



## **Q Site Audit & Recommendations**

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## Overview & Recommendations

### Breadcrumb Navigation

The tab and breadcrumb metaphors represent two varying architectural schemas: breadth and depth. The tab navigation represents breadth, and is useful for showing the user the full scope of services available on a site (Nielsen, *Designing Web Usability*) and in the context of Q, is ideal to show the overall services— Qguide, Qhome, etc. Breadcrumbs represent the depth of the site and are ideal for the directory structure in Qguide.

- As noted in the page-by-page Audit of the Q site, we recorded many inconsistencies in the use of the breadcrumb outside of Qguide.
- Remove the use of the breadcrumb outside of the directory, as this will keep it in context of the directory only, where it provides the most benefit.
- Also, see below regarding integration of the Qhome functionality within your partner's sites.

### Home Page – Get ‘em Hooked Early & Throughout

The home page of the Q site can do a better job of informing the user of all the great community-building features available. Use the top space with the current Q watermark and text for a more rich experience.

- Either simply link the features—“Manage & Access,” “Contribute your best sites,” etc.—to more information on these
- Or create an element which gives them more information right on this page.
- Let people know what the benefits are for joining, and balance this with what they get if they *don't* join.

The benefits of joining need to be much more apparent throughout the site. Show which functions, in the left nav, are member-only features by visually differentiating them. And by no means take the user to a new page with no context, if they click a members-only function.

### Public Pages

As these have been called the “if you must” or “the ego pages” ... leverage Public Pages as much as you can:

- Allow users to search for Public Pages (and content in those Public Pages), not just the directory itself.
- Allow users to upload an image of themselves for their Public Page.
- Allow users to show what sites they have contributed to topics they have suggested, and how many people have subscribed to those sites.
- Within the directory, how about showing who suggested a topic, or who contributed a site to the directory?
- Get the community of users involved on a personal level with the directory, and give contributing users recognition of this.



### Consistent and Contextualized Language

In many places throughout the Q site, there are language inconsistencies from page to page. For example, when clicking “Suggest New Topic” from the left-hand navigation from within the directory, the user is sent to a page titled, “Add a new topic.” This can cause a great deal of confusion.

- All actions, which take a user to a new page, should be consistent in their naming.
- Language within page copy should be consistent with the title of the page as well as other pages. For example, on the My Public Pages, “Your” and “My” are mixed and create confusion.
- Reinforce the “Top Sites” subheader with the location in the directory “Top Sites in <topic>”

### Copy Tone

Keep consistent with a single tone for all site copy, and make it more neutral to integrate with your partner’s sites. You may have to rewrite it, and make sure it is as flexible as possible. For example, the introductory text for “Your Public Page at Q” is much more direct than other copy on the site. It is much more direct. Also, avoid excessive use of bangs! (exclamation marks). They become distracting and tiring.

### Preferences Pages

You may need to integrate your partner’s site preferences and Q-specific preferences.

- Can you integrate your public page information, as well as all other preferences, into a global set of preferences which your partners may already have as part of their site’s functionality.
- If they already have login/screen names, can you integrate these into the Q directory and services?

### Naming

Although we did not delve into naming of the overall services (other than at our first meeting), it is important to note the naming of the “Q Community Powered Directory.” This should only be used as a descriptor for your service, not as a noun. It is hard to read when trying to scan through instructional copy, as on the “Add a new topic” page, to have such a long, heavy term.

### Related Public Pages & Popular Topics

Just as there currently is a display of number of links within topic of subtopic, there should be a display of that topic’s popularity (as number of subscribers).

- I want to know how popular topics are in my community.
- I want to know who, in my community, has subscribed to a topic I am interested in, but I also want to know how many people have subscribed to it.
- Putting this in context with your user base, why not be able to search the directory not by topic, but by the *popularity* of a topic (and again, show numbers of users who have subscribed)?



- Also, on the Related Public Pages, note the users as “subscribed to <topic> not “interested in.” Be consistent in language and user actions.

### Visual Branding & Elements

The “Powered by Q” label should be flexible in placement on varying background colors. Currently it is on a dark background, but has a light background, making it stand out abruptly. The graphic on the Q site should work better with the current dark background, to show integration into your own template, and suggest ease of use with your partner’s designs. If it doesn’t look good on the Q site, your partners may think it will not integrate easily with their brand.

Re-use the dotted arrow. It is used with the GO button for search, but could be used within the left navigation elements as well. There may be implementation issues with this, as you would be incorporating a graphic instead of the current textual carrot, but consistency is a key for visual design and good navigation.

