Holly Copeland
TWC 421
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Module 4 Report:
“Design and Conduct a Usability Test”

Introduction

I chose to conduct a usability study for welcometonightvale.com because it is a fairly popular podcast that has been well established for several years. Their website is fairly professional and they obviously have had professional graphic design work done for their website, products, and merchandise. In my opinion, even though it does look like it has had professional design work done on the site, the layout still seems a bit odd to me, so I thought it might be an interesting usability test subject. The graphics and design are aesthetically pleasing, but not very functional from a UI perspective.

Based on my impression of the website before conducting the usability test on it, it seems like it is more difficult than it should be to find podcasts on the website and start playing them. I believe based on my memory of how the site worked several years ago, it is improved, but still a bit more difficult than it should be. Since Welcome to Night Vale is a podcast series and all their other products are based on the podcast series, the podcast should be very prominent and very easily available to listen to on their website.

If I remember correctly, several years ago they had a simpler website with less features (eg: no shopping, store or merchandise, live shows, etc) and it didn't have the option to play podcasts on it at all. It simply instructed users to find their podcast on iTunes and listen to it there.

Now the website does have links to play the podcast online without iTunes, but finding the links is more difficult and takes longer than it should in my opinion, so I decided to test welcometonightvale.com in this assignment with other users to see how they would react to it.

A full-page screenshot of the homepage is included on the next page for your reference throughout the paper.

WELCOME TO NIGHT VALE

WELCOME TO NIGHT VALE is a twice-monthly podcast in the style of community updates for the small desert town of Night Vale, featuring local weather, news, announcements from the Sheriff's Secret Police, mysterious lights in the night sky, dark hooded figures with unknowable powers, and cultural events.

Turn on your radio and hide.

Subscribe on:
Apple Podcasts | Google Podcasts | RadioPublic | Stitcher | RSS

WELCOME TO NIGHT VALE IS PART OF THE NIGHT VALE PRESENTS NETWORK.

NEW TO NIGHT VALE? START HERE
WHO WE ARE
WHAT'S NEW?

LATEST UPDATES

A SPY IN THE DESERT LIVE RECORDING NOW AVAILABLE!

A Spy in the Desert is now available on Bandcamp and iTunes!

Jan 31, 2020

OUR 2020 WORLD TOUR

Just announced! Our 2020 World Tour! Tickets on sale November 22.

Nov 15, 2019

FOR MORE NEWS, CLICK HERE.

Sign up for our twice-monthly newsletter and get all the Night Vale news before anyone else. Know more than your friends. Lord it over them. Keep secrets from your loved ones. It all starts here:

Email Address SIGN UP

By signing up, you're actively confirming that you'd like to receive e-mail communication from Welcome to Night Vale.

BECOME A MEMBER

BECOME A PATRON

ONE-TIME DONATION

Donate

Follow @NightValeRadio

Night Vale presents

Methodology

The first thing I did for this assignment was to read the recommended chapters 4 - 9 in the textbook, “Rocket Surgery Made Easy” by Steve Krugg. Based on those chapters, I wrote a few instructions for users to guide them through the testing process and about 3 pages of questions for them to answer during the process. I printed all the pages of questions and instructions/guidelines for users to answer and follow during the testing process and gave a printed copy to each user at the start of the test.

I also downloaded the free trial for Camtasia mentioned in the textbook to try it. I used the free trial of Camtasia to record users during the testing process. I am only including written notes and observations in my project submission because it meets the requirements in the rubric and I don’t have time to do additional work. I did however at least check out Camtasia to gain some knowledge and familiarity with using it in a recording the process for user testing. I like that it captures both the screen and audio during the testing. It looks potentially very useful and I’m glad to know about Camtasia.

I wrote about 3 pages of instruction, guidelines, and questions to print out for the users to view during the process of user testing. Having the pages printed so the users could see them creates more consistency for each user because everyone received the exact same copies printed pages to use during the testing, which creates a lot of consistency for each test. It also makes it easier to keep users on task, make sure they all receive the same instructions, all know what to do and don’t get lost and confused during the process, and makes it easier to record and take notes on what they are doing during the test. It also gave users a place to record their own answers to questions and thoughts about the website during the testing procedure. The next few pages are the exact same pages I printed and distributed to each user participating in the user test for welcometonightvale.com.

