Group project report

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Illustration 1: Image of the front page (Desktop Version)

Illustration 2: Image of the front page (Mobile Version)

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Report

Introduction

This is a report on the development of my groups project on creating a website. We wanted to create a website that presented information to users in a clean, interesting and efficiently. This is something that me and the team felt that no other website did for the information that we choose. I will discuss the structure, content, my contributions and general development of the website. Further I will include summaries on the testing we did both user testing, code testing and browser support testing that we did and finally my own views on the final result. I will say that this project has enlightened me and introduced me to concepts and views that I have learned a lot from.

Topic

For topic there was quite a discussion. We were not certain about what we wanted to do and while all had good ideas we could not decide on one topic that was doable and had all of us interested. However when we came up with the idea of creating a website featuring important web designers/innovators we all wanted to know/learn more about. Given this common goal we decided on this topic. We were pretty confident that no such service existed and it took little research to realise that there were no competition. This gave us the opening of designing the web site however we wanted and populate it with the content we found interesting without a thought of crashing with other sites, because there were none.

Our guide Elliot

We defined it as a persona where we defined a character and through this character we target people similar to this person in many or all of the aspects our persona was given. I named our persona Elliot, since I did not care if this was a man or woman. Elliot lives in the dynamic city of Copenhagen and is technically oriented. Elliot has some experience in web design, but no official training or education on the subject. Like many people Elliot knows about the most famous web designers like Ethan Marcotte, but would like to know more about his and other web designers work and background. This gave us some freedom in how we laid out the information and navigation. Since Elliot is technically adapt and has used the web before we could safely use concepts like hamburger menu, picture links and other navigational elements that new internet users might not know about and might not know how to use. However, by defining Elliot this way and knowing who we want to reach and how we felt that the gain of removing the boring navigation bar.4 Inserting instead something that is interesting and fitting for the intended audience and I think Elliot would approve.

Navigational schemes

"Sometimes called the principle of emphasis, the focal point is the center of attention in the design or layout."Golombisky and Hagen(2010, 50).

We only have two navigation systems on our website, our primary navigation linking only to the content that is important in five focal points on the middle of the main page. Having chosen the target audience that we did, we decided to use a hamburger menu as a secondary navigation since it is easily expandable with more items should we need it and easy to hide away in a corner not drawing the eyes of the user away from what we really want to showcase which is what this site is all about. It should be noted here that we have no global navigation which is due to the websites size and the necessity of a global navigation. As can be seen in illustration 3 all pages but the index page is reachable form its child-page and the peoples pages has internal navigation with the hamburger menu that references different sections.

Layout and design choices.

For the front page of the website we wanted to create a first impression that made people want to stay on our site. According to data by Tony Haile of Chartbeat most people will leave the site if they are not captured within 15 seconds Haile(2003). This is a very short amount of time, giving us a lot of pressure for the first site. We choose a risky strategy and for our defined audience, fitting. Web designers and students of information technology are inherently curious and that is what we want to archive here. The general theme of this website is exploring, elegance and sleekness and every page is tailored for this purpose. For the exploring part there is hovering over pictures and getting coloured version of them, for elegance there are the menus and how they are designed and for the sleekness there is the absolute minimalistic main page and about us page.

Landing page

For the index part of our website and in light of the design choices and information there we wanted to create something intriguing and capturing that would hold the audience long enough for us to present the information that we wanted to show the users. The landing page was made to spark an interest for the rest of the website and work as a metaphor of delving into the world of web-design. The whole page is then a link to the next page and that engages user to work with the page rather than not. Other than that this it serves no other purpose as I shall discuss later in the report in the my views section.
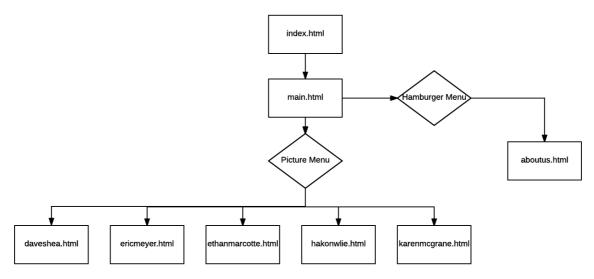
Illustration 3: Map of our website

Main page

Clicking on the image brings the user to the main page where the user makes the choices as can be seen in illustration 3. This is where we display the picture links that the site is about and the user should have available and get drawn to, exploring and interacting with. Described by Jason Beaird in his book "repetition of colors, shapes, textures, or similar objects helps to tie a web page design together so that it feels like a cohesive unit." Beaird (2010, 20). This is what we are trying for with the picture-links that is circles and the square-like figures on the background while distinctly separating the two from each other. It is also where the user gets taken to whenever he clicks on a "back" arrow that is on all the third step pages for easy navigation back to the main page.

Web-designers pages

Clicking on one of the portraits on the main page or a name from the hamburger menu the user arrives in the respective web-designers page. This was one of the most difficult and important page layout to create. Firstly we decided to make them all same layout to create familiarity throughout all these pages, have some sense of sameness and at the same time distinct through content. We then progressed, after many alternatives to have an about section and a work section where the related information is presented in an interesting and beautiful way. These section in addition to scrolling is reachable through the same placed hamburger menu in the upper right corner. Again giving the familiarity throughout the website.

