

# week::six

## Elements of Web Navigation

### Core Concepts

#### User-Centered Design

- *Defined:* A design philosophy and a process in which the needs, wants, and limitations of end-users of a product are given extensive attention at each stage of the design process.
- Focus on the end-user experience—not on the designers/client’s desires.
- Work to thoroughly understand and document the needs of potential users of your site.

#### Interface and Navigation Examples in Real Life

- MAX lines in Portland
  - Red, Blue, Yellow and Green MAX lines
- Interstate highway signage (wayfinding)
  - Green: General information
  - Blue: Rest areas/points of interest
  - Brown: Federal land or National Parks/Monuments
- Wayfinding
- Physical book navigation
  - Linear format with page numbers, TOC, index, etc....
- Music players and other electronic equipment



#### User experience == Customer service on the web

- In online commerce, online is the primary interaction between you (a company) and your customers.
- It’s your (only) chance to make a good impression.

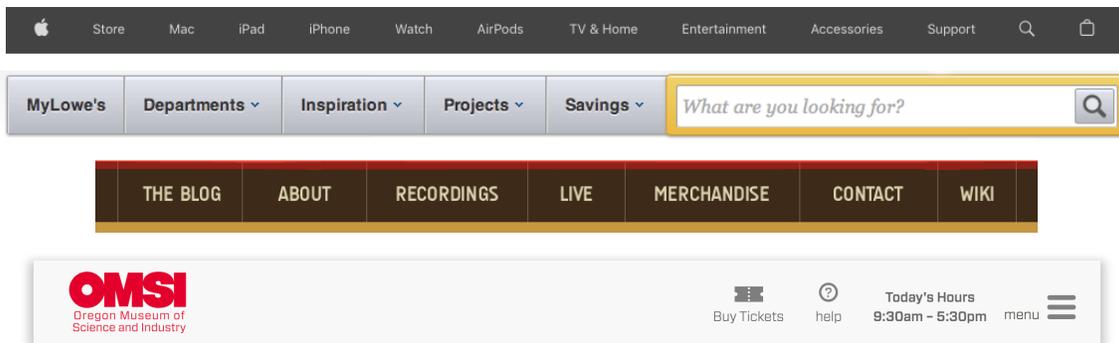
### Navigation on the Web

#### Defined

- Navigation is the means by which a website provides access to its content—the features, functions, and information that are its reason for being.

#### Importance

- The ease with which a user can navigate a website can be as important to its success as the quality of its content.
- The best navigation systems are nearly invisible, freeing users to focus on the content rather than its means of access.



## Navigation Building Blocks

### Signs that tell us *what* is available

- Tells the user what actions they can take.
- *Examples:* Hyperlinks (text and images), buttons, iconography, wording, action prompts.

### Signs that identify *where* we are

- Help orient users to the site and its content.
- *Examples:* Titles, headers, breadcrumb trails; “You are here” indicators.

### Controls that initiate *actions*

- Ask the users to respond to something or to input information.
- **Call to Action**
- *Example:* Form elements; interactive elements (hover/press/drag/voice).



## Methods of Organization

### Categories

- Useful when users wish to navigation via **browsing** for content.
- Categories must be well thought-out and make sense to the user.

### Search

- **Search** is useful when the user knows exactly what they want.
- Quality of results depends on *search terms* used by user, *quality* of the search engine programming, and *thoroughness* and *robustness* of the search database, and, of course, the *clarity* of the presentation of those results.

## Types of Navigational Elements

### Primary Navigation (aka: Main menus)

- Historically, the “inverted-L”
- Now comes in the form of a hamburger menu, horizontal or vertical navigation, and/or a mega-menu.

### Hamburger Menu

- Most common menu type for mobile websites.
- Becoming more common on desktops where space is not at a premium.

