**Task 1: Gather and present user requirements**

How the study was planned and conducted:

The first aim of planning this user study was to figure out what type of system the travel booking website is. Ideally, it should be a “walk up and use” system, which is aimed at “ordinary users” in the sense that they do not need to have an expert knowledge of travel booking in order to use the website. For the user study, I chose two people, one has had vast experience in online booking and the other has never used a travel booking website before. Furthermore neither of the participants had expert knowledge in IT nor computing.

Seeing as I was only studying two people, I wanted qualitative, not quantitative data. This left me with interviews and direct observation as techniques for gathering the data. I decided to go with interviews, after looking at the “DECIDE framework” as they are good for exploring issues, which is the aim of my user study, to gather their requirements for a good, user friendly travel booking website. The advantages also outweighed the disadvantages, where although interviews are generally, time, travel and cost restricted; those restraints were not as dominant as I carried out the interviews in their own home. Furthermore, the fact that I was present meant that I could guide the interviewee should it be required and hence make sure I gather data relevant to my research.

When planning the interview, I started out with a few key questions to ask and build upon that. I did not however plan the whole structure of the interview, as I believe a semi-structured interview would be best, allowing me to pursue concepts as they arose and get a stronger feel for what the interviewee as a user of the website wants and needs. I also made sure the questions I asked were not pre-empted in such that the interviewee would give me an answer that was encouraged by the way my question was phrased. For example in the basic scripts of the interview questions I asked them to describe and explain why your past experiences on travel booking websites, rather than asking, tell me why your previous experiences of travel booking websites have been unsatisfactory, thereby encouraging the interviewee to answer as if that assumption was true.

HTA:

0. Book a plane ticket on the internet

1. Navigate to flight booking website

2. Find the required ticket

2.1 Access search page

2.2 Access Advanced Search

2.3 Choose class

2.4 Choose how many stops

2.5 Enter dates from calendar and locations of departure and arrival

2.6 Choose from a selection flights from results of search criteria

2.7 Check availability

3. Choose required ticket

4. Pay for the ticket

4.1 Choose preferred payment method

4.2 Enter shipping details

Plan 0: do 1-3-4

If ticket isn’t advertised for example on sale do 2-3-4

Plan 2: do 2.1-2.5-2.6-2.7

If flight results are too vast and need to be more specific do 2.2-2.3-2.4-2.5-2.6-2.7

Plan 4: do 4.1

If new customer or if details from a previous booking is not saved do 4.1-4.2

List of Concepts:

**Plane**

Carrier – e.g. AA – AA, AA Eagle, One World Alliance

Size/Capacity – e.6 747, 777

Quantity – more than one stop or non-stop

Time – morning, afternoon, redeye

Seat – Aisle, window, middle

Smoking/Non Smoking

**Class**

First

Business

Economy Plus

Economy

Upgrades

**Ticket**

Delivered to house

Pick up at Airport

E-ticket

**Passengers**

More than one

Adults

Seniors

Students

Children – Travelling alone, age groups within

Infants –in a seat, sitting on passenger

**Website User Friendly**

Calendar

Lookup airports within distance

Search by – price, schedule

Air miles

Visa Information

**Task 2: Develop a persona and scenario**

Why I chose these particular persona and scenario:

My persona and scenario concern Emma, as I believe she represents a typical professional user, and depicts that even people high in their jobs can have trouble from using an online travel booking website. I also believe she represents the typical IT knowledge of the user audience. Emma also is a vegetarian, which is something she will need to consider when booking her flight, which the in-flight meal caters to this need. The fact that this is something that the website needs to cater for means I will need to implement extra needs to design to cater for all people.

It’s interesting that she is not what most people will consider a beginner user, considering her job outline, yet encounters trouble with the travel booking website.

Persona Chosen:

Emma works in a corporate investment firm in the field of merging and acquisitions. After working three years in London, she got promoted to an overseas job in Milan. Apart from using the internet for emailing and research through search engines, she only uses the internet for instant messaging to her friends and family. She is a vegetarian .She is a family oriented person; she calls her parents sister and grandparents every weekend. Every Christmas she goes to Dover to spend the holidays with her family. Previously, she has driven down from her North London home down to Dover or taken the trains. She has never used the internet for travelling, as she had a railcard for travelling in Britain and if she needed to meet clients anywhere, it was arranged and paid for by the company she works for. While money isn’t a worry for her, she looks for sales whenever possible; recently she saw advertised Christmas breaks to London for a travel booking website. This is her first year abroad, and has never taken a flight outside Italy since arriving a few months ago.

