

Usability Analysis Essay

-- Delta Air Lines vs. American Airline

Introduction

It is universally acknowledged that there are four major airlines in the United States. Delta Air Lines, American Airlines (AA), United Airlines (UA), and Southwest Airlines. Some of them are very international and some of them are more focused on the US market. Since Delta and AA are two airlines that I'm more familiar with and have a high reputation, the official websites of Delta Air Lines and American Airlines are what I would like to analyze here.

Delta Air Lines (also called Delta) and American Airlines are both legacy carriers. Atlanta is Delta's largest hub and where its headquarter located in and AA is headquartered in Fort Worth, Texas. Their operates are both over 5 thousand flights daily and serves in more than 50 countries on 6 continents. The prime target segment of Delta is business travelers and the target segment of AA is male and female working professionals, ages 25-54, that are affluent customers and often fly internationally. According to the information that related, we could certainly say that the user of these two airline websites come from all over the world. The design and usability of these websites are definitely worth studying.

Design

What is the design of a website? It's about aesthetics! When we first look at these two websites, the big difference we first notice is the color. The background color of the Delta websites is kind of deep, dark blue while the AA website is all about bright white. The Delta

website uses white and red as the color of the font and button to create more attraction and the AA website uses blue color to catch more attention. The same thing is that the two photos on the header area of these two websites are both match their main background color. More specifically, the Delta website uses an Analogous color scheme. Red and blue as hue are next to each other on the color wheel. It easily brings a harmonious and comfortable feeling. However, red is the lack of contrast choice when the background is dark blue. According to the AA website, it uses the Monochromatic color scheme. White background with blue title and button (also include red in the logo). It is very simplicity but harmony. Why they both using red and blue colors on the websites? Don't forget! They are both airline companies, the color psychology of these two colors is very good choices: "Excitement" and "Trust". They look very different but the main concept is similar.

