

# collegewebeditor.com

*Higher Ed Web Pro Files* 26 May 2005 06:11 am

Interview: Jerry Dannemiller, The Ohio State University's New Media Assistant Director

**New Media Director Assistant at The Ohio State University, Jerry Dannemiller worked as a publications editor before switching to the Web at his alma mater. His New Media Unit is part of the Marketing Communications Office - overseen by the University Relations VP - and partners with the IT department when necessary. The New Media team is responsible for the core university websites serving more than 50,000 students (FTE). The team has just completed the text-book redesign of OSU homepage and associated second-level pages. Some of OSU 783,000 web pages are maintained by a homegrown php/MySQL content management system, while the others, composed of php pages, require more traditional editing work.**

**1) What's your background? What did you do before becoming a higher ed web pro?**

I'm coming at this all from a writing background. I was an English major – at Ohio State. After meandering through the bulk of my 20s, seeing the inside of nearly every drinking establishment from here to Tulsa (sic), I was hired at Ohio State as a publications editor. I did, and still do a lot of freelance writing. Then, when our web unit was created, Ted Hattemer, my boss, figured he would need someone to proof copy, so I made the switch. It was a very fortuitous opportunity. The job has developed beyond anything I could have imagined from that humble beginning...

**What's your biggest achievement as a higher ed web pro?**

I guess the thing most people would want to hear is CASE Gold Medals and the like, and, yep, our team won one of those pay-to-play awards for an admissions' site we did a few years back. I'd have to say, however, that my biggest achievement is getting people to think about Ohio State in a different (and unexpected) way because of the features and the content we create. By that, I mean trying to humanize a very large Midwestern research university with a sprawling reputation for football over academics. We've got a great football team, which we all love and support, but so much top-level academic and research work goes on here: it's mind-boggling. It's a daily struggle, but subtly trying to present a fresh, dynamic image of Ohio State (without being trite or predictable) is something I think we've had some success at, subconscious as it may be to the general public.

**What's the most difficult part of your job?**

Constantly staying on top of a mountain of events, news, and feature content, and really thinking about what information should be presented to which audience. It's the difference between a site that's, eh, pleasant, nice, and has lots of images of ivy-covered buildings and one that's really dynamic, robust and a bit unpredictable. It keeps people coming back. That's what we strive for. Also, it's not easy to put yourself in the shoes of 16-year-old kids to find what they would be interested in

when they visit your site, but it's even harder to do it with some semblance of transparency and grace.

### **In your opinion, what's the biggest challenge we face as web pros in our industry?**

Continuing on my previous answer... From a content point of view, so often university websites try so hard to appeal to our future, um, customers (incoming undergrads) by being "*fresh*," "*hip*" or "*rad*" and fail miserably. Not only is it painfully apparent when 40-year-old web designers and writers try to be "*cool*," but it really talks down to future students. They don't equate coming to college with, say, watching Paris Hilton on MTV's TRL. They want to be treated like adults, and presented information in a smart, mature, and serious manner. I realize this is a really subjective, and small slice of the big picture, but universities who don't grasp this concept are missing out.

### **Any good advice to share with your fellow higher ed web pros?**

Always realize that designers (graphic, web, or otherwise) are a more developed species, a higher form of life which must be treated with respect and care ;-). In all seriousness, truly good designers are a rare breed: people who can synthesize all these factors, visual and otherwise, into something useable and attractive. I'm really lucky at Ohio State to work with two great designers with impeccable taste, Jim Burgoon and Ellen Hoover.

### **What about a couple of good links?**

Sure, I would be remiss if I didn't mention the [new front door for Ohio State](#), which we've been working on for a long time. We're all very happy with it, and think it's a vast improvement—mostly for users—over our current set-up. One note: we created a [blog which documented all stages in the redesign process](#) and proved to be really useful in keeping stakeholders informed of what was going on. It also showed that the process was a very open one; many people had an opportunity to voice their concerns. [Cornell also did this really well recently](#), so we decided to *hijack* their good idea.

### **Found this post interesting? Keep reading:**

- [Interview: Georgina Hibberd, The University of Sydney's Senior Information Architect](#)
- [Interview: Piet Niederhausen, Georgetown University's Webmaster](#)

### **What do YOU think? Share your opinion: [post a comment!](#)**

so far

**Browse our archives:** [August 2005](#) (3) [July 2005](#) (10) [June 2005](#) (6) [May 2005](#) (10) [April 2005](#) (14) [March 2005](#) (17) [February 2005](#) (12)

## **Comments »**

The URI to TrackBack this entry is:

<http://collegewebeditor.com/blog/index.php/archives/2005/05/26/interview-jerry-dannemiller-oi>

No comments yet.