

Evaluation Four:

St. Paul Public Library Website

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Overview of St. Paul Public Library Website

This Evaluation is an analysis of the St. Paul Public Library [website](#). This analysis will center on the User Experience Maxim of Fitts's Law, as it is demonstrated through the "catalog search" feature of the St. Paul Public Library website. The St. Paul Public Library website has the task of serving multiple purposes for this institution. This is the website where patrons will go to search the catalog, search for events, learn more about the library as a whole, find locations and hours of operation for branches near them, and more. That being said it is critical that the web design make some choices about what it will prioritize on its homepage. From my review it seems to me that the home page reflects the designers priorities for web visitors to see exciting images regarding what the library has to offer, searching the catalog, and finding locations and hours of operation. This is my conclusion based upon what is most visible and accessible when first landing on the homepage. Overall, the website has a clean visual appearance, with a pleasant, though simple aesthetic. The layout is similar to other library websites that utilize the "bibliocommons" functions and formats, such as Charlotte Mecklenburg Public Library (see Evaluation 2). The website prominently displays its logo, name, and some major events and initiatives, which they would like promoted and noticed by the public. Major functions such as searching, logging into an accounts, and basic information about library locations and events are prominent and accessible on the homepage without the need to scroll further.

Literary Review of the User Experience Maxim, Fitts's Law

The most relevant User Experience Maxim by which to assess this library website feature is "Fitts's Law." Fitts's Law states, "The time to acquire a target is a function of the distance to and size of the target." (Yablonski, 2023) This feature is most applicable to the catalog search bar, as it is likely to be among the first, if not the first, feature or function of the website used by

visitors. Therefore it is prudent for web developers to attend to Fitts's Law with regard to this feature, to ensure that patrons and visitors are "acquiring that target" as needed or desired.

Fitts's Law has three takeaways to internalize when evaluating or implementing web design with regard to this User Experience Maxim. The first takeaway being, "Touch targets should be large enough for users to accurately select them." (Yablonski, 2023) This takeaway address the "size" aspect of Fitts's Law, the target needs to be an adequate size to garner user attention, clearly display what it is and or will do, and be easy to touch or click with a pointer. The second takeaway states, "Touch targets should have ample spacing between them." (Yablonski, 2023) This takeaway expounds on the concept of size and space to ensure users are not struggling to access or accurately utilize a touch target due to awkward or unappealing crowding of the target or feature. The thirds major takeaway says, "Touch targets should be placed in areas of an interface that allow them to be easily acquired." (Yablonski, 2023) This takeaway acknowledges the "distance" aspect of Fitts's Law, the target needs to be a reasonable distance for users to easily notice and navigate to it for use.

Fitts's Law fits neatly into the the primary goals of the application of User Experience principles- to simplify and improve the user experience, as well as to create an experience that leads users to engage with the site and perform tasks via the website as the developer has envisioned. One article elaborates on the objective behind focusing on Fitts's Law with regard to User Experience, "The aim of user interface design should be to reduce the distance from one point to the next and make the target object large enough to enable prompt detection and selection of interactive elements without sacrificing accuracy." (IxDF Course Instructor, 2019) Through applying the findings of this literary review of Fitts's Law as a User Experience Maxim we can determine that a successful implementation of the "search catalog" feature of the St. Paul

Public Library website would involve the search bar and button being sizeable enough to be noticed and clicked on without error, at an appropriate distance for navigation, and without needless crowding with other touch targets which would hinder accuracy.

Analysis of St. Paul Public Library website’s “Search Catalog” Feature Through the Lense of the User Experience Maxim, Fitts’s Law

For the purpose of this analysis I will be evaluating the “catalog search” feature of the St. Paul Public Library website. This is an essential feature of any library website and has been for as long catalogs have been digital and searchable by patrons. As access to the library has become increasingly more digital and technologically based, so has the importance of accessible online catalog search features. Many users will end up using this feature before even visiting a library in order to determine if what they are looking for is available, and if so in what format and or at what location. In order to address each of the three takeaways for Fitts’s Law highlighted previously, we will evaluate the current status of the “search catalog” feature with regard to each aspect of Fitts’s Law the three takeaways addressed- size, crowding, and distance.

