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New Technologies Summary

Learn new technologies and environments with limited interpersonal support

CAI purchased a template to style the new website. I was given this template to work with while building the new site. I have never used templates before. A template is used in HTML to keep the styles among all of the pages in a website consistent. They include stylesheets (that define the formatting/styling of the content). Then, as you add content to a page, you can use the formatting/styling from those stylesheets to make the site look consistent. The CAIBuzz site's template had a header and footer that was the same across every page in the site. So for each page that you navigate to (Issue Resolution Management, Partner Opportunities, etc.), it will have the same general look and feel. This gives a professional look to the site.

The template came with many stylesheets that included classes (pieces that can be repeated in your page) that would serve a specific purpose. For example, there is a class called "columns two". It divides content into two columns. This class can be used multiple times throughout the page, even within itself. There are other features like a graphic slideshow, tabs grouped together, formatted lists, and much more that are included in the stylesheets.

There was a page in the old site that had tabs and graphic effects (when clicking on one of the images, the picture would fill the screen and you could click through each picture). I had to try to reproduce these features in the new site. It would have been a lot more difficult to create them if I had to build the page from scratch. Luckily, I did not have to. The template had similar effects included in its stylesheets. Initially, it was challenging to find these features. My first instinct when designing a page is to just get started and create the page myself. However, it made it much easier when I started using pieces of the template. This taught me that using your resources wisely can save a lot of time and effort. It is not a bad thing, but actually a very wise thing, to use something someone else made (no need to "reinvent the wheel"). I also had the freedom to move content around to make it look presentable and professional.

I also gained some more experience using JavaScript (language used in web design). JavaScript allows you to do some interesting things like validating forms, graphic effects (slideshows), and more. I had to create forms for the CAIBuzz site and validate what the user entered before the form was submitted. Validating can come in many different forms, but the two main forms I used were required fields and email addresses. I required the user to enter certain fields that the system was looking for so that people could not send a blank form. I also checked for a valid email address so they have to include the “@” and “.” symbols.

jQuery is a helpful tool when coding JavaScript. It is a JavaScript library (meaning it already has functions defined in it) that allows you to reuse code that has already been developed by someone else. Many of the most common functions used in web pages can be found in the jQuery library. I used a “validate” function for forms I created. I had to look at the documentation on the jQuery website to figure out how the methods worked. I then added the JavaScript code that would call the jQuery function to validate to each page that had a form on it. After clicking the “Submit” button, the jQuery function to validate executed. If the user did not enter values correctly, it added an error message beside each field. I edited the message to turn red so it was obvious to the user. You can format the message in other ways too. For example, you can put the message to the right of the input field or below it.

Another thing I learned when designing pages for this site was how to use the `getParm()` JavaScript function. I had to make a form for users to sign up for a demo from the APO, Portfolio, Issue, and HealthCheck sections of the CAIBuzz site. Rather than making four different forms/pages, I used one form and passed a parameter to that page to tell it which section of the site it was coming from. When the user clicked on the link for a personal demo, the user was redirected to the demo page with the appropriate parameter (“Portfolio”) passed to the URL using a query string (“demo.html?ProductType=Portfolio”). The `getParm()` JavaScript function was used to get this parameter from the query string and use it in the page (to make it specific to Portfolio). When the form was submitted, the `ProductType` was stored so we knew which type of demo they wanted to see. I changed the title on this page according to the `ProductType` parameter that was passed. When I first heard this idea, I was a little intimidated because I had to figure out how to use this function on my own. But, after experimenting a little bit, I was able to figure it out. This page is now used for the APO, Portfolio, Issue, and HealthCheck sections of the site.

I learned some new things while designing the CAIBuzz site, but it was difficult at times because I did not get much support or help from others. The other team members were very busy and were either located on the other side of the office or at another building, so it was hard to find time to work with them. This made it hard to learn these new things with limited help from the team. Nevertheless, I did what I could to figure them out and asked smart and quick questions when I had the opportunity. It was definitely a challenge, but also a learning experience.