Travel Booking Site Design Critique

Team: The PowerPuff Girls

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Description and Executive Summary

Description:

This document describes my findings after evaluating Team 4’s website wireframe. I have evaluated it using the heuristics of useful interaction design and detailed it within the UAR templates provided by our professor. I walked through Team 4’s wireframe for their website until I found seven problems and two good aspects of their current functionality and layout/design. I refined my UAR’s to be readable and useful even for those who aren’t aware of how the website is laid out or isn’t as familiar with the design. Finally, I summarize the problems that I found and summarize any recommendations I have for the design going forward. I also discussed my overall experience working on this assignment later on near the end of this report.

Executive Summary:

Based on my findings, I didn’t find too many important problems with this team’s interface. The design was solid and adhered to many heuristics well so I had to really focus onto fine details to be able to find any problems to describe within my UAR’s. Many of the aspects I found to be problematic were mainly cosmetic issues and a few minor issues that would have been bothersome but not detrimental to the overall function of the website. Many of the suggested changes I offered were also simple to implement if the team chooses to use them such as adding in a checkbox or removing a section of unnecessary text. Overall, this was a solid interface with little to criticize.

Introduction

This website functions as a typical booking website for people planning vacations or other trips that require hotels, car rentals, etc. It allows for a general broad search on the home page where you can enter in your arrival and departure days as well as the locations you’re going to and coming from. This search can be narrowed down to specifically looking for lodging, rental cars, flights, and bundled packages that include things such as flight and lodging bundles to provide an option to save money. Once the user initiates the search, they are presented with a results screen that lists all the options pulled up from their search criteria. They can use the sidebar on the left side of the screen to further narrow down the list with more detailed criteria such as vehicle types, lodging types, exact price ranges, etc. One the user chooses the items they want to their cart, they can choose any extra amenities provided by the specific items they chose, such as which class their flight seats are, and enter their payment information as well as their email to check out and finalize their decision.

UAR’s

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| No. **Christine\_\_\_-Chrisrine Wendell - 1\_\_\_** | **Problem/Good Aspect** Problem |
| **Name:**  Can’t Remove a Booking | |
| **Evidence:**  **Interface aspect:** I found this on the Details Page (Bundle Selected) screen  **Heuristic:** User Control and Freedom | |
| **Explanation:**  The heuristic was violated because there’s no obvious way for the user to be able to remove a booking before they add it to their trip. The user will probably select a booking based on what they saw on the search page but will want to remove it because they realized it wasn’t as good of a deal as they thought. | |
| **Severity or Benefit:**  **Rating:** 3  NA – good aspect  1 – cosmetic problem (does not matter too much)  2 – minor problem (would be nice to solve, but not a high priority)  3 – major problem (a problem that should definitely be solved with high priority)  4 – usability catastrophe (a problem that renders the Web site / app useless)  **Justification (Frequency, Impact, Persistence):**  *Frequency:* This problem will be common with many users, especially new users and ones who rarely plan trips in this manner, since people tend to be indecisive and change their minds often.  *Impact:* This problem would be a medium impact at most since it is easy to overcome because all that you would need to do is to add a more visible option to remove the booking on the page that the user can easily access. Otherwise the user would probably get frustrated trying to navigate around the page to find the remove button and waste time they could be using planning their trip.  *Persistence:* This problem would only occur once because if the option is hidden within the layout of the website then once the user locates it then it won’t be much of a problem because they know where to find it.  *How I weighted the factors:* I gave this problem a 3 because while it only ocurrs once, there’s no way for me to know if this option exists or not based on the annotations provided in the document so I had to assume that it didn’t exist. If I knew that this option existed but was hidden within a menu hierarchy then I would have dropped the rating down to a 2 since the visibility is mainly for the improvement of the user’s experience since the frequency is high but the impact is relatively low. | |
| **Possible solution and/or trade-offs:** | |
| **Relationships:** | |

