

To Professor Smith
From Jane Smith
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Subject Website Recommendations

The information provided through the Internet is essential in today's rapid moving society. Websites that display clearly their information are the most efficient in communicating with their audiences. Websites like yours, which provide very useful information to university students, play a very significant role in the educational system. Because the information in your website is very important, your website could benefit from recommendations to improve its presentation and content.

This report presents some recommendations aimed at improving your website. As a student of one of your classes who has knowledge about your personal career and education background, I have analyzed every page of your website. I have also carried out usability tests by three anthropology students from California State University Long Beach to find out exactly what in your website they find problematic.

This report is divided into two major sections. The first section is discussion in which the usability test is discussed at length with major emphasis on the research questions, demographics of the participants, the test procedure, and the findings. The second section is recommendations, which presents detailed recommendations based on the findings from the research including the usability testing and the design elements. This section will also explain how the solution illustrated at www.newwebsite.com better fulfills your purpose and the users' needs than the original website.

Discussion

Usability Test Purpose

Usability tests are beneficial for evaluating web pages because they allow us to see where the test users have problems. Those sections are probably those that the intended audience as well finds confusing specifically in understanding the content and locating information. Hence, the purpose of the usability tests was to gather credible data to provide to you recommendations for improving your website to ensure that its content and design match its users' needs and your intended purpose.

Research Questions

The usability test was designed to answer the following questions:

- What is your first impression when you first accessed this website?
- Can you identify the most important information on the website? (Proximity)
- Do you consider the alignment of the text and graphics problematic or helpful for the identification of the information in the website? (Alignment)

- Can you identify the second page as belonging to the same document in the first web page? (Repetition)
- Is the website interesting to navigate based on the visuals it contains? (Contrast)
- Given a navigation scenario, find some specific information on the website or navigate to a specific page.

Demographics of Test Participants

For the usability test I chose three anthropology major students from California State University Long Beach. They are two females in their junior year and one male in his senior year. They are very familiar with conducting internet research. These participants were chosen because they are representatives of your website audience. They use their professors' websites on a regular basis to find information and they have a common background on your field.

Test Procedure

The usability tests were conducted on December 9 at the Computer Center at the CSULB library. The conditions and circumstances in which I conducted the tests resemble an everyday scenario of the targeted audience. First, the test users are appropriate representatives of the target audience. In addition, the Computer Center is used on a daily basis by students to access their professors' websites and to conduct research.

The participants took the test one at a time. On average each took about 14 minutes to complete the test. By the time they began their test I had the computer connected to your website www.oldwebsite.com. Thereafter, I gave them seven research questions to answer based on the main page and the vita page of your site. They were able to complete the questionnaires without any interruptions or distractions. Throughout the test I only observed to take note of the parts on which they seemed confused.

At the beginning of the test the participants asked me what was the purpose of the test. I hesitated to answer them because I wanted their answers to be unbiased. For this reason, I simply instructed them to answer the questions as honest and clear as possible. However, when they completed the test, they asked me once again about the purpose of the test and this time I answered their question in detail.

Findings

The usability tests allowed me to recognize recurring problems of the two test pages of your website. In general, the first reaction of the participants to your website was that it needed to be better organized and its visual presentation improved. One of them commented "This page lacks professionalism. It is not representing well the professor's strong education background and his admirable experience in the field of anthropology." The following are the problems and good points found by the test users:

- The participants had trouble identifying the most important information in the first page. They commented that the way the links were placed in the middle of the first half of the page and then described on the second half of the page was very cumbersome. One of the test users said about this problem "I had initially

thought that because the information was not placed together it was even not related.”

