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LTLE 611-User Experience

Usability Report

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Introduction

For my project, I created a travel site called “Urban Explorations.” The purpose of the site is to serve as a resource for others drawing from my personal experiences in cities across America as well as internationally. The site is intended to allow users to choose a city of interest and explore recommendations within different categories for each city. Given the scope of the project, I chose to focus on 3 cities in different regions of the U.S.—Asheville, North Carolina, San Francisco, California, and Chicago, Illinois.

I conducted the test myself during two separate testing sessions—one initial, and then another after some changes had been made. The first test session was done with participants at a remote location with the test participants receiving a Dropbox link to the site files. Participants then opened the files on their laptops in their preferred browser. I communicated with test participants via Blackboard Collaborate using screensharing and a microphone. The participants’ actions and voices were recorded with a screen recorder (Screencastomatic). Only the administrator (myself) was present at my location and the participants at theirs. Instructors anonymously dropped into these internet test sessions to observe. The second session also used Dropbox to access the site files and used Screencastomatic to record the sessions. The second session tests took place in person on a Mac desktop computer using the Chrome browser with the administrator (myself) and the participant present. Both tests adhered to the same protocol and number of participants (2 per session). The recorded sessions captured the participants’ time on task, navigational choices, task completion rates, comments, questions and feedback.

Accessibility

The Urban Explorations site was developed using the Bootstrap 3 framework and by adding customized CSS and JavaScript plug-ins. The site is very image-heavy, which was a concern with designing for accessibility. The most recent version of the site after having gone through two rounds of usability testing contains a Lighbox JS plug-in to allow for smooth navigation between photos with captions and image number indication (e.g., “Image 1 of 8”). Although I have not been able to get the captions read aloud with a screenreader, the gallery is fully functional with keyboard shortcuts (as is the entire site’s navigation). All images have alt tags included except for decorative ones. The navigation bar remains fixed at the top of every page, and the links remain in the same order for consistency.

Please see Appendix C for a link to the website files via Dropbox.

Executive Summary

The usability test sessions took place on Wednesday, April 20 and Sunday, May 1, 2016 at James Madison University and at participants’ remote locations. The purpose of the test was to determine the usability of the site’s interface design, navigation, and information architecture. The total number of participants during both test days was four—two during Test 1 and two during Test 2. These were all different individuals, but all test participants were graduate students at James Madison University and in their twenties. Each session lasted approximately twenty minutes, with the two Test 1 sessions taking longer due to technical difficulties.

Overall, the site appeared to be structured in a usable manner, with a few issues that were brought to attention. Changes to the site were made based on feedback from Test 1 and again after Test 2. Based on the Test 2 sessions, the changes from the Test 1 results appear to be an

improvement and have made the site more useable. Issues that were highlighted in testing included the following:

- Lack of fluid navigation method for photo gallery
- Lackluster color scheme on some pages
- Lack of captions for photo gallery
- Icon positioning in photogallery
- Hovering on landing page photos

This report contains participant feedback, task completion rates and efficiency, time on task, and recommendations for future improvements. Copies of the testing protocol and the usability plan are included as appendices to this document.

Methodology

Sessions

Participants were recruited from the LTLE 611 graduate course, and also from among graduate students at a study session. None of the participants had seen the site prior to testing, and the participants in Test 2 were different individuals than those in Test 1. Each session lasted no more than twenty minutes. In each test instance, participants were allowed a maximum of three minutes to complete each of the four tasks, all of whom succeeded in completing tasks well before the three minute limit. Participants were briefed about the session according to the protocol and were then asked their general perceptions of the site based on the landing page before clicking on anything. Participants were asked to think aloud as much as possible while going through each task. Four tasks were then read to each participant in the same order each time. They were given time to complete the task before moving on to the next one. After the

tasks were completed, I followed up by asking any questions about the way they behaved during the test, and also asked about:

- Any changes to the navigation and the site as a whole they would recommend.
- Anything they liked or didn't like or that they expected to be different

Please see Appendix A for the protocol used in both test sessions, and Appendix B for the usability plan.

