

A Summary of Don't Make Me Think H. DiMarchi



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1 Introduction

Don't Make Me Think outlines Krug's idea of good website and webpage design. Many of the ideas he presents extend to other products and their design. Krug begins his book with a few things that aren't central to the core material. This excludes his definition of usability.

1.1 Usability

In Krug's words, a product is **usable** if:

"A person of average (or even below average) ability and experience can figure out how to use the thing to accomplish something without it being more trouble than it's worth."

In other words, if a user's desire to use the thing is stronger than the user's desire to not have to learn something or figure it out, the product is usable. It is more difficult to make a thing usable when the user isn't heavily invested in its use.

2 Guiding Principles

2.1 Don't Make Me Think

I'll say it again; **Don't Make Me Think**.

2.1.1 The First Law of Usability

The sentiment, don't make me think, is Krug's first law of usability. It refers to the idea that an interface should not make the user ask questions about the interface and have to navigate it. Their thoughts should have periods. Not question marks. If this can be accomplished we can describe the interface, and how to use it, as **self-evident**.

Sometimes this cannot be accomplished and so we have to settle for making an interface **self-explanatory**. This means a little, nearly effortless, thought is involved in understanding the interface.

These are some important questions a user should not have to ask about an interface:

- Where am I?
- Where should I begin?
- Where did they put _____ ?
- What are the most important things on this page?
- Why did they call it that?
- Is that an ad or part of the site?

2.2 How We Really Use the Web

This chapter is summarized by "Three Facts of Life".

2.2.1 Fact 1: We Don't Read Pages, We Scan Them

We/users will not read an entire webpage and then make a decision about what to do next. We scan the page for particular words, phrases, or other cues to identify what they are looking for.

We do this for three reasons:

1. "We're usually on a mission"

2. “We know we don’t *need* to read everything”
3. “We’re good at it”

2.2.2 Fact 2: We Don’t Make Optimal Choices. We Satisfice.

We choose the first reasonable option (satisficing), not the best one.
According to Krug we do this for four reasons:

1. “We’re usually in a hurry”
2. Not much of a cost for guessing wrong
3. “Weighing options might not improve our chances”
4. “Guessing is more fun”

2.2.3 Fact 3: We Don’t Figure Out How Things Work, We Muddle Through.

In other words we don’t go out of our way to come to an accurate understanding about how the thing we’re using works. We rely on instincts, associations, and limited reasonings without any broader comprehension of what we’re doing.

We do this for two reasons:

1. It’s not important to us, we just want to use the thing
2. “If we find something that works, we stick with it”

This makes it all the more important for interfaces to be designed well. If a user can effortlessly comprehend the thing they are using they will avoid inefficiencies and errors, leading to a better experience. But if comprehension isn’t effortless they won’t bother.

2.3 Designing Great Billboards

Knowing how users behave we have to use techniques that will maximize their absorption of information they could, or must, use.

Krug offers up 6 techniques and conventions:

1. Conventions are your friends; users will respond better to things that are familiar to them
2. Create effective visual hierarchies
3. Break pages up into clearly defined areas
4. Make it obvious what is clickable
5. Keep the *noise* down to a dull roar. *Noise* refers to
 - Shouting: when everything on a page is loud and clammoring for your attention.
 - Disorganization: Why is this here and that there?
 - Clutter: If there’s too much assume everything is visual clutter until proven otherwise.
6. Format text to support scanning

2.3.1 Needless Words

An effective way of reducing visual noise is to get rid of needless words. Words that are needless can add fluff to a sentence or concern something nobody cares enough to read about.

A special case of needless words is **Happy Talk**. Happy Talk is something like:

“Hello and welcome to my website, I am very happy you are here!!!”. Happy talk must be removed. It doesn’t do anything except annoy and inconvenience users. Happy talk will actually make people less happy.

3 Things You Need to Get Right

3.1 Web Navigation

Purpose of Navigation Navigation exists to:

- Help us find what we’re looking for.
- Tell us where we are.
- Tell us what is here.
- Give us confidence in the people behind the site.

3.1.1 Key Navigation Elements

It is important to note that websites should be organized along some sort of hierarchy that is relevant to the contents of the website. This hierarchy is used for browsing a website. A user may also search, usually by text, across a website. This relies less on this hierarchy.