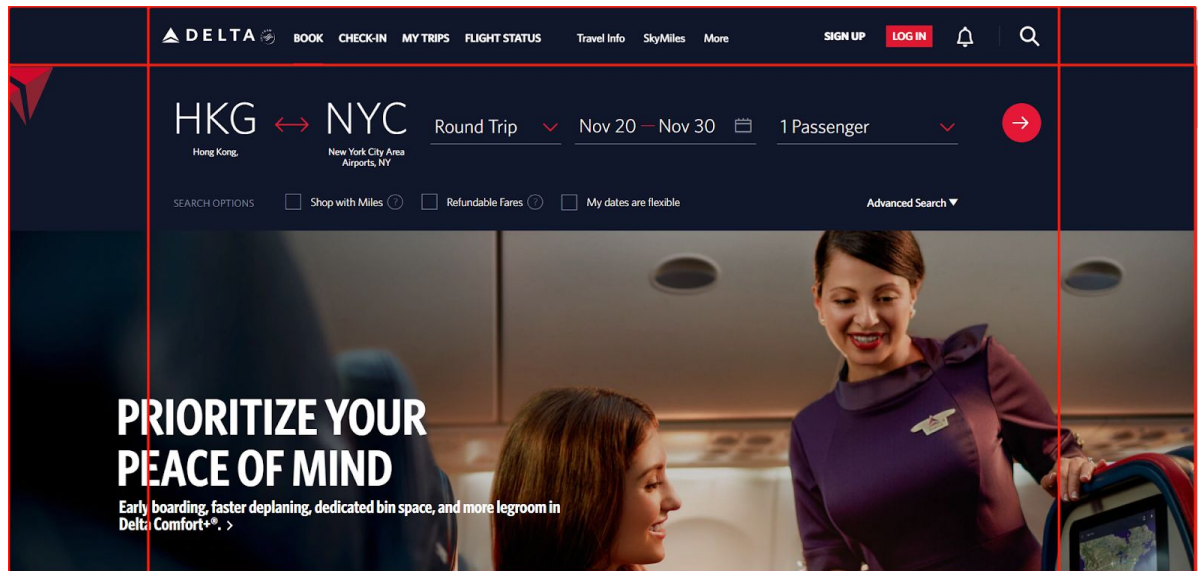


Figure 1.1 Delta

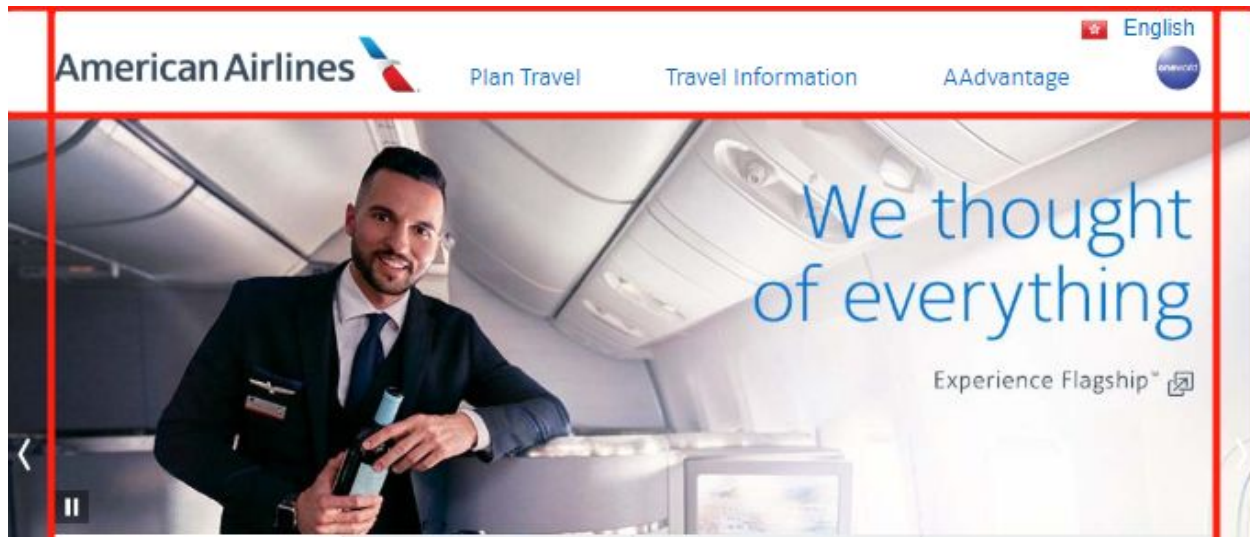


Figure 1.2 AA

Color is the first thing when we look at a website. What is the first thing when we create a website? The principles of design are what we can not miss. Both of the two websites are following the 12 column grid concept. I would say both of them use the multicolumn grid with a horizontal anchor style. In the Home Page (Figure 1.1 & 1.2), they both put a photo with a flight steward (stewardess) in the horizontal anchor. It shows a strong connection with the theme of the web page. The flight stewardess in the Delta website keeps right, it makes users easier to focus on other things, such as the searching and the “PRIORITIZE YOUR PEACE OF MIND” title (The Golden Triangle & white color). While the flight steward’s position of the AA website is similar to the CUHK website example that has shown in class. Though the steward didn’t look to the right side, his body leans to the right. It also leads people’s attention to the slogan “We thought of everything”.

The content hierarchy and the headings of both websites are very clear. As Figure 1.3 and 1.4, both websites are corporate sites that have multiple functions. Compare with the Delta website, the AA website is more simple and informative (three-column). The grid of the Delta

website is more complicated but has a sense of design. Though both websites use sans-serif typography, the design is different. From Figure 1.3, a big part of the Delta website are in caps. Including the title of the website, some navigation part, the title of contents, and buttons. While all the titles and contents in the AA website use lowercase (Figure 1.2 & 1.4). I would say that the Delta website provides more visual impact and more special. However, the AA website is more simple and clear.

