



# Embassy Website

## REVIEW REPORT

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A hand is pointing at a laptop screen. Overlaid on the image is a complex network of white lines connecting various digital icons such as a padlock, a globe, a Wi-Fi symbol, a bar chart, a car, and a mail icon. The background is a blurred image of a person's hand interacting with a laptop.

# Introduction

**The role and importance of digital diplomacy is rapidly evolving as ambassadors and embassies understand that influencing the opinion of their local audiences is a powerful tool in conducting foreign policy.**

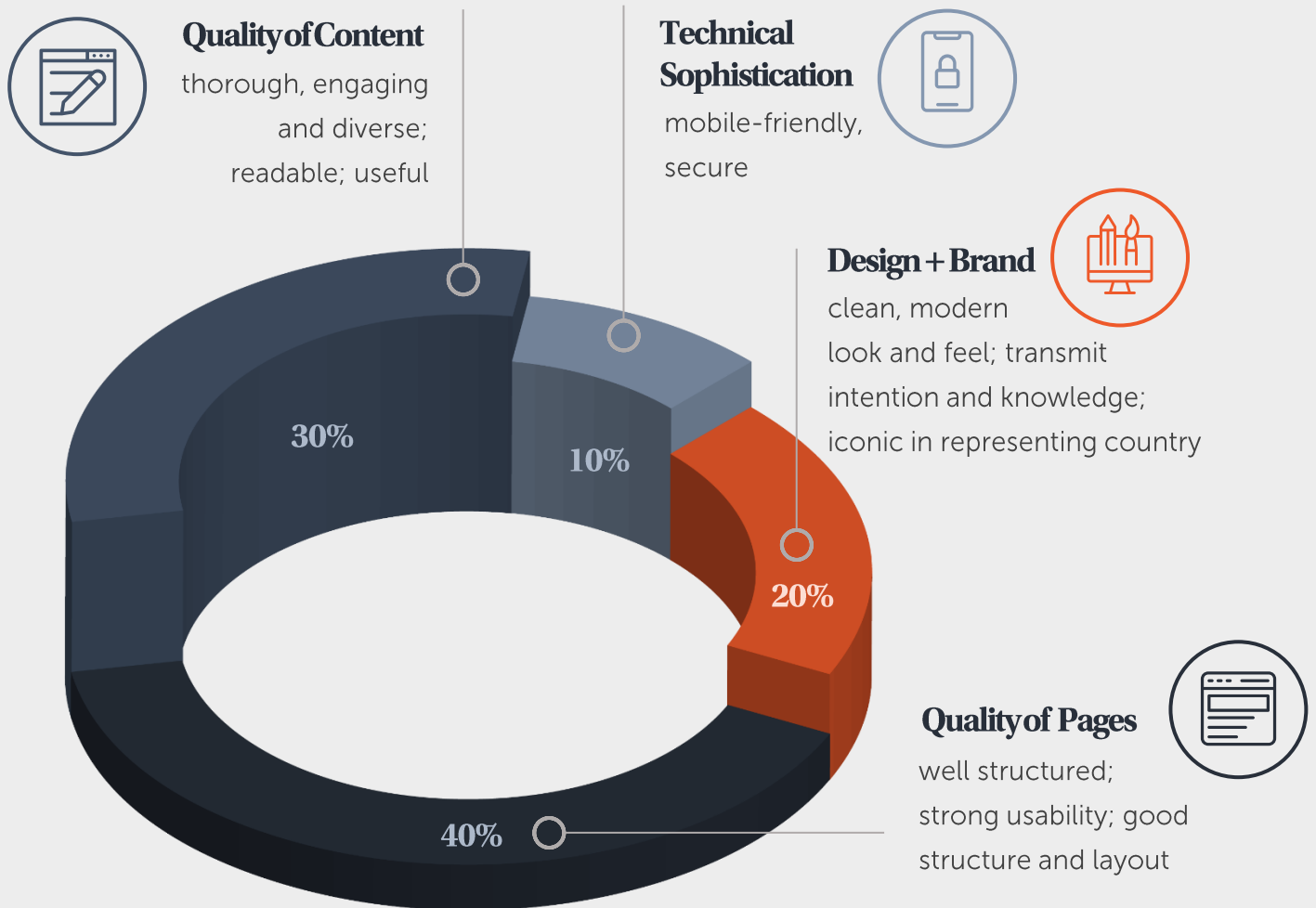
To date, social media has dominated public diplomacy strategies, which makes sense, as Twitter, Facebook, Clubhouse, TikTok and others directly engages audiences in innovative and creative ways to influence and sway its targets. However, this focus on social media has shifted attention away from one of the workhorses of digital diplomacy: the embassy web site.

In general, embassy websites in the U.S. are sadly neglected. This is an oversight, as an embassy's website is a "front door" for their country. An embassy's website is frequently used by policymakers, think tanks, prospective investors, U.S. citizens and a country's diaspora to understand a country's policies and stay connected.

Signal studied over thirty countries' embassy websites to evaluate how sophisticated and successful they were in representing their country. Our goal is that this report will help digital diplomacy officials to evaluate their websites, consider best practices and look for ways to better serve their constituents and represent their country.

