PBA Web Development

KEA - Copenhagen School of Design and Technology

Interface Design Exam

Event management System

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Introduction

Outline of the Project

The report documents the task taken by a group of students at the Interface Design course at KEA. The team, comprised of Ralf Patrik Blaga and Johannes Otto Skjærbæk, undertook the task of developing a fully-designed prototype for an imaginary client called TechX.

The company requested a web application where they can log in into the system and be able to create and organise events and partners of these events.. They were not entirely sure about other functionalities, and they have requested of us that we add any additional functionality we find useful.

Inspiration

The client presented us one of their competitors, Foo Cafe[1]. These competitors served as primary inspiration for the development of the prototype. The general idea behind TechX and Foo Cafe is roughly the same, so we tried to build a little on top of what they already have to make it better and more usable.

Their whole idea is strongly dependent on their online platform and by the delivery time of the product, we want to ensure that the work we have done for this company is something that will be able to add more value to them as a growing startup.

Background

As mentioned previously, the concept of TechX and Foo cafe are similar at their core, however, TechX is still a concept in development, so it has the possibility of going in many different directions. At the moment, the company is focused on building the minimal viable productm which would include a listing of all the current events and partners they have.

[1] http://foocafe.org/ - Foo Cafe website

Preliminaries

Definitions

There are no specific Definitions the reader should be aware of. In case of acronyms or other self-defined abbreviations we have made sure to explain these in the sections they were mentioned. Moreover, it should be noted that in case something needs a broader explanation of things we have listed additional material in the appendix.

Related Work

As mentioned in the previous sections, the concept of our website is extremely similar to Foo Cafe, so instead of reinventing the wheel, we have decided to add more functionality to it.

> *Sometimes time spent reinventing the wheel results in a revolutionary new rolling device. But sometimes it just amounts to time spent reinventing the wheel.*[2]
>
> *Steve Krug*

Mainly, the inspiration we took from Foo Cafe the was the layout for their specific event page. We found it optimal to display some crucial information above the fold of the page (just like Foo Cafe), so that the visitor can quickly grasp the topic, location and price of the attended event.

State-of-the-Art

The internet and its use is rapidly evolving nowadays, and in order for the developers to keep up with this continuous growth spurt, developers have to quickly learn and adapt to new frameworks, techniques and often times even completely new languages. In the development of our prototype, we tried to use the latest advancements in our technologies in order to make sure that our application is up to date.

We have used technologies such as SASS, Flexbox and experimented with the new Grid system in order to style and align the content on our pages. To automate and enhance our

[2] Steve Krug. Don't Make Me Think, Revisited: A Common Sense Approach to Web and Mobile Usability. 2014. New Riders Press. ISBN:978-0321965516

workflow, we have implemented the gulp toolkit. We wanted to "*stop messing around and build something*"[3].

Minimum Viable Product

Process Behind

Analysis

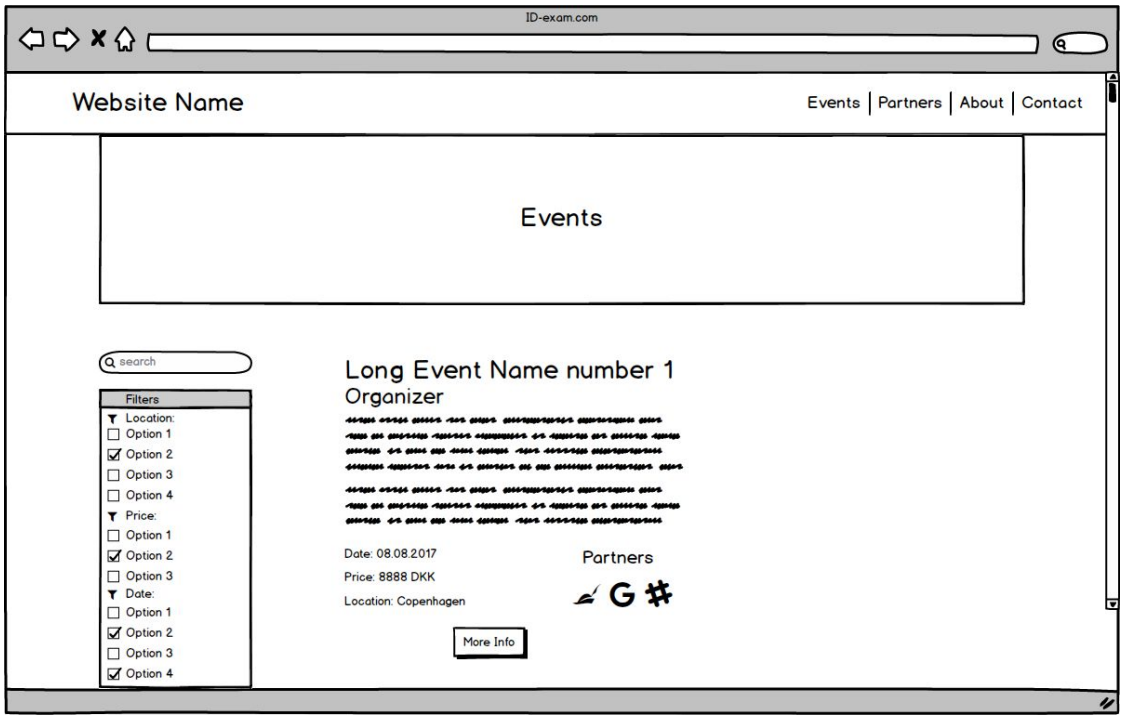
The process started off by analysing the client's requests in depth and splitting up the workload into Sprints. We decided that, in order to be as efficient as possible, we would use the Scrum development framework in order to manage time and workload. We split the whole process into 4 sprints - Research, Design, Development and Report Writing. In this section, we will mostly cover the findings of the first sprint.

During the first sprint we heavily focused on researching the main competitor, Foo Cafe, to determine in which direction to take the developed product. We agreed that the layout they have incorporated works with what we want to achieve as well, but at the same time, we felt that something was missing and that it could be improved.

Solution Idea

Based on the findings of our analysis we decided to create the search and filter functionality. Displaying the events as a long list works until somebody is interested in events that target a specific topic. Users do not want to spend more time than needed on a website and want to get the information as fast as possible, so we believe that the additional functionalities we want to implement will improve the general user experience on the website.

[3] http://gulpjs.com/, frontpage motto. Website accessed on 25th of May, 2017



Furthermore, the clients requested a system that will allow them to log in into the web application and create, read, update and delete events and partners. Additionally, among the requested features there was an admin creation functionality, that allowed current admins to create other admins, so all the members of the board will have their own account. The created prototype will act as proof of concept for the desired web application, including all the requested features and the search and filter functionality which we came up with ourselves.

Choices

Once the analysis sprint was ready and we had the general idea of what functionalities we wanted to implement, we decided on what programming languages and interface design style we wanted to use.

Due to the nature of our application, a web application, we used the key front-end development languages of the web, HTML, CSS and javascript. In terms of design style we implemented a clean and flat design.

Architecture and Design

The second sprint we had planned revolved around the design of our application. During this sprint we underwent a rigorous process which included low and high fidelity mock-up [4] creations and usertesting.

Visual Design

Colors

"Color is used in design to attract attention, group elements, indicate meaning and enhance aesthetics."[5]

Universal Principles of Design

The color palette chosen for this design was selected based on the stability and reliability of the promoted events. We wanted to ensure that the visitors of the page do not think about the company as something that is unreliable and fake.

The colors we have chosen are light blue, white and dark grey. All of the mentioned colors suggest and inspire, to some degree: Faith, security, and sophistication

White

We picked the color white to be used as whitespace for our webpage as it is one of the most used colors for this purpose. It helps the webpage to divide the elements between them and smooth things out so we do not have a very busy page only filled with text and very strong colors.

Dark Grey

Dark Grey was used to enhance and refine the general feeling of the webpage. Grey is often associated with formal, conservative and sophistication, while dark grey advertises

[4] See Appendix 1 for all the Mock-ups
[5] William Lidwell, Kritina Holden, Jill Butler. Universal Principles of Design:Revised and Updated. 2010. Rockport Publishers. ISBN:978-1592535873

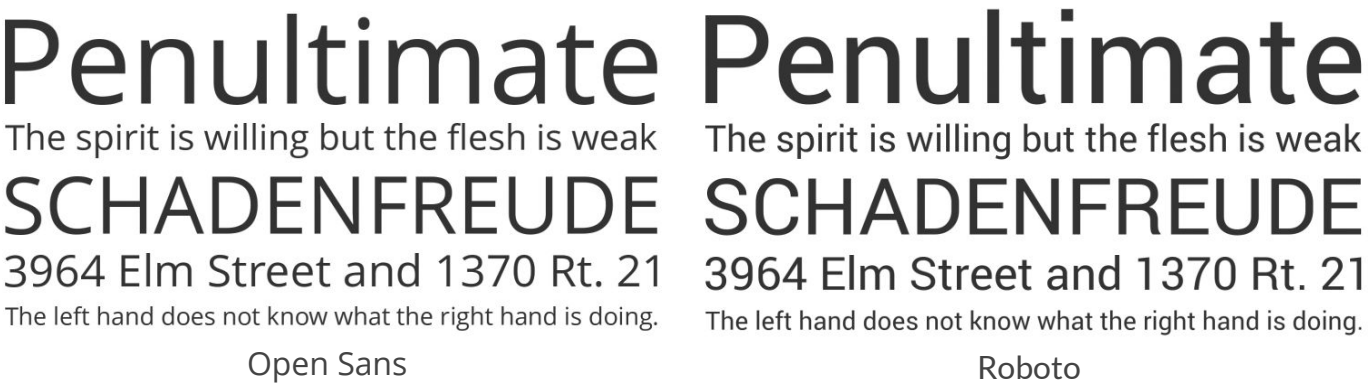
strength and mystery. These are all feelings that guide the user towards a more professional and premium feel that makes both TechX and its events appear more genuine.

Light Blue

Light blue is the color that breaks out of our neutral and down-toned colors. In our project, this color is used to draw attention to headlines and buttons. Blue represents trust, faith and intelligence, yet again reinforcing the whole “safe and well organized event” feeling we want to offer.

Typography

We have chosen two fonts in our design, aesthetically motivated primarily by the need to provide contrash between headlines and body text. With these choices, we solve the visual problem of distinguishing elements in our design.