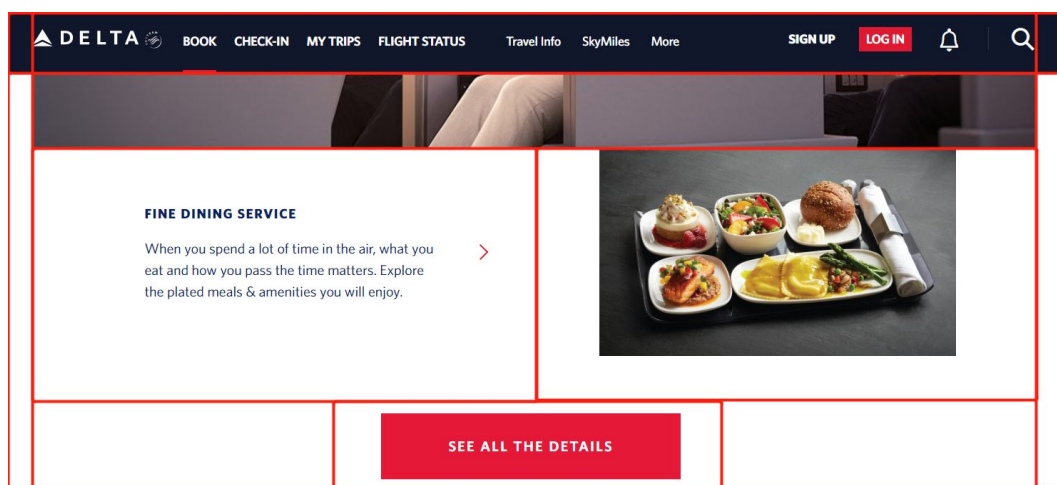


Figure 1.3 Delta

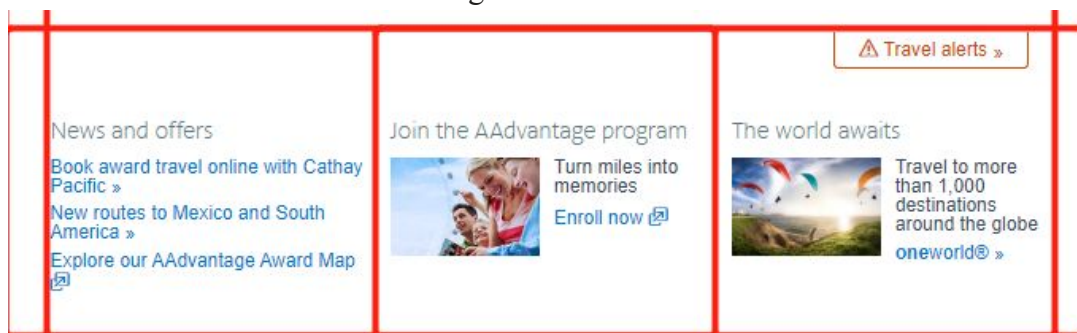


Figure 1.4 AA

What about the size of these two websites? The screen resolution of my computer is 1920*1080. Both of the websites show perfectly in this resolution and also on the screen of my mobile phone. I've found something interesting when I scale down the page size on my computer. The appearance of both websites automatically changed. For the Delta website, the

layout of the navigation bar irregularly changed from one line to two lines. Moreover, the horizontal anchor part (picture) and the red logo fits the width of the page, didn't scale down along with other content. While there's nothing changed on the AA website except the overall size. In a word, the content of the Delta website separate in different parts while the AA website is more complete as a whole.

