Final Project - RealtorReviews.com

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Abstract—**We have designed a website which is to be used to provide feedback on realtors after a real estate transaction. A need was identified for the ability to read and write reviews on an independent site that is not affiliated with one or more specific real estate companies. People have had issues with finding only positive reviews for realtors and believe that it is likely due to relationships between sites such as Zillow or Redfin and specific real estate companies. As such they felt the existing information available online was not very helpful. We are targeting potential users who are either looking to buy or looking to sell a home and who want to make an informed decision on what realtor to use for that process.**

I. DESIGN DECISIONS

New Changes

Overall our concept was well received. Where appropriate, our design decisions have been udpated to include changes made since our last prototype to reflect the suggestions offered by student's via the Design Gallery posts. The modifications were mostly related to adding contextual and navigational hints to keep the scent strong while users search for information. Information Foraging is an important design theory that we have utilized to help keep the users on track.

A. Website

Based on feedback from users that we interviewed it was decided that the best initial format for our concept would be a website. The screen real estate afforded by using a browser to navigate through the site helps with visibility of the various aspects of leaving a review, such as seeing more information about a realtor and what others have said about them on a single screen. A touchscreen keyboard on a phone or mobile device would constrain a user's ability to type out a lengthy and meaningful review and as such we would be more likely to aggregate data by having the majority of actions (especially those done initially) be carried out via a browser. The consensus was that a keyboard affords the ability to better convey someone's thoughts.

B. Search

The final decision for search was to not limit a user to being able to search separately by location or separately by realtor ID, as this would provide an unneeded constraint when navigating the site. However the option to narrow down a search via an **advanced search** feature was added, which allows someone to add specific criteria to their search parameters to further narrow down their search. Our analytical evaluation process determined that the dropdown to specify searching by location or realtor ID was unclear, and they would prefer a ubiquitous search box to simply search by anything they wanted to. Now if someone enters an MLS # for a realtor it will detect that and bring up relevant results, or if you type in a city it will know that it is a city and again find relevant results.

Search Results Page: Our original design included links to past and current properties in the realtor search results page. After interviewing potential users it was decided that it would be best to leave this information to the individual pages for each realtor so that there would be more room on the results page for listing the realtors (as that is the primary focus). This also improves the aesthetic of the page, by providing a more minimalist interface.

Per a student's suggestion we added the text "you searched for..." (with the search terms) to the top of the Search Results Screen. This complies with the concepts from Information Foraging Theory to keep the scent strong as a user looks for the correct information.

Realtor Page: Based on feedback from students we added a "back to search results" button on the main realtor page. It was indicated that there needed to be an easier way to get back to the Search Results page from the Realtor main page so we included this functionality. Overall the change was fairly minor yet very beneficial.

C. Reviews

We kept with our original design decision to use multiple categories to determine the overall rating for a realtor. This helps contain the feedback that a user wishes to leave into filterable areas yet allows the ability for a realtor's rating to not be based on one specific premise of whether they like them or not. Our user's expressed frustration with other review sites where often times a product or item was rated based on less than relevant details, so the desire was for specific categories to

be used to create the overall rating. We added an average star rating for the different categories to the top the review section as well as an overall star rating for the entire review. We also increased the visibility of the "Leave a Review" button, as well as the number of places that it appears on the website. This makes it clearer where a user was supposed to go in order to leave a review and by reducing the number of steps that are needed to complete this task, we will not be overloading the user's memory.

Account Creation: In the design gallery, multiple students mentioned that there did not seem to be much incentive for creating an account. We modified the prototype to clarify the parts of the website that can be used without creating an account and those that require one. It is important that we attempt to limit the number of false reviews[1] on the site and requiring an an account helps with this.

D. Similarity to other Review Sites

Our design is a mixture of existing review sites' formats and proved very favorable with the potential users that we spoke with. We cleaned up some of the original elements that were on the site to make the site less busy and to not distract users from the key aspects of the site: reading and writing reviews. We wanted to make sure that other relevant information was accessible, but did not inundate the experience with design clutter. As is common in other review sites, we decided display the photo of the realtor, along with their name, since it is easier for users to recognize a realtor based on their image rather than recalling other information about them.

E. Navigation

Our original concept did not include a navigation bar and this was an area that multiple users requested. Since feedback involves sending back information about what action has been done and what has been accomplished, allowing a person to continue with an activity, the lack of a navigation bar it made it very difficult for users to navigate around the site after having performed actions. This directly correlates with visibiltiy as a navigation bar is something that users will look for and if one is not implemented at all the experience would have become extremely frustrating. It also reduces the user's memory load, since they do not have to remember all of the steps that they took, or need to take to get somewhere. This means that they can more easily get back to search results or access their favorites through the account menu.

F. Account Creation

One aspect that was left out of our original design was an account creation page. While this is something we had discussed from the beginning, it was left out of user evaluation and testing. However, a common suggestion in our empirical evaluations was to include an account creation page, so we added this to our final design concept. This gives the site a way to make sure that reviews posted are legitimate reviews and could provide a mechanism for verifying that a reviewer actually used that particular realtor and that they are only allowed to leave a single review for a single transaction. Additionally, it gives the user the ability to save favorite realtors and keep track of their reviews. This helps the user externalize the memory load by reminding them of which realtors they are considering and which they have already reviewed.

II. CONCLUSION

In the end our design differed a fair amount after talking with users, largely because there were some basic aspects of the experience that we had left out (ubiqiutous search, user accounts, minimalistic UI, navigation bar). Structurally things are laid out mostly how we had planned to have them but with important changes where they were needed. We will be excited to see how the changes we've made will be received by users, especially now that they are in a bit more accessible form via the myBalsamic prototype.

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[1]False reviews includes automated/spam reviews, paid for reviews, or the same person leaving a review multiple times