What is it?

A web design competitive analysis shows the differences between the site you're working on and comparable sites. The differences high-lighted and the sites compared in the document depend on the purpose of the analysis.

D. Brown

What we'll cover today

- Purpose

- Audience

- Scale

- Context

- Format

Purpose

- Helps the design team and client understand where their site fits or will fit among other sites in the same space.

- Helps determine:

  - What customers are used to

  - Best practices
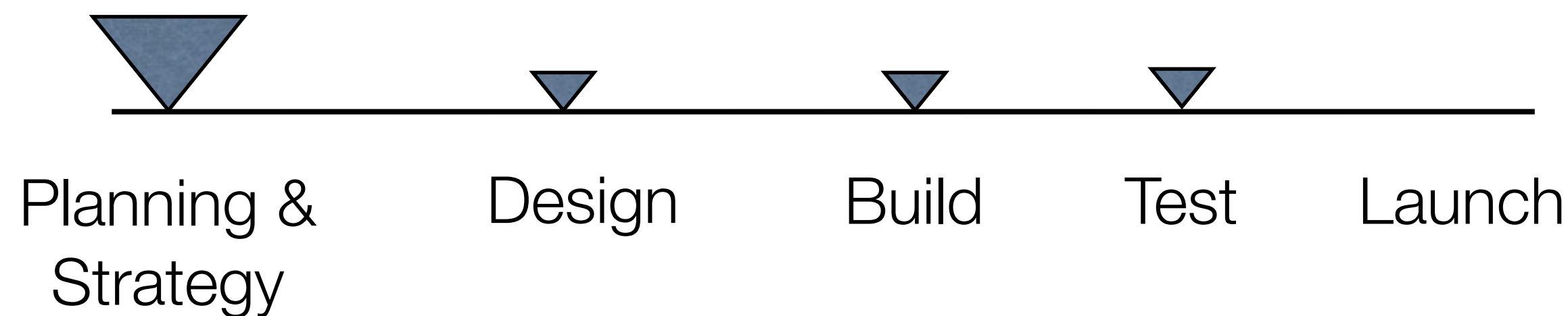
  - What works and what doesn't

Audience

- The business stakeholders

- Designers

- Developers

- Yourself

Scale & scope - how much work does it take to build one?

It depends ...

- on time

- on budget

- how many criteria you look at

- how many competitors you include

Context - when does it happen?

Planning & Strategy   Design   Build   Test   Launch

Usually done in a major way early in the project. But it also sometimes happens in an ad-hoc way throughout the project when you need some very specific analysis on a single interaction.

Format of the final report

It depends ...

on audience, purpose, and amount of data, but they commonly take the form of:

- Spreadsheets

- Posters

- Written reports

- Slide shows

- Sometimes a mix of these

You have to do one, now what?

- Purpose

- Competitive Framework

- Where to stop (this is often the hardest thing to determine)

