

Competitive User Experience Analysis Of Yamaha And Its Competitors



Attention: Changying Zhou, Web Content Manager

Presented by Alexander Golin, User Interface Designer

February 14, 2017



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Changying Zhou
Web Content Manager
Yamaha Acoustic Pianos

Dear Ms. Zhou,

Thank you for choosing Golin Bros Design Co conduct a competitive analysis of Yamaha Acoustic Pianos and several of its primary competitors. We are very excited to share our critiques with you, and we think you will find our suggestions for improvement exciting and unique.

This report is comprised of three things: a comprehensive design critique, a list of possible improvements to Yamaha's design, as well as a table containing quantitative ratings of various design attributes across the four websites being reviewed. The critique is broken into five sections: conceptual design, user interface structure, utility, visual appeal, and emotional engagement. Each of these sections will have a subsection devoted to each website.

Please contact Golin Bros Design Co with any questions or concerns you have about the critiques or the quantitative table. We look forward to moving forward with you all at Yamaha very soon!

Sincerely,

Alexander Golin

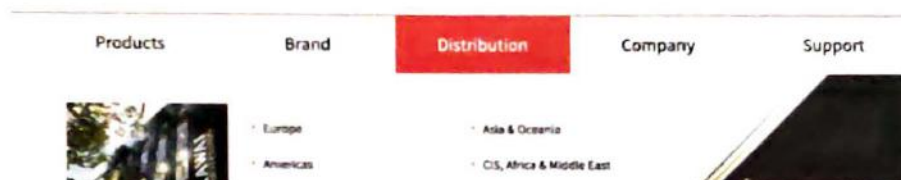
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Conceptual Design

Kawai

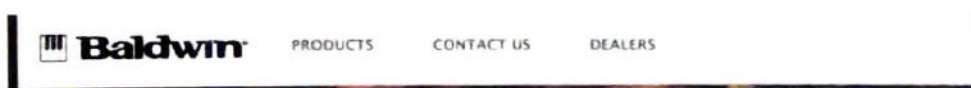
Kawai has a mostly clear primary conceptual model; the main menu bar contains an easily digestible five elements, though it is somewhat unclear how certain menu items differ. The confusion namely arises between Brand, Company, and Distribution. While distribution seems somewhat different, at first glance it is very unclear what the difference is between Brand and Company. Upon further inspection, it becomes only slightly clearer what the distinction is. Brand seems to focus more on marketing while Company seems to focus more on corporate structure. For a musical instrument website, two out of five primary menu items seems to be too many to devote to the corporation rather than the products. See Figure 1 below to see the menu bar and Distribution's subheadings.



By comparison, all of the products are housed within a single menu item. Perhaps most concerning is that Distribution seems to be devoted entirely to redirecting the user to a totally different web page for a local region. Not only does distribution appear in the menu bar, it also appears in the secondary highlighted page list below the banner image. It is then immediately followed by specific links to various Kawai subsidiaries around the globe. This is a lot of duplication on the homepage, particularly for material that may feel secondary to a consumer visiting the website. Aside from this somewhat major gripe, the conceptual design is laid out clearly, and it feels difficult to become lost within the website, so long as you aren't transported to a different website entirely in the process of browsing.

Baldwin Piano

Baldwin has a website with an incredibly clear and straightforward conceptual design, that allows the consumer to take immediate action upon visiting the site. There are only three primary menu items, plus the company logo, which serves as the Home tab, which can be seen in Figure 2 below.



The three menu items are completely distinct even upon immediately seeing them. The Products tab is home to a sortable and filterable list of pianos made by Baldwin, Contact Us is a straightforward contact form, and Dealers allows the user to find a local dealer of



Baldwin pianos near them. In terms of conceptual design, there is really not much room for Baldwin to improve as a consumer based site. Perhaps if they wanted to make more note of the company, they could somehow link back to their parent website, which belongs to Gibson.

Steinway & Sons

Steinway has a slightly nuanced conceptual design, but all in all it sets up clear expectations, and each menu item is distinct (see Figure 3 below).



The primary menu bar contains a reasonable six elements, and all but one of them are rather clear from the start. The item that stands out is the Spirio item, which upon further inspection is a tab devoted entirely to a new player piano product that Steinway seems to be pushing for. Aside from this, the only source of confusion may arise from wondering what is housed by Music & Artists as well as Community, but upon very brief inspection their purpose becomes clear.

Yamaha

Compared to its competitors, Yamaha's conceptual design is the least clear. Since Yamaha is such a large company, the inclusion of items such as bread crumbs and wide-scope menu items makes this piano "homepage" not feel like much of a homepage at all. See Figure 4 below.



