

Design Thought Process

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User Research and Testing

Before I even began to design a single new element, I tested the current website homepage with two users and gathered their feedback. I asked some simple questions such as:

- “What direction do you feel the site is trying to lead you?”
- “What stands out to you the most?”
- “What are your first impressions?”
- “What do you like about the homepage?”
- “What do you dislike about the homepage?”
- “What could be done to improve the homepage?”

This user feedback was very valuable in guiding my design direction. Both users indicated they felt there was too much happening and too much given to them on a single page. They understood the reason behind that design, but it just wasn't working for them. They especially did not like the tabbed section that tries to give you everything in one windowed section. The design elements were off to them as well as feature overload.

I also looked at other websites that showcased ocean attractions and tourism and showed them to my users and asked what they liked about those sites. I took note of those elements and designs that appealed to the users.

I took their feedback and started to iterate on designs.

Designing the new homepage

Due to the design time limit, and my own time I had available, I did a few quick mockups directly in Adobe XD. I shared my low-fidelity mockups with my two use volunteers. After getting feedback on the mockups, I created my final design.

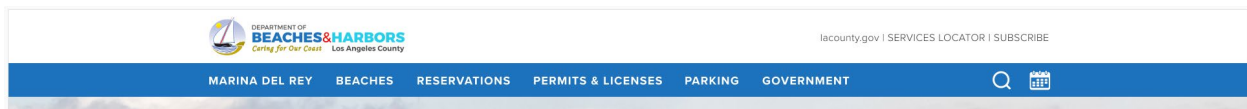
Here are a some examples of feedback I got from users:

- “The background image is blurry and looks like old site design.”
- “The main menu is dated looking.”
- “The giant “welcome” text takes up too much space and just doesn't look good.”
- “I don't understand what the middle section is. Is it a second menu? Because then it shows new content in the window and there are even more buttons.”
- “The buttons in the middle section don't look like buttons.”
- “I don't like the magazine/poster looking animation thingy.”

- “The blue highlighted links in the mega menus look like heading text sections, not links. But they are links.”
- “In the menus the word “link” in grey boxes makes no sense to me. The menu items are links, so what do they mean by “link” in the grey box next to it?”
- “I don’t mind the maps and their animated features, but they put the map in a small box and it feels squeezed. Id prefer to have a whole page dedicated to the map and using it. I also think the map could look better.”
- “I actually like the bottom section design that says, ‘Explore Marina del Rey’ and ‘Discover LA’s Best Beaches’. It’s odd because to me those two boxes don’t match the design of anything else on the homepage. But I like them. Maybe use those more.”
- “They’re just trying to do too much and give you too much on the homepage. They need to reduce the content. I feel overwhelmed by it all. It’s too much.”

I took that user feedback to heart as I began my final design. I too agreed with much of what the users had to say.

Both users I tested indicated they did not mind the menu structure of the main menu items, nor did they mind the drop-down menus and how they functioned and looked. They both only said that the menu could use a superficial redesign. So that is what I focused on. I redesigned the main menu sections, but left all the content the same, including the drop-down menus.



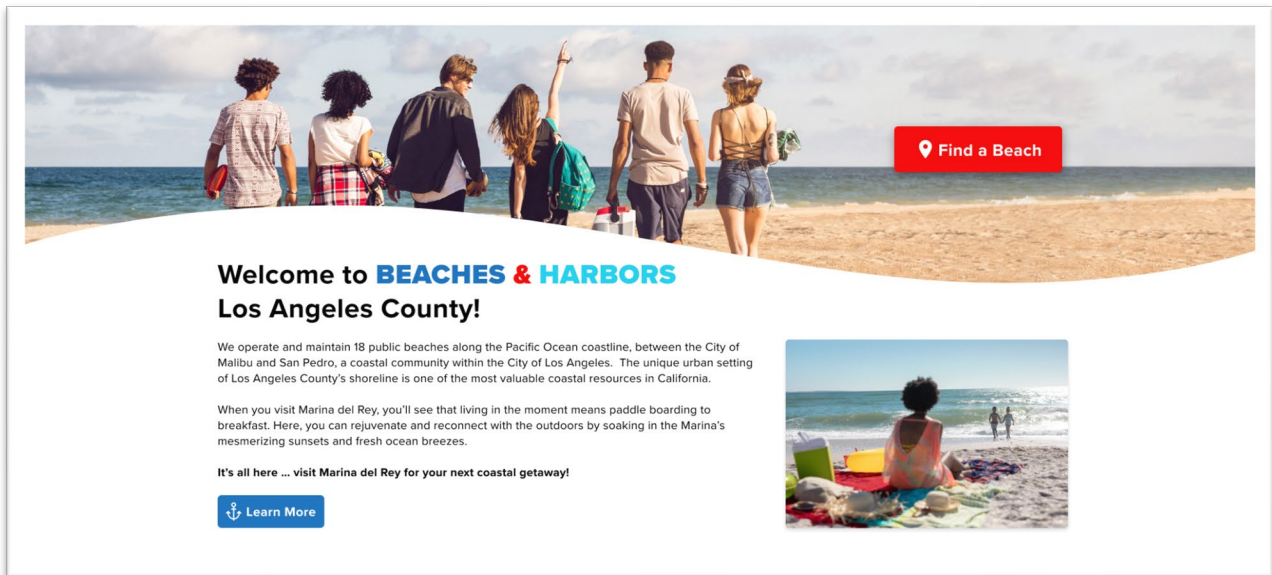
My first large task was to decide how to reduce the amount of content presented on the homepage. I realize that most likely stakeholders told the designer they wanted all this on that page, but users think it’s too much.