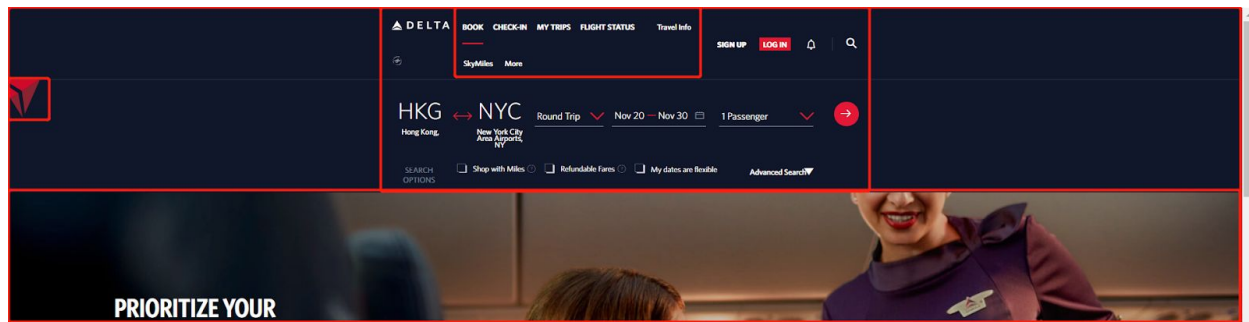


Figure 1.5 Delta

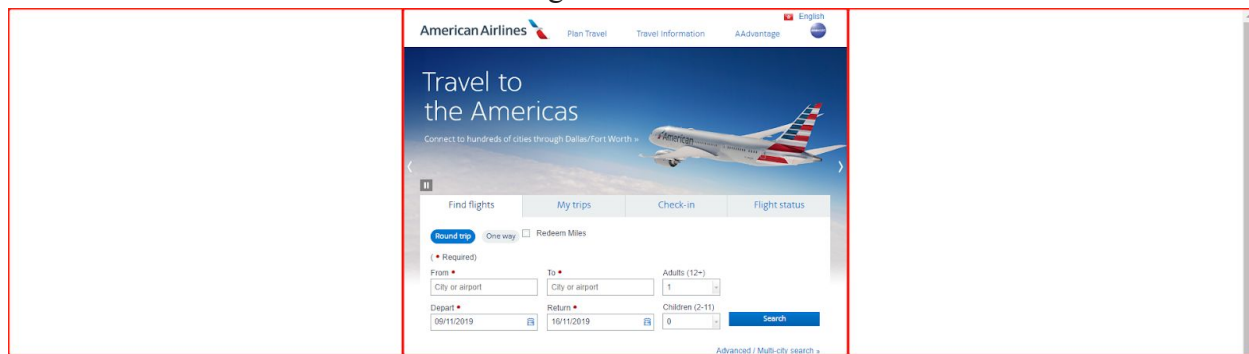


Figure 1.6 Delta

Usability

Great products and websites combine both good design and usability. Not only what it looks like, but also what it makes people feel about it. A website with great usability has the power to make users revisit it. Otherwise, it will gradually lose all the users. As I focus on two websites of international airline companies, the main function of these two websites is very clear: provide information and selling the ticket! For this purpose, usability plays a decisive role.

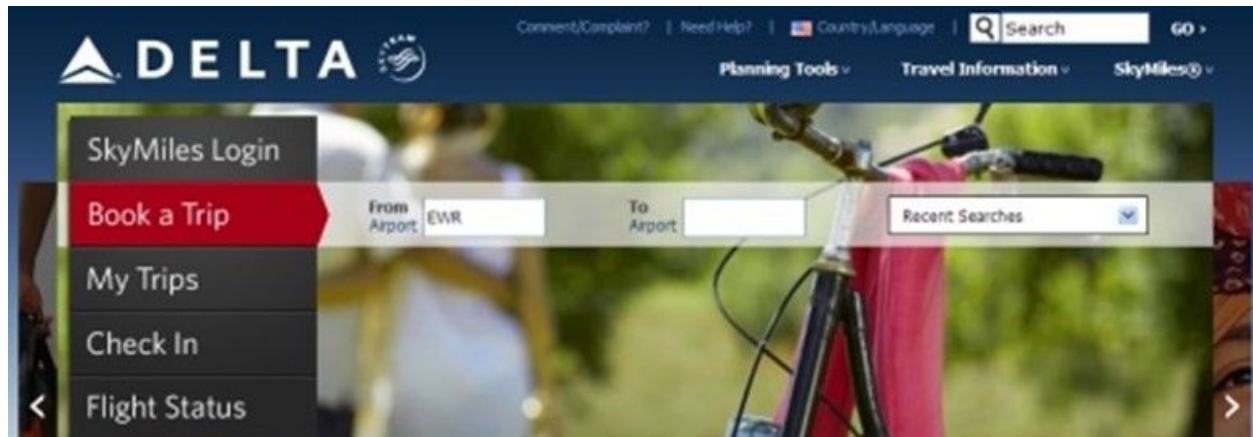


Figure 2.1 Old Delta website navigation bar (2010)