Open Sans

Open Sans is a humanist sans serif typeface mainly encountered in flat design. The font has excellent legibility characteristics in its letter forms, and it is well optimized for print, web and mobile devices.

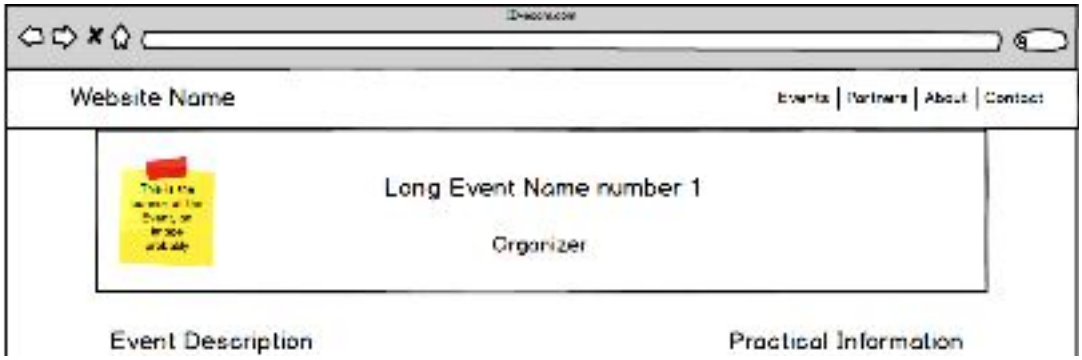
It is clean and modern with open forms and a friendly appearance. It is the most widely used open-source font thus making it a very attractive of a choice, especially when the company we are building it for is a start-up on the rise.

Roboto

Roboto is a neo-grotesque sans serif typeface developed and mainly used by Google. The font offers a natural reading rhythm due to its geometric forms while also keeping friendly and open curves. The reason why we have chosen to use Roboto as a body text is to ensure the comfort of our target audience.

Most of the people visiting TechX will be tech savvy people who have unwillingly encountered the font before and will unconsciously recognize it, giving them a feeling of familiarity.

Images



In order to improve layout hierarchy on the page, we used images to emphasize the title of all the pages. They were selected in a way to reflect each page individually and to give a boost in color to the pages, which otherwise could come off as fairly dry.

Despite the fact that we want to promote our platform as something premium and sophisticated, we do not want to appear to be too serious or formal, either. Therefore, having a splash of different but carefully selected color on every page generally helps the pages alleviate the otherwise fairly conservative look a little. We want to appear refined and trustworthy, but not prudish, boring or unapproachable.

Patterns Followed

Page Layout

The general layout of the page follows a straightforward approach. In order to keep a unified look throughout the whole website, we decided to use the same layout on all of the pages. We have a full-width navbar at the top of the page, which has the content spread out at 75% from the middle.

The navbar is followed by the title-container, which is five percent larger than the navbar content and the actual content, which is wrapped in a different 75% wide wrapper. Having the content of this wrapper be the same size as the content of the navbar helps the website have a unified and aesthetic view, while the slight overflow of the title container helps break visual monotony.

At the bottom of the page, we have a full width, 5px high footer that creates a horizontal wrapper for our pages. The height of the pages is defined by the content that is on them and we needed to create a sense of page closure thus leading us to add that fixed footer.

Navigation Flow

There are two types access points on our website, the visitor pages and the admin page. The visitor pages consist of 7 different pages in total, the landing page, the events page, the specific event sub-page , the partners page, the specific partner sub-page, the about page and the contact page.

The navigation flow of the visitor pages is the standard text link nav paired with sub-navigation. This type of navigation can get quickly out of hand if the website is very large and complex, which in our situation is not the case, thus making it a reliable and safe choice to guide the event-seeking user through the pages that are meant for them.

The navigation flow of the admin page is a bit different. The admin page is a dashboard that allows the members of the board to create, update and delete events and partners at will while also adding other admins if and when needed. It is a single page dashboard that hides and displays content based on what the current administrator wants to do. The page contains the standard text link nav on the top in case the admin wants to quickly navigate to the list of events or sponsors to check out the new addition, while also containing a button navigation system.

The button navigation system allows the administrator to quickly change between the things he can edit or create. In order to increase productivity and the speed of general information addition to the site, we made the whole admin panel on one page to eliminate the page reload time.

Components - Design

Navigation bar and Footer

The navigation bar and the footer are present in all the pages of the website. These two components work together in order to create the wrapping of every page. The navigation bar component is not complicated, as it is just a regular text link navigation that connects the pages to each other, except the admin page, which must be specifically accessed in the address bar.

Title-Container

The title-container is a banner component we use on all the pages to emphasise the titles of the pages. It is a simple and effective way to highlight the title of the page and to create awareness of the current location on the website.

Contact/About Page

The Contact and About pages are fairly similar in nature to each other. They are not difficult pages, and include the navigation, footer and title container components. The last component that is included on these pages is a content-container which has the page specific information displayed.

Event Page

The event page contains the global navigation, footer and title page components. Along with these global components there is also the listing of the events and search/filter component we have created.

The search system is the differentiator between Foo Cafe's platform and TechX's platform. Once on the event page, the user is allowed to filter the generated events either via a word search or some predefined filters we have created. We tried to make the search and filtering system moderately generic so that the user will not have to spend time to figure out how it actually works. The design of the filter was based on Steve Krug's words:

> *"Your objective should always be to eliminate instructions entirely by making everything self-explanatory, or as close to it as possible."*[6]
>
> *Steve Krug*

The listing of the events is also showcasing some short and concise information about the event. It is meant to simply instigate the user to want to read more and eventually attend the specified event. Due to this, we believe that showcasing a limited amount of information is a suitable compromise that allows the user to learn about the event, without overloading them with text.

Partners Page

The partners page is imperative to our website. In order to stay afloat, TechX need funding and affiliation with large companies to be able to support the organised events. We want to make sure that there is a page dedicated directly to these partners, because they are the ones that help the startup grow.

All the partners that support events are listed in one page, and the partners supporting a specific event are listed on that event's page, so people who attend events can see who is the support behind the event they are attending.

Admin Page

The admin page contains 4 major components. The navigation component, the title-container component, the footer component and the interchangeable admin window. In order not to confuse the general user of the website with a login button and to secure the page through obscurity we decided to only be able to access this page only through the url. This way, only the members of the board will know about the existence of the page and how to access it.

Once logged in, the admin can choose what he would like to administrate. The administrator can create, delete or alter events, create, delete or alter partners, or create

[6] Steve Krug. Don't Make Me Think, Revisited: A Common Sense Approach to Web and Mobile Usability. 2014. New Riders Press. ISBN:978-0321965516

or delete administrators. The layout of all the subcomponents is similar, they are all styled as lists so the editing can proceed in a quick manner.

Development and Implementation

Components - Technical

When the page is accessed, the admin window will request authentication from the admin and he will be able to log in to start managing the content. Once the login is successful, username and password matching what is saved in localStorage, he will be presented with 3 buttons in order to access different admin functionalities. The event and partner management sub-components are fairly similar as they both allow the admin to create, edit and delete elements from their respective sections.

The third button launches the admin creation component. This part of the dashboard was created so that admins can create admins so everybody in the board can have its own account, a stated requirement of the task. Here, an already-registered admin can create another admin user with a new password. A list of current admins can also be seen, and users can be deleted via this list by clicking the trash can icon, and confirming in the pop-up dialog box. Behind the scenes, what happens is that the id of the admin that should be deleted is compared with that admin's id in localStorage, and if they match, the admin is deleted. As this is a prototype, there is little security implemented here.

In the events subsection, the admin is presented with an input form where they can detail events they want to create. When the "CREATE" button is clicked, data is gathered from input fields via Javascript, and is saved to the sEvents variable in localStorage as a JSON object that is added to an array of JSON objects.

Much the same process is done when an existing event is edited in the list of events. Whatever is in an event's input fields when the submit button is clicked is gathered, and the given event is updated in localStorage and on the page to reflect the new data.

The partners subsection is extremely similar to the events subsection, the only change being different fields are saved to localStorage on creation or edit.

Each individual event item in the page is made dynamically via events saved, in this case, as simple Javascript variables.

Frontend, a very similar process, though the strings in localStorage are interpreted rather than edited or created. Since we have no backend, whenever a specific event or partner is

clicked, the id of it is saved to localStorage and the browser is then redirected to the partner/event template page, and the saved ID used to pull the correct event/partner from localStorage to populate the page.

The search/filter on the events page is likely the most complicated bit of code in the prototype, but in the end, boils down to picking up the state of several input boxes and using this state to search events in localStorage for matches, excluding everything that is not a match, and then at last going through the remaining events and inputting their data in the event template to be presented on the page.

Targeted Media (Laptop/Phone/Tablet)

We acknowledge the importance of friendly cross device compatibility and understand that they have to perceivable, operable, understandable and robust on all platforms and browsers. In order to accommodate a wider range of platforms and not only specific devices, the team has decided to implement responsive web design into our project.

Adaptive vs Responsive

In order to satisfy the need of cross platform functionality, we have take adaptive and responsive layouts into account. Our main targeted media was the laptop, the phone and the tablet.

Adaptive design seemed attractive at the beginning, as it is a lot easier to target specific devices rather than making a fluid responsive page. However, this would mean that we should have had several other layouts set into standby in case they were not use. This is something we could not afford in terms of loading time. We wanted to make our website as snappy and as “responsive” as possible, thus we eliminated this option.

Responsive design is the way to go. At this point in time, the market is flooded with different types of resolutions and screen sizes and we simply could not ignore this wide range of products. Despite a little harder to implement, it had to be done. It should be noted that due to state-of-the-art technologies such as flexbox and media queries, this was not difficult at all. The web is constantly growing and it is trying to make the life of developers easier every day by “arming” developers with newer and more advanced technologies.

It is true that our main targeted media was the laptop, phone and tablet, however if we had the chance, we did not see why we should not have made sure that everybody can properly enjoy our content.

Technical Choices

Languages Used

Due to the nature of our project, a front-end web application, we used the core languages of front-end web development, HTML, CSS and Javascript. Furthermore, in order to ease the development of the process, the team turned to version control to share code among its developers.