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| No. **Christine\_\_\_-Chrisrine Wendell - 2\_\_\_** | **Problem/Good Aspect** Problem |
| **Name:**  Why Have Popular Destinations Tab | |
| **Evidence:**  **Interface aspect:** This appears on every search screen, but I’ll specifically reference the Home Screen since that’s where I originally noticed it.  **Heuristic:** Aesthetics and Minimalist Design | |
| **Explanation:**  The heuristic was violated because it feels like that tab is just clutter that takes up the screen with a vary limited available usage. The user will probably find it to be annoying and ignore it because it looks very similar to typical sidebar ads and will likely go unused because the user goes onto the website with a specific destination in mind anyways. | |
| **Severity or Benefit:**  **Rating:** 1  NA – good aspect  1 – cosmetic problem (does not matter too much)  2 – minor problem (would be nice to solve, but not a high priority)  3 – major problem (a problem that should definitely be solved with high priority)  4 – usability catastrophe (a problem that renders the Web site / app useless)  **Justification (Frequency, Impact, Persistence):**  *Frequency:* This problem would be rare since the section will likely go ignored as users navigate the page. New users might get drawn in but that’s very unlikely.  *Impact:* The problem has a low impact since it doesn’t affect the user’s ability to complete their task at all, it’s just an aesthetics problem.  *Persistence:* This problem would only occur once if it becomes a hassle at all since the user can simply ignore it.  *How I weighted the factors:* I gave this a 1 because overall this is a low issue in terms of frequency, impact, and persistence sine it’s out of the user’s way, but I wondered why it was there in the first place if the user would just search for their own destination anyways. | |
| **Possible solution and/or trade-offs:** | |
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| No. **Christine\_\_\_-Chrisrine Wendell - 3\_\_\_** | **Problem/Good Aspect** Problem |
| **Name:**  Missing Check Box in Confirmation/Payment Page | |
| **Evidence:**  **Interface aspect:** This is in the Confirmation/Payment Page  **Heuristic:** Error Prevention | |
| **Explanation:**  The heuristic is violated because there is usually a check box with these websites before you make a booking to ensure the user knows what they are getting into concerning cancellation policies and similar important policies before putting money down on a reservation. The user will probably get upset if they aren’t made aware of any important policies like this if they go to make cancellations or something similar and encounter issues due to differences in policies. | |
| **Severity or Benefit:**  **Rating:** 2  NA – good aspect  1 – cosmetic problem (does not matter too much)  2 – minor problem (would be nice to solve, but not a high priority)  3 – major problem (a problem that should definitely be solved with high priority)  4 – usability catastrophe (a problem that renders the Web site / app useless)  **Justification (Frequency, Impact, Persistence):**  *Frequency:* This problem is likely to be experienced by all users, but will be unlikely to cause a problem unless the user attempts to cancel a reservation.  *Impact:* This problem would be easy to overcome because it would only take a simple checkbox to be added to the payment page that wouldn’t allow the user to press done until it’s checked. It could also have a hyperlink to a list of policies so the impact would be very low.  *Persistence:* This problem would probably only occur once since the problem itself won’t arise unless the user encounters the policies in a cancellation.  *How I weighted the factors:* I gave this a 2 because while it wouldn’t normally appear to be an issue but it could make customers upset if they are unable to complete an action because if a policy they weren’t aware of. It would just help ensuring that the user is fully aware of what they are agreeing to when they decide to make a booking on the site. | |
| **Possible solution and/or trade-offs:** | |
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| No. **Christine\_\_\_-Chrisrine Wendell - 4\_\_\_** | **Problem/Good Aspect** Problem |
| **Name:**  No sign-in function for profiles | |
| **Evidence:**  **Interface aspect:** Confirmation/Payment Page  **Heuristic:** Flexibility and efficiency of use | |
| **Explanation:**  This heuristic is violated because there isn’t a sign-in function for a profile for the user to be able to keep track of bookings and have saved payment data for repeated transactions. The user will probably benefit from this function because it will help save them time if they visit the site for multiple trips. | |
| **Severity or Benefit:**  **Rating:** 2  NA – good aspect  1 – cosmetic problem (does not matter too much)  2 – minor problem (would be nice to solve, but not a high priority)  3 – major problem (a problem that should definitely be solved with high priority)  4 – usability catastrophe (a problem that renders the Web site / app useless)  **Justification (Frequency, Impact, Persistence):**  *Frequency:* This problem would be semi-common since it would only impact repeat users for the website who could find repeatedly entering information annoying.  *Impact:* This would have medium-to-low impact because it’s not an essential part of completing a transaction, it would just help speed up the transaction.  *Persistence:* Users could be repeatedly bothered by it if they frequent the site enough to want to have their info pre-filled once they hit the confirmation screen.  *How I weighted the factors:* I rated this a 2 because while it’s not a necessary feature, it could help make the process quicker for people who will use this site repeatedly. All the justification ascpects are rated low for this specific reason since it will only affect a section of the overall users who will use the site. | |
| **Possible solution and/or trade-offs:** | |
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| No. **Christine\_\_\_-Chrisrine Wendell - 5\_\_\_** | **Problem/Good Aspect** Problem |
| **Name:**  Lacks a Designated Confrimation Page | |
| **Evidence:**  **Interface aspect:** Confirmation/Payment Page  **Heuristic:** Visibility of System Status | |
| **Explanation:**  This heuristic is violated because there’s no dedicated page in this presented wireframe that provides clear confirmation to the user that their booking has successfully completed. The user will probably wonder if the confirmation has even succeeded at first because they might not always be available to check their mail or even bother to check their mail at all. | |
| **Severity or Benefit:**  **Rating:** 2  NA – good aspect  1 – cosmetic problem (does not matter too much)  2 – minor problem (would be nice to solve, but not a high priority)  3 – major problem (a problem that should definitely be solved with high priority)  4 – usability catastrophe (a problem that renders the Web site / app useless)  **Justification (Frequency, Impact, Persistence):**  *Frequency:* This would be a common problem for users who are inexperienced with the site and are unaware of how the company handles confirmations if there isn’t a specific confirmation page.  *Impact:* <In the current interface, is this problem easy or difficult to overcome? Why? The problem has a high impact if it prevents users from achieving their goals or if it makes them waste a lot of time> This would have low impact because they would only waste time if they forgot that they had the itinerary sent to their email.  *Persistence:* This problem would likely only occur once since afterwards the user will be aware of it and will watch out for it the next time they send a booking.  *How I weighted the factors:* While only having a confirmation email isn’t a bad thing, it’s not always a good thing to purely rely on the user to check their emails for such things since some people rarely choose to check their emails at all. Having a specific page confirming their booking with the relevant details could help remind them to be on the lookout for an email on the way. | |
