

Example of user experience evaluation: online information for a trip to disneylan...

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Technology

Executive Summary

This evaluation of the user experience online has a special twist because old media and new media are meeting in this report. Old media is the old fashioned journey one needed to take to learn information in order to prepare for a family vacation like a trip to Disneyland. Bookstores were a great place to find many travel books and maps to study before heading out the door. The new media is the Internet and the World Wide Web (www). Planning a trip to Disneyland using two sites to find a helpful book was the problem that needed to be solved. The main purpose of this report is to compare the differences and the similarities between the two websites - Amazon. com and GoodReads. com. A secondary purpose is to evaluate the usability of the websites because if they are designed to make a book shoppers experience rewarding, they may parallel the old way of shopping at bookstores. Amazon. com is clearly a commercial site that happens to include a star rating system and a place for customer reviews. On the other hand Goodreads. com is designed similarly to other social network sites that allow users to interact. Goodreads is an example of a social cataloguing site because users use different headings to ' catalogue' the books they have read or want to read. Using both the Amazon. com and the Goodreads. com sites in a way that complimented each other was found to be the best way to identify a book which was needed to answer specific questions.

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1. Introduction

Evaluating websites for useability is done by every person who uses a website whether the user is conscious of doing the evaluation or not. A positive evaluation will result in the user returning to use the site again; if the site is a social site the user will become a member if they like their virtual surroundings. The purpose of this research is to compare two websites in terms of function and usability. The two web sites being evaluated are Amazon. com and Goodreads. com. The set-up for the problem that needs to be solved can be found in the next paragraph.

A person has decided to purchase a book to help plan a family vacation to Disneyland. Disneyland is a huge park so the person decides this year to focus on seeing all of Tomorrowland. Focusing on only one area in Disneyland does help make the planning a little bit easier but only a little bit. That is why a book which answers the following questions would be a big help.

- How do I go there?
- Where is the closest hotel?
- Is it a nice hotel?

- Are there any rides in Tomorrowland?
- Will we learn anything about science in Tomorrowland?

The more valuable information available in one book the more helpful it would be. Therefore the person wants to decide where is the best place to find a really good book for planning a trip to Disneyland. Amazon. com is a good place to buy books but - is it a good place to narrow the search and find the exact book that fits the needs of the shopper? GoodReads. com is a social community site where friends and strangers share their favourite books and write reviews. The experience of searching for a good book to answer the questions will be compared between Goodreads. com and Amazon. com.

Nakamura (2013) wrote that Goodreads. com is an important Internet-based social network that allows a discussion on what is being read instead of on what device is being used to read the book. She points out that the distinction is important for people who love books and for literary critics. The Goodreads site is targeted to lovers of books not people who are buying a book because of an assignment or a training workshop. The Goodreads site has some virtual visual devices to make the user more comfortable such as bookshelves where they can arrange their books. (See fig. 1) A user on Goodreads can click an Amazon button to purchase the book at the Amazon. com website. Amazon is a 100 percent commercial site although reviews and ratings are on the page of the book being sold.

Figure 1 Virtual bookshelf on the Goodreads site

1. 1. Goodreads. com (Goodreads)

Goodreads is a large social network specifically for people who read books

and like to talk about books. (See fig. 2) As Nakamura (2013) has explained “ Goodreads is an exemplary business for it is grandly imperial, inviting users to comment, buy, blog, rank, comment, reply, to engage in participatory culture from a range of different devices, networks and services.” On July 23, 2013 the Goodreads blog announced that the membership had doubled over the past 11 months to 20 million people. (Chandler, 2013) Weissmann (2013) pointed out that although many other book-reader focused websites are available, “ Goodreads is by far the largest in this field.” More social networking sites are easily accessible for the web pages. For example there are buttons integrated onto the website pages so the user can easily access their own accounts at Twitter, Goggle and Facebook and some popular e-mail applications like Hotmail and Yahoo. Goodreads is free to use but advertisements are embedded on the pages. (See fig. 1-A)

Figure 2 Portion of the Goodreads banner.

