UX/UI Audit of Northbound Product Lab (northboundproductlab.com)

Introduction

Northbound Product Lab positions itself as a design-strategy partner for growth-stage companies. The home and services pages present a polished, dark-themed design with orange accents and a clear message about unlocking growth through design. To assess how well the current user experience supports prospective clients, I reviewed the publicly accessible pages and the application form on 10 December 2025 using a desktop browser. The audit highlights positive aspects of the site, identifies usability and accessibility problems, and provides recommendations grounded in recognized standards such as the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). Citations are provided to support key recommendations.

What Works Well

- **Clear value proposition.** The hero section on the home page succinctly states the company's mission and conveys the potential revenue impact. The primary call-to-action (CTA) invites users to start a review, signalling the next step.
- **Structured service descriptions.** The services page breaks down offerings into numbered cards, helping users scan the options quickly.
- **Consistent visual style.** A dark background with orange highlights creates a distinctive aesthetic, and typography is large and readable in most cases.

Issues and Recommendations

1. Insufficient color contrast

Issue: Several sections, particularly the orange "Apply for review" banner and the long application form, present white or pale-orange text on a bright orange background. According to WCAG, normal-sized text must have a contrast ratio of at least 4.5:1, and large text must meet a 3:1 ratio【244122614991944†L40-L47】. For user-interface controls and icons, non-text elements must also achieve a contrast ratio of at least 3:1【341990295185541†L28-L45】. The current color scheme likely fails these thresholds, making content difficult for users with low vision.
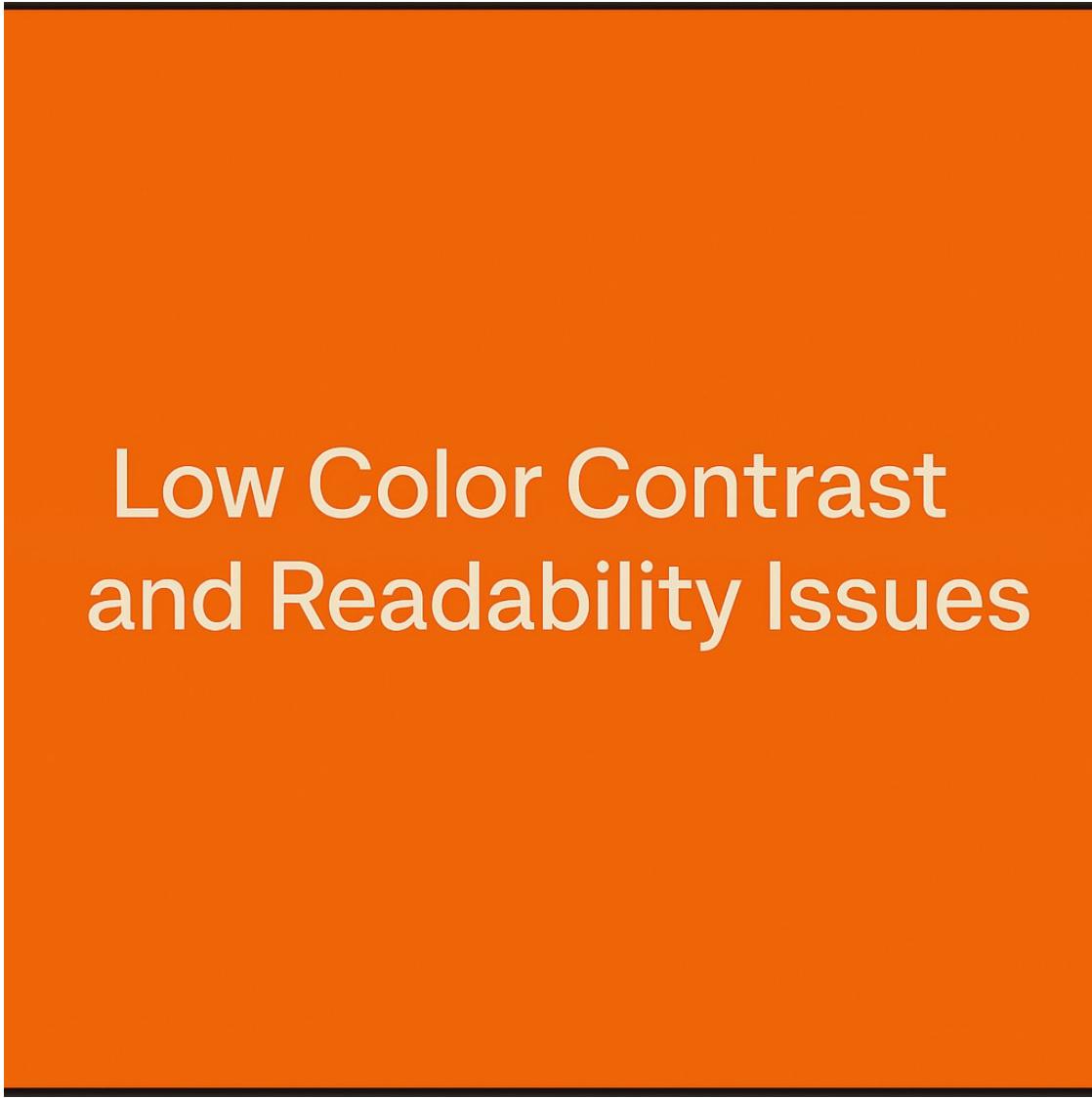
**Impact:** Low contrast reduces readability and may exclude users with visual impairments. Buttons and links may be overlooked, hurting conversions.

