

User Testing Report:

The San Diego Zoo
<http://www.sandiegozoo.com/>

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Executive Summary

As part of the Designing User Experience II class, a two-student team conducted user testing for the San Diego Zoo website. Over two weeks, five users were given ten tasks to complete using the website. One student moderated the task flow, while the other took extensive notes on the user's actions. The results of the test were documented with click-track and opinion data.

This report discusses the findings and makes recommendations based on the information learned from user testing. Detailed information on the testing data is available in the User Testing Data report, attached at the end of this report. Summarized below are the successes and recommendations:

Successes

- **The site was perceived by most users as aesthetically pleasing.**
The color scheme, visual layout and overall organization were seen as appropriate, and did not impede the user's tasks.
- **All users noted that the site has a lot of useful information.**
Users were impressed with the amount and quality of information available on the website.
- **Users found the Animal Bytes information interesting and comprehensive.**
Users were pleasantly surprised by the level of detailed information available about animals and birds in the Animal Bytes section of the website.

Issues and Recommendations

- **Flash technology impedes user access to the site.**
All users were frustrated by the use of Flash for global navigation. Several users were not able to track their mouse with enough precision to keep the sub-global navigation active. In addition, IE users had to click each item twice – once to activate the Flash control and once to use it. Replacing the Flash navigation with HTML links would provide direct access to site content and accommodation for imprecise mouse tracking, saving extensive user frustration.
- **Essential park information is not easily accessible to site visitors.**
Users spent an unacceptable amount of time searching for the Zoo's hours, ticket prices and exhibit information (an average of three minutes per task). In addition, some users believed that they had found the correct information when they had not. For example, one user who located hours of operation had actually found the hours for the Wild Animal Park. Providing basic visitor information in a highly visible location on the home page would improve user efficiency in gathering information essential to their decision to visit the zoo.
- **The San Diego Zoo and Wild Animal Park appear to be one entity.**
All users confused the Zoo and Animal Park's information while working through tasks for finding hours of operation, ticket prices and events information. The blurring of information between the two parks caused users to erroneously believe they had found information about the Zoo when they had not. For example, almost all users believed that the Zoo provided accommodation for weddings, when actually only the Animal Park provides such accommodation. Separating the information on the website by displaying Zoo information and using reference links to the Animal Park information would greatly reduce user confusion in this area.

Description of Test

<i>Dates of testing:</i>	September 13 – 20, 2006
<i>Testing location:</i>	User's home office or place of business
<i>Number of users tested:</i>	5
<i>Length of each test:</i>	One hour or less
<i>Platforms tested on:</i>	All five users tested on Windows XP
<i>Browsers tested on:</i>	Three users tested on Internet Explorer, two users tested on Mozilla Firefox (choice was given to the user)
<i>Tasks completed summary:</i>	64% of all tasks were completed successfully, 36% of all tasks were completed unsuccessfully

Task #	Users Successful	Users Unsuccessful
1	5	0
2	3	2
3	2	3
4	1	4
5	4	1
6	3	2
7	3	2
8	5	0
9	2	3
10	4	1
Totals	32	18

Priority Levels

The issues identified through user testing are grouped into three levels of priority:

- **High priority:**
These issues are likely to impact the majority of users significantly. They should be resolved as quickly as resources allow.
- **Medium priority:**
Issues at this priority level are also likely to affect the majority of users but generally are less disruptive to the user experience than high-priority issues. If resources are available to address these issues, they should be addressed.
- **Low priority:**
Low priority issues may impact either a minority or majority of users. Regardless of the number of users affected, these issues have minor impact on the user experience. Low priority issues typically require fewer resources to resolve, and should be addressed as appropriate.

Recommendations

Home Page

High Priority

- **Clearly separate the San Diego Zoo and Wild Animal Park information.**
Almost all users confused the Wild Animal Park with the Zoo, and often based decisions on incorrect information. For example, several users thought that they had found an event held at the Zoo when, in fact, they had found an Animal Park event. Separating this information by displaying the Zoo's information and providing a reference link to the Animal Park information would greatly reduce user confusion in this area.
- **Provide ticket prices and hours of operation on the Home Page.**
The basic information required for visiting the zoo should be readily available to site visitors. The task for finding information on hours and ticket prices was unnecessarily complicated for the majority of users tested because this information was not prominently featured. Providing this information on the Home Page gives users immediate access to information critical to their decision to visit the zoo.

