



FoodNetwork.com

Heuristic Evaluation Report

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Executive Summary

The Food Network website, foodnetwork.com, is the second most highly trafficked cooking website on the internet. Boasting thousands of recipes from hundreds of chefs, it provides an invaluable resource to cooks around the world. However, this wellspring of information can make finding exactly what you're looking for a difficult task. What's more, a recipe is only good if you're able to use it. This evaluation is aimed at improving what is already a wonderful reason.

The heuristic evaluation was undertaken by following a loosely guided user flow. Specifically, the three evaluators were tasked with landing on the foodnetwork.com homepage, navigating to Alton Brown's "The Chewy" cookie, reviewing the ingredients they had available to them, and substitution/purchasing those that they did not. Along their journey, evaluators noted anything that violated Nielsen's "Ten Usability Heuristics". Notes from all three evaluators were then compiled, consulted, and analysed, and the following key recommendations were extracted:

- 1) Allow users to directly link to the list of chefs from the Navigation bar
- 2) Improve the users ability to make ingredient substitutions
- 3) Better integrate the "Buy ingredients online" widget onto the page

What follows in this report is a breakdown of how the problem areas were identified, details on the specific issues, as well as proposals and mock-ups for potential solutions.

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Introduction

The Food Network website, foodnetwork.com, is the second most highly trafficked cooking website on the internet. Boasting thousands of recipes from hundreds of chefs, it provides an invaluable resource to cooks around the world. However, this wellspring of information can make finding exactly what you're looking for a difficult task. What's more, a recipe is only good if you're able to use it. This evaluation is aimed at improving what is already a wonderful reason..

Methodology

Heuristic Evaluation

In order to identify areas for improvement on the FoodNetwork.com website, a heuristic evaluation was undertaken. This is a type of usability inspection method wherein a small group of experts examine the interface while consulting a list of 'heuristics', or rules of thumb, of good interface design. Specifically, this test uses Jakob's Ten Heuristics for User Interface (See appendix), a widely used set of heuristics designed specifically for this type of testing.

By using a formal list of heuristics, evaluators are able to quickly and easily identify problem areas, as well as consolidate their notes. This method also requires a small number of expert evaluators, typically 3-5, allowing the testing to be done quickly and at minimal cost. One drawback of this method however is that while the heuristics are broad, they are not all encompassing, and some issues may be missed due to poor or no matching.

Tasks

Three evaluators were given three tasks to complete on the FoodNetwork.com website. As tasks were completed, evaluators took note of any violations of as well as their severity, with 1 being inconvenient, and 4 being severe. Tasks were completed with no restrictions other restrictions such as time or number of clicks:

You're hungry and have decided that the only thing that can fill you up is freshly baked cookies, and you know exactly the recipe: The Chewy by Alton Brown. You saw him make it on his show and now is the time to try it yourself. Go to foodnetwork.com and, without using the search functionality, try to accomplish the following

- 1) Navigate to Alton Brown's chef page
- 2) Navigate to The Chewy recipe (Hint: it's his second highest rated recipe)
- 3) How much is it going to cost to get all the ingredients?
- 4) Wait, you have a dairy allergy. What can we substitute for the Milk and Butter? How much?
- 5) (Optional) Make the cookies

Analysis

After all three evaluators had completed their testing, their notes on heuristic violations and severity were submitted to the lead researcher. The notes were then consolidated into a single table (see appendix) where problem areas were grouped, and their overall severity was determined by inspection. Once potential areas for improvement were identified, domain knowledge was used to create a series of three recommendations. These recommendations suggest ways in which the interface can be changed in order to no longer violate the heuristics identified in testing.

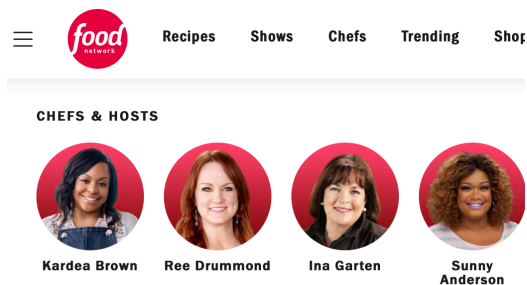
Insights and Recommendations

1. Differentiate between hubs and “see all” in the navigation bar

The Issue: Within the navigation bar, the “See all x” within the dropdown menu categories currently links to the hub page for the category. For example, “See all chefs” directs the user to the “Chefs and Hosts” page. This is not what the user may expect, and requires users to recall specific user flows rather than recognise them, a violation of heuristic 6. Additionally, the links to the true “See all” pages are often buried towards the bottom of the hub pages, and written in a small, low contrast font. This can be problematic for both the same reason as the previous issue (heuristic 6), but also becomes an aesthetic issue (heuristic 8)

