Guelph Public Library Website Usability Study Findings

A Note About this Document

This document is meant to serve as a high-level summary of our findings. An in-depth exploration of our results on these topics, and more, including some "quick wins", will be shared in our upcoming presentation on Sept 13th. We hope this summary provides an entry-point into our research and helps facilitate fruitful discussion during our in-person meeting.

A Note About the Study

The aim of this study is twofold; to uncover issues and better understand how users are experiencing the newly redesigned Guelph Public Library (GPL) website.

We conducted in-person interviews and usability tests with 25 participants (8 Older Adults and 17 Adults) at 5 different GPL branches during July 2017. We set up our laptop, desk, and signage in a central location at each branch we visited. Participants either approached us wanting to provide feedback or we invited passersby to participate. Participants were asked to complete a variety of usability tasks including locating branch hours, the catalogue, the events calendar, and the Bookmobile schedule. Their experience with the Library website, and navigating websites in general, varied greatly.

One of the major limitations of our study is that we conducted usability testing on a laptop. Unprompted, many participants discussed frustrations they encountered trying to navigate the website using their mobile devices. Some of the issues raised include the events calendar display and filtering, the search icon bar, and navigation between the catalogue and the homepage.

General Observations

Primary uses of website. Most participants use the website to check their Library account or search the catalogue. Several regular website users were unaware of the redesign because they bookmark the catalogue to bypass navigation of the homepage.

Aesthetics over functionality. Most participants thought the new website looked modern and found it visually appealing. However, some of them were concerned about the

website's functionality. Several participants commented specifically on the lack of information above the fold.

Initial learning curve. Participants often had difficulty completing the more complex usability tasks, but most acknowledged that there is a learning curve associated with a new website. As such, they were willing to spend time familiarizing themselves with the new layout.

Lack of contrast. Several older adults had difficulty reading the persistent navigation menu (grey text on white background) and titles in the events calendar (white text on grey background). The lack of colour contrast made navigating the website a frustrating experience for them.

New Releases popular. The New Releases section located at the bottom of the homepage was well-received by those participants that noticed it.

Navigation

Confusing menu structure. Several participants were confused by the structure of the persistent navigation menu. Their comments centred around the idea that the categories in the menu are neither mutually exclusive nor collectively exhaustive. Other participants felt the secondary categories did not follow logically from the primary categories.

Meaningless library jargon. Terms like 'eLibrary' and 'eResources' were lost on most participants. Very few users realized 'Ask Us' was a live chat service. Several participants specifically suggested the Library use more intuitive labels.

Underused homepage boxes. Most participants navigated the website by reading through the persistent navigation menu. Very few participants scrolled below the fold and even fewer clicked on the boxes (e.g., 'Ask Us', 'eLibrary', 'News', etc.).

Search

Drop-down options. The majority of participants could not articulate the differences between the drop-down menu options - 'Catalogue', 'Resources', and 'Website'.

Search icon unknown. The older adult participants did not know the magnifying glass icon would lead them to the search bar, and that searching there was the same as searching the catalogue. Adults were more likely to click on the magnifying glass icon, but some of them still either did not notice the icon or preferred to navigate directly to the catalogue (sometimes via My Account) and search that way.

Events Calendar

Visually overwhelming. The events calendar was visually overwhelming for most participants primarily because the program information is not clearly displayed. Specifically, participants could not read the complete program titles and this frustrated them.

Easy-to-miss legend. The majority of participants did not understand the colour code because the legend went unnoticed.

Limited filters. Several participants found it difficult to filter events from all branches by audience. Other participants wished they could filter events by type (e.g., to view only technology events).

Book Club

Misleading calendar. Participants were confused by the 'View Availability' calendar. Specifically, users were perplexed when presented with a blank calendar. Participants also had trouble determining how many books were available.

Cumbersome two-part system. Many participants did not understand the two-part 'View Availability' then 'Make Reservation' system. Some participants found the 'Book Clubs' webpage but did not know how to proceed. Other participants tried to search for book club sets in the catalogue, but were unsuccessful.

Ask Us

Easy-to-miss box. Very few participants clicked on the 'Ask Us' box (or any of the boxes for that matter!) on the homepage without being prompted. Participants were more likely to click 'About Us', 'How do I?', and 'Contact Us' to contact the Library. When participants were prompted about the live chat service, several of them clicked on the headphone icon for the Browsealoud service.