

An Investigation into the
Usability of the Stroke Association Website

Competitor Review

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Introduction

Generally, people have a 'charity budget' and charities compete to be the donor's charity of choice. In 2016 a total of 61% of people donated money to charity with 26% of those donations being made online (CAF, 2017). It is important to charities that they have a good web presence so that donors will choose them over other charities. This is referred to as the 'Share of Wallet' (Keiningham et al, 2018).

An important aspect of a website is its usability. To discover the user experience of a website it can be useful to carry out a review of competitor sites. The subject of this project is the Stroke Association (www.stroke.org.uk). In this exercise the website has already been built and this is therefore a summative review. However, 'The goal of any competitive evaluation is to see what competitors are doing, how they're doing it, what's working and what's not.' (Schade, 2013). The results of this comparative review can be used to see where improvements can be made.

Three other charities were selected to carry out the review. These direct competitor sites were chosen based on the amount of donations made to them in 2010, this was the most recent data available (Guardian, 2011). There is an assumption that charities with a similar amount of income will spend a similar amount of money on their website development. All the charities involved in this review are medical charities and will therefore have similar goals. These charities all raise money and promote awareness of the conditions they are supporting. Their websites enable money to be raised through direct donations, signing up to fundraising events or the sale of items through their online shops. They also provide information and support to sufferers and carers. This enabled the comparative review to be fair as they provide the same services online.

The charities selected were:

- Parkinson's UK - www.parkinsons.org.uk
- Bloodwise - bloodwise.org.uk
- CLIC Sargent - www.clicsargent.org.uk

This review establishes the usability of the websites. As Instone states, heuristics enable an expert to find 'violations of common usability principles' (Instone, 1997). The heuristics selected for this project are good measures of key functionality of charity websites. The first six review criteria are task based, visitors to the website will generally carry out these tasks and not visit the few remaining pages not covered in this study. The tasks used for the tests were quite vague (Fig. 1) so that several pages could be explored by the expert. This reduced constraints on the testing process and allowed exploratory assessments.

The last four heuristics come under general testing and have been selected as the most appropriate for this study, from Nielsen's list of ten usability heuristics (Nielsen, 1995). The other tests in Nielsen's list are less relevant for website testing.

The ten measures each have statements that can be either passed or failed. The passes are added up to give an overall rating of the usability of the site.

Method

The tests were carried out, one website at a time and the scores recorded on a spreadsheet. The first six tests used tasks for the testing. Tests seven and eight were applied whenever forms or searches were encountered. The last two tests were considered on every page of the website.

| | |
|---|--|
| 1. Donations | 'Set up a direct debit for a monthly payment to the charity' |
| 2. Online shop | 'Purchase a product from the shop' |
| 3. Fundraising events | 'Sign up to a fundraising event' |
| 4. Volunteering | 'Find out about how to volunteer near your home' |
| 5. Information | 'Find out about treatments for the medical condition' |
| 6. Support for healthcare professionals | 'Find information about new research for the condition' |

Fig. 1. Tasks

The expert user concentrated on one website at a time and carried out all the tasks before moving on to the next website. The testing process was recorded using OBS Studio (Open Broadcaster Software). This enabled the tests to be reviewed and confirm problem areas.

| Heuristic | Description | Stroke Association | Parkinson's UK | Bloodwise | CLIC Sargent |
|---|--|--------------------|----------------|-----------|--------------|
| Donations | It is easy to find the donation page and set up a regular donation | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Online Shop | Products are easy to find and the checkout easy to use | N | Y | N | N |
| Fundraising Events | Events can be sorted and the sign up process is simple | N | Y | Y | N |
| Volunteering | Information about how to volunteer locally is easy to find | N | Y | Y | Y |
| Information | Appropriate information for both sufferers and carers | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Support for healthcare professionals | Information about supporting sufferers is easy to find | N | Y | Y | Y |
| Error prevention | Input forms provide the ability to avoid errors | Y | Y | N | N |
| Help the user recognise, diagnose and recover from errors | Zero search results are managed | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Consistency and standards | Menu titles match the page they go to and all pages have a consistent look | Y | N | N | Y |
| Aesthetic and minimalist design | Uncluttered attractive pages | Y | N | N | Y |
| Overall Score | | 6 | 8 | 6 | 7 |

Fig. 2. Heuristic Results

The heuristic was marked as passed or failed, either when the task was completed or part way through. This information was recorded on a spreadsheet, the results are displayed in Fig. 2.

Findings

The results show that the overall usability of the Stroke Association and Bloodwise websites is poor, both scored 6 out of 10. CLIC Sargent fared better with a score of 7 and the best website is Parkinson's UK with a score of 8. Three of the sites failed the online shop test, indicating that this is a difficult area to do well. The Stroke Association failures were all related to carrying out tasks and not the general criteria. The other sites all failed at least one of the general heuristics and performed better on the task-based criteria. If the online shop is too difficult to use this could result in lost sales for the three charities that failed the shopping heuristic. Many events are promoted by several charities, if it is difficult to sign up on one site the user may choose a different charity to support. The three competitor charity websites all performed well on the provision of information, but the Stroke Association fell down in this area. This means that the money invested in providing the information is wasted, if it is not easy for the users to find what they are looking for on the website.

Most areas and pages of the four websites were covered with the ten review criteria. This meant that we can be confident that the final mark for each website gives a good representation of their overall usability. Although ten review criteria were selected it would have been possible to have subtests with each criterion. This would result in a score against each one rather than a pass or fail. It was considered outside the scope of this project to include extra tests. The information gathered with the ten tests alone was sufficient to show the differences between the websites. The Competitive Assessment Rubric is an example of extending this form of testing and could be considered in the future (Forth, 2014).

Some usability issues were encountered that did not fall into the category of the tests being assessed in this project. These issues were noted but were not reported due to the scope of this project.

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