

Homepage Usability 50 Websites Deconstructed

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Communicating the Site's Purpose

- 1) Show the company name and/or logo in a reasonable size and noticeable location
- 2) Include a tag line that explicitly summarises what the site or company does
- 3) Emphasize what your site does that's valuable from users point of view
- 4) Emphasize the highest priority tasks so that users have a clear starting point on the homepage
- 5) Clearly designate one page per site as the official homepage
- 6) On main company website, don't use the word "website" to refer to anything but the totality of the company's web presence
- 7) Design the homepage to be clearly different from all other pages

Communicating Information about your company

- 8) Group corporate info, e.g. about Us, Investor Relations, Press Room, Employment etc in one distinct area
- 9) Include homepage link to "About Us" section to give overview of company and links to relevant details about products, services, company values, business proposition, management team etc.
- 10) If you want to get press coverage for your company include a "Press Room" or "New Room" link on homepage
- 11) Present unified face to customer in which the website is one of the touch points rather than an entity unto itself.
- 12) Include a "Contact Us" link on homepage that goes to a page with all contact info for your company.
- 13) If you provide a "feedback" mechanism specify purpose of link and whether will be read by customer service of the webmaster.
- 14) Don't include internal company information (which is targeted for employees and should go on the intranet) on the website.
- 15) If your site gathers any customer information include a "Privacy Policy" link on the homepage
- 16) Explain how the website makes money if it's not self-evident

Content Writing

- 17) Use customer-focused language. Label sections and categories according to the value they hold for the customer, not according to what they do for your company.
- 18) Avoid redundant content
- 19) Don't use clever phrases and marketing lingo that make people work too hard to figure out what you're saying.
- 20) Use consistent capitalization and other style standards.
- 21) Don't label a clearly defined area of the page if the content is sufficiently self-explanatory
- 22) Avoid single-item categories and single-item bulleted lists
- 23) Use non-breaking spaces between words in phrases that need to go together in order to be scannable and understood.
- 24) Only use imperative language such as "Enter a City or Zip Code" for mandatory tasks, or qualify the statement appropriately
- 25) Spell out abbreviations, initials and acronyms, and immediately follow them by the

- abbreviation in the first instance.
- 26) Avoid exclamation marks
 - 27) User all uppercase letters sparingly or not at all as a formatting style.
 - 28) Avoid using spaces and punctuation inappropriately for emphasis

Revealing Content Through Examples

- 29) Use examples to reveal the site's content rather than just describing it.
- 30) For each example, have a link that goes directly to the detailed page for that example, rather than to a general category page of which that item is a part.
- 31) Provide a link to the broader category next to the specific example
- 32) Make sure it's obvious which links lead to follow-up information about each example and which links lead to general information about the category as a whole.
- 33) Archives and Accessing Past Content
- 34) Make it easy to access anything that has been recently featured on your homepage, e.g. in last two weeks or month, by providing a list of recent features, as well as putting recent items into the permanent archives.

Links

- 35) Differentiate links and make them scannable
- 36) Don't use generic instructions, such as "Click Here!" as a link name
- 37) Don't use generic links such as "More..." at the end of a list of items.

Navigation

- 38) Locate the primary navigation area in a highly noticeable place, preferably directly adjacent to the main body of the page.
- 39) Group items in the navigation area so similar items are next to each other
- 40) Don't provide multiple navigation areas for the same type of links
- 41) Don't include an active link to the homepage on the homepage.
- 42) Don't use made-up words for category navigation choices.
- 43) Categories need to be immediately differentiable from each other - if users don't understand your terminology, it will be impossible for them to differentiate categories.
- 44) If you have a shopping Cart feature on your site, include a link to it on the homepage.
- 45) Use icons in navigation only if they help users to recognize a class of items immediately such as new items, sale items or video content.

Search

- 46) Give users an input box on the home page to enter search queries, instead of just giving them a link to a search page.
- 47) Input boxes should be wide enough for users to see and edit standard queries on the site. (25-30 characters)
- 48) Don't label the search area with a heading; instead use a "Search" button to the right of the box.
- 49) Unless advanced searches are the norm on your site, provide simple search on the homepage, with a link to advanced search or search tips if you have them.
- 50) Search on the homepage should search the entire site by default
- 51) Don't offer a feature to "Search the Web" from the sites search function.

Tools and Task Shortcuts

- 52) Offer users direct access to high-priority tasks on the homepage
- 53) Don't include tools unrelated to tasks users come to your site to do.

- 54) Don't provide tools that reproduce browser functionality, such as setting a page as the browser's default starting page or book marking the site.

Graphics and Animation

- 55) Use graphics to show real content, not just to decorate your homepage.
- 56) Label graphics and photos if their meaning is not clear from the context of the story they accompany
- 57) Edit photos and diagrams appropriately for the display size.
- 58) Avoid watermark graphics (background images with text on top of them).
- 59) Don't use animation for the sole purpose of drawing attention to an item on the homepage. Animation rarely has a place on the homepage because it distracts from other elements.
- 60) Never animate critical elements of the page, such as the logo, tag line or main headline.
- 61) Let users choose whether they want to see an animated intro to your site - don't make it the default.

