

Calendar Event and Task List Manager: Usability Test Report



Prepared by Team Thundercats

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1. Summary

The usability test for Team Thundercats' Calendar Event and Task List Manager was performed on February 26, 2015. We received beneficial and meaningful feedback from both the tester and the broader class; this feedback motivated specific improvements to our design, which we have detailed in the subsequent sections including both the theoretical foundations for the modifications as well as before and after images.

2. Search Box Functionality

For a given webpage, some users are search dominant in that they navigate through the site by using a site's search box while others are link dominant in that they browse through the site via links. Any modern website must accommodate both types of users well. One student noted that our page did not include a search box as shown in Figure 1.

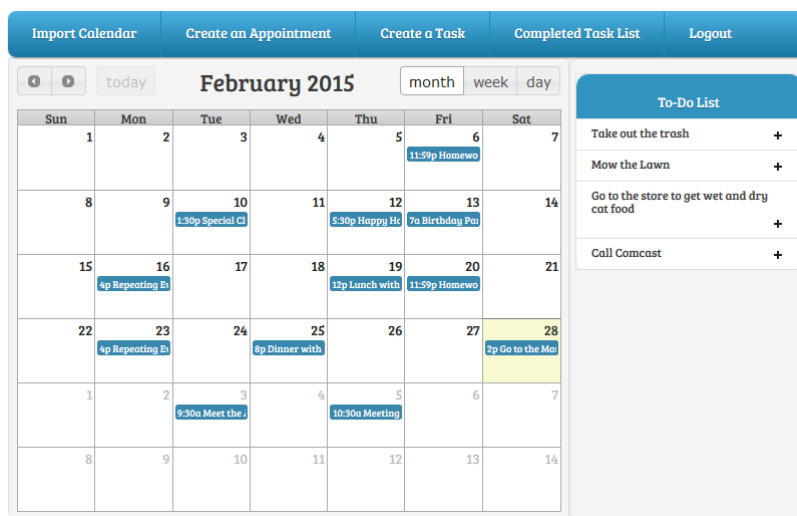


Figure 1 – Original Layout of the Main Page without Search Included

In our very early planning, we decided that a search feature would not be included in our prototype since we did not intend to support it in this demonstrative version. What is more, our planning considered primarily “link dominant” users. This decision was a mistake not only because “search dominant” users would find the site difficult to navigate but also because our site design lends itself, in its own nontraditional way, to the “Feature, Search, and Browse” design pattern. The “Feature” in our design is clearly the calendar since it is the largest item on the page; what is more, if a user has many scheduled events, appointments, and meetings, the calendar will be very information dense as well. In addition, the to-do list provides a type of browseable list. By including the search box as shown in figure 2, we enable searching without in any way detracting from the site's overall browseability.

3. Calendar Event Color Coding

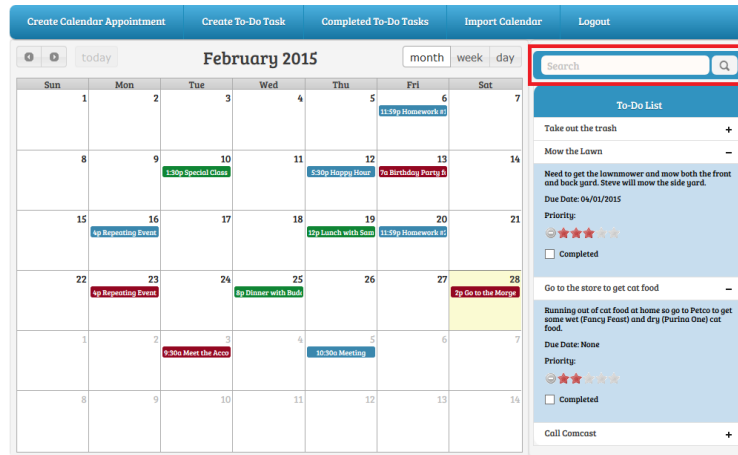


Figure 2 – Modified Layout of the Main Page with Search Included

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2	3	4	5	6 11:59p Homewo	7
8	9	10 1:30p Special Cl	11	12 5:30p Happy Ho	13 7a Birthday Pa	14
15	16 4p Repeating E	17	18	19 12p Lunch with	20 11:59p Homewo	21
22	23 4p Repeating E	24	25 8p Dinner with	26	27	28 2p Go to the Mo
1	2	3 9:30a Meet the J	4	5 10:30a Meeting	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14

