Lessons Learned from Watching 200,000 User Testing Videos

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INTRODUCTION

No matter how different we like to think we are, there are always going to be things we have in common.

Think of how we react to certain situations. If you smell something awful, you'll probably cover your nose. If you see a bright light, chances are you'll shield your eyes and squint, or close your eyes altogether.

These common behaviors also extend to the way we browse the Web, and after watching hundreds of thousands of videos from companies like Google, Apple, Facebook, and Twitter, we've found that certain elements on a site trigger certain behaviors in people.

2 TECH GIANTS, 1 COMMON LAYOUT

Have you noticed how similarly Google and Apple design the layouts of their product pages? Take a look at the Google Nexus 4 product page and the iPad product page. It's no coincidence that they start off by stacking feature upon feature, before hitting you with a call to action to buy their products.

Notice the similarities between Google's Nexus 4 and Apple's iPad Mini product pages?

The uniformity of these designs is a result of extensive testing that has brought both of these tech giants to the same conclusion - this layout is a great way to encourage customers to place an order.

What Apple and Google have proven is that you don't need telepathy to know what your site's visitors want. Instead, they've shown that by testing, you can gain enough insights to learn how most of your customers will behave on your site.

By finding these insights, you'll be able to give your customers a better experience, which in turn, puts more money in your pockets. It's a win-win situation.

WHAT YOU'LL FIND IN THIS EBOOK

Much like Apple and Google, we at UserTesting have run extensive studies, and we've done them on hundreds of thousands of sites.

Over the last year, we've learned so much from these studies that we just had to share our insights. In this report, we've compiled 7 of the most common usability issues we've encountered, and offered solutions on how to give your customers an even better experience.

Multi Level Navs Are Not User Friendly

To get things started, let's take a look at one of your site's most important elements - your navigation.

Most designers create multi-level navs with good intentions. They take up less space, and they contain all of the information a site visitor would need without cluttering up the page. That's a good thing, right?

An example of a multi-level nav.
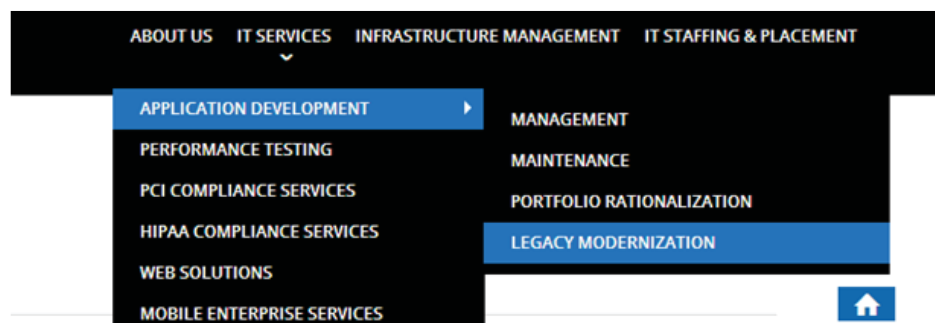
While it sounds great in theory, what happens when visitors on your site actually use them is a different story. Think of the last time you came across a multi-level nav on a site.

Did the menu collapse before you could click on the option you wanted? Did it make you more conscious about the precision of your mouse movements on your second attempt? Did you grimace at the thought of the menu collapsing before you could get to your choice another time?

If your site's visitors are feeling even a hint of frustration, especially at the start of their visit, you're increasing their chances of leaving without buying anything. This is why it's important to test how visitors are interacting with your site, especially with important elements like your navigation.
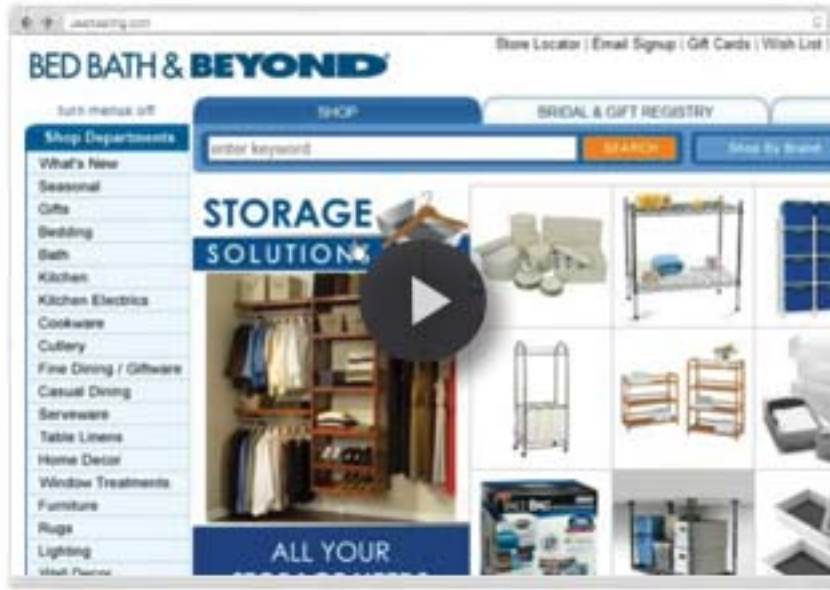
This user is having a difficult time with the site's multi-level navigation.

