

Kennedy Space Center Site Analysis

Overview

The Kennedy Space Center site serves to provide tourists with information about the Center and its many historic launches as well as assisting with booking tours and purchasing tickets. Tours advertised range from close-up looks at the control center to observations of the launch pads. The main demographic for this site includes Florida tourists interested in exploring one of the United States' famous rocket launch sites, ranging primarily from families to senior citizens. For many, this site may be a necessary step between planning their visit and realizing their full experience.

Goals

This site displays itself with the goal of giving visitors a taste of the Kennedy Space Center brand and aesthetic before they even arrive. While that may appear intriguing at first look, visitors may soon find it burdensome with attempt to actually use and navigate the site. It is vital that participants should have an easy and pleasant experience while accessing the site's primary features-- information and ticket purchasing, but there are three main distractions which interrupt this process:

1. **Discoverability**—Those interested in reading about the Kennedy Space Center's historic launches and affiliations with NASA may be interested in the very key timeline feature of the homepage. This featured timeline gives visitors the first look at what the center is all about—however it is quite a hassle to figure out how to use. The links and images run off the left side of the screen and while the timeline affords scrolling, the on-screen arrows that appear to do the trick, do not. A visitor may not have the patience to discover that the keyboard arrows must be used to scroll the timeline and therefore disregard the feature altogether.
2. **Layout**—The layout of this site's main content is fair from page to page, however the header navigation and footer information and links are so large they distract from the main content completely. On certain screen sizes the menu sticking out from the right pushes into the main content, also providing a distraction. A drop down menu from the header navigation may work the same purpose more effectively.
3. **Readability**—The distracting layout of this site interferes directly with its readability. It is firstly a bit poor that the header and footer text is often larger than the main content text. While the red and blue color choices work well to advertise the Space Center brand, putting small white text against them in important informational sections may not be the most readable option for visitors. Once again, the menu opening in from the right, covering the main content, is definitely a distraction as well.

Testing Script

Scenario—With a trip planned to Florida’s east coast with relatives to visit beaches, museums, and other tourist locations, you plan to spend a day touring Cape Canaveral’s Kennedy Space Center. You want to perform some research on the location before your visit and possibly purchase some tickets for unique experiences there.

Questions and Tasks:

1. You heard much about this location from a friend who had previously toured it and recommended it, noting it has had several historic launches. Check out a couple articles regarding the space center’s launches from the past decade.
2. Your party is interested in experiencing an up-close tour at the space center. The Up-Close Launch Control Center Tour might be a good choice for your party of five adults. Check what the pricing on this tour.
3. Before deciding purchasing tickets, you’d also heard great things about the center’s IMAX theater. Check the pricing on films you might be interested at the IMAX theater.
4. It’ll be a good idea to find the location of these activities on a map of the center. Look for a map that can provide you with this information.
5. Now you’re ready to purchase tickets! Look into purchasing tickets and make sure all of your activities are included for your party of five adults.

Subject Profiles

Elaine
Age: 54

Technical Background: Comfortable using the internet, especially Facebook. Surfs the internet to make online purchases often.

Demographic: Grew up in Chicago suburbs. Has traveled within the United States and been to the Florida area many times. Has considered visiting the Kennedy Space Center in the past. She has a high school education.

Occupation: None, Homemaker

Ray
Age: 58

Technical Background: Very comfortable using the internet and computer software/downloads. Makes use of apps. Not as comfortable with social networks.

Demographic: Raised in Chicago; has traveled within the United States and Mexico and has been to Florida several times. Has expressed interest in visiting the Kennedy Space Center. He has a high school education.

Occupation: Government

Angela
Age: 23

Technical Background: Very comfortable using the internet and social networks; uses them in daily life. She is used to purchasing online as well as making travel plans online.

Demographic: Raised in Chicago and has traveled to Florida many times. She has used ticket-purchasing sites before to book Florida activities.

Occupation: Customer Service/Relations

Testing Results

Subject: Elaine

Initial Response—She enjoyed the theme of the homepage and found the large background gif interesting/fitting of the theme.