GIT

GIT is the version control system of our choice. It is critical to have a such a system as soon as you have more than one developer working on a project. Often times, single developers use version control in order to to maintain an archive of their project's progress. In case some new implemented feature causes the application to crash, the developer can then roll back to the latest functioning version and try again.

The Version Control system functions by giving people copies of the files on which they can work on and eventually merge together with the main master branch. If people work on different files, this usually does not create any problems, however if two people work on the exact same file, the changes they make will eventually cause merging problems which then need a manual merge. It is not complicated and makes working in groups tremendously easier for everyone.

SASS

SASS, or Syntactically Awesome Stylesheets, is a CSS extension language that adds feature-rich functionalities to CSS, enabling it to do much more than initially intended. Features such as simple mathematics, variables, nesting, as well as mixins, extensions and imports help the developer manage the files much more easily rather than having one CSS file that is over a thousand lines.

It is often a good idea to make multiple scss files in order to maintain the order throughout the project. Additionally, the creation of variables can also prove quite useful, especially when it comes to something that appears on very a frequent basis. It is a lot easier to

create a variable for a color and reuse that variable rather than using the color code. This way, if the whole project needs a change in color, the process of it gets less painful as the developer can simply change a variable, and not have to change it in all the places where that color was used.

The drawback of SASS, however, is that it has to be compiled into CSS in order to function properly. But, once a SASS watcher is set up, the process is made automatic and does not prove to be troublesome, running automatically in the background.

Flexbox

Flexbox is a relatively new layout mode which was added to CSS3. It makes the content of the elements behave predictably when the layout must accommodate the content to different screen sizes and resolutions. The introduction of flexbox was a great leap forward in terms of responsive design as it helps display the content in a “flexible” format so it can mold based on the screen size and resolution.

Frameworks and Libraries

jQuery

jQuery is one of the biggest and most recognized javascript libraries on the market. It is well known for its rich features that ease the workload of the front-end developer. Our project is heavily dependent on jQuery because much of our HTML and most of our DOM manipulation is made with jQuery. The beauty of jQuery is that it simplifies the task that would otherwise take many lines of code to develop using vanilla javascript.

Sweet Alert

Sweet Alert is javascript library that allows us replace the the javascript native alert function with a more user friendly and visually pleasing alternative. The library is lightweight and easy to implement. It is not crucial to the development of our prototype, however it adds a little bit of professionalism to the whole end product. We specifically implemented this library in the event/partner deletion part of the admin page, as we consider Sweet Alert to be less intrusive than its built in version.

Optimisation[7]

The optimisation of a website is decisive for a good user experience. If the page does not load in a very short amount of time, we risk of losing the interest of the user. Not just seconds, but fractions of seconds really matter. The more a website is optimised, the faster and snappier the page will load. This is one of the primary reasons why people these day lean towards using front-end frameworks such as Angular or React.

There are certain things that need to be taken into account when it comes to website optimisation. This includes placing the CSS and javascript files in their respective places, creating external javascript and CSS files while also minifying these files, helps greatly with the loading time of the page. Furthermore, the size and resolution of image files should be reduced as much as possible.

Gulp

Gulp is a taskrunner tool that helps us handle different tasks in order to properly optimise the website. In our project we have used several gulp plugins. We have used these plugins to watch and precompile the SASS files into CSS, minify the CSS, minify the javascript and also handle the compression of our images. Additionally, we have used an extension called browserSync in order to refresh the page every time a file is saved so we do not have to manually refresh the page every time.

Conclusion

Interface Design taught us more about the importance of the user even in the extremely early stages of development. The group contains two former multimedia design students who already knew some of the basics of web design and development, however this course taught us more about how the end user experiences the website as a product once it is out in a functional environment rather than a development environment.

Although we managed to fill all the requirements of the project, we believe that there are still improvements to be made. We were fairly limited by some of the technologies we chose to work with, especially gulp, however, we are glad we made these choices because we had the reason to break out of our comfort zone and learn to work in a new development environment we haven't worked before.

[7] How to lose weight in the browser - https://browserdiet.com/en/ (Accessed on 21.05.2017)

Reflections

The course we have attended is not a heavily coding focused course, and because of this, we were in a different environment than we are generally used to. Both of the members of the group are coding-oriented people, and we are well aware of the fact that our weakest suite is our design sense.

Despite all this, we truly believe that we got at least a little bit better at what we are doing, and we appreciate the time and effort we put into the project. Many things could, and likely should, be made with more reasoning behind it yet in the end the project managed to achieve our predefined goals.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Design Process Report

Activity Analysis

Activity 1 : Search for Event

Steps:

- Click input field, search for topic

Artifacts:

- Search Bar with Button

Pain points:

- It is never specified what they can search after

Activity 1.1 : Filter Events

Steps:

- Select desired event from the list of events from the page
- Use Filter
- Mark the checkboxes of interest
- Click Search button next to search bar

Artifacts:

- Search Bar with Button
- Search Filter

Pain points:

- Despite fairly simple, user does not know he has to click the search button next to the search field

Activity 1.2 : Select Event

Steps:

- Click More Information Button

Artifacts:

- More Information Button

Pain points:

- Simple step, if the person is interested in the event, the more information call to action button is present.

Activity 2 : Check Partners

Steps:

- Click on Partners in the navigation bar
- See cards of partners

Artifacts:

- Partners page

Pain points:

- There are no specific pain points that we are aware of

Activity 3 : Contact TechX

Steps:

- Click on Contact in the navigation bar

Artifacts:

- Contact page

Pain points:

- There is no contact form on the page that the visitors can fill out. They have to use a mailing client and copy our email or call using their phones.

User Stories

As a user, I want to be able to quickly look through the events, so that I will be able to find what I am interested in.

As a user, I want to be able to filter the results, so that I can target a specific area where the events unfold.

As a user, I want to be able to check which events are free, so that I can what fits my budget.

As a user, I want to be able to read more about the sponsors of the events, so that I can keep an eye out on more events with the same partners.

As a user, I want to be able to read a short introduction about the event on the same page, so that I don't have to reload or navigate away from the page.

As a page administrator, I want to be able to quickly create pages, so that I can move on to other tasks.

As a page administrator, I want to be able to create other administrators, so that every board member has its own account.

As a page administrator, I want to be able to add other partners, so that they can be added to events sponsored by them.

Low fidelity Prototype - Wireframes[8]

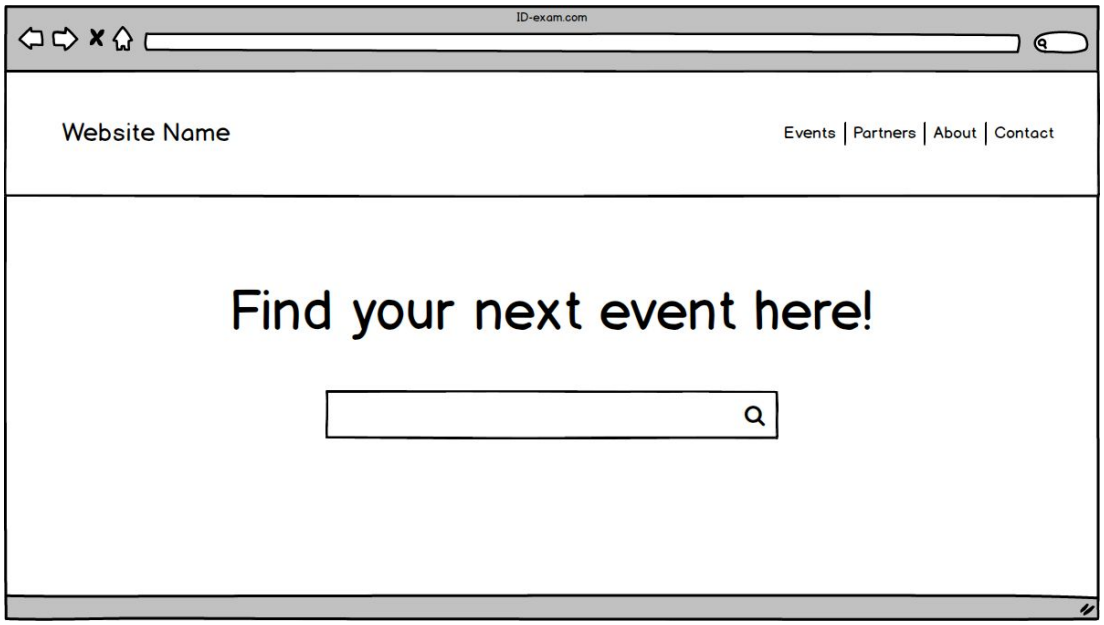


Fig. 01 Landing Page

[8] How to design a Wireframe - http://blog.fuzzymath.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/Fuzzy-Math-How-to-design-a-wireframe.pdf (Accessed on 05.05.2017)