- They commented that the centered alignment of the text in the first page does not create a strong line compared to the second page where the text is aligned to the left.
- The test users noted that because the second page is very different visually from the first page, it appears as if the two pages do not belong to the same document. One of them mentioned “When I accessed the second page, I thought I had mistakenly pressed a key that took me to a different website. It was not until I started reading the second page that I realized that I was reading the professor’s vita.”
- They mentioned that the solid white background of the web pages helps to be able to read the text.
- They commented that the visual presentation of the website discouraged them from navigating through the site. They said that the font type made the text difficult to read. One of them even said, “Reading through the web pages is like reading a textbook full of writing with no color. This lack of color makes the reading less interesting to read.”
- When the participants were asked to click on the Vita link on the first page, they hesitated for a moment because they were unsure on which link to click because the page has two links to the Vita page.
- When the test users were asked to find the Current Research Projects on the Vita page, they told me that they had trouble following the organization of the information presented and consider that there are other logical ways in which the vita could be organized.

Recommendations

The test participants and I agree that there are some problems with the website design that makes it look unprofessional. The site can have a better presentation if the following recommendations are taken into consideration for redesigning it because they are based on the design of elements of proximity, alignment, repetition, and contrast.

- One problem that the test participants had was identifying the most important information in the first page. They commented that the way the links were placed in the middle of the first half of the page and then described on the second half of the page was very cumbersome. Based on the design element of proximity, it is not a good idea to place information in the middle of the page just to space them out because people assume that if information is not related it is separate. Because these two sections refer to the same information they should not be separated. I

recommend deleting the section on the description of the links and keeping only the links because they are self-explanatory.

- I noted that the description of “Puvonga” at the beginning of the site is extremely misleading. When one first access the first page, it appears as if the content of the website is on “Puvonga.” I recommend deleting it because the site already has a link for the Puvungna Sacred Site Struggle that contains an extensive description of it. This will prevent the users from being confused because it takes into account the element of proximity allowing the user to focus on and recognize the most important information.
- At first sight it is confusing to see the contact information placed in the center of the first page. The information does not flow from the “Puvoga” description followed by the contact information. Hence, I recommend placing the contact information at the top of the first page followed by the links. This will comply with the principle of proximity because related information will be placed together.
- Another problem that the test users found with the site was that the centered alignment of the text in the first page does not create a strong line compared to the second page where the text is aligned to the left. Therefore, I recommend aligning to the left the text on the first page and keeping the original alignment of the second page. According to the design element of alignment, this will create a sharp, professional look and visual coherence.
- An additional problem with the website noted by the test users was that it appears as if the two pages do not belong to the same document because the second page is very different visually from the first page. To correct this problem, I recommend placing the same header and using the same font and background color on both pages. This repetition will avoid confusion by allowing the users to see that the page they are reading belongs to the same website.
- I also noted that second page does not have any bullets, which are very helpful in organizing lists. To make the text on the second page easier to read I used the same type of bullets on every section of the page. By consistently placing like information in the same manner or place, users can more easily recognize and find that information.
- The test users mentioned that the font type made the text difficult to read. I recommend the use of sans serif fonts on both pages because it makes it easier to read the text. In addition, to create contrast I suggest bolding the titles. Moreover, by keeping the solid white background of the web pages it will create contrast with the text. This contrast will add interest to the page by creating a difference in similar elements.

- The test users and I had difficulty understanding and following the organization of the information placed in Vita page. The original order is as follows: Previous Positions, Academic Preparation, Academic Interests, Professional Memberships, Courses Taught, Other University Activities, Selected Fellowships, Grants, and Awards, Selected Publications and Current Research Projects. To make the organization more logical I recommend the following order: Academic Preparation, Previous Positions, Academic Interests, Professional Memberships, Selected Fellowships, Grants and Awards, Courses Taught, Other University Activities, Current Research Projects, and Selected Publications.

Conclusion

The solution I am recommending better fulfills your purpose and the users' needs than the original website. Considering the problems encountered in your site by the test participants and me, it is evident that the pages need to be redesigned. The test users and I are representatives of the everyday users of your site and the problems we experienced are likely the same that others have encountered. These problems are probably creating confusion and impeding full understanding of the content of the site. The recommendations provided and applied into the redesigned website take into account the design elements of proximity, alignment, repetition, and contrast. This new website allows the user to read and understand the information with greater clarity and ease. In addition, it provides a more professional presentation of your recognizable education background and academic experience. Hence, I highly recommend you to consider the redesigned website because it fulfills your purpose and the users' needs.