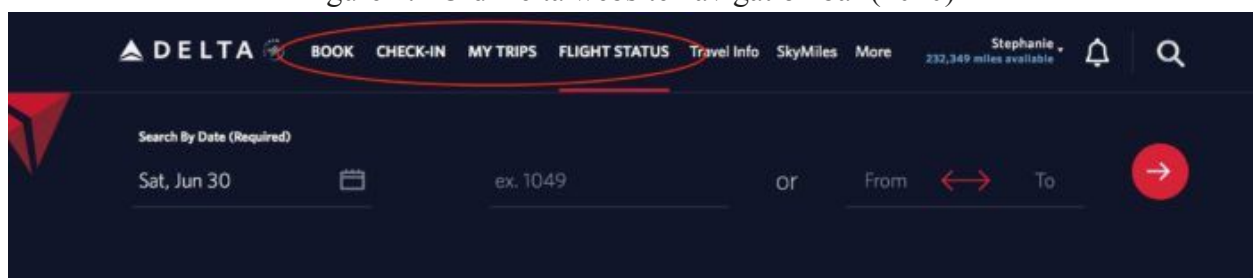


Figure 2.2 Current Delta website navigation bar (2019)

Website navigation is the first part that every visitor will use. It's like a road map to all the different areas and the information contained within the website. Using the navigation from page to page lets visitors learn the basic navigation system and find their needed information around the website more easily. Both Delta and AA websites combined link and search-orientated navigation to meet their users' needs. Yet the changes over time still exist. For the Delta website, the link and search-orientated navigation parts were separated before 2010. The old website uses a typical golden triangle pattern and always puts its Skymiles member first. While both parts are on the top of the current Delta website with full caps and functions (dropdown or flyout) to distinguish them. Furthermore, the navigation was simplified. For example, from "Travel information" to "Travel Info" (Figure 2.1 & 2.2). In a word, the current navigation part of the Delta website is more clear and user-friendly.

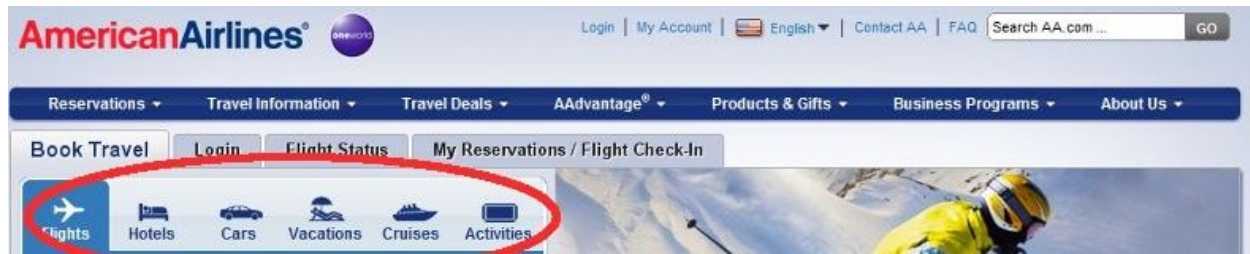


Figure 2.3 Old AA website navigation bar (2010)

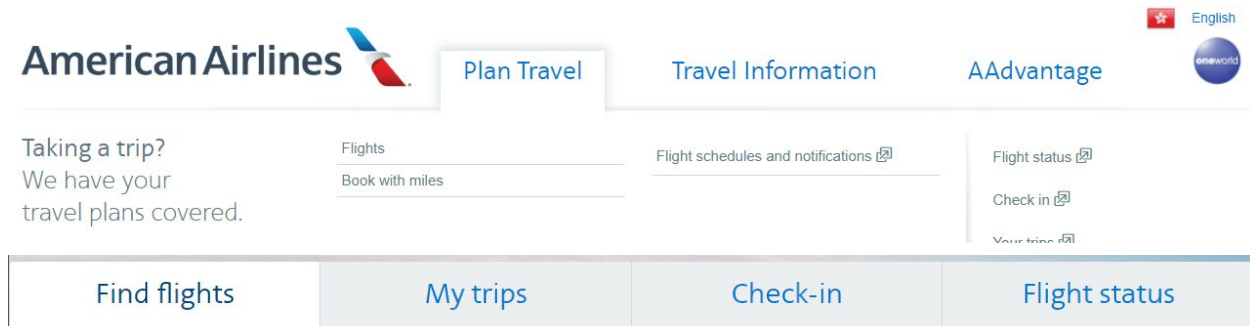


Figure 2.4 Current AA website navigation bar (2019)

As for the AA website, the changes are more obviously from 2010 to 2019 (Figure 2.3 & 2.4). Though the link and search-orientated navigation are separate all the time, both of them become much simpler! The link-orientated navigation was cut from seven to three and the search-orientated navigation removed the options part with small graphics (eg. Flights and Hotels). The current AA website re-integrated the information to improve their user experience. But the stabled navigation bar is the weakness of the current AA website! The navigation bar that follows the screen movement on the Delta website is more convenient. On coloring, the Delta and the AA websites both changed their color and make the navigation more appealing. It works great to grab the visitors' attention for a moment. What's next?