### Tab Navigation

The current tab navigation has several challenges, both in usability and potential integration into your partner’s sites. First, the lack of color contrast between the tabs and their background color make it hard to differentiate them. Second, the tabs would be more easily integrated into a partner’s site if they were less like tabs and more distinct blocks. These would be able to butt up against a partner’s top navigation, for example. The colors (if the tabs are intended to be integrated at all) could be increased in contrast, but also neutralized in overall color to be more easily integrated. Please see the following sample designs. They show several different options, which begin to show directions for more efficient use of space and suggest better integration with your partner’s navigation space.



### Page Layout



Within the directory page there are varying gutter widths in between the left nav and the content. Keep this consistent and minimal, as you have to comply with many partners' sites, which may take up more real estate, causing a cramped content area.

- One suggestion for *varying* the content design is from the main directory page to subtopics pages. A three-column layout for these pages would bring up the URL list above the fold more and clearly differentiate the lower pages from the very top of the directory.
- There is too much white space on the topic pages between the subtopics list and the Top Sites list. Tighten this up to make space and scanning more efficient: less scrolling will help usability and effectiveness of the directory.
- Abrupt edges, mismatches and the horizontal stripe element all contribute to a template design that looks broken. Clean this up to improve first impression and competency in integration with your partner's site designs.

## Search Results

Contextualize the results by showing the "Results for <search term>." The toggle function for ">Topics" and ">Sites" are confusing and should be reworked. The functionality of the URLs is also inconsistent with most users' expectations.

- Toggling can be more easily accomplished within the body of the results page, by use of a graphic or text link for "windowshading," or minimizing, either the Topics or Site results.
- Don't open a new window when taking users to one of the outside URLs. Allow the user to control this.

## Automatic Refresh

Avoid automatic refresh on most pages throughout the Q site.

- On Subscribe, bring this functionality into the content of each directory page. Use space on this page, not in the nav section, to tell users how many people are subscribed, but also inform the user whether they are already subscribed to the topic, and allow them to subscribe. When they have subscribed, refresh the directory page and show on the page that they have subscribed. This would 1) eliminate the need for a thank you/successful subscribe page 2) would show them whether they are already subscribed right on the topic page, and 3) would create more community-centric awareness displayed within the directory.
- On other confirmation pages, allow the user to control their return. Often, the page refreshes before a user has time to assess what is happening on the page. This can be confusing and creates mistrust.



## My Topics - multiple actions

Currently the action links look like subtopics to the user's subscribed topics list. In order to reduce the redundancy of action links on this page, as well as reduce confusion, please see our sample design for the content list and actions on this page.

### My Topics

- Art History
- Arts & Humanities
- Bibliography
- Co-Browsing
- Food Safety
- Intelligence
- Literature

= Contribute to Topic

= Remove checked Topics



**Heuristic Evaluation**

A usability analysis of the Q beta site was conducted in order to assess current strengths and liabilities in usability. Key site assets - Content (copy, images, messages), design (page layout), application flow, features/functionality, and navigation resources - were reviewed to understand their impact on the customer's ability to complete the site's tasks.

The site was evaluated by information architects who judged the usability of the site with an industry standard list of usability heuristics (established principles and rules of thumb. This evaluation identifies specific usability problems and provides recommendations for corrections to be considered for site enhancement. The analysis is built around your business goals and therefore the heuristic violations are rated in context to those goals, not just the severity of the heuristic violation.

**Rating & Organization**

The following table contains the usability problems found with Q's beta site. It is organized by page noted in the site flow diagram built from the site as of 10/4/00. A severity is assigned to each problem, which is derived from a combination of factors:

- The **frequency** with which the problem occurs: Is it common or rare?
- The **impact** of the problem if it occurs: Will it be easy or difficult for customers to overcome?
- The **persistence** of the problem: Is it a one-time problem that customers can overcome once they know about it or will they repeatedly be bothered by the problem?
- Does the problem effect Q's overall business goals to
  - Provide a content-rich, relevant and customized directory of links to its partner's users.
  - Drive or incent users to add to the (partner's) directory.
  - Make it as easy as possible for users to provide more links to the directory.

The following 1 to 3 scale is used to rate the severity of the problem:

- 1 = Minor usability problem; fixing this should be given low priority
- 2 = Major usability problem; important to fix, so should be given high priority
- 3 = Mandatory: essential to fix for product usability/business success

Also included are recommendations/notes on how to fix the problem.