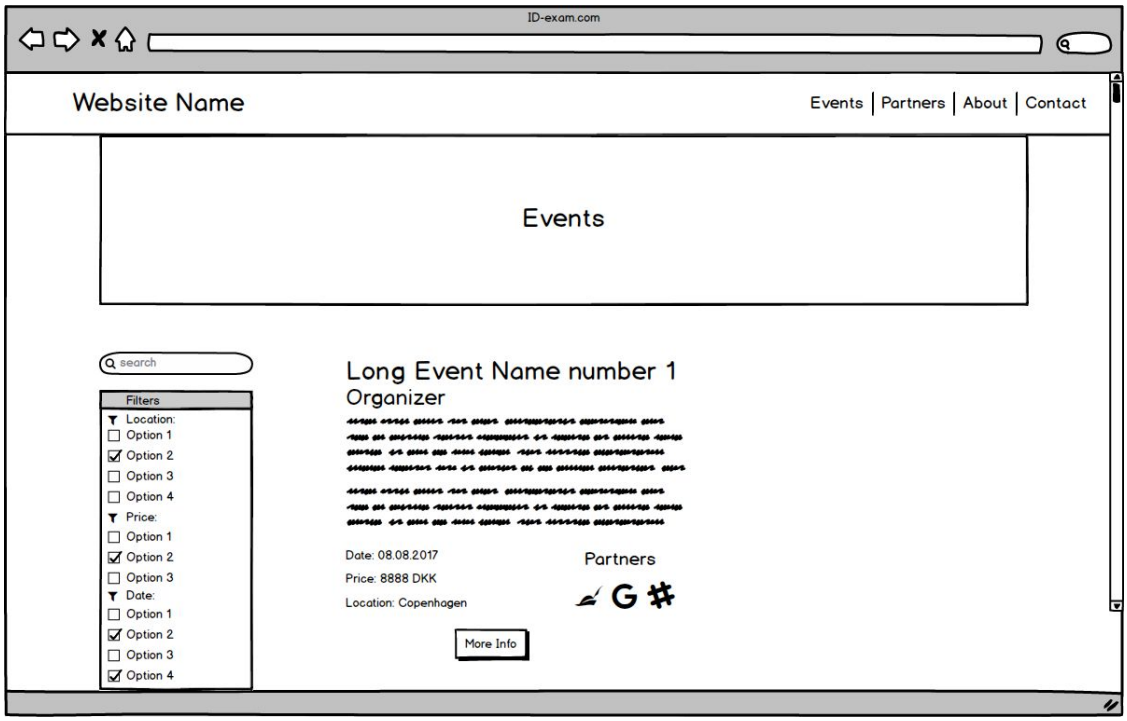


Fig. 02 List of Events

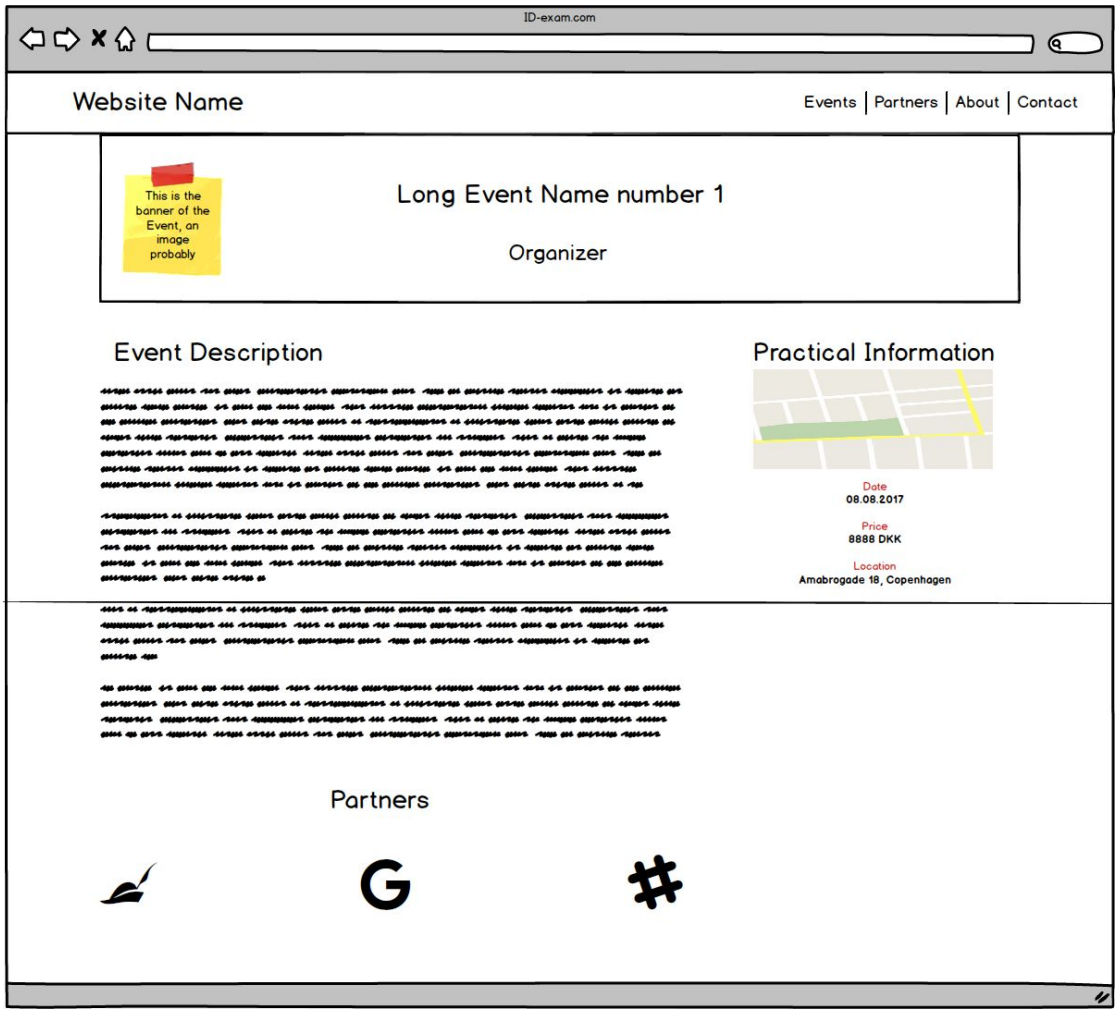


Fig. 03 Specific Event Page

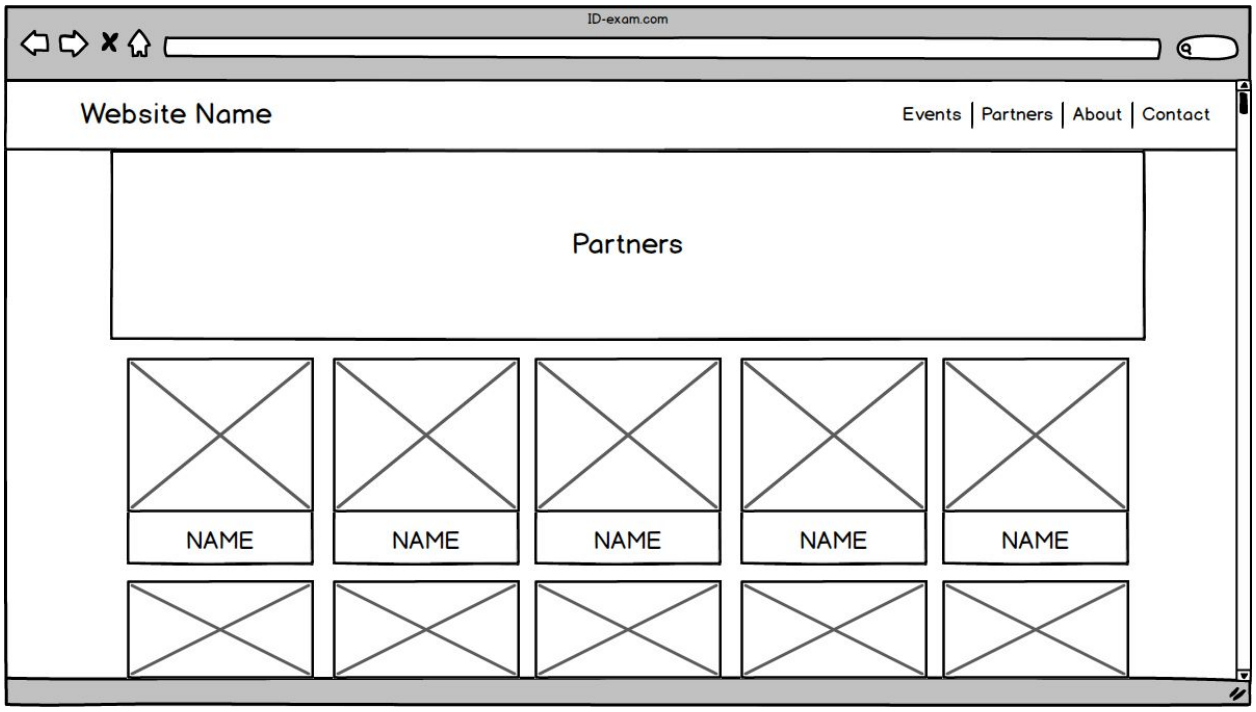


Fig. 04 Partners Page