Questions & Tasks Response

1. She made use of the search icon along the red footer bar to search for launches from the past decade. After finding relevant articles she discovered that once selecting an article it did not display its year but only its month and day. However, the article descriptions were helpful in finding the information she was looking for.
2. Once again she was able to make use of the footer's search bar to easily find the price of the Up Close Launch Control Center Tour. She noted that the "Buy Tickets" link and other tour options were very visible and easy to find if needed.
3. Found the IMAX page easily with the search bar. She saw that the theater is included in general admission and clicked the link for more information. Mentioned it was bothersome that the link took her to the general tickets page with all types of ticket options.
4. Easily found a map using the search bar and was able to pinpoint the location of the IMAX theater. She had a harder time locating the Up Close Launch Control Center Tour and wondered if it might be under the "Bus Tour Boarding" area. The popups distracted

her a bit in the process as well until she found the second map which provided the locations of the tours.

5. Navigated the purchasing process with ease, first selecting her general admission tickets and then Up Close Tour. Mentioned it might be simpler if she could select both for one date at the same time as opposed to having to go through the date selection again.

Summary: Elaine enjoyed the look and feel of the site and generally had no problem navigating through it and finding what she needed due to the search bar. She enjoyed that the contact information such as the center's phone number was displayed largely at the bottom; therefore easy to locate. Were she to actually use the site's functionality to plan a trip, she found the interface rather easy to navigate and the information she needed to plan quickly.

Subject: Ray

Initial Response—Like Elaine, he found the earth gif in the background intriguing and very fitting of the site's theme. Thought the timeline's scrollbar was a bit difficult to see.

Questions & Tasks Response

1. Used the "Launches" link to locate launches from the past decade with ease. He thought the option to filter through different types of launches or events made the process simple as well as the calendar to select date ranges.
2. He easily navigated towards "Buy Tickets" to locate the Up-Close Tour tickets. Had no problems finding the price for the Up-Close Launch Control Center Tour.
3. At first, he assumed the IMAX page might be under the "Tours" link, until he discovered it was part of "Experience." To find the price he quickly went to the "Buy Tickets Now" link. *As the "Buy Tickets Now" link is in bright red with an arrow, it is easy to automatically assume the pricing would be listed under that page.* After discovering the page listed only general tickets, he wondered why the IMAX pricing was so hidden. In the end he overlooked that it was included in general admission on the original IMAX page. *Because the "Included in General Admission" button is a shade of blue that somewhat blends in, some users automatically assume "Buy Tickets Now" as the best option.*
4. Found a map with ease using the "Info" link and navigating over to "Maps & Visual Tours." The IMAX Theater was easy to locate but he spent more time searching the guide for the Up-Close tour. Like Elaine, he at first overlooked the second map link, assuming there would only be the one map. *The tour locations being on a second map is problematic because many participants will assume the tours should be listed among the first map's guide.*

5. To purchase tickets he easily used the “Buy Tickets” link and went through the ticket purchasing process pretty smoothly. Overall his experience with buying tickets was satisfactory but he suggested it might be helpful to be able to select multiple ticket types at once (gen. admission, tours, etc.).

Summary: Ray had a pleasant experience using many of the site’s functionalities and locating the correct links he needed. The main problems he ran into regarded finding easy-to-overlook details about the experiences he was researching. Unlike Elaine, he did not find the footer bar useful because he didn’t know what any of the social media links meant; therefore not really looking there at all or finding the search bar there.

Subject: Angela

Initial Response—She felt the homepage looked rather cluttered and outdated. She found the colors a bit bright and the giant earth background unnecessary.

Questions & Tasks Response

1. Used the timeline to locate launches from the past decade but found its functionality lacking. She was able to discover you have to click on the dots to make the timeline scroll but thought it may be difficult for less experienced users to discover.
2. Using the “Tours” link she easily found the price of the Up-Close Launch Control Center Tour.
3. The “Experience” link led her to the IMAX page quickly and, like Ray, selected “Buy Tickets.” Became confused once the link took her to the general tickets page and overlooked that it was included in general admission in the end. *Once again, the easy-to-overlook general admission note proved to be a problem on this page.*
4. Located the map easily using the “Info” link. Because the large footer hid the map guide she didn’t assume to scroll down at first and wondered what all the numbers on the map corresponded to. *When the large footer hides important content, some users may not assume the content they need is on the page.* After scrolling down, she discovered the guide and the IMAX location. Like the other users, she overlooked the second map and was unable to locate the Up-Close tour.
5. While she understood the mechanics of the purchasing process she disliked that it seemed like everything had to be added to the cart separately. She mentioned an easier option for add-ons to one order as many other sites have would be helpful.

Summary: While Angela understood how to navigate the majority of the site to complete her tasks, like Ray, she found several easy-to-overlook details and thinks more visible and simple options should be considered. Generally, she thinks the site should be simplified and looks too cluttered. She mentioned the bright color theme doesn't help simplify the site, either. Were the site simpler, she would find it easier to look for and locate certain details while using it.