### Horizontal vs. Vertical

- *Horizontal:*
  - **Is the dominate type of primary navigation on the web today.**
  - Good if number of primary navigation items is limited and rarely changes.
  - Leaves a little room for managed growth and almost zero room for organic growth.
  - Useful for primary navigation menus where the number of items is often limited and controllable.
- *Vertical:*
  - If designed correctly, allows for almost unlimited growth as verticals can scale in height without affecting other elements.
  - Best as a secondary menu system—is not the first choice of most website these days.
  - Works as a primary only if the list of choices is short and enough visual emphasis is given to the menu.



### Left or Right Vertical Navigation?

- Left: Standard; expected; always visible.
- Right: Unusual; unexpected—often reserved for ad space; sometimes tuned-out or not even visible by users.

### Cascading (or Drop Down) Menu

- Can allow visitors to quickly review many menu options without a page refresh.
- Can be challenging for some user, especially if the menu coding is not forgiving.
- Requires precise mouse movement.
- Support for touch is inconsistent.



### Mega Dropdown Menus

- Places the secondary menu items (and more) in a dropdown/reveal menu right off of the primary navigation elements.

amazon.com

barnesandnoble.com

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mtbachelor.com

rei.com

### Tabs

- Use to organize related items
- Confine to one row (or more in particularly bad implementations).
- Tabbed-look can often look dated. See the Amazon navigation from 2000:



Please, oh please, don't try to create these types of tabs anymore.

### Hypertext & Hyperlinks

- Must be made clear to the user, but do not need to draw too much attention to themselves.

## Cards

- Card-based layout feature contained arrangements of content that vary in size, often featuring images and entry points to content.
- Often used to increase discovery of content, card represents a section of related information, most commonly with a headline, an image or graphic, links, and text.



## Breadcrumb Trails

- Usually used on category-based sites.
- Helpful to most users; Easy to implement with content management systems like WordPress.

## Site Map

- A last resort for most people.
- Making a comeback as content for footers (and some mega menus).

## Search

- A go-to navigation tool for many users.
- More and more, navigation elements are being built into the search field itself.

## Back/Forward Buttons Within the Browser

- Back button works sometimes; Forward button is not-well understood.
- Sometimes disabled

## Principles of Successful Navigation

### Navigation should be easily learned

- Make your categories common, intuitive and obvious.
- Provide easy links to primary site areas.
- Make good use of metaphors
  - Good: Shopping carts
  - Bad: Channels as groups of categories; Southwest Airlines ticket counter from 1999  
([web.archive.org/web/\\*/www.southwest.com](http://web.archive.org/web/*/www.southwest.com))



### Navigation should be consistent

- Don't make your users learn a different navigation system on each page.
- If it is consistent, navigation becomes transparent to the user.

### Navigation should provide feedback

- Types: Rollovers, bold/plain changes, color changes, motion.

### Navigation should appear in context

- The wording of links should be able to stand on its own.
  - The word *back* can have a variety of meanings since users can come to a page from many different places.
  - Wording like *Go to Home page*, or *New search* on a secondary page are better.

### Navigation should offer alternatives

- Site maps
- Search engines
- Drop-down menus
- Text-only versions
- ALT tags
- All of these are good for accessibility.

**Navigation should require an economy of action and time**

- Keep number of steps to a minimum.
- Common tasks should have featured links.
- Examples: [www.google.com](http://www.google.com), [southwest.com](http://southwest.com)

**Navigation should provide clear visual messages**

- There should be a clear visual distinction between navigation elements and static elements.
- No hidden, camouflaged, or piñata navigation.

**Navigation should offer clear labels**

- Make your categories common and familiar.
- Be careful when using trendy labels.
- Don't use organizational-speak.
- Should be mutually exclusive.

**Navigation should be appropriate to the site's purpose**

- Know and understand your site's primary goals and objectives (from your creative brief).

**Navigation should support users' goals and behaviors**

- Know your audience (from your project's creative brief).
  - Who are you going after?
  - Who will be using the site?
  - What are the common characteristics of your audience?
  - What are the most common tasks that your users will perform?

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References: Fleming, Jennifer. Web Navigation, O'Reilly (1998); Silver, Marc. Exploring Interface Design, Thomson (2005).