Scenario Chosen:

Emma is booking her flight for Christmas. She goes on to Google and searches for booking flights. She logs onto the first link website and is greeted with a huge banner saying the flight sales has now ended, this disappoints her but opts to carry on. After closing the pop-up, she looks to book her flight, but has to navigate through all the links on the page advertising offers not interesting her before finally finding the Flights and Holidays tab that was actually at the top of the page, but having been drawn to the middle of the page by the previous banner she missed it. She now reaches the booking page and proceeds to enter the details. In the departure field, she puts Paris and London in the arrival field, booking 1 passenger and business class from the drop down menus and enters the departure date from the calendar. After clicking the next button she is brought back to that page with the departure and London fields highlighted. She doesn’t understand what is wrong. It turns out that she needed to put the airport names. After resolving that, she realises that needs to make sure that she gets a vegetarian meal. She can’t see any option at the current screen and clicks continue. The same happens till she gets to the payment screen. She goes back trying to find the option for specifying meal choices and has no luck finding it. After the third attempt getting to the payment screen, she gives up and decides to use the telephone instead.

**Task 3: Produce a storyboard for your chosen scenario**

Main Design Decisions:

I considered design principles and patterns when making decisions for the design. The main six design principles are visibility, feedback, constraints, mapping, consistency and affordance.

With regards to visibility, I made sure that the layout of the webpage was clear and simple. By only having a few options and parts to the page, the user is not overwhelmed with information which may lead to confusion. Furthermore is used bold colours and large font to guide the user to the important information. I incorporated a search function in the page, which allows the user to easily input what they want and get an output to exactly what they need. Calendars were used for dates, so the user can see the days and also eliminate the possibility of invalid dates entered.

With regards to feedback, it was important to not scare the user with vast amounts of text. There is a lot of graphical parts to ensure the page is as simple as possible. Furthermore I incorporated a pop-up which is shown after the user inputs their search queries and clicks continue, this was to prompt the user to check for mistakes in their queries and offers the chance to rectify.

With regards to constraints, if the user chose a one way flight, the return dates were greyed out, to make sure the user does not enter the dates in the wrong field. I also made used of drop down menus for dates and number of passengers, and radio buttons for choice of class, eliminating the non-viable options. Furthermore checkboxes were used for the choice of flexibility and time of day preferences.

In terms of mapping, I followed conventional layouts after researching existing travel booking websites. The user works the page from top to bottom, ensuring the process is done in a logical order. The order for the process was considered the same way, with flight search, flight choice, seat and other preferences choice and finally confirming the booking and payment. I also considered mistakes by the user, for example if a destination was spelt wrong, a possible correct destination is suggested.

When considering consistency, I made sure I kept the same choice of inputs for similar tasks. All dates used a calendar, all fields of destination/arrival were text fields, all choices where there could only be one choice e.g. class were radio buttons.

Finally when considering affordance, I made it easy for the user to see the functionality of every part of the page. For example it was clear that the continue buttons needed to be clicked, text fields to have input of text and so on.

As for considering design patterns, I decided to make the search area of the page into a form. This is a common used pattern for inputting data. I incorporated auto complete into the text fields, which would help the user enter the destinations and more importantly the airports. I decided against a two panel layout and went with a one panel then another, then another etc, to guide the user confidently along the booking process.

Storyboard:

See next few pages

**Task 4: Evaluation of an existing travel website**

Summary of findings from Heuristic Evaluation:

I evaluated easyjet.com using Nielsen’s Heuristics . With regards to the Visibility of System Status, easyjet.com performs well, with pop-ups for clarification of the user’s steps in their bookings, ensuring the user is making the correct choices. It also outlines how far along the process of booking the travel the user is at in steps at the top of the page.

When evaluating with the matches between the system and the real world, the website did well yet again. The website’s language is quite informal, with comfortable and easy to understand concepts put forward. The order in which the procedure is done is familiar to the user as well.

As for control and freedom, I believe the website excels. The initial pop-up to confirm your choice allows the user to have an “emergency exit” should the choices the user made be wrong and can easily leave the unwanted state.