- Which comparative formats will you use to communicate your ideas

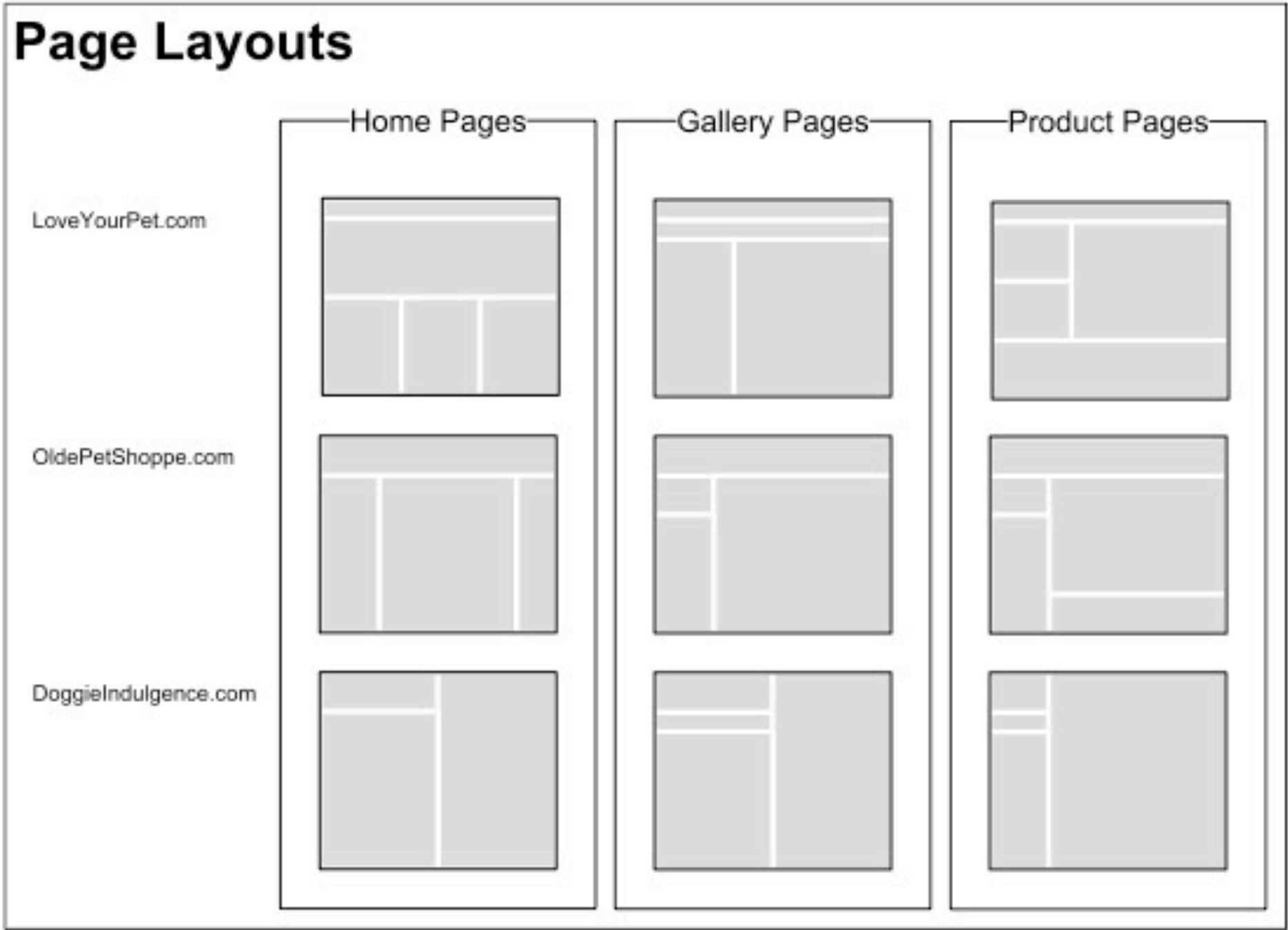Competitive Framework = Competitors + Criteria