**Ten Usability Heuristics<sup>1</sup>**

The following set of heuristics developed Jakob Nielsen have been used to judge the usability of arthurandersen.com. Because these heuristics are used for both software and websites, web-specific comments are provided after each heuristic.

**1. Visibility of system status** - The system should always keep users informed about what is going on, through appropriate feedback within reasonable time.

Do users in the site know where they are and where they can go next? Does each page look like it belongs in the site? Is clear navigation provided to allow users to move up and down the hierarchy?

**2. Match between system and the real world** - The system should speak the users' language, with words, phrases and concepts familiar to the user, rather than system-oriented terms. Follow real-world conventions, making information appear in a natural and logical order.

Concise jargon-free nomenclature should be used.



**3. User control and freedom** - Users often choose system functions by mistake and will need a clearly marked "emergency exit" to leave the unwanted state without having to go through an extended dialogue. Support undo and redo.

In general, avoid "trapping" users in a single path. Don't always rely on browser functionality to provide navigation. Consider having a homepage link and links to the main sections of the site always available.

**4. Consistency and standards** - Users should not have to wonder whether different words, situations, or actions mean the same thing. Follow platform conventions.

Does the site have a consistent, clearly recognizable look and feel? Is nomenclature, fonts, color schemes and GUI elements used consistently throughout the site? Make sure link names and page titles match as closely as possible.

**5. Error prevention** - Even better than good error messages is a careful design, which prevents a problem from occurring in the first place.

Does the interface prevent errors from occurring in the first place? Submission of data via forms should be checked by system for accuracy before being submitted.

**6. Recognition rather than recall** - Make objects, actions, and options visible. The user should not have to remember information from one part of the dialogue to another. Instructions for use of the system should be visible or easily retrievable whenever appropriate.

Are there visual clues that users can understand at a glance rather than having to read directions?

**7. Flexibility and efficiency of use** - Accelerators - unseen by the novice user - may often speed up the interaction for the expert user such that the system can cater to both inexperienced and experienced users. Allow users to tailor frequent actions.

Is it easy for users to bookmark pages of the website?

**8. Aesthetic and minimalist design** - Dialogues should not contain information, which is irrelevant or rarely needed. Every extra unit of information in a dialogue competes with the relevant units of information and diminishes their relative visibility.

Make sure content is written for the web and not just taken directly from a brochure.

**9. Help users recognize, diagnose, and recover from errors** - Error messages should be expressed in plain language (no codes), precisely indicate the problem, and constructively suggest a solution.

**10. Help and documentation** - Even though it is better if the system can be used without documentation, it may be necessary to provide help and documentation. Any such information should be easy to search, focused on the user's task, list concrete steps to be carried out, and not be too large.

Is context-sensitive help provided?

<sup>1</sup> J. Nielsen, "Heuristic Evaluation". In Jakob Nielsen and Robert L. Mack, editors, "Usability Inspection Methods". John Wiley and Sons, Inc. 1994.



Page Name	Heuristic Violated	Rating	Recommendations/Notes
General		1	Search field and GO graphic are misaligned.
General	Consistency & Standards (4)	1	FAQs should be general enough that your partners can copy and paste in their service name and add them into their Help section.
General	Documentaion and Help (10)	1	"Q Community Powered Directory" is a mouthful!
General	Consistency & Standards (4)	1	The tab navigation and breadcrumb navigation are visually too far apart. It used throughout the site, they must reference one another more clearly.
General	Error Prevention (5)	2	Refresh should not be used throughout the site. See report for more comments.
General	Consistency & Standards (4)	2	Consistent language for general/instructional copy is needed.
Home page [0]	Minimalist Design (8)	1	GO and the dotted carrot element are not designed properly. Redesign so there is more connection between the text and carrot.
Home page [0]	Minimalist Design (8)	1	There is a lot of dead space in the top logo 'watermark' graphic used ... between the "Download Qbar now!" text and the benefits of using Q.
Home page [0]	System Status Visibility (1)	1	Because the Qguide directory is already shown on this page, is it not, effectively, the first page of the directory? Make the tabs reflect this.
Home page [0]	Recognition, not Recall (6)	1	"Meta Directory" graphic is lost on all lower pages, except for first page of Qguide and Qhome.