Evaluating using Consistency and Standards shows the website’s strongest Heuristic. Everything is very straightforward, the choice of words used cause no confusion and the user can easily proceed with the booking without the worry of wondering if he/she has made a mistake or wonder whether certain words or actions mean different things.

Error prevention is pretty decent. The website fulfils this Heuristic is at the start with a confirmation message, and also uses a calendar for selecting dates, rather than having the user type in dates which could be an invalid one.

With regard to recognition, the website’s design has done an amazing job, with the use of bold colour and very large font and buttons to guide the user. Furthermore the user is constantly reminded on each page the details of his/her booking so far in a large floating box that follows wherever you scroll.

I do feel however, there is a lack of flexibility and efficiency. There is no quick way to proceed along the process of the booking; each user regardless of experience walks the same path.

In terms of Aesthetic and Minimalist design, I do believe there is a lot of non-required information on most of the pages, for example when you choose the flight, you go through the choice of hotel and car rentals even if you don’t need it.

The website does well handling the errors, with the clear pop-up and possible solutions provided, but apart from that, it is limited.

Finally, I felt the help available pretty decently with a large list of FAQs to help answer the common questions.

How I planned and conducted the user study:

For the user study, I chose to use the talk aloud technique to help evaluate the interface design. By observing their actions and their thought processes, it enabled me to see the decision making they go through and highlight any problems they face. Seeing as the aim was to book a journey, I didn’t specifically design individual tasks for them to do, as it is generally a naturalistic action, instead I told them what I wanted them to book and have them themselves go on to the website and do it. With regards to the specificity of the task, I just asked them to book the cheapest flight from London (any airport) to Paris (any airport) for sometime next week. This gave them the freedom of choice for airline, airports and time of day, only restricting the departure and destination locations. The domain was set that it was a journey between two places. I did not give any additional detail, for example how to find the flights, using a list of available flights or using the search function, instead that was up to them.

I needed to get data from two different sets of users. I chose my parents as they suited my requirement perfectly. My mother is a very experienced user of online booking, whereas my father has never used the internet apart from checking email. It also made sense to choose these two as my candidates as the environment wouldn’t be alien to them; a comfortable environment would produce more accurate results. Furthermore this mean I didn’t have to consider any time or money constraints.

To help make sure it was a fair test, I chose a website that neither of them used before but have both heard of, easyjet.com. Also before I conducted the study I had informed them how to perform a talk aloud task and went through an example myself, any queries were them handled. This made sure that u would get the data I needed.

Summary of findings from user study:

As expected, the experienced user had much less problems than the beginner user, but it was very interesting the find that they both encountered two common problems. The first was that they found the layout of the selection of flights displayed quite confusing. They both preferred a textual or list layout, rather than a flash applet. They didn’t like the 3day view idea. Furthermore, even though the continue button floats around on the right hand side when you scroll, they both spent a while looking for it, as by convention they were looking for that or similar to be on the bottom of the page.

They both commented that the calendar for booking the dates were useful, as it enabled them to check the days of the journey, as they both decided to go for weekend breaks. The experienced user was commenting that apart from the continue button, the layout was pretty, with the use of bold colours and large font. They also added that finding the cheapest flight was very easy as it was already highlight for them when they went to choose the flights.

The experienced user did not like that the luggage and travel insurance was added for them, as she would have wanted to do that herself, whereas the beginner praised that the website had done that for them.

The beginner user did however encounter problems at the start locating the area to book the ticket as his eyes were led all over the page looking at offers and saying, ok I see all the offers but where do I just book what I need.

Overall both participants managed to carry out the task with relative ease, with no major obstacles in the way.

How well the site reflects the user requirements:

My user requirements dictate that the website should be user friendly. In this area the website excelled. The layout was simple, and there were many helpful parts incorporated in the website. The calendars and pop up confirmations prompt user accuracy. The user also had their search results sorted by day and price, very helpful.

The website also had choices of class available, but not a preference of choice of seat type. It did however provide information for those travelling with small children, which was an extra plus.

On the negative side, each user was forced to go through a hotel and car rental page, which is only useful for some, perhaps an option whether either was required on the first place would have been more appropriate. Moreover, which the search results were ordered by day, it did not break down the time of day clearly, this should have been highlighted.

In conclusions, the website reflected the user requirements very well. The layout was simple and in general the interface was very user friendly. The idea was that it should be a walk up and use system, and this website reflect it well.