Participants

Four participants tested the site—2 remotely in Test 1 and 2 in person in Test 2. Test 1 remote sessions were conducted on April 20, 2016 and Test 2 sessions on May 1, 2016. All participants were graduate students from James Madison University, and of the four that tested the site, 3 were female and 1 male.

Results

before, all participants successfully completed each task, but not all approaches were the same, as indicated below:

Responses and Recommendations

Based on participant responses, all 4 participants correctly identified the purpose of the site.

Issues arose with the initial lack of a smooth photo gallery navigation system, as clicking on and off photos was not preferable based on Test 1, and the “lackluster” color scheme of the site:

Participant	Initial Impressions	Follow up Question #1	Follow up Question #2
1	<p>“It looks like you’re sharing your travels with the viewer...places they’ve visited and their recommendations. It looks like you can learn more about it.”</p>	<p>“When I was going through the picture gallery, I expected an easier way to click through the pictures.”</p> <p>“The only way you can navigate between images is by using the ‘back’ button”</p> <p>“I never used the “Featured Cities” link, but it looks like it takes you to the same places from the homepage. There’s a little redundancy there, but it’s good redundancy.”</p> <p>“I don’t think there’s anything else that didn’t behave like I thought it would behave.”</p>	<p>Aforementioned photo gallery navigation</p>
2	<p>“I like the big, bold title in the middle of the page.”</p> <p>“Looks like a travel site based on places you’ve visited.”</p> <p>“Featured cities makes me think maybe there are some places you liked more than others...”</p> <p>“The color is a little lackluster”</p>	<p>“I liked the photo gallery but I wish there were explanations [captions] for the pictures and a better way to navigate through them.”</p>	<p>“I liked the navigation. It definitely makes a lot of sense.”</p> <p>“As you continue with the site though, I’m not sure if you’ll be adding to the “Featured Cities” segment or not.”</p>
3	<p>“Looks like it’s a U.S. traveler who has gone to some major cities and what to tell people what they can do there.”</p>	<p>Didn’t like position of X-button in photo gallery</p> <p>“Looking for ‘contact’ I almost didn’t notice it in the navigation because of the color—maybe make it stand out a bit more? I thought it was part of Chrome.”</p>	<p>None. “I really like that it starts with a picture of each city so you can pick which one you want to look at.”</p> <p>“I like how it’s organized by types of locations instead of a bunch of links.”</p>

Participant	Initial Impressions	Follow up Question #1	Follow up Question #2
4	“It’s a site about someone’s travels with clear links to places where the person has been and photos.”	Resizing photos in gallery. “I’m used to keeping my mouse in one place and being able to click.”	<p>“I’m not crazy about the font, but I don’t know what would be better.”</p> <p>“I like the overall look—it’s very simple.”</p> <p>“Maybe add a picture to the contact page or the about page.”</p> <p>Background on landing page could be more colorful. “A new photo with more color. Doesn’t really imply ‘cities’.”</p>

Time on Task

Time to complete each task appear satisfactory, with task two taking the longest due to the first two test participants actually inputting their information and submitting the email whereas the last two participants stopped at identifying the page. The time spent on the photo gallery will also vary depending on how long the user wishes to spend perusing photos.

	P1	P2	P3	P4	Avg. TOT*
Task 1	60 sec	50 sec	40 sec	24 sec	43.5 sec
Task 2	1 min 50 sec	1 min 35 sec	18 sec	25 sec	62 sec
Task 3	60 sec	50 sec	60 sec	50 sec	55 sec
Task 4	27 sec	14sec	22 sec	37 sec	25 sec

Conclusion and Recommendations

Overall, participants found the site to be well planned in terms of navigation and information architecture. The main issues, as can be seen from the data presented, appear to be aesthetic and design related.

