

Don't Make Me Think

- A Common Sense Approach to Web Usability

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1. Don't make me think!

I could list dozens of other things that visitors to a site shouldn't spend their time thinking about, like:

- Where am I?
- Where should I begin?
- Where did they put _____ ?
- What are the most important things on this page?
- Why did they call it that?

2. How we really use the web.

Scanning , satisficing, and muddling through

We don't read pages. We scan them.

- We're usually in a hurry.
- We know we don't need to read everything.
- We're good at it. We've been scanning newspapers, magazines, and books all our lives to find the parts we're interested in , and we know that it works.

We don't make optical choices. We satisfice.

In reality, though, most of the time we don't choose the best option- we choose the first reasonable option, a strategy known as satisficing. As soon as we find a link that seems like it might lead to what we're looking for, there's a very good chance that we'll click it.

Why don't Web users look for the best choice?

- We're usually in a hurry.
- There's not much of a penalty for guessing wrong.
- Weighing options may not improve our chances
On poorly designed sites, putting effort into making the best choice doesn't really help. You're usually better off going with your first guess and using the Back button if it doesn't work out
- Guessing is more fun.

3. Billboard Design 101

Designing pages for scanning, not reading

Faced with the fact that your users are whizzing by, there are five important things you can do to make sure they see- and understand- as much of your site as possible.

- Create a clear visual hierarchy on each page
- Take advantage of conventions
- Break pages up into clearly defined areas
- Make it obvious what's clickable
- Minimize noise

Create a clear visual hierarchy

- The more important something is, the more prominent it is.
- Things that are related logically are also related visually.
- Things are "nested" visually to show what's part of what.

Conventions are you friends

Conventions enable users to figure out a lot about a Web page, even if they can't understand a word of it.

- They're very useful
- Designers are often reluctant to take advantage of them.

Break up pages into clearly defined areas.

Make it obvious what's clickable.

Keep the noise down to a dull roar.

One of the great enemies of easy-to-grasp pages is visual noise. There are really two kinds of noise:

- Busy-ness
- Background noise.

Users have varying tolerance for complexity and distractions: some people have no problem with busy pages and background noise, but many do.

When you're designing Web pages, it's probably a good idea to assume that everything is visual noise until proven otherwise.

4. Animal, Vegetable or mineral?

Why users like mindless choices

In general I think it's safe to say that users don't mind a lot of clicks as long as each click is painless and they have continued confidence that

they're on the right track. I think the rule of thumb might be something like" three mindless, unambiguous clicks equal one click that requires thought."

We face choices all the time on the Web and making the choices mindless is one of the main things that make a site easy to use.

5. Omit Needless words.

The art of not writing for the web.

Omit needless words

Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts.

Getting rid of those words that no one is going to read has several beneficial effects:

- It reduces the noise level of the page
- It makes the useful content more prominent
- It makes the pages shorter, allowing users to see more of each page at a glance without scrolling.

Happy talk must die.

- A lot of happy talk is the kind of self-congratulatory promotional writing that you find in badly written brochures. Unlike good promotional copy, it conveys no useful information, and it focuses on saying how great we are, as opposed to delineating what makes us great.

Instruction must die.

- The main thing you need to know about instructions is that no one is going to read them. If the instructions are wordy, the odds of users finding the information they need is pretty low.
- Your objective should always be to eliminate instructions entirely by making everything self-explanatory, or as close to it as possible. When instructions are absolutely necessary, cut them back to the bare minimum.

6. Street signs and Breadcrumbs

Scene from a mall – We need a decision chart*

Web Navigation 101

- You're usually trying to find something
- You decide whether to ask first or browse first.

- If you choose to browse, you make your way through a hierarchy, using signs to guide you.
- Eventually, if you can't find what you're looking for, you'll leave.

The unbearable lightness of browsing

- No sense of scale: In web, there could be huge corners we've never explored.
- No sense of direction: meaning up and down, the direction in hierarchy- to a more general or more specific level.
- No sense of location: We develop a sense of where things are and can take shortcuts to get to them.

The overlooked purposes of navigation

Two of the purposes of navigation are fairly obvious: to help us find whatever it is we're looking for, and to tell us where we are.

- It gives us something to hold on to.
- It tells us what's here: By making the hierarchy visible, navigation tells us what the site contains.
- It tells us how to use the site: Navigation tells us implicitly where to begin and what your options are.
- It gives us confidence in the people who built it. Clear, well-thought-out navigation is one of the best opportunities a site has to create a good impression.

