

CS22310 Website Usability Mini-Project

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Abstract

This report covers web design guidelines for three sites these are File Hippo, IMDb and Kates Clothing. Each site has a specific purpose to achieve and is rated on how easy they are to use. In the final section of the report, there is a site that was design with these guidelines in mind and an evaluation as to weather it meets them.

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1 Introduction

This report will cover design and general usability guidelines, covering three large web sites and an evaluation of one of my own sites. The report is broken up into two main parts. The first being the evaluation of three large sites. The second section will cover the evaluation of my own site.

2 Applying web design guidelines to three sites

Part One will cover three web sites and evaluate them on how easy they are to navigate and locate a desired page. Each site will have a different purpose in mind and will show how the user has reached the information. It will also show whether the site matches the guidelines for web design from Krug¹

2.1 File Hippo

This site contains a library of software for the user to download, these may be free-ware or open source. FileHippo.com also provides the user with previous versions of software including the latest beta/stable version. I am attempting to find and download an old version of Foxit Reader. See Figure 1 for an image of FileHippo's main page.



Figure 1: FileHippo.com home page

On first load of the site I noticed the latest updates and popular software. These were good as I could see some of the new software that is on the site. This

¹Steve Kurg is the Author of "Don't make me think". This book is a very good standard to compare websites too.

did not help me in my search though. The next part of the site that caught my eye is the main area with the top 5 or so software. These were split into different categories. This looks like a good place to find my pdf reader. So I started to look through the different categories, thinking it might be in "Desktop" I later found it to be in "Office and News", towards the lower end of the site. Now I am looking for an older version of the software, but this has the title of "Foxit Reader 4.3.1.0323", now I'm hoping that when I click on this link it will give me more options and some information about the software.

Good news, after clicking the link it gives me a page with a description about the software and a big green download button at the top right of the page. Also on the right hand side of the page there are a list of different versions of the software, these seem to be links. See figure 2. After deciding which version I wanted to download I clicked on the version 3.0.1222. After doing this and expecting a download to start, I was happily surprised to find more information about this specific version. I then proceeded to read the information and continue with my download by clicking on the nice green download button, which had changed from "Download Latest Version 7.57MB" to "Download This Version 3.69MB" this re assured me that I was downloading the correct version that I am looking for.



Figure 2: FileHippo.com download page for Foxit Reader

Overall the site did not make me think, I was able to find the software I was looking for with out any problem. If I had ran into a problem I would have been able to use the search form located at the top of the page. I was able to work out that on the main page there are different categories which split the software up. Also once I have selected a software the site displays a bread

crumb of my current location. All of the links where the same and are easy to identify. Although I did find it a little difficult in using the site as the adverts appear in quite a lot of places on the site. To find that what I was looking for without using the search feature, wasn't hard but I wasn't completely sure if I would have been able to get to it from the main page, as I had to go down past the fold, the first 800px of the site. I believe that this site complies with Krugs guidelines.

2.2 IMDb

IMDb is a site devoted to providing users with great amount of detail about upcoming movies, it provides users with a synopsis of the film, who acted in it and what the public think of the film. See figure 3 for an image of the home page. I am attempting to find out what other films the actor who played "Keylee" in the TV show FireFly, which had a film called Serenity. When the site first loaded up I saw the featured trailers, which contained images from upcoming films. I decided to have a look in the TV section, I saw from the drop down a "Best TV Series" I knew that Firefly is rated as one of the top, so I clicked on it. Once it had loaded up I scrolled down in search of it, and found it in place number eight.

