

week: :five

Web Navigation

Introduction

User-Centered Design

- Focus on the end-user experience.
- Thoroughly understand the needs of the potential users of your site.

Interface & navigation examples in real life

- MAX lines in Portland
 - Red, Blue and Yellow MAX lines
- Interstate Highway Signage
 - Green: General information
 - Blue: Rest areas/points of interest
 - Brown: Federal land or National Parks/Monuments
- Book navigation (yes, a real book, paper cuts and all)
 - Linear format with page numbers, TOC, index, etc...
- CD players and other electronic equipment

User experience == customer service on the web

- In e-commerce, it's the primary interaction between you (a company) and your customers.
- It's your chance to make a good impression.

Principles of Successful Navigation

Navigation should be easily learned

- Make your categories common, intuitive and obvious.
- Provide easy links to primary site areas.
- Make good use of metaphors
 - Good: Shopping carts, PhotoDisc's Lightbox
 - Bad: Channels as groups of categories; Southwest Airlines ticket counter from 1999 (web.archive.org/web/*/www.southwest.com)
- Example: www.apple.com

Navigation should be consistent

- Don't make your users learn a different navigation system on each page.
- If it's consistent, navigation becomes transparent to the user.
- Example: www.oregonfoodbank.org; www.idxsolutions.com

Navigation should provide feedback

- Types: Rollovers, bold/plain changes, color changes, shape changes.
- Example: www.vlct.org, www.samhealth.org

Navigation should appear in context

- The wording of links should be able to stand on its own.
 - The word *back* can have a variety of meanings since users can come to a page from many different places.
 - Wording like *go to home page*, or *new search* on a secondary page are better choices.

Navigation should offer alternatives

- Site maps
- Search engines
- Drop-down menus
- Text-only versions
- ALT tags
- All of these are good for accessibility.
- Examples: www.amazon.com

Navigation should require an economy of action and time

- Keep number of steps to a minimum.
- Common tasks should have featured links.
- Examples: www.google.com, www.united.com

Navigation should provide clear visual messages

- There should be a clear visual distinction between navigation elements and static elements.
- No hidden, camouflaged, or piñata navigation.
- Example:
 - Good: www.webstyleguide.com
 - Bad: www.atlasmagazine.com/win96.html

Navigation should offer clear labels

- Make your categories common and familiar.
- Be careful when using trendy labels.
- Don't use organizational-speak.
- Should be mutually exclusive.

Navigation should be appropriate to the site's purpose

- Know and understand your site's primary goals and objectives (from your creative brief).

Navigation should support users' goals and behaviors

- Know your audience (from your project's creative brief).
 - Who are you going after?
 - Who will be using the site?
 - What are the common characteristics of your audience?
 - What are the most common tasks that your users will perform?

Reference: Fleming, Jennifer. *Web Navigation*, O'Reilly (1998)