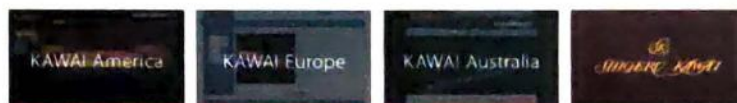
From the first moment the user lands on the page, it feels like they are already waist deep in a website experience and conceptual model, and this is a difficult feeling to recover from. While it may be impossible for Yamaha to synthesize all of its interests in the piano realm into Baldwin's astounding three menu items, they could certainly benefit from setting up a more compact and self contained conceptual model for the user.



User Interface Structure

Kawai

Fundamentally, Kawai's website is a three leveled branching tree. With home as the root, the user can navigate to any one of the main menu tabs' pages and from there drill down further into subsections. There is some confusion introduced to this model since Kawai links to local Kawai websites in several places (see one example in Figure 5 below), but all in all Kawai's website makes it easy for users to delve into the site's content, and easily recover or reroute their journey.



Baldwin

Baldwin has an even less branched structure, ending at only two levels. With the homepage as the root, the user can navigate to any of the primary menu tabs, and that is as deep as the user can go. This makes accomplishing tasks very easy, though it limits the user to only a select subset of actions, which seem to work for Baldwin. The persistence of the menu bar allows users to recover or reroute whenever they please.

Steinway & Sons

This website has a more complex branching structure than the prior two websites. Users can delve to varying depths depending on which portion of the site they are exploring. This structure promotes a more meandering experience, however the fixed nature of the menu bar allows users to jump around the site with ease, and if a user needed to accomplish something quickly, they would not be hard pressed to do so.

Yamaha

Since Yamaha's piano hub is more of a child page within the larger Yamaha digital hub, its structure is far from immediately apparent. At its highest level, the branching has almost nothing to do with pianos. At the piano hub level, there seem to be three primary categories each of which branches into a list of child categories, resulting in what resembles a three leveled tree. This deeply nested and segmented structure does not promote easy completion of tasks, nor does it promote enjoyable browsing.



Utility

Kawai

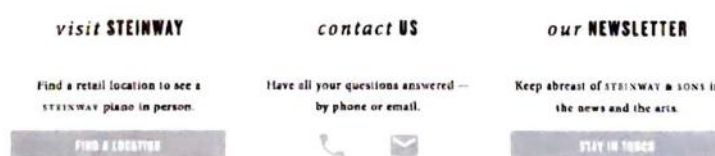
Kawai's website is not the most useful from a consumer standpoint. Products play only a minor role in the overall structure of the website, and instead users seem to be funneled into local Kawai sites based on locale. If a user were coming to this website from a corporate perspective, then this website is likely the most useful of the bunch, but this should not be the primary function of a piano retail website.

Baldwin

Baldwin's website is incredibly useful for the minimal amount of content it houses. Each tab of the menu bar is essential, and each tab allows the user to complete interactive tasks. That said, the user is contained to a rather limited scope due to the minimal nature, so there may be too much weight put on the Contact tab. For example, there is nowhere for users to ask questions or look up FAQs, so they must rely on specifically contacting the manufacturer through the website.

Steinway & Sons

Steinway's website does a wonderful job of being useful for their marketing team, promoting a meandering and near awe inducing experience. That said, completing a specific task in this immersive UI is somewhat less straightforward than in a more simplistic UI such as Baldwin's. Even with this immersion, Steinway's site still grounds the user by always including a menu bar, and also multiple links to Steinway retail locations and contact information, seen in Figure 6 below.



Yamaha

While Yamaha's website does not promote the most immersive experience, it does a good job of highlighting the immense range of products Yamaha has to offer, and making them browsable. The persistence of the sidebar that lists all the product categories promotes a constant browsing experience, particularly since Yamaha's piano hub does not offer much other than product listings.



Visual Appeal

Kawai

By and large, Kawai has a clean and visually appealing interface. It features strong colors, and enough photos to keep the page layout interesting. That said, the page layouts become a bit stale over time. While this may promote consistency of mental model across site sections, some of the enjoyment of the browsing experience is lost when traversing every page starts to feel the same. For example, all content pages adhere to a two column layout with a banner. See the Figure 7 below.



Baldwin

While this site's minimalism may have served it well in terms of utility, it is very visually unappealing. It's static design and plain backgrounds make it feel like a very dated design, reminiscent of the pre-mobile and pre-responsive design of the mid to late 2000's. It is not an ugly site, but there is nothing visually memorable about it, and it is not an exciting site to navigate.

