

An Analysis of Minimalism, Efficiency, and Brand Consistency on UWild

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October 10th, 2018

Introduction

Web Pages have become sources of information for diverse audiences. Ones that communicate information and services, especially under a notable brand, are tools that need to stay optimized to direct and help users. The University of Washington's department of recreation provides services that can benefit many who are not aware of it as a resource. Specifically, the UWild program is a culmination of resources for students who might be interested in experiencing key parts of the Pacific Northwest. The purpose of this paper is to look at the background of the UWild interface before defining the methods of communication, efficiency, and brand consistency to evaluate its effectiveness.

Background

The UWild page exists under the university's recreation home page for Intramural Activities. Its purpose is to provide access to information to students about the many adventuring opportunities in the Pacific Northwest. These include classes, equipment rental, activities, and clubs all encouraging adventure in the wilderness. The main page uses the generic banner, which is an image of an unmarked building. On the page there are also six links on the sidebar, and an abundance of text in the body with four thumbnail images at the bottom. There are a few links embedded throughout the site to direct users to referenced pages, and a list of departmental contacts on the side of every page.

Methods

The User Interface will be evaluated through aesthetics/minimalism, efficiency, and brand consistency.

Aesthetics/Minimalism

Aesthetics/Minimalism is defined by content that does not contain irrelevant information. Interfaces with a targeted audience or goal should communicate their message with the help of visuals when possible. It is described by Nielson that, "Every extra unit of information in a dialogue competes with the relevant units of information and diminishes their relative visibility" [3]. A successful approach to this will allow the user to understand a service or purpose at first glance.

Efficiency

It is often not enough to put content on a page and present it to the user. Even if the content itself contains the necessary information to use and navigate the pages, efficiency is important to keep work for users at a minimum. Like minimalism, efficiency is evaluated in regards to conciseness. But efficiency also takes into account effort for users to access features and information that they

can digest and navigate. This is important to speed up interactions across different levels of users. Organization of information, numbers of steps for a frequent action, and flexibility to audience all have an effect on an interface's efficiency [2].

Brand Consistency

Consistency is generally important to keep an interface usable and this can be seen through language, UI elements, colors, fonts, and site layout [1]. The University of Washington is a brand that tries to keep a high standard across all web pages. In this case, the values of consistency are intertwined with the values of accurately representing a larger brand. Although the focuses on minimalism and efficiency are to keep things easy for users, consistency also makes an important contribution to this. Consistency and standards minimize confusion for users and help the brand to feel more united.

Discussion

The methods of communication, efficiency, and brand consistency are used to analyze the success of UWild's interface.

Aesthetics/Minimalism of UWild

UWild provides services that support action and adventure in the Pacific Northwest. The success in communicating this can be seen through the dynamic writing throughout the page, but the text is the only feature that communicates this and can become lengthy to the reader. The only image visible when visiting the site is the header. The other images on this page are at the bottom after some scrolling, and are all of the climbing center which is unnecessary information because the climbing center also has its own link in the sidebar. UWild uses an uninformative image for the header which poorly represents the program. After further reading, much of the content is redundant and contains many details unnecessary to the page. Much of the contents on the home page is restated on their respective links. Too much information is presented to the user and upon visiting the page, it is unclear what to focus on because of the long uninterrupted text. The interface lacks utilization of space and visuals to keep content minimal and communicate the program's services.

Efficiency of UWild

There are a few navigational issues in UWild that negatively affect the interface's efficiency. The sidebar has six items, one having the label of "Classes, Activities, and Employment Opportunities," and another being "Wilderness Medicine Courses." The wilderness medicine courses are a type of class offered by UWild, but they have their own link on the sidebar and is separated from the rest. There are some hierarchical issues here that break up the organization. Also, as shown in Figure 1 below, two different pages under the same subject share contents that

are almost identical. The redundant pages are an issue for users as navigating becomes confusing and there is no new information being presented. The use of the pages becomes unclear and more work for the user to understand. These issues break up the clarity of purpose for either one of these pages and slow down interactions.

<h2>What is UWild Adventures?</h2> <p>Live curiously. Experience nature. Be wild.</p> <p>There is no setting like the wilderness to inspire the wild in all of us. To be wild is to experience life outside of the comfort zone. To push, believe, and accomplish something previously thought impossible, or never thought of at all. Engaging in adventure enriches the human experience. The raw, natural landscape drives curiosity to understand the unknown, develops the willpower to take one step further, and inspires thought of travel, place and purpose.</p>
<h2>UWild Adventures</h2> <p>Live curiously. Experience adventure. Be wild.</p> <p>Being wild is experiencing life outside of your comfort zone. To push and believe that you can accomplish something previously thought impossible, or never thought of at all. Engaging in adventure is connecting to your wild side, and enriching your human experience. The raw, natural landscape drives your curiosity to understand the unknown, pushes your willpower to take one step further than you have before, and inspires you to think larger than yourself.</p>

Figure 1 Comparison of contents on two separate pages

Brand Consistency of UWild

UWild uses a template under the university's branding guidelines, which serves its purpose for holding up site's brand consistency. Features like fonts and color that come with the template and brand guide are represented correctly, but it falls short in the use of headers and writing style. The university sets standards on grammar and organization, specifically using the Associated Press guidelines. As mentioned before, content on the UWild page aids in communicating its purpose in a unique way. But in addition to diverging from punctuation and grammar rules as well as hierarchy of the page, it not only interferes with communication, but also fails to uphold the standards of the university's brand.

Conclusion

Overall, the page interfaces for UWild evaluated through minimalism, efficiency, and brand consistency are not very effective. Although they include informative content through dynamic text, their contents become overshadowed by the text's lengthiness and the lack of expressive visuals for its users. Navigating through the pages presents issues, further discouraging users to take in their contents. UWild itself is an essential program that provides services to the university's expanding student body. They support adventure, exploration, and community at the benefit of the students and should have an interface that reflects this. The current web pages serve their job as they are informative, but could be elevated.

Recommendations

The UWild page follows some baseline style guides under the university's brand. Moving forward, improvements could be made by implementing the following:

- Utilize visuals to communicate purpose quickly effortlessly
- Combine closely related pages to eliminate confusion
- Cut down content to allow for easier interpretation and understanding
- Edit writing styles to remain consistent with the university brand

References

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