

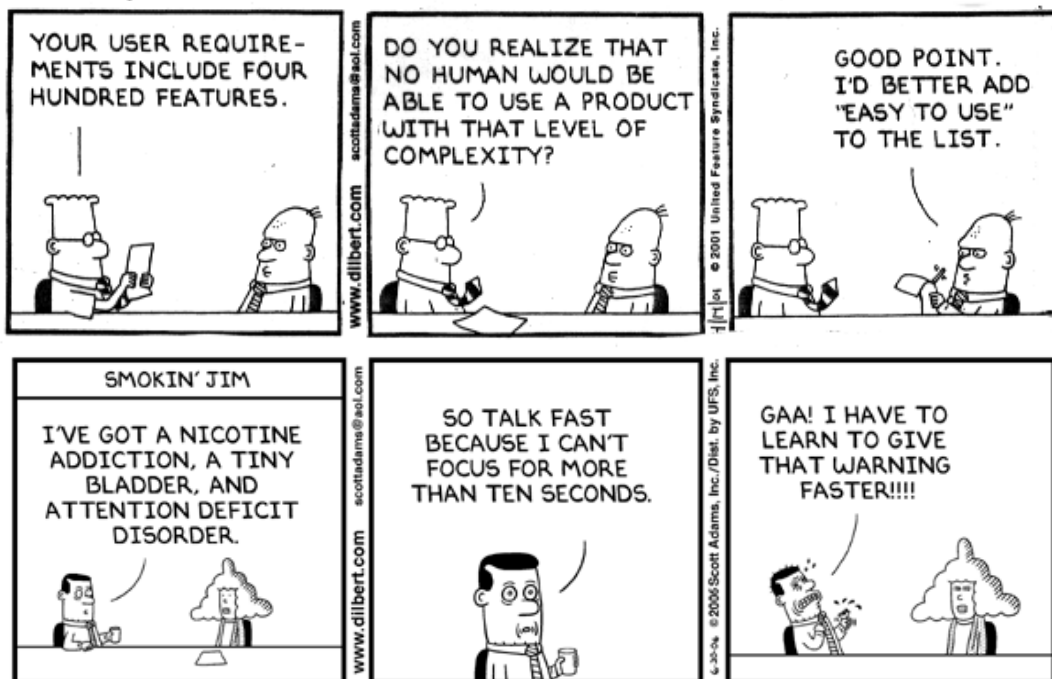
Website Usability

Welcome to this month's issue of Interact!

We discuss the subject of "Website Usability" and address questions like:-

- ▶ What makes a site user-friendly?
- ▶ Design and copywriting do's and don'ts
- ▶ Practical tips when briefing your designer on site architecture and design

DILBERT by Scott Adams



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With more companies branching onto the web and demanding customers' attention, how intuitively and easily your website dispenses information and guides a customer from page to page is of paramount importance. However, clients' are neither always "reasonable" in their demands or expectations as the 2 Dilbert strips above illustrate.

So where do we start?

The most basic ingredients for an intuitive and well-designed site are:

1. Ease of navigation (ie, the user knows where they are and how to move around your site)
2. Speed of information download
3. Ability of the site to work well regardless of the users' choice of browsers and settings.

If these basic requirements are not fulfilled, customers will either abandon your site or worse, migrate to your competitor's site.

A study in the US found that 89% of all online customers have recently experienced significant site issues and 34% switched to a competitor's site! (Harris Interactive and Tealeaf 2006. "A study about Online Transactions").

Our own personal experience? We love watching movies and have now switched from all other cinemas to GV just because we can buy tickets online with ease; the site loads quickly and we can choose where we want to sit.

What do you think of when you create your site?

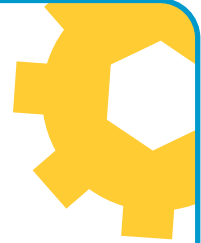
When you start thinking about your site, you probably have some great ideas about what would hook people and make them want to come back again and again. These high-priority features have to grab the customer's attention as soon as they reach the site.

By using design elements and words intelligently, you can give your audience a set of goals that will lead them directly to your best content or help them experience your site in the way you'd like it to be experienced.

Overall checklist

- Will the goal, subject matter, or point of the site be immediately clear?
- Is the value proposition (what's the relevance for me?) clearly conveyed?
- Will the basic steps to achieve the goal be clear from the start?

There are 5 elements you need to look at when designing your site which will help you achieve your goals:-



▶ Don't Make the User think

Keep in mind your customer is constantly bombarded with choices. Given this situation, make sure he/she does not have to think about what to do when they get to your site. Make it evident.

Using a site-map, clearly worded headings, subheadings and breadcrumbs as page/section guides are just a few simple techniques you can use.

More of these below...