## Our Methodology

The methodology used in this report is based on the evaluation of thirty-eight embassy websites. Signal's three reviewers rated the embassy websites based on a standard set of criteria with a rating scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being a best-in-class rating. Each category was independently rated by the three reviewers and an average score was determined. The categories were then weighted, and overall embassy website site score was calculated.



## A Note Before We Begin

When reviewing this report, it is important to acknowledge the individual perspectives of each reviewer, as well as the design choices made by the embassy. For example, some embassies did not focus on travel or tourism while others went the extra mile to explain the history of their relationship with the U.S. We tried to take these differences into consideration when reviewing the sites and not penalize an embassy site if they made a seemingly deliberate design choice that did not match our rating criteria.

# Design + Brand



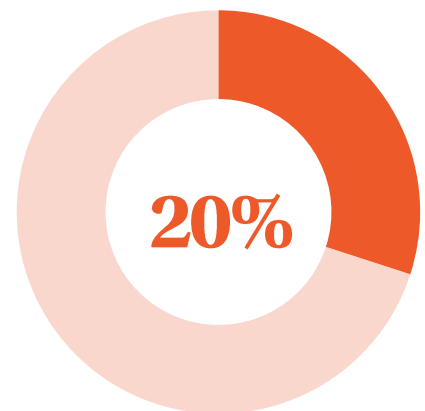
An embassy website is an expression of a country's brand and of how it wants to be perceived in the world. It is also the front door where users find information about a country, its policies towards the U.S. and services for visitors and its citizens.

The design of an embassy site – the home page, Ambassador and consular pages – matter because our first encounter with a site is focused on the design of a site: is it welcoming? Is it attractive? Do I like it? These first perceptions are not just about the Embassy website, but also contribute to a perception of the country itself.

## What We Measured

The Design + Brand criteria was focused on the overall presentation and experience of the site. Signal was looking for whether the website had:

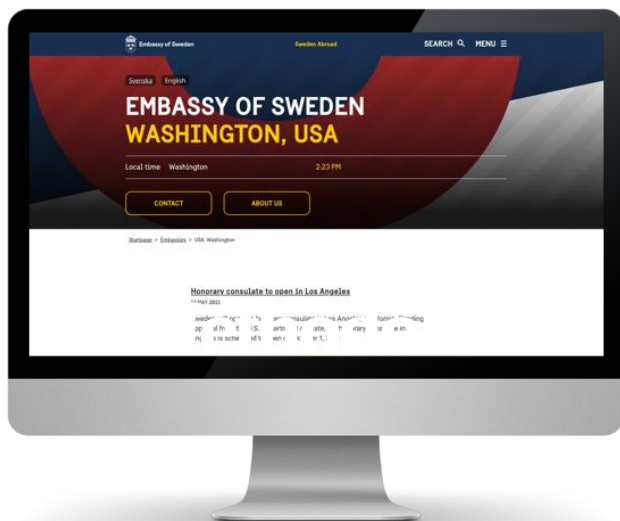
- a modern (or even innovative) sensibility; did it represent the country through visual presentation?
- did it have unique qualities that were reflective of the country?
- was it effective in presenting the country's U.S. and international policies?
- was it effective in helping to connect users to services and information in a way that reflected positively on the country?



of total score

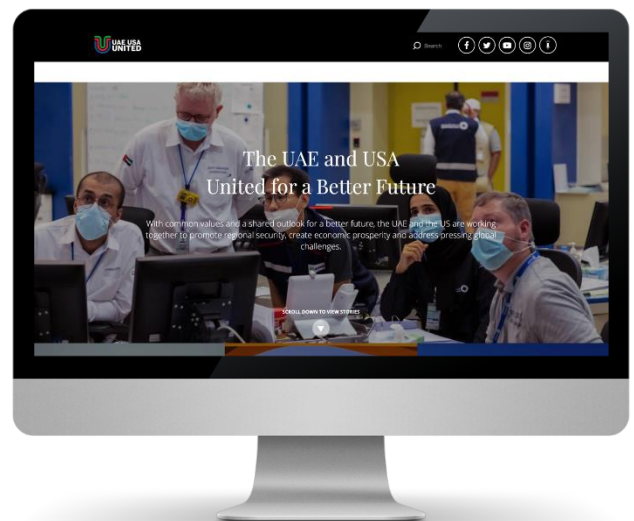
# Best in Class

There were several stand-out Embassy websites that represented the country and its relationship with the U.S. well. These sites had a modern sensibility and design, they reflected a thoughtful user experience. They were clear in how the embassy wanted to speak to important topics of politics and policy, trade and investment, tourism, and consular information. While the examples below are not all the exceptional websites, they have been selected as examples of skillful best practice implementation.