Page Name	Heuristic Violated	Rating	Recommendations/Notes
Qguide [1]		*	Can we use the left navigation element for Advertising? Some partners may already be using this real estate for such.
Qguide [1]		*	How are the specific subtopics displayed on the main page created? Dynamically? Any customization?
Topic page [1.1]	User Control & Freedom (3)	3	In left navigation, show what is a member privilege and what is not. Don't take users straight to the Qhome page with no context.
Topic page [1.1]	Efficiency of use (7)	*	Showing the number of links within a subtopic is a great idea. It shows users what they're getting into, quickly.
Subtopic page [1.1.1]	Consistency & Standards (4)	2	"Top Sites" are these specifically for this subtopic? If so (and should be) display as "Top Sites for <subtopic title>".
Subtopic page [1.1.1]	User Control & Freedom (3)	1	Show all results pages a user can click through ... 1 2 3 through the total number at the bottom of the content body Keep Previous and Next links as well.
Subtopic page [1.1.1]	Error Prevention (5)	1	Spell out "Previous" in above-mentioned navigation controls.
Subtopic page [1.1.1]	Consistency & Standards (4)	1	Left gutter between left Nav and body content should be consistent throughout, as well as space efficient (less gutter). Redesign.
Contribute to this topic [1.3]	Consistency & Standards (4)	1	Correct spelling of "Url".
Contribute to this topic [1.3]		1	Layout of fields should be consistent.
Contribute to this topic [1.3]	Consistency & Standards (4)	1	"Cancel" button should only say cancel.
Successful Contribution [1.3.1]	Recognition, not Recall (6)	2	Don't link "here" for action. Link on the term, "return now".



Page Name	Heuristic Violated	Rating	Recommendations/Notes
Contribute to this topic [1.3]	User Control & Freedom (3)	1	Put the upload bookmarks below the Contribution fields/actions ... or put this element into a distinct 'box' to differentiate it from the intended actions for this page.
Contribute to this topic [1.3]	User Control & Freedom (3)	2	If a user clicks "Upload Bookmarks Now!" they cannot get Back to their original Contribution page.
Contribute to this topic [1.3]	Error Prevention (5)	1	Place, in HTML, "http://" outside of the URL input field to avoid errors and confusion.
Contribute to this topic [1.3]	Documentaion and Help (10)	2	Inform the user that their contribution will be reviewed and how long it typically takes, and whether they will be notified when it is approved/disapproved.
Contribute to this topic [1.3]	Consistency & Standards (4), System Status Visibility (1)	1	Breadcrumb is confusing/ inaccurate - should place user within the directory structure, as the title of the page "Contribute to this topic: <topic>" denotes.
Successful Subscribe [1.4]	Recognition, not Recall (6)	2	Inform the user what they are subscribing to in the title/ header, "Successful subscription to: <topic>" and remove the first sentence in the body text.
Successful Subscribe [1.4]	Recognition, not Recall (6)	2	Don't link "here" for action. Link on the term, "return now".
Add a new topic [1.5]	Recognition, not Recall (6), Consistency & Standards (4)	2	Page title must be consistent with the link "Suggest New Topic".
Add a new topic [1.5]	Documentaion and Help (10)	1	Under first step, inform user that their current location is already inputted.
Add a new topic [1.5]	Recognition, not Recall (6)	1	"Directory Root" is a confusing term. Do not use a technical term. You call it "main page" on [1.5.2].
Add a new topic [1.5]	Consistency & Standards (4)	1	Form fields should be consistent widths throughout.



Page Name	Heuristic Violated	Rating	Recommendations/Notes
Add a new topic [1.5]	Documentaion and Help (10)	2	Tell people here that their suggestion will be reviewed.
Add a new topic [1.5]	Documentaion and Help (10)	1	The instructions are inaccurate - the New Topic will *not* open.
Add a new topic [1.5]	Minimalist Design (8)	1	Layout of page needs to be tighter. It's hard to read the steps, and the field titles are too far removed from the fields.
Add a new topic [1.5.1]	User Control & Freedom (3)	2	This page goes no place other than to "Tell a friend". No left navigation, no refresh.
Add a new topic [1.5.2]	User Control & Freedom (3)	3	This page refreshes (after 10 seconds - a longer time than other pages) back to the main page. It should return the user to where they came from before the clicked "Suggest New Topic" and inform them of this.
Public Pages [1.6]	Minimalist Design (8), Documentaion and Help (10)	2	Page needs to be better designed. No bolded text for the body text.
Public Pages [1.6]	Minimalist Design (8), Efficiency of use (7)	2	Layout needs to be changed due to relation between alpha list and found list for topic. Redesign.
Public Pages [1.6]	Error Prevention (5), Efficiency of use (7)	2	Do not display letters which do not have any public pages for this topic.
Public Pages [1.6]	User Control & Freedom (3)	3	Allow users to search within a topic/subtopic only - how about within just the public pages? A search by user?
Public Pages [1.6]	Documentaion and Help (10)	2	What does "interested in" mean? Simply say "subscribed to" if that's it.
Public Pages [1.6.x]	Consistency & Standards (4)	2	Do not underline text that is not a link.
Public Pages [1.6.x]	Consistency & Standards (4)	1	Textual elements are in different fonts. Make consistent.
Search Results [1.2]	Consistency & Standards (4)	2	I am not within a hierarchy which should be noted in a breadcrumb. This breaks the purpose of a breadcrumb.



