WEBSITE USABILITY PROJECT PROPOSAL

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Subject: Website Usability Proposal - The Autism Aspergers Friendship Society of Calgary
http://www.aafscalgary.com/

INTRODUCTION

This proposal is in response to the request for a website usability consultation for the non-profit organization *Autism Aspergers Friendship Society of Calgary*, henceforth known as *AAFS.*

PURPOSE
The purpose of this document is to present an inclusive review of the current website usability and recommend the improvements our research suggests. Our research will include reviewing contemporary usability practices and methods as well as collecting AAFS website specific primary data from our usability survey. Our evaluation and recommendations for the website will be based on 4 core components:

- *Design*, how effectively the user interface helps the user;
- *Identity*, how the organization wishes to portrays itself;
- *Accessibility*, how easy is it to gain information from the website;
- *Navigation*, how easy is it to get around the website.

BACKGROUND
AAFS is a non-profit organization that provides respite care in a recreational environment for all individuals on the Autism spectrum. Since 2004, the AAFS has worked to facilitate recreational programs and activities to help their members develop social, life, and communication skills by providing them with the opportunity to practice these skills in a safe community (www.AAFScalgary.com). To exemplify this, their mission statement was written by two members of AAFS on their website.

THE AUTISM ASPERGERS FRIENDSHIP SOCIETY'S MISSION STATEMENT

Friendship means someone who you can trust and/or someone who heals you. You cannot simply ask to be Friends, or if the other person is your Friend, it is much more advanced than a yes or no answer, and Friendship builds up over time.

Friendship is "People getting to know other people and being interested in one another. Liking them for who they are, and not judging them. Not judging the book by its cover. (www.AAFScalgary.com)

RATIONALE

As an organization that focuses on providing a community that facilitates the development of such skills, the website has a requirement to also facilitate this development. This proposal is meant to determine if the website is able to support their online community, and in the case that it is not, provide constructive feedback that encourages improvement in usability. As a non-profit organization, AAFS is also heavily reliant on either its members or the general public to cover expenses. By having a professional, user-based website for AAFS, potential investors will have an easier time connecting to their pay pal account.

DELIVERABLES

Based on our research we will provide you with:

- A copy or reference to any relevant data or resource we found throughout our research,
- A Power Point presentation on the existing and potential usability of the website,
- A final report that explains our findings and recommendations in detail.

USABILITY CRITERIA

Websites are used to either complete a task, or to get some kind of relevant information. In this study, the principles of these four criteria will be to reviewed and tested to determine the website's usability. Specific examples are included to demonstrate the criteria's significance.

I. DESIGN

The Design component of our criteria concentrates on the form of a website, the aesthetic choices of the user interface that aid the user experience in creating an inviting and attractive service. The design criteria takes into account visible creative factors that can help express a strong organization identity. Visible language refers to all of the graphical techniques used to communicate the message or context. (Martin, n.d) During our research we will be focusing on AAFS' use of the following design principles and choices:

Design choices used to Convey Information

- **Layout**: formats, proportions, and grids; 2-D and 3-D organization
- **Typography**: selection of typefaces and typesetting, including variable width and fixed width
- **Color and Texture**: color, texture and light that convey complex information and pictorial reality
- **Imagery**: signs, icons and symbols, from the photographically real to the abstract
- **Animation**: a dynamic or kinetic display; very important for video-related imagery
- **Sequencing**: the overall approach to visual storytelling

- **Sound**: abstract, vocal, concrete, or musical cues
- **Visual identity**: the additional, unique rules that lend overall consistency to a user interface. The overall decisions as to how the corporation or the product line expresses itself in visible language. (Martin, n.d)

Martin (2014) also talks about three fundamental principles, which will be explained in detail in the final report, when discussing visible language:

1. **Organize:** provide the user with a clear and consistent conceptual structure.
2. **Economize:** do the most with the least amount of cues.
3. **Communicate:** match the presentation to the capabilities of the user. (Martin, 2014)

Design Example 1: AAFS Header Graphic

"As the header is likely to be the first thing to draw attention on a website, it is important that it is exploited to its fullest potential" (Idler, 2012). The header of AAFS' website defies the Visible Language Principles Organize, and Economize, as it appears void of any layout or structure. There are overlapping pictures, two links to Facebook (one which is broken), and multiple typefaces of different style.

