

**Project description:**

Two years ago, WHEDA embarked on a rebranding process that resulted in a new logo and tagline. This process commanded a redesign of wheda.com to apply the new brand and offered an opportunity to completely revamp the usability of the website. The new site would need to easily communicate the vast amount of complex information that HFAs need to disseminate to a variety of different audiences.

The previous WHEDA.com's navigation operated like a file cabinet of information, making the user either click through several pages to get to their desired destination, or read through paragraphs of information to find their link.

The primary goals of the website redesign were to apply the new brand, improve content organization and enhance navigation. Secondary, WHEDA also wanted to update the software system by which web content is entered, categorized and managed. WHEDA purchased Ektron Content Management Software to meet the project goals and increase the accuracy and efficiency by which business units provide web content.

To isolate how to redesign and reorganize the website content, WHEDA conducted a series of internal and external surveys to understand the various types of customers that visit wheda.com and the kinds of information they are seeking. This research revealed that WHEDA has many different users such as Realtors, mortgage lenders, commercial lenders, first-time home buyers, businesses, developers, media partners, farmers and much more. The survey also revealed that each audience type has a need to access very different information. And, that the information needs to be presented in a specific format designed for a particular audience. For example, WHEDA needs to promote home loans to a consumers very differently than they would to a mortgage lender or a Realtor.

**Concept behind the Home Page structure:**

WHEDA's approach was simple: route the end user to the right section first, rather than clutter the home page with everything WHEDA has to offer. A good design, clear graphics and concise descriptions were essential to improving end user navigation and website experience.

As tempting as it may be to put every piece of vital information on the home page, WHEDA resisted. Instead, key portals were created for users to access web content by category: either as a consumer, a business partner, a current borrower, a member of the media or someone who needs rental assistance. The new organizational structure empowers the user to define what's important and where they should go based on their specific need. WHEDA's approach was to organize content from the "outside" of WHEDA looking in rather than a tradition model of organizing by internal business unit such as Single Family Lending, Multifamily Housing or Economic Development.

The new design process also required home page flexibility so that new programs or products could be highlighted without cluttering the site and impeding navigation. Each square on the home page can be changed out to reflect new or pertinent WHEDA information. WHEDA is currently using the squares to heavily promote the multifamily conference in October and our new Wisconsin Neighborhood Advantage loan.

For added flexibility there is white “ad” space on the left hand side of the home page. This ad space currently holds a link to ARRA information. In the future it will be used to promote marketing campaigns or other new programs. Or, the “ad” space can be left unused while still maintaining the integrity and clean design of the home page.

Finally, the homepage integrates the new brand into its design. WHEDA’s logo, an orange square, is represented and then played-off of with other squares in complimentary colors or as bright pictures. Note that the home page was designed to never go “below the fold” on a computer screen keeping everything highly visible.

#### **Concept behind Product/Program pages:**

The drop-down menu allows WHEDA to categorize the information on the home page easier and with less clutter. From there, once the user chooses their category, they get to a page that utilizes a tabbed structure, with flexible space on the right and left sides of the page. Furthermore the drop-down menu from the home page is carried through to the product/program pages to maximize navigation.

For business units like Multifamily, where massive amounts of information needs to be organized for audiences with diverse needs like property managers or developers, the tabbed structure (with the drop-downs) allows maximum use of space without having to click through many pages to access content. To demonstrate how a developer might use the new WHEDA.com, we have attached several screenshots.

- From the home page, a developer will identify themselves as a business partner and click on the Multifamily Developers bar in the drop down menu (1)
- The bulleted items list whatever is new such as updates on the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, new postings on the QAP, etc.
- From there, the tabbed structure takes over and does the heavy lifting. Each tab is devoted to a significant amount of content which then the user can click through to find what they need – financing products, tax credits, forms, etc. (2)
- On the left and right sides of the screen we have designed ad space to promote ARRA guidelines, WHEDA guidance and WHEDA’s annual multifamily conference.

Another feature that differentiates WHEDA.com from other HFA sites is that we treat those interested in our single family products differently. If you are a first-time home buyer, we have created a section for WHEDA home buyers, with targeted information on home buyer education and WHEDA loan products currently available. As a primary audience, they are given a prominent spot among the drop-down items. Lenders, on the other hand, have a need for far more complex information on the products, including underwriting guidelines, forms and manuals.

### **Additional Enhancements:**

This new structure allows WHEDA to add features for new audiences that was previously not possible. A website organized by business unit, did not allow WHEDA to easily add new content. Here are a few examples:

- On the old site, there wasn't a natural space for Realtors to visit, or for us to post Realtor-specific information. We would have to hope they were interested in our Single Family program, and then look at content intended for home buyers or lenders. With the new site, Real Estate Professionals can find a section dedicated just for them in the Business Partners heading. There they will find information on new products and programs specifically designed for them to promote their business. (3)
- WHEDA was the first state HFA to receive a New Markets Tax Credit allocation in 2005 – and yet nowhere on the old site was there a good spot to talk about the projects, how people could use the credits, or to describe the Wisconsin Community Development Legacy Foundation, which is the formal entity WHEDA formed to apply for the tax credits. Because there is now a "Products" drop down item, we were able to add an entire page/tabbed area on New Markets Tax Credits. (4)
- Current WHEDA homeowners have always been able to access their loan online, but they were never thought of as a unique audience. We created a special section for WHEDA homeowners where they could continue to access their loan online, as well as have access to HomeWorks newsletters with homeownership tips, information on our Home Improvement Advantage loan, and the servicing number to call if they need help. (5)

Feedback thus far has been positive. Staff was involved early on in the development, organization and ultimately the roll-out of the site to achieve internal buy-in. We also conducted stakeholder surveys to determine what was lacking or what worked about the previous website.

The website continues to evolve – the beauty of the Internet, of course, is that it is a living, breathing resource. WHEDA has taken advantage of the changeable nature of the Internet to regularly provide our many audiences with current information and has thoughtfully developed a website that channels oodles of complex information into the hands of those who need it.