Usability Project Part 1 Website Evaluation

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Part 2 Below

Overview:

The category of website I will be looking at is Asian recipe websites. Different recipe websites are usually quite similar, and this can either make it easy or difficult to spot areas that could use improvement, as it either goes unnoticed or sticks out like a sore thumb.

Research:

List of websites I looked at:

<https://www.maangchi.com/>

<http://hannaone.com/>

<http://userealbutter.com/>

<https://mykoreankitchen.com/>

<https://importfood.com/>

<https://rasamalaysia.com/>

Looking at these websites together really helps you understand what the basic conventions are in these types of recipe websites. For most of these websites, we see two basic columns split on the left and the right. On the left we see the most recent recipes with large pictures and then on the right we see social media and advertising. Having this sort of convention helps a lot with these websites, since you know where to look right away as soon as the page opens, rather than trying to search all over the page for what should be the main content.

What I found a bit weird was how the search bar position and usage was not uniform across the board. You would normally expect to find a menu bar at the top below the header and then the search bar would be on the right of that, but that isn’t the case for every website here. There are a few where you have to go looking for the search bar, whether it is in a bad place or if it isn’t styled in a way that makes it stand out. Overall, the way the search results displayed was different for every single website, which was interesting since most of the content was very uniform otherwise.

The website I decided to choose for evaluation was userealbutter.com, and that is because it seems to have the bone structure to be a strong website like some of the others are, but appears to fall short of that mark by a wide margin. There are plenty of problems to be addressed here with usability testing, so I think it will be a good website to use.

Evaluation:

Web Assets

Grade EACH CATEGORY on a scale of A to F

Give each item in each category a PLUS (+), CHECK (✓) or MINUS (-)

A – Absolute confidence by user

B – Better usability with minor adjustments

C – Change or modify to improve

D – Difficult / challenging for user

F – Frustration / people fleeing your site

What website are you evaluating? http://userealbutter.com/

Layout \_\_D\_\_\_\_

\_\_-\_\_ Clear “call to action” on the home page

There is no particular call to action here, The recipe that is on the front doesn’t really stick out, it just happens to be the only thing that you can see

\_\_-\_\_ Clear emphasis and hierarchy

There is not much of a hierarchy here, the content seems to be slapped on the page with no real thought or care put into it.

\_\_-\_\_ Tasks prioritized on page

There is a lot of space between sections of the recipe and it makes it hard to see directions and such.

Navigation and Page Links \_\_B\_\_\_

\_\_+\_\_ Navigation is easy to find and available from every page

The navigation here is okay, You can access the recent recipes, the menu buttons, and the search bar from anywhere

\_\_ch\_\_ Navigation labels make sense and represent the content found within

For the most part the navigation labels are okay, but some of them are either too specific or not specific enough, such as creste butte love could just be “location information” or something of the sort, and “urb” would make more sense as “home”

\_\_-\_\_ Navigation is consistent in design, location and connections

The design around the navigation is all over the place here. There are lots of different links that all have different colors, and then you see a color like bright orange that you would assume is a link but it isn’t. Every link has different colors and different hover effects and it can really throw off a user when there isn’t uniformity there.

\_\_ch\_\_ Navigation works on mobile as well as larger screens

The navigation isn’t great on mobile, as the buttons for the menu don’t become any bigger, so you have to zoom in a lot to be able to press them, but the links and content itself look pretty good on mobile since it uses a one column centered hierarchy.

(Large enough buttons for fingers? Functional?)

\_\_+\_\_ Links have active/hover effect and are an emphasis color

All the links use the active and hover, even though the design is not consistent for them.

\_\_+\_\_ Links are descriptive (i.e. not “click here”)

Most of the links you know what you are getting into, they do a pretty good job of showing what page or information the link will take you to, other than the nav buttons.

Design \_\_D\_\_\_

\_\_-\_\_Color palette has adequate range of contrast

There isn’t really a color palette here, the background is white and there is nothing else really done colorwise to the page or it’s content.

(Can the content still be read by colorblind individuals?)

\_\_-\_\_No more than 3 typefaces, used and applied consistently

There appears to be only one typeface used, but it is only used in lower case at all points, and doesn’t seem to fit the headlines or the links very well. It might look better with just being the text font, but when the whole page is lowercase of one font it can be very drab. All of the font size is also the same, the headlines don’t really have a much larger font, They look almost the same as the first line of the paragraph.

