Introduction

We concluded from our previous round of focus group testing that we had developed a sound set of prototypes with a Dollars & Sense (Crenshaw, Sakell, Rice, Yzaguirre, & Henry, 2009) website and Facebook Page (Henry J Henry, Crenshaw, Sakell, Rice, & Yzaguirre, 2009). Our findings indicated that our content was appropriate and desirable to our target audience. However we also received feedback that indicated a desire for design improvements and an increased incorporation of videos, graphics, and charts in the prototype.

Website: http://portfolios.gmu.edu/tcrenshaw/EDIT752Prototype_U1/
Facebook: http://www.facebook.com/pages/Dollars-Sense/56461796315
YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-xnmHyxQxmk

In the spirit of the iterative nature of the design process we listened carefully to our focus group audiences and incorporated their recommendations (summarized below) prior to conducting usability testing. Our objective was to make improvements to one subpage for each persona. Homepage changes feature a clickable video as a part of the News Headline article in order to create a more interactive look and feel.

The Facebook Page was improved with an updated Dollars & Sense graphic, including a more prominent URL to the website. It also included additional fans, YouTube (Henry, Crenshaw, Yzaguirre, Rice, & Sakell, 2009) videos and podcasts.

Iterative Changes Since Focus Group

• Podcasts. We found if we offered multimedia, our testers were interested enough to at least click on it. The group produced
podcasts - writing scripts, creating audio bumpers (intros, outros), recording audio, editing, posting to iTunes and writing RSS feeds. We placed simple text links for podcasts on our second-level pages.

• Live Chat. An early tester asked, "how can I talk right now to an AGORA rep?" The request surprised us; we hadn’t expected someone to want to talk immediately to the company. We built a Javascript app to simulate what a Live Chat window would look like. A later tester said he wouldn’t want to click on it for fear of having to talk to financial sales person.

• Multimedia icons. These gave us the opportunity to be a little creative. Early testing indicated users didn’t know what was happening on the right side of the page. We’d intended for people to use the area for tools, multimedia and chat. Testers thought it was disorganized and were disinclined to click. We created a family of icons for multimedia, tools and chat. Testers in the next round immediately knew what the area’s purpose was. One late tester kept clicking on the new icons to access the content. We decided to not make them active – they were category icons, not links for individual items.

• More video. Early testing showed users preferred video as a delivery method. We brought in personal finance and job seeking videos from YouTube – sometimes we embedded the video on the site, and sometimes linked out through images.

• Video picture. Our testers told us they were more likely to click on an image of a video instead of a text link for a video. They
also said they understood that an undersized image did not represent the video – that the image would “become” a video.

- Content pictures. Our testers responded to content that contained an engaging, relevant image. If the image was unusual (a road sign that reads Careers), they were more inclined to pay attention to the content.

- Background color coordinated with tabs. Throughout our testing, users had trouble understanding the Big Picture / Main Article theme of our content. Making each tab a separate color helped, but once we put a shade of the color behind the main content – making it clear this was the Big Picture content – users understood the connection.

Executive Summary

The final phase of research is usability testing, and this is how Kuniavsky defines it:

Usability Tests are structured interviews focused on specific features in an interface prototype. The heart of the interview is a series of tasks that are performed by the interface’s evaluator (target audience). Tapes and notes from the interview are analyzed for the evaluator’s successes, misunderstandings, mistakes, and opinions. Multiple observations are compared and the most common issues are collected into a list of functionality and presentation problems. It tests whether people can understand prototype designs as they are supposed to understand them. (Kuniavsky, 2003)
In this phase we wanted to discover how users would interact with our prototypes and if they were intuitively easy to use. We also asked questions related to motivation of use and motivation to return to the sites.

Usability testing was conducted with four subjects ages 18, 20, 26 and 28. They were able to complete the tasks for both the website and Facebook Page.

The key findings included:

• Generation Nexters are interested in information that is applicable to them and is presented and organized in a way in which they prefer to receive information.

• Generation Nexters preferred communication and sharing methods evolving with the latest web 2.0 trends.

• Generation Nexters are mainly interested in personal finance topics but are often intrigued by national finance topics as long as it applies to them and it is written in a tone that appeals to them.

• Pictures and multimedia are worth a thousand words.

We strongly recommend incorporating Generation Nexters into the process when developing sites as much as possible. Their feedback and ideas are what helped shape our prototypes into information tools that they would be motivated to use. Our usability testing supports the conclusion that our prototypes function as intended and that Generation Nexters are comfortable with the navigation features and ability to find relevant information.