What we've found is that multi-level menus are difficult to use, which results in frustration and confusion. For many users, their initial reaction after a failed attempt to use your menu is to use your site's internal search (which you can optimize using these tips), but for others, their first reaction is to simply leave your site.

So how do you keep them from jumping ship?

SOLUTION #1: MEGA MENUS

Remember how we mentioned that the similarities in Google and Apple's product pages are no coincidence? The same could be said for the similarities between the menus of the Web's two biggest online marketplaces: Amazon and eBay. Their menus share a number of features, which you can compare below.

Amazon's exhaustive mega-menu is organized and doesn't require precise mouse movements to navigate.
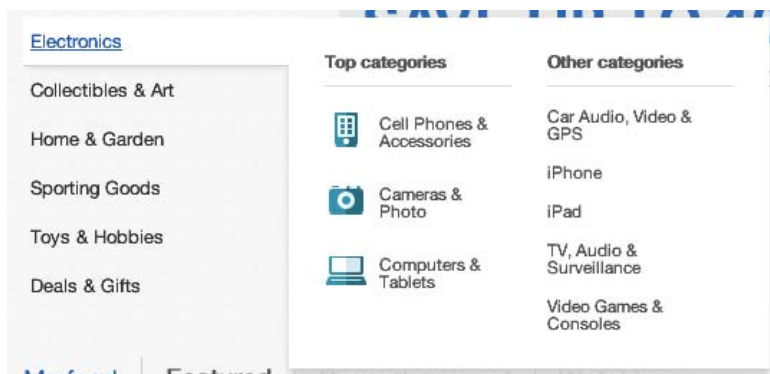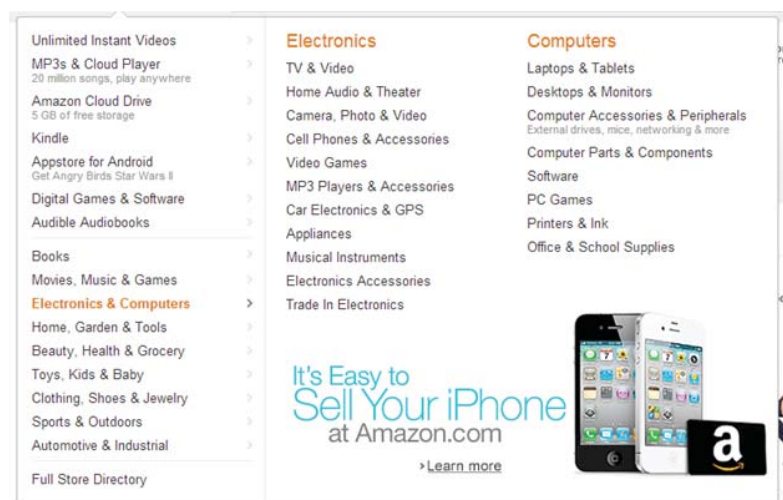
eBay's menu isn't quite as comprehensive as Amazon's, but it's similar in the way it lays out categories and subcategories in its second level.

Aesthetics aside, you can see that Amazon and eBay's menus have three things in common:

- They only have one level
- They include all submenus that are related with the parent category
- They take up a considerable amount of real estate on the page

This leaves little room for users to encounter menu behaviors that will irritate them, like the menu collapsing if a user's cursor ventures too far off the menu item. Without these potential irritants, you're allowing your customer to focus on the important aspects of your site: your products, services and/or content.

SOLUTION #2: CLICKABLE MENUS

You may have noticed that some of the biggest headaches from multi-level menus come from having to hover your mouse over items to activate them. Thankfully, there are other options that our studies have shown to be more user-friendly, like clickable menus.

