

Michigan.gov

One State, One Brand

Our Journey to Improve Resident Experience

Category: Digital Services: Government to Citizen

State: Michigan

Project Start: May 2018

Project End: April 2022

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The State of Michigan (SOM) is committed to improving the user experience for all residents, businesses, and visitors looking to complete transactions and locate information across our diverse digital properties. This commitment is evident in the SOM's information technology (IT) strategy, our strategic goals and objectives, our investment in human centered design, and through the digital innovations we have implemented over the course of the last several years.

Historical research conducted by our SOM team demonstrated that citizens had a significant amount of trouble and confusion when interacting with state services online. Users had difficulty interacting with state services across agencies, experienced obstacles carrying out multi-agency digital transactions, and found it difficult to locate information online. To minimize these issues, the SOM adopted a unified Michigan brand to create visual consistency across agencies as well as improve user experience across our digital services.

The SOM's "One State, One Brand" project was truly a digital transformation initiative. The project goals were to create and maintain unified foundational branding elements to enable the digital transformation of state services across websites, applications, and social media. With the launch of the SOM's Digital Standards, Guidelines, and social media branding assets, the project later expanded to encompass unified branding elements in direct constituent outreach provided through our GovDelivery, eNewsletter communications.

With executive sponsorship support from the Lieutenant Governor and the Executive Office of the Governor (EOG) the project created efficiencies and opportunity for collaboration across state government. The EOG assisted with project adoption and setting key expectations for the roll-out of unified branding and improved user experience. In a phased implementation strategy, several One State, One Brand initiatives were carried out to directly impact our users and improve agency processes. Throughout these, multiple workgroups were formed to assist in communicating and championing the project.

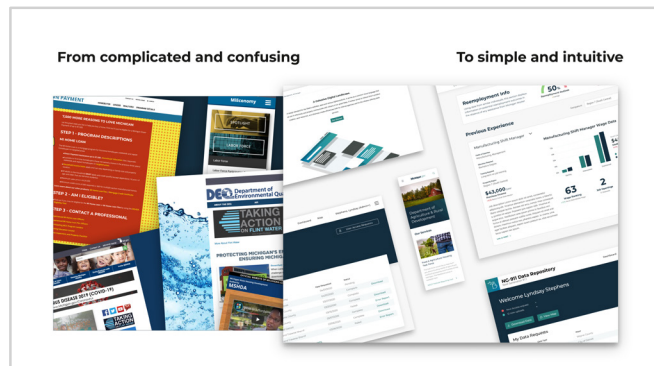
The specific work completed covered the entirety of our digital ecosystem including our social media presence, email marketing platform, all 110 Michigan.gov websites, as well as our transactional applications.

IDEA

The most common way for users to interact with state government is through digital experiences. Prior to our One State, One Brand project, the SOM provided residents with a disjointed experience that resulted in confusion and frustration for users. In 2021, the SOM supported 119 agency websites and 314 online services spread across Michigan's digital landscape. In total, users could interact with state services through over 433 distinct user experiences. The state also had over 800 decentralized social media accounts and included hundreds of branded eNewsletter communications for agencies in GovDelivery.

User research, including hallway testing, observations, and mobile interviews, confirmed that we needed to focus on improving user experience. Inconsistency in visual aspects, including branding, less than desirable usability, and a lack of accessibility within our systems prevented residents from finding information or successfully utilizing our online services.

Given this problem, the SOM set out to develop an enterprise strategy to develop universal branding and strengthen our user experience strategy. This encompassed defining the state's brand and identity, as well as developing tools and resources for both content authors and technical teams to implement change. The goal in doing this was to create simple and intuitive digital interactions and to make digital experiences from one platform to another, and from one agency to another, as seamless and easy as possible.