Competitive Framework Formats

- Tables/spreadsheets

- 2 by 2

- Small multiples
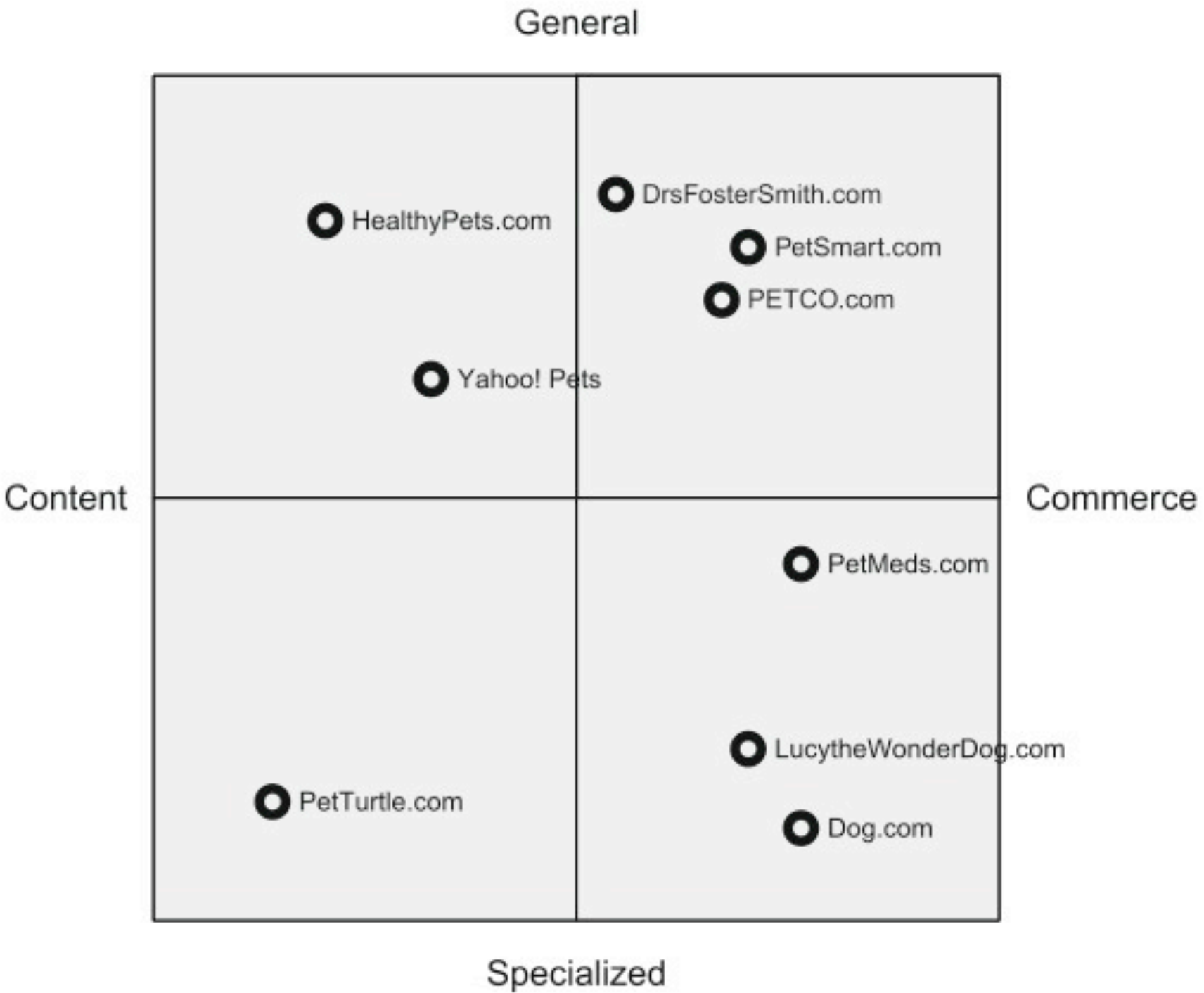
- Data: Yes/No, Scores, Descriptions

Tables

Criteria	PETCO.com	PetSmart.com
Products	No specific products, links to product categories and specials	Home page features six products
Search box	Upper-left-hand corner, adjacent to primary navigation	Upper-right-hand corner, between primary navigation and account navigation
Navigation	Primary navigation organized by pet. Additional navigation for retail services	Primary navigation organized by pet. Additional navigation for account management
Contact information	Linked from left-hand navigation	Linked from top navigation
Shopping functions	Links to shopping cart, account management, and order status	Links to shopping cart and account management

Small Multiples (thanks to E. Tufte)

2 by 2

General

Content — Commerce

Specialized

- HealthyPets.com
- DrsFosterSmith.com
- PetSmart.com
- PETCO.com
- Yahoo! Pets
- PetMeds.com
- LucytheWonderDog.com
- PetTurtle.com
- Dog.com

Data (in tables)

Scores

	PetSmart.com	DrsFosterSmith.com	PetMeds.com
Promoting products on home page	4	4	5
Alternate modes to find products	2	3	4
Promoting noncommercial content	3	1	4

