

Site Analysis: Heuristic Evaluation



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INTRODUCTION 3

USER CRITIQUES 4

FUNCTIONALITY 4

3) Developer’s Implicit Goals for the Web Site..... 4
4) Site Organization 5
5) User-Site Interaction 5
6) Implicit Learning Strategies..... 6

NAVIGATION 6

7) Accessibility.....
8) Consistency.....
9) Redundancy.....
10) Feedback

AESTHETICS

11) Composition.....
12) Color
13) Graphics
14) Typography.....
15) Animation

DOCUMENTATION

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

AUDIUSA.COM

2. Introduction

A heuristic evaluation was conducted for the Audi web site (www.audiusa.com) user interface. The user interface was evaluated in terms of specific attributes and how these are consistent or inconsistent with commonly accepted user interface design guidelines. The strengths and weaknesses, or opportunities for improving the architecture and design of the web site was based on the following four areas of assessment:

- Functionality
- Navigation
- Aesthetics, and
- Documentation

Opportunities for improvement are presented in a bulleted list format, and additional comments are provided as necessary.

3. User critiques

A search for user feedback on the new audiusa.com web site was conducted using Yahoo, Excite and Altavista search engines. Since the web site is new, no feedback specific to the new web site was found. However, information regarding the recall of the Audi TT, and the QTVR movies on the previous and current web sites were found on forums dedicated to the Audi TT (www.audi-tt.org/forums). Below are two excerpts from this forum:

A post by Mitch Miller on May 25, 1999 at 22:07:58 regarding new stuff on www.audiusa.com was as follows: “Hmm. Actually, these look like the “same old goodies” that Audi of America have been posting, a month at a time, from last October till now. The QTVR movies showed up in January (when the TT made its US debut at the Detroit auto show), etc. But it’s still cool stuff, and put together in an interesting new way.”

A post by Lindsay on July 19, 1999 at 00:58:07 regarding the Audi TT night commercial can be found at <http://www.nudgie.com/askndgie/messages/351.htm>, and states, “I love this song that plays on the commercial for the new Audi TT. It is all instrumental. It plays on the commercial where the TT is parked in a desert at night. If you go to the Audi TT web site: www.audiusa.com/tt_tech3_frame.htm you can click on the “night commercial on the far right to hear a clip. Who is that song by? Is it even a song or simply a clip composed just for the commercial. Does anyone know? Please help!”

Functionality

This section describes the overall functionality of the web site, in regards to:

- The developer’s implicit goals
- How the site is organized
- How users interact with the web site, and
- Implicit learning strategies

3.0.1 Developer’s Implicit Goals for the Web Site

It is assumed that the developer’s goals are reflected by the contents and current design of the web site. An additional assumption is that the content is prioritized for placement within key areas of the user’s eyepath (clockwise starting from the upper left hand corner of the screen) as follows:

- Information about the different types of Audi vehicles (technical specifications, consumer news, videos, promotional content, dealerships and competitive analyses. Users also are provided the ability to virtually experience the Audi brand, build their own Audi, and to receive a brochure on the Audi of their choice. This is provided to inform users of the Audi experience, promote the Audi brand, offer a compelling shopping experience and convince users that an Audi is the best choice on the market.
- Content in the Pre-owned section further demonstrates the quality of the Audi brand, and provides detailed information on warranties available, dealerships offering pre-owned Audi cars, and assurances that a pre-owned Audi has full company support when purchased.
- The News and Traditions section allows users to explore Audi's rich traditions of design, technology, and history. In addition, up-to-date information on how Audi has built its recent successes on nearly a century of technological progress and, an inside look at the beginnings of the Audi brand and how it has progressed over the years is provided.