Web navigation conventions

The basic elements are:

- Site ID
- Sections/Sub-Sections : sometimes called the primary navigation- are the links to the main sections of the site: the top level of the site's hierarchy.
- Utilities: Important elements of the site that aren't really part of the content hierarchy.
// About Us, Archives, Checkout, Company Info, Contact Us, Customer Service, Discussion Boards, Downloads, Directory, Forums, FAQs, Help, Home, Investor Relations, How to Shop, Jobs, My____, News, Order Tracking, Press Releases, Privacy Policy, Register, Search, Shopping Cart, Sign in, Site Map, Store Locator, Your Account
- "You are here" indicator
- Page Name
- Local Navigation(Things at the current level)
- Small text version
- A way home
- A way to search

Homepage and Forms

- Homepage is not like the other pages- sometimes it makes sense not to use the persistent navigation there.

- Forms: It's useful to have a minimal version of the persistent navigation with just the Site ID, a link to Home, and any Utilities that might help me fill out the form.

Just click your heels three times and say, "There's no place like home"

There's an emerging convention that the Site ID doubles as a button that can take you to the site's Home page. It's a useful idea that every site should implement, but a surprising number of users still aren't aware of it.

- include a Home page link in either the Sections or the Utilities, or
- add the word "Home" discreetly to the site ID everywhere but the Home page to let people know that it's clickable.

A way to search

Unless a site is very small and very well organized, every page should have either a search box or a link to a search page.

- Fancy wording: "Search", not Find, Quick Find, Quick search, or Keyword Search.
- Instructions: "Type a keyword" just makes you sound clueless.
- Option: Only give the option when it is useful.

Secondary, tertiary, and whatever comes after tertiary

I almost inevitably get a flowchart that shows a site four levels deep....

I think this is one of the most common problems in Web design (especially in larger sites): failing to give the lower-level navigation the same attention as the top. In so many sites, as soon as you get past the second level, the navigation breaks down and becomes ad hoc. The problem is so common that it's actually hard to find good examples of third-level navigation.

The reality is that there's users usually end up spending as much time on lower-level pages as they do at the top. And unless you've worked out top-to-bottom navigation from the beginning, it's hard to graft it on later and come up with something consistent.

The moral? It's vital to have sample pages that show the navigation for all the potential level of the site before you start arguing about the color scheme for the Home page.

There are four things you need to know about page names:

- Every page needs a name
- The name needs to be in the right place
- The name needs to be prominent
- The name needs to match what I clicked

“You are here”

The common failing of “You are here” indicators is that they’re too subtle. They need to stand out: if they don’t, they lose their value as visual cues and end up just adding more noise to the page. One way to ensure that they stand out is to apply more than one visual distinction-

“Breadcrumbs”

You are here: Home > Hobbies > Book Collection > Welcome

Breadcrumbs alone are a good navigation scheme. Breadcrumbs are self-explanatory, they don’t take up much room, and they provide a convenient, consistent way to do two of the things you need to do most often: back up a level or go Home.

- Put them at the top
- Use > between levels
- Use tiny type
- Use the words “You are here”
- Boldface the last item.
- Don’t use them instead of a page name.

Four Reasons why I love tabs.

- They are self-evident.
- They’re hard to miss
- They’re slick: Web designers are always struggling to make pages more visually interesting without making them slow to load. If done correctly, tabs can add polish and serve a useful purpose, all without bulking up the page size.
- They suggest a physical space. Tabs create the illusion that the active tab physically moves to the front.

Amazon

Amazon was one of the first sites to use tab dividers for navigation.

- They’re drawn correctly.
- They load first.
- Rollovers. : To implement rollovers in tabs or button bars, each button needs to be a separate graphic. Rollovers have merit, but in most cases I don’t think they pull their weight.
- A misguided belief that it will be faster.
- They’re color-coded. : Color is great as an additional clue, but you should never rely on it as the only cue.
- There’s a tab selected when you enter the site.

Try the trunk test: Test for good Web navigation

- What site is this? (Site ID)
- What page am I on? (Page Name)
- What are the major sections of the site? (Sections)
- What are my options at this level? (Local navigation)

- Where am I in the scheme of things? (“You are here” indicators)
- How can I search?