Yes/No

	PetSmart.com	DrsFosterSmith.com	PetMeds.com
Products on home page	Yes	Yes	Yes
Retail store locator	Yes	No	No
Expedited shipping options	Yes	Yes	Yes
Non-pet-type categories	No	Yes	Yes

Descriptions

	PetSmart.com	DrsFosterSmith.com	PetMeds.com
Product catalog	Though the home page does not show the depth of the catalog, clicking into each pet category reveals a list of about two dozen product types, specific to the pet.	Extensive catalog of all kinds of pet supplies, somewhat more obscure than PetSmart.com. Clicking into a category reveals many different product types for each pet. There's a separate category for pet pharmacy, which is subcategorized by ailment.	The catalog is limited to dogs, cats, and horses, and focuses almost exclusively on medication. Nonpharmaceutical items are categorized under "accessories" for each type of pet.
Navigation	The catalog links on the home page are limited to pet types. Other links take users to store information and account information.	The catalog links on the home page are limited to pet types and sale categories.	Primary navigation is through a long list of ailments and needs, like "heartworm" or "grooming,"
Noncommercial content	Lots of noncommercial content but hidden behind two small links on the home page. This content does not offer any links into the catalog.	Extensive noncommercial content, with some linking into product catalog. The pet care articles reference each other, avoiding dead-ends in navigation.	Noncommercial content located in "Ask the Vet" section. Site contains extensive frequently asked questions, categorized by product category (though not linked to the products!) and a link to a separate pet care site.

Analysis done
Now, tell the story

- Competitor driven: walk through each competitor across all criteria, but start with criteria overview

- Moral driven (by criteria): walk through each criteria one by one, comparing competitors at each step

- Know your rationale - be prepared with it ...

  - You must say WHY you conclude what you conclude

  - You must say HOW it relates to the data

  - Have an opinion and back it up

Keep this stuff in mind

- Your audience and purpose of the document will help you decide on the format

- It is a strategy document, and does not describe the experience itself, but is a stepping stone to getting there

- It is an essential input to the design

- Generally, you choose competitors who are doing better work than you/your client

- Just because the competition does something doesn't mean you should

- Keep your data meaningful (see pg. 127 in Communicating Design)

pg 27 in Communicating Design reads:
"You could also build a document with all generalizations and no data. In this case, you may be overly concerned about simplifying the data for your audience, and end up boiling it down to the point of meaninglessness. You may also find yourself unconsciously biased – wanting to prove a point but finding the data doesn't stand up to your hypothesis."

Real, Small IA Problems

- Should we show this line if it equals zero?

- Should we disable the button on this form or just not show it at all if the user can't progress?

- We are running out of space in our breadcrumb trail for our wizard. How can we fix it?

- Button text for a wizard: Prev/Next? Back/Continue? Back to <pagename>/Continue to <pagename>? Action/Action? Cancel and Erase and Go back/I'm done here?

