Usability Report

A New User Experience for BexhillCollege.ac.uk

Introduction

This report will conduct an expert analysis of the current user interface of Bexhill College, namely their website; bexhillcollege.ac.uk

This will be achieved by performing a heuristic evaluation of a walk-through of the website in a systematic manner which will identify any usability issues. A peripheral examination of channels to and from the website will be investigated to reveal an in depth study of the user journey.

Analysis of the findings will be discussed with allocating priority in order to each with a solution to solve and improve the user experience (UX).

Methodology

The heuristic walkthrough was used to produce the findings, conclusion and recommendations summarized in this report. When conducting a heuristic evaluation, an

evaluator compares specific usability principles with a product or web site interface while attempting to accomplish actual system tasks.

This methodology will be applied to both the website and associated social media channels.

The finding together with the same application of heuristic principles will be used to develop further development recommendations including an email marketing strategy.

The majority of heuristics used in this report will be drawn, primarily from sources such as Nielsen and Norman and Tognazzini (Nielsen 1995, Tognazzini 2000).

The Walkthrough: Website

Usability testing can involve more than one type of walkthrough. Cognitive and pluralistic walkthroughs involve the use of multiple evaluators, may of who have no real knowledge of usability principles and focus their evaluation on initial thoughts from alay perspective.

Another type of walkthrough is an expert review, this involves identifying usability heuristics derived from academic and industrial study of interface design and testing from large sample sizes.

Key usability issues can be recorded by page. This may involve the formulation of a visual sitemap to help in navigation for testing and collating of evidence.

For the purposes of this report a site map was created by using Dynomapper (2018). The results were disappointing (See Fig. 14, Appendix A). Only fraction of the pages available could be 'crawled' resulting in fatal errors and many other usability errors. There was no clear way to recover from the errors found from a users perspective. It is important to note

that a website that can not be crawled easily possibly can not be visited by the browser and therefore cannot be journeyed by the user.

Findings

Navigation, absence of a user visible site map for navigation, absence of a search feature to help in navigation (typical of larger scale websites). Drop down menus take a prolonged time fall below the fold of the page. Notably the 'About' drop down menu. Browser view had to be zoomed out to reveal extent of drop down menu, this conducted on a large screen resolution (1366x768).

Home page has content that falls below the page fold. There is an absence of a visual cue or affordance to prompt the user to scroll the page, see Figure 1 of Appendix A.

Local Offer Page conveys confusing content to the user, not typical layout for industry. Reading of text required to ascertain purpose. This should not be necessary, the page heading should indicate this better and not force the user to 'think' (see Krug, 2000) as seen in Figure 5 of Appendix A.

Inconsistent content on the international students page has a simple, professional and standard look and feel but is not consistent with brand as seen in Figure 7 of Appendix A. Nielsen refers to this inconsistency as a "Crime". (Nielsen & Loranger, 2006, p. 178). Kalbach (2007) suggests that a brand is a "promise to the consumer about the goods and services offered". It would be best to keep this in mind when asserting a brand with the user seen as the consumer.

Flexibility is a heuristic principle that refers to how an interface is adapted to circumstances. In terms of website, this generally refers to the mobile responsiveness of the interface, or how the website will change in appearance to be more usable on mobile and tablet PC's.

The website has responsive issues with the mobile menu being obfuscated due to 'colorblindness' (see Tognazzini, 2018). Tested on Chrome Simulator for iPhone X and Galaxy S5, (a list of other screen resolutions tested: Galaxy s5, Pixel 2, Pixel 2 XL, iPhone 5/SE, iPhone 6/7/8, iPhone 6/7/8 Plus, iPhone X, iPad, iPad Pro) as seen in Figure 12 in Appendix A.

Content such as the 'pay here' button on the international students page does not communicate a clear definition of the purpose to the user. I also compared this page to James Kalbach's Internationalization content guidelines (Kalbach, 2007, p. 272).