The size of the “search catalog” feature is likely the dimension of Fitts’s Law which this feature of the St. Paul Public Library website is most lacking. Although I am of the opinion that the sizing is adequate enough, it is evident just by looking that it isn’t even close to the largest element on the home page, in spite of the fact that it is likely among the most used features of the home page (see Figure 1 below). Recalling that, “Creating larger targets will facilitate interaction as well as allow you to get the most pixels out of your interface.” (Purwar, 2019) Fitts’s Law could support the view that this feature would benefit from slight enlargement.

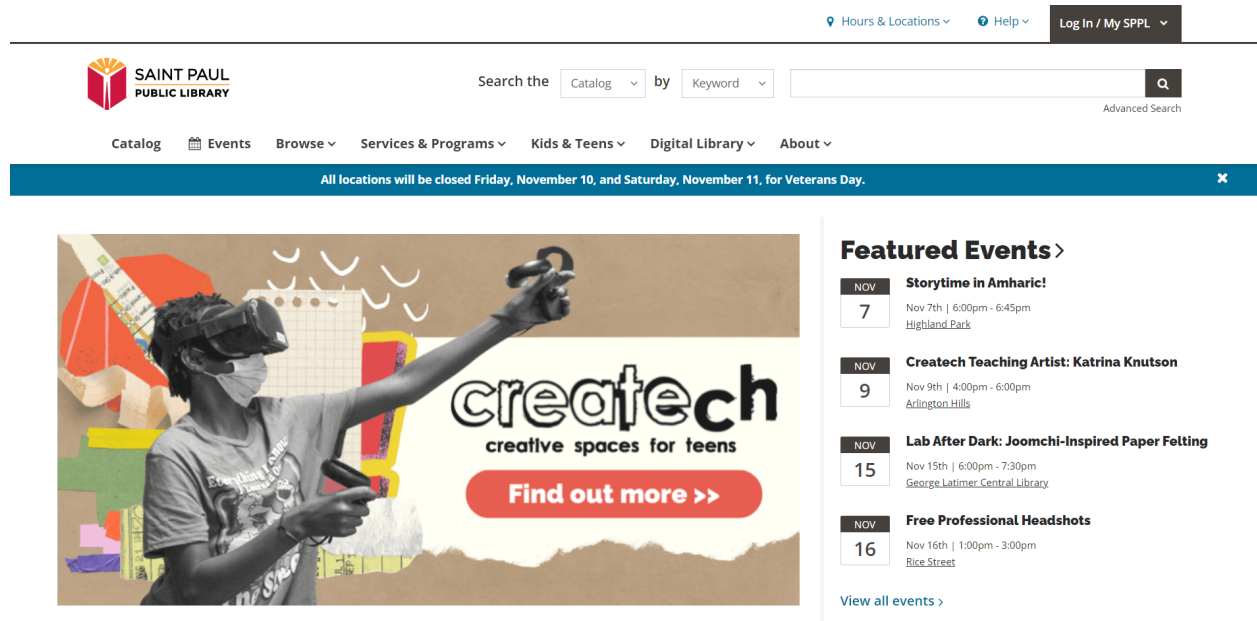


Figure 1. “Search Catalog” feature on the St. Paul Public Library home page.