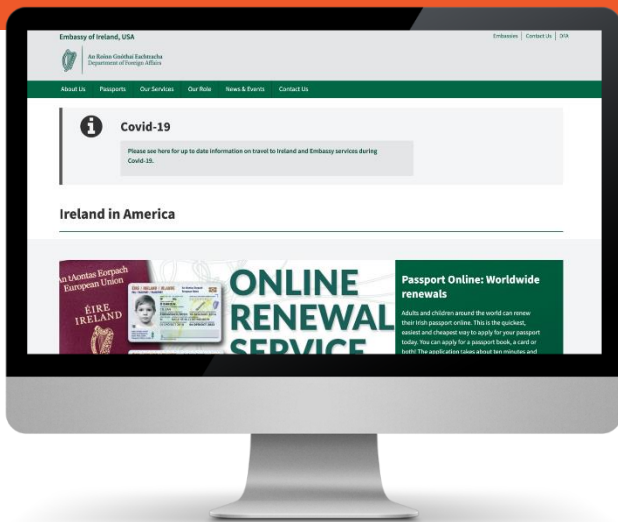
## Sweden

The Swedish Embassy's U.S. site ranked high with Signal reviewers as an almost perfect expression of the Swedish brand. There are no unnecessary design flourishes, rather a focus on simplicity, functionality, and human-centric design. The Embassy's website is a success in its ability to provide critical information in a way that is both welcoming and attractive. Reviewers noted a clear focus on the interests and needs of the user, whether that was a policymaker, U.S., or Swedish citizen, rather than on a more heavy-handed approach that emphasized power or position. It is a case study in utility, from its clean, usable design and content layout to its efficient navigation and small touches in usability.



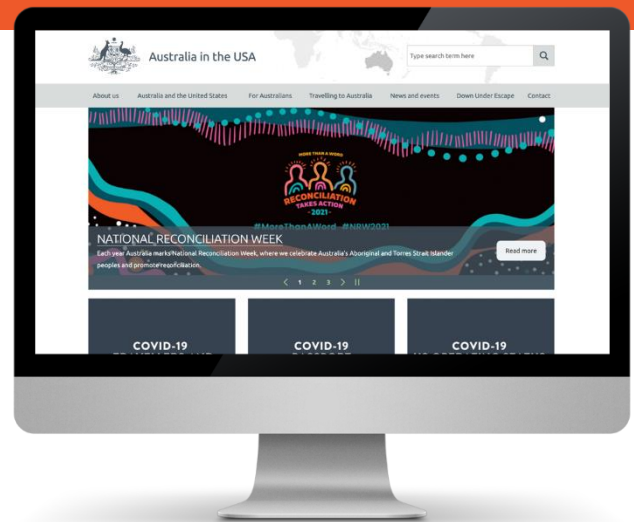
## United Arab Emirates

The UAE embassy website is all about boldness. As soon as user sees the homepage, they are struck by its strong colors, large images (especially that full-width carousel) and strong navigation. The content pages also feature large, clear fonts and images. The Signal reviewers also noted the small touches that reflected smart design choices and the brand of the UAE. These include the highlighting the beauty of Arabic design in the backgrounds and border graphics on pages, the persistent search bar and strong footer. While not directly reviewed by Signal, we also noted the companion site UAE-USA United is a smart digital diplomacy asset.



## Ireland

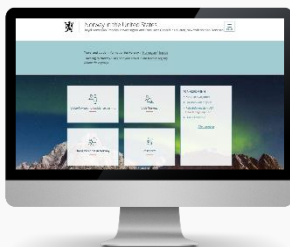
Signal reviewers admired the Embassy of Ireland's website, commenting that it is both functional and attractive. Ireland's site proves that you do not have to have rich graphics, oversized photos, or design flourishes to be successful. The site's success is built on presenting its content in a clear, bold style with a good layout supported by strong navigation so you know where you are in the site and where you can go. The site also has a depth of information that is impressive, and which is easily scanned and absorbed, along with its well-designed pages for the Ambassador. Our reviewers did note that Ireland's tourism and culture information and trade and investment content could be improved by surfacing the content higher up in the navigation.



## Australia

Like Ireland's Embassy website, Australia's U.S. Embassy website is a model of stylistic restraint in its use of muted colors, well-designed columns, and efficient boxes. It focused on clearly presenting information that the Embassy wants to highlight. Signal reviewers noted that the home page carousel is kept up to date with the latest news. The site also has surprising amount of depth, providing information on tourism, trade and investment, the U.S. and Australian policy relationship and consular services. The site is also enhanced by strong navigation, marked links when you are leaving the site and attention paid to content management and smart use of images and links.

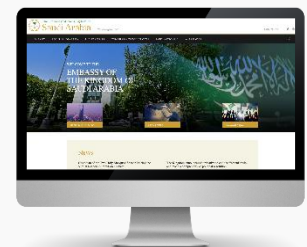
### Other Embassy websites of note:



**Norway** – like the Swedish embassy, it is a model of usability and restrained design. Reviewers noted the attractive home page and attention to detail in its content.



**Panama** – while the design is a bit dated, its exuberance in celebrating Panamanian culture and imagery puts this site into the upper ranks. The navigation and thoroughness of its content were excellent, but it was the rich images and cultural information that made us want to hop on a plane.



**Saudi Arabia** – the reviewers noted the success of the Saudi website in exuding power and confidence; from its strong use of imagery, priority placed on news and policy and its depth of carefully presented content it is a best-in-class website.

# Substandard

Over the review process we saw too many websites that were sorely out-of-date. The design of these websites was either reminiscent of, or indeed were from, the late 1990s or early 2000s. Boxy without style or depth, they reflected poorly on the Embassy and the country. Embassies need to reevaluate their websites if they suffer from any of the following:

## PHOTOGRAPHY + IMAGERY

Poorly chosen photos and/or images that are not formatted properly, blurry, or not sized for the web.