Figure 3 – Original Calendar with Uniform Appointment Coloring

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2	3	4	5	6 11:59p Homework #1	7
8	9	10 1:30p Special Class	11	12 5:30p Happy Hour	13 7a Birthday Party #1	14
15	16 4p Repeating Event	17	18	19 12p Lunch with Sam	20 11:59p Homework #1	21
22	23 4p Repeating Event	24	25 8p Dinner with Bud	26	27	28 2p Go to the Movie
1	2	3 9:30a Meet the Acco	4	5 10:30a Meeting	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14

Figure 4 – Modified Calendar with Appointment Color Coding

As described previously, the main “feature” of our application is the central calendar; it is the largest in terms of size and can be the densest in terms of information. When deciding on the color scheme for calendar appointments, our original focus was on ensuring consistency by making all of the calendar events the same color as shown in figure 3.

When a user is examining a webpage, they typically do not “read” the text in the traditional sense. Rather, the user’s behavior is more akin to scanning where they are looking for specific keywords and triggers. One of the points of feedback we received during the usability test was that users should be able to configure the calendar so that appointments can individually have different colors. This recommendation aligns with the Gestalt principle of similarity where a user typically associates things that are visually similar (in this case similar through color). To that end, an example where color coding of events would be useful is when a user wants to visually differentiate professional and personal appointments by making the two categories of appointments different colors. Our modified calendar with appointment color coding is shown in figure 4.

4. Menu Item Naming and Ordering

Concerning the menu bar at the top of the main page, we received two primary pieces of feedback from both the tester as well as the class as whole. First, the tester found the original menu bar button descriptions (shown in figure 5) to be unclear. For instance, from just reading the menu text, she was unsure of the exact function performed by the “Create a Task” button. To better align the application’s functionality with the mental models of users, we renamed some of the menu bar items as shown in figure 6. The specific changes were:

1. “Create an Appointment” was changed to “Create Calendar Appointment” as the tester was unable to quickly distinguish between to-do list tasks and calendar appointments. This new version clearly states that the button is used for the calendar.
2. “Create a Task” was modified to “Create To-Do Task”. This new version more explicitly links the task to the to-do list.
3. “Completed Task List” was changed to “Completed To-Do Tasks” to again more explicitly associate this item with the to-do list.



Figure 5 – Original Main Page Menu Bar



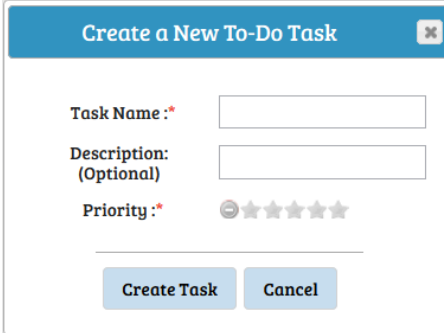
Figure 6 – Modified Main Page Menu Bar

A second point of feedback from the class was to improve the information architecture of the page by ordering items in the menu bar according to the likelihood that the user will use that

feature. A student specifically mentioned that he would rarely, if ever, import calendars from a third party site so putting that item first in the menu bar may not be ideal. In our original planning, we had not paid sufficient attention to the optimal ordering of the menu bar so we missed this detail. We decided to adopt the student's feedback and place "Import Calendar" second to last in the list right before "Logout."

5. To-Do Item Due Date

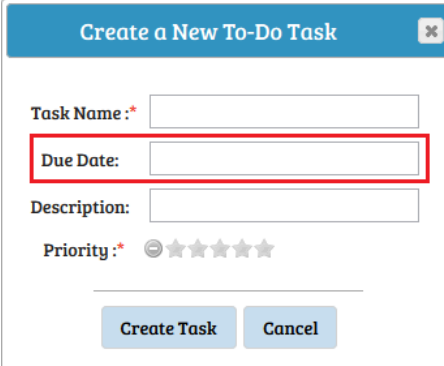
Our application combines calendar appointments (which we describe as synchronous events) with to-do items (which we describe as asynchronous tasks that are not associated with a specific time). The intent behind the to-do list was that the user could complete the task at his/her convenience. As such, in the original form to create a to-do task as shown in figure 7, we did not include a feature for the user to specify a "Due" (or to borrow a legal term a "Drop Dead") date, which would serve as the absolute latest the task could be done.



