Final Project

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Web Usability

LIBR 251-01 – Fall 2009

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Introduction

For this project, I chose to redesign the website for the Sherwood Forest Motel in Garberville, CA (http://www.sherwoodforestmotel.com/). I am familiar with this website from personal experience, as my partner and I stayed at the motel in 2007.
Heuristics

Recognition rather than recall:
The page does not provide the user with any reference points for the “home” state, nor are the
link targets labeled. For example, when a user clicks on the link for “About Us” the user is
brought to a section of the page that has the motel’s contact information. This particular section
is not labeled “About Us”, nor does it say anything else about the motel or it’s owners. There is
no link for “Home” or “Return to Top of Page”. The only way for a user to get to the “home”
state is to use the browser’s back button.

Aesthetic and minimalist design:
• Most of the information is on one page, and is reachable by named anchors (e.g. the “About
  Us” link at the top of the page redirects further down the page to
  http://www.sherwoodforestmotel.com/#aboutus. The same is true for the other links at the
top of the page).
• There is also at least one link that is important (such as “Our Rooms”) that is not accessible
  from the “home” state. There is a section called “Other Family Links” that has two links
  whose relevance to the user is not readily apparent.
• The logo at the top is not hyperlinked. It also takes up a lot of space on the page that could be
  used for content.
• The illustration of the bear at the bottom of the page is merely decorative and is not a link,
even though it does seem to fit in with the “feel” that the motel is trying to project.
First Principles of Interaction Design

**Autonomy:**

- As the majority of the information is on one page, there is not much room for exploration.
- Other than the URL, there is no indication to the user as to where he or she is in the site, as the various sections do not have the names of the links that lead them to the particular section.
- There is no way for the user to go from section to section to section without scrolling up and down the page, or hitting the browser’s back button and selecting another link.

**Efficiency of the user:**

- Not being able to navigate directly among sections without hitting the browser’s back button and clicking different links or scrolling up and down the page causes the user to take unnecessary extra steps to find information.
- Information whose purpose is not entirely clear (such as the “Other Family Links” page), or which is not clearly labeled will cause the user to sidetrack unnecessarily.
- Icons that are not links (e.g. the illustration of the bear at the bottom of the page) can be very frustrating to a user who may expect it to have an associated action.
- Does not provide information that the user will be looking for or needs. The website suggests that users try MapQuest for directions to Garberville, CA. However, the link is buried in the middle of the page and is not differentiated by any visible characteristics other than its being separated out as its own paragraph. The MapQuest link directs the user to the MapQuest homepage, which is not pre-populated with the motel’s address, meaning the user has to go back to the motel’s website, find the address, copy it, and go back to the MapQuest website, paste it, and enter his or her own information. Again, this requires unnecessary extra steps on the part of the user.
Explorable Interfaces:

• When a user is directed down the page or scrolls down the page, there is no visible way to get back to the home state. The user has to scroll back to the top of the page or hit the browser’s back button.

Human Interface Objects:

• There are no interface objects. There is no way of interacting with the site beyond viewing information.
• There is no way of finding room rates or availability without the user physically picking up the phone and calling the motel.
• There is no option for the user to email the motel.
• As the user is led away from the website to accomplish key actions, this means that the website does not fulfill its purpose.

Visible Navigation:

• Again, there is little visible navigation provided in the design of the page itself. A user must rely on the browser’s function (back button and scrolling) to navigate around the page.
• Even on the page for Our Rooms (http://www.sherwoodforestmotel.com/rooms.php), the user must scroll down to the bottom of the page to find the “home” button, or else click the browser’s back button to get back to the previous page.
User Population

In general, the people who would use this website would most likely have the following characteristics:

- People who like to travel
- Adventurous people, i.e. people who like to travel to places that are off the beaten path.
- People who often use the Internet to explore and make travel arrangements

For my test group, I used my partner, Scott, and my neighbors Keith and Jeni. Keith is a copy-editor for Wired Magazine, and Jeni revues UI in her work. As they both use the Internet professionally, I felt that they would be able to provide good feedback on the prototypes I created. Though Scott only uses the Internet socially, he does use it extensively to follow films, which is his hobby. In this capacity he is quite familiar with Web 2.0 functionality, such as YouTube and similar embedded videos and blogs. As he went to the hotel with me, he also has some idea of the clientele they may be trying to reach.

Solutions

I based my solutions on the following patterns described by Jennifer Tidwell in *Designing Interfaces*:

Pattern 22: Global Navigation

Pattern 32: visual framework

Pattern 88: deep background

Pattern 93: contrasting font weights
Process

I created three prototypes in PowerPoint using the techniques described by Kris Jordan in his video “10 Minute Mock Prototyping”. I found this to be easier than creating them with actual paper as it afforded me greater control over design and layout and allowed me to simulate actual web interactions.