Since these pages has the most text font was an important choice, mentioning now that there is only one font (roboto slab serif) on the website. We chose the serif family because it spoke of style and elegance and information. All important elements on our website and it really helped giving weight to the information. Roboto slab was chosen because we might be struggling with some contrast problems and wanted a font that gave weight to the characters. So the thickness of the letters and numbers made a huge difference and was one of the things that code testing revealed as weak before we changed it.

Finishing up these pages we have the contact buttons. In a design world where staying with the time is essential and famous people stay in contact with their fans

About us page

Testing

User testing

We did user testing when the template was done and most of the information was written to get some response and tips on feedback.

We used google forms to distribute a questionnaire to get response from people we know as can be seen in illustration 4. I will only include the criticism that affected our website since the website design did not improve from praise or simple stuff like spelling errors. I will also describe what was done to rectify the problem. Again, this was before the website was finalized so the stuff I mention here will not be the case on the published website since everything here was improved or fixed.
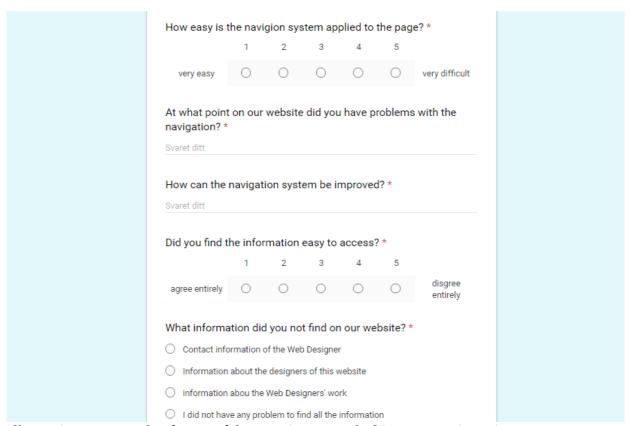

Illustration 4: Example of some of the questions we asked in our questionnaire

We got a lot of response about small navigational elements on mobile devices. This was fixed by making the hamburger menu larger when the users device was small. And the to the return arrow

which is on the upper left corner on some of the pages was added to the word back which made it easier to click when on a mobile device and easier to see.

Before we laid in links to the peoples pages in the hamburger menu we got some complains from the questionnaire that people did not find the links. However we still wanted the image-links so we solved the problem by making an extra alternative and put all the links in the hamburger menu.

The biggest one of our feedback was however the old design of the peoples pages as can be seen in illustration 5. Here the big responses was that the whole page did not respond well to scaling, was not in tune with the general theme of the other web-pages and many of its features was not well designed. It was the biggest one because we had to do a total reconstruct of the whole layout, redefining everything. However we are much more happy and we think that the new version gives justice to the people the pages are about.
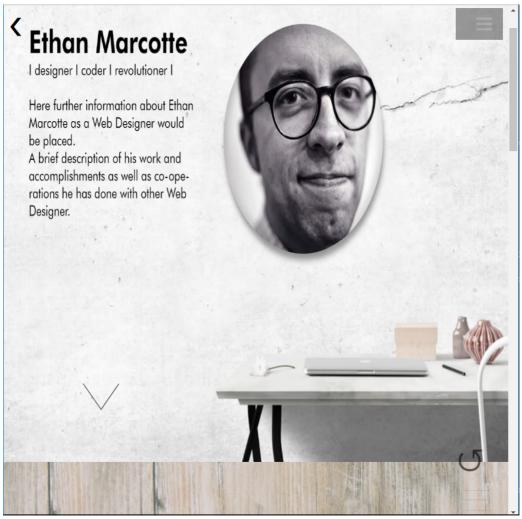

Illustration 5: Outdated version of Ethan Marcottes web page(stretched because responsive related issues)

All of this gave us a lot of help and made the website into what it is now. User testing was so worth it and after a while it becomes impossible to notice badly designed code without third-party input.

Code testing

Here responsive design was key. This was done throughout the project, but at a much more intensified level at the end. Here we also used the questionnaire and got good feedback of stuff that was broken as a fundamental level, not just badly designed or wrong. Thanks to the use of flex display, which gives a lot of power to the coder and makes the site mostly responsive by itself. Most of the pages on the website was easy to make fully responsive and even on mobile there was no major pitfalls. However the index page that contained one picture was easily the hardest one to make fully responsive on all devices and browsers.
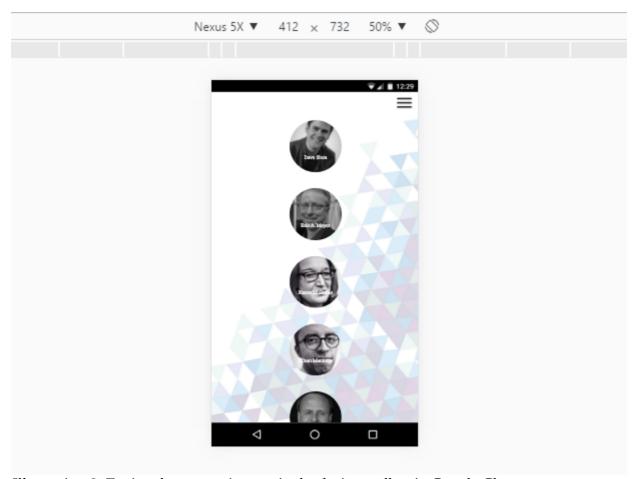

