

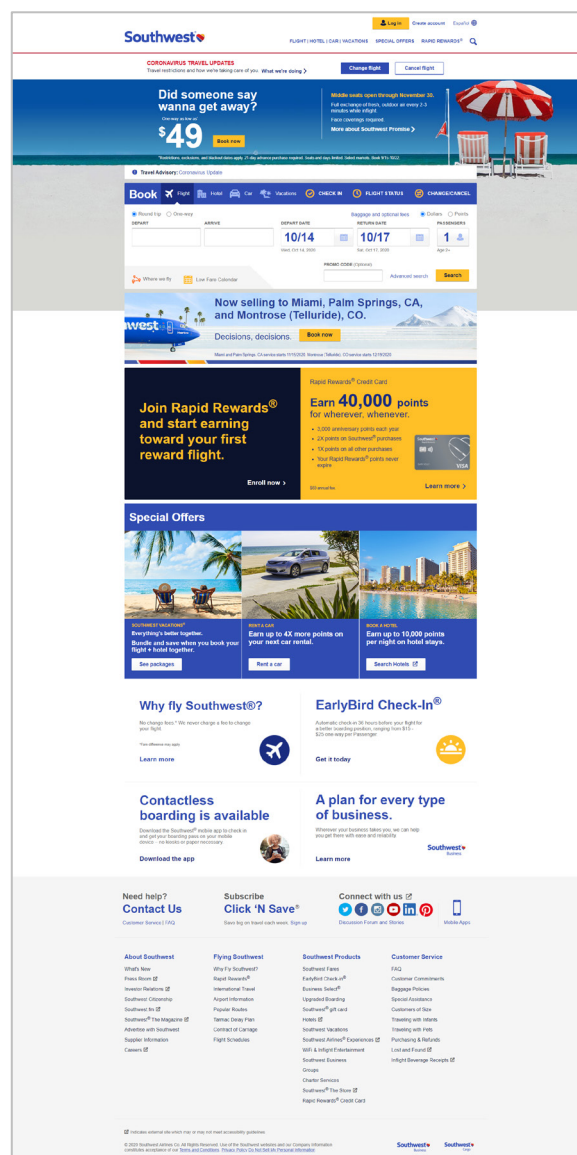
Introduction

As my first assignment, I am going to evaluate www.southwest.com, which is a website that helps you find flight tickets, rent a car, book a hotel room, ...

The task that I am trying to accomplish here is to purchase a round-trip ticket from New Orleans to Chicago. Sometimes I had to change the task slightly in order to evaluate how the website will handle different requests.

I have identified 6 usability problems on this website, which we will go through later in this article.

Notice: I used Jakob Nielsen's 10 usability heuristics from The Nielsen Norman Group. The concept is the same thing, but the terms might differ from those used in the course. Make sure to check their website www.nngroup.com/articles/ten-usability-heuristics



heuristic name: User control and freedom

severity number: 3 (major usability problem)

description:

while trying to purchase a flight ticket, most websites cover a wide range of options for passengers, which include adults (18-64), Seniors (+65), Youth (12-17), Child (2-11), Sean Infant or Lap Infant. Most airlines offer different options for different age groups. For example, infants' tickets usually come with a discount, and their food options are different from adults.

As you can see, there is no such option on the Southwest Airlines website. It doesn't give the user the freedom to choose different passenger base on their age group.

The screenshot shows the Southwest Airlines website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with the Southwest logo, links for 'Log in', 'Create account', and 'Español'. Below this is a 'CORONAVIRUS TRAVEL UPDATES' banner. The main hero section features a large blue area with the text 'Did someone say wanna get away?' and a price of '\$49' with a 'Book now' button. To the right, there's a section about 'Middle seats open through November 30'. Below the hero section is a 'Travel Advisory: Coronavirus Update' banner. The main booking form is titled 'Book' and includes tabs for 'Flight', 'Hotel', 'Car', and 'Vacations'. It has fields for 'DEPART' (IND), 'ARRIVE' (MDW), 'DEPART DATE' (10/14), and 'RETURN DATE' (10/16). A dropdown menu for the number of passengers is open, showing options from 1 to 8. The '1' option is selected. Below the form, there's a 'PROMO CODE (Optional)' field and a 'Search' button. At the bottom, there's a banner for 'Now selling to Miami, Palm Springs, CA, and Montrose (Telluride), CO.' with a 'Book now' button.

heuristic name: Help and documentation

severity number: 2 (minor usability problem)

description:

As you try to purchase a ticket, you can see that there are two radio buttons that one of them is active by default. "Dollars" and "Points"

So, what exactly is "Points." It is clear that this is a payment method (considering the fact that you have to choose between two options). But the question is how you can earn points. Do you have to purchase a ticket in order to earn it, or you can simply earn points by referring friends to use their website?