I got rid of the background image and instead opted for a modern looking hero banner at the top. No so big that it pushes all other content below-the-fold of the screens window, but also not too small that it doesn’t catch the eye and draw in the user.

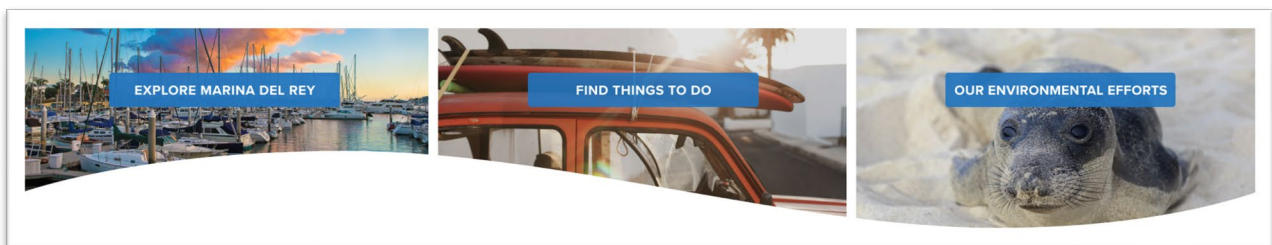
I got rid of the entire tabbed section and instead changed each tab into a link on the homepage to more content that could be better expanded on a new, separate page.

I moved the “Welcome” tab to be a welcome message at the begging of the homepage. And if the user wants to see more, they can click the “Learn more” button.

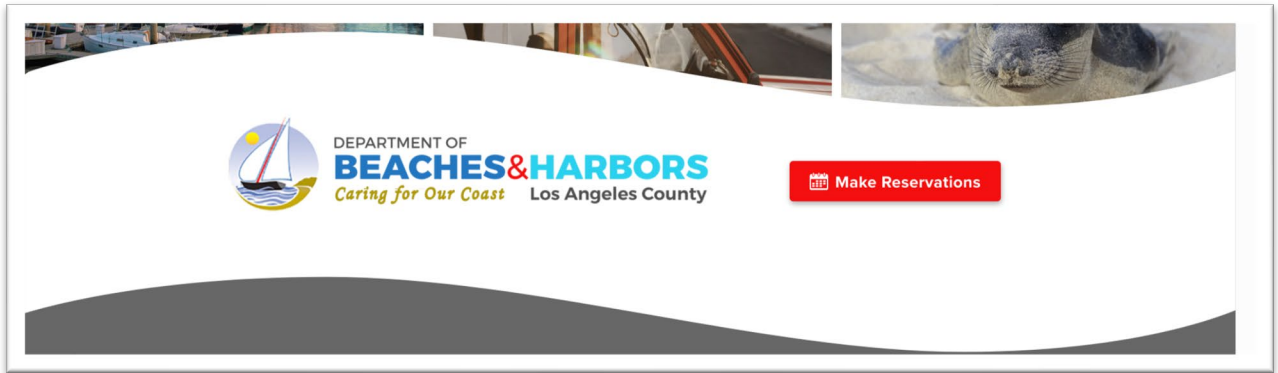
The second tab, “Find a beach” was moved to be a main call to action in the hero banner. Following the user feedback I got, I decided that that whole map can exist on its own page with more space. Rather than trying to cram it all into the tabbed window section. So that red CTA takes you to the beach map.



After taking the two first tabs, “Welcome” and “Find a beach”, I decided to make the last three into more inviting image links under the “Welcome” section. Again, as the users indicated, I did not try to cram a paragraph into each image box or have tabs or dropdowns or any hidden content. I instead opted for images and links combined to please the eye and the user can then click the links to view more about each of those subjects. That allows each of those subjects to have their own page with more space to design good content. Not try to squish it all in the tabbed box window section the site currently has.



The final section is meant to showcase the logo of the department. Since I reduced the logo in the heading section at the top, and it appears from the current site that they want the logo big, I added this section to have the large logo and a new call to action to make reservations. Since the 3rd main menu item is, “Reservations”, and that drives purchases and tourism, I decided that would be a good call to action to showcase in this section.



I left the footer section with all the same content, but I changed the design.

After my redesign I tested again with both of my volunteer users. They gave me very positive feedback. I made some new changes to image choices and some other small design nuances. Then I was given the thumbs up from my user volunteers that the new design was much better than the current site.