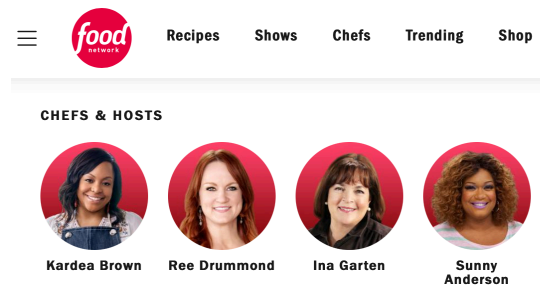
Quick Fix: Create an additional button within the dropdown linking to the hub pages, and link the “See all x” to the associated page (see figures below).

Long term: A reorganisation of the hub pages should be considered. There is a high amount of overlap between “Chefs” and “Shows” in the top half of the pages, that might better serve as standalone content, and redesigning the pages with more specific content.



1a

Current Navigation Dropdown. “See all chefs” button (1a) doesn’t lead to expected result.



1b

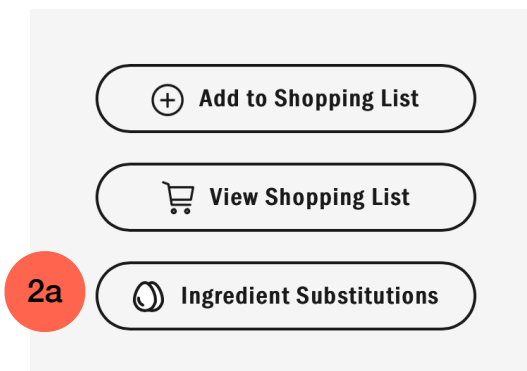
Proposed Navigation Dropdown. Added a “chef’s homepage” button (1b). “See all chefs” skips to chef index.

2. Restyle the “Ingredient Substitution” flow

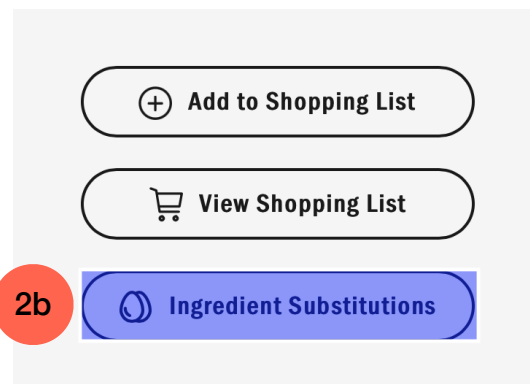
The Issue: The current “Ingredient Substitutions” button links to a generic page about what substitutions can be made. However given that it’s linked to from a specific recipe, and that it is in the style as the “Add to shopping list” button, this doesn’t meet user expectations of knowing what/how much to substitute in the recipe. This is a violation of heuristic 6 (recognition rather than recall), and can also lead users into an error state, a violation of heuristic 5.

Quick Fix: Restyle the button so that it is less similar to the “Add to shopping list” button. Rewrite the body text of the ingredient substitution guide to ensure all items are presented uniformly.

Long Term: It may be worth implementing an ingredient substitution calculator. Such a thing could load in recipes or custom ingredients, and allow direct conversions of the ingredients, and export the new recipe.



Current Substitutions Button. “Ingredient Substitutions” (2a) is identical to other buttons, suggesting identical function



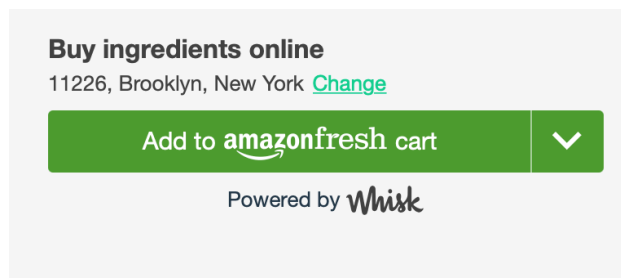
Proposed Substitutions Button. “Ingredient Substitutions” (2b) is not distinguished from other buttons

3. Reconsider the use of the “Buy Ingredients Online” widget

The Issue: During the evaluation, using the “Buy Ingredients Online” widget was consistently the highest pain point. Reasons included ambiguous wording of “per serve” (Heuristic 2, match between system and real world), the fact it was unusable within the page itself as all links/buttons opened a new window (heuristic 4, consistency and standards), and the general confusion about if it was part of the website or an ad (heuristic 5, error prevention).