Usability Test Goals
In general usability tests are meant to discover how users interact with products and if the products are easy and intuitive to use. As such, our usability test largely followed the same goals. In addition, we also decided to ask questions related to motivation of use and motivation to return to the site.

More specifically, our goals sought to answer five main questions about the Dollars & Sense website, and Facebook Page:

- Were the users able to find information?
- Was the information they found what they expected? If not, was it interesting?
- Were the users able to complete the tasks given?
- Were they motivated to come back to the site?
- Did the users like the site?

With the information discovered through this test, our group will be able to refine any elements of the site that are confusing or uninviting to the user. We will also be able to reaffirm some of the more successful design decisions of the website.

Usability Test Process

Our group used a hybrid interview type of usability test which asks participants to complete specific tasks on the Dollars & Sense website and Facebook Page and also uses probing questions to gain insight into the participants' impressions and thinking processes. Each usability test session was conducted with one participant and one observer. The observer used a pre-established script and set of questions and encouraged the participant to verbalize hid thoughts,
impressions and any confusion he might have when bringing up a new page or completing a task.

The observer set the tone early in the interview for the participant to feel free to "speak his or her mind" and that negative feedback was actually constructive and helped make the website better. The usability test began with a blank screen while the observer asked some baseline questions regarding his or her current use of the internet and Facebook. Then the observer brought up the home page and asked the participant to convey his or her first impression about the page (graphics, layout and main headings.) The observer then gave the participant a series of tasks to complete on each page to test the ease of navigation, features, tools, links and clarity of headings.

If the participant was able to complete the task on the first try without expressing doubt or confusion, the task was rated as a success. This process was completed for the home page, a second level page, and Big Picture page for each of the three personas: College Planning, Career Planning and Life Planning. During this process, the observer recorded the participant's impressions, thoughts and task completion success.

One of the usability tasks was to locate and link to the Dollars & Sense Facebook Page. The participant was asked to share his impression and feedback on the Facebook Page, and review the content. He was also asked to complete a few tasks but the Dollars & Sense website uses Facebook standard navigation with which most participants are very familiar.
At the end of the usability test, the participant was encouraged to explore the Dollars & Sense website and verbalize his thought processes as he progressed through his self-selected tasks. In conclusion, the participant was asked to name three changes that should be made to the website that would increase his motivation to revisit the Dollars & Sense website in the future.

User Profiles

In this round of data collection we conducted usability testing with four individuals, two females and two males, ages 18, 20, 26, and 28.

Home Page Findings

Tasks

Testers were able to successfully accomplish all tasks related to the homepage. They were also able to identify multiple ways in which to navigate to their desired information due to the layout and options available on the homepage. When developing the initial prototype homepage group 2 wanted to be sure that the personas were the highlight of the page and helped to draw the users into the their desired track. Based on the feedback received from this usability testing we have successfully completed that goal, three out of four of the testers identified the main graphic as the first point of interest. The main navigation across the top and the options underneath the main homepage graphic were used and identified as ways to get to the needed information.

Key Findings
Our target audience is very forgiving when it comes to the amount of content you place on a page but the key is to make sure it is organized in logical categories. Card sorting activities seem to be key when organizing information for this age group in addition to images and multimedia that stimulates their auditory and visual senses.

According to our feedback, the main area of improvement for the homepage, and all others on the website for that matter, had to do with the drop-down navigation. Users did not like how the sub menus displayed horizontally and often found them difficult to use. They expressed a strong desire for a vertical drop-down menu to help solve this problem.

Second Level Page Findings

Tasks

- Find and access video
- Find and access chat
- Find and access podcasts
- Find and access Career Interest Test
- Find and click on the Big Picture option

Through iterative testing, our users were able to successfully find content once our page organization was improved. The icons for multimedia, tools and collaboration served as road signs for the right part of the page. One could even say they were beacons. Using imagery — whether embedded video or images of videos — was a large improvement in this round of testing.

Key Findings
• Getting users to the appointed places on the page is no longer a problem. The effort should now be on how to prioritize the different items. All users were drawn to the two image areas on the page – large photo next to content, and video images. Second-level page designers now need to decide which is most important on each page – content images or video images. Examples: If content image is most important on Big Picture page, then use text links on videos. Otherwise, emphasize video images.

• The images are vital to users actually reading the main content. A good, engaging photo draws them into the content; a poor image does not.

• Readers are still having a disconnect understanding what is the Big Picture, and what is the Main Article. One tester said, if you have five Main Articles and one Big Picture, why not show all the Main Articles (each in their own folder tab, in the same color) and the Big Picture, in its own tab and own color.