Google's clickable "Apps" button stays put no matter where your cursor goes.
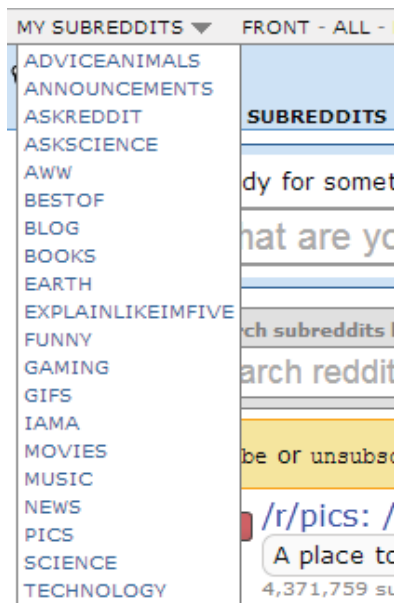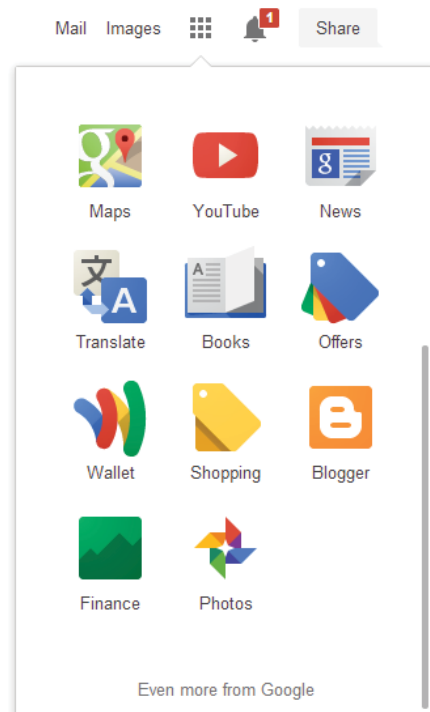
The self-proclaimed "front page of the Internet," Reddit, features a clickable menu.

{ *... some of the biggest headaches from multi-level menus come from having to hover your mouse over items to activate them.*

The main benefit of having a clickable menu is that your site's visitors don't have to be as careful when selecting items. Once they've clicked on your menu and the options drop down, they'll remain there until the user has clicked the menu link again. It's predictable and easy, which is just the way your customers like it.

LESSON 1

Links Should Look Like Links

Think of links as road signs telling your visitors what to do. You want your links to grab the attention of your visitors and to be distinguishable from the surrounding copy.

We wonder how many cars got towed because of Cayetano Ferrer's art.

Like the sign in the image above, if your links aren't obvious enough within your body copy, there's a good chance your visitors will miss them. Just take a look at the video below as an example. The tester is looking for a link to the "basic uploader" without realizing that it's right in front of her.
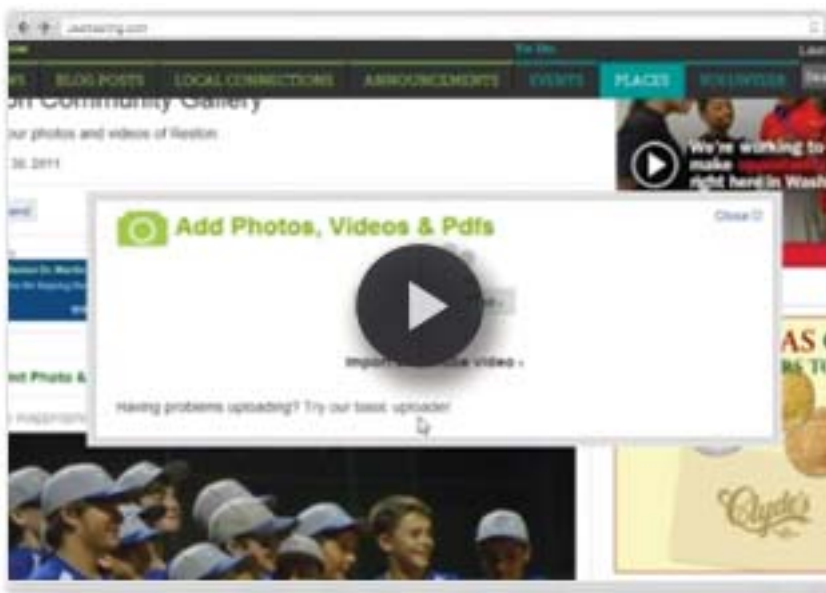
"Okay, that's frustrating. It would make more sense to me that you'd have a link that I could just click on."

We've found that there are two traits that people use to identify a link: it's underlined and it's a different color from the body text. Simple, right?