The matter of crowding is addressed via the dropdown menu options within the “Search” feature as shown below in Figures 2 and 3. By adding in these linear drop down menus users are able to easily navigate through the search options without being confronted with an excessive amount of search bars or buttons linking to additional pages. Instead the default search option is set to “Search catalog by keyword” as this is anticipated to be the most frequently sought out function of the search bar. However, this allows searching within the catalog to be modified as needed or desired, without issues of crowding, additional navigation, or distance occurring. The same is true for searches intended to be outside of the catalog. Additionally, it should be noted that the most relevant or most commonly used search settings are at the top, whereas functions that see less search use are descended towards the bottom of the linear drop down menu. This format and strategy is supported through User Experience literature as shown here, “In the linear menu, you can see that the distance from the menu handle to the first element in the menu is the shortest and the distance to the last element in the menu is the longest. Therefore, with such a

menu, you may consider ordering items according to their frequency of use (with the most frequently accessed ones at the top).” (Budi, 2022)

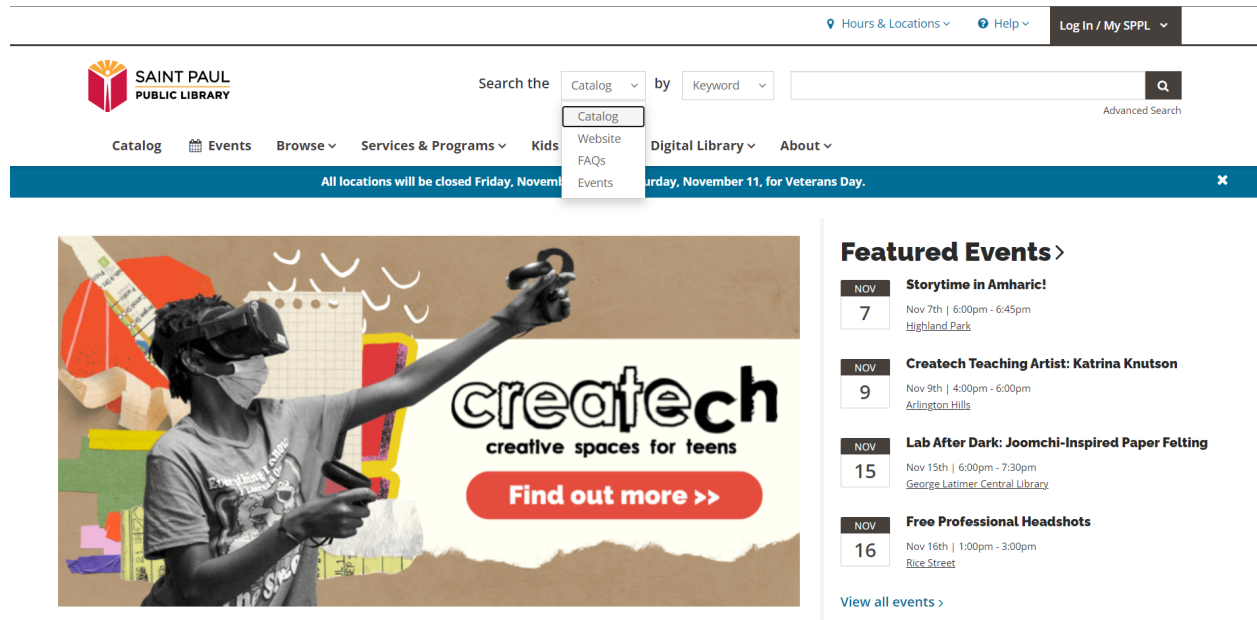


Figure 2. “Search” feature’s “Search the” dropdown menu on the St Paul Public Library home page.