Clear typographical hierarchy? No text is too small for sight-impaired viewers

\_\_-\_\_Design elements are lined up. Evidence of an underlying grid

As I stated before, there is no grid here they are simply using a single centered column for everything. This is the biggest problem I see with the website, structuring the content better would do wonders for readability.

\_\_ch\_\_Repeated design patterns, elements or treatments to create unity

It is all relatively uniform, they don’t really change their ideas across the pages, aside from the links being all sorts of different from each other.

\_\_-\_\_Related content placed more closely together – proximity

There is no relationship between different content since we only see a single recipe stretching all the way down the page.

\_\_-\_\_Emphasis / Call to Action for the site supported by the design

As stated before, there is no real call to action here.

\_\_-\_\_Use of principles of design evident in the site

Nope

\_\_ch\_\_Overall design is appropriate and consistent

I give this a check for consistency even if there isn’t much being done in terms of design, since all the pages look relatively uniform.

Content \_\_B\_\_\_

\_\_+\_\_Content is relevant to site topic and to audience

The content here is pretty good, they have some nice anecdotes, and plenty of pictures to go with the recipe, it just needs better structure.

\_\_-\_\_Content easy to scan and ranked by relative importance

Just like before, it isn’t very easy to scan because of the small column that you have to scroll down.

(Clear hierarchy with whitespace, headers, bullets?)

\_+\_\_\_Language is visitor centric: “you” not “we”

Since they are recipes, it talks a lot about what you are doing for the recipe.

\_\_+\_\_Tone, language and material appropriate for expected users

It feels a lot like a family-esque website where they are sharing their experience and recipe ideas. The content fits quite well in this way.

\_\_+\_\_Social media accessible and easy to find?

The only thing to break the single center column rule is their social media links, which helps it stand out a lot.

\_\_+\_\_Content is free of grammatical and spelling errors

Not much to say here

\_\_-\_\_Content is scaled down, with no unnecessary words

The content has way too many pictures in between recipe steps, and there are large portions of text tha have nothing to do with the recipe that can definitely be watered down a bit.

\_\_ch\_\_Error messages, form fields and pages in general are clear and

All the forms and pages are pretty clear here.

options are explained when possible

Conclusion:

Looking over this website I think I’ve managed to narrow down the four biggest usability issues that I will be testing out. First of all, having the entire page colored white can make websites difficult to read for some people, this is why we see a lot of websites that use white along with another accent color like blue. This page could benefit a lot from a color scheme or a new aesthetic that fits with the theme of the website. The recipes are all about asian food and cooking in the Colorado mountains, so showing that theme with the colors, images, and fonts can help a lot with making a more coherent webpage. The second issue is the structure of the content, making the text of the recipe the star and letting the pictures supplement it rather than take over. Thirdly would be the problems with inconsistent navigation design and implementation. By making all of the links uniform it can make it easier for the user to instantly tell that they are links rather than trying to hover or click on them to find out. Lastly I think the lack of related content or supplemental materials really hurts this website. If I’m looking at the Japanese mushroom roll recipe, but maybe I decide I want something similar but not quite the same, It can be really helpful for users to have links to similar recipes that they might want to check out. I will be exploring these four issues for my usability testing in part 2.

Report Part 2:

Intro and Overview Above

Tasks from task file:

* Can you find the social media links on this page? How do you know they are the social media links? Can you find them anywhere on the page?
* Can you find the recipe for almond toffee? Describe your thinking as you look for it. What links are you clicking on and how do you know they are links?
* Look back at the recipe for almond toffee. Can you find the directions for the recipe? Are the directions readable? If not, what would make it more readable?
* Can you find any recipe’s that are similar to the almond toffee? If not, do you think having related recipes to look at would help you find recipes you may like?
* What is the theme of the website? Can you tell from the colors and content of the design? Does it make it hard to read the content?
* Do you know where the menu bar is? Can you tell what the links go to? How can you tell that they are links?