The information displayed on the Performing Arts Academy and Students pages have PDF viewer content that takes an excessive 7 seconds to load on Chrome for Desktop. According to S. Work (2016), this should not take more than 2 seconds in order that the user receives the content as quickly to meet the user demands. Delaying content visibility can result in user frustration and the page be navigated away from. Further to this Nielsen suggests a threshold of "1 minute and 49 seconds" to create a conversion (Nielsen, 2006, p. 78). Such a narrow time frame makes each wasted second vital to performance.

Further Colour Blindness (Tognazzini, 2014) issues are apparent on the page footer (on most pages, almost all). There is confusing content with links towards the bottom changing colour to one very similar to background colour (on 'cursor hover') this would affect user

control and freedom during the human computer interaction (HCI). This relates to the importance of 'clickability' and the user knowing "where to click on a screen", (Nielsen & Loranger, 2006, p. 97).

Some pages do not provide a seamless experience to perform a typical navigation back to the main home page, which would result in the user having to use the browser back button. Namely the pages, jobs available page and international students page (Figs. 9 and 7 of Appendix A respectively).

Recovery from Errors is a vital aspect in order to accomplish a successful UX. The site map analysis has shown fatal errors, deep within the website structure. The website has also pages with no clear visible navigation for the user to return resulting in a user having difficulty recovering if found in a place erroneously.

Accessibility Review

The Equalities Act (Mueller, 2016) is the law regarding accessibility in the United Kingdom.

There is European Union law and regulations that apply also Foreign Legislation (Mueller, 2018). The later would be relevant for The International Students page.

When is comes to the Visually impaired, there should be enough relevant content, easy to read and sized and spaced appropriately, good use of white space can help with user recognition (Nielsen & Lorenger, 2006, p. 347).

In the interests of having content sufficient for people with speech impairment and generally helping user find essential content, I compared the content to Chaffe's concept of informatics (Chaffe, 2005, p.27)

Ofsted Compliance: Ofsted make guidelines for schools and colleges about what content must be included on a website. This includes such things as academic achievement results, addresses and other details. Bexhill College is currently compliant. Ofsted also advises a usable and accessible website, which emphasises the importance of the findings of this report (Ofsted, 2018). A brief list is also available as seen in Appendix E.

Social Media Walkthrough

One important consideration for social media is the Legalities around imagery and children (Dept. Culture, 2016). When using images online of persons below 18 years of age, and under 15 in some cases, parental permission must be sought. It may be difficult for a college to seek this information each time a social media post is made. This particularly implies when regular daily publishing on social media is required, in order to benefit from the various search and social media algorithms that push content higher in search results.

In general terms, the purpose of each social media platform can be compacted into the following primary functions for any Client, Twitter is News, Instagram events, You Tube Media, facebook is a business page.

There has been a study by the ONS that ultimately links heavy social media use to truancy. The report actually reveals that students who truant report spending more time on social media. In this perspective social media can be used to win back students, or warn of of the perils of truancy. This can be done by ensuring followership by such students and therefore making direct marketing possible (ONS, 2016).

Social Media Findings

Youtube, icon offers little affordance, difficult to make out and poor visibility (see Fig 11.1, Appendix A). Bexhill makes good use of social media and Youtube. Student who make digital video as part of there course have a good platform to use. The Youtube comments are lacking, this could be to perhaps stifle potensial trolling (OUP, 2018).

Facebook startup page, has a login lightbox and perhaps more due to the facebook platform shows the bexhill logo stretched past the page folder and makes user control difficult (See Fig. 4, Appendix B. 1).

Twitter, Bexhill has a enormous number of followers and liked pages. The like pages are as seen in Figure. 1 in Appendix B. 1.

Bexhill uses instagram to promote a positive image for student wellbeing and happiness. This helps both current and new students learn the aim and goal of their college to the students.