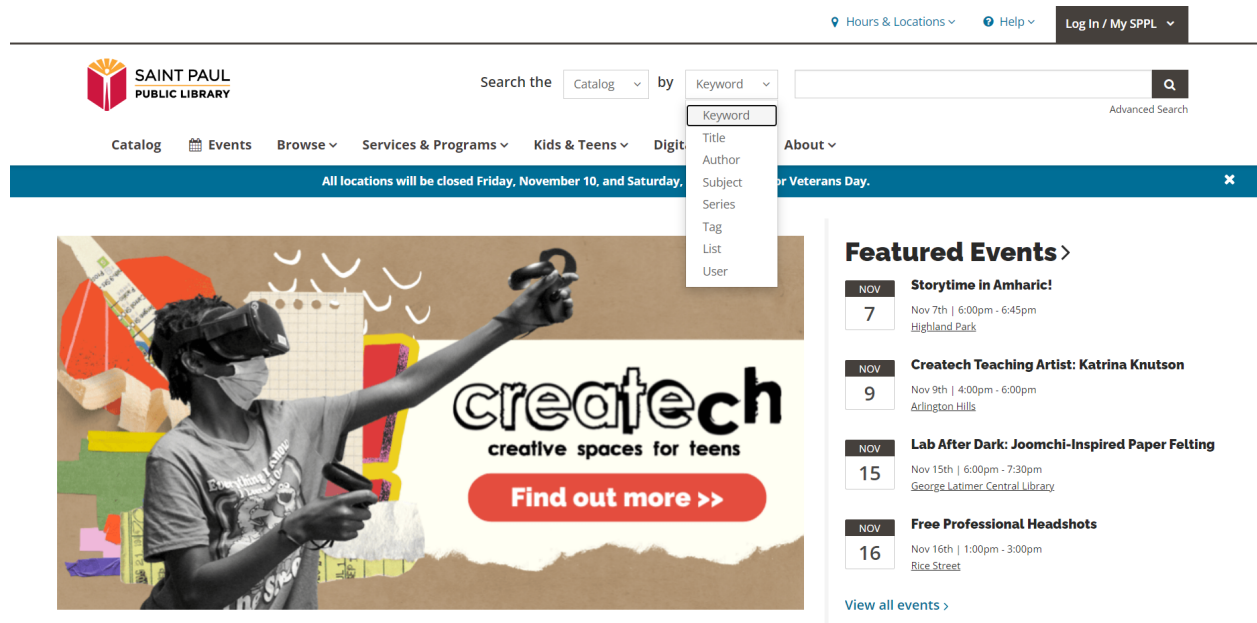


Figure 3. “Search Catalog” feature’s “by” dropdown menu on the St Paul Public Library home page.

Presently, this web feature can be found in the upper right corner of the website, as shown above in Figures 1-3. This is another aspect of this web feature that is done well when measured

against the principles and goals of Fitts's Law as a User Experience Maxim. Placing features and touch targets in corners or edges enhances their accessibility and thereby addresses the issues of distance and navigation with regard to Fitts's Law. Again, this web development technique is supported by contemporary User Experience literature, as seen in the Wikipedia page for Fitts's Law, "Placing layout elements on the four edges of the screen allows for infinitely large targets in one dimension and therefore presents ideal scenarios." (Wikipedia, 2023)

Conclusion: Recommendations

In summary, the St. Paul Public Library webpage is succeeding in User Experience in many ways, including its clean, simple aesthetic, its use of bibliocommons in line with many of its large urban library system counterparts, and its use of User Experience maxims and principles, such as Fitts's Law, as analyzed in this evaluation. It is critical for libraries, as it is for all institutions wishing to remain relevant, to be actively involved in creating digital platforms that follow contemporary norms around User Experience. The following quote articulates this need well as it states, "Rest assured that no matter whether we want to focus on experience or not, technology will always create some. Consequently, it seems wise to actually put experiences at the center of our design efforts." (Hassenzahl, Burmester, & Koller, 2021)

With that said my analysis of the St. Paul Public Library webpage through the lens of Fitts's Law as it applies to User Experience yielded minimal recommendations due to my positive outlook on the current state of their webpage. As previously stated, two of three of the major components of Fitts's Law, crowding and distance, were sufficiently, satisfied, while only the third, size, needed improvement. My recommendation would be to increase the size of the search bar, even is only by a somewhat small margin, in order to better adhere to Fitts's Law and thusly improve the User Experience through enhanced visibility and accessibility.

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