Page Name	Heuristic Violated	Rating	Recommendations/Notes
Search Results [1.2]	Recognition, not Recall (6)	3	Show search criteria in HTML, with results, not just in the search field.
Search Results [1.2]	Minimalist Design (8)	1	Users don't need to see the "Topics 1-3 of 3". It's redundant because these are all shown on one page.
Search Results [1.2]	Consistency & Standards (4)	1	"Sites: 1-10 of 50 Next>" must be consistent with layout from the standard directory pages.
Search Results [1.2]	User Control & Freedom (3)	2	">Topics" and ">Sites" toggle links are not explicit in their naming and their function. There should be a way to come back to both on the same page, without using the browser's Back button.
Qhome [2.0]	Consistency & Standards (4), Error Prevention (5)	3	Users should not be dumped directly to this page if they are not logged in, or not a member. There is no reason they should be taken here unless they expect it.
Qhome [2.0]	Minimalist Design (8)	2	Action buttons and related text are not designed to be easily read. Perhaps a boxed table.
Qhome [2.0]	Minimalist Design (8)	1	Remove the "Now" and "Now!" from the action buttons. They are unnecessary.
Join Q Directory [2.1]	Consistency & Standards (4)	2	The top tab navigation is inconsistent - is the Join page part of Qhome or Qguide?
Join Q Directory [2.1]	Consistency & Standards (4)	2	Keep consistent between "Join Qweb" and "Join the Q ... Directory".
Join Q Directory [2.1]	Minimalist Design (8)	1	Layout is off - the bottom section of content is off to the right. Redesign.
Join Q Directory [2.1]	User Control & Freedom (3), Error Prevention (5)	3	The First and Last Name fields do not work.
Join Q Directory [2.1]	User Control & Freedom (3), Error Prevention (5)	2	Can a user just put in First or Last Name, but not both? Can't I be referred to by only one name (like "Sparrow")?



Page Name	Heuristic Violated	Rating	Recommendations/Notes
Join Q Directory [2.1]	Documentaion and Help (10)	2	If Q will not sell my name without my consent - how will you get my consent in the future? Is that happening now?
Join Q Directory [2.1] (Privacy Statement)	Documentaion and Help (10)	3	The Privacy Statement is tightly bound/written to the Qbar tool. This should be removed for clarification.
Join Q Directory [2.1] (Terms of Service)	Documentaion and Help (10)	3	Extremely hard to read. If not needed, because you're ending Qbar offering, remove it.
Join Q Directory [2.1] (Email confirmation)	*	2	Rewrite the signature suggestion in your email to "Help build awareness of your community ..." Tell them what's in it for them to put this in their signature.
Welcome to My Qhome [2.2]	Recognition, not Recall (6)	1	If a user is already logged in, this page should not say "Welcome to Qhome" - it's too introductory.
Welcome to My Qhome [2.2]	User Control & Freedom (3)	2	Differentiate the "Download Qbar" from the other elements on the Qhome page. It does not carry the same function as the other elements.
Welcome to My Qhome [2.2]	Documentaion and Help (10)	1	There is too much copy in the intro to My Topics. Too many "!'s. Rewrite.
Welcome to My Qhome [2.2]	Documentaion and Help (10)	1	In My Messages instructional copy, remove "Click on the icon" and alter rest of sentence.
Welcome to My Qhome [2.2]	Documentaion and Help (10)	2	In My Public Page instructions, "folders" is confusing without reference to bookmarks. Rewrite.
Welcome to My Qhome [2.2]	Documentaion and Help (10)	2	My Messages does not have introductory text associated with it. Rewrite.