Conclusion

Currently the website and related web presence does some things well. For one, the website makes excellent use of Parallax Scrolling, which can help bring "the page to life" (Creative Bloq, 2013). Bexhill College's Content is Compliant with OfSted guidelines. The format of text is appropriate and overall, and at key parts. It makes good use of Call Outs.

Conversely the following could necessity help with improvement; Responsiveness, Confusing Structure, Branding and Consistency.

Below is a more detailed summary of these conclusions, I will segway these conclusions into a list of recommendations.

Summary of Findings

After completing the heuristic evaluation of the Bexhill web presence, I have identified a number of problem areas. These problems have been prioritized below, with the most severe and easiest to fix problems listed first.

Specific Problem Areas

Problem	Primarily Where	
Confusing Structure	Navigation/ Inner pages	
Responsive Issues*	On Mobile Browsers	
Accessibility adherence	Knowledge base pages.	
Consistent look and feel	International Pages	
Full Utilization of Social	Google Plus, Youtube	

These specific usability problems were clustered into five general problem areas and ranked according to severity and the ease with which they could be fixed. The most severe problem areas were addressed in more detail in this report, providing information about

the general problem, some specific examples, and recommendations for solving the problem.

Priorities

Priority	Problem	Related Principle	Solution
1	Confusing Structure	Error Recovery	HTML Sitemap, Redirects
2	Responsive Issues*	Flexibility	Partial Rebuild
3	Accessibility adherence	Control/ Freedom	Screen Readers/ Subtitles
4	Consistent look and feel	Recognition	Moodboarding
5	Full Utilization of Social	Stickiness	Student Involvement

^{*} Responsive issues and those concerning the fold can be resolved simultaneously.

Conclusion: Recommendations

As part of my conclusions, I have listed the recommendations that could be employed as part of the heuristic analysis and application thereof towards developmental solutions to usability problems.

Accessibility

Accessibility can be improved by allowing optional screen reader that can be accessed like a social icon such as browsealoud. Youtube captions to aid the hearing impaired.

Pluralistic & cognitive walkthrough

This report has been focussed on a heuristic evaluation. It is advised that a pluralistic evaluation be made including cognitive evaluation using evaluators who do not have experience of heuristic evaluation techniques. They are intended to simply make intuitive responses and interactions with the interface reporting back their success of use. This would include the setting of a goal scenario the better understand the user's success of use without prompting or coaching. Wong suggests the using of multiple evaluators of mix expert and general user background, the study recommends an optimum number of 10-15 Evaluators (Wong, 2018)

Importance of demographic targeting, (Analytics)

The Usability of the website, social media channels and email marketing can be improved by targeting content around specific demographics. A study into user types would perhaps be best, in overview, these would be students, parents, job seekers, the media and so on. Composing a persona or hypothetical archetypal user would make it easier to build the interface to suit this person.

This will aid in selection of cognitive walkthrough candidates and knowing how your demographic uses the internet and interfaces in general. This will also aid in improvement through question and answer surveying of user satisfaction.

Persona Development

I will develop a working persona based on an overview of prospective users, notably parents of GCSE students who the Open Day Marketing Campaign seeks to target.

Therefore I shall develop 2, an Open Day Persona and Student Persona for the Website and Social Media. These Personas will be listed in Appendices D.1 and D.2.

Social Media Strategy

Firstly, I might examine the marketplace for colleges of a similar standing and demographic, and see what social media channel they use and what has proven successful. The data on this may be limited to an overview and basically an educated guess. It will be important to ascertain what information is most pertinent to Bexhill as a college, from this a conversion rate expectation can be derived.

In relation to content and imagery, a college may seek to delegate the role of social media management to individuals such as student representative or lecturers. Simply doing the same second hand also be legally liable. It may therefore make certain channels inappropriate, due to practical infeasibility.

