INFO 90005 Information Architecture

Assignment 1: User research (30% of Subject Marks)
Deadline: Monday 12th September 2022, 5pm.

In this assignment, you will investigate users' expectations through a log analysis.

Nature's Way is a clothing retailer that specialises in natural materials, including a variety of different wools, linen, silk and cotton. They avoid the use of any plastics (e.g. polyurethane) in what they sell. Across the COVID period, they have seen a growth in demand for their merchandise, in part due to an increased demand for comfortable-to-wear clothing, and in part from a rising demand among many customers for clothing that does not involve the use of plastics, for a variety of environmental reasons. Their current site has a relatively simple structure, but it is now needing to be revised. The range of their stock has increased, and this has created problems with their information architecture. Current reported problems from visitors to the store who had used the website include:

- Visitors have difficulty finding their way around the site. In particular in browsing across the range (see below for further details)
- The current search engine does not seem to be effective; interviewed users are reporting that they can't easily locate products that match their needs (e.g. low-allergenic wool – e.g. merino or cashmere is hard to find a match for)
- Discovering the delivery information on the site is problematic.

Goal of the Exercise

The objective of this exercise is to plan a log analysis exercise to help investigate current problems with the website. A sample dataset will be made available to you to examine to help in this planning. You should take care to identify appropriate measures that might help confirm the example problems above.

Planning the Activity: Preparation

Choice of Measures

There are a range of potentially useful measures that could help confirm any of the problems above. Lecture material will be an excellent starting point. You should consider which measures may help test the suspected issues, and which pages in the navigation structure (see below) are most likely to be relevant to each of the problem areas. While only a small sample log is initially available, this should be enough to outline your approach. Take care to explicitly justify your choice of measures with reference to lecture or written guidance (e.g. Nielsen-Norman Group or ACM publications) where possible, using references to make clear your source.

Choice of Pages

You may focus on a particular set of pages in your initial analysis. This might focus particularly on one of the above problems, but all should be considered to some degree. Within a practical project, you need to be selective which pages you focus on initially, before taking the time and resources to examine a larger set in more detail. Make an explicit judgment about which pages will be your focus, drawing on the specifics of this brief, and principles from lectures and written guidance.

Study design

There are multiple choices in how to undertake any log analysis. As already noted, the focus here is on an initial plan, and to do a preliminary analysis of the sample log data provided. Consider which problems are most readily analysed from log records, and prioritise your attention to the log data explicitly as a result. The issue of which pages and measures has already been identified.

If there are additional steps you would ideally take in addition to examining the current log data, then note these in your report. Bear in mind that this practical phase would be likely done in only 2 staff days of work, including the report writing. As a result, your initial analysis plans cannot include extensive work that would take days to arrange or execute. You may and should take care to report your choices based on that time constraint in your report.

Planning the Activity: Expected Results

You should capture your expectations of the measures that you wish to choose based on the scenario above. For example, if electing to choose the bounce rate on a single page, be explicit whether you would expect the existing rate to be high or low, what the rate should be in a well-designed site, and why these expectations can be justified based on existing literature and industry benchmarks.

There is no need to make speculative design decisions or conclusions at this stage. You should be careful to have a focussed aim on the current activity, and how it would help you undertake a successful full analysis

Submission format

Your submission should be uploaded to the LMS in PDF format. It should include:

- Study design (choice of measures, focus pages and study design): No more than two pages of A4.
- Initial Results from Sample Data (executive summary): one page A4, main outcomes, outline plans and expected outcomes high-level summary.
- Expected Results: one page A4, likely outcomes from the full study, any concerns from the initial data, additional actions that should be taken in addition to the log analysis

Text should be no less than 11-point text with 2cm margins on an A4 page. Take care to fully credit, cite and quote other people's work and comply with the university academic integrity policy. Ensure that text is legible, spell-checked, grammatically sound and visually well presented.

Where possible, design decisions and recommendations should be backed up by research literature to support your point.

Expected Time

This exercise should take no more than 20 hours of time, including planning, reading and presentation. This represents 10% of the expected 200 study hours for this subject.

Marking Scheme

The grade is awarded as follows, from 30 marks:

Overall Presentation: 5 marks
Study design: 15 marks
Initial Results (Executive summary): 5 marks
Expected Results (Additional material): 5 marks

Indicate scoring out of 5 for each part:

5: High-quality material at a polished professional standard; well-argued ideas justified in detail by clear linkage to research and professional materials throughout. Key points are clearly emphasised, and minor points only provided when necessary. Would match the output of an experienced professional.

4: Very good material which is generally polished, and key points are justified by appropriate references to research and professional knowledge. Moderate but inconsistent use of appropriate emphasis for critical or less important issues. Matches the standard expected of an intermediate professional.

3: Good material that is a presentable draft, with some points justified with references. Weak emphasis, or inappropriate emphasis on minor concerns. With further work would reach a professional standard.

2: Fair material that is workable but has little or no justification, or justified only by unsupported opinion. Unclear emphasis, and/or poor grammar in many places. Some lack of evidence of the work done, or minor inconsistencies between data and findings. Unsuitable for presentation except as a first draft.

1: Poor material that is incomplete or has extensively unclear expression or bad spelling. No clear justification, and evidence of flaws in the analysis. Evidence may be incomplete, or major inconsistencies between data and findings. Unsuitable for use as a first draft.

0: Missing or absent material, or profoundly erroneous analysis. Repeated and serious grammatical errors. Evidence entirely absent, or clear conflicts between findings and the original data. Needs substantial rework throughout.