1. 2 Amazon. com (Amazon)

Weissman (2013) called Amazon the “ king of online booksellers.” (See fig. 3) Kevin Smith writing for Business Insider reported that in 2012 Amazon’s revenue amounted to \$61 billion. In March 2012 the ComScore. com listed Amazon as Number 5 of 2000 top web domains. The web bookseller started out in a garage and now “ could hold more water than 10, 000 Olympic Pools” (Smith, 2013). Amazon. com started as a site to buy books but now sells many other items from shoes to toothbrushes online. In fact in March 2013 Amazon purchased Goodreads for \$150 million. So earlier this year Goodreads became a book review-reader social network owned by a huge commercial online bookseller which created a social network within a

commercial business. The implications of this are discussed below. Richter (2013) reported that Amazon. com showed a 73 percent satisfaction rating with its customers. (See fig. 1-B)

Figure 3 Portion of the banner and top of the page at Amazon. com

2. Guidelines for Usability

The usability of a website can be evaluated in different ways. The design of the website must give the user the most efficient way to find the desired information or product; this is a fact generally accepted no matter what guidelines are shared. A website should allow a user to find the item they want with as few clicks as possible. (Jasek 2007) Therefore the information on a page, the content, needs to be presented in a simple, straightforward way. Download speed must be fast enough so that users become impatient or walk away before they have completed their search.

Good organization of the information with usefully crosslinks save a viewer time because that makes navigation is easier. Navigation must be the same for every page of the website and the design elements should be consistent. Chris Jasek (2013, 9) recommends “ using real estate wisely” meaning the space available on the monitor. The important information a user needs should not be overwhelmed with logos or navigation tools. Too many colours or images are distracting adding difficulties to find specific information. Hyperlinks should be in a different colour from the text or at the least underlined.

The website needs to be accessible and to have good usability features. Most of the people using websites are not experts with computers so the best websites are designed with intuitive use at the core. (Jasek 2013, 15) On the

other hand users may need or want to know more on how to use certain parts of the webpage so any extra instructions or explanations need to be easily available on the page or by moving a mouse over the subject head; a link to click for help should be on every page.

3. Evaluation of GoodReads. com and Amazon. com

This portion of the report is focused upon evaluating the two websites in terms of finding a book for information on Disneyland. The websites needed to demonstrate satisfactory function, usability, content, and navigation. The book needs to answer the questions posed in the introduction needed to be found.

3. 1 Situation

Visiting Disneyland can be a harrowing experience because there are so many things to do and see that one annual vacation cannot cover the whole park. Therefore I narrowed down the scope of our vacation before looking for information on the web. I knew that there is too much of Disneyland to see on one vacation so I narrowed the destination to Tomorrowland in Disneyland. If after reading the book of my choice I understood that we could learn about science and have fun then Tomorrowland would be the place to go. The questions I want the book to answer follow. 1. How do I go there? 2. Where is the closest hotel? 3. Is it a nice hotel? 4. Are there any rides in Tomorrowland? 5. Will we really learn anything about science in Tomorrowland?

3. 2 The Journey

I started by Googling the search words ' Goodreads. com: Trip to Disneyland' because I wanted to be sent to the Goodreads site. (See fig. 4) I hoped ' Trip

to Disneyland' would narrow down the number of books that would be displayed. Figure 1 displays the variety of types of books which showed on the screen; from novels to quotes to one book that is recently published and looked like it might be somewhat helpful; the book titled Inside Story. Unfortunately Inside Story is a history book of Disneyland which would be interesting at some point but I needed practical information. I clicked the link though and I reached the Goodreads site immediately. Then I typed ' Trip to Disneyland' in the large, conveniently placed search bar at the top of the Goodreads page.

Figure 4 Google search for ' Goodreads. com: Trip to Disneyland

Fortunately only 42 books were listed. Under each book the average user rating, number of ratings and year the book was published are all included. This turned out to be a convenient way to help me skim for the books published in the year 2013 that had received the highest ratings. The first book that caught my eye was Little Known Facts About Well Known Places: Disneyland by David Hoffman Published in 2008 by Metro Books. The book is fairly recent compared to many of the other books reviewed. 144 people had rated the book and the average rating is good - 4. 10 out of 5. Thirty five reviews were available to read. Over and over the reviewers praised the book and many of them mentioned that after reading the book they felt their next visit to Disneyland would definitely be enriched. Goodreads has had a hyperlink to Amazon. com for some time which makes it easy for users to purchase the book. I clicked the hyperlink but the book is not available for the Amazon. com warehouse only from other bookstores that are listed with Amazon. I did not want to use other book stores so I returned to the

Goodreads site.

Interestingly the book that I found that would be the most helpful and answer all my questions was near the bottom of the list, *The Disneyland Encyclopaedia: The unofficial, unauthorized, and etc.* by Chris Stodder. (See fig. 5) I also checked on an older edition of the book with the same title and same author; the older edition had been given a 4.32 average rating from 93 ratings with 19 reviews. This indicated that the author is consistently reliable in sharing good, reliable information from year to year.

Figure 5 A portion of the page of the search for a Disneyland book.