Article 13 (EU, 2016) is a new regulation that intends to be brought to the UK by the EU which prevents the use of copyrighted material despite fair use defences such as parody or educational basis. The defences that traditionally permitted educational use, can be used for appeals sake but will not be automatically applicable. Its an enormous shift in common practice in the UK at least and could make the use of social platforms for educational purposes difficult or uncertain for the time being. There is no indication that the UK would adopt this law upon complete withdrawal from the UK next March 2019 (Hunt, 2018), therefore perhaps a wait and see policy is advisable.

Enhanced UX

Clients will often expect suggestions on user experience enhancement of the interface rather simply evaluation/ solution reporting. In this respect I have identified the following academically supported propositions.

Virtual Worlds

There was a study conducted by Barneche & Hernández in 2014 that followed how Museums and Schools have developed interactive digital environments that create an immersive experience for users and have proven very successful and impressive. Bexhill might consider using something similar to both engage students on certain courses such as these orientate around new media, and also impress parents with this highly impressive technology.

Sitemaps

The inclusion of a Visual and HTML Sitemap on the website would aid in navigation for finding obscure content. A Visual Sitemap would aid in design and testing for developmental reasons. This would be a schematic sitemap.

Greater responsiveness

The website currently has issues around responsive design noted above. If the website was redesigned with a common user interface that works seamlessly across various resolutions and screen dimensions, it would mean the cumulative effect of device evolution would be less harmful to the website's usability.

Generally it is recommended to use Prototyping (Usability.gov, 2018) to develop usable models before developmental commitments are made.

On-site Search

The addition of a Search Feature on the website, near the common page header navigation would assist the user in finding content on such a large scale website. These features are common for large scale websites and really help with navigation (Nielsen, 2006, p. 178).

A/B Testing

A/B testing is the process of showing users of interfaces one of two options of design, there feedback from their use, either reported feedback or analytical can be used to determine the best choice of design. This would be an ideal approach for a fully developed website and is certainly worth considering when a pluralistic walkthrough is conducted.

Moodarding

This can be used to derive a consistent brand, being mindful that the branding is already common to other promotional material and may not be that flexible in change.

Email Marketing Strategy

Primary concerns with email marketing today are the legal restrictions around this mode of promotion. The General Data Protection Regulation (IOC, 2018) along with various other law and web standards that prevent the unwanted use of user data. Data must be sought ethically and with the knowledge and consent of marketing recipients.

In order to do this, data can not be purchased and must come from voluntary sign up.

Bexhill should provide channels on their existing website and social media channels to permit email list registration.

A goal should be set for the purpose of the campaign, such as driving attendance for an Open Day. The Goal of the user or target user must be understood, such as finding a good place of study for my children. A user will tend to look past content not relevant to this goal in fact Nielsen suggests, "they have evolved a natural self-defence against it" (Nielsen, 2006, p. 76). The creation of a persona would help in this content design.

In order to create a user registration for the emailing list, a page would need to be sticky, essentially hold the user's attention. This is a tested technique that asserts the longer a user stays on a page the more likely a conversion (Denney, 2012), in this case a conversion means a registration. See Appendix B 1 for my analysis of a well formatted and usable contact form.

The campaign should follow Email campaign ethical and legal standards including opt-in registration procedures. I have identified the platform, 'MailChimp' as a tool to manage this campaign. Mailchimp is the industry leading platform for email campaign management.

One important consideration for email design would be white space "Having adequate white space around groupings draws users' attention to key points without causing eye strain" (Nielsen & Loranger, 2006, p. 347).

I have identified 4 possible selections for a signup method for email marketing. A mailing list must be developed from a voluntary sign up form. Where the User knows why they are registering. In order to achieve these sign up, a selection of method are possible.

In the attached Appendix B 3 are sample prototypes and working examples of an email marketing campaign. Both employ Usability principles. It is further advised that Bexhill could advertise signups for the open day in one of the following recommendation methods:

See Appendix B 2.

Figure 1. An alert bar sign up. This will minimise page obtrusion but also reduce call-to-action.

Figure 2. A light box sign up on page load solution. This would enhance obtrusion but also call-to-action. This method also risk frustrating the user.