Recommendations:

1. Use a contrast checker to ensure that all text and icons meet the 4.5:1 (normal text) and 3:1 (large text and non-text UI components) standards【244122614991944†L40-L47】【341990295185541†L28-L45】. For instance, change the "Apply for review" panel to a darker shade of orange or place the white text inside a dark overlay.
2. Increase the luminance difference between buttons and their backgrounds. The black "Submit application" button in the form meets contrast requirements; other buttons should follow a similar pattern.

3. Provide a high-contrast mode toggle or follow system preferences so that users who need stronger contrast can enable it easily.

Illustration:

Low-contrast text on orange background

## 2. Misleading plus icons in "Who we work with" section
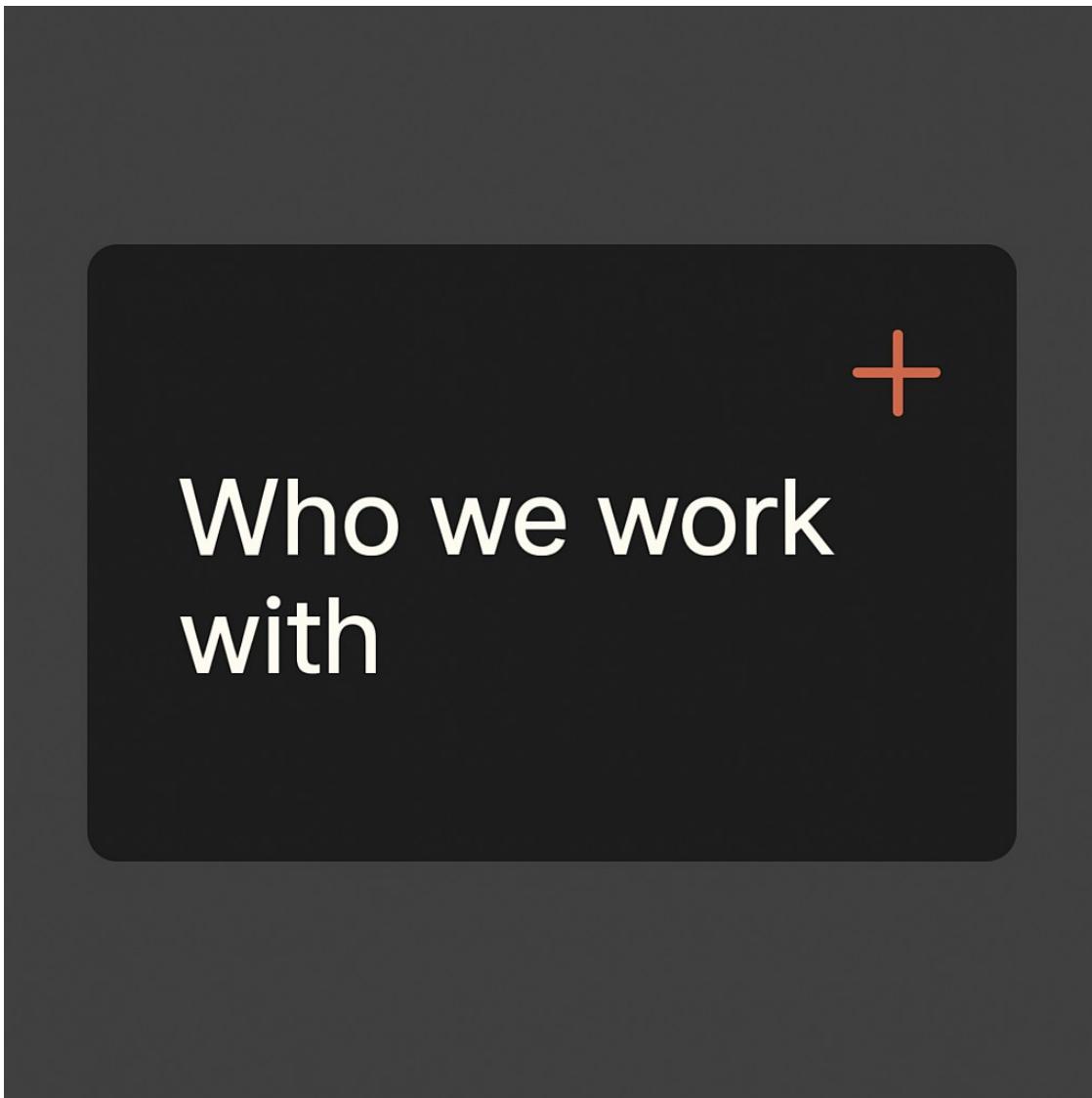
Issue: Each card in the "Who we work with" section features a small orange plus icon in the top-right corner, hinting that more information is available. However, the icons are not interactive; clicking them produces no change. In UX, signifiers should clearly indicate available actions 【843177600470047†L75-L78】 . The plus sign is a metaphorical affordance commonly associated with creating or expanding content 【843177600470047†L156-L158】 ; using it without functionality is a false affordance.