Page Name	Heuristic Violated	Rating	Recommendations/Notes
Welcome to My Qhome [2.2]	Efficiency of use (7)	1	Why only show two or three of my topics and have a More button. Perhaps none, or all with a link to the added functionality on the My Topics page.
Preferences for <user> [2.2.1]	Documentaion and Help (10)	1	What is the meta-directory and what is the user list? I need more information on what these are. Rewrite.
Preferences for <user> [2.2.1]	Minimalist Design (8)	1	The layout of this page is very confusing, with content all over the place. Redesign.
Preferences for <user> [2.2.1]	Error Prevention (5)	2	Dependant logic issue with Change password: if I Change password but DO NOT "Update Preferences" does my password get changed? Perhaps redesign with change password featyre within page. See slashdot for an example.
Preferences for <user> [2.2.1]	Consistency & Standards (4), System Status Visibility (1)	1	Breadcrumb is not consistent; "You Are Here: Qhome: My Preferences".
Preferences for <user> [2.2.1]	System Status Visibility (1)	1	Breadcrumb is not consistent with page title. Change from "Edit My Preferences" to "Preferences for: <user>". See final report for added comments on breadcrumb usage.
Preferences for <user> [2.2.1]	Efficiency of use (7)	2	Automatically populate the first Name and Last name fields if they have already been filled.
Upload Bookmarks [2.2.2]	Consistency & Standards (4)	2	Title of page is inconsistent with link to it. Change "Upload Bookmarks" to "My Bookmarks".
Upload Bookmarks [2.2.2]	Consistency & Standards (4), System Status Visibility (1)	1	Breadcrumb is not consistent; It should be "You Are Here: Qhome: Upload Bookmarks". See final report.



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Upload Bookmarks [2.2.2]	Consistency & Standards (4)	2	Title of page is inconsistent with link to it. Change "Upload Bookmarks" to "My Bookmarks". In other places, the link is Refresh Bookmarks. Change this link name to be consistent.
Upload Bookmarks [2.2.2]	Consistency & Standards (4), Minimalist Design (8)	1	Bullet the text on this page, after the first sentence to aid readability.
Upload Bookmarks [2.2.2]	Minimalist Design (8)	1	Layout of page needs to be fixed - break out elements more and contextualize the "Note: ..." with the "Browse..." button; move down the Send File button.
Upload Bookmarks [2.2.2]	Documentaion and Help (10)	2	Rewrite copy about Bookmarks and the benefits of uploading
Subscibe to a Topic [2.2.3.a]	Documentaion and Help (10)	3	This page should not refresh. Do not link the "here" to "return now".
My Topics [2.2.3.a]	Consistency & Standards (4)	2	"Subscribe to a Topic" is the title of this page when you first come to it. Keep consistent and make it "My Topics" always.
My Topics [2.2.3.a]	Consistency & Standards (4), System Status Visibility (1)	1	Breadcrumb is not consistent; It should be "You Are Here: Qhome: My Topics". See final report for more on breadcrumb usage.
My Topics [2.2.3]	Minimalist Design (8)	2	Redundancy in action links - remove, contribute. Redesign.
My Messages [2.2.4]	Consistency & Standards (4), System Status Visibility (1)	1	Breadcrumb is not consistent; It should be "You Are Here: Qhome: My Messages".
My Messages [2.2.4]	Documentaion and Help (10)	3	Users need more information on what this is about. Why/how do I get these messages? Inform.
My Messages [2.2.4]	Documentaion and Help (10)	2	What are the differences between Private and System Messages? Inform.



