college CDI

User interface design (C1U)
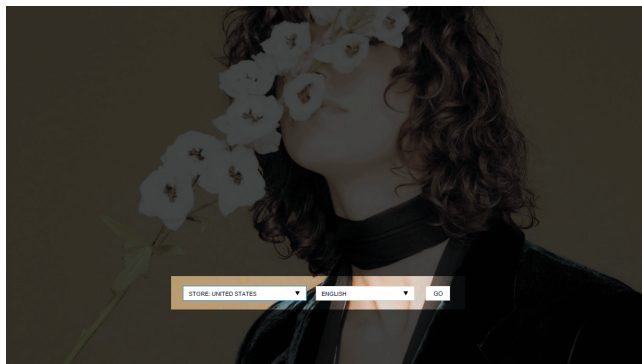
Class 4

Usual components of homepage and user interfaces

Home page

The homepage is the official first page of a web site. For a long time, it was perceived as a book cover, which isn't quite true anymore, except for certain top of the line companies or brands. Homepages used as covers (usually without navigation) are called splash pages.
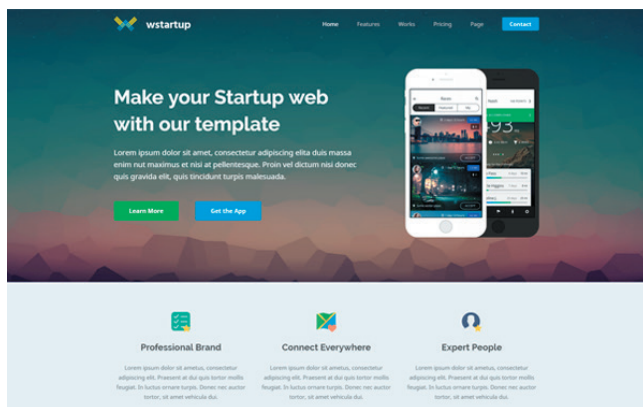
Example of a common homepage.

Example of a splash page.

Just like the cover of a magazine, and using design and aesthetic, the home page establishes the tone, the ambiance. It constitutes a web site's face and the personality.

The homepage is the starting point, even though users may enter a web site from another page. Depending on many factors, search engines such as Google may or may not index several of a web site's pages, so it is possible that traffic comes from various parts of a web site.

The home page plays a pedagogical role in the sens that is the users first contact with the interface, this is where the designer establishes different content zones, the navigation, etc.

The home page is also used to explain summarily the web site's purposes, its structure, the available contents and the tasks that can be completed.

It is usually composed of a header, a main section and of a footer.

Header

The header, just like in a letter, is the top part of the interface. It is especially important since this is where reading starts.

Therefore, this is in the header that the designer will answer first users questions : *what is it* and *what does it offer*?

Upon arrival, users need to know what web site it is or to verify if this is the web site they intended visiting. Once that is done, users need to know the features of the web site in terms of available content, functionalities, login, important contact informations.

The logo

The logo is very commonly positioned in the upper-left corner of the interface as this is the starting point of the reading pattern.

The logo shouldn't usually be too big nor to small, but too big is the most frequent mistake amateurs make.

In certain situations, for instance when the homepage is used as a splash page, the logo may be big, or even gigantic. When that occurs, the section pages of the web site will use a declination of the splash page where the logo will be of a more usual and acceptable size.

Most of the time, and this is a standard, clicking the logo will bring users to the home page.

The navigation

The navigation segments the informations and the features of a web site. It is usually positioned following the logo, very often aligned right. Again, the reason for this is the reading pattern.

We all know the usual reading pattern is Z shaped. Although, studies has shown that the reading pattern on the Internet is different than for printed material, it is F shaped.

These eye tracking heatmaps show where most of users attention time is spent (in red), forming an approximate F shape.

Whether it uses words or icons, it is important that the navigation items clearly describe the section contents and the functionalities or purposes of the different features.

As we already explained, there shouldn't usually be more than between five and nine navigation items and you should be careful to minimize the number of clicks between the homepage and the contents users are seeking for (minimum-click approach).

Make sure to position navigation far enough from content so there is no confusion and do not hesitate to make them using a different style or effect so users understand well.

There are different approaches to navigation. None are really better than others, but it is important to create a navigation well suited to the situation. In some cases, a designer may opt for a horizontal development where all possible content is accessible within one click. In other circumstances, a vertical development made of sub-navigations and contextual navigations bringing users more detailed content can be the best choice.