After two rounds of usability testing, I have implemented the following changes to the site based on user feedback:

- Changed the color of the navigation bar to stand out from browser
- Implemented a lightbox photo gallery feature
- Changed the landing page photo to something more evocative of travel and with a bit more color
- Added background image to “contact” page

Going forward with the site, I would like to address the issue of the “x” button location in the photo gallery. I have not yet been able to address this, as in researching the problem, I have found it requires tweaking the JS source code, which I am not as familiar with as HTML and CSS. I would also like to make the city photo icons on the landing page stand out when hovered over, but was not able to implement a solution I liked before the deadline for this assignment. I do believe that the site is greatly improved since the first round of testing, but there is room for more useful modifications.

Appendix A—Protocol

Usability Test Protocol

- Files will be shared with user. User will be instructed on which file to open in browser.

Hi, _____. My name is Katelyn, and I’m going to be walking you through this session today. Before we begin, I have some information for you, and I’m going to read it to make sure

that I cover everything. You probably already have a good idea of why we asked you here, but let me go over it again briefly. We're asking people to try using a Web site that we're working on so we can see whether it works as intended. The session should take about fifteen minutes.

The first thing I want to make clear right away is that we're testing the site, not you. You can't do anything wrong here. In fact, this is probably the one place today where you don't have to worry about making mistakes. As you use the site, I'm going to ask you as much as possible so try to think out loud: to say what you're looking at, what you're trying to do, and what you're thinking. This will be a big help to us.

Also, please don't worry that you're going to hurt our feelings. We're doing this to improve the site, so we need to hear your honest reactions.

If you have any questions as we go along, just ask them. I may not be able to answer them right away, since we're interested in how people do when they don't have someone sitting next to them to help. But if you still have any questions when we're done I'll try to answer them then. And if you need to take a break at any point, just let me know.

With your permission, we're going to record what happens on the screen and our conversation. The recording will only be used to help us figure out how to improve the site, and it won't be seen by anyone except the people working on this project. And it helps me, because I don't have to take as many notes.

Do you have any questions so far?

OK, great. Now we can start looking at things.

****If not in person, have the user open the correct file****

First, I'm going to ask you to look at this page and tell me what you make of it: what strikes you about it, whose site you think it is, what you can do here, and what it's for. Just look around and do a little narrative. You can scroll if you want to, but don't click on anything yet.

****Allow 1-2 minutes****

Thanks. Now I'm going to ask you to try doing some specific tasks. I'm going to read each one out loud.

And again, as much as possible, it will help us if you can try to think out loud as you go along.

1. **Read Task 1: Locate an art museum recommendation in San Francisco and obtain address (3 minutes)**
2. **Read Task 2: Find out how to contact the author of the site. (3 minutes)**
3. **Read Task 3: Click through photographs in the gallery (3 minutes)**
4. **Read Task 4: Find information on how the site started (3 minutes)**

Thanks, that was very helpful.

****Probe on anything you want to follow up on****

Questions:

1. How did you feel navigating around the site? Was there anything that was confusing, gave you difficulty, or that you expected to be different?
2. What about the layout of the site? Do you have any suggestions on changes to the navigation?

Do you have any questions for me, now that we're done?

****Stop screen recorder. Thank them.****

Appendix B—Usability Plan

Usability Testing Plan

Date of test: 4/20/2016

Administer: Katelyn Quinley

Product: “Urban Explorations” website

Description of Participants: JMU LTLE 611 Graduate Students

Number of Participants: 2

Goal Oriented Tasks:

5. Locate an art museum recommendation in San Francisco and obtain address (3 minutes)
6. Find out how to contact the author of the site. (3 minutes)
7. Click through photographs in the gallery (3 minutes)
8. Find information on how the site started (3 minutes)

Methods for sharing files with participants:

1. If on site: Have files ready on laptop for participant to view
2. If online: Have files shared with participant via Dropbox
3. If telepresence: Have files shared with participant via Dropbox

Methods for Data Collection:

(will use screenshare and screenrecording)

1. Note taking
2. Think-aloud
3. Time on task

Instruments used to collect data:

- Spreadsheet with time on task and user observations
- Formative review log (with suggestions for improvement)

Appendix C—link to website files via Dropbox

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/xf5ig3gct3ud3ix/AACta4zYJNT5O_YALcTvnZD2a?dl=0