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Des 157, Comparative Analysis

Accessibility is one of the up and coming subtopics within UX and UI design. If we as designers can make something that is intuitive for disabled people to use, then we can make bounds and leaps in the progress of accessible, smooth, and intuitive design for everyone.

In doing background research for my interactive campus map project, I have found pieces of the puzzle in various online maps. In the AXS Map app, which has gotten outside media attention, there is a search function and appropriate locations based on your current location. The design is minimal in coloring, with contrasting, but not overly bright yellow and grays.

The design is clearly based on mobile design, which is effective for a map application, which is going to be used on the go, and not necessarily by a computer. Using a mobile-based design is also effective because it is more basic in design. The buttons tend to be larger and bolder. There is less room to fit content, so the content (e.g. features of a location, the map, the search bar) has to be bold, streamlined, and easily rearranged. Another excellent accessibility feature is the Google-maps-style map that can be dragged and zoomed with ease.

One of the pitfalls with this design is that it only rates the overall usability of a location, and not the features that are available at that location (e.g. restrooms, accessible entrances, etc). The features are there, but you have to filter for them. Upon first seeing the website, the basic ratings of the locations are all that the user sees. If the user is searching for a particular utility, this is less than effective design.

Another design that I seek to emulate in a sense is the SDSU accessibility map. The design is also streamlined with a black, white, and blue color-scheme, one bold, easy-to-read san-serif typeface, and a bold, distinct legend that won’t get muddled. All of the services are placed in plain view of the user on the conventional right-hand side.

However, the fact that the map isn’t intuitively zoomable gives the user only a bird’s eye view initially, which is problematic even for able-bodied users. The zooming buttons are a tad archaic, with today’s finger-dragging zoom. The user may not think to look for a + button to zoom. The resolution is good, but hard to reach. Another issue is that the map is not searchable.

With my design, I hope to combine the best elements of both. I hope to include the list/map hybrid style of AXS, the searchability of AXS, the simplicity of both, the easy-to-decipher legend of the SDSU map, the easy-to-read type of both, and the interactive elements of neither. To create a better interactive map, the user should have the choice to turn on and off information, because maps can be overwhelming to a user when all information is present at once. For disabled users, it’s important to not overwhelm with information, but have all information easily available. For instance, being able to turn on just the accessible entrances within two blocks of the ARC or all the accessible bathrooms in North Campus.

Overall, these are good starts for my design concept in crafting the perfect interactive map for UC Davis campus accessibility features.