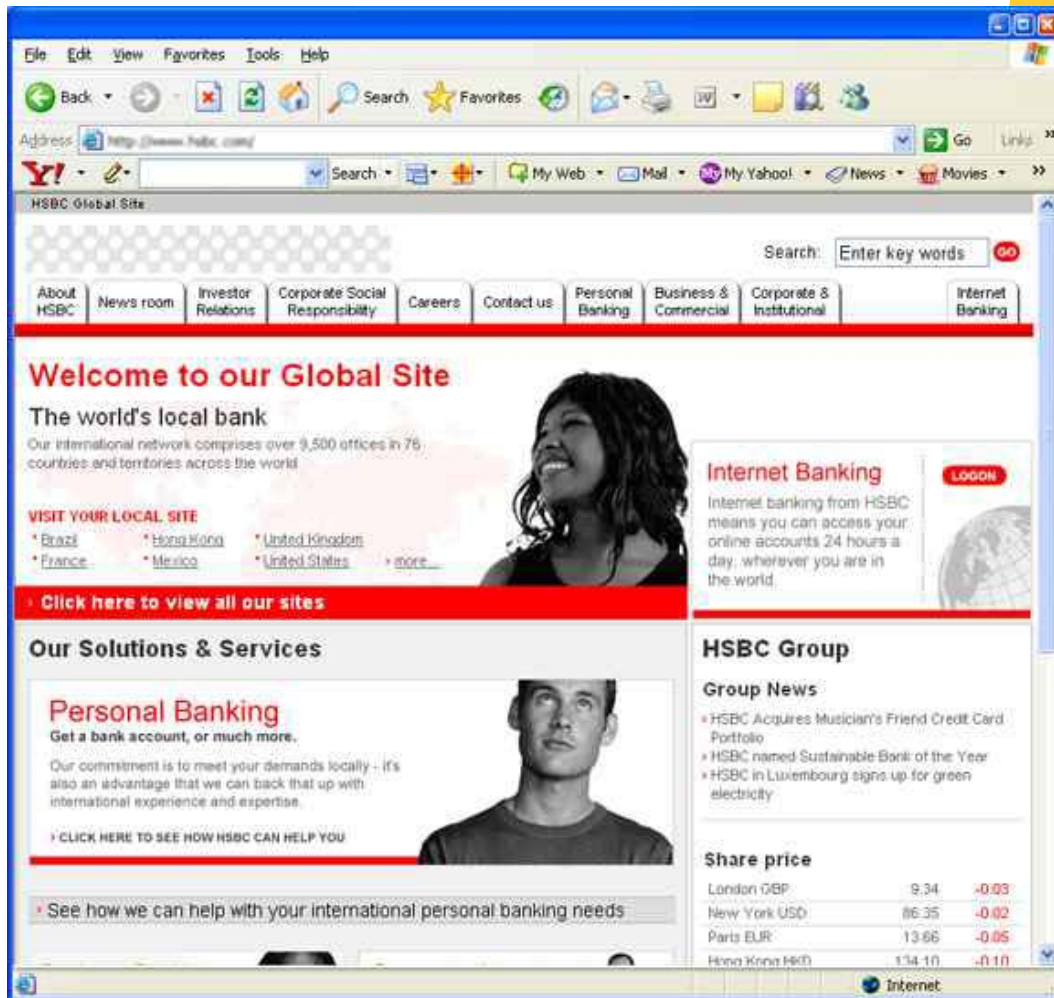
▶ Simple Layout That is Easy to Follow

The reality is that users do not read every word on a webpage. They scan and click on things that interest them. Make your site easy to scan, with attractive headers inviting users to click on them. You will find good ideas by following newspaper formats.

- Prioritize your content.
- Boldly promote your most exciting content with size, color, animation, and/or screen position. Minimize less important content.
- Organize your home page/site by creating clearly distinguishable areas. Chunk information into visual groups, based on topic or functional similarity from the audience's perspective (such as the navigation bar, the adventure area, and the ad area).

The site below is a good example for the following reasons:-

- 1) You know exactly which site you are on.
- 2) The different sections of the site are clearly labeled so if you are not on the page you want, you can click onto tabs and move on.
- 3) The choices that you can make on the site are clearly marked/highlighted so one can click on them. There is no confusion in terms of where to start.
- 4) There is no copy clutter so there is no feeling that you have missed out on some important information if you don't read every single word.



► Make Choices Intuitive for the User

Erase ambiguity from your site and people will be happier to use it. That means avoid littering your site with “warnings” like:

“This site requires Adobe Flash 8+. Click here if you need to install” or
“If nothing happens make sure you have no pop up blockers installed and disable if so.”

Remember everyone is paranoid about computer security, so non tech – savvy users will shy away from any thing that they construe as warnings, ie, make sure that your site is able to run on all sorts of browsers with any settings.

▶ Do not be verbose

This is an impatient world, so say what you need to in the fewest words possible. This is important for 3 reasons:-

- It reduces the noise on a page and the reader does not feel guilty for not reading everything
- focuses the readers attention on the most salient points
- It makes the pages shorter so there is more relevant content on each page without the reader having to scroll.

▶ Pay Attention to Navigation

As people click from one section of your site to another they might forget where they have been. Make sure that you support them by highlighting to them where they are on your site. Navigation is also important because the customer might want to go back to a previous section that was visited and buy something from there or get more information about something.



Look at the example above.

Here, the user can see that they started at BOOKS went to ARTS & PHOTOGRAPHY and are now at PERFORMING ARTS. There is no ambiguity. The navigation is also clear on top of the page given that it is designed as a folder. This is something that we are all used to.

Also compare the two sites below. In the first one, it is apparent that the navigation lies on the top. In the second one we can't tell whether it is on the left of the top of the page.



Another effective tool for navigation purposes is a site map. A sitemap is a webpage that lists down all the webpages in your site, categorised in a logical manner. Think of it as a table of contents for your website.

At the end of the day, focus on what you are trying to achieve, and given your constraints, ask yourself what is the best way you can achieve this?

Answer this question with clarity and you will be on your way, and if you need some guidance in answering this most important question, call us and we will try our utmost to help you.

Until next month then.

Want us to address any topics that interest you? Drop us a line at:

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PS: Found this newsletter informative and useful? Email us with your comments, questions or other topics you would like covered at custservice@designdepot.com.sg

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