Very often, the navigation (or more commonly the entire header) is fixed so it remains in place when users are scrolling through content. This avoid being forced to scroll back up to navigate to other pages or sections.
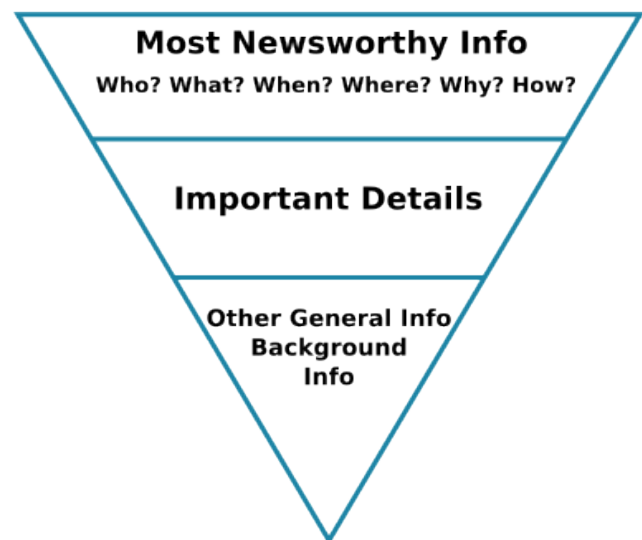
The main section

The main section is the body, the content part of an interface. This is where users read the content they are looking for.

It is very important to use proper page layout approaches and techniques in order for users to actually read the contents and for the web site to achieve its goals.

Make sure to apply hierarchy to your content using titles, subtitles and captions. Write short paragraphs and proper typography rules to maximize readability and legibility. The maximum width of a paragraph should never be over 400 pixels.

One important basic rule for writing web content is to used the journalists *inverted pyramid* approach.

The inverted pyramid approach states that you first grab attention announcing clearly what it is all about (the leads), followed by the important informations (the body), then with less important information to finish with complementary and/or background informations (the tail).

Again, based on the F reading pattern, remember that 70% of the main section's content that is read by users is positioned on the left side. This is why you see less important contents positioned on the right side of web pages.

Also, know that 70% of users read images and figures legends. Therefore, it is a very good idea to put important information in legends and even to use an image for the sole purpose of writing and image legend to transmit informations.

The footer

Depending on the structure of the web site and if it is on the home page or a content page, footers can contain many and various informations. The main purpose of a footer, is to give users supplementary informations and navigations options.

On a home page or else, it may be fixed (sticky footer) and contain very limited information such as the copyrights, a link to legal notice (terms of use), contact informations and/or a call to action.

On a content page, the footer can also follow the content (in a position relative way) and contain much more various types of informations.

Between 75 and 100% of users will read (or see) the content above the fold line (the page before scrolling) depending on the type of web site. Then, of course, progressively less users will read content below the fold line to the footer. But a very small percentage of visitors can still means hundreds of thousands or millions of visitors, it is then quite important to consider them.

For instance, when users fail to find what they are looking for, they developed the habit of scrolling down to the footer where they usually find a solution to their problem, let's not disappoint them!

Possible contents of the footer

Copyright
This is the most common item found in a footer. The copyright symbol and the year usually are enough.

Sitemap
This can be all the links to all pages of the web site, or a best practice would be to create a link to a page displaying a very detailed site map which can also contain a search engine.

Privacy policy and terms of use
These are the second most common items in footer. Privacy policy explains how the information collected by the web site may be used. Terms of use explains to the user what they agree on by visiting the web site. By using the site, the user automatically agrees to certain things.

Contact informations
Although contact informations should be placed in the header as a standard, they can be repeated here and a link to full contact informations along with maps and chats, etc. can be used.

Social networks icons
Although it can be sometimes positioned in the header, it is a standard to place these in the footer (over 70% of web sites).

E-mail sign-up
This is often placed on the right side of main content. Although, the top 25% of most popular web sites have the e-mail sign-up placed in the footer.

Press link
Since very few of the visitors are journalists, it is not necessary to put such a navigational item in the main navigation bar, but the footer is a standard for such a link to all the informations journalists may need.

Awards and certifications
This adds credibility to the offer. Although, for some businesses such as hotels and restaurants, you may want to show this right on the homepage.


Example of a non-sticky footer.

Common entry page types

Splash page

A splash page acts like a book cover and it usually displays a message or a warning to users. The message can be of various types such as a special promotion, access restricted to -18 or a warning about specific technologies (e.g. Flash).

