

Usability News is a free web newsletter that is produced by the Software Usability Research Laboratory (SURL) at Wichita State University. The SURL team specializes in software/website user interface design, usability testing, and research in human-computer interaction.

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Do We Need the "GO" Button?

By [Barbara Chaparro](#)

One popular method of navigation within a web site is a drop-down list of web pages accompanied by a "GO" command button. In our usability evaluations of such sites, we have discovered that many users select a page from the drop-down list and wait for the browser to take them to that page. Many do not realize that they need to press the "GO" button to actually navigate to that page. Why does this happen? After all, it is not characteristic in software applications for drop-down list selection to result in an immediate action. (In fact, standard UI design guidelines recommend against this behavior.) What is different about the use of drop-down lists on the Web?

It appears the user's mental model is different with a drop-down list on the Web than with a drop-down list in a software application. In typical software applications, drop-down lists show selectable options. In a Web site they often display other pages within that site where the user may navigate. Users think that when they make the selection, they are choosing to navigate to that page immediately.

In addition, drop-down list behavior is inconsistent — we surveyed a number of sites and found three different ways of displaying navigational drop-down lists (Fig. 1) with a "GO" button, (Fig. 2) with no "GO" button, and (Fig. 3) with a "GO" button but the user is not required to use it for every selection. Each method has its own problems:



Figure 1

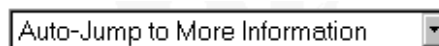


Figure 2

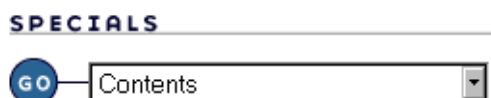


Figure 3

"GO" Button:

Users often wait to press "GO", thinking that simply selecting an option will take them to that page.

No "GO" Button:

With this approach, users navigate to the selected page immediately. Though this may seem like a good idea, navigating to a page that is already selected is problematic. Users must first select a page on the list they do not desire, then return to the page with the list, and reselect their desired choice. Likewise, accidental selections result in the same time-consuming recovery.

"GO" Button that is not always required:

This design attempts to mix the above options. To navigate to a page, users need only select the desired option. A "Go" button is present, however, in the event that the user does want to reselect an already selected page. This inconsistent behavior requires users to figure out the logic behind the drop-down list — when do they have to press GO and when do they not?

Clearly, there is a need for some standardization on the use of navigational drop-down lists. We are currently investigating the various alternatives to determine what method is most usable for web users.

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