## TEXT HEAVY

Cluttered, text-only pages with font styles that were hard to read and feel copied from an encyclopedia article.

## UNBALANCED COLOR

Color choices that clashed and undermined the readability of the site or detract from the experience.

## ERRORS

Errors, broken links, images cut in half or other obvious technical issues that undermine confidence in the site.

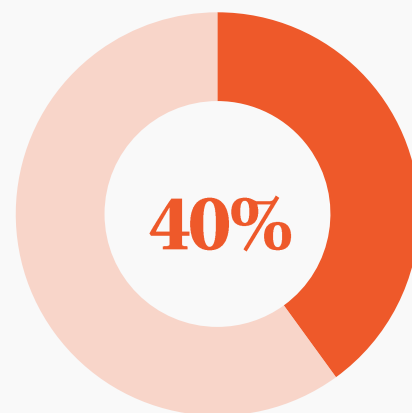
# Quality of Pages (Structure + Implementation)



A great design can be marred by poor layout that confuses and distracts the reader, broken navigation that frustrates, and misguided formatting that hides important information. If design is the surface that attracts, the structure of pages, navigation and footers are the bones that make the website function.

## What We Measured

Signal reviewers were looking for smart, clear, and easy-to-use functionality across embassy sites and focused on the home page, content pages, navigation, and usefulness of the footer. While many websites are built on templates, we wanted to see how well those templates were implemented plus any innovation that may have been included. Finally, we were looking for solid user experiences – does the page help users identify and consume information and use that information to fulfill their needs?



of total score

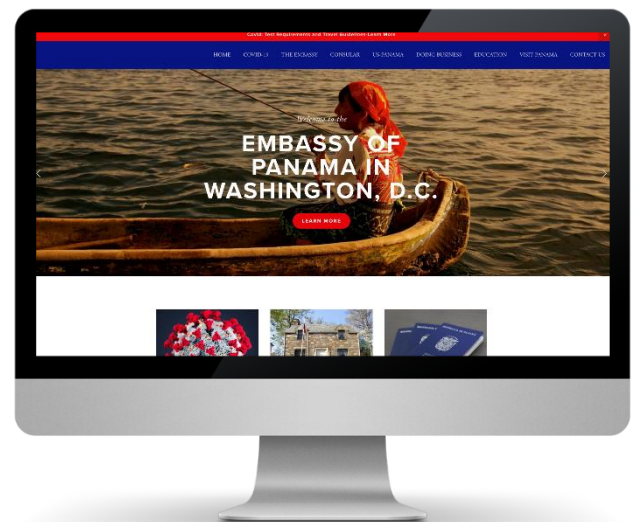
# Best in Class

Signal found the greatest mix of scores in this category than any other area of our review. For example, we found embassy websites with fantastic navigation or a great content page layout, but also poorly conceived homepages or barely-there footers. We've listed below the most important elements of a successful website and which embassies we felt knocked those elements out of the park.

## HOMEPAGE

### Panama

Signal reviewers thought that Panama's home page could have a more current design and presentation, but they excelled in their efficient way of presenting the most important information for users on the home page. Utilizing a grid structure is great method, and coupled with clear, simple titles, and a small prompt of what you will find in that section, it demonstrated best practice. The most important lesson for embassies is that hierarchy, utility, and clarity are important goals for a home page, which Panama achieved on their site.



## NAVIGATION

### New Zealand + Portugal

A quick note: while the New Zealand U.S. Embassy page is a part of the Foreign Affairs & Trade site, reviewers focused on just the embassy pages. What our reviewers were looking for in high-quality navigation is clear top navigation, consistent on-page or sectional navigation, breadcrumbs, and an easy, scannable presentation. These two embassies executed navigation well and should be considered as good examples of putting best practices into use.

Portugal's top navigation was clear and consistent with nicely responsive and formatted dropdowns to view the subsections. Then, both sides added side navigation when moving into the site.

Reviewers also appreciated the extra step of the New Zealand page in providing a small box at the top of content with "On this page" to give further page-specific section navigation. Finally, both sites have strong navigational breadcrumbs to allow you to know where you are in the site structure. (Signal reviewers also liked Portugal's site map, which was well done...a true sign of user experience geekdom.)