Simplifying user experience by creating consistency

We feel our users deserve uncomplicated digital interactions that provide value and promote confidence in state services. Building trust with our customers, ensuring accessibility, and creating a more unified brand experience was and continues to be a top priority for the state. All of these goals directly aligned with the State chief information officer (CIO) Top Ten Priority for Digital Government/Digital Service to provide a framework for digital services; state portals; improving and digitizing citizen experience and accessibility.

IMPLEMENTATION

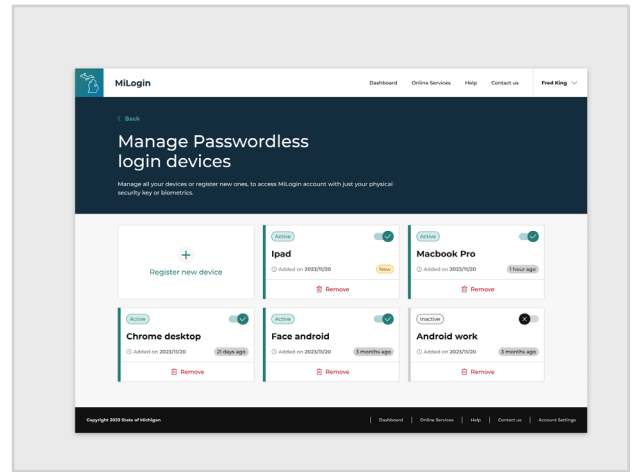
Architecting the user experience strategy was and continues to be a collaborative effort driven by the user experience (UX) / user interface (UI) team within the Michigan Department of Technology, Management & Budget (DTMB) eMichigan office and the DTMB Communications Office. The team consists of a digital strategist, production designers, user researchers, front-end developers, and accessibility testers. The statewide social media director and digital content administrator is also a core element to this team.

New to the team in 2021, was the addition of a digital accessibility coordinator (DIAC). The DIAC provides governance on SOM digital accessibility efforts and supports agencies as they design products and services across digital properties.

Ensuring digital accessibility is at the forefront of all of our work, the DIAC worked to modernize the states electronic accessibility standards and best practices

It's important to note that the goal of the unified branding initiative was not to replace SOM agency brands, but to create a hierarchy with the SOM being a clear top-level brand. Agencies were not required to give up their logos or names, however the overarching color palette became consistent to ensure continuity across agencies.

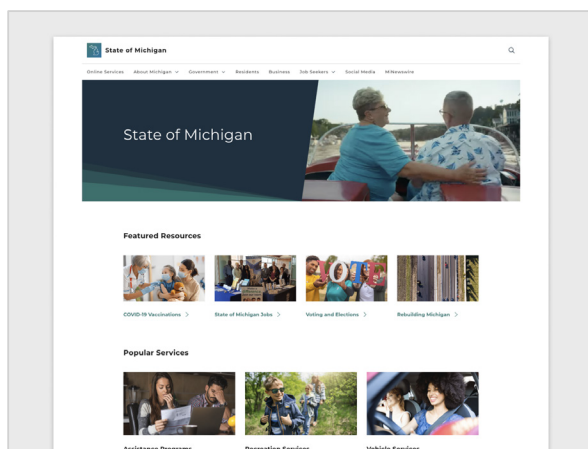
An emphasis was placed on leveraging a common set of web components in the development of applications and website. This provided end users with familiarity in using Michigan’s digital services and drastically improved the user experience. Leveraging a common framework of components was accomplished through updating the state’s [Digital Standards](#) and creating the [Digital Guidelines](#). These resources assist development teams and vendors with building and maintaining consistent digital user experiences under the One State, One Brand project.



An app designed with Digital Guidelines components

With the updated strategy, in 2021, Digital Guidelines became the enterprise design system for all state websites, applications, and various digital products. By creating a single, uniform design language that was familiar to our end users, we provided visual affirmation of security, established trust, and eliminated worry. Through this effort we also created consistent patterns for the user to navigate websites and applications more easily.