They could consider using minimalistic headers using a single picture or graphic and big letters as they can help websites draw immediate attention (Idler, 2012). Minimalistic headers such as a title above a picture create a simple user interaction that will grab their attention.

Design Example 2: Communicating with Comic Sans

A great example of the AAFS' understanding of the Visual Principle Communicate is their use of Comic Sans as a typeface. Comic Sans is a sans serif (no small ticks on the strokes of a letter) font, originally created by a Microsoft Designer for use in comic bubbles, and for notices to appeal to children. It is not associated with professionalism, and has even been determined to be an untrustworthy font (Morris, 2012). Typically, websites are suggested to use a different font.

Principle 3 of visual identity, Communicate, justifies AAFS' choice to use Comic Sans. Dyslexia can be present in some cases of Autism Spectrum Disorder (AAFScalgary.com, 2014). Studies have shown that People who are dyslexic have an easier time reading the Comic Sans font than others (Bdadyslexia.org.uk, 2014). Through our research, we plan to provide a list of alternative fonts for consideration.

II. IDENTITY

Identity refers to the website's marketing campaign and to whom they are trying to communicate with. We believed that this was a big enough factor in the AAFS' website that it needed to be addressed in its own criteria. Our research on the topic will include but is not limited to:

- Audience tone: what is their main audience and what are they doing to attract them?

- Effective communication: Is their communication clear and professional?
- Imagery consistency: do the images build something recognizably AAFS?
- Promotions: Are they promoting themselves and their events effectively?
- Quote and or statement consistency: Are all the messages cohesive?

Identity Example 1: Effective Communication: Contact Us

Contact information is an important part in showing the website is real, and instills trust in the user (www.webtechclub.com,2014). It also increases accessibility to your organization as a whole.

The AAFS has a 'Contact Us' tab conveniently located in the navigator bar. Instead of only having a drop down to the blog, it should also include a direct link to their contact page. Once the contact page link has been located, http://www.aafscalgary.com/contact, it returns a 404 error. While currently on the blog Contact Us page, it only supplies an email as substitute, with no addressee or message that they will get back to you, or fix the problem.

Identity Example 2: Events and Social Media Promotions

Advertising events has never been easier with the creation of social media and websites. By providing a consistent layout for their event pages they create a hub for people to sign up for their events. It is suggested that it is to their benefit to have a separate tab on their navigation bar with each event having its own link directly on it. When dealing with multiple social media platforms for promotion, it is also wise to create a centralized sign up to aid event administration. (Crestodina, Blogger, Cooney & Crestodina, 2014).

Right now, AAFS has three single line event descriptions and links on their home page. One directs you to a Facebook event, another to a separate website, and another to an otherwise unlinked page on their webpage. This will reduce the ease at which they can brand themselves as the user is forced to relearn each navigation. In addition, a link to their blog should be included with their other social media platforms as blogs are part of their social media presence. Another way to increase consistency would be to move the blog to a different website such as Blogger, Tumblr, or Wordpress, (Miller, 2014).

III.   ACCESSIBILITY

Accessibility is always important in website design and is a core of usability testing. Access to information and communications technologies is a basic human right as recognized in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (*Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Optional Protocol*, 2006). The accessibility criteria of our review of AAFS' website is particularly important and circumstances require them to exceed conventional or minimal standards of accessibility. Through use of our usability survey and secondary data, we will explore the current and potential accessibility based on the following components:

- **Assistive technology**, in some cases - screen readers, alternative keyboards, switches, scanning software, etc.
- **Users' knowledge**, experiences, and in some cases, adaptive strategies using the Web.