Having a small textbox containing a description would stop the user from getting confused while using the website.

The screenshot shows the Southwest Airlines website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with the Southwest logo, links for 'Log in', 'Create account', and 'Español'. Below this is a banner for 'CORONAVIRUS TRAVEL UPDATES' with a 'Change flight' button. The main hero section features a promotional offer: 'Did someone say wanna get away?' with a price of '\$49' and a 'Book now' button. To the right, there's a section about 'Middle seats open through November 30' with details about full exchange and face coverings. Below the hero section, there's a 'Travel Advisory: Coronavirus Update' link. The 'Book' section is prominent, showing options for 'Round trip' and 'One-way'. The 'Flight' tab is selected, and the 'Baggage and optional fees' section shows two radio buttons: 'Dollars' and 'Points'. The 'Points' button is highlighted with a red box. The flight details show a round trip from Indianapolis (IND) to Chicago (MDW) on October 14 and 16, 2020, for one passenger. There's a 'Search' button and a 'PROMO CODE' field. At the bottom, there's a section about 'Now selling to Miami, Palm Springs, CA, and Montrose (Telluride), CO.' with a 'Book now' button.

heuristic name: Match between system and the real world

severity number: 2 (minor usability problem)

description:

Using a phrase like "Enroll Now" is not a very wise choice of word. Enroll usually means registering for university or any other educational institution. In contrast, sign up is less formal and more user friendly.

The screenshot shows the Southwest Airlines website. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for FLIGHT, HOTEL, CAR, VACATIONS, SPECIAL OFFERS, and RAPID REWARDS. A search icon is also present. Below the navigation bar, a large message reads "Thanks For Stopping By!" and states that the website is undergoing maintenance. To the right of this message is a "Quick Air Links" section with links for Check In, Change Flight, and Check Flight Status. Below this is an "Account Login" section with fields for Username (Account Number or Username) and Password (Password Case Sensitive). A "Remember Me" checkbox and a "Login" button are also present. A red box highlights the "Enroll Now" link next to the Username field. Below the login section is a "Need help logging in?" link and a "Rapid Rewards" button. At the bottom of the page, there are four columns of links: "About Southwest" (What's New, Press Room, Investor Relations, Southwest Citizenship, Southwest Inn, Southwest The Magazine), "Flying Southwest" (Why Fly Southwest?, Rapid Rewards, International Travel, Airport Information, Popular Routes, Tarmac Delay Plan), "Southwest Products" (EarlyBird Check-in, Business Select, Upgraded Boarding, Southwest gift card, Hotels, Southwest Vacations), and "Customer Service" (FAQ, Customer Commitments, Baggage Policies, Special Assistance, Customers of Size, Traveling with Infants).

heuristic name: Match between system and the real world

severity number: 2 (minor usability problem)

description:

When you encounter an error message, it precisely indicates the problem and addresses the solution on how to fix it. So far, the system helps the user to recognize and diagnose errors and recover from them.

But including error codes does not help the user, and it is part of the irrelevant information. Even googling it will not give the user any information.