Based on our studies, navigation elements are the exception, and we've found that users expect navigation elements to be clickable. As long as your text is legible, you're good to go.

SOLUTION: USE DIFFERENT COLORS FOR VISITED AND UNVISITED LINKS

Navigating through your site shouldn't be a process of trial and error. In the early days of the Internet, it was easy to spot which links we'd clicked and which ones we hadn't. Unvisited links were blue, and visited links were purple.

> *Navigating through your site shouldn't be a process of trial and error.*

These days, our links are much more colorful, and they're usually done this way to complement the color scheme of a given site. Make it easier for your visitors by using different colors for your visited and unvisited links. This typically works best if your unvisited link colors are vivid, while your visited links should be a muted variation of the color.

Most Customers Want More Payment Options

Many of us have experienced the disappointment of finding out that a store only accepts cash or certain credit cards as forms of payment. If this happened in a restaurant and you'd already finished your meal, your disappointment was likely coupled with embarrassment and maybe a stint alongside the dishwashing crew.

"But… but all I have is my American Express card…"

When potential customers visit your e-commerce store and find that you don't have their preferred payment method, they're faced with the same disappointment that you and I have when we see a "cash only" sign at a restaurant.

While it's likely that you have the most popular credit card options readily available on your site, nowadays, it might not be enough. Because of security concerns, and the inconvenience of having to type out a credit card number and a security code every time you order online, new payment options have emerged that make shopping online less of a hassle.

SOLUTION: IMPLEMENT A VIRTUAL WALLET SERVICE

Based on our studies, we've found that customers like the option of paying with virtual wallet services such as PayPal and Google Wallet. With these services in place, checking out online becomes as easy as putting in your email address and virtual wallet password.

As these services continue to gain widespread acceptance, more customers like the one in the video below will expect to see it on your e-commerce store.
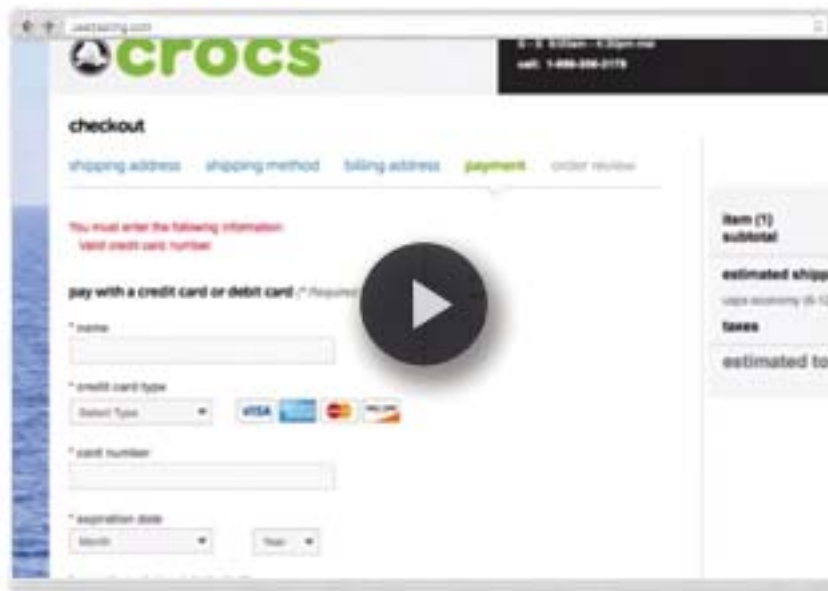
From this study, Crocs was able to make the necessary adjustments to satisfy their customers and subsequently added PayPal to their payment options.

Virtual wallet services also have the added benefit of alleviating your customers' security concerns because they'll have one less website to store their sensitive payment information.

{ *With these services in place, checking out online becomes as easy as putting in your email address and virtual wallet password.*

If you're a small business without the name recognition of the big boys in your space, this added security benefit also increases the likelihood of a new customer converting, and who doesn't like seeing their conversion rates and revenues go up?

Not All Icons Are Universal

If you've read our ebook, The Four Mobile Traps, you've seen how icons can be a source of confusion among mobile users. But this issue goes beyond mobile apps and sites, and extends into desktop applications and websites.

What you might have intended to be a "share" button might be interpreted as a "reply" button to others. Take a look at the highlighted Google Plus icon below. At first glance, would you know what clicking the button would do?