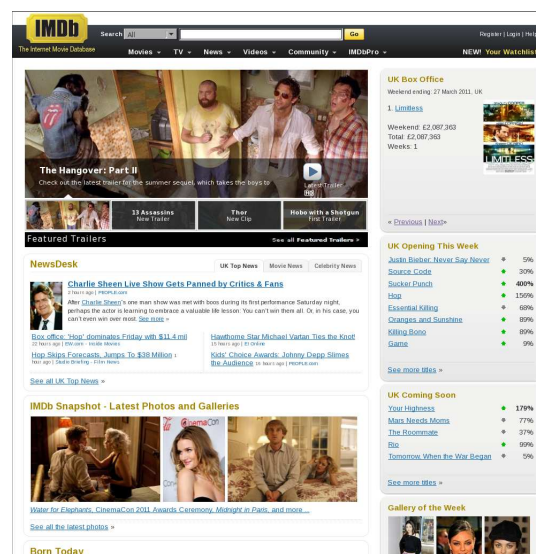


Figure 3: IMDb.com home page

Upon clicking on the thumbnail image of Firefly the site loaded up with a profile for firefly, see figure 4, this provided me with screen shots and description of the show. When I scrolled down the page I found information about the cast. As I am looking for information on the actress who played Keylee, I looked for

Keylee's name in the cast list. Once I did find her, I wasn't sure what link to click on, should I click on the Actress name or the character she played. I decided that if I was to click on the character she played it would take me to a page with more information about the character. So I clicked on the actress name, to find out what else she had acted in.

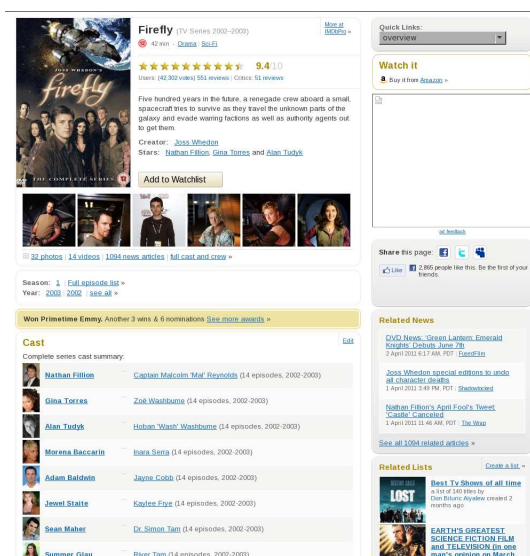


Figure 4: IMDb.com on the firefly page

After clicking on the actress name, the site loaded up with a nice profile page it showed me all of the films she has been in, and some that haven't been released yet. All of the pages of this site tried to keep all of the important information above the fold. I found this worked well as they used images to help get this point across. This made it nice and easy for me to quickly work out if I had seen the film before than just the title. For example when on an actors profile there is a section above the fold, with cover art of the film or series that they are in. These are also click able allowing you to get more detail about the item.

There is also a comprehensive search feature that is always available in the header of the site. This allows for searching of different terms and parts of the site in one go. There is also a menu, from which I found the Firefly series, that allows filtering of site content based on choices available from the drop down sections. I believe that this site complies with Krugs guidelines. Many of the images are click able they also have the title of the item which makes it even clearer that this is a link. There was not a bread cumb system in place, but depending on where it displayed where I was in the form of categories, such as Drama and Sci-fi. And for more detailed information such as when you are on a actors profile, or series, it would say "Actress" or "TV Series" along with the

date aired. This provided a more of a dynamic site than just a bread crumb, as it has the feel that there is a lot more content on there.

2.3 Kate's Clothing

Kate's Clothing is a UK based alternative clothing site. They sell alternative clothing, accessories, hair dye and shoes. The item that I am looking to buy is the "Necessary Evil Men's Esus Black and Urban Camo Transformer Trousers". My first impressions of the site is that it is hard to know what the site is called and work out what site I am on, as the title, located in the top left, blends in with the background. See figure 5. The overall colour scheme of the site seems to be black, red and white. The contrast of the colours make it hard for me to read and find my way around. The search is located toward the top of the page on the left hand side. Followed by a list of categories and some filtering options, in the form of drop down boxes.

