**PROJECT PROPOSAL**

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**Subject:** Website Usability Proposal - The Autism Aspergers Friendship Society of Calgary

[**http://www.aafscalgary.com/**](http://www.aafscalgary.com/)

**Introduction/Background**

This is a response to the request for a proposal sent by the Autism Aspergers Friendship Society of Calgary. This proposal is composed of a brief outline on the background of the AAFS, usability criteria for evaluating the website, as well as research methods and a task schedule.

The Autism Aspergers Friendship Society (AAFS) of Calgary is a non-profit charity 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.

This proposal is for the improvement of the usability of the AAFS Calgary website. We hope to improve the websites professionality and navigation so that it is easy to follow. As it is a website for Autism and Asperger’s, we want to ensure that the website also caters to those with special needs.

**Usability Criteria**

**i. Design**

* 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 that the AAFS Calgary website uses could be improved as it appears unprofessional and cluttered. The first things noted in the header are the two images. Of the two, the cartoon image would be more effective to use as the characters would not obstruct text if put alongside a title. The second thing noted in the header is the repeated text, “The Autism Aspergers Friendship Society of Calgary” is stated twice in small, drop shadowed text. The legibility of the text can use improvement with increased font size as well as contrast between the title and the background. Minimalistic headers using a single visual element and big letters as they can help websites draw immediate attention (Idler, 2012). Placing the title centered in the header with a relevant accompanied photo would be much more effective. While minimalistic headers are easy to read, artistic and remarkably designed headers can also draw attention. Creative and artistically illustrated website headers can help convey a high degree of professionalism (Idler, 2012). The website could benefit from the use of one effectively executed banner image instead of using two poorly sized images with text thrown on top. Investing in a new banner design would be important as it is the first thing a viewers eyes are drawn to.
* Graphics for their social media platforms are helpful however, using better quality images such as .png files would be more professional if they remove the white/black borders surrounding them. Interactive elements can help make websites feel more personal so including the social media links at the header is something we would not recommend removing. Maintaining consistent design improves the overall experience when visiting the website, as well the professionalism. (Webpage Mistakes, 2013)
* On the homepage, the use of green and white text for headings is consistent, however “What We Believe” does not show transparent background like the others do. Consistency in graphics adds to the professionalism and usability of a website (Webpage Mistakes, 2013). The same font is used for the main heading “Welcome to AAFS!” as well as the subheadings “Our Mission is Friendship” and etc. Although the fonts are the same, keeping with the original color scheme (red/green) is also important (Webpage Mistakes, 2013). Everything should match to not only appeal to users, but also to maintain website quality.
* Giving sufficient spacing between blocks of text would also increase legibility for the readers (Gube, 2011). According to the study, “Reading Online Text: A Comparison of Four White Space Layout”, taking advantage of and maneuvering margins in a passage of text affects the reading comprehension and speed of the user (Baker, R. J., Brady, L., Chaparro, B., Hull, S., Shaikh, D. A., 2008). The information under the headers “What We Believe” “AAFS Philosophy” and “Our Vision” would be more effectively formatted in horizontal paragraphs rather than in vertical columns. This is because it would increase the amount of white space between the text, increasing readability of the text. Also, utilizing a multi column layout because “users are likely to interpret the fields inconsistently” (Appleseed, 2011).
* The use of staff member images is friendly and quirky, however, it displaces the information of the page ineffectively. To maintain consistency, all images should maintain a “standard” size throughout the entire page (Webpage Mistakes, 2013).

**ii. Identity**

* The identity of the group, including it’s staff and members, could be clarified. Introducing the history of the AAFS, as well as additional information regarding the website, would be more effective if it placed on a separate page. By including these two on the homepage, it draws attention away from the events posted on the homepage. Creating a separate “about” page would be effective as the readers would focus solely onto it.
* Contact information under the ‘Contact Us’ tab is convenient as it is located in the navigator bar, however instead of only having a drop down to the blog, it should also include their contact information or a contact page.

E.g. The ‘Contact Us’ tab does not have a click through to <http://aafscalgary.com/contact> whereas the FAQ page does.

* A link to their blog should be included with their other social media platforms to keep consistency (Miller, 2014). Perhaps moving the blog to a different website such as blogger, tumblr, wordpress would be more practical instead of directly maintaining it via the AAFS Calgary website.
* The history of the AAFS, could be more concise as “shorter articles enhance readability” (Gube, 2011).

**iii. Accessibility**

* Links aid users move around on the website. It is important that links are easy to find and are easily accessible. Unclicked links should be underlined and bolded to make them prominent. It is also important to note that contextual links should be descriptive to optimize user friendliness and accessibility (Webpage Mistakes, 2013)
* 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 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.

**iv. Navigation**

* It would be effective to reduce or limit the number of links on the navigation bar as it makes each remaining 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).
* The use of the footer as a bottom navigation section where it lists each page in an ordered list of hyperlinks, would be more organized and easier to access for those who have difficulty utilizing the top navigation bar (Kudrez and Lemon, 2014).
* Because the website is fairly content heavy, it may be effective to input a search bar to help users who need to quickly find information (Conlin, 2014).

**Research Methods**

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. 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. Participants will be asked questions based on the usability criteria. When the evaluation is complete, we will conclude our results and focus on what the website excels and lacks.

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

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

**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: |
| Finalize survey questions | October 20, 2014 | October 21, 2014 |  |
| Complete ethics document | October 22, 2014 | October 23, 2014 |  |
| Send out survey invitations | October 24, 2014 | October 28,2014 |  |
| 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**

**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](mailto:Gabarnha@ucalgary.ca), or our instructor Lisa Stowe at [lstowe@ucalgary.ca](mailto: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 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. |  |  |  |  |  |
| Consistency in design and layout is well executed. |  |  |  |  |  |