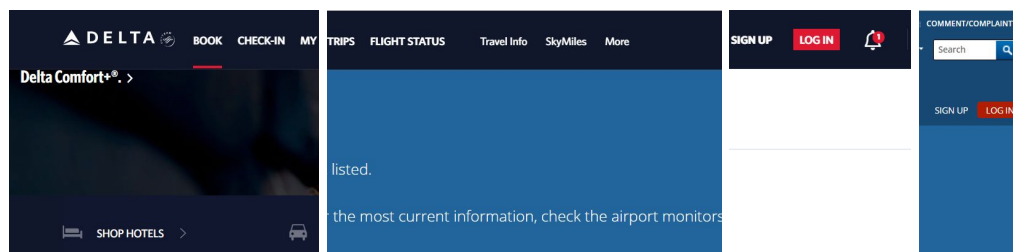


Figure 2.5 Delta background

Undeniably, both Delta and AA websites (current) did great on the internal consistency within pages. The grid, the font, the color, and the pictures are fairly uniform. The same color always has the same meaning. In the Delta website, the pictures are very creative and full of textures. The pictures are positive and contagious on the AA website. The internal consistency between the pages of the AA website is also great. The pure white background gives visitors a touch of contemporary and elegance. However, the color of the Delta webpages is not very consistent. Sometimes dark blue; sometimes pure white; sometimes light blue, like the old Delta website(Figure 2.5). A lot of subpages are still using the old Delta website page, including the grid, the navigation part, and the footer part. The Delta webpages do not provide a good visual experience to their visitors.