Page Name	Heuristic Violated	Rating	Recommendations/Notes
My Messages [2.2.4]	Minimalist Design (8), Efficiency of use (7)	1	Layout looks confusing and is not efficient with space. Redesign.
Your Public Page ... [2.2.5.a]	Consistency & Standards (4)	2	Inconsistency in language of title. Rewrite.
Your Public Page ... [2.2.5.a]	Consistency & Standards (4)	2	Language of intro copy must be consistent with overall style flow. Rewrite.
Your Public Page ... [2.2.5.a]	Minimalist Design (8)	1	The "Note:" should be differentiated from the other, instructional copy. Redesign.
Your Public Page ... [2.2.5.a]	Consistency & Standards (4), System Status Visibility (1)	1	Breadcrumb is not consistent; It should be "You Are Here: Qhome: My Public Page". See final report.
Create My Public page [2.2.5.b]	Consistency & Standards (4), System Status Visibility (1)	1	Breadcrumb is not consistent; It should be "You Are Here: Qhome: Create My Public Page". See final report.
Create My Public page [2.2.5.b]	Consistency & Standards (4)	2	Rewrite "some text about yourself". Perhaps "Enter some cool information on yourself". Excite people more in order to get more info.
Create My Public page [2.2.5.b]	Documentaion and Help (10)	1	"My public folders" is confusing. The instructional copy is not helping. Rewrite & Inform
My Public Page [2.2.5]	Consistency & Standards (4), System Status Visibility (1)	1	Breadcrumb is not consistent; It should be "You Are Here: Qhome: My Public Page". See final report.
My Public Page [2.2.5]	Minimalist Design (8)	1	Poor layout of this page. Redesign.
Mail Your Public Page [2.2.5.1]	Consistency & Standards (4), System Status Visibility (1)	1	Breadcrumb is not consistent; It should be "You Are Here: Qhome: My Public Page: Mail Your Public Page to a Friend". (See below for rewording.) See final report on breadcrumb usage.



Page Name	Heuristic Violated	Rating	Recommendations/Notes
Mail Your Public Page [2.2.5.1]	Consistency & Standards (4), System Status Visibility (1)	2	Name of page is inconsistent with link to it - "Send to a Friend" is more consistent and should replace "Mail Your Public Page ...". It is also important not to mix "My" and "Your".
Mail Your Public Page [2.2.5.1]	Documentaion and Help (10)	1	Static copy should be rewritten to be more efficient.
Thank You! [2.2.5.1.1]	Consistency & Standards (4), Minimalist Design (8)	1	Copy & title are not consistently designed with other pages. Bold and enlarge "Thank You!". Redesign.
Thank You! [2.2.5.1.1]	Recognition, not Recall (6)	2	Don't link "here" for action. Link on the term, "return now".
Thank You! [2.2.5.1.1]		*	See final report for comments on refresh functionality.
Edit My Public Page [2.2.5.2]	Consistency & Standards (4), Recognition, not Recall (6)	1	Make sure the action button is titled the same as the page - "Edit" instead of "Update".
Remove my Public Page [2.2.5.3]	Consistency & Standards (4)	1	It is important not to mix "My" and "Your".
Remove my Public Page [2.2.5.3]	Consistency & Standards (4), System Status Visibility (1)	1	Breadcrumb is not consistent; It should be "You Are Here: Qhome: My Public Page: Send to a Friend". See final report.



## Some Notes on Content and Copy

The two articles below provide an overview of the strategies and importance of web-centric content and copy writing and their impact on usability and user success factors. Both articles are authored by Jakob Neilson, arguably the most prominent, referenced, and consulted web usability engineer today.

From Jakob Nielsen's Alertbox, [www.useit.com](http://www.useit.com), May 14, 2000:

### **Eyetracking Study of Web Readers**

In May 2000, the Poynter Institute released an eyetracking study of how people read news on the Web, mainly focusing on newspaper sites. Their results confirm the findings from my previous studies in 1994 and 1997 of how users read on the Web.

Web content is intellectually bankrupt and almost never designed to comply with the way users behave online. Almost all websites contain content that would have worked just as well in print. Even online-only webzines are filled with linear articles with traditional blocks-of-text layouts. No hyperlinks, no scannability.

### **Main Findings**

#### **Text Attracts Attention Before Graphics**

It was almost twice as common for users to fixate on the text as on the images upon their initial visit to a page. In general, users were first drawn to headlines, article summaries, and captions. They often did not look at the images at all until the second or third visit to a page.

#### **Keep Headlines Simple and Direct**

Confirming our findings from 1997, the users in the current study also preferred straightforward headlines to funny or cute ones. A new finding was that users often praised the Web headlines for being better than the headlines in print newspapers. It seems that several of the news sites have taken the earlier findings to heart and have started rewriting their headlines for online.

#### **Shallow Reading Combined With Selected Depth**

It was more than three times as common for users to limit their reading to a brief as opposed to reading a full article. Even when reading a "full" article, users only read about 75% of the text.

In other words, the most common behavior is to hunt for information and be ruthless in ignoring details. But once the prey has been caught, users will sometimes dive in more deeply. Thus, Web content needs to support both aspects of information access: foraging and consumption. Text needs to be scannable, but it also needs to provide the answers users seek.