Is it a share button, or is it a reply button?
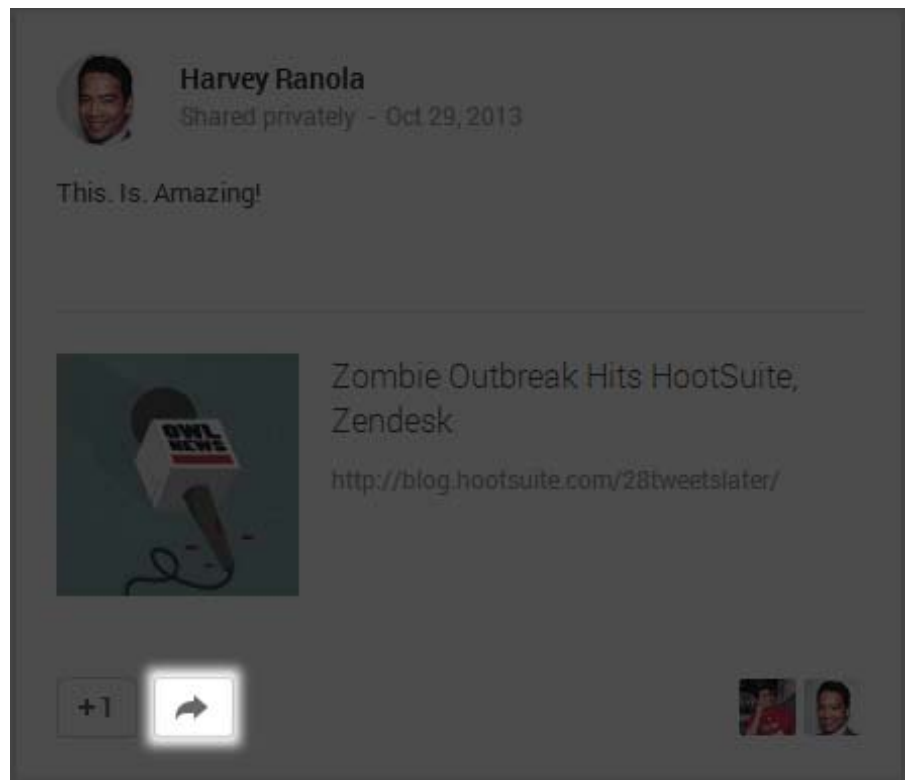
As you know, it's important to keep the attention of your visitors, and the last thing you want is for them to be distracted from the content on your site because they misinterpreted a symbol.

SOLUTION: USE TOOLTIPS TO DESCRIBE ICONS

If you spend a lot of time adding images to websites, it's easy to forget how effective tooltips can be. For instance, longtime Twitter users may be familiar with this icon:

Twitter's "compose new tweet" button.

However, new users might not understand the significance of the icon. After all, who uses a quill to write things down these days? The good thing is, Twitter benevolently included a tooltip that spells out exactly what this button will allow users to do.

Thankfully, Twitter included a very informative tooltip.

By hovering over the button, new users can see that this is another way for them to compose a new tweet to share with their followers. It's simple, but effective.

Social Integrations Cause Privacy Concerns

Thanks to the open nature of social media and the Web, we'll always be somewhat paranoid of how our information is being used, and where it's going to appear. With social media sharing buttons growing more widespread, you're bound to be faced with the decision of whether or not you want a site to access your personal information, in exchange for allowing you to share content.

If you're not sure what these prompts look like, take a look at the example below.

Browse the Web long enough, and you're bound to encounter this prompt when attempting to share content.
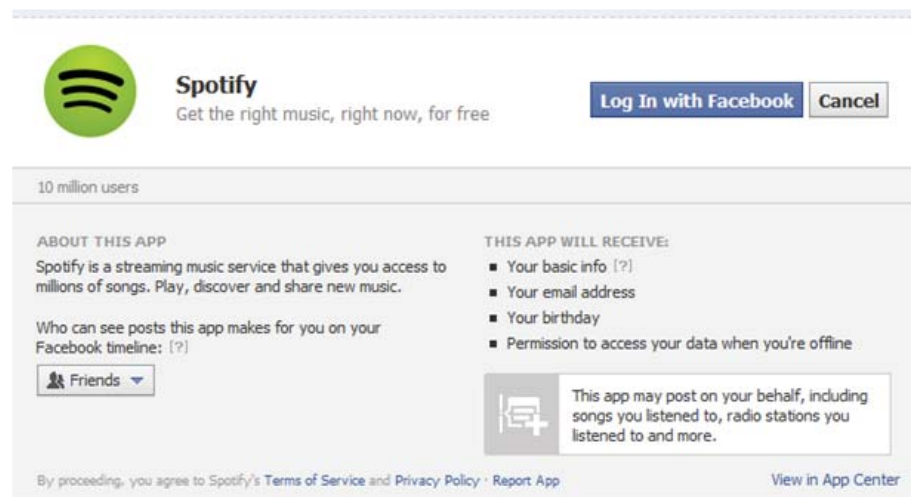
While there is growing acceptance of social media integrations, your site's visitors will still have reservations about allowing your apps to access their social media accounts. Thankfully, there are things you can do to alleviate your users' privacy concerns.