Sometimes, splash pages are used to creates an ambiance, a style, and to build a momentum. This can also help building credibility. It is more commonly used for high-end products and brands, for instance jewelers or luxury cars such as *Alfa-Romeo*. The use of such a homepage can sometimes be efficient, but it should be avoided in most circumstances as it is only suitable for users willing to spend more time and efforts than they would on other usual websites.
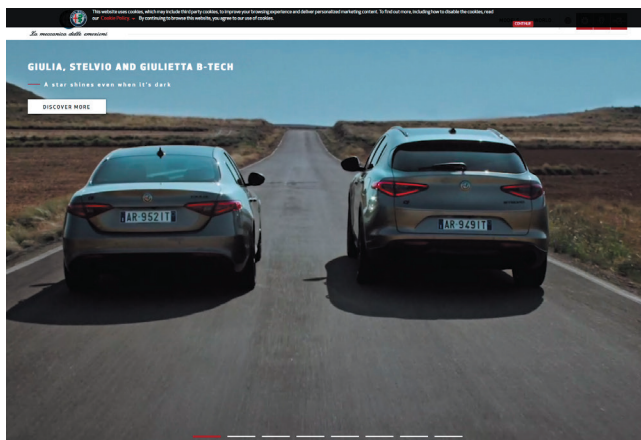

Alfa-Romeo splash page

Splash pages usually have no or very little text. It can use an image or not, for instance a full width background, and a call to action (usually asking the users to proceed to the web site). It can sometimes asks users to supply informations such as their age, their language or their country. A splash page creates a supplementary « useless » click for users, but it can be an excellent solution if an important download is necessary for the homepage to follow. While users are on the splash page, the necessary homepage files download so it is ready upon users arrival.

A splash page isn't an independent page. It is part of the home page, but it shows first in overlay. It is very important to include a very clear exit link or button so the users can proceed to the web site easily.

Homepage

The homepage, as it was already explained, is the official first page of a website. It uses the same structure as the other pages of the website and it displays a navigation.

The home page is very commonly used to guide the users, explaining what there is to be found, what tasks can be completed and showing them the way to what they came to get.
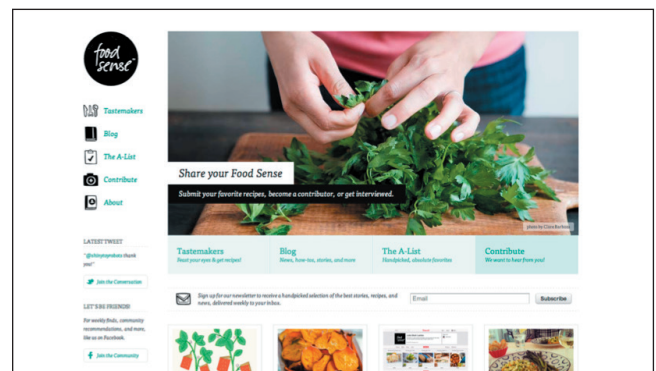
Homepage example

Landing page

Landing pages are independent pages used as some sort of antechamber built for specifically targeted users segments. Often looking like splash pages, it can include complex contents and functionalities, while not being part of the home page. Many different landing pages can be produced for the same website and their purpose is to built interest, to get users to proceed to the website using good marketing and a clear call to action.

Landing page example

Common website types

Informational

An informational website's purpose is to present, informations, facts of various types. Websites of this nature often use a URL ending with .edu (education), org (organization) or .gov (government).

Advocacy

An advocacy website is sponsored by an organization and its purpose is to influence public opinion. Websites of this nature The URL frequently use a URL ending with .org.

Just like organizations, nonprofits organizations need websites in order to have an online presence. Nonprofit websites are an easy to raise funds, to build credibility and to supply more informations to potential donors.
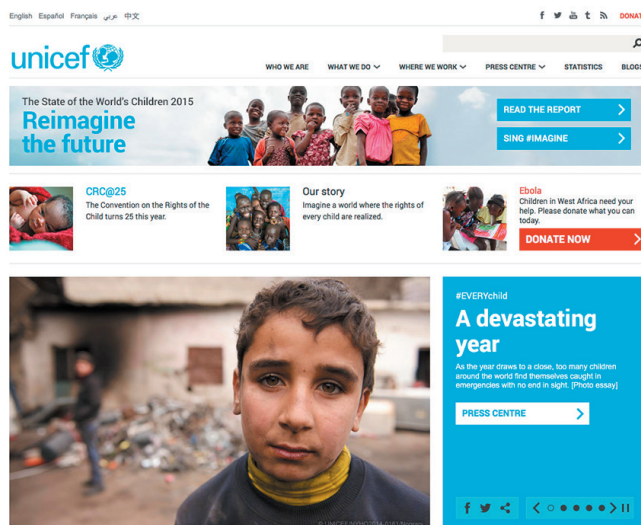
Advocacy website example

Media

Media websites collect news and reporting. Major Newspapers and TV stations, such as The Guardian or the BBC, have their own official web sites.

Media websites generally sell advertisements and/or offer users to subscribe in order to have access to integral articles or full contents.

