Branding, Search Engine Optimization, & Usability: Competing Interests & Required Components for Success—Usability Perspective

Position Statement

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How Branding, SEO, & Usability Contribute to Website Success

• SEO: Pull visitors to website
• Branding: Express identity and push messages
• “Usability”: Pull visitors into successful experience
  – Heuristic evaluation
  – User testing and contextual research
• How do heuristic evaluation & user research fit within SEO and branding activities?
Usability & Branding: In Concert

• Branding enhances usability by:
  – Building trust
  – Creating recognition
  – Increasing comfort in exploring
Usability & Branding: In Conflict

- Real estate allocation: Branded content vs. information above the fold
Usability & Branding: In Conflict

• Labeling clarity: “clean UI” vs. meaningful labels

What’s the difference between EXPLORE and SHOP?
Usability & Branding: In Conflict

- Budget: reduced commitment to user research
  - Heuristic evaluation only
  - Focus groups instead of usability testing (better than none!)
  - Single cycle of usability testing (better than none!)
  - Surrogate users
Usability & SEO: In Concert

- Good SEO creates good usability

Meaningful URLs
Strong page title
Purposeful first paragraph
Keyword-rich link text
Use of visitor vocabulary
SEO & Usability: In Conflict

- Quantitative data perceived as sufficient, without user input
SEO & Usability: In Conflict

- Schedule compression
Insights from User Research—
Example 1: AAA Website “Facelift”

- 7 usability sessions to look at redesigned home page & 4 second-level pages
Confusion about Terms on Home Page

• If users don’t click on choices, is it because they don’t need them or don’t understand them?

• Testing showed “Financial” and “Savings” confused 4 of 7 users
  – “I don’t associate Financial and Savings with AAA”
  – “Savings—on auto insurance, if you’re a good driver?”
Example 2: Alltel Website Redesign Testing

- Participants with unlimited phone plans looked for comparable plans on Alltel.
- They did not recognize “My Circle” as the equivalent.
- They concluded Alltel offered nothing comparable.
Components for Success

• Goal setting
• Skill blending
• Project planning
• Keeping sight of ROI of qualitative as well as quantitative research