During the transition period, the core DTMB UX/UI team oversaw and provided governance to multiple workgroups and committees that were charged with implementing the user experience changes across the state. Groups include the SOM Digital Council, Digital Accessibility Review Counsel (DARC), and the Statewide Social Media Governance Council, to name a few. Comprised of subject matter experts from across agencies and disciplines, the core UX/UI team provided strategic guidance to these groups as they worked to align products and services with the state’s citizen-centric vision.

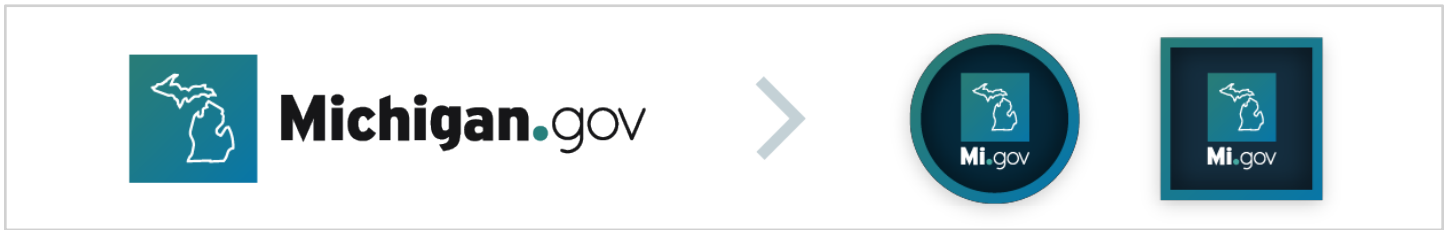


New global branding and reusable components created in Sitecore applied to Michigan.gov

In mid-2021 and 2022, efforts shifted to focus on the implementation of a new web content management system (WCMS). During the WCMS Replacement Project, the DTMB eMichigan and UX/UI teams worked with agency teams to inventory and map content for over 110 websites, more than 170,000 pages, and 133GB of digital assets as part of a mapping and migration process. The state’s Digital Council, an interdepartmental workgroup of advocates from across state government, played a critical role in unifying digital experiences and supporting the Michigan.gov platform replacement project. Driven by agency and customer feedback, the Digital Council

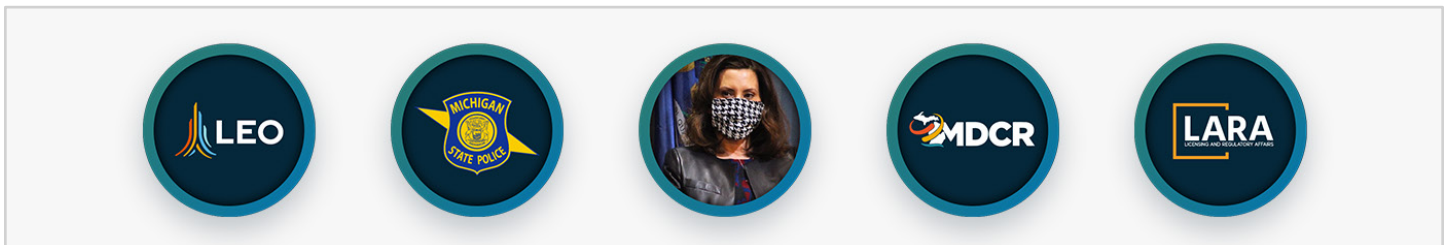
identified content for migration and helped to finalize site, template, and component designs under the new unified One State, One Brand. Collaboration from this group helped not only to collect feedback throughout the project but also strengthen agency participation and adoption of the project and its modernization efforts.

The One State, One Brand strategy was also applied to our SOM Social Media Program. Historically, SOM agencies had a decentralized social media brand strategy. It was difficult for users to tell if an account was an official SOM account. Leveraging elements from the website and application brand strategy, we leaned into one unifying brand element for social media, while allowing some level of agency individuality. Updates added unintrusive hints of global branding.