Figure 3. A dedicated page for user sign ups. A social media marketing or email marketing campaign could be used to direct relevant users to this page for the Bexhill Open Day sign up.

Figure 4. A slide in Menu contact form. An exposed label on the right of the page, opposed to the contact form menu. would expand on 'clicking' to reveal a registration form. This would be present on most pages. With a Call-to-action on the label of Open Day Reservations - perhaps.

All the above options have there merit in terms of Call-to-action and are limited to their appropriate use depending on situation and how the content is accessed.

Bexhill Open Day Solution

It is recommended to use a mixed use of Social Media, Email Marketing and Website on-site promotion to drive traffic from one channel to another and ultimately to the Event. The journey the user takes is designed to meet the needs and questions of the user, quarms if you will, in order to result in a conversation, the signup and ultimately arrival at the event. This offers a gestalt marketing mix solution for the Open Day Event.

To accompany this report is a prototype email page, see example in Appendix B 3. Note the reverse format of text and general usable style that matches the recommendations of this report. Persona development and analytics should be used in order to understand how to target parents of GCSE students. This information can also apply to a cognitive walkthrough. Market analysis such as discussed in this report, including analytics, can be used to employ premium social media channels where keywords will play an important role.

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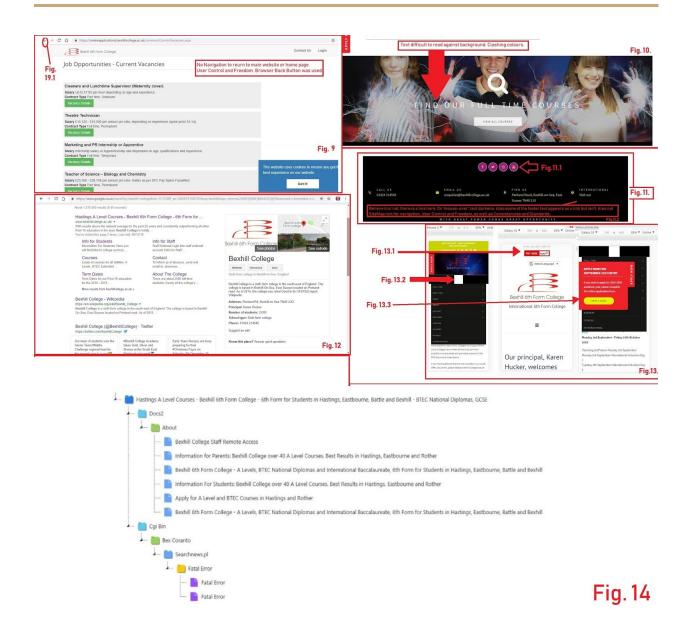
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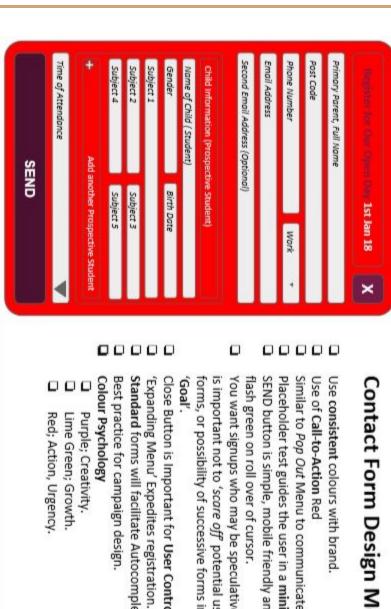
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Appendix A





Appendix B 1.