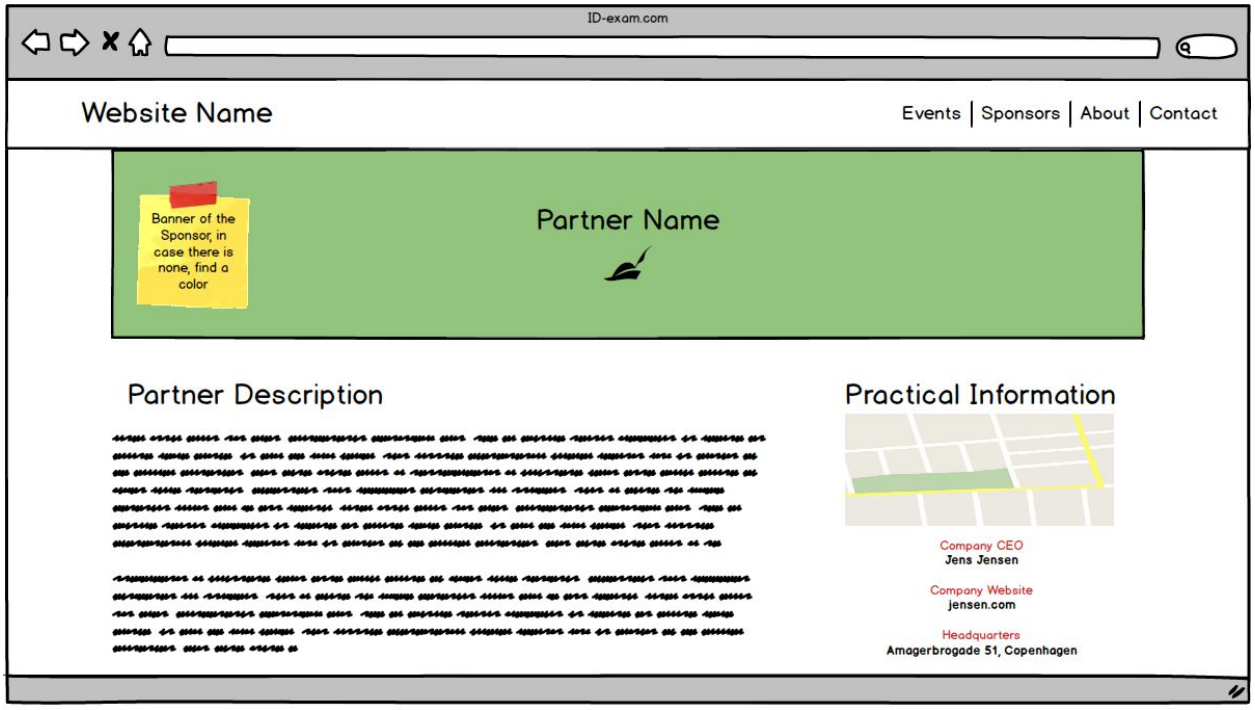


Fig. 05 Specific partner page

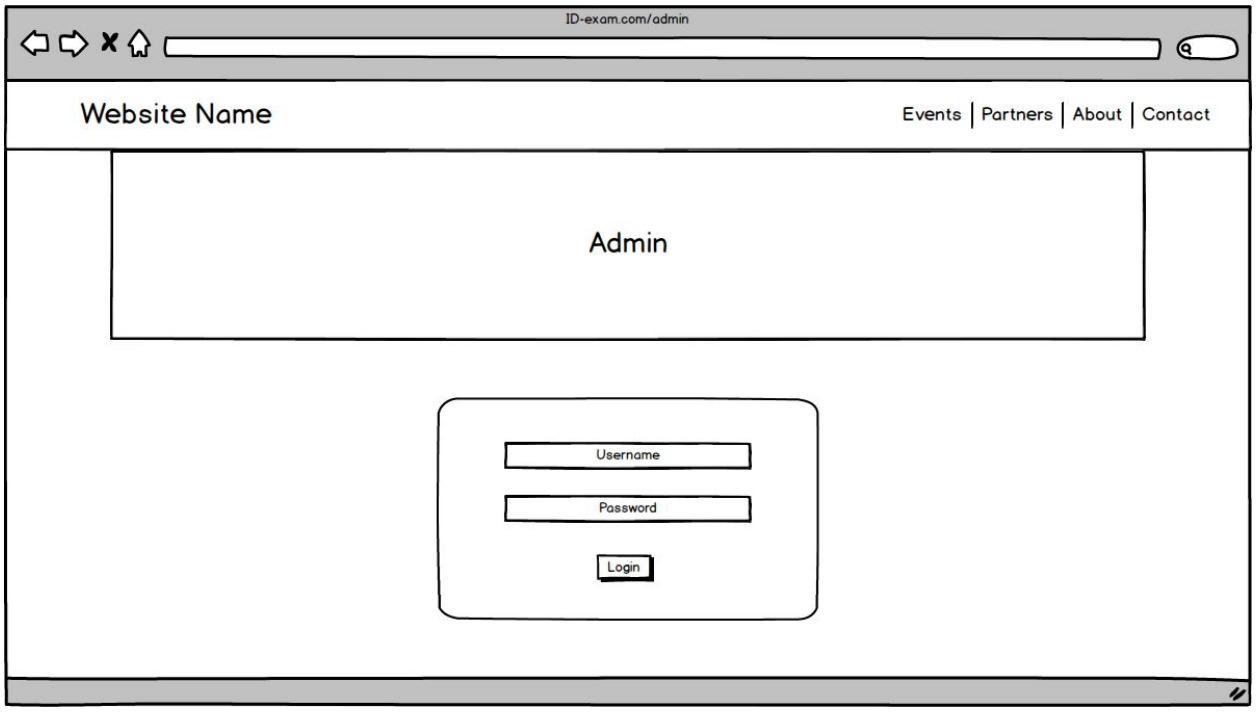


Fig. 06 Admin Login Page

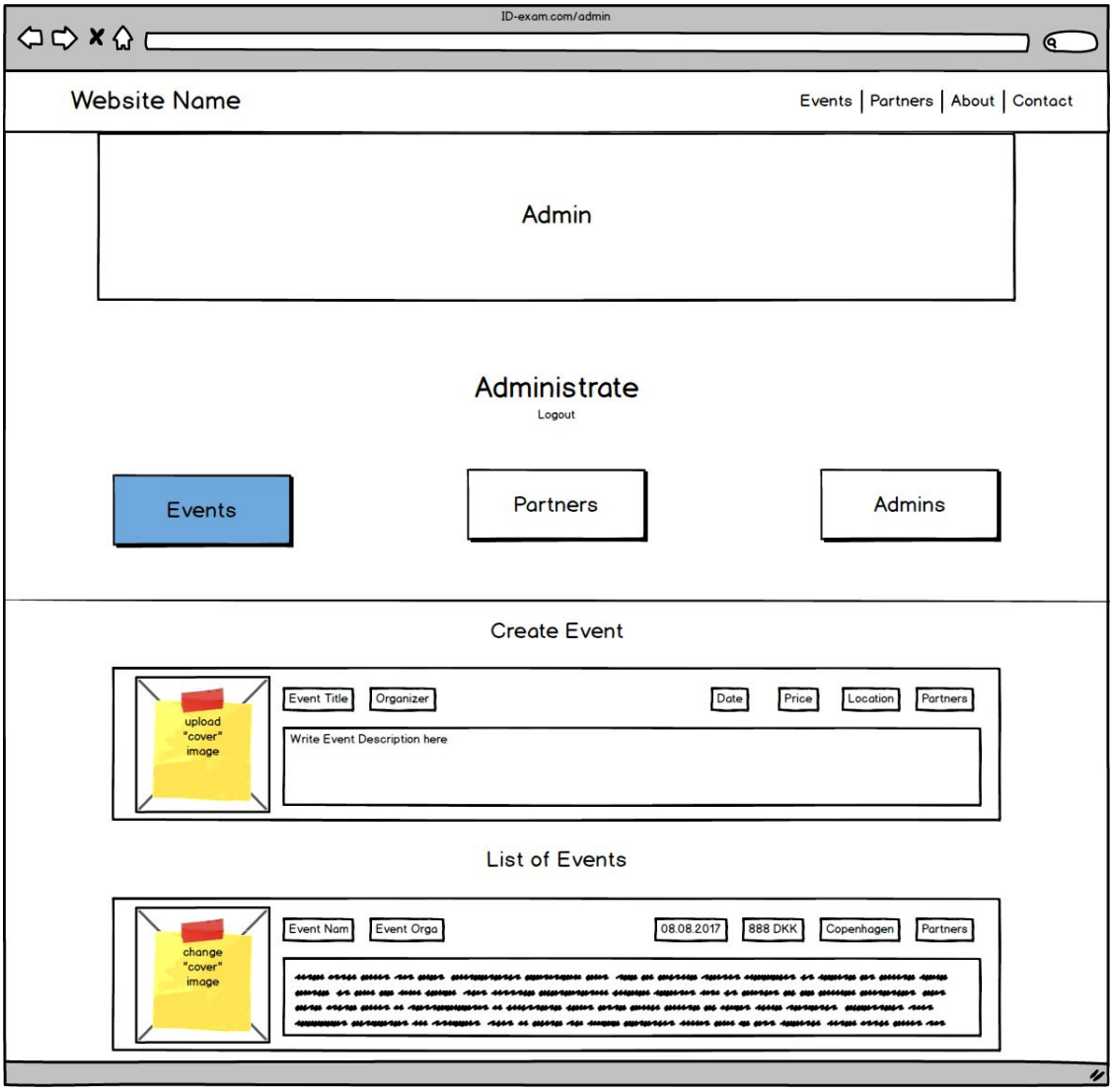