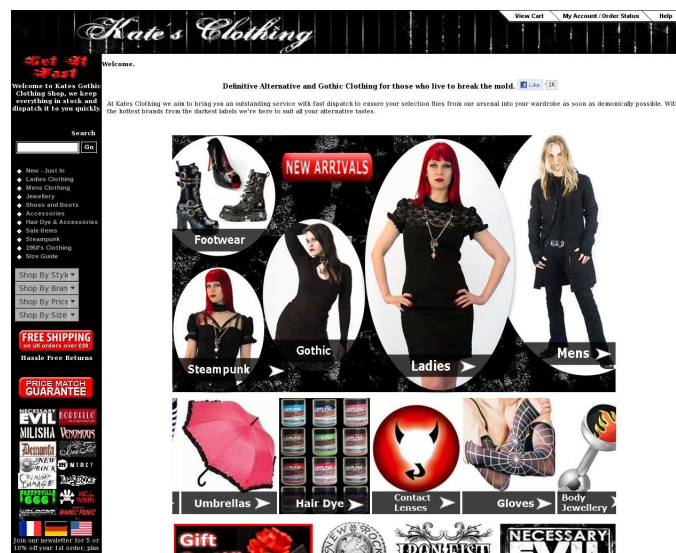


Figure 5: katesclothing.co.uk Home page

The item that I am looking for is a brand called "Necessary Evil", so I decided to select this from the brand section. This brings up a page with every item they sell from this brand. I scrolled up and down in search of my trousers or at the least any men's items. Unable to find my item, I was faced with a decision. I could go to the next page and continue searching or I could refine my search and, search within the brand. I decided to click on men's clothing from the left hand side menu and give up looking through the brand. Once I had clicked on the "men's clothing" section, I was given the option to restrict the types of items, I selected "Trousers & Kilts", this seemed like a good option.

See figure 6. In this section there is a bread crumb listing at the top, this reassured me that I was in the right place, and am able to find my way back to where I was.

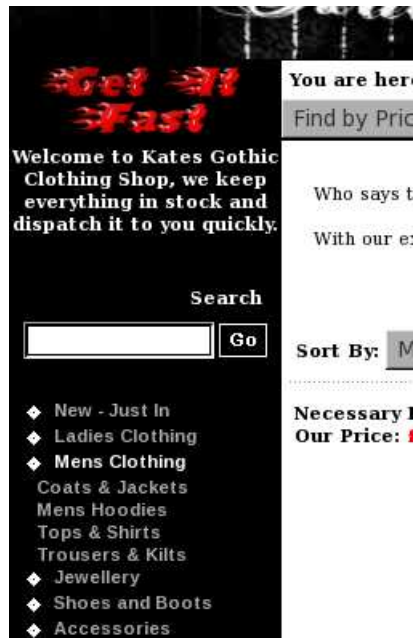


Figure 6: Katesclothing.co.uk, Options to restrict my items, under mens clothing.

I was able to find "Necessary Evil Men's Esus Black and Urban Camo Transformer Trousers" in the seventh item on the page. I instantly clicked on the image of the item to find out more about it, I later found out that I could have clicked on the title to achieve the same result. See figure 7. This site makes me think about some of the site, but overall I was able to browse and find my item with out too much effort. I believe this site follows Krugs guidelines.

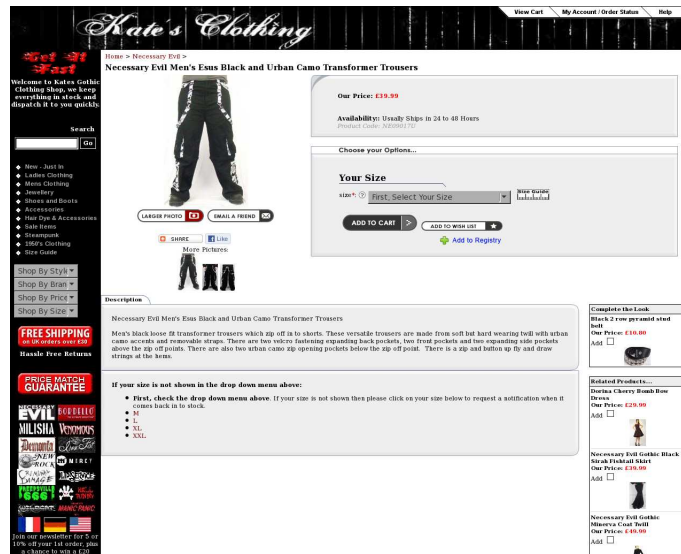


Figure 7: Katesclothing.co.uk, this is the page for the item I was looking for.