| **Possible solution and/or trade-offs:** | |
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| No. **Christine\_\_\_-Chrisrine Wendell - 6\_\_\_** | **Problem/Good Aspect** Problem |
| **Name:**  Need a Separate Details Page for Search Results | |
| **Evidence:**  **Interface aspect:** All search results pages, but I’ll be specifically referencing the Flights Search Results Page as an example.  **Heuristic:** Aesthetic and minimalist design | |
| **Explanation:**  This heuristic is violated because trying to condense so much information in a drop-down menu could lead to the details being difficult to read. The user could find this annoying if they’re trying to figure out which package fits them best. | |
| **Severity or Benefit:**  **Rating:** 1  NA – good aspect  1 – cosmetic problem (does not matter too much)  2 – minor problem (would be nice to solve, but not a high priority)  3 – major problem (a problem that should definitely be solved with high priority)  4 – usability catastrophe (a problem that renders the Web site / app useless)  **Justification (Frequency, Impact, Persistence):**  *Frequency:* This problem would be rare since it’s only the readibility of information that’s affected. All levels of users could have this problem.  *Impact:* This is a very easy problem to overcome if it even becomes a problem at all. It has very low impact.  *Persistence:* This problem would only occur once since users will know how to work around it after the first encounter.  *How I weighted the factors:* I rated this a one because it’s more of a cosmetics choice than anything. Trying to condense the information that’s listed on the wireframe in a simple drop down window could be a bit crammed and it could make navigating all the necessary details difficult. So, if there was a separate page with these details it could be easier to manage, but choosing to keep the format how it is won’t be detrimental to how the website functions overall. | |
| **Possible solution and/or trade-offs:** | |
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| No. **Christine\_\_\_-Chrisrine Wendell - 7\_\_\_** | **Problem/Good Aspect** Problem |
| **Name:**  Unneeded Advances Search | |
| **Evidence:**  **Interface aspect:** On the Home Screen and the other more specific search home screens that have the search button  **Heuristic:** Aesthetic and minimalist design | |
| **Explanation:**  The heuristic is violated because the Advanced Search button on the large search button doesn’t seem needed since the same function is capable on the search results page on the refinement sidebar. The user will be less likely to use this because the option is available on the results page as well. | |
| **Severity or Benefit:**  **Rating:** 1  NA – good aspect  1 – cosmetic problem (does not matter too much)  2 – minor problem (would be nice to solve, but not a high priority)  3 – major problem (a problem that should definitely be solved with high priority)  4 – usability catastrophe (a problem that renders the Web site / app useless)  **Justification (Frequency, Impact, Persistence):**  *Frequency:* This will likely be a rare problem since it doesn’t exactly cause many issues just by not being used much.  *Impact:* This would be an easy problem to overcome since it wouldn’t get in the user’s way.  *Persistence:* This problem would only occur once if it even occurs at all.  *How I weighted the factors:* I rated this a one because it’s not really an issue persay than a possibly unnecessary aspect of the design. It wouldn’t really get in the way at all but it could be used less than expected when the layout was designed. | |
| **Possible solution and/or trade-offs:** | |
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| No. **Christine\_\_\_-Chrisrine Wendell - 8\_\_\_** | **Problem/Good Aspect** Good Aspect |
| **Name:**  Great, Clean Search Layout is Very Efficient | |
| **Evidence:**  **Interface aspect:** This applies to all of the search results pages since they each have the same basic layout with different details  **Heuristic:** Consistency and Standards | |
| **Explanation:**  This heuristic is adhered to because the layout mimics other websites that do the same function. The user will have an easy time narrowing down their search results because all of the necessary information is clearly laid out on the sidebar. | |
| **Severity or Benefit:**  **Rating:** NA  NA – good aspect  1 – cosmetic problem (does not matter too much)  2 – minor problem (would be nice to solve, but not a high priority)  3 – major problem (a problem that should definitely be solved with high priority)  4 – usability catastrophe (a problem that renders the Web site / app useless)  **Justification (Frequency, Impact, Persistence):**  *Frequency:*  *Impact:*  *Persistence:*  *How I weighted the factors:* It was such a smart idea to structure the website this way because it already solves many problems by harnessing a system that has proven itself time and time again to work well when narrowing down exactly which searches they want to see. It’s sleek, efficient, and helps users feel more at home with the website. | |
| **Possible solution and/or trade-offs:** | |
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| No. **Christine\_\_\_-Chrisrine Wendell - 9\_\_\_** | **Problem/Good Aspect** Good Aspect |
| **Name:**  Search Category Bars on Top of Screen | |
| **Evidence:**  **Interface aspect:** This can be seen throughout the layout since it’s a constant feature but I’ll specifically reference the Home Page here.  **Heuristic:** Recognition rather than recall | |
| **Explanation:**  This heuristic is met because the upper bar shows exactly what kinds of bookings can be made on the website in case the user doesn’t want to try and wade through the general search results. The user will probably take full advantage of this feature because it will help save time as well as prevent headaches for older users who aren’t as computer-savvy as younger users. | |
| **Severity or Benefit:**  **Rating:** NA  NA – good aspect  1 – cosmetic problem (does not matter too much)  2 – minor problem (would be nice to solve, but not a high priority)  3 – major problem (a problem that should definitely be solved with high priority)  4 – usability catastrophe (a problem that renders the Web site / app useless)  **Justification (Frequency, Impact, Persistence):**  *Frequency:*  *Impact:*  *Persistence:*  *How I weighted the factors:* This is a great aspect because it provides a clear list of exactly which specific bookings can be done on the site. It’s efficient, simple, and to the point so that it actually saves time while still providing all the options that the user can choose while creating their travel plans. | |
| **Possible solution and/or trade-offs:** | |
| **Relationships:** | |

