**Introduction**

Problem domain:

Motivation

Our area of focus falls within the domain of travel. We intend to develop a travel site with two specific goals in mind: (1) Given the fact that most travel-related websites are targeted at people who already know where they want to go, we want to create a site where the user can explore travel destinations based on their interests; (2) There is plethora of travel websites, each with a specific purpose such as a site for looking for flights and hotels, a site for travel photo galleries, a site for destination ratings, and a site for matching travel buddies. We would like to make a site that would incorporate two or three of these major elements that will serve as an easy-to-use consolidation for travelers. Ideally, this website will recommend some destinations to the user, search for good deals given a chosen.

User group

As most people like to travel, our target user group is the general public, and more specifically, people who enjoy traveling for fun. Among our subjects we selected for contextual inquiry, in order to get a better sense of the needs of different user groups, we interviewed one literature professor who is in her 50s and two UW-Madison students in their early 20s.

Overview of contextual inquiries and how we selected our subjects as well as our questions

As the main goal of destination recommendation is relatively specific and we are not sure if a site with a similar purpose exists, we decided to frame our questions in a more open-ended manner when we conducted our contextual inquiries. At the beginning of our contextual inquiries, we generally framed our tasks in the following manner: “ If you want to go on a trip, but don’t have a destination in mind, what would you do to figure out or get inspiration on where you would want to go?” or “Where would you start when you are planning a trip?”

**CI**

**USER1**

Physical and task contexts

For user 1, who is a literature professor, we conducted the inquiry in the living room of her apartment, where she claimed was her usual working area and was comfortable working there.

Goals, tasks

We described to her the tasks, and right away she started the process without much hesitation. Her main goal is to find a good getaway destination, and find a really good deal for the destination she decides upon.

Communication flow

The communication throughout the CI was very fluid. As soon as we asked her a question and gave her a task, she knew exactly where to start and what to do as this seems to be a regular routine for her, and she constantly explained to us her actions and her motivations throughout the rest of the interview as she was performing her task. Once in a while we would ask questions about the motivations of her actions, but overall we didn’t have to ask too much as she talked out loud a lot regarding her actions.

Sequence of actions and artifacts in use

She logged into her email account, claiming that the way she figures out a destination is via her news letters that she receives from her airlines, as there are better deals this way. She clicks into a United Airlines newsletter that takes her into the United Mileage List page, and then she clicks on “view more fares”. She seems a little lost here as she hovers over some menu tabs then scrolls down the page then scrolls back up, and accidentally closes the page. She repeats all the steps again but instead of clicking on “view more fares” she enters into the United Specials page. She scrolls up and down, a little lost again, hovers over the menu items quickly as she is looking for something. She closes the window again, this time intentionally. She repeats all the same steps again and this time clicks into United Vacations. She finds a last minute offer that is a good deal: a trip to Hawaii. Next, she closes the window, opens it and starts from Google again, this time she logs into another email account to see the newsletter from Delta, a different carrier. She clicks on “buy miles now”, and tries to find deals but fails to do so, so she directly types into the search box “deals”. She clicks into North America deals, and can’t seem to find deals for Chicago so keeps on scrolling up and down, and hovers over “book” and other menus.

culture, policies and expectations

The main factor that seems to be guiding her decisions is how much she values good deals, which is her priority while planning a trip. Other factors that may affect her decision include work, as she can only travel over her time off; family, as she also takes into consideration where they want to go; pet, as she doesn’t want to leave her pet too long; and weather, as she would want to go to a warmer place for a getaway.

physical environment

We conducted the CI in her living room, which is where she usually works. Our only notable observation is how she often needed to get close to the computer screen in order to see the various tabs, and we wonder if it has to do with the height of her desk, the distance between her and the actual computer, or due to bad design of the interface in terms of font size.

What was the user able to accomplish/ breakdowns/ workarounds

She was able to find destinations based on good deals by following links in newsletters from her carriers, but there were some difficulties that she encountered in the process. First, she either accidentally closed the window she was on or purposely closed it. Second, she often scrolled up and down the page and hovered over menu tabs. Finally, she directly typed in “deals” in the search box after she wasn’t able to find it from the menu tabs.

other suggestions

She suggested that for our site, other than having the function of recommending travel destinations we should also include deals-related functionalities.

**USER2**

Physical and task contexts

Our second user is a 21 year old student. He was working in his living room. He was interviewed in his living room, where he usually works and is comfortable.

Goals, tasks

The user is leaving soon to spend a semester abroad in Japan. His personal goal after hearing to look up somewhere to travel was to find an affordable vacation that he could take while he was abroad. He thought of a destination pretty quickly. After he thought of a location he spent most of the interview looking for hotels and transportation. He wanted to find a traditional hotel (not westernized) that he could get to using the train.

Communication flow

The communication flow was very fluid. He could very easily talk about ideas he had for traveling. He did not talk about what he was specifically doing, or what tools he was using, right away. Because of this, most of the questions asked regarded why he was using certain functions on the internet, what he found most helpful, and if he had ever used the websites he was using before. He was very confident using several websites and was comfortable talking about them.