Impact: Users may repeatedly click the icon expecting an accordion or modal. Failing to deliver expected behaviour erodes trust and creates frustration.

Recommendations:

1. Remove the plus icon or replace it with a more appropriate signifier (e.g., a subtle arrow) only if the card expands. If more detail is not available, eliminate the icon altogether.
2. If additional information exists, implement an accessible accordion. Accordions should show and hide content with clear focus states and ARIA attributes so screen-reader users understand the structure.

Illustration:

Card with non-functional plus icon

3. Overly long application form

Issue: The "Design Audit Application" form is presented as a single, lengthy page on a solid orange background. Users must scroll through many input fields spanning contact details, company information, audit goals, timing, and file uploads. Research cited by form-analytics company Zuko shows that when a form is complex or long, breaking it into multiple steps delivers a higher conversion rate; comparative studies found a two-step form improved conversions by about 14% over a single-step form 【375302600638864†L80-L90】. Long forms also create cognitive overload 【375302600638864†L109-L115】.
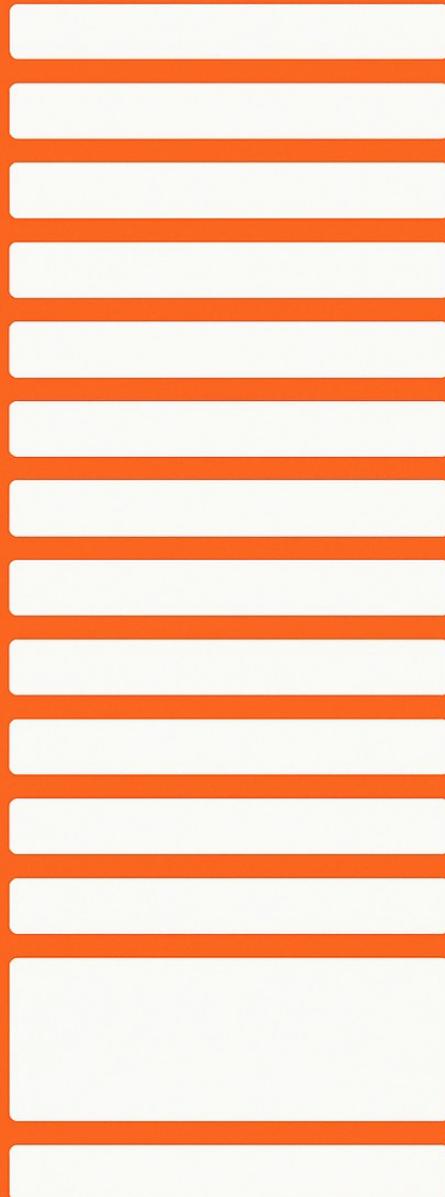
Impact: Prospective clients may abandon the form because it appears daunting. On mobile devices, the long scroll exacerbates the issue. The current design does not communicate how far along the user is or how many fields remain.

