Designing Web Usability: The Practice of Simplicity, New Riders, Indianapolis, 2000
useit.com: Jakob Nielsen’s Website

Permanent Content

Alertbox

Jacobs bi-weekly column on Web usability.

The 3Cs of Critical Web Use: Collect, Compare, Choose (April 15)
According to a recent critical incident analysis, users’ most important Web tasks involve collecting and comparing multiple pieces of information, usually so they can make a choice.

Corporate Websites Get a D in PR (April 1)

Stationary Mobility (March 18)

Recruiting Key Staff: What High-Tech Employees Say versus What They Do (March 4)

All Alertbox columns from 1995 to 2001

Reports

Designing PR Sites (guidelines from usability studies with journalists) NEW

E-Commerce Design Guidelines (219 rules for ecommerce user experience)

WAP Usability Report (field study of WAP users)

Web Usability Book

Designing Web Usability: The Practice of Simplicity

News

Interviews with participants in the final stop of the User Experience World Tour: Is the Slowing Economy Helping or Hurting Usability?

Yahoo’s quarterly results for Q1 of 2001 show that they made 0.2 cents per page view. This corresponds to a CPM of $2, though some of the revenues derived from non-advertising sources, so the average CPM must have been lower than $2. Of course, we all know that nobody pays list price for Web advertising, but a more surprising fact comes from comparing this latest quarter with earlier results. For as long as I have tracked this statistic, Yahoo has been making 0.4 cents per page view. This was even true for the last quarter of 2000, so having the value of a page view drop to half of its historical value is big news. (The one exception to the 0.4 cents statistic was Q4 of 1999 when Yahoo made 0.5 cents per page view - in retrospect, the 1999 holiday shopping season was the high of advertising folly.) Well, I have said since 1997 that advertising doesn’t work on the Web. I used to say “with the exception of Yahoo and a handful of big sites.” Too bad that even this exception doesn’t hold any more, since I am a great admirer of Yahoo’s design. I have faith in the company’s future exactly because the site has great usability; if anybody can convert users into paying customers for value-added services, it’s Yahoo.
Why is web usability important?

• In product design and software design, customers pay first and experience usability later.

• On the web, users experience usability first and pay later.
A million competitors

• Users may experience “millions” of websites

• “If I can get great service when I buy a $5.00 paperback, why can’t I get the same service from you?”
Web design and GUI design

- Similarities
  - Interactive systems
  - Software designs

- BUT many differences
  - Device diversity
  - User-controlled navigation
  - Part of a whole

- One of the frontiers of interface design
Device diversity

• Designer has to give up full control
  – Factor of 100 in screen size
  – Factor of 1000 in bandwidth

• Looking different is a feature not a bug

• WYSIWYG might look and sound different…
User-controlled navigation

In traditional GUI design, the designer can control where the user can go and when.

On the web, the user fundamentally controls their navigation.
Part of a whole

• Users spend relatively long periods of time in a traditional application and become familiar with its features and design.

• On the web, users move between sites at a very rapid pace and borders between different designs (i.e. sites) become blurred.

• The web as a whole has become a genre
Fundamental design errors

The web is different

- Treating the web as a brochure
- Managing a web project as a corporate project
- Structuring the site to mirror the organisation
- Creating “cool” web pages that do not translate
- Writing in the old linear style
- Not linking to other sites
Page Design

- Web pages should be dominated by content of interest to the user.
Screen Real Estate
MapQuest

- 20% Content of interest to user
- 31% OS and browser controls
- 23% Site navigation
- 10% Advertising
- 16% Unused
Separating meaning and presentation

• Tim Berners-Lee

• Semantic encoding
  – Second level heading <H2>

• Browsers introduced presentation coding
  – 18 pixels tall bold Garamond
Resolution-independent design

- Monitor sizes
  - 640 x 480 (or less) 13%
  - 800 x 600 55%
  - 1024 x 768 25%
  - 1280 x 1024 (or larger) 2%
Response times

• 0.1 seconds – limit of “instant” reaction

• 1 second – limit of user’s flow of thought
  (User will notice delay – but no special feedback needed)

• 10 seconds – limit of keeping the user’s attention
  (Over 10 seconds users will turn attention to other tasks)
The weakest link

- The throughput of the server
- Server’s connection to the Internet
- Internet bottlenecks
- User’s connection to the Internet (modem)
- Rendering speed of the browser
Writing for the web

• Be succinct. 50% of normal text

• Write for scannability. Short sections of text.

• Use hypertext to split into multiple pages.
The Good Web

- High quality content
- Often updated
- Minimal download time
- Ease of use

- Relevant to user’s needs
- Unique to the online medium
- Net-centric culture