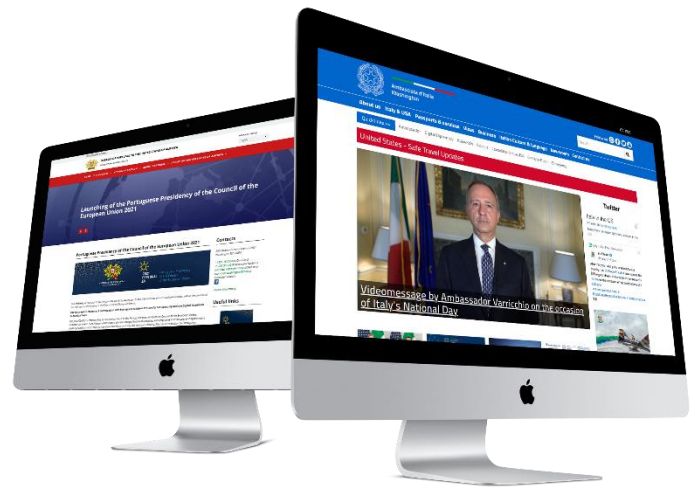




## CONTENT PAGES

### Saudi Arabia + France

What stood out for Signal reviewers was a content page that presented its information with clarity, but also allowed information to stand-out with a good font choice, a clean background to allow the content to be readable, but most-of-all: good layout and spacing. The Saudi website is a model for embassies with its clear, clean content pages set off by nicely chosen and formatted images. While the font could be a tad larger for older eyes, the font color and background made it easy to read. The French embassy also has gotten the content right with well-chosen font, just enough white space, and a good layout. It is easy to scan or read these pages and the font colors on the off-white background make it easy on the eyes. (Although, we would urge the Embassy rethink the crowded right rail.)



## FOOTER

### Portugal + Italy

The poor, oft-neglected website footer. Forgotten by designers, eschewed by content managers, and ignored by website owners, it can be a critical tool for users to find information, be a navigation beacon or a marketing board, and/or highlight something of importance. The Embassies of Italy and Portugal recognized the potential of the footer and have raised it up to a higher plane. For the Embassy of Italy, the footer is a cool, efficient place to place high-level navigation, including links out to their national government and the EU, and, notably, underline their commitment to transparency. Solid, smart, and efficient and just what a footer should be. The Embassy of Portugal's footer is a bit showier, but still restrained in design and style. While Signal reviewers would have liked the text links a bit larger, the use of attractive, well-sized brand images/links made this footer a winner.

# Substandard

Embassy websites can be significantly marred by poor user experiences founded in poorly constructed navigation and page structure. The most common culprit for these flaws were the underlying web templates that reach back twenty plus years when designs, font and photography were limited by low bandwidth. Another culprit is the use of free templates and tools (such as social share buttons), which lower the cost of the website, but reflect poorly on the embassy.

## SCANT NAVIGATION

Scant navigation was a critical problem; we saw several examples where navigation was limited to the top sections, even if the site had multiple sub-sections. When you start to go down one or more pages into the site you can easily get lost. We also saw navigation that changed as you went deeper, such as suddenly adding a side navigation, or even worse, having navigation where page names and order change depending on where you are in the site.

## HOME PAGES TOO SPARSE OR DENSE WITH CONTENT

Home pages that were either too sparse or over-stuffed with content. Reviewers noted that overly sparse homepages were generally older templates that are structured with a grid of clickable links and images that were too small. There is also an opposite trend that overemphasizes the homepage and overstuffs the page with content, links, share buttons, (please do not put your Twitter feed on the home page...if we wanted to read Twitter posts we would go to Twitter) and every flashing bauble that could be found. In a world of search engines that deliver traffic to specific pages, an embassy home page should be elegant, informative and on-brand.

## CLUTTERED PAGES

Pages that were crammed with blocks of text (often with fonts that were too small) detracted by the user experience. Many of these pages did have some imagery, but often it was poorly formatted or too small to appreciate.

## NO FOOTER!

It may be a design choice, but it is a bad choice. Footers are easy to make and are a useful tool for framing content and adding navigation.

# Quality of Content (Presentation, Utility, Detail)

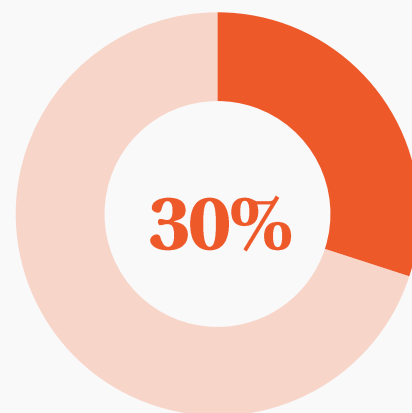


The quality of an embassy's website content is key to its value for audiences. The embassy website should not only provide audiences with useful information but also find ways to go beyond by anticipating the interests of the audience and, if possible, delight the audience. While different embassies made different choices about what to have on their sites, we were looking for smart, useful, and detailed information on the site or clear links off the site to another information source on the U.S. ambassador, content for potential tourists, information for business and investors, and strong consular information.

## What We Measured

The content criteria focused on the quality of content contained on the internal pages of the website. Signal reviewers looked at different pages to determine the adequacy of information and how it was presented.

- Did it represent the country?
- Was it easy to learn about the consular services and the ambassador?
- The biggest question is what do the content pages provide and is it useful information presented in a clear format?



of total score

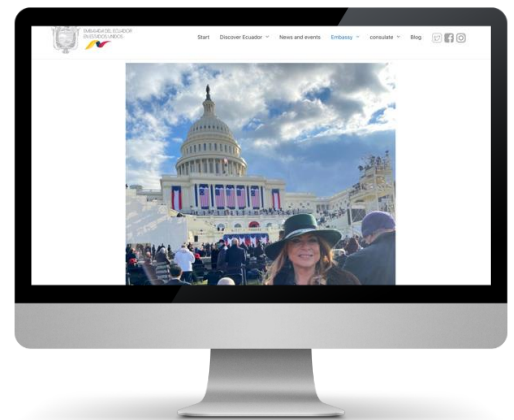
# Best in Class

Some embassy sites had stand-out quality of content. These sites showcased the country and gave the viewer a strong sense of the country's identity. These sites had high-quality content and information presented in an understandable way. While these are not all the exceptional sites, these are examples of standouts who presented different content pages well. They highlight what the Signal reviewers were searching for.