Medium Priority

- **Eliminate Flash splash page on sandiegozoo.org.**
All users mentioned that it was annoying to wait for this to load before they entered the site's main content area. Removing the splash page helps to ensure that visitors enter the site with a positive impression of the Zoo.

Low Priority

- **Link Flash pictures on home page to site content.**
Several users attempted to click the picture, which currently does nothing. Linking the pictures to an appropriate exhibit would provide an easy entryway to interesting site content.
- **Reduce text content on the Home Page to eliminate visual clutter.**
At least one user remarked that the home page seemed cluttered, and another commented that the home page was for "people that browse." The amount of text content below the fold feels overwhelming, and none of the users spent time reading through it. Reducing the amount of clutter on the Home Page increases the chance that users will benefit from its contents.

Navigation

High Priority

- **Replace Flash global navigation with HTML links.**
All users struggled with the Flash global navigation. When users did not track precisely with the mouse, menus would appear/disappear unexpectedly, making it difficult to orient and select links. In addition, IE users had to click the navigation twice to engage it, an unnecessary and annoying step when trying to navigate the site's main content. Implementing HTML link navigation would provide accommodation for imprecise mouse tracking and immediate entry to the site's content areas.

- **Clearly label the zoo exhibits and move it to the global navigation.**
When asked to find exhibit information, most users unsuccessfully sought out this information in the Animal Bytes category. In addition, several users said that exhibit information would be the first thing that they would look for when entering the site. Placing an Exhibit link in the global navigation gives users direct access to information that impacts their decision to visit the zoo.

Medium Priority

- **Implement a landing page for all global navigation.**
All users were confused when clicking certain global navigation labels had no result. The linking inconsistency within the global navigation also frustrated users (For example, Education is linked, but Visit is not). Implementing a landing page for all global navigation links eases the user into each category and provides good feedback for their actions.
- **Make the local navigation more prominent.**
One user never noticed the local navigation during the tasks that required it, and other users did not notice it right away (but found it later). The color of the text and background make the links difficult to see. In addition, one user expressed preference that the local navigation persist instead of disappearing/reappearing when browsing. Making the local navigation more prominent by increasing the color contrast would improve accessibility to those site pages.

Low Priority

- **Relocate the Quicklinks menu.**
Users either did not notice it at all, or activated it unintentionally when attempting to use the main navigation. In both cases, the Quicklinks menu was not helpful to users. Relocating the Quicklinks menu out of the navigation path would reduce visual distraction during navigation efforts.

Labeling

High Priority

- **Clearly identify content that is exclusive to the Wild Animal Park.**
While the two parks have different hours, prices and events, users perceived that all of the information on the website related to the San Diego Zoo. Clearly identifying the Animal Park content could help to prevent users from making decisions based on incorrect information.

Medium Priority

- **Ensure all links have a good information scent.**
Several users made errors due to poor information scent. One user expected Calendar to display a page in calendar format, while the page actually lists events by category. Another user noticed that clicking the "Click on an animal to learn more about adopting" link actually displays a page about the animals, not about the adoption process. Ensuring that all links have a good information scent reduces opportunity for navigational errors and the amount of time users spend looking for information.

Low Priority

- **Clearly label Webcams and Flash Videos.**
When users noticed Webcam or Flash Video content, some were unable to identify whether the content was interactive, and/or showed live images. Clearly identifying the different technologies would help users to benefit from the site's interactivity.

Membership

Medium Priority

- **Provide membership benefit levels in a table format.**
All users attempted to compare the benefits between the different membership levels. This process was made unnecessarily difficult by the up and down scrolling required to compare the information. Providing benefit information in a table format would assist users in comparing the membership levels, helping them with their Zoo membership purchase decision.