I clicked on to the Amazon link for the book and found that both the editor reviews and most of the reader reviews were enthusiastic about the book and many mentioned the author's attention to detail. According to information on the Amazon page, all my questions would be answered in an easy to search alphabetic listing. I was disappointed to see that I was not allowed to open the book virtually before I purchased it to review the Table of Contents. So the next step I took was to search for other books by the author. The Amazon search bar is easy to use and I was able to find an earlier book by the author which offered customers to 'look inside.' (See fig. 6)

Figure 6 Amazon presentation of a book by Chris Stodder on Disneyland

4. Comparison

Goodread is a site for people who love to read books. The reviews are often assumed to be more honest and direct than in other sites because the book readers here are writing reviews for their friends. Douglas (2013) suggested that this is a wrong impression people have when they talk about the

difference between the reviews on Amazon. com and Goodreads. com. She concluded that the book reviews at Goodreads are really recommendations, where as the reviews at Amazon fall more reliably into the book review category. (Douglas, 2013). I ended up agreeing with Douglas' conclusion. On the Amazon site one does have to disregard the reviews that are merely saying " This book is great. You have to read it" and " The book is so horrible you should never buy it." Once those extremes are ignored there are thousands of excellent, well thought-out reviews on the Amazon site. On the other hand the reviews on Goodreads are typically conversational as one would expect to see on a social networking site. The publishers review is displayed both at Amazon and at Goodreads. (See fig. 3-A) The comments and conversations on Goodreads do lead people to purchase books. People who have been on Goodreads are more likely to buy a book they learned about than after leaving author sites or any other site-type. (Weissmann, 2013) Whereas Amazon is the destination for purchasing a book and therefore the reviews are most often geared to helping other users make the decision on whether to buy the book or not. (Douglas, 2013)

The Goodreads site is not as full of information as Amazon leading which makes browsing the Goodreads site while relaxing enjoyable. The Goodreads site is easy to navigate but I found that there is a learning curve before a user can easily and quickly navigate the site. For the most part the actions are intuitive and the site can be learned without any other information like referring to a website or manual. There is so much information available at Amazon that dropdown menus are necessary and can be accessed by hovering the mouse over different headings. The use of the drop down

menus is very important because otherwise Amazon would be far too complicated to navigate.

The Goodreads search bar is very conveniently positioned at the top of the web page and users can search by the title of the book, the name of the author or the ISBN number. I tried an experiment and typed 'Disneyland' into the search bar. More than 15 pages of books were available for Disneyland so I looked for a 'sort' button to sort the books by the most recent date, but there is no sort key on the Goodreads site. A way to sort the book reviews by relevance, date and ratings would be very helpful. Amazon has an easy to find large search bar which works well to find what a customer wants. Amazon is essentially one big advertisement to buy something. Goodreads has ads on the site but they are placed on the edges and most of them might be of interest to the users. The ads on Goodreads were not distracting and some of them could be helpful.

5. A Reflective Discussion

The most time in preparing this paper was spent doing the research. The final draft of the paper has ten separate works cited in the paper. Therefore the research is the highest strength of the paper. The most notable weakness may be that I could have spent more time taking notes of the process when I was on the Goodreads and Amazon websites. It would have been good to have more notes about what I did on each website and whether or not the intuitive choices I made were satisfactory. I wanted to talk more about having websites designed so users can follow their intuition to find the information they want. I did not have research on that subject and I did not have detailed enough notes so maybe I will have a chance to write

about that subject another time.

I learned how to focus searches better so I could find the appropriate information for the paper. At first I was looking at many of the pages of each website and I think I wasted some time. I could have spent less time on each website and taken better notes on the details. I found a good manual on how to design library websites that helped me learn the practical way to think about function and usability focusing on the parts of a website and a webpage. I also learned about social cataloguing. I have learned about cataloguing but social cataloguing is not a familiar topic. I had not thought about the way Goodreads calls virtual furniture bookshelves which is the same way that we talk about print materials but not digital information. The website about social cataloguing is called Undaimonia and I will start paying attention to other posts there. Another blog I learned about researching the paper is called Beyond Paper Editing and that has good discussions so I will start following that blog too. The article from The Atlantic by Weissmann (2013) is hard to follow; the figures took some time to interpret so that is a good learning experience. It was also frustrating.

Creating the journey maps for the slide show was especially is fun. Next time I make a journey map though I want to spend time looking for clip art that would fit well. Clip art should have books, shelves, and personal computers in about the same size so the slides would look more proportional. The best slide is the slide that shows the journey starting with Google, I was able to cut and paste both the current edition of the book about Disney land and the older edition so hopefully that will demonstrate how there is more than one straight path to finding the exact book you want once you are on the

Amazon site.