The screenshot shows the Southwest Airlines website. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the Southwest logo, links for 'Log in', 'Create account', and 'Español', and a search bar. Below the navigation bar, there is a red-bordered box containing an error message. The error message starts with a red exclamation mark icon and the text 'Sorry, we found some errors...'. It then says 'We are unable to process your request. Please try again. If you continue to have difficulties, please contact a Southwest Airlines® Customer Representative at 1-800-I-FLY-SWA (1-800-435-9792)'. Below this, there is an 'Error detail' section with a long alphanumeric code: '1: 88ba30a3-c0ac-400e-b022-1e4e0808eada : 403999999'. To the right of the error detail, there is a link for 'Error details' and a timestamp '10/13/2020 - 20:37:33'. Below the error message, there is a 'Book a Flight' section. This section includes a 'Recent searches' dropdown, radio buttons for 'Round trip', 'One-way', and 'Multi-city', and radio buttons for 'Dollars' and 'Points'. The flight details are as follows: DEPART: MSY (New Orleans, LA - MSY), DEPART DATE: 10/14 (Wed, Oct 14, 2020), TIME OF DAY: All day, PASSENGERS: 1 (Age 2+), ARRIVE: MDW (Chicago (Midway), IL - MDW), RETURN DATE: 10/16 (Fri, Oct 16, 2020), TIME OF DAY: All day, and a PROMOTE CODE (Optional) field. A 'Search' button is located at the bottom right of the flight details section. At the bottom of the page, there is a banner for 'Southwest Promise' and a promotional offer 'Did someone say One-way as low as \$49.99'.

Southwest

Log in | Create account | Español

FLIGHT | HOTEL | CAR | VACATIONS | SPECIAL OFFERS | RAPID REWARDS®

Sorry, we found some errors...

We are unable to process your request. Please try again. If you continue to have difficulties, please contact a Southwest Airlines® Customer Representative at 1-800-I-FLY-SWA (1-800-435-9792).

Error detail 1: 88ba30a3-c0ac-400e-b022-1e4e0808eada : 403999999

Error details

10/13/2020 - 20:37:33

Book a Flight

Travel Tips | Special Accommodations

Recent searches

Round trip One-way Multi-city

Dollars Points

DEPART

MSY

New Orleans, LA - MSY

DEPART DATE

10/14

Wed, Oct 14, 2020

TIME OF DAY (Optional)

All day

PASSENGERS

1

Age 2+

ARRIVE

MDW

Chicago (Midway), IL - MDW

RETURN DATE

10/16

Fri, Oct 16, 2020

TIME OF DAY (Optional)

All day

PROMO CODE (Optional)

Search

Where we fly Low Fare Calendar

Now booking through April 11, 2021

Southwest Promise

Did someone say One-way as low as \$49.99

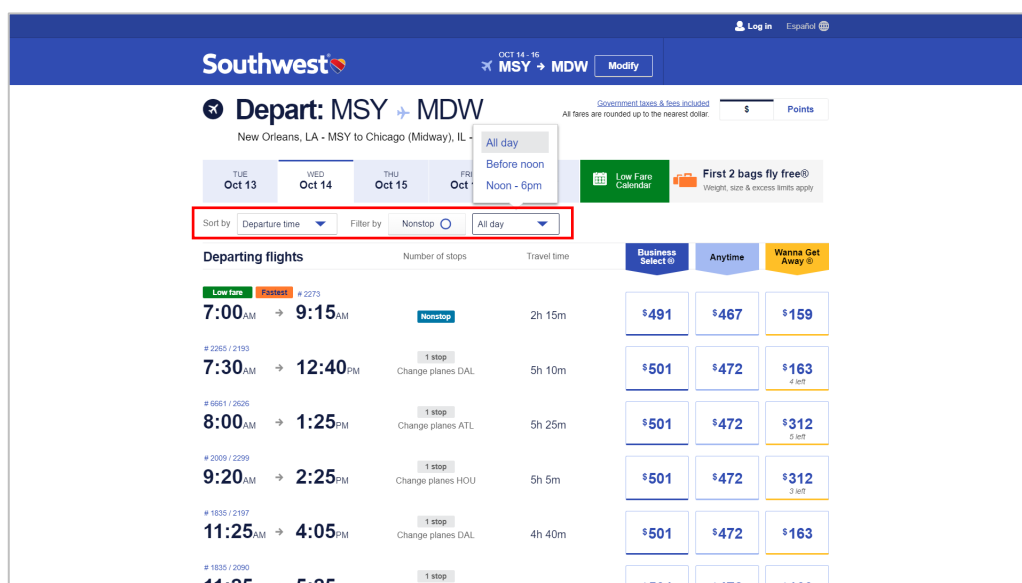
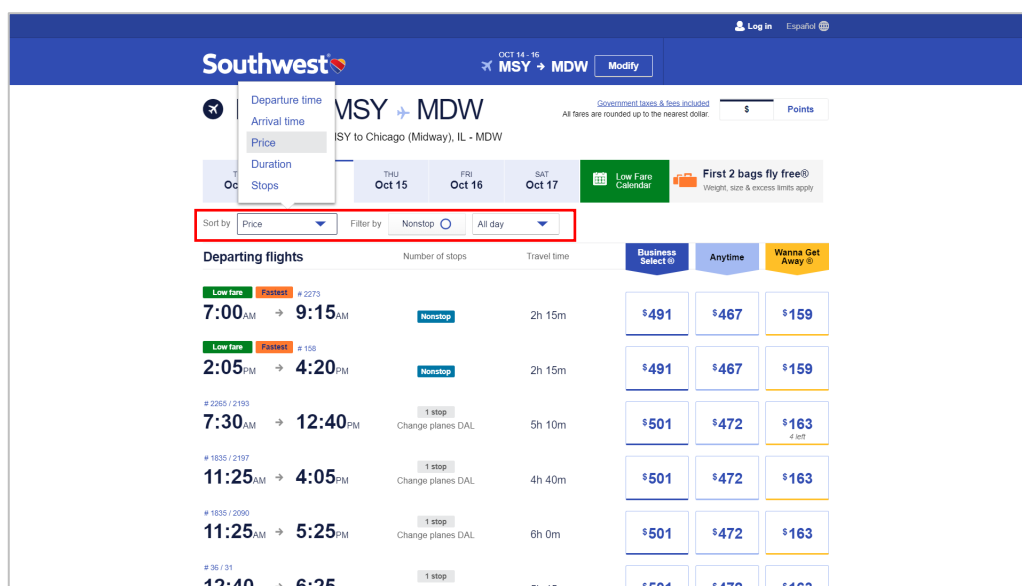
heuristic name: User control and freedom

