GDS

Government Digital Service (GDS) - GOV.UK

Discovering the biggest problems with Whitehall before we can start to put solutions on GOV.UK

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USER RESEARCH | INTERACTION DESIGN
PROTOTYPING | QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

Context

Whitehall publishes on the web most parts of the business of government
There are 100k pages on GOV.UK. It has more than 1 million visitors a month. Whitehall publishes by far the most content.

Our job is to improve the experience of using Whitehall
We say that this is partly objective but the reality is that it's subjective. Our job is to improve the experience of a small segment of Whitehall's overall business.

My approach

Understand the biggest problems with Whitehall
Using a mixed methods approach including quantitative & qualitative research

Start with the low hanging fruit
Fixing the biggest problems first

Re-design the main office on Whitehall
Beyond content and design, we need to think about how we do things on Whitehall, using a lean mindset

Research and design of further problems
Improving usability, data, SEO, content, workflows, and other areas of Whitehall

Action - understand the biggest problems with Whitehall

Stakeholder survey
- Previous participants
- Experts
- Large organisations and publishers spanning a spectrum over 200 anti-spam operations about what we do and what we publish
- Small organisations and publishers who publish very infrequently and who don't have any specialist staff, and who find the application of government guidance difficult
- Ministers and senior civil servants who have expressed an interest in the topic

Google Analytics
- Content Audits: with the performance analysis of the content we publish, we can understand the data we have about the content we publish
- Understanding which users spend the most on the site, so we can understand who we need to make things easier for. This is an interesting question, for example, we want the vast majority of our users to be able to find what they need, but might the superfast finding of what they are looking for be a bad experience for someone who is a heavy user of Whitehall?
- Understanding which content is most used by which audiences

Analysis tickets
- Analysing support tickets and what are the biggest problems they are having
- Tagging tickets with relevant topics and categories, adding context to Whitehall, and grouping it understand what are the problems

User interviews
- Exploratory research is underway for the behind-the-scenes stakeholders & specialists interviews
- Interviews with users of Whitehall are underway
- Interviews with users of the biggest problems on Whitehall
- Interviews with users who have experienced the biggest problems we learned about

Result - understand the problems

Here you can see a snapshot of the survey data for the question: "What is the thing you do on the web most frequently? Pick the top 3 from the following 10 options"

These are the most-mentioned areas for improvement

Finding documents	Transport	Attachments	Access & Participation
Markdown	Images		

These are entirely extra-geographic category and so you can see that the biggest problems are:

1. Finding documents
2. Markdown
3. Navigation
4. Images
5. Attachments
6. Access & Participation

The biggest the most underlined what we need to tackle to improve the experience of Whitehall Business.

Highlight: Office is the fact that publishers and users struggle with finding documents on Whitehall. Markdown is the fact that people find it difficult to write and edit pages. Transport is the fact that people find difficult to find and edit transport pages. Images is a significant amount of people who struggle with images. Attachments is a significant amount of people who struggle with attachments.

Key Takeaways:

- Writing solutions is time-consuming and emotionally especially when writing tickets
- Navigation between tasks (when editing/fixing content) is a major problem, and it's not just about the number of clicks, it's about the cognitive load it takes and the mental navigation that people have to do

Action - fix topic tags flow

- Redesigned the flow so that topic taxonomy tags are now optional, and so people can publish without having to do something that they don't care about
- Fixing the most-used topic tagging tickets from the help desk

Redesigned topic taxonomy interaction

Result - fixing topic tags flow

It is better so we can see the business is taking tickets again on the topic tags page. Once upon time we were more time spending than usual on tickets coming in.

Almost all the complaints published we spoke to in interviews said that it used to be a large pain in the arse to publish. It is now much better.

> "Most having to go to topic tags every time."
> Interviewee, Large Government Department

Action - fix tables in markdown

Fixed collapse-expand on GOV.UK

Fixed publishers UI: Pop-out table in Markdown

You can see that publishers are finding it a lot with the tables.

Through user research we learned that users are using it a different way than we thought they would, and we've made changes to accommodate.

This is problematic from a security point of view. This content could be used to persuade people to do something that they don't want to do.

So, we have made it possible to copy a table and paste it directly into the table. We also have fixed the formatting.

Table
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