I tried to present the evaluation in a straightforward way. I think I did well in keeping the flow of the text moving so someone reading the paper will not become too bored. If I were preparing an information tool to use over and over or if I is preparing an information tool for a client I would do the write-up differently. I would add bulleted lists so the order of the process would be very clear.

6. Grade Self-Allocation

I would give myself an ' A' on the paper for the following reasons. The research is up-to-date and fits the topic well. The most up-to-date information from 2013 about Amazon. com and Goodreads. com can be found in the paper. Quotations are added only when they are unique comments that would take too long to explain otherwise. Using the library guidelines is a good strategy because the perspective of the web page makers was offered. The guidelines explained what is most important about function and usability during web page design. If there had been more time it may have been nice to have a table comparing the two websites. On the other hand that would be a little difficult since each of the websites serve a different purpose. I thought a long time about how the purchase of Goodreads by Amazon affected my paper. Finally I decided that the users still use the websites like before the purchase. Therefore I did not feel that there was any negative effect on doing the comparison of the two sites. Although I have mentioned that more detail may have been better I'm not sure more detail would be necessary to evaluate the two sites. The conclusion would remain the same. I also think that the figures in the

Appendix added to the understanding of the overall points made in the paper.

7. Conclusion

Both the Amazon and the Goodreads sites have appropriate content so the user can do what they want to accomplish when entering each site. The content of Goodreads is focused to cater to users that love to read books. The Amazon site seems a little cluttered and takes more time to find exactly the correct button to click. On the other hand for the amount of information on the Amazon site, everything is well-organized and the use of drop-down windows is essential. The best feature on Amazon is the capability to look inside some of the books before deciding on a purchase. (See fig. 4-A) I found that using the Goodreads reviews enabled me to narrow down the choices of books and then I could purchase the book at Amazon. This seems to be a common journey for other book shoppers. (See fig. 2-A) My comfort level with the recommendations is higher with those on the Goodreads site. But the reviews, especially the editor reviews on the Amazon site were very helpful and served to help me make my final decision. Both sites demonstrated high usability and fast download speed. The crosslinks were well-placed and the hyperlinks could be identified as different from the text for easy use. This helped immensely in navigating the sites and therefore added to my positive assessment of usability.

The disadvantage for Amazon is the large amount of content that customers are faced with even though they may only be interested in purchasing books. On Goodreads I would suggest a sorting application to be added so that the most recent, most relevant and most highly rated of the reviews could be

listed for the user.

I conclude that the two essentially different types of websites, Amazon. com and Goodreads. com complimented each other when I wanted to choose a book that could answer specific questions.

6. Works Cited

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7. Appendices

Figure 1-A. Facts about Goodreads. com (Baron, 2013)

Figure 1-B. Facts about Amazon. com (Richter, 2013)

Figure 2-A The digital media used to find 1 to buy compared to the most recently purchased books on the Goodreads site and author sites. Amazon is also included in the list. (Weissmann, 2013)

The Disneyland Encyclopedia: The Unofficial, Unauthorized, and Unprecedented History of Every Land, Attraction, Restaurant, Shop, and Event in the Original Magic Kingdom

4.32 of 5 stars 4.32 · rating details · 93 ratings · 19 reviews

Spanning the entire history of the park, from its founding more than 50 years ago to the present, this fascinating book profiles 500 attractions, restaurants, stores, events, and significant people from the history of Disneyland®. Each of the main entries in the book examines in detail the history of a Disneyland® landmark, including how many of the most popular attractions went through several incarnations before becoming what they are today—Tomorrowland's Hall of Chemistry and Hall of Aluminum were transformed into the groundbreaking Adventure Thru Inner Space in 1967,

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and then became the popular ride Star Tours 20 years later. Read about unbuilt concepts, including Rock Candy Mountain and Chinatown, and delight in fascinating trivia about the park, such as ride statistics and attendance records. With a daily list of events, openings, and closings in the park's history, a yearly summary of attractions that came and went, simple and clear maps that correspond to the book's 500 entries, and sidebars with additional information on each ride, this is a comprehensive and entertaining book overflowing with detail on the most-renovated, most-loved, and most-visited theme park in the world.(less)

Paperback, 480 pages

Published May 1st 2008 by Santa Monica Press

Figure 3-A book review from Goodreads 1. (Goodreads. com, 2013)

Figure 4-A two maps from the inside of the book. (p. 26-2) (Strodger, 213, pp. 26-27)