Entertainment

Very generally, these websites objective is to make money, like business and e-commerce websites. They sell advertisements and in order to maximize profit, they need to prove they generate a lot of traffic.

There are various type of entertainment websites such funny or informative videos, blogs of various natures, comics, quizzes, etc.

Brochure

Brochure websites are a basic form of business websites. They usually consist of small websites simply insuring an online presence. The brochure website usually describes the company, its products and services and it's not a major tool for bringing in new business.

Business and Marketing

A business or marketing website purpose is to try to sell or market products and services. Most of the time, these websites URL are ending with .com.

E-commerce

E-commerce websites are definitely businesses websites, although they have functionalities allowing customers to purchase goods online.

Progressive web application

Whenever a website is very complex and usually targets a very high volume of users, we are talking about progressive websites applications. These can be websites such as Facebook, YouTube, etc.

But progressive web application includes all sorts of applications such as those you install to your mobile phones.

Home page design

Although all the UI and UX design considerations we have covered so far are very important, they would be of no use if, upon arriving on your web site, users would leave immediately. There are many reasons why a user would leave a web site at once other than compatibility and loading time.

As it was already stated, a web site must meet users expectations, and that's true in many ways. Even before finding out about the functionalities and features, some very basic expectations need to be met.

Creating credibility and trust

Upon arrival on a web site, even before starting to read any type of contents, the users have an overall impression related to expectations. These expectations vary depending on many factors, so it is impossible to design a universally good homepage design. Design is about adapting to contexts, users and purposes.

For example, if an elementary school teacher invites parents to visit the kids web pages, the users won't have high expectations in matters of design. They expect something very low-end in matters of presentation and functionalities. They would even be shocked if the aspect of the web site would be too much good looking.

So, it is important to anticipate users expectations in order to adjust the overall graphic design aspect of a website. The level of quality should be equal or superior to those of the competition in order to be credible, so the users can trust the content presented.

Would you have your website created by this designer?

Making users feel concerned

Users of a website must feel they are concerned, they should feel they are the target public. If they don't feel concerned, they won't have the necessary motivation to read the content.

For instance, if an average single user makes a Google search using a sentence such as « How to find love » and then clicks on a link saying something like « Finding love in the 21st Century », the user will have some expectations. We can easily imagine he or she is looking to find a partner or tips and tricks to find love, etc. But, what if the user arrives on a text-only website displaying a 274 pages university thesis on love? Of course, the user won't feel concerned and will visit another website.

The aspect of a website should be designed accordingly with the target public anticipated expectations. If the users feel the content is intended to a category of users they don't belong to, they will leave.

Applying design principles

Apply composition rules and use only the necessary formal elements. Use negative space efficiently for desktop version and don't be scared of using a lot of white space between elements. Create meaningful color palettes, using contrasts to your advantage, and choose appropriate fonts.

Use only great quality images and avoid stock-images as much as you can. Compress your images as much as possible as an entire web page should ideally download within three seconds.

Include human faces in your imaging and, as much as possible, find a concept producing emotion. To be efficient, communication must be human, it should feel as closed as possible to normal interpersonal communication.

Try to avoid the burger icon

Although the burger icon is quite useful for mobile devices as it avoids clustered informations, it also hide the website contents. Tabs bars are getting more and more populars.

Websites statistics

- 95% of the first impression is related to the aesthetics of a web site.

- Over 75% of the overall credibility is based on the website's aesthetics.

- Nearly 40% of users won't engage with a company if its website is poorly designed.

- In 2017, 94% of users stopped trusting websites with bad or outdated design.

- 60% of users have a better opinion of a brand or of a company after reading their websites contents.

- Over 85% of users want to see information about a company's products and services on their websites.

- 100% of highly successful websites have their logo positioned top-left.

- About 50% of highly successful the websites have a contact link positioned top-right
  (it is not a standard, but it is considered best practice).

- About 90% of highly successful websites uses a horizontal navigation in the header.

- About 75% of highly successful websites have social media icons in the footer.

- In over 70% of cases, video helps convincing users to buy a product or a service.

- Long scrolling (for instance one-pagers) reduce bounce rate by at least 15%.

- Only 1% of users click on a slider content (image carousel)

Mobile websites statistics

- 67% of consumers have and use mobile devices in the US.

- Nearly 60% of users won't recommend badly designed business mobile website.

- About 70% of highly successful websites are responsive.

- Over 50% of users say they are less likely to engage with a company
  if they had a bad mobile experience.

- Mobile users are 5 times more likely to leave a page
  if a website isn't optimized for mobile.

- About 50% of users feel frustrated and annoyed when websites are poorly optimized for mobile.

- About 80% of users will search elsewhere if they are not satisfied with the experience on a website.