Circle*****

1. Site ID
2. Page Name
3. Sections and subsections
4. Local navigation
5. “You are here” indicator(s)
6. Search

Chapter 7 Designing The Home Page

The first step in recovery is admitting that the Home page is beyond your control

Think about all the things the Home page has to accommodate:

- **Site identity and mission.** Home page has to tell me what site this is and what it’s for – and if possible, why I should be here and not at some other site.
- **Site hierarchy.** Home page has to give an overview of what the site has to offer-both content (What can I find here?) and features (What can I do here)-and how it’s all organized. This is usually handled by the persistent navigation.
- **Search:**
- **Teases.** Like the cover of a magazine, the Home page needs to entice me with hints of the “good stuff” inside. **Content promos** spotlight the newest, best, or most popular pieces of content, like top stories and hot deals. **Feature promos** invite me to explore additional sections of the site or try out features like personalization and email newsletters.
- **Timely content:** may needs to have some content that gets updated frequently
- **Deals:** Home page space needs to be allocated for whatever advertising, cross-promotion, and co-branding deals have been made
- **Short cuts:** The most frequently requested pieces of content may deserve their own links on the Home page so people don’ t have to hunt for them.
- **Registration:** for new users
- **Show me what I’ m looking for.**
- **...and what I’ m not looking for.** some of good things the site has to offer that I might be interested in– even though I’ m not looking for.
- **Show me where to start:** There is nothing worse than encountering a new Homepage and having no idea where to begin.
- **Establish credibility and trust:** For some visitors, the Home page will be the only chance your site gets to create a good impression.

And you have to do it... blindfolded

Some of the usual constraints:

- Everybody wants a piece of it.
- Too many cooks.
- One size fits all.

Everybody wants to drop a line on the Home page. And they want good bait (a large, eye-catching link) and a good location (above the fold).

The First Casualty of War – They haven't made it clear enough what the site is

- What is this?
- What can I do here?
- What do they have here?
- Why should I be here- and not somewhere else?

How to get the message across

There are two important places on the page where we expect to find explicit statements of what the site is about

- **The tagline.** One of the most valuable bits of real estate is the space right next to the Site ID. When we see a phrase that's visually connected to the ID, we know it's meant to be a tagline, and so we read it as a description of the whole site.
- **The Welcome blurb.** The Welcome blurb is a terse description of the site, displayed in a prominent block on the Home page that's visible without scrolling.

Here are a few guidelines for getting the messages across:

- Use as much space as necessary.
- ... but don't use any more space than necessary.
- Don't use a mission statement as a Welcome burb.
- It's one of the most important things to test: You can't trust your own judgment about this. You need to show the Home page to people from outside your organization to tell you whether the design is getting this job done because the "main point" is the one thing nobody inside the organization will notice is missing.

Nothing beats a good tagline!

- Good taglines are clear and informative.
- Bad taglines are vague
- Good taglines are just long enough. Six to eight words seem to be long enough to convey a full thought, but short enough to absorb easily.
- Good taglines convey differentiation and a clear benefit.
- Bad taglines sound generic.
- Good taglines are personable, lively, and sometimes clever. Clever is good, but only if the cleverness helps convey-not obscure- the benefit.

The fifth question

When I enter a new site, after a quick look around the Home page I should be able to say with confidence:

- Here's where to start if I want to search.
- Here's where to start if I want to browse.
- Here's where to start if I want to sample their best stuff.

Home page navigation can be unique.

(The homepage navigation and the persistent navigation)

“Yes, it can be different. But not too different”

Given the unique responsibilities of the Home page, it often makes sense not to use the persistent navigation there. Typical differences include:

- **Section descriptions.** Since the Home page has to reveal as much as it can of what lies below, you may want to add a descriptive phrase to each section name, or even list the subsections- something you don't have the space to do on every page.
- **Different orientation.** The Home page often requires a very different layout from all the other pages, so it may be necessary to use horizontal instead of vertical navigation, or vice versa.
- **More space for identity.** The Site ID on the Home page is usually larger than in the persistent navigation, like the large sign over a store entrance, and it usually needs some empty space next to it for the tagline, which may not appear on every page.

The trouble with rollovers/Pulldowns

- You have to seek them out, and hard to scan.
- You can only see one at a time
- They're twitchy.
- They're ineffective unless the popup appears near where you're pointing. This is where most rollovers fail miserably – and for a good reason.

Rotate your stock

Instead of several small promos that are always visible, you can use the same amount of space to cycle through a series of three larger promos, displaying a different one each time the page is loaded.

- The worst case is sites that require users to register before they can even browse the site.

You be the judge

Decide for yourself how well these two Home pages get the job done. Take a quick look at each one and answer these two questions, then compare your answers with mine.

- What's the point of this site?
- Do you know where to start?