The fact that the prices were all in red made me think that there was something wrong with them. I knew after looking that this is the standard, but there was no difference between sale and normal price in colour. For a while I thought that the items might have been out of stock.

3 Design and Evaluation of my own site

This section will cover a site in which I have created. I will explain my design decisions and reasons why it was created this way. I will also evaluate the site and explain my accessibility guidelines used in the construction of the site. The site that I have made for this report will be a commercial site for a local Veterinary Surgery. It is located at www.prioryvetcardigan.co.uk. The back end is Wordpress and the site uses Javascripts JQuery to provide a slide show of images for the main page. See figures 8 and 9

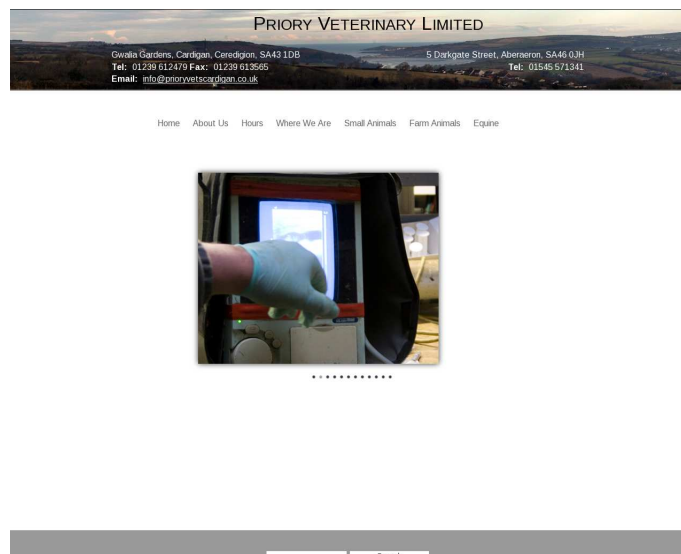


Figure 8: www.priorityvetscardigan.co.uk - Splash Page

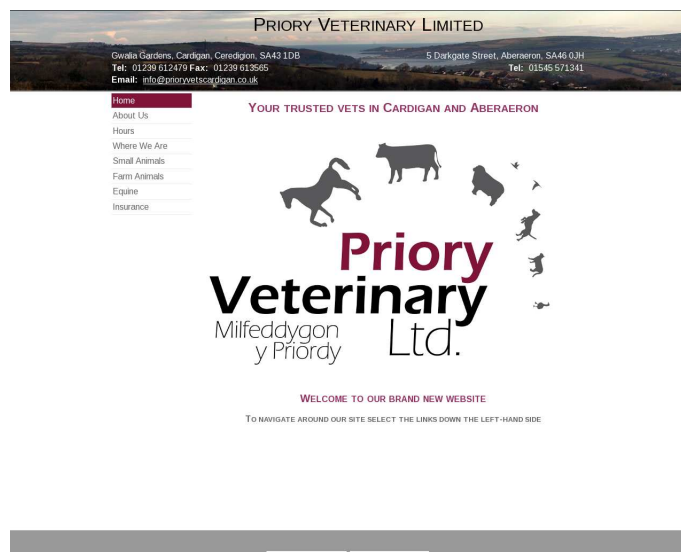


Figure 9: www.priorityvetscardigan.co.uk - Home Page

3.1 Design

The design was built from the ground up to provide the user with a clear path to navigate the site, and to find as much information about the company as possible. I believe that this is done relatively well. It has had limited testing with users attempting to find information on the site whilst it was in development. The design is meant to be clear and simple to use. I attempted to do this by providing the user with a left hand menu. The reason for having a left hand navigation menu is that the target audience will tend to read left to right. This means that users will not be confused as to how to navigate the site. All though on the splash screen the menu is horizontal along the top of the screen below the header. This is only on the splash page and should not be able to get back to this page unless they re type the address into the browser. Some people might say this is a bad idea, because it might confuse the user. I believe having a splash screen is a bad idea, because at the moment the site has two home pages with very little information on them. But this is what was required from the client.

