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Memo

To: Dr. Nancy Barta-Smith, Customer Support & Marketing Supervisor
From: Lindsey D. Kelley, Customer Support & Marketing Coordinator
Date: February 20, 2006
Re: emsCharts Website Analysis and Redesign Project

Purpose

In your email to the Customer Support Department on February 7, 2006, you mention your desire to expand the existing emsCharts marketing website (www.emscharts.com) with additional information for potential customers. I would like to suggest at this time, prior to the expansion of the website, that we revisit the design of the existing website. The goal of this analysis is to identify elements of the current design that could be changed to better serve the site's rhetorical situation. By polishing the existing web design prior to the website expansion, it is my hope that the expanded website will be more informative and adhere to the rhetorical strategies that will make it the most effective marketing tool possible. I have proposed a project below to analyze existing design elements of the emsCharts website, to recommend changes when applicable, and to apply those changes to the expanded version of the website.

Summary

The proposed emsCharts website analysis and redesign project is a systematic examination of the current design elements studied against the website's rhetorical situation. The goal of this examination will be to gain a better understanding of how each visual element in the marketing website is working to either support or detract from its rhetorical strategy. Phase 1 of the project will result in a full report on the rhetorical design of the website, as well as a list of recommended changes that will improve its visual rhetoric. Phase 2 of the project will result in the expansion of the current "Integration" page, as requested, using the redesign recommendations established in Phase 1.

A Phase 1 report will be compiled upon completion of Phase 1 tasks, and will be submitted to you at the end of April 2006. The Phase 2 Redesign and Expansion will carry a tentative completion date of June 1.

Introduction

According to Charles Kostelnick in Designing Visual Language, a document's visual language, cognate strategies, and guides for those strategies are all factors of its rhetorical situation, which is composed of the document's audience, purpose, and context. The emsCharts marketing website is no different, in that it contains visual elements on every design level that all work together to support its rhetorical

situation. This project proposes an analysis of the website to dissect its visual elements and to provide evidence as to why and how each element does or does not support the website's rhetorical situation. The proposed analysis will identify those elements that bolster, and those detract from, the website's visual rhetoric; allowing the design team to build on the elements that are working and change the elements that are not.

In order to analyze how well the website's visual elements work to support its rhetorical situation, we must first define the rhetorical situation of the website. According to Kostelnick (1998), a document's rhetorical situation is made up of its Audience, Purpose, and Context. Below is a description of each of these categories as they apply to the emsCharts marketing website.

The Rhetorical Situation of www.emsCharts.com

Audience

The emsCharts website was developed to be an informational reference for potential customers, partners, and the general public. The website is available on the World Wide Web, and theoretically could be accessed by anyone in the world with a connection to the Internet. The ideal audience for the website is potential customers who are interested in finding out more about emsCharts products and services. Potential customers for emsCharts products include EMS Providers, City and State EMS Directors, Hospital Information Systems personnel, and Healthcare Billing Companies. Since the homepage of emsCharts.com contains the login location for the emsCharts private customer site, the audience for the emsCharts marketing website may also include current customers who want to learn more about the company and product offerings.

Purpose

The purpose of the website is to provide clear and interesting information to the audience about the emsCharts company, including marketing information about our products and services. The content of the website is meant to inform and persuade potential customers to purchase emsCharts products.

Context

Since the website is primarily an online information resource, it is assumed that the audience will view the website on a computer screen. All company literature provides the URL for audiences to access; therefore the audience member could be accessing the website in response to a marketing mailer, web search, trade show meeting, sales call, or other type of interaction. In any case, it is assumed that the reason for visiting the website is to learn more about the company and products.

By defining the rhetorical situation of the website first, the design team can work to analyze how every design element works in supporting the website's rhetoric. Once the design elements have been identified, analyzed, and modified when needed, those elements can be used in the expansion of the website

Proposed Program

The proposed project will be conducted in two phases; Phase 1 will consist of the analysis and reported observations of the design elements of the existing website; Phase 2 will incorporate the observations from Phase 1 into the redesigned and expanded version of the website. Phase 1 will consist of the following tasks:

Phase 1 – Analysis and Observations

1. Analyze Intra and Inter level visual elements
2. Analyze Extra and Supra level visual elements
3. Develop rationale for or against existing design elements with respect to the website's rhetorical situation
4. Redesign visual elements to support rhetorical situation
5. Present of findings in Written Progress Report and Oral Walk-Through

Task 1 – Analyze Intra and Inter level visual elements

The first task in Phase 1 of the proposed project will be to examine the Intra and Inter level visual elements of the website, with respect to Gestalt principles of design, as well as each of the three coding modes – Textual, Spatial, and Graphic. The analysis will focus on elements present on both the Home Page, as well as elements present on a selected sample of individual product pages.

Intra-level design elements are those that are observed across a single line of text. Textually, this includes font size and type, case type, and text treatments (e.g. bold, italic, etc.). Intra-spatial elements are those that affect the spacing between letters and words. Intra-graphic elements are punctuation, symbols (e.g. \$, %), and text treatments (e.g. underline).