Quick Fix: Until such a time as the widget can be significantly improved, it may be worth considering removing it from the recipes page. This may be different from the shopping list page however.

Long Term: The widget would better serve the user if it was usable entirely within the page, either as a sidebar or a modal. While the final checkout can be done via an external site, all steps leading up to that should be done locally. In addition, better signifiers as to what the widget does should be implemented, as should a better way to display the “price”



Current Buy Ingredients Online Widget

Conclusion

FoodNetwork.com is a wonderful repository of recipes from some of the best chefs in the world, and is used by millions of people of all walks of life. In order to best serve this multitude of users, a team of domain experts came together to undertake a Heuristic evaluation - completing a series of tasks while noting any items that violated Jakob's Ten Usability Heuristics. All notes were then collated, and an analysis was undertaken to examine key areas for improvement. Three recommendations were provided based on this analysis:

1. Differentiate between hubs and "see all" in the navigation bar
2. Restyle the "Ingredient Substitution" flow
3. Reconsider the use of the "Buy Ingredients Online" widget

All three of these recommendations aim primarily at reducing violations of Heuristic 6: Recognition rather than Recall. This will allow users to better navigate the site, and prepare many more delicious meals.

Appendix

Final Heuristic Violations

Problem Description	Heuristic	E1	E2	E3	Severity
"All chefs and hosts" nav link does not direct the user to all chefs and hosts page	H6, H10	4	4	4	4
Link to list of all chefs/hosts highly obfuscated	H6	4	4		4
Substitutions cannot be made on the recipe page/ related to specific recipe	H6, H7, H9	2	3	3	3
Substitution amounts cannot be calculated	H7, H8, H10	3	2	4	3
Substitutions do not account for allergens (e.g. milk is subbed with yoghurt or sour cream)	H6	2			2
Ingredient cost calculator takes the user to an external service	H7, H8	4	3	2	3
Ingredient cost calculator calculates per portion, unclear what that means	H2, H6	2			2

Jakob's Ten Usability Heuristics

1 Visibility of System Status

Designs should *keep users informed* about what is going on, through appropriate, timely feedback.



Interactive mall maps have to show people where they currently are, to help them understand where to go next.

2 Match between System and the Real World

The design should *speak the users' language*. Use words, phrases, and concepts *familiar to the user*, rather than internal jargon.



Users can quickly understand which stovetop control maps to each heating element.

5 Error Prevention

Good error messages are important, but the best designs *carefully prevent problems* from occurring in the first place.



Guard rails on curvy mountain roads prevent drivers from falling off cliffs.

8 Aesthetic and Minimalist Design

Interfaces should not contain information which is irrelevant. Every extra unit of information in an interface *competes* with the relevant units of information.



A minimalist three-legged stool is still a place to sit.

3 User Control and Freedom

Users often perform actions by mistake. They *need a clearly marked "emergency exit"* to leave the unwanted action.



Just like physical spaces, digital spaces need quick "emergency" exits too.

6 Recognition Rather Than Recall

Minimize the user's memory load by making elements, actions, and options visible. Avoid making users remember information.



People are likely to correctly answer "Is Lisbon the capital of Portugal?".

9 Recognize, Diagnose, and Recover from Errors

Error messages should be expressed in plain language (no error codes), precisely indicate the problem, and constructively suggest a solution.



Wrong-way signs on the road remind drivers that they are heading in the wrong direction.

4 Consistency and Standards

Users should not have to wonder whether different words, situations, or actions mean the same thing. *Follow platform conventions.*



Check-in counters are usually located at the front of hotels, which meets expectations.

7 Flexibility and Efficiency of Use

Shortcuts — hidden from novice users — *may speed up the interaction* for the expert user.



Regular routes are listed on maps, but locals with more knowledge of the area can take shortcuts.

10 Help and Documentation

It's best if the design *doesn't need* any additional explanation. However, it may be necessary to provide documentation to help users complete their tasks.



Information kiosks at airports are easily recognizable and solve customers' problems in context and immediately.

References

Nielsen Norman Group. 10 Heuristics for User Interface Design: Article by Jakob Nielsen. Retrieved March 4, 2019, from <http://www.nngroup.com/articles/ten-usability-heuristics/>