Fig. 07 Admin Administer Events Page

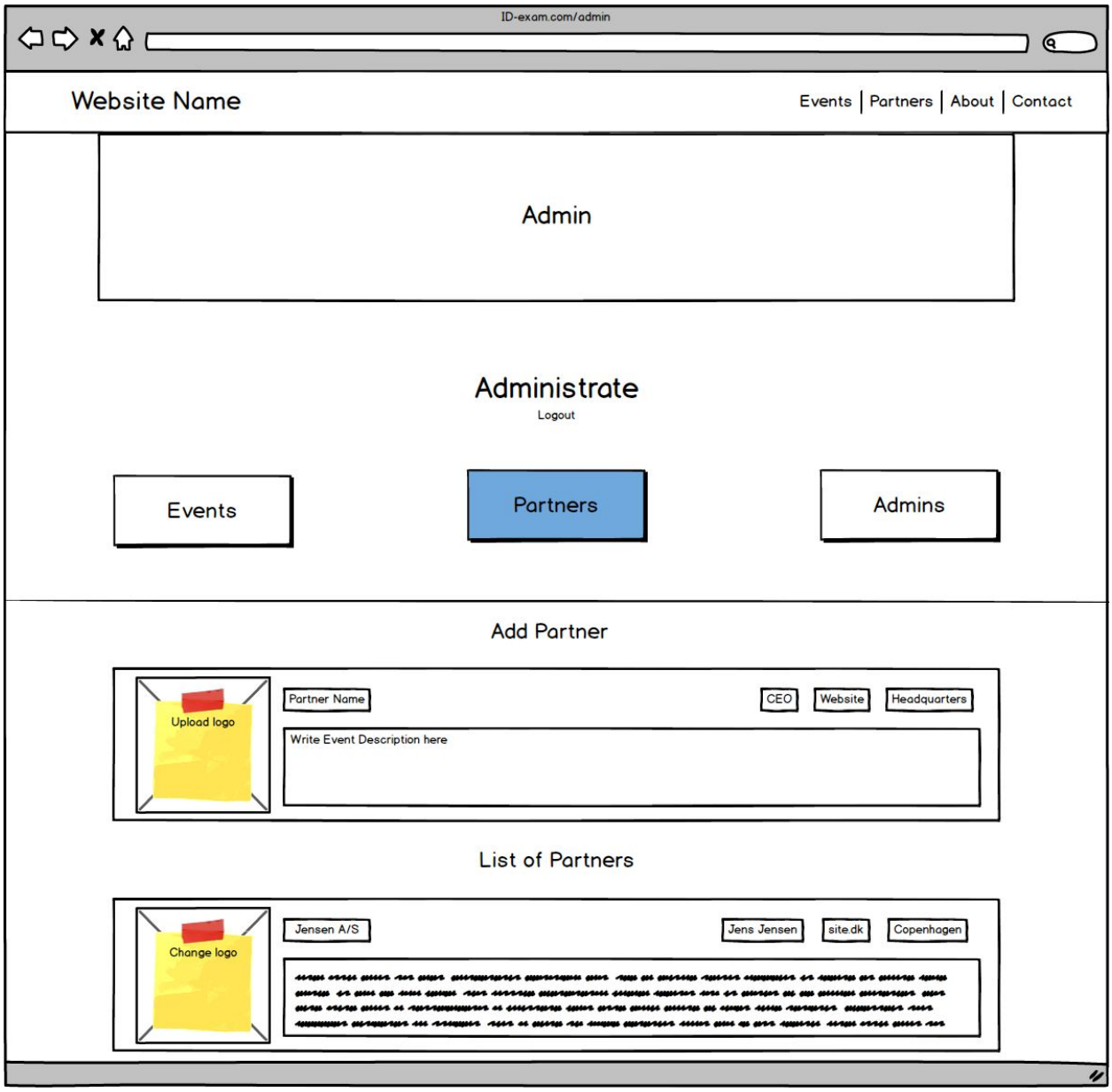


Fig. 08 Admin Administer Partners Page

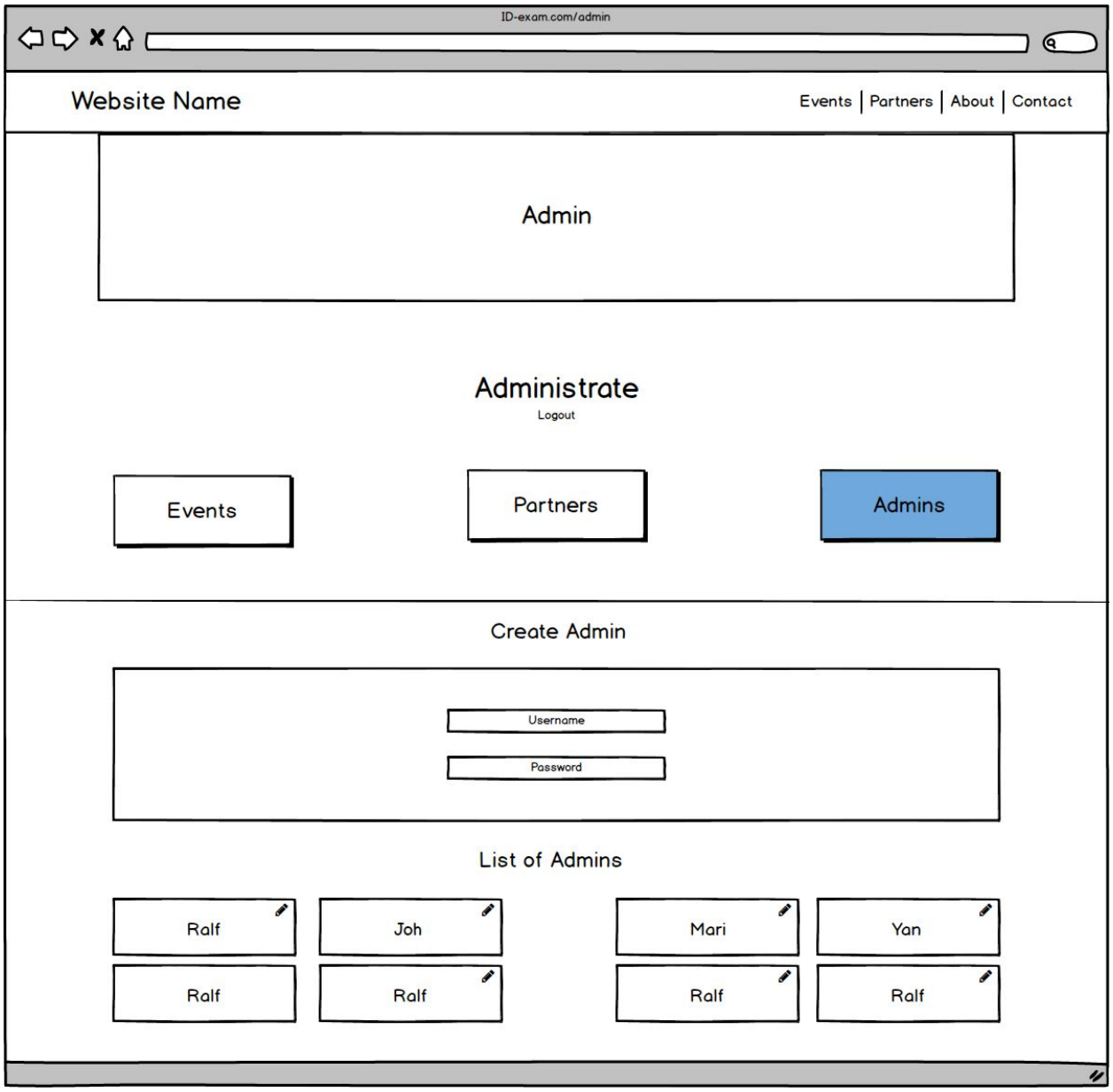
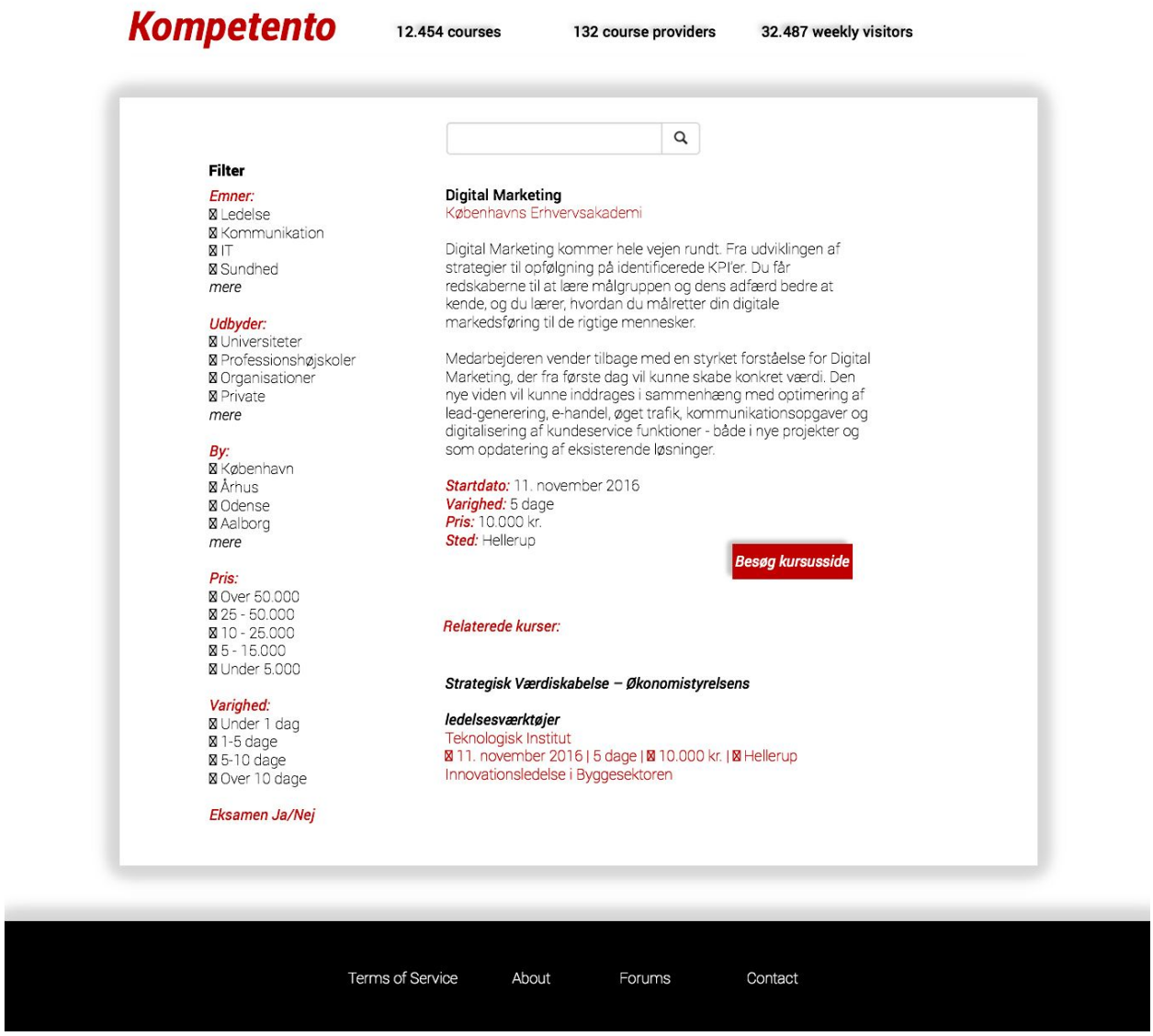