Recommendations:

1. Break the application into logical steps (e.g., contact information, company profile, audit focus, final details) and use a progress indicator to show completion status. Multi-step forms reduce cognitive load and encourage completion 【375302600638864†L80-L90】.
2. Group related fields visually with borders or cards. Provide descriptive labels outside of form fields instead of relying on placeholder text to improve accessibility and ensure that screen-reader users hear field labels even after typing.
3. Reduce the number of required fields; ask only what is necessary to initiate a conversation. Offer the option to upload supporting files later in the process.
4. Include inline validation and clear error messaging so users know immediately if an entry is invalid.

Illustration:

A very long online application
form with many input fields and
orange background, showing user
frustration due to long scrolling.

Submit

Long one-page application form

4. Inconsistent calls to action

Issue: The site uses several CTAs—"Start your review," "Start application+," and "Submit application." Some are outlined buttons with low visual weight, while others use solid black backgrounds. CTA effectiveness depends more on contrast than on the specific color used; the button should stand out from surrounding content 【341990295185541†L28-L45】. Several CTAs are small, and the plus sign in "Start application+" may be misinterpreted.

Impact: Users may not notice or may misinterpret important actions, reducing conversion opportunities.

Recommendations:

1. Use a single, consistently styled primary CTA across the site. Place CTAs in prominent locations with ample negative space around them. Ensure buttons have a high contrast ratio against their backgrounds 【341990295185541†L28-L45】.
2. Remove unnecessary symbols ("+") from button labels unless they serve a clear purpose. Label buttons with action verbs ("Start your review") and ensure they are large enough to tap on mobile devices.
3. Provide secondary CTAs (e.g., "Learn more about services") where relevant and style them distinctly from the primary CTA.

5. Generic stock photography

Issue: The process section ("How we work") uses stock images of groups of businesspeople that do not reinforce the specific activities described (discovery call, deep dive, audit, results delivery). Visuals lacking context can feel generic and reduce credibility.

Impact: Users may perceive the company as less authentic and may not connect emotionally with the service offering.

Recommendations:

1. Replace stock photos with illustrations or custom imagery that reflects digital product work—e.g., designers analysing a user flow, a dashboard showing conversion metrics, or team members collaborating over product sketches. Custom visuals help convey expertise and align with the company's brand.
2. If photographs are used, choose images that directly relate to the described step and include alt text for accessibility.

6. Navigation and footer improvements

Issue: The top navigation is minimal ("Home," "Services," "Log in"), but it is not sticky. Users must scroll back to the top to navigate elsewhere. There is no visible link to an "About" page, blog, or contact information outside of the application form. The footer only contains the company name and copyright notice.

Impact: Lack of persistent navigation makes it harder for users to explore and lowers discoverability of important pages. Missing contact information may reduce trust.

Recommendations:

1. Make the navigation bar sticky so it remains visible while scrolling. Include links to key pages such as "About," "Case studies," or "Contact." This can help users learn more about the company before committing to a review.
2. Expand the footer to include secondary navigation links, a brief company description, social-media icons, and contact details. A richer footer improves credibility and provides alternative navigation paths.

7. Accessibility considerations

Issue: The site uses placeholder text within input fields as labels, and some inputs have no external labels. WCAG requires that form fields be clearly labelled so screen-reader users understand each field's purpose. Additionally, there is no skip-navigation link at the top of the page, and headings sometimes jump levels (e.g., a section labelled "03" uses an <h2> after an <h3>), which can confuse assistive technologies.

Impact: Screen-reader users may have difficulty completing the application or understanding page structure. Users navigating via keyboard may not know where focus is when interacting with hidden elements.

Recommendations:

1. Provide visible labels for all form inputs. Avoid relying on placeholder text as the only label.
2. Add a "Skip to content" link at the top of each page so keyboard users can bypass repetitive navigation.
3. Ensure heading levels follow a logical hierarchy and use ARIA landmarks to group content.
4. Test the site with keyboard navigation and screen readers to identify and fix focus-order issues and to confirm that interactive elements announce their state and purpose correctly.

Conclusion

Northbound Product Lab has a strong brand identity and clear messaging, but several usability and accessibility issues undermine its effectiveness. By improving contrast, refining signifiers, simplifying the application process, and enhancing navigation and accessibility, the website can deliver a more inclusive and persuasive experience. These improvements will not only meet standards like WCAG but also help convert more visitors into clients.