The image shows a web form titled "Create a New To-Do Task" with a close button in the top right corner. The form contains three input fields: "Task Name" with a red asterisk indicating it is required, "Description: (Optional)", and "Priority" with a red asterisk and a five-star rating system. At the bottom, there are two buttons: "Create Task" and "Cancel".

Figure 7 – Original To-Do Task Creation Form

The usability tester mentioned that she would like to have "due dates" for tasks. For example, if a task was to "File Income Tax", the "due date" would need to be April 15. To accommodate this feature, we added a "Due Date" field to the task creation form as shown in figure 8. This field is optional (as denoted by no red adjacent star) since not all tasks necessarily have a due date.



The image shows the modified version of the "Create a New To-Do Task" form. It now includes a "Due Date:" input field, which is highlighted with a red rectangular border. The other fields, "Task Name" (required), "Description", and "Priority" (required with a five-star rating), remain the same. The "Create Task" and "Cancel" buttons are still at the bottom.

Figure 8 – Modified To-Do Task Creation Form

With the addition of the to-do task “Due Date”, the inlay list used to display all open to-do tasks also needed to be updated to include a field for this information. The updated “Due Date” field in the to-do list is shown in figure 9.

The screenshot shows a mobile application interface titled "To-Do List". It features a list of tasks, each with a title, a description, a due date, a priority rating, and a completion checkbox. The first task is "Take out the trash" with a "+" icon. The second task is "Mow the Lawn" with a "-" icon. Below the task title and description, the due date is displayed: "Due Date: 04/01/2015". The priority is indicated by a row of five stars, with the first three filled and the last two empty. A checkbox labeled "Completed" is at the bottom of the task entry. The third task is "Go to the store to get cat food" with a "-" icon. Its description is "Running out of cat food at home so go to Petco to get some wet (Fancy Feast) and dry (Purina One) cat food." The due date is "Due Date: None". The priority is indicated by a row of five stars, with the first three filled and the last two empty. A checkbox labeled "Completed" is at the bottom of the task entry.

Figure 9 – Modified To-Do List with Added Due Date Field

6. Skipping the Setting of a To-Do Item’s Completion Time

In our mental model for the to-do list, we had expected that a user would want to specify a task completion time in the vast majority of cases. As such, when we designed the menu for completing a task, we did not prominently display the feature to bypass specifying a task completion time.

Figure 10 is the original menu for specifying a task’s completion time; for a user to bypass this menu, they would need to click the “X” in the top right corner. Admittedly, this process is not optimally intuitive.

During the usability test, the user showed little interest in specifying a task completion time and was confused by the process. In her mental model, this feature did not provide much utility, and she quickly wanted to bypass this menu. To address her feedback, we added the “Skip” button to the task completion form as shown in figure 11 to more prominently feature the ability to skip the step of specifying a task completion time. With the introduction of this new button, we judged that the “Finish” button’s text should be modified since “Finish” would not make sense when juxtaposed with “Skip”. As such, the “Finish” button’s text was modified to “Set Completion Time”, which we believe more completely describes its functionality.

The image shows a web form titled "Completed Task Manager" with a close button (X) in the top right corner. Below the title, the instruction "Enter the Task Completion Time:" is displayed. There are two labels: "Date:" and "Time: (24Hr Format)". Under "Date:", there is a button labeled "Today". Under "Time:", there is a button labeled "Now". A horizontal line separates these from a single blue button at the bottom labeled "Finish".

Figure 10 – Original Form for Specifying a To-Do Item’s Completion Time

The image shows a modified version of the "Completed Task Manager" form. It has the same title and close button. The instruction "Enter the Task Completion Time:" is present. The labels "Date:" and "Time: (24Hr Format)" are also present. Under "Date:", there is a button labeled "Today". Under "Time:", there is a button labeled "Now". A horizontal line separates these from two buttons at the bottom: "Set Completion Time" and "Skip". These two buttons are enclosed in a red rectangular box.

Figure 11 – Modified Form for Specifying a To-Do Item’s Completion Time