Background on Users

My subjects were my family, I had 3 members of my family test with this website with the tasks I came up with. I started with my mother, she is a 40 year old paralegal, so she works with computers and websites most of the day in her job. She is used to government websites, which are generally not very user-friendly, so I think she was pretty good at finding the issues with websites. She has never seen this individual site before, but has seen similar sites before. My second subject was my brother, he is a 23 year old massage therapist but spends most of his time online so he is very familiar with websites. He has also never seen this site, and generally uses high budget websites where you don’t see a lot of usability issues. Third was my dad, who is a 55 year old general contractor, who doesn’t use the internet that much but can navigate his way around a couple pages that he knows. He’s never seen a page like this, so he is a good example of people who are mostly computer illiterate. The user tests took around 10 minutes for each of them.

Background on User Interface

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Findings

For my first issue, I looked at the color aesthetic and overall theme of the website. The first thing you see when you click on a website is the aesthetic, and it is what sets the stage for the rest of the user’s experience. During my tests, all three of the subjects expressed their confusion with the theme of the website. A pure white background with a couple of nonsense pictures at the top did very little for their experience. They expressed a desire for softer colors in the background to accentuate the content, and perhaps some pictures to express the mountain Asian food theme of the website. Especially for my dad, he expressed that it was difficult to look at the website for him because of the brightness of the white, compared to having some softer colors to ease the eyes. My mother and brother did not have as much of an issue with it, but they agreed it took away from the content. Adding some images and softer colors to the background would boost the readability by a large margin, especially for those who have some vision problems.

The second issue I looked at was the overall navigation. I had them look at the different links on the page, from the menu bar links to the general navigation links and then the social media links. For my brother and mother, they had no real issue figuring out what was a link, since even if they were different they changed on hover, with the exception of the title and the social media. They both expressed that they only knew the social media was a link because of the icons, and that a hover of some sort would help give weight to the links. All three subjects had no idea that the title “use real butter” was a link to the home page. It didn’t really stick out, and that was a problem for all of them to navigate back to the home. For my father, he had a lot more trouble figuring out what was a link, because some of them were grey and some were green, and then there were sections of orange text that weren’t a link. The uniformity here is a big problem. Making all of the links have the same styling will ensure there is no confusion on what is and isn’t a link, and making them stand out a bit more, especially with the title would help a lot. For the social media, having a hover effect would ensure that users know it’s a link, and perhaps fixing it to the page so that it stays as you scroll down would give it more availability rather than having to scroll to the top.

The third issue was with the content hierarchy and overall website structure. All three agreed that the content was good for the website, but that it was extremely hard to read due to the centered column design and the overly large pictures. They all had trouble finding the directions for the recipes, and then attributing the directions to the pictures was difficult. My dad especially complained that he only wanted to see the recipe ingredient and directions at the top, and that the extra stuff should be below it, not the other way around. This is an important issue, because if your users cannot easily find what they are looking for, they will just leave to a different website. A good recommendation here would be to perhaps use two columns for our content, and have the supplemental pictures and comments about the recipe on one side, with the directions on the other. This allows the users to easily find what they want, and they still have the ability to look at any background information or a picture that displays the step.

The last issue I wanted to look at was having similar content displayed when looking at recipes. This is a huge turnoff for most users when they want to look at a recipe, but it may not be exactly what they want, so they want to look at something similar to see if it is a better fit. Without this functionality, users become easily frustrated not being able to find related content, and that is what I saw in my tests as well. For my parents, they are both used to using normal recipe websites, so that if they find something they like they have the ability to explore related items, and not having that ability here really cut into the experience. It was a problem for my brother as well, as he did not know what to search for as a related item, and did not want to look through an alphabetized list of recipes for the right one. By adding related recipes or featured recipes on the sides of the pages would help get rid of some of the whitespace and provide users with a reason to stay on your website and look at more recipes compared to leaving for another site.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to come up with ideas on how to make this website more inviting and friendly to users looking for specific recipes. I recommended that they should add some sort of aesthetic or theme to the site in order to make it more readable and set the stage for the mountain Asian style cooking that the recipes are made for. Fixing the navigation was another priority, by making all the links uniform and helping any clickable link to stand out more, you give all users the ability to easily traverse through the website without having to be extremely web literate. Reading a single centered column website can be extremely boring, especially if it is structured poorly. By splitting the pictures and anecdotal text into one column, and then using the other column for directions, you provide a better structure for users to find the content they are looking for. Lastly I recommended to add some related recipes or featured recipes to the website in order to encourage users to explore and keep them looking at your webpage longer. I think experimenting with changes that go this route and then testing my family again to see what they think about the improvements would be the way to go from here. By testing each round of changes you could slowly improve the usability of this website.