## AMBASSADOR PAGE

### Ecuador

An ambassador page is designed to showcase the ambassador to the U.S. and enhance their standing as an experienced, trusted, and influential representative of their country. We want to understand their career, duties, and accomplishments, as well as learn a bit more about them and their perspective on their assignment. Ecuador did a stand-out job in this regard and Signal reviewers appreciated the detailed information about the ambassador. While we might suggest cropping the image to enable the content to live higher on the page, but when a viewer scrolls past, they can get a sense of the person and how they see their role representing Ecuador in the U.S. We note that the depth of information and digital media clips helps push this page up in search results.

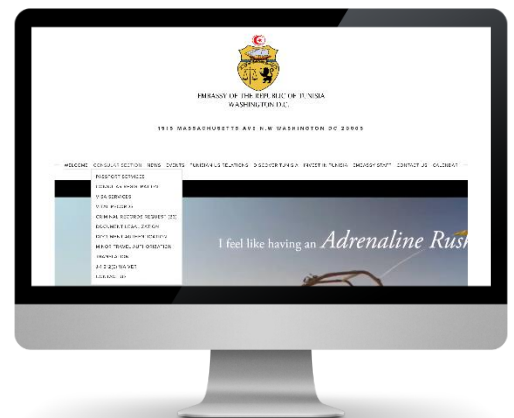


We would also like to make a special note of the multiple embassies that had staff pages that had pictures and small bios about key embassy staff, including contact information. We know that an embassy runs because of a great team, and we gave extra attention to those embassy sites who acknowledge that fact.

## CONSULAR AFFAIRS

### Tunisia

Consular pages are meant to help citizens of the country who reside in the U.S. by providing legal, news and information, visit, and citizenship information. For many, this information is an essential lifeline. Whether this information is found directly on the site, or linked out to a separate site, the best consular pages answer the most critical questions regarding paperwork, travel, visas, or anything else someone from another country might need to know to reside in the U.S. Signal reviewers enjoyed the clarity of Tunisia's consular page. The consular section opens into a dropdown menu where viewers can select the page with the information they need. Each page provided the necessary information for whatever the subject might be, like passport services, document legalization, and more. This page is one of the best because it concisely provides the necessary information with smart organization and economy. While many countries have a separate consular site (some good, some bad), the Tunisian Embassy pages are a model to emulate.

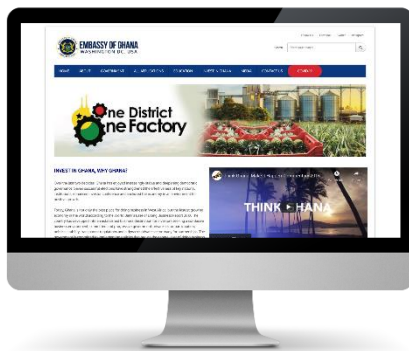


## TRADE AND INVESTMENT

### Ghana, Norway and Mali

While many countries will have a separate trade office in the U.S., we still think it important that an embassy website helps promote trade and investment information. We were looking for pages that did not simply list the major industries, exports, and imports, but tried to facilitate and direct business and investment interest to the right source. Signal reviewers picked out three best-in-class content pages: Ghana, Norway, and Mali. Norway was the most sophisticated of the three countries because it has a large and sophisticated agency – Innovate Norway – that runs several sophisticated trade and investment programs in the U.S. However, even Norway could learn from Ghana and Mali on the way they present helpful, detailed information, smart content, and anticipate visitor interests. If an embassy wants to get their onsite trade and investor content right, study these three sites.

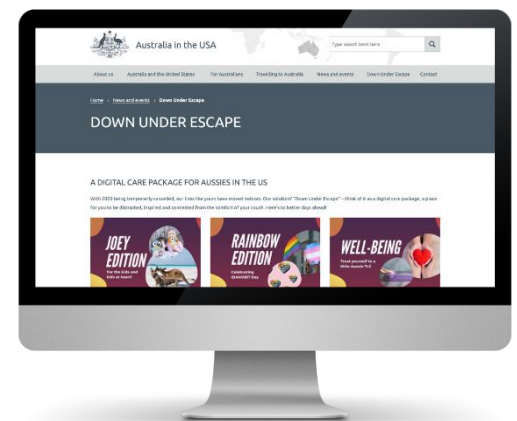
*Note: Signal is planning a review to country trade and investment sites as a follow-up to this report.*