### **Interlaced Browsing**

Users in the Poynter study frequently alternated between multiple sites:



They would read something in one window then switch to another window and visit another site and then return to the first window and read some more on the first site; possibly to turn to the second window again later in the session

I observed this behavior as early as 1994: users would interlace browsing sessions in several windows. Doing so is particularly easy on big monitors that show several full-page windows simultaneously, but can also be done on small screens. The Windows task bar facilitates session interlaced browsing as long as users stay below eight sessions or so.

I admit that I was surprised when we started seeing interlaced browsing in 1994. Previous studies had not identified this behavior, so I originally expected people to browse a specific site and stay with its navigation features until they decided that they were done with it. In retrospect it is clear why interlacing was not seen in the old days: we were simply not studying sufficiently rich hyperspaces.

The lesson for site designers is that users are not focused on any single site. There is not even such a thing as "a visit" to a site: even while the user is "visiting" your site, he or she is also checking out the competition. Truly, the Web as a whole forms the user experience.

**Site design must accommodate people who leave and return frequently:**

- help users reorient themselves
- plain and simple headlines immediately tell users what each page is about simple page titles that start with a salient keyword help users pick out pages from the minimized tiles in the Windows task bar do not assume users can remember their entire browsing session:
- provide breadcrumbs and other location tools
- do not change the standard link colors - doing so makes it harder to recognize what pages the user has already seen
- use standard terminology to minimize the need for users to switch context and remember what you call things

Trust is less of an issue for newspapers which usually have high integrity. Other sites need to fight for credibility and must reduce marketese, slogans, and other elements that generate distrust.

Users are likely to spend much less time on other sites. Ten minutes would be a long visit to most sites.

Users will read fewer words on other sites than they do on newspaper sites. Editorial integrity and journalistic objectivity makes people more willing to read a larger percentage of the material. The task of reading news implies a willingness to process more words more than the average Web task which is directed at finding specific information and solutions.

The new eyetracking study is mostly applicable to all types of websites. Most of the Poynter findings confirm earlier findings from studies of many other types of sites, so they relate to basic characteristics of reading on the Web and are not limited to newspapers.

Adding one more study to the list of evidence for different reading behavior will hopefully convince more Internet executives of **the need write differently for the Web** and hire specialized Web editors who understand online content.



## Jakob Nielsen's Alertbox for October 1, 1997:

### How Users Read on the Web

They don't.

People rarely read Web pages word by word; instead, they scan the page, picking out individual words and sentences. In a recent study John Morkes and I found that 79 percent of our test users always scanned any new page they came across; only 16 percent read word-by-word.

As a result, Web pages have to employ scannable text, using

- highlighted keywords (hypertext links serve as one form of highlighting; typeface variations and color are others)
- meaningful sub-headings (not "clever" ones)
- bulleted lists
- one idea per paragraph (users will skip over any additional ideas if they are not caught by the first few words in the paragraph)
- the inverted pyramid style, starting with the conclusion.
- half the word count (or less) than conventional writing

We found that credibility is important for Web users, since it is unclear who is behind information on the Web and whether a page can be trusted.

Credibility can be increased by high-quality graphics, good writing, and use of outbound hypertext links. Links to other sites show that the authors have done their homework and are not afraid to let readers visit other sites.

Users detested "marketese"; the promotional writing style with boastful subjective claims ("hottest ever") that currently is prevalent on the Web. Web users are busy: they want to get the straight facts. Also, credibility suffers when users clearly see that the site exaggerates.

### Measuring the Effect of Improved Web Writing

To measure the effect of some of the content guidelines we had identified, we developed five different versions of the same website (same basic information; different wording; same site navigation). We then had users perform the same tasks with the different sites. Measured usability was dramatically higher for the concise version (58% better) and for the scannable version (47% better). And when we combined three ideas for improved writing style into a single site, the result was truly stellar: 124% better usability.

It was somewhat surprising to us that usability was improved by a good deal in the objective language version (27% better). We had expected that users would like this version better than the promotional site (as indeed they did), but we thought that the performance metrics would have been the same for both kinds of language. As it turned out, our four performance measures (time, errors, memory, and site structure) were also better for the objective version than for the promotional version. Our conjecture to explain this finding is that promotional language imposes



a cognitive burden on users who have to spend resources on filtering out the hyperbole to get at the facts. When people read a paragraph that starts "Nebraska is filled with internationally recognized attractions," their first reaction is no, it's not, and this thought slows them down and distracts them from using the site.