SOLUTION: BE TRANSPARENT

Our studies have found that users strongly object to an app posting things on their behalf, so lay everything out on the table when explaining to users how your app will integrate with their social media accounts.

> *... lay everything out on the table when explaining to users how your app will integrate with their social media accounts*

This isn't limited to your app posting content on their social media timelines; it also addresses how your app uses their personal information and location. If your app absolutely must access this information, explain to your users why you'll need it and how it will be used.

Spotify Privacy Policy

Effective as from 17 October 2012

1. Introduction
2. The information we collect
3. How we use the information we collect
4. How we share the information we collect
5. Your preferences
6. Transfer to other countries
7. Links
8. Security
9. Children
10. Accessing and updating user information
11. Contact us
12. Changes to the Privacy Policy
13. More information about cookies & similar technologies

Spotify has an easily accessible privacy policy link from their Facebook app that explains to users how their personal information will be used.

Ads Should Be Consistent with Landing Pages

If you decide to watch a movie based on a trailer, it's likely because you saw something you liked. Now if it turned out that what you liked about the trailer didn't show up in the movie at all, you'd probably be disappointed. Well, through the studies we've conducted, we've found that ads and their corresponding landing pages work the same way.

Think of your ads like movie trailers, and your landing pages as the movie. If a visitor finds something they like in an ad and clicks through only to find that the landing page has nothing to do with the reason they clicked the ad, chances are they're not sticking around to look for what you were advertising.

This user clicked on an ad for a $69 computer and was disappointed at what she found on the landing page.

So how do you make sure that your site's visitors don't feel like they've been misled?

SOLUTION #1: CONSISTENT COPY AND IMAGES

If your ad has "25% off During Our BIG Winter Sale!" in bold letters over a snowy, blue background, your landing page should include those same elements from the ad. This is how your customers know they've landed on the right page.

Metal stalwarts Metallica expertly carry the images and copy from their ad over into their landing page.

If your ad is inconsistent with your landing page, you're putting your customers back at square one and in unfamiliar territory. Remember, people like consistency, and they like to be in familiar surroundings. If there's even a hint of uncertainty or confusion in your customer, it's time to go back to the drawing board.

SOLUTION #2: CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION FROM YOUR AD

Much in the same way that you're maintaining consistency with your copy and design, when appropriate, your ad copy should also continue the conversation from your ad.

For example, if your ad asks, "Looking For Info. About Migraines?" like the ad below, your landing page should include copy that indicates to the visitor that he or she is on the right page. In the case of the Excedrin ad below, the landing page is a migraine information center, and it is a perfect example of continuing the conversation from the ad.
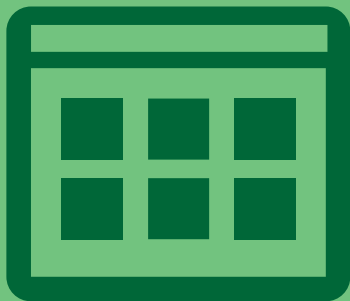

This Excedrin ad tells potential customers that they can find more information about migraines and follows through in the landing page.

There's No Perfect Way to Categorize Pages or Products

## (But There's a Right Way to Do It)

One of the most difficult things to do when setting up the layout of your website is determining the categories of your subpages or product pages. The reason for this difficulty is that while you may categorize things one way, another person might categorize them a completely different way.

> *... the first thing you should do is to get out of the mindset that there's a perfect way to categorize your pages.*

Is Pluto a planet or not? Is pizza a vegetable or is it just pasta? The debates rage on and on about similar issues, so it shouldn't be a surprise that while one person sees a vacuum cleaner as an electronic gadget, another sees it as a "home and garden" item. You can see how this plays out in the video below.