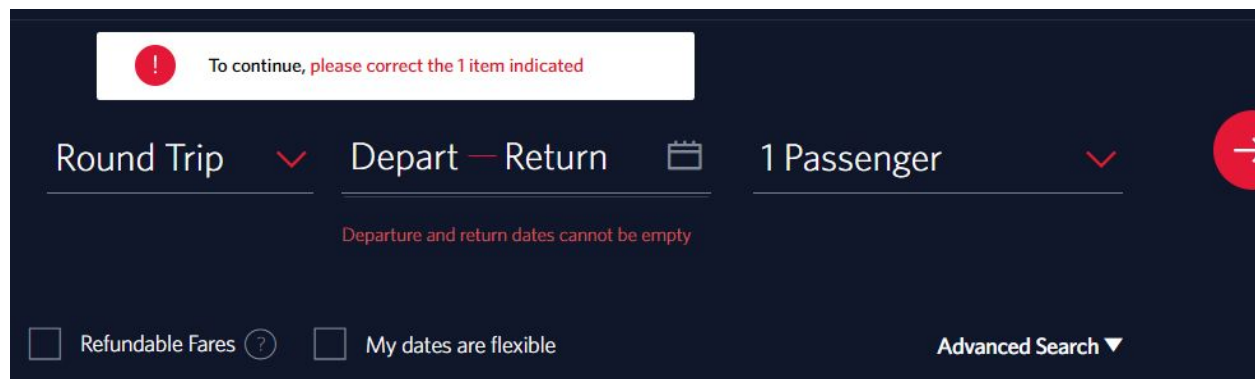


Figure 2.6 Delta Error

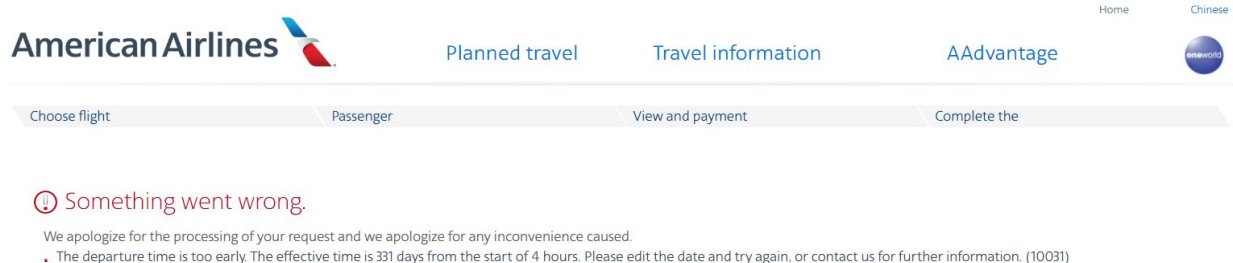


Figure 2.7 AA Error

On the one hand, the Delta website does not handle the “Consistency and contrast” well. On the other hand, its “Error handling” is much better than AA. When visitors enter incorrectly or forget to enter their information in the searching area, the webpage will automatically pop up a detailed prompt message with red text on the same page. As shown in Figure 2.6, the Delta website tells me directly that I left the “Departure and Return Date” empty. When I do the same for the AA website, the response is much more comprehensive (Figure 2.7). The AA website starts a new page and alerts “Something went wrong”. What if the visitor doesn’t know what went wrong and where to modify it? Therefore, both websites have their advantages and disadvantages. It’s difficult to say which one is more usable.

Report usability (task-based comparisons)

I’m too familiar to tell which part of each website is more useful than another. I am curious about people’s feelings who have never used these two airline websites. So, I invited two of my friends, Lin and Chen, to help me complete the usability test. They are willing to spend their time and give it a try. I provide a Windows computer and an iPhone for them to try. They use the computer as their primary device. Before the test, I first explained to them about the purpose and the details about this usability test. Then I also informed them that I will record the whole process and there’s no need to be nervous. Just think aloud no matter the answer is correct or not. Their opinions are the most important thing that I would like to know. The observation I made is:

As a college student (don’t have much money), you need to buy a round-trip flight ticket from Hong Kong to New York during November 20th, 2019 and November

30th, 2019. Since you don't want to spend too much time on the road, you are only looking for the one-stop flight. Also, for some reason, the return flight needs to departure after 5 p.m.

Lin is the first volunteer who did the usability test. Since she has never using an English airline website to book a trip before, she took this test very seriously. When Lin started the operation, everything went smoothly. Firstly, she thought Delta's search-orientated navigation bar create a clearer user journey than AA (Figure 1.5 & 1.6). More specifically, the search-orientated navigation bar of the Delta website is always floating at the top of every page. The AA website doesn't have it, but it has the "following nav" which is also very useful (Figure 3.2).