Animal Bytes

Low Priority

- **Remove sound from auto-play on Flash video.**
The animal sound that is played toward the end of the Flash video on the Animal Bytes page both distracted and startled several users. Most users did not notice the video, and so the sound suddenly captured their attention and distracted them from their task. Removing the sound from the Flash video enables users to feel comfortable on the page and to continue their information finding.

Adopt-an-Animal

High Priority

- **Make it obvious what the user gets when adopting an animal.**
Several users had difficulty finding this information and hesitated to proceed with the transaction. In addition, one user was confused as to what the gift recipient would receive compared to what the purchaser would receive. The information about what is included in the Adopt-an-Animal program, and to whom it is sent, should be placed up front in the process.

Medium Priority

- **Pre-fill the adoption form with the animal that the user selected on the adoption information page.**
Most users arrived at the adoption form by clicking the "Click here to adopt an [animal name]" link, and then were either annoyed or confused when trying to again select the animal name on the adoption form. One user had forgotten the animal they selected, and had to return to the adoption information page. Another user couldn't find the animal that they selected, because the animal list isn't alphabetized. Pre-filling the adoption form with the user's selection may increase user follow-through by eliminating unnecessary mental load.

Low Priority

- **Improve format of adoption form to support task workflow.**
While all users completed the form successfully, several users commented that it could have been made easier. One user who initially did not see the header text commented that the colored bars made the text difficult to read. Another user commented that numeric sequencing cues (Step 1 of 4, Step 2 of 4, etc.) would have helped, and a third user commented that required fields should be designated with an asterisk. Making improvements to the adoption form to make it easier to use may increase the number of animal adoptions.
- **Use a unique page for animal information instead of an anchor link.**
Almost all users were either annoyed or confused when selecting a link for an animal from the adoption information page displayed a page with information about all of the animals (anchor linked to the animal that they selected). The page appeared jumpy and some users were visually distracted by information about animals that they hadn't selected. Separating the animal information promotes user focus during the adoption process.

Events

High Priority

- **Consistently link all event titles.**
Users expressed frustration that some of the titles on the Events page were linked and some were not. The events that were not linked did not hold the users attention, because there was little information to explore. Consistently linking all event titles encourages user exploration and may increase event attendance.

Medium Priority

- **Make links to the calendar-style listings more prominent.**
Links to event information displayed in calendar format were used by almost all users who noticed them. One user, however, did not notice the links and was frustrated because they thought that event information was not available in a calendar format. More prominent links for the calendar pages would increase user satisfaction when looking for events information.
- **Show only those events that are not sold out.**
Several users expressed frustration at finding interesting events only to find that they were sold out. One user even abandoned searching for an appropriate event because so many of the choices were sold out. Displaying only those events which are available would greatly reduce user frustration in this area.

Low Priority

- **When updating events, also update references to them.**
One user was very frustrated when they could not find a schedule for an event that was referenced by "see schedule, below". On further testing, the schedule re-appeared and was updated for the next month. Keeping references and event information up-to-date and relevant helps to increase user confidence in the site's information.

Zoo Shop

Medium Priority

- **Place a San Diego Zoo link on the Zoo Shop website.**
In the course of completing the task to shop for a stuffed animal, most users visited the Zoo Shop website. While users did not have problems being directed to the Zoo Shop website, at least one user had difficulty returning to the San Diego Zoo website because of the absence of a link back to it. Placing a link to the San Diego Zoo website ensures that visitors to the online shop also have access to the Zoo information.

Low Priority

- **Change “Winged Animals” labeling on Zoo Shop page to “Birds”.**
At least one user incorrectly concluded that the Zoo Shop did not have stuffed animals of birds because they did not associate the label “Winged Animals” with birds. Other users tested did not immediately recognize that birds would be in the Winged Animals category. Changing the labeling for this category increases the chances that users will find stuffed animals of birds.

Weddings

Low Priority

- **Condense the links that display the wedding information page.**
At least one user noted that the General Wedding Info, Wedding Sites and Wedding Packages links all went to the same page. Users were frustrated that they spent extra time exploring the links only to find the same page of information. Condensing the links to provide a single entry point for all wedding information would reduce user frustration in this area.