This user looks at electronics twice and only finds the vacuum cleaners after scanning all the categories.
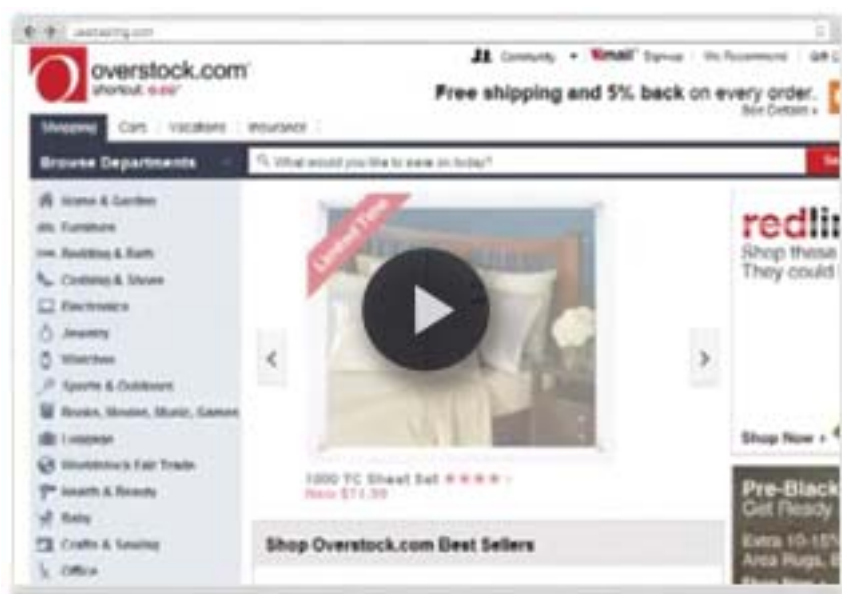
And this doesn't apply only to e-commerce stores. In another one of our studies, even the NFL's Baltimore Ravens gave visitors a bit of trouble when they tried to find the team's win-loss record:

*"I don't know...
I can't do it."*

Now you might be thinking, "so how do I fix it?" Well, the first thing you should do is to get out of the mindset that there's a perfect way to categorize your pages. The more pages you have on your site, the more difficult it will be to categorize them in a way that makes sense to 100% of your visitors. What you can do is to make your categories intuitive for a bigger chunk of your site's visitors.

SOLUTION #1: TEST HOW SOMEONE WOULD FIND A PAGE WITHOUT INTERNAL SEARCH

It's important to understand how your site's visitors are finding content on your site because otherwise, you're flying blind with your attempts at optimizing it. User testing not only allows you to find exactly where customers are getting hung up on your site, it also reveals what you've done right.

> *... User testing not only allows you to find exactly where customers are getting hung up on your site, it also reveals what you've done right.*

When setting up tasks for your study, ask users to find a few products or pages on your site using only the navigation. Be sure to emphasize that they cannot use your site's search field to find these pages. You'll want them to focus on using your navigation to get them to the right page.

While analyzing your results, note the path they take to find the pages you've selected and any difficulties they might have along the way. After running a few of these tests, you'll have a much better idea of where your customers are getting tied up, and you'll have the data you need to focus on your biggest problem spots.

SOLUTION #2: CARD SORTING

Card sorting tests allow you to figure out the best way to organize your categories, and you can do so without breaking the bank. While there are a number of card sorting services out there, all you really need is a pen or pencil, a few strips of paper and a few willing participants.

Setting up the test is simple. Simply write up your categories and place them on the side of the table furthest from your participants. Then write up the various items you need categorized, and have your participants place these items below the category that is most logical to them. After running a few tests, you'll begin to find trends with how people organize your items, as well as potential problems with your categories.

Ohio University's library Web team used a stack of cards for their card sorting tests.
Credit: Ohio University

If you're looking for a more high tech solution, or maybe you just don't want to spend time cutting up flash cards, services like Optimal Sort are available online and help you conduct your card sorting tests remotely. What's even better is that if you're running a small test, many of these services are actually free.