Recap

- It is (usually) part of planning phase

- Competitors & Criteria

- Small Multiples

- 2 by 2

- Scores

- Yes/No

- Descriptions
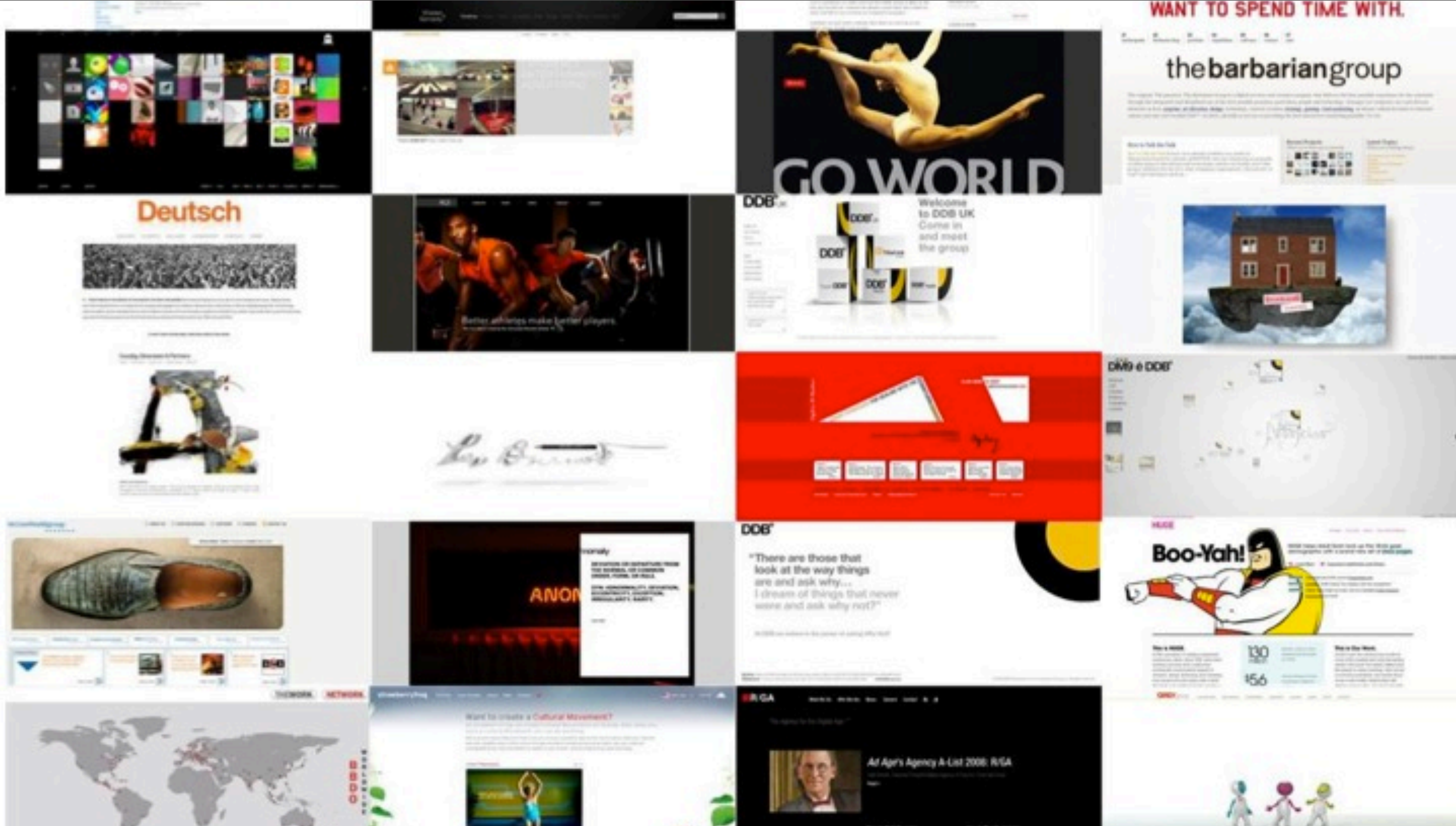
Friday, 2 November, 12

Talk about the competitive analysis of the online presence of advertising agencies. 60'ish pages long.
Key points to take away:
- Introduction to set up criteria & methodology
- Executive summary outlines key conclusions
- pg 6 – yes/no table
- 'Disappointing moments' sections
- Professional tone & expert opinions
- pg 40 – table with descriptions for video case studies comparison
- pg 44 – start of appendix: review of each site

How long? 5 full days

Approximately a 50hr work week.

Other examples from previous students

- Good opening summary to express purpose

- Defines what is going to be covered; therefore, she defines what is **not** covered

- Did not choose to use all the tools, but judiciously chose which tools communicated points best

- Screen captures overlaid with annotations and highlights

- Good summary at the end to express conclusions

Let's do some competitive analysis in class.

Competitive Framework

- Navigation

- Content Features

- Interactive Features

Navigation

- Common Items

- Location and structure

Main content features on home pages

- Carousels

- Secondary features

- Tertiary and lower level content

Interactive Features

- Data plan calculator (Rogers)

- Data plan calculator (Telus)

- Build your solution (Bell)

- Account management areas - requires login