To make sure that the user knows where they are and what they are viewing, each page has a heading, stating the page name. This heading matches the navigation menu items. When the user is on the page the navigation item will be highlighted. See figure 10. This is to make sure that the user knows where they are and what other pages they can view.



Figure 10: www.prioryvetcardigan.co.uk - Example of navigation location

All of the pages follow a standard layout, providing the user with a clear distinction between content and hyperlinks. All of the hyperlinks are underlined, this is to make sure that users know that these are click able and will take them to another page, or document. The header items are all set the same colour

and size, this is to help in making sure that the site is constant. There is also an opaque image of the company's logo at the bottom right of the page. This was placed here so that the user should all ways know what site they are on. I have also used the companies colours in the site design to help re assure the customer is on the right site.

I have placed a search box in the footer of the site, during the design stage of the site I thought this would be a good idea. The reason why I placed it in the footer is because once the user has viewed the pages and where unable to find the information they want they would be at the bottom of the page. More information on this in the Evaluation.

The whole site is designed to be viewed on many different size displays, the site uses a fluid layout. This means that the site will look different on different displays. It will still display the same content, but it will change the width of the content depending on the size of the screen. The header is able to provide up to 1,920px before the image becomes too small.

The site has sub pages in the about us section. See figure 11. This allows the user to find more about the company as well who the staff are, in a nice clear and easy to find fashion. The information about the company is displayed as the parent, and the child pages are different ranking staff members.

Lessons that I have learnt from part one, review of other sites, are that it is a good idea to provide the user with a search and ways to get back to where they came from with out any problem. I have also learnt that it helps to have an easy to read contrast ratio for the site colours. I have attempted to do this in my design.

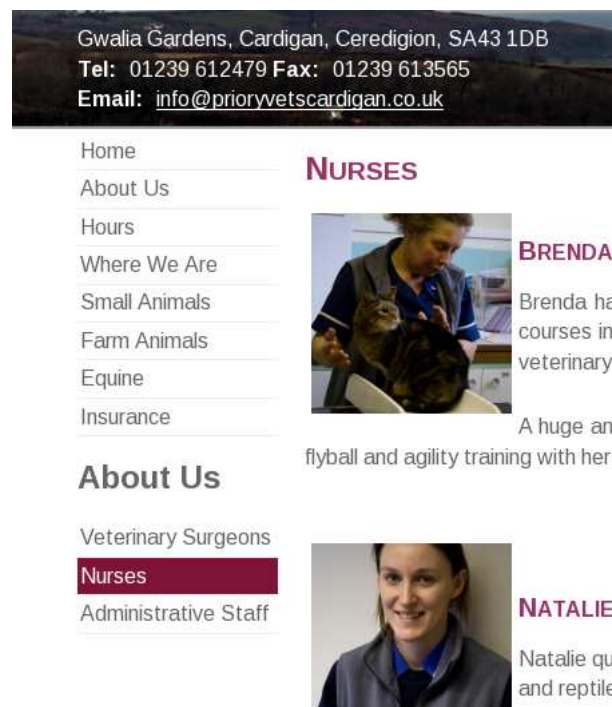


Figure 11: www.prioryvetcardigan.co.uk - Example of how sub pages are displayed.

3.2 Evaluation

I believe my design complies with the basic usability guidelines. Aside from a few aspects which I will cover here. The first is the location of the search form. This is located in the footer, and to make matters worse the footer is all ways displayed below the fold, due to a CSS error. This can make it harder for users to find content that they are looking for. The reason why it is located in the footer is because I was expecting the user to read the page they are on and if they do not find the item they are looking for they could enter some search terms into the form in the footer. After reading guidelines and reviewing sites I believe that the user will not do as I imagine, but get annoyed or confused as why there is not a search for somewhere they can see.