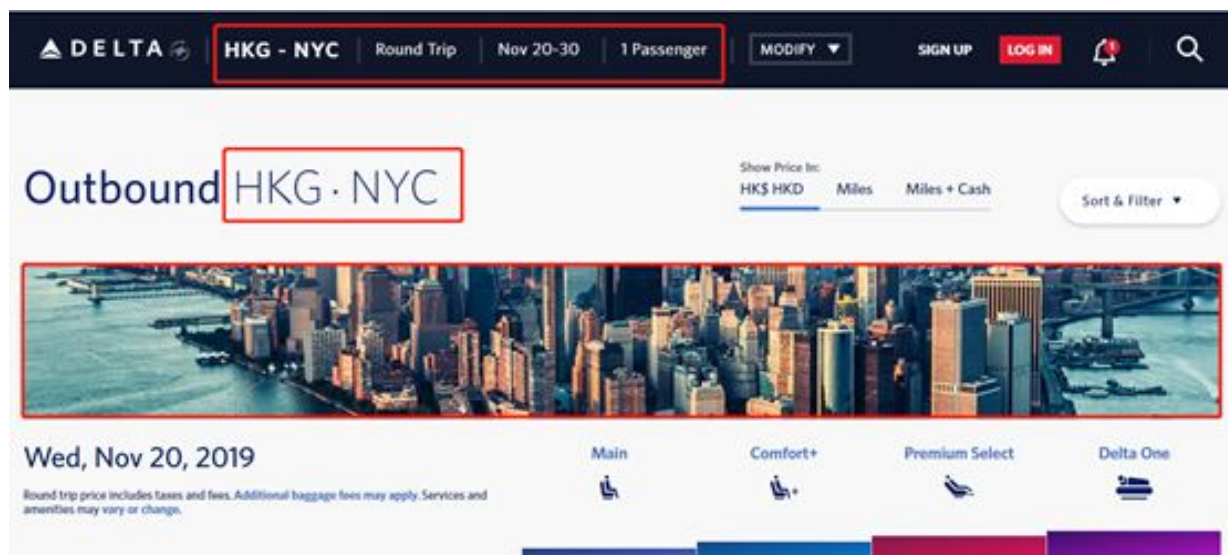


Figure 3.1 Delta searching



Figure 3.2 AA searching

Secondly, she doesn't like the abbreviations that Delta uses for the airport name (Figure 3.1). "User, just like me, who don't familiar with the abbreviations may confuse about it," she said, "It's better to have the full name of the airport like AA website" (Figure 3.2). Over-simplistic sometimes is not good. Last but not least, she thinks the sort order of the search results on the AA website is more human. The results are sorted by price, time, etc. The top recommendation is like the right balance of all the requirement and it perfectly meets her needs. Since the results are automatically sorted by time, it's very easy to find all flights that departure after 5 pm on November 30. However, the search results of the Delta website are very messy. The top recommended flights are not advisable. For example, the first one is the cheapest but at the crack of dawn and has multiple stops and the second one is an expensive direct flight or new aircraft. In this case, AA is the website that she found more usable. Convenience is the first thing she cares about.

Another volunteer, Chen, has used the English airline website several times but not including the Delta and AA websites. I could tell from her operation that she is familiar with the English airline website. When she opened the Delta home page, a popup window appeared and asked if she needed to change the origin to Hong Kong or change the default language. While

she didn't get any guidance from the AA website and she needed to set the origin and the language by herself. That's the first difference she told me. What's more, she could read all the tickets and personal information within one webpage before making her payment. This page allowed her to check all the information while reminded her that this is the last step. Meanwhile, the AA website's ticketing process is step-by-step which has no step for users to preview the final information. These functions of the Delta website served Chen's needs and gave her a clear cognition about where she is.



Figure 3.3 AA popup window

The visual design of the Delta website is what she praises me repeatedly. The color collocation of the homepage is extraordinary great! Compare with the AA homepage (white & blue), the Delta homepage looks more business and high-end. It definitely enhanced the interaction of the Delta website. When Chen came to the next step and selected a flight on the

AA website, she could not find the “Continue” button. The only thing that popup is the ad window about upgrade class (Figure 3.3). She took a while to find the “Continue” button. It is actually at the very bottom of that page. This design gave Chen a really bad user experience and feeling about the AA website. Also, the popup window does not respect her. In contrast, the Delta website gave Chen a great ticket buying experience. The page loading speed of the Delta website is also faster than AA. She said she will become a loyal member of the Delta airlines because of this usability test.

In a word, Lin and Chen accomplished the task well. Even though their preferences are different, they both thought these two websites generally served their needs on both the iPhone and computer (responsive design with flexible grids). At the end of the task, I gave them a little gift as thanks.

Conclusion & recommendations

In conclusion, design and usability complement each other to enhance the user experience of the website. As I analyzed throughout this essay, these two websites have their own styles and focus. Every part of the design has its reason and purpose. We could find out the truth of usability by analysis the change of the design over the years. Therefore, design and usability could not be separated.

After doing the usability test with Lin and Chen, the strengths and weaknesses of these two websites are undoubted. The Delta website is more focused on the design and serves for the users who are familiar with the operation. Its transition from the old style to the new style has not been fully completed. The AA website has a very simple design but dedicates to providing a

good operating experience for every user. The “upgrade class” and the “Continue” button really need to be fixed.

Reference

Steph, Ben, & Kate. (2018, July 1). 5 Known Issues (And Workarounds) On The New Delta Website. Retrieved November 1, 2019, from

<https://onemileatatime.com/new-delta-website-issues/>.

Yunker, J. (2010, March 22). The best global airline web site: American Airlines. Retrieved November 1, 2019, from

<https://globalbydesign.com/2010/03/22/best-global-airline-web-site-american-airlines/>.

Airline Tickets & Flights: Book Direct with Delta Air Lines - Official Site. (n.d.). Retrieved November 15, 2019, from <https://www.delta.com/>.

American Airlines - Airline tickets and cheap flights at AA.com. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.aa.com/homePage.do>.