## TOURISM/CULTURE

### Australia

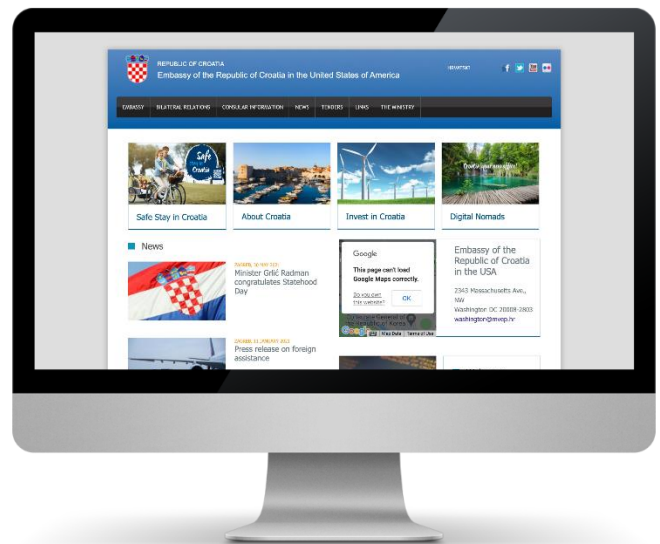
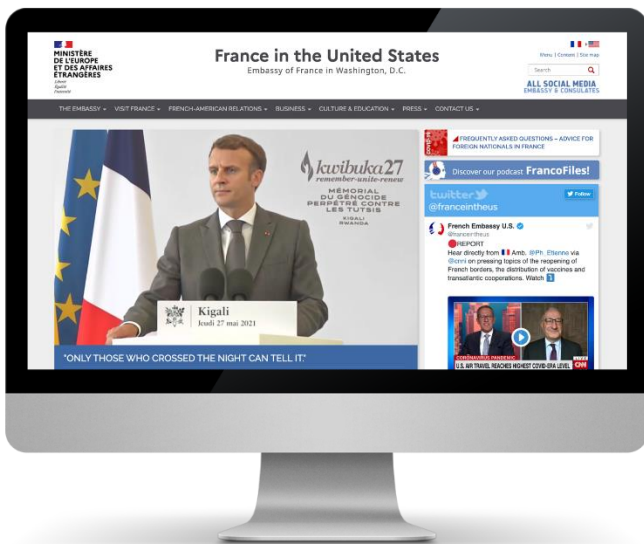
We were reviewing sites through the eyes of prospective tourists in accessing (or being directed to) helpful information and rich, creative ways of getting to know the quality and flavor of a country's culture. Did the site showcase important matters and necessary information for visitors? Were the important cultural elements highlighted? The culture pages should provide a strong sense of the country is and what are some important cultural aspects. Signal reviewers ranked Australia's tourism/culture page among the highest. Their tourism section features a creative name of "Down Under Escape" and uses video, audio, and outside content for every type of traveler, including creative content for kids. (Who wouldn't want to turn an old egg carton into an Australian sugar glider?) Reviewers also appreciated that the Australian cultural pages were kept up to date, including a care package to Australians who are stuck in the U.S.



## COUNTRY REPRESENTATION

## France and Croatia

The embassy website is literally a representation of the country to U.S. audiences, and should provide a strong, collective perspective about the country, its people and culture. Signal reviewers were looking for embassy sites that not only listed facts about the country but utilized words, images, links, and media to celebrate their country for U.S. audiences. This report has already identified Panama and Australia as outstanding examples and note the impressive content by the Italian Embassy on its deep focus on the Italian language. The reviewers noted the value of how France and Croatia connected audiences with culture. Both countries link out from their embassy, the French Embassy to a French Culture site and Croatia, not to be outdone, to two sites, Land and People and Safety in Croatia. Signal reviewers were impressed by the depth, design, and quality of information on all these sites. It also points to the fact that an embassy website is does not have to be a repository of information, but also a guide connecting visitors to the best place to fulfill their interests and inquiries.



# Substandard

While some embassy sites succeeded in their content presentation, others did not. (Which is our way of being diplomatic.) Signal reviewers saw huge variations across many sites: the ambassador page might be well done, but the trade and investment pages were a disaster.

## NO REPRESENTATION OF AMBASSADOR

Too many sites featured little to no representation of the Ambassador, which was eye-opening as our contention is that the official liaison between the country and the U.S. is an absolute necessity on the site. Embassies with poor rankings for their Ambassador pages were most likely docked by having almost too sparse information on the Ambassador and limited information on their speeches, presentations, exchanges, and events. Reviewers also noted when the Ambassador's photo was poorly cropped, and low-quality.

## SPARENESS TO A POINT OF BLANDNESS

While an embassy website does not have to be all things to all people, pages with link and a picture might be reevaluated and incorporated into another page, expanded with additional helpful information, or eliminated. Embassy staff should judge their web pages from the perspective of the audience: is this satisfying to read?

## COOKIE CUTTER PAGES

Reviewers encountered several pages that were seemingly cut and pasted from other site or were just a list of bullet points without much context or depth. Consider removing these pages or building out a fuller picture of the content.

## CONTENT LACKS MEANING

Content on embassy sites needs to be useable, meaning easy to scan and read, have good structure and layout, along with good backgrounds and white space. Reviewers encountered usability and readability issues on many sites, with too small fonts, layouts that jammed together paragraphs and distracting backgrounds and odd 1990 features such as pulsing "New" next to what we would understand and updated information. There is a balance to the information needed on sites and it is worth reevaluating the necessary content.