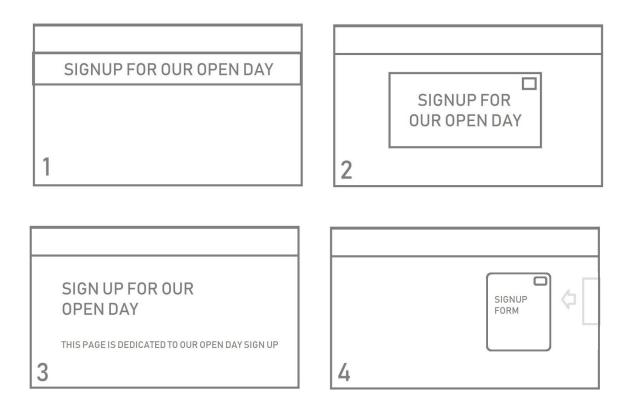


Contact Form Design Mock-up

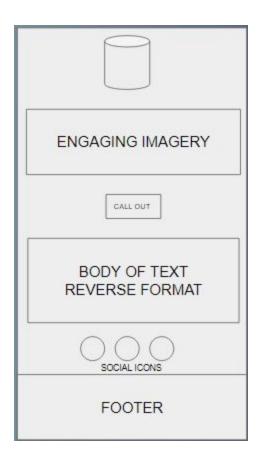
- is important not to 'scare off potential users with length You want signups who may be speculatively interested, so it's SEND button is simple, mobile friendly and responsive. Could Placeholder test guides the user in a minimalist design Similar to Pop Out Menu to communicate the similar context. forms, or possibility of successive forms in order to reach the flash green on roll over of cursor.
- Close Button is Important for User Control.
- Standard forms will facilitate Autocomplete function.

18

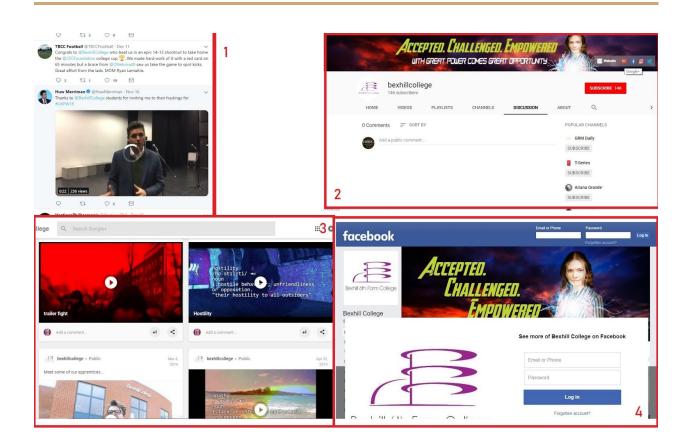
Appendix B 2.



Appendix B 3.



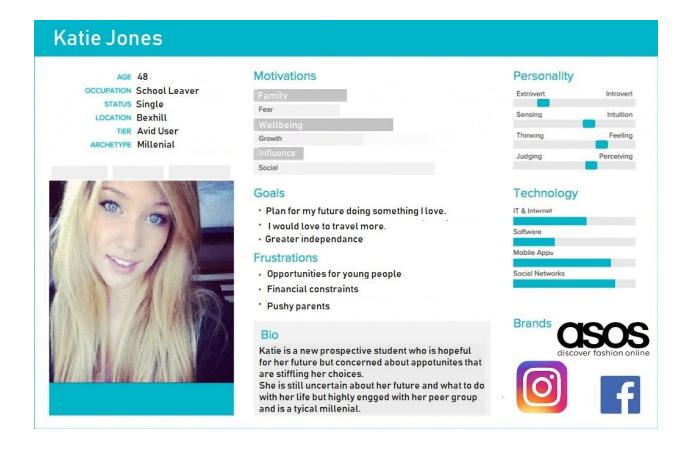
Appendix C.



Appendix D 1.



Appendix D 2.



Appendix E.

Ofsted Content Requirements.

- Are your admission arrangements properly explained?
- Have you got all your school contact details on the site and are they easy to access?
- Have you got a link to your most recent OFSTED report?
- Do you have a space for exam results and provide information about your curriculum?
- What about your school behaviour policy and how can someone make a complaint?