Before the start of each session, I explained to my users the project I was working on, the goal and scope of the project and their role. I explained to each user that I would be giving them a set of directions to follow, and would be asking follow-up questions regarding what they felt were they high and low points of the design. I also recorded the sessions using Audacity, and asked the users for their permission to be recorded, to which they each assented.

Prototype 1

Date of session: 11/29/2009

Test user: Keith

Fig 6. Home Page
Fig 7. Other Family Links

Changes from original:

Pattern 22: Global Navigation

- I separated out each of the elements of the page into separate pages.
- I turned each of the section titles into a hyperlink for a specific page.
- I turned the bear icon into a link for “Other Family Pages”.
- I turned the hotel name and crests into a home page link.

Pattern 32: visual framework

- Each page has the same layout with only the content changing.
Instructions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question:</th>
<th>User Action:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Find contact info about the hotel</td>
<td>Clicked on “About Us”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you get information about the rooms?</td>
<td>Clicked on “Room Rates” and “Our Rooms”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you get to the motel?</td>
<td>Clicked on “Map to Us” and then clicked on MapQuest Link</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find out what there is to do in the area</td>
<td>Clicked on “Things to Do”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What kind of other info is available?</td>
<td>“Special Events” link</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go to the home page.</td>
<td>Clicked on the logo containing the motel name</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Follow-up questions:

- What worked well?
  The design was clear and straightforward and did everything that was expected.

- What didn’t work well?
  “Our Rooms” should be re-labeled as “Photos” or “Photo Gallery”

- What would you change?
  Don’t center justify the text. Having the text left-justified makes it easier to parse the text.
Prototype 2

Date of Session: 11/29/2009

Test user: Scott

Fig 8. Text left-justified

Fig 9. “Photo Gallery” replaces “Our Rooms”

Changes from Prototype 1:

- I changed “Our Rooms” to “Photo Gallery” to make it stand out and not be confused with “Room Rates”
- I left-justified the text
## Instructions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Question:</strong></th>
<th><strong>User Action:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Find contact info about the hotel</td>
<td>Clicked “About Us”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you get information about the rooms?</td>
<td>Clicked “Room Rates”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you get to the motel? <em>(Note: this was misread to the user as “How do you get info about the motel”)</em></td>
<td>Clicked “Photo Gallery”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find out what there is to do in the area</td>
<td>Clicked “Things to Do”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What kind of other info is available?</td>
<td>Indicated “Map to Us” and “Special Events”. User also discovered that the picture of the bear was a hyperlink to “Other Family Links”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go to the home page.</td>
<td>Clicked on the logo containing the motel name</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Follow-up questions:

- **What worked well?**
  
  Photo gallery was “OK”

- **What didn’t work well?**
  
  “It would be nice if they had the actual room rates. I hate having to call for rates.”

- **What would you change?**
  
  “Special Events” and “Things to Do”. It would be nice if they had one page devoted to both, and not just links.

- **What would you add?**
  
  Room rates, more pictures of the motel. User indicated there were very few pictures.
  
  More design and colors in the background.
• What would you remove?
  Remove the crests and bear.

• Other comments:
  The whole thing looks bland. “Cool for 1999”.

Prototype 3

Date of Session: 11/30/2009

Test user: Jeni

Fig 10. Deep background, crests and bear removed
Pattern 32: visual framework

- I removed the bear and the crests to make the aesthetic more minimal.
Pattern 88: deep background

- I changed the background of the page from white to blue to give the page a richer feel.

Pattern 93: contrasting font weights

- I bolded some sections of text to make it stand out.
- Italicized text for different sections (hyperlinks)
- Lightened text to make it stand out from background.

Other:

- I added a chart of room rates
- I added an email address (info@sherwoodforestmotel.com - this is a fictitious email created for the purposes of this assignment).

<table>
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<td>How do you get information about the rooms?</td>
<td>Clicked “Room Rates”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you get to the motel?</td>
<td>Clicked “Map to Us”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find out what there is to do in the area</td>
<td>Clicked “Things to Do and Special Events”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What kind of other info is available?</td>
<td>Clicked “Other Links”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go to the home page.</td>
<td>Clicked on the logo containing the motel name</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Follow-up questions:

- What worked well?
  
  It all worked well
• What didn’t work well?
Nothing. It was very intuitive.

• What would you change?
Possibly have a slide show of the rooms link from the room rates page. Have the title of the page the user is on change color.

• What would you add?
A slide show of the rooms or link the names of the rooms to pictures.

• What would you remove?
Wouldn’t remove anything.

• What is your opinion of the aesthetics and the layout?
Simple. Good. Has a “Web 2.0 feel”. “Very user friendly”.