



PRACTICE-BASED DESIGN RESEARCH WORKS: USABILITY STUDY + REDESIGN OF CRAIGSLIST.ORG

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ABSTRACT:

A practice-based design research methodology incorporating usability study was developed and applied in an educational graduate studio setting to craigslist.org. This study provides a solid introduction to human computer interaction and usability study to the graphic designer.

KEYWORDS:

Practice-based design research, case study, craigslist.org, usability study, design education, HCI

1. INTRODUCTION

The field of human-computer interaction and usability testing has provided designers with information pertinent to the successful design and execution of user-based usability testing. Designers must become specialists in practice-based research and testing. Jakob Nielsen puts it best when he states, "Having a good designer doesn't eliminate the need for a systematic usability process." (Nielsen) Applying proven usability methodologies to existing websites through case studies, the design student becomes familiar with these methods and creates a novel positive user experience whilst expanding their usability testing potential.

2. BACKGROUND

The website craigslist.org is a popular localized, on-line community oriented, classified site with global impact. Preliminary research indicated information architecture and user interface systems were the primary factor contributing to negative user interaction. (Fig. 1)

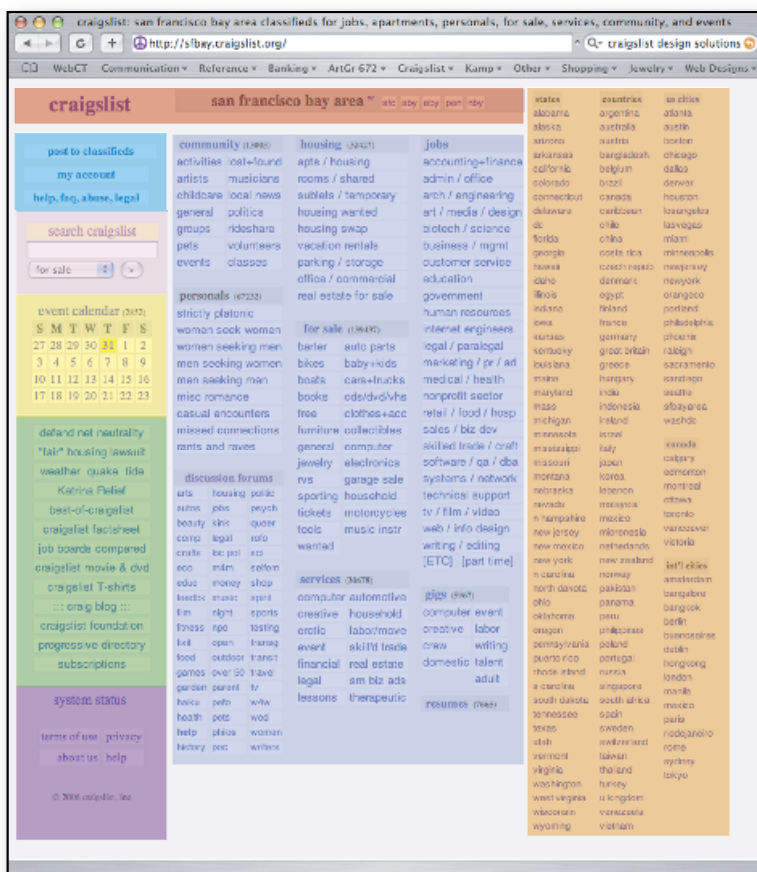


Figure 1: Craigslist.org screenshot indicating multiple navigational regions.

Upon completion of initial research, a three-pronged methodology of analysis, including user testing, was executed.

3. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this usability testing is to explore how design iteration, in tandem with practice-based design research, can enhance usability, navigation and overall user experience of a global website. First a complete design audit was completed and an initial prototype designed. Second a usability study was conducted utilizing eight human test subjects (Table 1) complete with qualitative and quantitative statistical information compiled regarding the success and failure of their tasks (Table 2). Lastly these findings were compiled into a design brief and applied to a newly redesigned website while incorporating information design principles by “merging ...function, performance-based requirements with the most appropriate form for presentation” (Watzman, 2003) of all three phases of analysis including the formal design audit and usability studies.

		Age	Internet Level	Educational Level	Purchased thru 'net	Heard of craigslist	Visited craigslist
Group I	1	18-25	▲	College	YES	NO	NO
	2	18-25	▲	College	YES	YES	YES
	3	51-65	▼	Masters	YES	NO	NO
	4	18-25	▲	College	YES	NO	NO
	5	18-25	▲	College	YES	YES	NO
Group II	6	51-65	●	VoTech	YES	YES	NO
	7	26-35	▲	College	YES	YES	NO
	8	51-65	●	College	YES	NO	NO

Table 1: User profiles and statistical task analysis information






Task #	Mean #1 (Orig)	Mean #2 (Proto)	P-Value	Significant?
1	107.37	27.75	0.0117	
2	84.25	47.00	0.006	
3	118.62	11.75	<0.001	
4	53.00	11.50	0.0074	
5	111.87	54.32	0.089	

Table 2: Statistical task analysis indicating successful changes at the 95% significance level for 4 of 5 tasks.

3. CONCLUSION

Statistical analysis comparing the completion times for the five user tasks indicated the prototype design was successful in significantly (standard p-value comparison at the 95% confidence level) reducing the total task time. Designers should begin integrating practice-based usability studies during the initial prototype phases of any website development project to validate their design and further realize the importance of user feedback.. These results demonstrate that design research and simplistic usability studies can easily be incorporated into any website design workflow while increasing user satisfaction and validating aesthetic design choices. Finally, usability studies are not limited to just HCI practitioners.

REFERENCES:

Nielsen, Jakob. <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/genius-designers.html>, accessed May 30, 2007.

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