The second problem I think my design has is the fact that in the "About Us" and "Hours" pages have sub pages. This is not shown in the menu at all. Which means the only way that a use will be able to get to the sub pages is from the search or by clicking on the parent pages themselves. Also once a user is on a sub page they do not know where they are from, as the only highlighted item in the menu is the sub page, see figure 11, the parent page is displayed as a header in the menu, but this is not the same as having the parent page in the

menu highlighted.

If I were to have a second chance as my design again now that I have learnt more about user interaction. I would make the sub pages clearer by placing a marker on the links which have sub pages, this would mean the user can see from the menu without having to view the page that they have child pages. I would also make it clear as to what page the user is on when viewing a sub page, this will help the user in deciding where to go next. I would move the search form up to the header, this would make the user more likely to use the search before they find out that the page they are on does not have the information they are looking for. I would also fix the CSS bug that hides the footer below the screen forcing the page to scroll down. As when they are pages with little information the footer will expand the page, this could annoy the user as they would have scrolled down and not find anything interesting.

Overall I am happy with the final design, aside from the few mistakes that are discussed above.

4 Appendix A

Here is a collection of screen shots showing the overall design of my site. The site can be found at <http://www.prioryvetcardigan.co.uk>.



Figure 12: www.prioryvetcardigan.co.uk - Footer

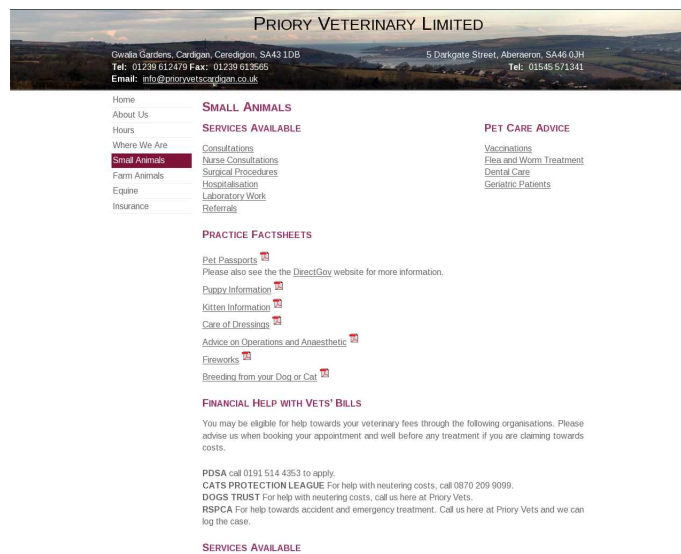


Figure 13: www.prioryvetcardigan.co.uk - Small Animals Page

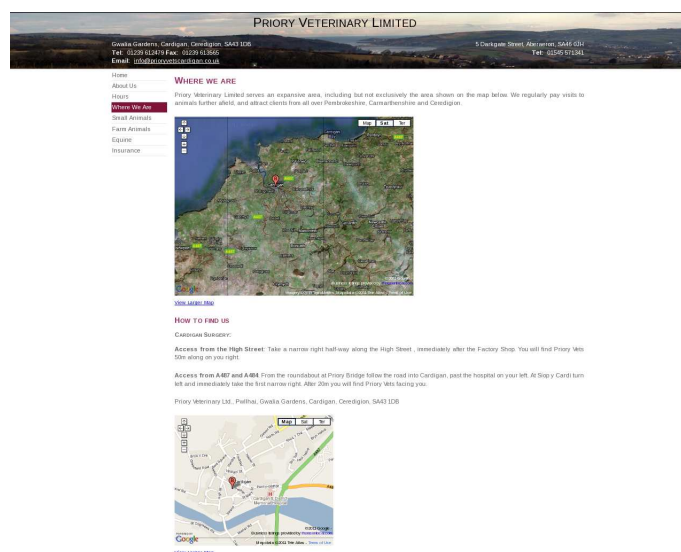


Figure 14: www.prioryvetcardigan.co.uk - Google maps

References

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- [2] FileHippo, <http://www.filehippo.com> Last Access 03 April 2011.
- [3] IMDb, www.imdb.com Last Access 03 April 2011.
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