How Michigan.gov's logo was leveraged for social media

The goal was to unify social media branding across all official channels within the enterprise. A universal account/profile 'frame' was developed for agency assets and elected officials. The updated design template shows the public "they're with the SOM" without losing who "they" are as agencies. The below image shows both agency and elected official account/profile images and how they appear under the One State, One Brand social media strategy.



The universal SOM frame applied to a variety of entities.

Additionally, a unifying treatment for banner/cover photos was created to add credibility and universality under the Michigan.gov brand. An overlay with brand colors and the Michigan.gov logo now ties official social media accounts into the larger brand.

DTMB developed templates for customizing both account/profile and banner/cover images. Utilizing Smart Objects in Photoshop, the drag and drop templates allow staff to create high quality social media assets under the larger brand strategy. Use of the templates includes over 90 percent of the publicly listed accounts at Michigan.gov/SocialMedia.

The SOM's unified social media brand strategy was recognized on the national stage in a breakout session at the 2023 Government Social Media Conference, managing social media in large organizations. It was also highlighted in the 2022 Granicus Digital Government Awards with the SOM being named a finalist in the Digital Government Experience category for branding efforts.

Within the enterprise email communication platform, GovDelivery, the DTMB UX/UI team created a standard design template for banner images. The template allows agency staff to customize and align eNewsletter communications banner images under the larger One State, One Brand strategy.

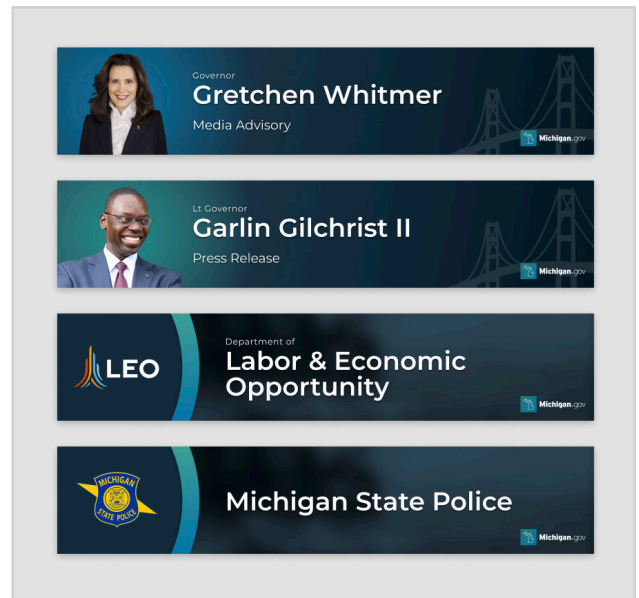
As the leader of the SOM, the EOG acts as a trendsetter and a trailblazer for other departments within the state. By uniting the EOG's branding with the global SOM brand, we encouraged agencies to unify under a common visual language. Under the template we leaned into one unifying brand element for eNewsletter banner images, while allowing some level of agency individuality. Together, this skilled and innovative team provided the strategy, vision, and digital assets necessary to achieve Michigan's citizen-centric vision.

IMPACT

The past two years have seen considerable progress in improving Michigan's digital services. Through the Implementation of the One State, One Brand strategy, the once disjointed user experience has disappeared, replacing it with a unified, modern, straightforward and ADA compliant user experience.