Sequence of actions and artifacts in use

He started looking for places using google maps. He then opened another tab and googled the area he wanted to go to. From there he used the first website basically and followed links to a website about festivals and tours. He did not spend most of his time on any one website, he switched between several.

culture, policies and expectations

His main expectations were to see somewhere that was traditional, and somewhere relatively cheap. His idea of a vacation is to be involved in festivals and things that are very different from his everyday life. He also would not feel comfortable spending a lot of money.

physical environment

He was sitting in his living room. His roommate and he were both sitting on the couch with both of their laptops on their laps. This is their typical setting. He only sat in one spot and occasionally talked to his roommate.

What was the user able to accomplish/ breakdowns/ workarounds

He was able to find some hotels by following several links. He ended up going back to a website he had previously been on by following a link. He skipped over most of the words on the websites and looked at the photos, calendars, and short phrases.

other suggestions

His suggestion was to make it more clear what activities were available. He said he would use an interactive calendar and that pictures were a major part of his decision. He also said he really likes looking at popularity ratings and reviews.

**USER3**

Physical and task contexts

Our second user is a 22 year old student. She was facebooking in the Union South. The interview was taken at a table by the fireplace, where she feels relaxing.

Goals, tasks

User3 was planning on a trip during the spring break, but she does not know where to go because there were too many destinations to choose from. We described to her our project idea and she started looking for potential destinations online. Her goal was to find where to go for her spring break, or at least narrow down to 3 potential destinations.

Communication flow

We had a very smooth communication flow. She kept speaking out her thoughts when she was searching for her destinations, such as how she was comparing Brazil and Argentina and the major factors that impacted her decision. She also made a lot of comments on the review pages, the way the information on the destinations was presented, and suggested improvements that could be made on the layout. So mostly we let her do her searching and encouraged her to speak out whatever she was thinking, and out questions focused on why she felt so and how she thought a certain change in design could improve her experience.

Sequence of actions and artifacts in use

She started her searching by googling “travel destinations”. She clicked on internationalliving.com and went to a travel recommendation blog. The blog included 38 popular international destinations and reviews. She skipped most text, but looked at most of the pictures very carefully. She commented there were too much text and more pictures were needed. Then she returned to the google result page and went to travelleisure.com. She thought the photo gallery should have included thumbnails so that she could look at only the pictures she was interested in. She also complained about the reloading of the entire page when she went to the next picture every time. Nevertheless, she was still able to narrow down her potential destinations to 3 places. Then we suggested her use tripadviosr.com to further compare these 3 places.She searched for them one by one, and said that she did not find the information partufularly userful, because there was no obvious information on the key factors that she was looking for:cost, transportation and weather. Then we asked her to pretend she completely had no idea where to go and start over by searching on tripadvisor.com. She tried to use the “search for destination” bar, but immediately find it was impossible to use, because the field is required and the website assumed her to know her destination before she could use it.

culture, policies and expectations

At first, she was looking for a place to go travelling to during the spring break. Then she found she was interested in Latin America, and narrowed down to Carribean, Mexica and Brazil. To choose one from the three she most cared about cost, whether transportation was convenient, and the weather.

physical environment

She was sitting at the table in the Union South on the Sunday afternoon. There were not a lot of people and it was very quiet. The environment was relaxing.

What was the user able to accomplish/ breakdowns/ workarounds

She was able to narrow down her choices among three places. But she still could not make her decision because she did not find user information on cost, transportation and weather comparisons on any of the websites she used.

other suggestions

She suggested that for people who have no idea where to go, there should be an “Explore” button with an optional location preference form. For people who wanted to compare among several places, she suggested a bullet list of factors like cost and weather should be at the top of page. For destination reviews, she strongly preferred there to be more pictures than text and said there should be a limited amount of text. Also, she thought photos should be organized in a slider with thumbnails.

**and summarize each work model and highlight main points**

**Physical work model**

The physical work model we created is the layout user 2’s apartment. The user’s roommate is included in this diagram because she was talking to him during the CI. In general, the user did not leave the place where he was sitting. The window is another aspect that was interesting because they did not turn the light on because it was the middle of the afternoon.

**Flow work model**

The flow work model shows how user 2 would usually interact with websites and his friends. The main categories are living accomidation, means of travel, friends and bank account. There are several “communications” that the user does with each of these services. Most of them were done via the internet.

**Discussion/Conclusion**

* areas of importance to the user’s tasks and problems
* speculate on possibilities of new technologies that could help remedy the problems
* describe this technology and how it would work more easily and be more satisfying

From our contextual inquiry experience, we learned various user needs by observing them and asking them questions. Some of the design insights we have gained include: (1) Allow the users to have options, instead of just being a destination recommendation site, also include functionalities such as searching for deals and matching travel buddies as extra options; (2) add a search box as a backup in case the user has difficulty navigating the site; (3) have appropriate font sizes so the users can be comfortable while using the interface; (4) create a minimalistic, accessible and intuitive interface where the major functionalities can be found in the same general area and make use of internet conventions such as the regularly recognizable icons; (5) add a photo gallery for the destinations and an event calendar, as these are elements that users typically would expect from a travel site.

reflect on the experience of doing CI

We have realized the importance of conducting Contextual Inquiries while designing interfaces, as aspects we have learned about our users were not something we had expected prior to this experience. It provided us with valuable insights in designing a accessible while functionally-robust interface.