# Technical Sophistication



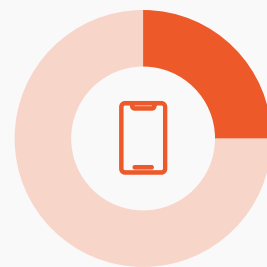
Today we live in a thoroughly mobile world and websites need to be responsive to smaller screens. Another trend is ensuring that your website (and your users) is safe from hacking and stealing of their information. It is essential that websites are secured, and the Signal reviewers found too many embassy sites that were open to malintent.

In addition to safety and security, measuring usability also considers the speed at which pages load, the presence of any 404 errors, and the safety of any external links redirecting from the website.

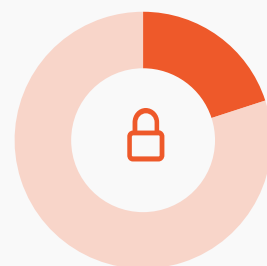
## What We Measured

In our simplest category we were looking for just two things: was the Embassy website responsive to mobile formats and was secured (HTTPS.) Because so many embassy websites are built on old web templates, they are not ready for a mobile world, nor do they keep their website secure.

While several were mobile responsive and secure, our review found 25% of the sites we reviewed as not ready for mobile devices, and even more worrying 20% not secured, including sites of several prominent embassies.



**25%**  
Not ready  
for mobile



**20%**  
Not secured



# Summary

Signal's review of the embassy websites in the U.S. was a perspective on how a country represents itself to official Washington, the U.S. public, and its own citizens abroad. The website, along with the speech, the event, and the social media account, are all extensions of foreign policy, a country's brand, and how it presents itself to the world.

Our review shows that an Embassy's website can be a powerful tool to engaging and informing U.S. audiences, as well as being a platform for a country's policy and influence. While there were a few knock-out examples, on average, the websites we reviewed needed updating in design, content, and structure. A few were even deeply concerning with their lack of security or ability to be utilized on a mobile device.

The good news is that improving websites is not a complicated nor expensive affair. There are numerous services that can offer lightly customized sites, as well as teams – like Signal's – that have deep website design and development experience for clients, including understanding the nuances of diplomacy and foreign policy.

Our goal with this review is to highlight best practices and provide practical advice on how to improve an embassy website. We thoroughly enjoyed the process and were suitably impressed by a number of countries in how they presented their face and offered services to the U.S. These are the sites that we hope mark the future standard of this critical piece of digital diplomacy.

If any Embassy would like to discuss their website, this report, or strategies for improvement, please do not hesitate to contact us. Signal is dedicated to helping clients and future clients build smart, engaging, and powerful digital products and campaigns that deliver high impact.

## **Robert Bole**

Managing Director, Digital Practice Group  
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Embassy Name	All Reviewer Average Score	Design + Brand Category Avg.	Quality of Pages Category Avg.	Quality of Content Category Avg.	Technical Sophistication Category Avg.
UAE	8.4	9.0	8.5	7.7	8.3
Sweden	8.0	8.7	7.8	7.9	8.2
Norway	8.0	8.0	7.9	7.8	8.5
Ireland	7.8	8.0	8.0	7.4	7.7
Australia	7.8	7.7	7.5	8.0	8.3
Saudi Arabia	7.3	7.3	7.5	6.9	8.0
Panama	7.5	7.3	7.2	8.1	7.2
Italy	6.7	5.3	7.6	6.3	7.2
Netherlands	6.7	6.3	6.6	6.7	7.5
Portugal	6.5	5.3	7.2	6.0	7.7
France	6.4	6.3	5.8	7.2	7.2
Colombia	5.6	6.0	5.4	5.4	6.5
Qatar	5.6	5.3	5.8	4.8	7.3
Tunisia	5.6	6.0	4.9	5.6	7.2
South Africa	5.2	6.0	4.5	4.9	7.2
Ghana	5.2	5.0	5.8	4.9	6.8
Jordan	5.1	5.7	5.2	5.4	2.5
Brazil	5.0	4.3	4.8	5.3	6.0
Iraq	4.7	5.0	4.8	4.9	2.5
Mexico	4.5	4.0	3.8	5.1	7.0
Argentina	4.5	4.0	4.3	5.4	6.5
Ecuador	4.5	4.3	4.7	4.4	4.2
Mali	4.4	3.7	3.9	4.8	6.8
New Zealand	4.4	2.3	5.3	3.8	6.7
Thailand	4.3	4.0	4.3	4.6	6.5
South Korea	4.2	4.0	4.8	3.7	6.7
Indonesia	4.1	4.0	4.9	3.6	2.7
Chile	4.1	4.0	3.7	3.9	6.5
Lebanon	4.1	4.0	4.8	3.9	2.3
Costa Rica	4.0	3.7	3.9	4.7	2.8
Japan	3.8	2.7	3.7	4.1	6.0
Spain	3.7	2.3	3.8	3.7	6.0
Croatia	3.7	3.3	3.8	4.4	1.5
U.K.	3.4	2.7	3.1	3.2	6.8
Nigeria	3.2	3.7	3.8	2.3	2.2
Morocco	3.2	2.7	2.8	3.3	5.3
China	3.2	2.3	4.0	2.9	2.0
Albania	2.7	3.0	3.4	1.8	2.0



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