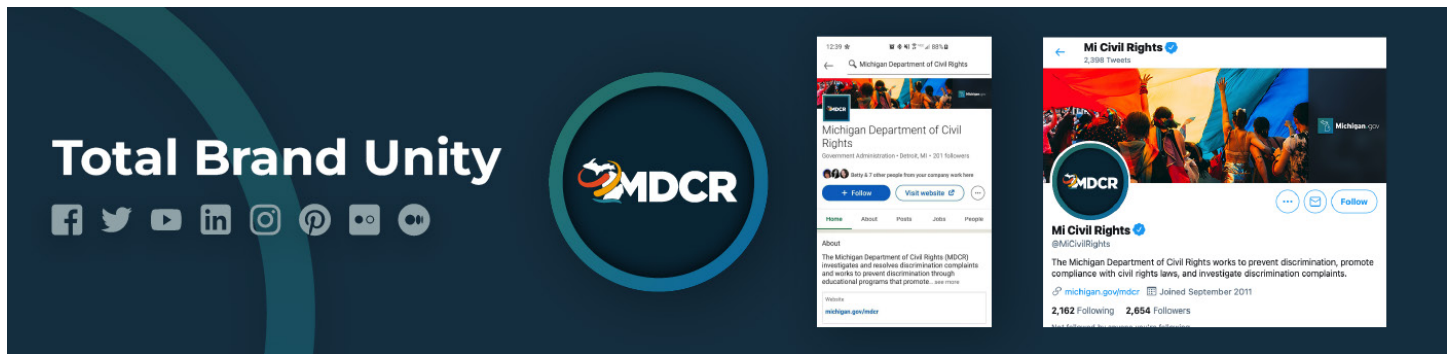
Since inception, Digital Guidelines has seen a high adoption rate across all agencies. For product teams, it simplifies and accelerates the creation of digital products. Developers can simply copy the code for pre-built components to speed up the development process, saving time and resources. No more digging through archives or searching endlessly for lost code resources; the Digital Guidelines stands as a single source of truth.

Use of the Digital Guidelines design system saves teams time during product creation. Our research shows that it reduces development time by 25%. 15 new projects a year with an average cost of \$250,000 results in a savings over \$900,000 annually. Included are colors, typography, icons, component designs and more. The library contains both the application and website component designs, and all meet WCAG 2.0 AA accessibility guidelines. Digital Guidelines was built using HTML, CSS and JavaScript. They are purposely built to be framework independent, therefore not relying on third party libraries or frameworks. The guidelines are continually reviewed and refined. Feedback from developers, designers and end users have allowed the SOM to create a backlog of both usability and functionality enhancements. Through this feedback loop, DTMB has given teams the confidence to quickly create user interfaces that meet both our branding and accessibility standards.



GovDelivery banners for the Executive Office of the Governor (EOG) and other agencies.

As a result of the success seen in applying the design system, all state applications being developed or undergoing significant enhancement must align with the unified brand and Digital Guidelines. A new Administrative Policy on statewide branding is under development to support this effort and give clear guidance to development teams and vendors. This follows the support of the Lt. Governor and EOG in articulating the need for departments to follow the SOM's unified branding efforts and unifying SOM experiences across digital platforms.



An example of how the global SOM brand coexists with agency branding.

Since implementation of the unified brand, the SOM completed the migration of all Michigan.gov websites to a new WCMS in April 2022. As part of this project, all websites now leverage components aligned with Digital Guidelines under the One State, One Brand initiative. There is now consistency and continuity across all websites in both branding and usage of common components across sites, this helps build familiarity and credibility with users. A usability study conducted at the conclusion of the project illustrated the improvements as a result of this strategy. During two rounds of testing, with 12 moderated tests and 30 unmoderated tests, the testers characterized the sites as having a clear, clutter-free, and simple design.

As one tester stated, “It looks professional, I really like these pictures... they kind of help draw you into what you’re specifically looking for. It seems very simply laid out and doesn’t feel cluttered.”

The DTMB Center for Shared Solutions-eMichigan team has issued four main updates to Digital Guidelines since its inception, including 88 beta releases in 2022. Updates are continually in the works to provide new and improved components.

With the growing adoption of the One State, One Brand strategy, and agency demand for UI/UX team support at an all-time high, four new resources have been added to the central UI/UX team in the last six months. With additional resources onboard the team has expanded their service offerings for user research and usability testing further ensuring that our digital services deliver exceptional experiences to our residents.

As for the future and what comes next, our applications, websites, and social media presence will continue to be developed and updated in alignment with this strategy and our One State, One Brand resources. Work to maintain and enhance our branding resources is and will continue to be a priority for the SOM.