- **Developers** - designers, coders, authors, etc., including developers with disabilities and users who contribute content.
- **Authoring tools** - software that creates Web sites. (W3.org, 2014)

Accessibility Example 1: Form and Function

Contrast is crucial for keeping navigation bars easy to read and navigate. By ensuring proper contrast, the website will be easier to navigate for people with poor eyesight. The text and background colours are much too similar in contrast and this makes it difficult for users to quickly search for the intended link. The brown highlighting is has a much greater contrast with the white text than the light green, so if the green was changed it would make the navigation bar easier to read.

Linking out is beneficial because it provides users with valuable and relevant resources (Webpage Mistakes, 2013). "Links" could be renamed to "Affiliated Links", to better direct users as it is more specific.

Accessibility Example 2: Assistive Technology

Assistive Technologies are aids that enable a user to browse and access elements of the website without disregard to a user's personal disadvantage. Examples include audio readers that will read website text to the user, and onscreen keyboards. It is not limited to these plug-ins. As mentioned briefly in Design Example 2, the use of Comic Sans as a font may be considered an assistive tool.

In our preliminary review, we recommend looking into a service such as eSSENTIAL ACCESSIBILITY, an organization that focuses on increasing accessibility specifically through optimizing this technology (Essentialaccessibility.com, 2014).

IV. NAVIGATION

Ensuring a website has an intuitive navigation scheme is necessary to provide users with an easy and effective means to move about the website. Our research from our primary and secondary data will be focused on the following criteria:

- **Organization**: Are the links ordered in a logical fashion with emphasis given to the most important areas of the site?
- **Consistency**: Does the navigation maintain a consistent layout, and is there a persistent navigation bar present?
- **Redundancy**: Are there redundant links, or drop down menus which are presented elsewhere on the website?
- **Accuracy**: Do the links accurately describe the information they lead to, and are there any broken links on the website?

Navigation Example 1: Navigation Bar

It would be effective to reduce or limit the amount on the navigation bar as it makes each section more prominent. Less is more because too many navigation buttons may leave users

with too many choices (Miller, 2014). It is important to be as descriptive as possible, but effective to stick to basic titles. Basic titles help users quickly navigate to the information they want to retrieve (Conlin, 2014). Additionally, considering the content-heavy nature of the website, it would be effective to include a search bar to help users quickly find information (Conlin, 2014).

Navigation Example 2: Footer

The use of the footer as a bottom navigation section where it lists a site map would provide an optional means to navigate the website for those who have difficulty utilizing the top navigation bar (Kudrez and Lemon, 2014). The use of a site map also provides a persistent source of links on every page and this reduces the need of the users to backtrack to previous pages to find a particular link.

RESEARCH METHODS

I.   DATA COLLECTION:

We will be conducting an online survey through the online survey website, SurveyMonkey, to determine if the website is effective in following the evaluation criteria: Design, Identity, Accessibility, and Navigation. Participants will be asked questions based on the usability criteria. The survey will be voluntary and conducted anonymously to ensure ethical requirements are met. Using the online survey is easier for participants to evaluate the website while completing the survey. Our survey will ask participants to look at specific pages on the website and access particular information on the page. When the evaluation is complete, we will conclude our results and focus our recommendations based on what the website excels and lacks in current usability.

The most desirable candidates for the survey are people who have not been on the AAFS website prior to the survey, people who are not affiliated with the AAFS, and members of the AAFS community. Participants will be asked at the beginning of the survey if they have visited the website before.

For our secondary research, articles and websites will be analyzed to enforce our primary research.

II.   ETHICS

In order to protect the identity of the participants and maintain the integrity of the collected data, it is essential to comply with the University of Calgary's code of ethics and guidelines. Confidentiality will be ensured. Personal information will not be requested to ensure anonymity and voluntary participation. The survey will be conducted through a secure online survey service, SurveyMonkey. An introduction and description of our research and reasoning for data collection will be included at the beginning of the survey (see Appendix) to help participants familiarize themselves with the subject matter prior to the survey to maximize reliability.