Conclusion

In summary, the problems I found within this wireframe were almost entirely cosmetic problems such as unnecessary dialogue boxes or very minor problems like lacking a way to confirm that the user is aware of the policies they are agreeing to at the payment confirmation page. Though it seems like these are mostly irrelevant issues, little details such as these could help better the design by removing little loopholes that could cause issues down the line. It was very difficult to find problems with this design because it is very solidly built and relies on many functionalities that have been proven to work very well on established sites that do the same thing. However, many of the fixes that I recommend implementing are as simple as adding in a check box that will activate the “Done” button once marked that will help strengthen the design further and keep the user from getting frustrated too quickly. Other fixes, such as adding in an actual confirmation page after completing a transaction and creating specific pages for the booking options to open up to provide more details, would be easy to implement as well as providing an area for the user to clearly see more details regarding their transaction without having to rely on smaller areas that could unnoticed to portray the same amount of data. I believe that, should Team 4 utilize any of these suggestions, it could help improve their design which is very strong in its own right.

Reflection

I found seven problems within this wireframe due to the stipulations given by this assignment, but there were no glaringly bad aspects of this website that I could see even after I combed through the entire wireframe multiple times. I doubt there are other problems with this design other than the ones listed by me and my team since there were already so few we could detect in the first place. Overall, I spent about six hours total evaluating the wireframe and finalizing my UAR’s. I had such a difficult time finding issues that I felt were relevant enough to list in each UAR that it took me much longer to complete than I had originally anticipated. However, making the two UAR’s for the good aspects of their website didn’t take me long to complete at all because examples for those were readily available.

I believe that Nielson’s Heuristics are a good tool for finding usability problems because they lay out the basic functions that a website should be able to do well that can lead to finding other issues that might not have been easily noticed during the initial design phase. This was proven true when I described the issue where the payment page had no way of ensuring that a user had read the policies relevant to their transaction before agreeing to submit payment. This might seem trivial, but in real life situations this could cause a serious problem if a customer gets upset about a cancellation or refund process they weren’t aware of when it comes time for them to perform those actions. I think that UAR’s are good to describe usability problems because it helps narrow down the exact reasons why a usability problem deserves the rating it has been given. I know there were multiple times during this assignment that I went back and changed my rating for certain problems because I realized that they weren’t fitting for the specifics I was detailing in my justification section. If I had to do the same assignment again, I would definitely try to portion off more time to dedicate to looking through each UAR and work with my schedule better. My assignment schedule was thrown off with the current COVID-19 situation and my workload increased as classes moved online. So, I ended up with much less time to properly work on this assignment than I wanted due to trying to complete assignments for other classes at the same time. However, the UAR system I used to evaluate the website made my job much easier to complete since the template helped me save more time that I could spend focusing on finding problems within the wireframe than attempting to keep everything organized.