Take a look at the examples below. The screen captures show the final results of the card sorting tests. Before you click on the videos to watch them, note the differences in how each tester categorized these products.
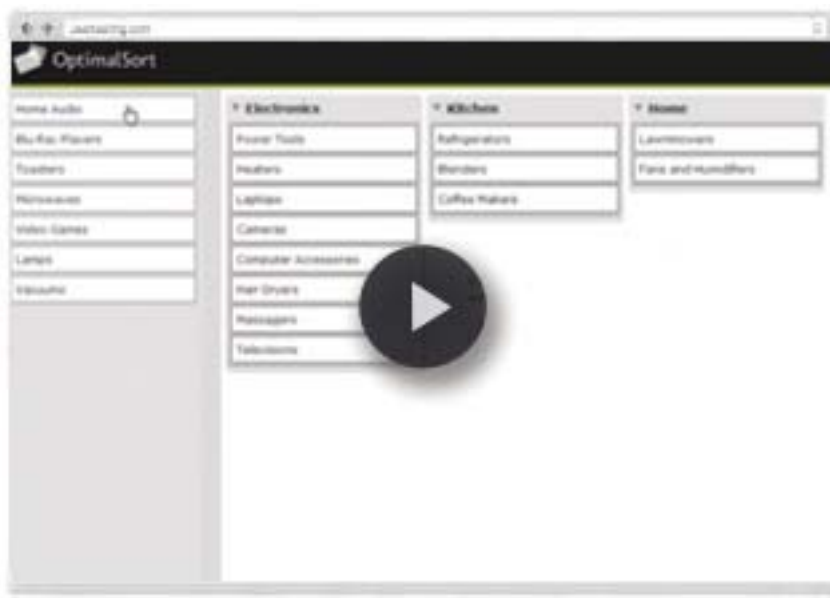
*This user wasn't sure if "Power Tools" belonged under "Home" or "Electronics."*

This user had second thoughts about some of his sorting decisions.

Remember, depending on the number of items on your site, it might be impossible to find a configuration that's logical to everybody. As you continue to revise your categories, you'll eventually find the most effective way to categorize your products for a majority of your site's visitors. This means more conversions for your site, and even better usability for your users.

{ *As you continue to revise your categories, you'll eventually find the most effective way to categorize your products for a majority of your site's visitors.*

Closing Thoughts
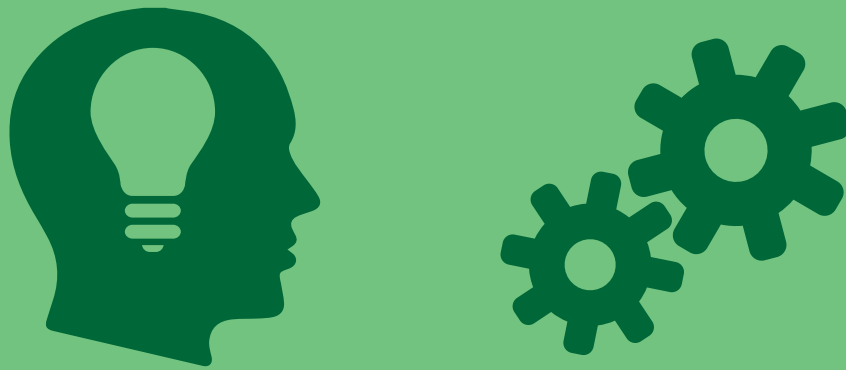
While these 7 lessons topped our list of lessons learned, we encourage you to run your own tests so you can learn even more about your users. Use the findings in this eBook to guide your own studies, and in time, you'll be able to find the solutions that are right for you. To summarize:

- **Multi level navs are not user friendly:** Mega menus and clickable menus help create a better experience for your users.

- **Links should look like links:** Tried and true link conventions from the early days of the web are still the most effective ways to format your links.

- **Most customers want more payment options:** Virtual wallet services are a great way to make checking out easier and more secure.

- **Not all icons are universal:** Test users for comprehension and use tool tips to describe your most important icons.

- **Social integrations cause privacy concerns:** Always be transparent with how you'll be using your user information.

- **Ads should be consistent with landing pages:** Maintain the theme from your ads to your landing pages and continue the conversation that brought users to your page.

- **There's no perfect way to categorize pages or products:** Test your internal search and use card sorting to find the categories that work best for your customers.

THERE'S MORE TO LEARN ABOUT YOUR OWN SITE

Optimizing your site is a continuous process, but it doesn't have to be difficult or time consuming. With UserTesting, you can set up a test for your site or app, and get results in the time it takes to grab a bite to eat. You're also guaranteed to find actionable insights from your tests or you'll get your money back.

There's really *nothing to lose*, and conversions to gain.

Get more out of your test results with UserTesting Enterprise. With a UserTesting Enterprise plan, we do all of the heavy lifting.

You'll have access to a research team who will create and administer tests, bookmark key findings in your videos and deliver an actionable report that will show you what's working and what needs improvement.

Take advantage of an expanded pool of users and additional demographics, or use live intercepts to gain valuable insights from real customers who are browsing your site right now… and that's only a handful of the additional features you'll have access to with a UserTesting Enterprise plan.

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a demo and have all of your questions answered.

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