Fig. 09 Admin Admin Creation Page

Mock-ups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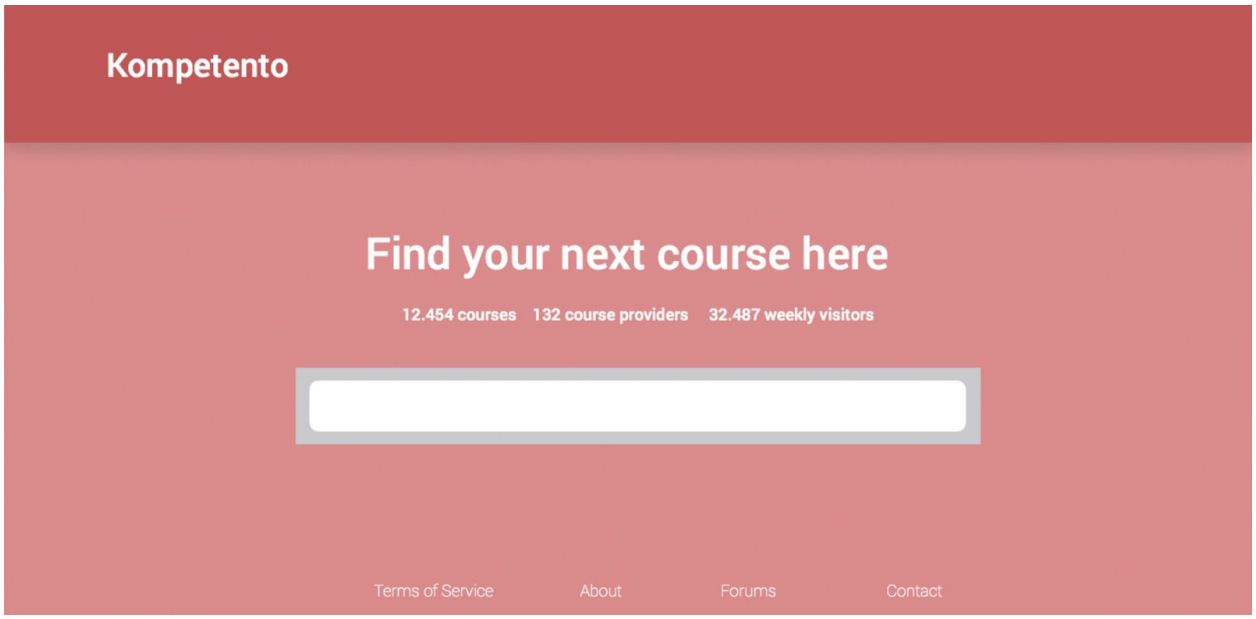
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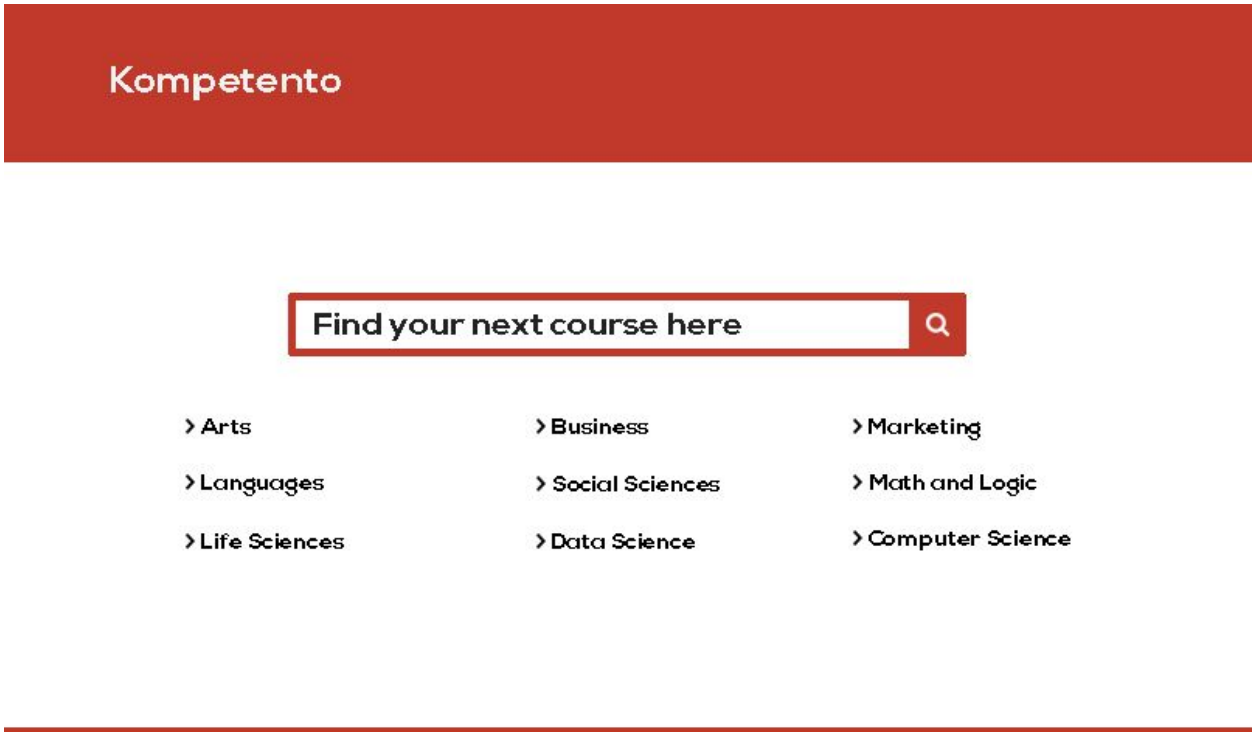
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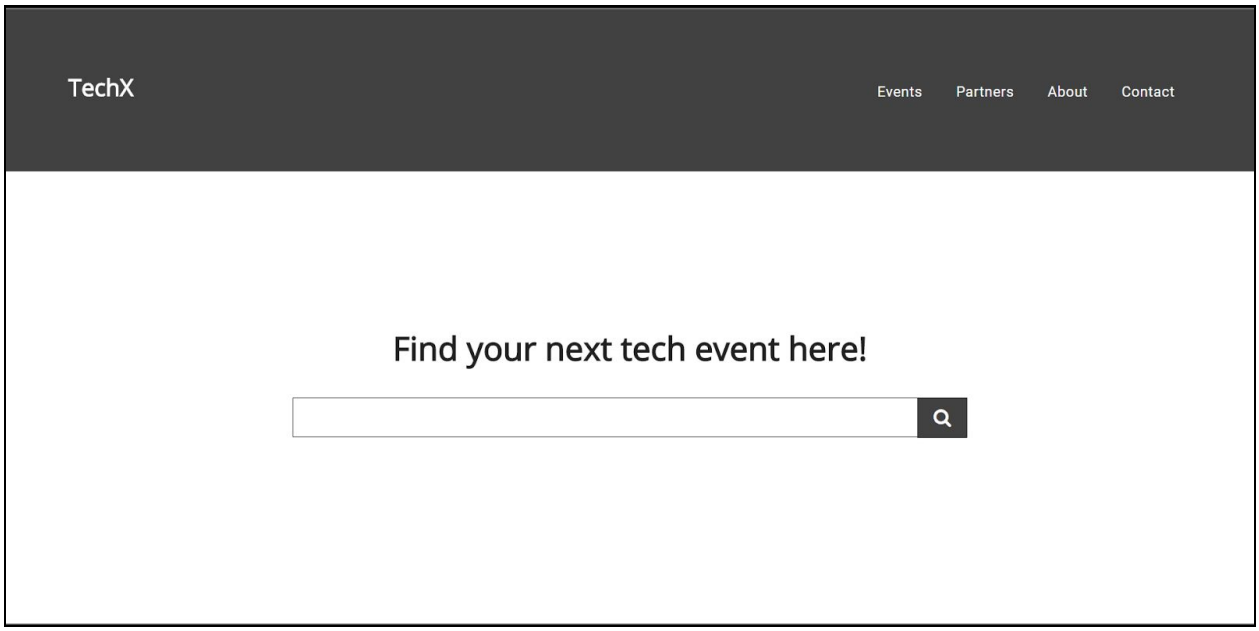

