Web Site Design

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SWE 432
Design and Implementation of Software for the Web

Nielsen, Ch 4
Usability of Web Site Design

• Users only find information they are searching for on web sites about 42% of the time.

• When given an interactive task, they can only accomplish the task about 26% of the time!
“Introductory” Web Pages

When a web site is not complete:

– Don’t tell users what is not yet available – it is frustrating

– Don’t release a web site until it is ready
Web Site Home Pages

• Many web sites have a “home page” – the introductory landmark page to the company or organization

• Home pages should look different from interior web pages
  – No HOME button
  – State purpose of the entire web site
  – Provide a directory of the web site
  – Include a search facility

• All interior web pages must link to the home page
Search Facilities

• More than **50%** of the users start by searching
• The search should be in the web site, not the entire WWW
• Make the search available on all pages
• People do not understand **boolean**:
  
  “I am interested in SWE 432 and CS 450” should be:
  • 432 OR 450

  but most people will enter:
  • 432 AND 450

  **Do not use boolean** operators in the search facility
Screen Width

- Try not to design to a specific width – keep the HTML as flexible as possible
- Users do not like to scroll horizontally
- If you have to specify the width:
  - 600 is reasonably safe
  - Remember to leave room for browser borders
  - Put information that is not particularly important on the right side of the screen
URL Design

• Unfortunately, we must type and remember URLs
• Help the users avoid typos:
  – Do not use upper case in domain, directory, or file names
  – Underscores require the shift key – hyphens are better, but not much
  – Avoid zeros (0 or O?) and ones (1 or l)?
  – Do not add unnecessary directories
  – Choose short, common words
  – Use standard abbreviations
• Use URL aliasing to be be error tolerant:
  – Allow x.com and www.x.com
  – Provide aliases for common misspellings
• Use the standard “html”, not the non-standard “.htm”
• Fully specify URLs in HTML links:
  – Do not use this: ise.gmu.edu/~offutt
  – Do use this: http://www.ise.gmu.edu/~offutt/
HTML Design Hints
(Repeats HTML lecture)

• Put **searches** on the front page (speed)
• **Do not use frames** (SS, errors, speed)
  – Confuse navigation
  – Bookmarks do not work
  – Make printing hard
  – Browsers render them differently
  – Slower

Use `<TABLE>` to partition web pages

• On site maps, “**low light**” current page
• Remember the page may be **too big** for one screen
  – Put navigation buttons on top **and** bottom
  – Put action buttons on top **and** bottom