Steinway & Sons

This is by far the most visually appealing site of the bunch. Not only is the homepage immediately immersive and eye-grabbing, every single page has an organic flow stunning visuals. Every aspect of the site pleases the eye, from the blending of static and dynamic imagery, to the subtle variation of fonts across the site. The branding is highlighted gracefully and subtly, by portraying pristine and classful images wherever possible.

Yamaha

Yamaha's design is best likened to Baldwin's, because it too has a dated design, relying on a static two column (sidebar and content) design, and even fewer color choices than Baldwin. The navigation feels cluttered due to the highly nested nature of



Yamaha's piano hub, and the branding feels weak, relying entirely on the color purple to carry the brand. The gradients, fonts, and image layouts also feel dated, and could certainly use an overhaul. After drilling down further into the site, the inclusion of more images is nice, however it feels forced and staged, rather than organic and enticing like Steinway's images.

Emotional Engagement

Kawai

While Kawai may have a visually appealing design, it could certainly improve its emotional engagement. It is not far off, in that it does contain many images of their products being used, but compared to a site like Steinway's, these shots feel significantly less concerted. Additionally, the site does not promote a leisurely browsing experience, instead opting to direct customers to company information or various autonomous Kawai branches. This feeling of being funneled somewhere else makes it very hard for the user to feel fully emotionally engaged.

Baldwin

Baldwin's minimal design once again does a disservice. There is only one image on the entire site, and although it is a good one, this stark emptiness keeps the user from feeling like they are experiencing anything more than simply clicking through stoic and curt pages. While this minimalism serves Baldwin well in the realm of utility, it certainly does not in the realm of emotional engagement.

Steinway & Sons

Steinway's site is far and away the most emotionally engaging of the bunch. The chosen imagery is very emotionally riling, and it is present across every single page. The mixture of dynamic and static media along with the varied page layout across different site sections makes traversing the site feel like a small adventure. Each image feels extremely purposeful and this concerted effort pays off in the form of each section of the site seeming appealing and curious to users. There is not much more Steinway could be doing to engage its users from an emotional standpoint.

Yamaha

Yamaha's emotional engagement sits somewhere between Baldwin's and Kawai's. Yamaha does use more imagery, and therefore introduces a more powerful and colorful emotional presence than Baldwin. That said, the layout and nested nature of the design feel confused and dated to the point that it does not quite live up to Kawai's modern UI. There is much that can be done to improve this aspect of Yamaha's design, and we outline some means of doing this in the next section.



Design Suggestions for Yamaha

General

- Give Yamaha Acoustic Pianos a hub of its own, rather than nesting it so deeply within the Yamaha parent site.
- Introduce a single button that links back to the parent Yamaha site rather having the parent site encase the piano hub.
- Introduce a more relevant menu bar that is specific to Yamaha's acoustic piano line. One item on this menu bar could be the button linking back to the parent site.
- Introduce more meaningful media to the website in the form of pictures, gifs, or videos.
- Make the website responsive and mobile friendly, this is a bare minimum of a top-tier site in this day and age.
- Utilize stronger branding in fonts and color choices.

Specific

- Make the menu bar fixed so that it stays at the top of the page as the user scrolls. This allows users to adjust their navigation from any point on a page, and it also adds a modern appearance to the design.
- Avoid the use of simple linear gradients in imagery and backgrounds, it feels dated. Allow the images to take up the space on their own, as they should be concerted enough to deserve the space on the page.
- Eliminate use of dotted lines in menus and lists.
- Eliminate the persistent and static two column layout, this feels dated.
- Do not use red text and highlighting if purple is Yamaha's branding color.

Attribute	Weight	Kawai		Baldwin		Steinway & Sons		Yamaha	
		Rating	Weighted Score	Rating	Weighted Score	Rating	Weighted Score	Rating	Weighted Score
Conceptual Design	15	6	9	10	15	7	10.5	5	7.5
User Interface Structure	15	7	10.5	10	15	7	10.5	1	1.5
Utility	15	4	6	6	9	8	12	7	10.5
Visual Appeal	15	7	10.5	2	3	10	15	3	4.5
Emotional Engagement	15	6	9	1	1.5	10	15	3	4.5
Modernness	5	8	4	1	0.5	10	5	2	1
Responsiveness	5	10	5	1	0.5	10	5	1	0.5
Branding Strength	5	7	3.5	3	1.5	10	5	5	2.5
Professionalism	5	8	4	6	3	10	5	5	2.5
Musicality	5	5	2.5	1	0.5	10	5	3	1.5
Score	100		64		49.5		88		36.5
Rank			2		3		1		4