severity number: 3 (major usability problem)

description:

The next step is to choose departure time. As you can see, there are limited options for sort and filter. Improving sort in order to enable the user to order flights based on factors like the highest price, lowest price, shortest duration, longest duration, ... will create a better user experience eventually.

In addition, we can improve the filter to enable the user to choose the number of stops, departure time, arrival time, etc.



heuristic name: Help users recognize, diagnose, and recover from errors

severity number: 2 (minor usability problem)

description:

As you proceed, the next stage is to fill out the personal information form (you probably won't need to do so if you already logged into the website since the fields would be filled already).

I have tried to enter wrong data for both year and day. As you can see in both scenarios, all three boxes are highlighted, which indicates that the input is not correct, while there is only one field with the wrong data. "Enter valid date of birth" doesn't precisely tell the user what causes the problem and which parts need to be fixed.

Passenger & Payment Info

Price Payment Confirmation

Flight details [Modify](#)

Date	From	To	Time	Stop	Class
Wed 10/14	MSY	MDW	7:00 AM - 9:15 AM	2 hr 15 min	Nonstop
Fri 10/16	MDW	MSY	9:35 AM - 11:50 AM	2 hr 15 min	Nonstop

Who's flying?
Please make sure names match government-issued IDs.

* Required

FIRST NAME * MIDDLE NAME LAST NAME * SUFFIX

Iman Noorbakhsh

DATE OF BIRTH * GENDER * RAPID REWARD\$/ACCOUNT #

May 30 2021 Male

Enter valid date of birth.

Secure traveler information

Special Assistance

Add EarlyBird Check-In®

Passenger & Payment Info

Price Payment Confirmation

Flight details [Modify](#)

Date	From	To	Time	Stop	Class
Wed 10/14	MSY	MDW	7:00 AM - 9:15 AM	2 hr 15 min	Nonstop
Fri 10/16	MDW	MSY	9:35 AM - 11:50 AM	2 hr 15 min	Nonstop

Who's flying?
Please make sure names match government-issued IDs.

* Required

FIRST NAME * MIDDLE NAME LAST NAME * SUFFIX

Iman Noorbakhsh

DATE OF BIRTH * GENDER * RAPID REWARD\$/ACCOUNT #

May 32 2020 Male

Enter valid date of birth.

Secure traveler information

Special Assistance

Add EarlyBird Check-In®