Recommendations:

After testing the three participants I discovered that of the three issues listed under my *Goals* section, this site's discoverability proved to be a much larger issue than originally predicted. The other issues still played somewhat of a part while not proving to be as difficult as predicted.

Discoverability

While it was originally predicted that the large timeline on the front page played a huge factor in the site's lacking discoverability, only Angela considered using the timeline at all and found the experience unpleasant. What was not predicted was this site's several easy-to-overlook details, which all three participants ran into trouble with. The "Buy Tickets" button seemed to pop out at each participant on just about every page, so while looking for the price of certain things such as the IMAX theater, they overlooked the fact that it was noted right on the page. While Elaine did see the general admission note on the IMAX page, she still assumed she might have to go to the "Buy Tickets" button underneath. Similarly, each participant struggled to notice the second map which listed the location of the Up-Close Tour, assuming there wouldn't be a second map at all. What I noticed as well was that none of the participants even thought to use the main "Explore" menu that drags out from the right side. While it is very visible, it is simply not the first place participants would look for information that could easily be found in the many other links on the page or the search bar.

Solution—While the front page's timeline isn't one of the most intriguing features to participants, its lacking functionality should still be addressed. Centering the timeline as well as having clicks on the arrows actually scroll it would do the trick. I wouldn't advocate removing the second brighter "Buy Tickets" button from page to page, but I would recommend that important details on pages regarding tickets should be either larger or displayed in a color that doesn't blend in with the rest. Otherwise, users automatically notice a bright red "Buy Tickets" button and assume it's the right place to go for specific information or details about an attraction. The same goes for the maps—the second map should either be integrated with the first or have its link moved to the bottom with the rest of the guide so users can find it as they look for tours in the guide. The "Explore" menu is completely unnecessary on the side; the users did not once consider using it. It has basically all the same information as the navigation links on top and could substitute those as a drop-down menu.

Layout

More mixed reactions than expected regarding this site's layout surfaced from testing these three individuals. It occurred that the older audience (Elaine and Ray) appreciated the visuals and theme more while the younger audience (Angela) would have preferred an aesthetic that was simple and usable.

Angela's immediate reaction to the site was that it was entirely too cluttered and confusing to look at, while Elaine and Ray immediately appreciated its theming and interesting colors. The header navigation and footer were my main concerns; also receiving mixed reactions from the audience. Elaine thought the large footer was helpful by displaying the contact information so boldly. Ray disliked the footer for its various social media symbols he didn't understand. Angela mentioned the footer only once when it blocked content she needed to see on the maps page.

Solution—A happy medium between fitting the brand aesthetic and simplifying the site would make for an overall more effective and user-friendly layout. The mixed reaction between younger and older audiences was very telling and because this location gets tourists of all ages, I wonder as well which end of the spectrum audiences in between would take. This is why a compromise between the brightness of the brand and the concern for interface layout and readability would enhance the site. Minimizing the height of the footer would help the layout of this site greatly. This way, it cannot block content and those who aren't interested in social media links won't really have to see them so prominently. Once again, I believe the "Explore" menu issue would tie in with layout, and incorporating it as a drop-down menu in the header navigation would be more effective.

Readability

After testing the participants, the readability of the site turned out to be less of an issue than predicted—particularly regarding the concern of white text against bright colored boxes and the explore menu covering content. Neither of these concerns were mentioned once by any of the participants, especially regarding the explore menu because no one used it. While participants mentioned the bright colors, it was never really in regards to readability issues. In fact, Elaine pointed out the large phone number on the bottom to be helpful, while I predicted it might be unnecessary. As mentioned in the Layout section, the readability was affected by the height of the footer, however, when Angela did not notice the map guide was underneath it. The concern of readability also arose in the details that blended in with the site, such as the IMAX general admission note on a blue box that was a shade very close to the rest of the blue around it.

Solution—First of all, if the explore menu was instead included as a hover drop-down menu on the top, its routine of getting in the way of content wouldn't be of concern at all. While mixed opinions were received regarding the bright colors, it would still be useful to take into consideration text readability against bright colors for certain audiences. Perhaps limiting the bright colored backgrounds to only box headers would help, while description text lay against a more simplistic white or neutral color. The IMAX important details as well as details on any other page like it should have larger font sizes as well as more prominent color to make them stand out *along* with the "Buy Tickets" button. Once again, the footer height should decrease so that less content is covered by the footer and easier to locate and read.