Inter-level design elements are those that are observed across several lines of text. Inter-textual elements are headings and the numbers or letters of a list. Inter-spatial elements include paragraphs, line lengths, and text justification (e.g. centered, unjustified). Inter-graphic elements include bullets and other listing devices, and highlighted text.

Each of these types of visual elements already exists in the current website. By analyzing the elements on the Intra and Inter design levels, and by establishing their involvement in supporting the rhetorical situation, we can make informed decisions for improving the rhetorical strategy of the website on the higher design levels and overall.

Task 2 – Analyze Extra and Supra level visual elements

Similar to the analysis done in Task 1 of Phase 1, Task 2 will also analyze design elements of the website with respect to Gestalt principles of design, as well as Textual, Spatial, and Graphic coding modes. Extra and Supra level elements, however, represent higher levels of design than Intra and Inter levels. This analysis will focus on the same web pages that were analyzed in Task 1.

Extra-level design elements are those that are observed outside of the main body of text, and include pictures, data displays, icons, and symbols (Kostelnick, 1998). An extra-textual element might be text that is present to aid in the understanding of a data display (e.g. label, key, legend). Extra-spatial elements include the size and orientation of data displays and pictures. Extra-graphic elements include line weights in data elements, and colors in pictures.

Supra-level design elements are top-down items that are observed across the entire document, and help to define, structure, and organize the document as a whole. Supra-textual elements include major section or chapter headings, or navigational bars on a website. Supra-spatial elements include page size and scrollable length for the screen. Supra-graphic elements include page borders and pictures placed over the entire document for cohesion.

As with the Intra and Inter level elements, Extra and Supra level visual elements already exist in the current website. By analyzing these high level elements, and by establishing their involvement in supporting the rhetorical situation, we can make informed decisions for improving the overall rhetorical strategy of the website.

Task 3 – Develop rationale for or against existing design elements with respect to the website's rhetorical situation.

An important task in the project will be taking the information gathered in Tasks 1 and 2, and detailing why and how each element is either supporting or detracting from the website's rhetorical situation. By developing rationale for each design element, Task 3 will set up the standards upon which Task 4 and subsequent website design decisions will be made.

Task 4 – Recommend redesign of visual elements to support rhetorical situation

The design elements that have been identified as not supportive to the overall rhetorical strategy of the website will be scrutinized in Task 4 in order to develop improvement recommendations. Those recommendations will be detailed in a final report to be presented at the end of April 2006. In addition, the recommended changes will play a significant role in the website redesign and expansion in Phase 2 of the project.

Task 5 – Present findings in Written Progress Report and Oral Walk-Through

A final report detailing Phase 1 research, procedures, and findings will be compiled and presented at the end of April 2006, on a date to be determined.

Phase 2 – Website Redesign and Expansion

1. Incorporate Phase 1 recommendations into the website redesign
2. Separate and expand upon information contained on the current "Integration" webpage

Task 1 – Incorporate Phase 1 recommendations into the website redesign

Phase 1, Task 4 will result in a list of recommended changes for improved rhetorical strategies of the emsCharts marketing website. In Phase 2, Task 1, the design team will determine which changes to consider and how to carry out those recommended changes.

Task 2 – Separate and expand upon information contained on the current "Integration" webpage

The expansion of the information on the marketing website will be an ongoing project. There is one element of the expansion, however, that you have requested be completed before other expansion projects, and that is the following: take the information contained on the existing webpage titled "Integration" (http://www.emscharts.com/pub/technology_datatransfer.htm) and separate each item of the page onto new individual web pages; thus allowing more information to be given on each topic.

Phase 2 will commence upon completion of Phase 1, Task 4. Phase 2 will be ongoing and therefore may not be completed prior to the presentation of findings at the end of April. The figures below show tentative time schedules for Phase 1 and Phase 2 tasks:

Figure 1. Proposed Schedule for Phase 1 Tasks

Phase	Task	February	March	April
Phase 1	1. Intra/Inter Level			
	2. Extra/Supra Level			
	3. Rationale for Design Elements			
	4. Redesign Recommendations			
	5. Presentation of Phase 1 Findings			

Figure 2. Proposed Schedule for Phase 2 Tasks

Phase	Task	February	March	April
Phase 2	1. Website Redesign			
	2. Website Separation/Expansion			

Qualifications and Experience

As the Coordinator of Customer Support and Marketing, I believe that I have the knowledge and experience in order to conduct the proposed analysis and redesign project. I have over 5 years of experience in specialized software support and sales, and a working knowledge of the website's Audience, Purpose, and Context, that is, its rhetorical situation. Additionally, I have been studying the elements of visual design with the purpose of applying this knowledge to a redesign project such as the one that I am proposing.

References

Kostelnick, Charles, and David D. Roberts. *Designing Visual Language*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 1998.

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to pursue this project. I am available at your convenience to discuss the details further. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions. I can be reached via email at the following address: Lindsey Kelley - lcd4467@sru.edu