- The Finance section allows users to pick an Audi model and their preferred payment method, and use an interactive payment calculator for assessing monthly payments in real-time. Financial details for the Prestige Lease, Premier Purchase Plan and Retail financing are provided, including estimated monthly and down payments. Users are also afforded information on the LeaseMate and College Graduate Program, and Audi Financial Services.
- By opening a My Audi account, users are provided an online experience using the latest Internet technologies for acquiring exclusive information about their Audi. Direct links to Audi Advantage, Replacement Manual Requests, exclusive Audi Boutique specials, and a personalized stream of Audi news and reviews are provided. Contact information for local dealers, and storage of the features chosen with the build your Audi feature are maintained.
- The Contact Audi section provides several means of communication and includes an 800 number and the ability to send electronic mail. Links are provided for a FAQ section, Annual Reports, employment opportunities and the Audi World Site (www.audi.com).
- Under the Boutique section are a plethora of interesting offers and information (Audi Active Wear, Audi for Everyone, Audi TT, Cigar Aficionado, Executive Materials, For Cold Weather, Sporting Corner, The Audi Rings, Writing Instruments), and Boutique Specials (Golf Kit and Audi A8 Model). Users begin their shopping experience by accessing their account by entering a username and password from the My Audi page. Users may examine items selected for purchase in the Shopping Cart area and terminate the shopping experience by accessing the Check Out link. Access to Customer Service information is also provided within this section.
- The Find Dealer section allows users to locate Audi dealerships within 1 to 999 miles or kilometers from their address, in the United States or Canada.
- In addition to these eleven major sections, users are provided information regarding copyright and the company's privacy policy, and a utility that contains shortcuts.

3.0.2 Site Organization

The AudiUSA home page allows access to web site information using the following links (details listed above):

- A4
- A6
- A8
- TT
- Pre-owned
- News & Traditions
- Finance
- My Audi
- Contact Audi
- Boutique
- Find Dealer
- Copyright
- Privacy Policy
- Shortcuts.

3.0.3 User-Site Interaction

3.0.3.1 Effective Design Aspects

- The audiUSA.com web site is considered to be an E-Commerce web site with a wealth of informational content. The user accesses content on the web site mainly through a linear hierarchy of links arranged on two horizontal Primary Navigation bars. Secondary and Left

Navigation to content is provided on level one pages, in addition to a consistent replication of the Primary Navigation throughout the web site.

- The home page is consistent with the convention that it should not scroll.
- The information architecture uses a frames layout that does not occlude the Primary Navigation when pages are lengthy and require the user to scroll.
- The major sections utilize animations and graphics that are meaningful and engaging, while adding a pleasing aesthetic quality to the page.
- All copy consistently uses the Arial font, and all copy was considered to be appropriate for transactions and the subject matter provided.
- The web site is rich with content and multimedia that is appropriate and understandable and provides a shopping experience that is compelling for the user.
- Unique and innovative methods for displaying and accessing web site content are provided to users.
- Content links follow industry standard conventions for the display of active and visited link colors.
- The use of graphics is both decorative and functional.
- Most of the major sections provide a means to maintain user orientation. Users are kept informed of their interactions with content, and what they are currently viewing through the use of screen titles that map directly to the link or icon they have selected.
- Shortcuts to My Audi, Find Dealer, Calculate Payments and the Site Map are provided to users on the Primary Navigation of all major sections.

3.0.3.2 Opportunities for Improvement

Several opportunities for improvement were identified and were mostly for navigation and functionality, with minor concerns for aesthetics and user assistance. The issues for specific content areas and their sublevel pages are described below, using the four areas of evaluation. Comments should be considered specific to the overall web site, unless a specific page or content area is indicated. Recommendations for improving user interface elements and navigation schemes are provided. Strengths of the web site are listed under the heading of “Effective Design Aspects”, and design issues are detailed under the heading of “Opportunities for Improvement.”

3.0.4 Implicit Learning Strategies

3.0.4.1 Effective Design Aspects

- Structuring: The information is well defined into categories and tasks.
- Context: Because of the excellent structuring and inter-screen flow, new information (presented on subsequent screens) is often well contexted, and it is easy for the user to form the relationship between this information and the information previously shown.
- Multiple coding: Information is often represented in multiple ways (e.g., a link represented simultaneously by both a picture and name of a vehicle). The use of the shopping cart metaphor reinforces the tasks involved in online purchasing.
- Attention Management: The focus of the application is clear at all times. There is a significant use of animations, but their use is meaningful for user interactions and was not found to be distracting.

Navigation

This section describes the issues surrounding navigation within the site. It describes the following: