Problem statement

The goal of this project is to create a user friendly system for creating and organizing wish lists for various events, like birthdays, weddings, or the like. While the complexity of the system is also important, the main focus will be on including potential users in the process, to create an intuitive and coherent system. This is summed up in the problem statement below.

What is needed to create an advanced system for wish list management, that feels easy to use, and at the same time satisfies the needs and wishes of the users?

Existing Solutions

Instead of blindly creating what we think is a solution for the problem, we found it important to take a look into any existing solutions. As it turned out there are already quite a few online wishlists to choose between. While this could mean that there is little more for us to do in the field, we took a look at some of the sites, realising they all have pros and cons. We did not find everything we wanted for a solution in one site.

The most ambitious sites had some very good features including login with Facebook, a search engine with item comparison, pricealert, and sharing to many social networking sites. While all these things are great, even the ambitious sites were definitely still missing some important things. One of the things that stood out to us, was the fact that of all the sites we looked at, only one site had the feature to hide from you what has been bought from your wishlist. This seemed off to us, as most people would probably prefer not knowing what they are going to get.

Also notable, was the design of many of the sites. Some of them were quite tedious to navigate, and felt counterintuitive.[1] The fact that a few of them was cluttered with odd images and aggressive commercials did not make them inviting either. One site actually stood out and had a great design, but at the cost of having next to no flexibility in customization. It seems that the amount of cluttering is proportional to how many features these sites have attempted to create; probably because the more ambitious sites try to earn money through advertisements.

Plain bad (or outdated) design was also a thing to come across. Surprisingly all of the sites we visited had no option to add several items at once. You have to click something like “New item...”, create the item and then click “Save” for every item you wish to add to the list. On creating lengthy list this seemed a bit tedious. This should be possible without having to navigate to a new subpage twice just to create one item.

In conclusion there are definitly reasons to create this project. While sites similar to what we want to make exist, we do not find that any of them are near perfect solutions of the problem we are trying to solve. All of them have certain strenghts and weaknesses, and there are several things to improve on. Even by gathering all the good things from the existing solutions there are a still few things that seem to be missing to satisfy the requrements for our solution.

[1] FiXme Fatal: An example would be nice, I think. /Dan

1 User Experince

An important part of this project is creating a product with a good user experience. While we, as developers, can have a good idea as to what will create a good user experience, it can some times be hard to know if a given function makes as much sense to the user as to the developer. Therefore it is important to include the user in the development process, and this chapter will discuss a good way to do just that.

1.1 The PACT Framework[1]

PACT, as explained by explained by Benyon (2010, Ch. 2) is an acronym for *People, Activities, Contexts, and Technologies*, and the aim of the framework is to help developers understand the needs and requirements of the users in different situations. This will help us make sure we develop a system that fills the users' needs and not what we think are the users' needs. Each part of the framework is explained in the sections below.[2]

1.1.1 People

A definitly important aspect of designing anything intended for people to use is a target audience. Often however, one can be too narrow minded and end up with something like: "We want to create a huge TV. So that means our target audience is people with a lot of money who likes big screens." While this may be a bit far fetched, the direction can sometimes lead in that direction. But there are obviously more aspects to it than that. Some considerations can be skipped from time to time though. In our project we want to create a online wish list (initially only) available on the world wide web. As such we do not have to cover the physical aspect of people. We do not have to create a new device to access our site. There are already plenty of ergonomically designed interfaces to do that. We can limit our worry to our own domain.
As our product is visual only, we have to take into account the psychological variety of people. We can easily design something we think is great. And it may very well be great in functionality, but if the user are unable to navigate the site that functionality is lost. This is a good reason to test products on real people. The

[1] FiXme Fatal: Maybe look at FACTOR too?

[2] FiXme Fatal: The details about PACT are also explained by Benyon (2012) - should we reference that more clearly?

product has to be appeal to intuition and be clear in order for all people to be able to use it properly.
Mentality is also something to take into account. What happens when the user experience a different outcome than expected? And why did that happen in the first place? Is the site sufficiently user friendly to help the user get back on track? This can be another pitfall if the site is not tested on real people; Another reason to not underestimate the power of bringing real people in and observing their use of a product.

1.1.2 Activities

The activities aspect is an aspect most designers probably will think about. But not necessarily in the right way. While everyone would want people to use their product, not everyone will remember to take into account how often, how exactly or how fast people will use it. These are all aspects that can change how the product should be shaped. In our scenario it would probably be realistic that people visit the site now and then just to add a wish they thought of. As such we might want to make sure that it is easy to do just that. We might also want to consider that when people have used the site for a wish list, many of them will not come back until next year for their next birthday. Will they remember the site then? Will they feel lost when they come back. A good design will have to take people's activities into account and compliment them. A way to make sure people will keep using the site could for example be by sending the user a mail 10 months after the last birthday, stating that it is probably time to get a new wish list going.

1.1.3 Contexts

All activities always happen in some context. There is always *something happening* around the system when it is used. An activity may be carried out alone or in a crowd, in bright sunshine or in complete darkness. A system may even have impact on an organization in that it may alter the ways things are done, or even replace people. That gives us three different areas of interest when taling about *contexts*: Physical environment, social context, and organizational context. Because it is not an aim for this project to be used by organizations, but rather by private people, we will mainly focus on the two former; physical environment and social context. In the longer run the organizational context may be worth investigating further, but for now we will use our resources on more important subjects.
The physical environment covers the surroundings in which an activity takes place. This may be in a noisy envrionment, it may be inside, or it may be outside. In this particular case, where the system is a web service, it may be used in a quiet office environment or on a bus using a smartphone or tablet.
The social context has to do with the people that may or may not be around when using the system. If people have to wait in line to use it, this may stress the current user, and if the system is used in a quiet environment sounds may be disturbing. People nearby may also be a threat to security or privacy if passwords or e-mail addresses are visible on the screen.

1.1.4 Technologies

This part of the PACT framwork is concerned with the technologies or media available for the system designer (and eventually the user). This includes whether there is a keyboard available, if there is a pointing device (e.g. a mouse) or if the system is operated via a touch screen. As our goal is to make a web application we will focus on technologies that allow access to an internet browser (e.g. a PC, smartphone, or tablet). This particular problem does not leave many (if any) options for specialized hardware, so it is important the solution will make good use of the existing hardware; it needs to take into consideration that people may use it on a touch device or on a low *or high* resolution monitor.

Bibliography

Benyon, D. (2010). *Designing Interactive Systems: A Comprehensive Guide to Hci and Interaction Design* (2nd ed.). Harlow, Essex, England: Addison Wesley.