

Gender Dynamix wins 2008 NGO Web Awards

The South African NGO Network (SANGONeT) has announced the winners of the 2008 NGO Web Awards.

The top three websites for the 2008 NGO Web Awards are:

- Career Planet
- Gender Dynamix
- Women'sNet

SANGONeT executive director, David Barnard says, "The 2008 winners reflect a growing recognition amongst civil society organisations of the importance of having an online presence. NGOs are beginning to realise that it is not only about providing information, but how this information is presented, and whether it encourages feedback."

The quality of the websites submitted ensured that the judges had no easy task in deciding the top 10 entries. The top three winning websites were selected based on their compliance with the criteria developed for the awards which included marketing, accessibility, tone, aesthetics and relationship building aspects.

Journalist and blogger, Damaria Senne who was one of the judges for this year's awards, made particular mention of the accessibility criteria: "While accessibility was a key criterion, judges were disappointed that only one out of the 60 entries specifically addressed the issue of access. I would like commend the Alzheimer's South Africa website for a simple yet informative site that has a functionality that allows visitors to increase the size of the text font if they want to. This is very critical to making the important information that the organisation provides accessible to people whose sight is impaired."

Alzheimer's South Africa receives a special mention award in the 2008 NGO Web Awards. The special mention of Alzheimer's South Africa in the 2008 NGO Web Awards, takes on significant meaning if we consider that civil society organisations marked the International Day of Disabled Persons on 3 December. It is essential that information and communication technologies (ICTs), including websites, be developed considering the needs of people with disabilities. It is only in this way, that we will build an inclusive knowledge society.

Having recently hosted the MobileActive08 conference, it was encouraging to note that, while the Career Planet website has no integrated mobile functionality, it encourages users to sign up for SMS notifications. "The Career Planet website is inviting, and clearly speaks to its various target audiences", said one of the judges.

Responding to the announcement of their win, Karin Chisholm, executive director of Career Planet said:

"We are absolutely thrilled to have been chosen as one of the winners in the SANGONeT website competition - and extend our congratulation to the other two winning entries. Career Planet is an NGO with a totally unique career information portal that links people with opportunities. Our site showcases training providers, employers, careers, career-pathing and skills development opportunities over 13 industry sectors. Winning this competition coincides with the launch of our next growth phase. We are particularly grateful that it will increase awareness of Career Planets services as we grow our provincial and national footprint in 2009!"

Judges felt that the Gender Dynamix is a good example of how NGOs can utilise their online presence to build communities. "The website provides the trans community with a space to meet and share experiences and information. In contrast to the offline space where transgendered people experience discrimination and are very vulnerable; the online community created by Gender Dynamix can be seen as is safe and supportive", says Jan Moolman, SANGONeT Civil Society Information Manager and NGO Pulse Portal editor.

Gender Dynamix executive director was thrilled to hear the news: "Everyone at the Gender Dynamix office was delighted to hear about the announcement of our Award. We strive to keep our website as updated as possible and always seeking new content. On a regular basis we add reports about events and presentations attended, and our activities. This Web Award feels like an affirmation of all the hours of hard work which went into our website since it was launched in August 2005", she said.

Judges described the Women'sNet website as interactive, accessible and fun. "Once you land on the homepage, you immediately realise that you have visited a "feminist organisation" that utilises ICT to further its feminist agenda. It works perfectly", says Butjwana Seokoma, SANGONeT information coordinator.

"Women'sNet feels honoured to receive the SANGONeT 2008 NGO Web award. We are proud that the work we do to provide women and girls specific content is being recognised. Since our inception we have provided training and facilitated content dissemination and creation that supports women, girls, and women's and gender organisations

and networks to take control of their own content and ICT use. This award means that we have achieved the creation of a hub of content that helps women and girls find information on issues that affect them, and use the platform to network, amplify their voices. As we continue to provide these services we would like to shout in joy and say Viva Mbokodo, says Lebohang Marishane, Women'sNet's Media and Information Coordinator.

In a tough selection process, 10 finalists (who are listed in no particular order) were shortlisted out of the 60 entries received. The top 10 entries what judges describes as an "increasing recognition of the value of using web 2.0 tools" to reach out and hold" their audiences.

The ten finalists for the 2008 NGO Website Awards in South Africa are:

- Career Planet
- Parliamentary Monitoring Group

- Feedback Food Redistribution
- Gender Dynamix
- Malamulele Onward
- South African History Online
- Women'sNet
- Open Africa
- Men on the Side of the Road
- Alzheimer's South Africa

Judging Criteria

To help assist the judges in their selection process, SANGONeT developed the following judging criteria to determine the effectiveness of the website as an online tool:

- Objectives of the website: What is the communication objective of the website?
- Marketing: How does the website capture the attention of the first time visitor?
- Relationship Building: How does the website retain the attention of the return visitor?
- Aesthetics: This is a subjective criterion, however, an important one as it often determines whether visitors stay on a site or move on.
- Accessibility: There are two important dimensions to this. Firstly, is the language accessible? Second, does the website pass the basic accessibility tests for reaching people with disabilities?
- Tone: What is the tone of the language on the website?

The three NGOs each walk away with R10 000 worth of prizes sponsored by Torque IT.

The awards aim to raise awareness amongst South African NGOs about the benefits of having an online presence, stimulate interest in the application of web solutions and applications, and showcase best practices in website creation and maintenance.

The winners of the 2007 NGO Web Awards were Afesis Corplan, Fair Trade in Tourism South Africa and the Heart and Stroke Foundation of South Africa.

Source: www.sangonet.org.za