Task Schedule

Task	Start Date	Estimated Completion Date	Completed by:
Collect and analyze survey data	October 25, 2014	October 28, 2014	
Draft the first revision of PowerPoint	October 29, 2014	November 5, 2014	
Edit the PowerPoint	November 6, 2014	November 8, 2014	
Finalize PowerPoint	November 9, 2014	November 12, 2014	
Draft the first revision of final report	November 13, 2014	November 20, 2014	
PowerPoint submission	November 21, 2014	N/A	
Edit the final report	November 21, 2014	November 24, 2014	
Finalize the final report	November 25, 2014	December 4, 2014	
Final report submission	December 5, 2014	N/A	

Conclusion

This usability review is meant to provide feedback and recommendations on how to improve the usability of the AAFS website. As a Non-Profit Organization, the website is often a face of legitimacy for the organization, impacting existing and prospective user's participation in the organization. A user's experience can therefore affect the development and attraction of the organization as a whole. Through the proposed data collection and analysis, our review will focus on the fundamental aspects of the website (design, identity, ...etc). Our intention is that through our recommendations the AAFS's website can create, without disregard for its unique audience, a professional, aesthetically pleasing, and user friendly experience for all.

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Appendix A: Consent Form

Author note: We are opting to do an online survey to supplement the data contained in our final review of the AAFS website. This survey is being administered via SurveyMonkey, an online survey tool that does not track respondents' names or e-mail information. No names will be collected with any of the responses collected.

Proposed SurveyMonkey Introduction:

Autism Aspergers Friendship Society of Calgary Website Usability Survey

Purpose of study: The goal of the project is to determine and evaluate the usability of The Autism Aspergers Friendship Society of Calgary website.

Your participation in the study: Your participation will involve navigating through the aforementioned website for approximately 10 minutes, and filling out a short survey about the aesthetics, usability, and professionalism of the website.

Publication of results: The survey will be used as the basis for analysis by myself, and my partner. It will also be viewed by the instructor, the marker, and potentially other students in the COMS 363 course.

Risk to you: SurveyMonkey does not store any personal data such as your name, email, ect. There are no risks associated to this survey. Your participation is entirely voluntary and may be cancelled prior to the end of the survey.

Informed Consent: Due to the nature of SurveyMonkey, I, or my group members, are unable to identify your survey after you have submitted it and we are unable to remove it. By filling out, and submitting this survey you are consenting to the use of it as part of our study.

Storage of Materials: All materials, any notes my group might make, will remain confidential. Only my group plus the course instructor will be able to access that information. Any research notes and consent forms will be stored for two years under lock and key, including during the data collection phase. Your survey on SurveyMonkey may last up to twelve (12) months after the end of the survey period.

You are free to request more information about the study by contacting George Barnhardt at Gabarnha@ucalgary.ca, or our instructor Lisa Stowe at lstowe@ucalgary.ca . For additional information on SurveyMonkey's Privacy and Security Policy you can find it located at https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/policy/privacy-policy-20130205/ .

Appendix B: Sample Potential Survey Questions

On a scale of 1-5, please answer the following questions:
(1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither disagree nor agree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree)

AAFS Website Usability Survey	1	2	3	4	5
The website is easily recognized as AAFS.					
The layout of the website is user friendly.					
The layout of the website is easy to follow.					
The font and size of text is easy to read.					
Graphics on the website enhances the information provided.					
The AAFS website has effective navigation tools (links and navigation menu)					
Navigation tools are user friendly.					
Navigation tools are user friendly.					
The contact information is easy to find.					
Information about provided programs is informative.					
Information about provided programs is easy to follow.					
The Frequently Asked Questions page is informative.					
The Frequently Asked Questions page is easy to follow.					
Content is concise and informative.					
There are no broken links.					