• Users like video. A lot. One tester even said she’d prefer a video “read her” the same content, rather than read it herself.

Website Motivation

Motivation to revisit the Dollars & Sense website is largely determined by how satisfying and worthwhile the website is to users. Users become quickly dissatisfied with a website if it is visually unappealing, confusing to use and lacking useful content. Therefore, questions were included in the usability test to assess participants' first impression of the website, its visual appeal, clear navigation and value of content and tools.
All of the participants liked the appearance of the Dollars & Sense homepage. One viewer felt that the bottom half of the page was "busy" but others described it as "clean," "attractive" and "engaging." Except for the drop-down menu display, most felt that the navigation was easy to use and uncomplicated. However, it was sometimes confusing to them when some of the links and headings were not yet active. All viewers understood the purpose of the live chat function with Agora but there was a 50/50 split reaction on motivation to use it. All participants liked the car loan calculator and said that they would use the tool as needed. The most useful tools and aspects of the website varied per participant because their personal situations differed. However, all participants rated the website positively as a valuable tool that they would be motivated to use "as needed" depending on their financial issues at the time.

Facebook Tasks

There were two main tasks associated with the Dollars & Sense Facebook Page:

- Navigating to and from the Facebook Page and main website
- Finding and sharing an article

In general, there were no problems getting to the Facebook Page from the main Dollars & Sense website. Users easily found it on the homepage and were able to access its content. Once on the Facebook Page, they were also no notable problems finding articles that interested them, and using the share feature to send the article to their peers.
The main problem that users had was navigating back to the Dollars & Sense website from the Dollars & Sense Facebook Page. Despite the web address for the website being more prominently displayed from previous versions of the prototype, two users still had difficulty seeing and using it. These users were forced to use the “back” button on their web browsers in order to get back the main website.

Key Findings

Like members of the focus group from the previous deliverable, members of the usability group also expressed concerns about the layout of the Facebook Page. These concerns mainly focused around the long list of articles and seeming lack of organization. Unfortunately, a redesign is unlikely due to the constraints that Facebook gives to its pages.

Facebook Motivations

User motivation to return to the Facebook site was largely related to the problems associated with its layout. One participant explicitly stated that she would not return to the page without a new layout since it was confusing to her. Another user expressed concern about articles that were irrelevant to her and displayed regardless of her personal preferences.

Summary of Key Findings

- Stickiness is vital for the site’s survival. Users said that the tools available on the Dollars & Sense website would motivate them to come back to the website repeatedly.
• The content of the site—relevant articles, intriguing images, new and engaging multimedia, unique video and podcasts are additional keys to the stickiness of the website. Users repeated rated the content as relevant and interesting, including the Big Picture articles.

• Imagery is vital. Good art will keep the user moving from page. Bad art gives a user another reason to leave the site, and no user needs very many reasons to exit any site.

• Layout/Navigation. Most of our testers told us that the website was very clear, clean and easy to use.

• Our age range is quite wide (18 – 26 years old). These are formative years and young adult years—a person entering college is far different than a recent college graduate as is the person in their second job buying their first home. In some of our examples (buying a car, choosing a major), we are targeting important, one-time tasks. Though they considered the car calculator tool useful, it would not become a frequently used tool.

• Motivation to use Facebook is not as high as we initially thought, however, other web 2.0 tools are gaining popularity. Agora will want to consider targeting broader subjects: choosing a major as well as choosing a graduate school. Our users didn’t feel all aspects applied to them.

Recommendations to the Customer for Future Development
If AGORA Financial intends to move forward with development of a financial website directed towards Generation Nexters it is essential to consider the following items.

- Generation Nexters are interested in information that is applicable to them and is presented and organized in a way in which they prefer to receive information.
- Generation Nexters preferred communication and sharing methods evolve with the latest web 2.0 trends.
- Generation Nexters are mainly interested in personal finance topics but are often intrigued by national finance topics as long as it applies to them and it is written in a tone that appeals to them.
- Pictures and multimedia is worth a thousand words

Group 2 strongly recommends incorporating Generation Nexters into the process when developing sites as much as possible. Their feedback and ideas are what helped shape our prototypes into information tools that they would be motivated to use.

Conclusion

The results from usability testing leads us to conclude that the design features of the website and Facebook Page do what they are designed to do. The navigation features and labels make sense and the interface appeal to the users and enabled them to locate information relevant to them. We conclude based on our findings that the prototypes are sound and ready for further development in already identified content areas.
Bibliography