Graphic Design

- 62) Limit font styles and other text formatting, such as sizes, colors and so forth on the page because over-designed text can actually detract from the meaning of the words.
- 63) Use high-contrast text and background colors so that type is as legible as possible
- 64) Avoid horizontal scrolling at 800X 600
- 65) The most critical page elements should be visible "above the fold" (in the first screen of content, without scrolling) at the most prevalent window size (800X600 at the time of this writing).
- 66) Use a liquid layout so the homepage size adjusts to different screen resolutions.
- 67) Use logos judiciously.

UI Widgets

- 68) Never use widgets for parts of the screen that you don't want people to click e.g. if you use graphical bullets next to text, make them clickable as well as the text.
- 69) Avoid using multiple text entry boxes on the homepage, especially in the upper part of the page where people tend to look for the search feature. Users sometimes confuse text entry boxes with search boxes.
- 70) Use drop-down menus sparingly, especially if the items in them are not self-explanatory. Users are attracted to them and they're often the least effective navigation devices.

Window Titles

- 71) Begin the window titles with the information-carrying word - usually the company name.
- 72) Don't include the top-level domain name, such as ".com" in the window title unless it is actually part of the company name, such as "Amazon.com".
- 73) Don't include "homepage" in the title. This adds verbiage without value.
- 74) Include a short description of the site in the window title.
- 75) Limit window titles to no more than seven or eight words and few than 64 total characters.

URLs

- 76) Homepages for commercial websites should have the URL <http://www.comoanv.com>

- (or an equivalent for your country or non-commercial top-level domain.
- 77) For any website that has an identity closely connected to a specific country other than the United States, use that country's top-level domain.
 - 78) If available register domain names for alternative spellings, abbreviations, or common misspellings of the site name.
 - 79) If you have alternative domain name spellings, choose one as the authorized version and redirect users to it from all the other spellings.

News and Press Releases

- 80) Headlines should be succinct yet descriptive to give maximum information in as few words as possible.
- 81) Write and edit specific summaries for press releases and news
- 82) Link headlines rather than the deck to the full news story.
- 83) As long as all news stories on the homepage occurred within the week there's no need to list the date and time in the deck V of each story unless it is truly a breaking news item that has frequent updates.

Popup Windows and Staging Pages

- 84) Take users to your "real" homepage when they time your main URL or click a link to your site. Splash screen must die. An exception is if the site has material inappropriate for *minors* or which is offensive.
- 85) Avoid popup windows.
- 86) Don't use routing pages for users to choose their geographical location unless you have versions of your site in many \ different languages with no single dominant language.

Advertising

- 87) Keep ads for outside companies on the periphery of the page.
- 88) Keep external ads (ads for companies other than your own) as small and discreet as possible relative to your core homepage content.
- 89) If you place ads outside the standard banner area at the top /' of the page, label them as advertising so users don't confuse them with your site's content.
- 90) Avoid using ad conventions to showcase regular features of the site.

Welcomes

- 91) Don't literally welcome users to your site. Before you give up prime homepage real estate to a salutation, consider using it for a tag line instead.

Communicating Technical Problems and Handling Emergencies

- 92) If the website is down or important parts of the website are not operational, show it clearly on the homepage.
- 93) Have a plan for handling critical content on your website in \ the event of an emergency.

Credits

- 94) Don't waste space crediting the search engine, design firm, favourite browser company or the technology behind the scenes.
- 95) Exercise restraint in displaying awards won by your website

Page Reload and Refresh

- 96) Don't automatically refresh the homepage to push updates to users
- 97) When doing a refresh, update only content that has actually changed, such as news update.

Customisation

- 98) If your homepage has areas that will provide customized information once you know something about the user, don't provide a generic version of the content to first-time users - craft different content for that space.
- 99) Don't offer users features to customize the basic look of the homepage UI such as color schemes.

Gathering Customer Data

- 100) Don't provide plain links to registration on the homepage; instead explain (or at least link to) the customer benefits of registration.
- 101) Explain the benefits and frequency of publication to users before asking them for their email addresses.

Fostering Community

- 102) If you support user communities or other discussion features, don't show generic links to them.
- 103) Don't offer a "Guestbook" sign in for business sites.

Dates and Times

- 104) Show dates and times for time-sensitive information only such as news items, live chats, stock quotes.
- 105) Show users the time that content was last updated not the computer-generated current time.
- 106) Include the time zone you are using whenever you reference a time.
- 107) Use standard abbreviations, such as p.m. or P.M.
- 108) Spell out the month or use month abbreviations, not in numbers.

Stock Quotes and Displaying Numbers

- 109) Give the percentage of change, not just the points gained or lost in stock Quotes.
- 110) Spell out stock abbreviations unless the abbreviation is completely clear, such as "IBM".
- 111) Use a thousands separator appropriate to your locale for numbers that have five or more digits.
- 112) Align decimal points when showing columns of numbers.