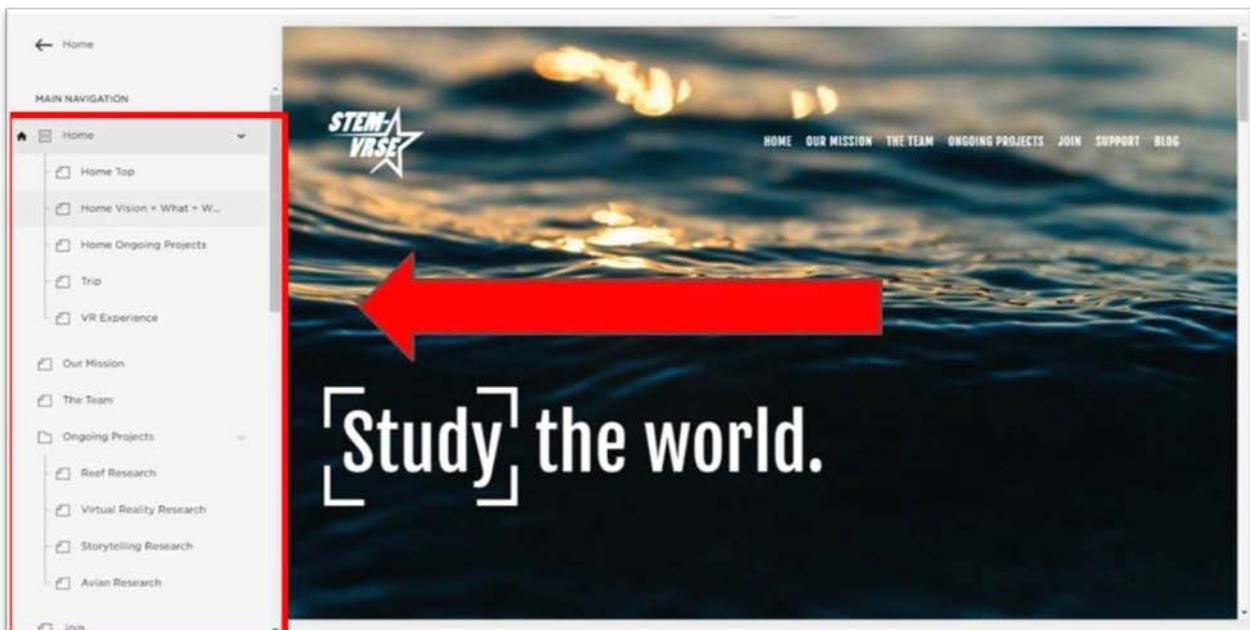


Figure 5. Screenshot of the cross links used in the STEM-VRSE website.

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