Global Navigation: Global Navigation is the set of navigation elements that appear on every page of a website. It is composed of four elements:

1. Site ID: The name of the site. Tells us what website we are on. This is the top of our hierarchy.
2. Utilities: Things that can help us use the site, such as an option to sign in, or contact the company.
3. Sections: Sections in the global navigation represent the primary level of the site hierarchy.
4. Search: This is where a user can go to search for something. Because it is in the global navigation a user can always jump to it if they have given up on browsing. In my mind this turns a potential abandonment of the site into a search process.

Home Page Button: The Site ID, or one of the sections, should link to the home page of a website. This gives users confidence because they can always start over.

Page Names: Page names are IDs for each and *every* webpage on a website. Page names should:

- Appear to be framing the content that is unique to their page
- Be prominent.
- Match what was clicked. The button text should match the page name.

You Are Here: Navigation elements can often be modified to give us an idea of where we are on a website. For instance we can highlight the navigation element we clicked on to go to the page we are on. This allows us to see where we are in the hierarchy of the website.

Breadcrumbs: This is a breadcrumb: Home > A category > A subcategory > **Where we are now**
Breadcrumbs should be:

- At the top of the page.
- Use > between levels.
- Have the last item bolded.

These tell us where we are and how we got there.

3.1.2 Trunk Test

The questions of the Trunk Test are:

- What site am I on? (Site ID)
- What page am I on? (Page Name)
- What are the major sections of this site? (Sections)
- What are my options at this level? (Local navigation)
- Where am I in the scheme of things? (“You are here” indicators.)
- How can I search? (Search)

Each page on your website should answer these questions.

4 Making Sure You Got Them Right

Often websites are designed by teams. Often these teams disagree.

4.1 Common Disagreements

Everybody Likes: Some team members will assert that everybody likes or doesn’t like some navigation element or style, usually because they do. They are always wrong. The important lesson is that we tend to think users are like us, and that we have to check that instinct at the door.

Farmers vs. Cowmen: Everyone involved in designing a website or other tool will have a different perspective on what the user experience of it should be based on the professional goals they have and the kind of work they do.

The Myth of the Average User: There is no average user. All users are unique, as is their use of the web.

4.1.1 The Antidote for Religious Debates

People tend to debate over large questions like, “Do people like check boxes?”. These questions are not important. It is more important to ask if *that* check box on *this* page creates the experience we want for most people who are likely to use this site. Usually the **debate is best replaced by usability testing**. Watch people use it instead of talking about them using it.

4.2 Usability Testing

“**Usability Tests** are about watching one person at a time try to use something (whether it’s a Web site, a prototype, or some sketches of a new design) to do typical tasks so you can detect and fix the things that confuse or frustrate them.”

4.2.1 Several Truths about Usability Testing

1. “If you want a great site, you’ve got to test.”
2. “Testing one user is 100 percent better than testing none.”
3. “Testing one user early in the project is better than testing 50 near the end.”

4.2.2 Who, What, When, Where, How

Krug outlines an ideal usability testing process for a webpage. This is somewhat flexible to specific project requirements.

- **Who:** Three loosely recruited “Users”. They do not have to be exactly like your target audience.
- **What:** Watch someone use your site and identify the most serious problems they run into.
- **When:** One morning a month, the same day each month.
- **Where:** On-site with observers in a conference room using screen sharing to view the users.
- **How:** The entire team debriefs over lunch the same day to compare notes and decide what to fix. This results in a short 1 to 2 page report.

4.2.3 Debriefing

After your usability testing you will gather with your team over lunch to identify serious problems. It is extremely important to focus on identifying and fixing the most serious problems in the order of seriousness. Krug gives us some steps to follow:

1. Make a collective list.
2. Choose the ten most serious problems.
3. Rate them on a 1 to 10 scale.
4. Create an ordered list - now you’re done!

Some other tips for making this happen:

- Keep a separate list of problems that aren’t serious but take less than an hour to fix by *one* person.
- Resist the impulse to add things to your page or site to fix the problem.
- Take new feature requests by the users with a grain of salt.
- Ignore problems that the user recovers from very quickly from without any prompting.