Illustration 6: Testing the responsiveness in the device toolbar in Google Chrome

We all tested the responsiveness and have concluded that none of the pages has any major flaws in respect to responsiveness and is all navigation is functional. Most of the responsiveness testing was done by using the device toolbar provided in web browsers Google Chrome and Mozilla Firefox as can be seen in Illustration 6. All the code has also been verified to the standards of HTML5 and CSS3 with W3Cs validators and all the pictures are cc-free or made/take by us. We have noted here that there were some warnings on the HTML5 validator on the peoples pages, but this is just about missing headers in sections which is done by choice. Also the whole page is JavaScript free so there was no need to handle eventualities like disabled JavaScript or no support.

Browser testing

This was done side by side with code testing and contains many of the same elements of testing and searching for errors. The code was also tested in Internet Explorer, Opera, Edge and of course Firefox and Chrome. Every browser passed our tests and by getting better and better feedback from the user testing we improved the browser compatibility all the time. One problem that arose was to test on safari. None of the group members has an Apple product and Safari was not available for windows at the time as far as we could figure out. So Safari has not been tested other than checked for CSS3 and HTML5 compatibility and cross checked with W3C CSS3 Browser Support Reference and all the code has been optimized for good backward compatibility.

Universal availability

Testing for universal availability was a bit tricky to do since we do not have the equipment that many disabled people use, but we focused on screen readers and site contrast since this is something that is relatively easy to simulate.
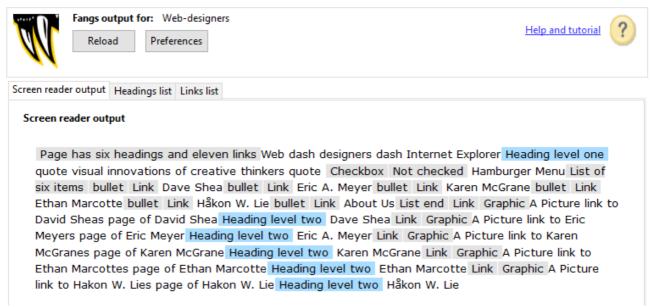

Illustration 7: Example of simulating a screen reader with a Firefox add-on "Fangs".

We used a Firefox add-on called Fangs which simulates a screen reader to check for how to make it as good as possible for visually disabled people(seen in illustration 7). We also tested contrast with http://www.checkmycolours.com/ and this yielded good results for most of our pages so people with reduced sight should be more comfortable reading/finding text/objects on our website.

Personal contribution and views

Here I have to mention that I did most, if not all of the coding. This might be because I did not trust the others to make good, quality code, but the code they wrote was in fact not good and I rewrote the parts they did. This is reflected in the code and style. With my background in information technology I did most of the responsive design and came up with ways we could implement the solutions that was discussed. Also I think that the others forgot universal availability and thus I

think that I am the only one to have done it and included it in the report. As well as blocking the page from crawlers with /robots.txt that blocks the crawlers that follows the rules.

I want to make clear that I do not agree with the current solution. I do not think that it is justified to have an index page that is simply a portal to one other page, giving the user nothing but a fancy picture and an extra click. If I could choose I would rather that the index page was removed and the page that is currently main would be the index page of the website. Also if you are on a mobile device, as can be seen on illustration 2, the structure of the page is not apparent and you would just have to guess what to do which is not something I think the intended audience likes. The idea works on a desktop where you can see the mouse change when you hover, but again, it really falls apart on a mobile device.

Retrospect and regrets

Looking back at the project and how we did it I want to say that I wish I could have invested more time in it and grouped with people that was more eager to try and ask for advice instead of just not doing anything. I wish that we could have collaborated more with the code and that I gave more responsibility to the others and not just said that I could do it. Although all this would have helped a lot there are some things that should have been more prominent in the group. That is to meet up often, define tasks, assign specific tasks to group members and keep schedules/deadlines.

Regrets for the project I would have liked to know CSS and HTML as well as I do now when I started. The project has given me a lot of knowledge, and I am certain that the whole website could have been made in a fraction of the time it took now. But then again, part of the creation is the progress and that helped a lot.

The future of the website

If I had three more months of development and full control of the design there is a lot I would have done, but I believe it can be summed up with a couple of words: cut, add and refine.
I would cut some of the design choices; the index page with the picture, shrunken the portraits of the web-designers and added many more and used a lot of time to refine the details. Another idea if the database of web-designers got larger would be to create categories and therefore create an ambiguous organization scheme as is defined in Information Architecture for the world wide web as "Ambiguous or "subjective" organization schemes divide information into categories that defy exact definition."Morville and Rosenfeld(2007, 61). But the bottom line is that unfortunately there was no time at the end.

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