Fig. 01 Landing Page

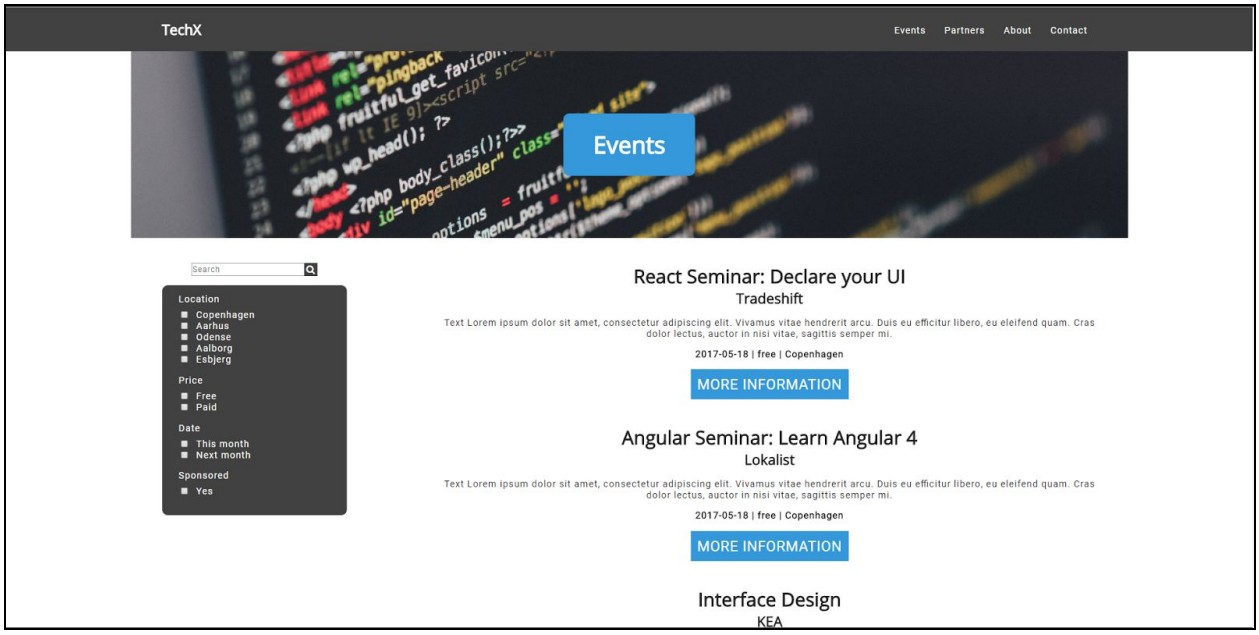

Fig. 02 Events Page

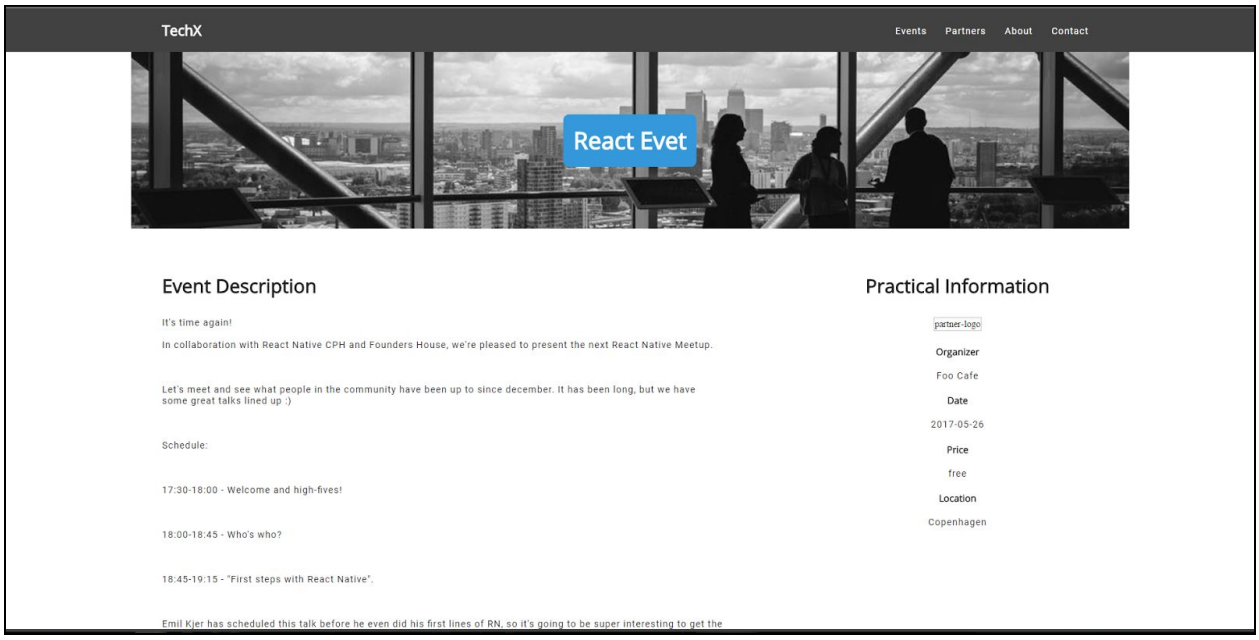

Fig. 03 Specific Event Page

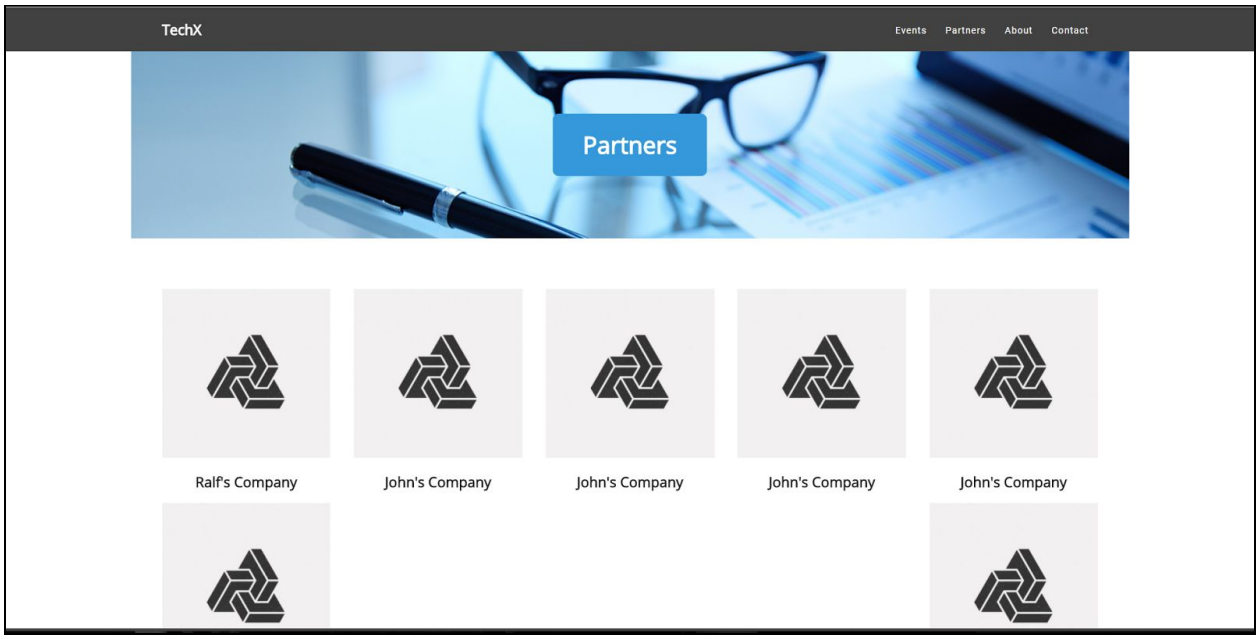

Fig. 04 Partners Page

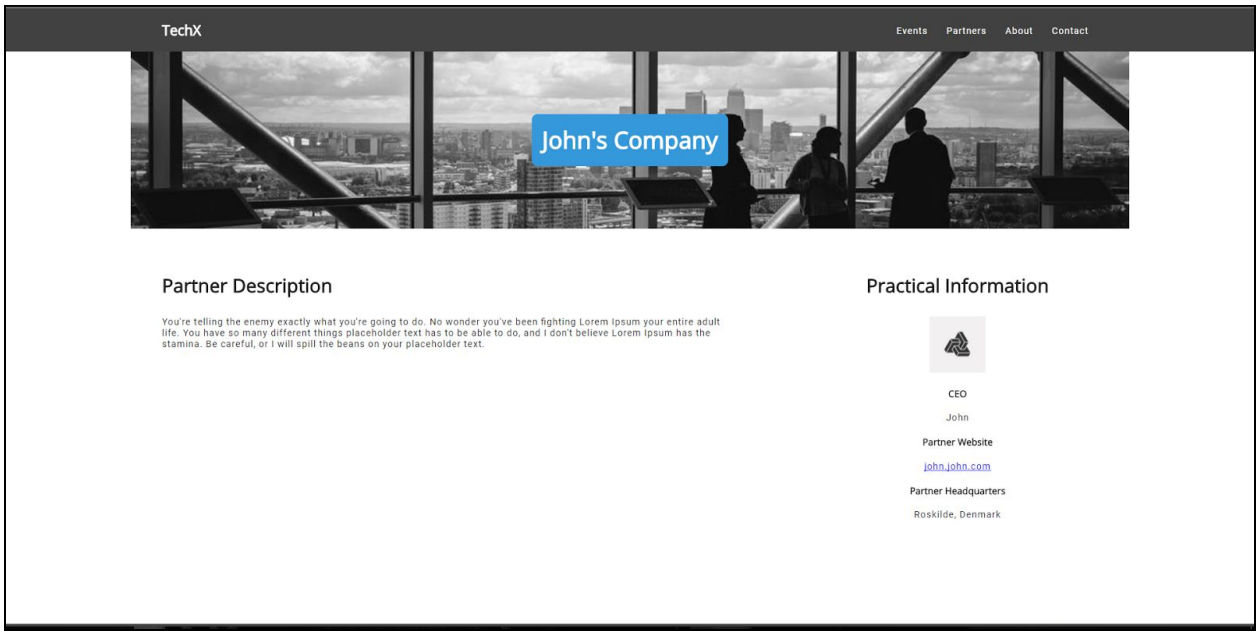

Fig 05. Specific Partner Page

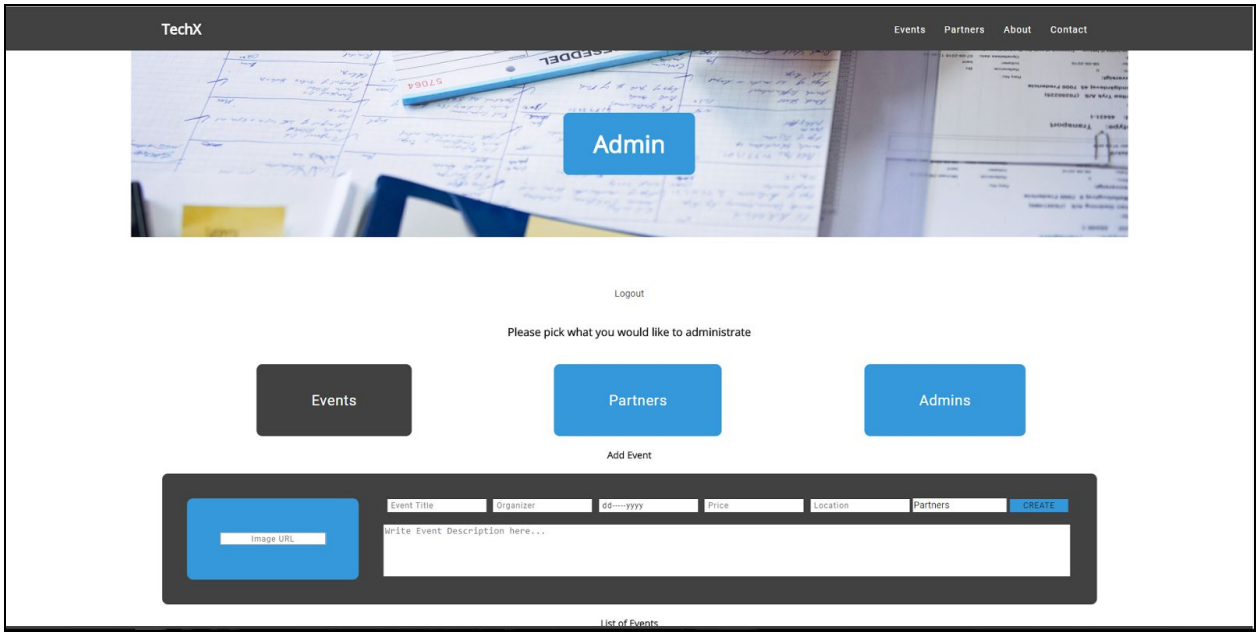

Fig 06. Administrator Page

User Testing Reports

5-Second Test[9]

The 5-second test is a very quick method to gather information from users regarding crucial aspects of our website. We have conducted this test on 7 different people. The main idea behind the 5-second Test is to show the prototype to the user for 5 seconds and ask questions to see how much they remember.

The questions we have prepared of the following:

- What is the main purpose of the website?
- What would you search for?
- Who is the sender of the webpage?
- How could you contact the sender of the webpage?

Most of the people knew instantly what the page was about however they had difficulty answering the second question. Only after answering the third question, did they realize that it's about tech events due to the name of the company.

Heuristic Evaluation[10]

The aim of the Heuristic Evaluation is to get a qualitative assessment of the usability of the page. The subject of our evaluation were students who had prior experience with heuristic evaluation. The conclusion we have drawn after the test was that the user was fairly comfortable with the overall feel of the webpage, however, they did not feel that the chosen color scheme(the red from the 3rd mock-up) was aesthetic enough to what we were trying to convey to our end users.

[9] Five Second Test: Measuring Your Site's Content Pages - https://articles.uie.com/five_second_test/ (Accessed on 08.05.2017)
[10] 10 Usability Heuristics for Interface Design - https://www.nngroup.com/articles/ten-usability-heuristics/ (Accessed on 14.05.2017)