Most of the questions I typed on the pages I printed and gave to the users were based on questions Steve Krugg, the author of “Rocket Surgery Made Easy” said he frequently asked users. They sounded like reasonable and useful questions to ask, so I asked a lot of similar questions, but added some of my own as well.

Based on the recommendations for user testing in the textbook chapters, it’s also best to avoid inputting too much of your own opinion to the user during the testing process. Sometimes users asked questions about what things were or what they were doing, but I avoided answering any questions that would interfere with the results of the test. A few times users asked questions but I politely avoided describing and explaining what things were on the website because it didn’t really matter what the site actually was or where things were because the purpose of the test was more about their opinion and reaction to the website than actually using the website.

TWC 421 User Testing Homepage Tour Questionnaire

Have you been to welcometonightvale.com before? Have you heard of it before?

Please try to stay on the homepage and focus on critiquing the homepage during this stage of the testing.

What strikes you about the home page?

Whose site you think it is?

What you can do here?

What is this site used for?

TWC 421 User Testing Task Phase

Tasks
1. Find a few podcasts to listen to on this website to check to see if you like it or not.
2. Find out where to subscribe to “Welcome to Night Vale Podcasts”
3. Check to see if there is a live show playing near you this year.

Scenario 1:
You are looking for a new podcast to listen to while working on something. You are not familiar with Welcome to Night Vale and have not heard their podcast before. You want to find a few podcast episodes to listen to so you can see if you like it or not. Find a few podcasts on this website to start listening to for a sample without subscribing and without leaving the website.

Scenario 2:
You have decided (whether or not you actually have) to subscribe to the Welcome to Night Vale Podcast. Find where to subscribe to this podcast and select your preferred method of subscribing to listen to the podcast (for free).

Scenario 3:
You want to check to see if there is a live show of Welcome to Night Vale playing in the state you live in sometime this year and find where to buy/book tickets for it.

TWC 421 User Testing Probing & Wrapping Up

Have you listened to podcasts before?

Are there any that you listen to regularly or subscribe to?

Did you know exactly what a podcast was before this?

Do you like to listen to anything regularly?

How many days per week do you usually use a computer?

How many hours per day?

How often do you use internet access to play music, podcasts, or other media?

What confused you the most about this site?

Was anything about this site awkward or difficult to use?

What do you think could be made better?

Wrapping Up
Do you have any questions you would like to ask before you go?

Thank you for your participation. You did a great job and helped find what we were looking for (especially if you were confused).

Results

Below are the questions and responses from the users who participated in the User Testing. The user wrote answers on the printed sheets of questions, instructions, and guidelines given to them at the start of the testing. All of the same questions I gave the users are below and in the following pages. Answers written by the users or descriptions and notes taken during the testing process are below each question/section in green italic text to differentiate them from the preceding questions or text to follow during the user testing process. Responses written by users are written in green italics unchanged from original handwritten responses (including grammar and spelling). Hopefully, any grammar errors in green italics can be overlooked for grading purposes in this context.

Notes and observations made by me are in blue.

User #1 (Jim) - page 1

TWC 421 User Testing Homepage Tour Questionnaire

Have you been to welcometonightvale.com before? Have you heard of it before?

No. Yes.

Please try to stay on the homepage and focus on critiquing the homepage during this stage of the testing.

What strikes you about the home page?

It's all white, black, purple. Uncentered Twitter icon, but nothing else.

Whose site you think it is?

I assume Welcome to Night Vale?

What you can do here?

Purchase items, sign up for membership, buy books?

What is this site used for?

Podcasts, books, fan merchandise?

User #1 (Jim) - page 2

TWC 421 User Testing Task Phase

Tasks
1. Find a few podcasts to listen to on this website to check to see if you like it or not.
2. Find out where to subscribe to “Welcome to Night Vale Podcasts”
3. Check to see if there is a live show playing near you this year.

Scenario 1:
You are looking for a new podcast to listen to while working on something. You are not familiar with Welcome to Night Vale and have not heard their podcast before. You want to find a few podcast episodes to listen to so you can see if you like it or not. Find a few podcasts on this website to start listening to for a sample without subscribing and without leaving the website.

Found some, but was only able to find a few podcasts on the site itself from the FAQ page.

Scenario 2:
You have decided (whether or not you actually have) to subscribe to the Welcome to Night Vale Podcast. Find where to subscribe to this podcast and select your preferred method of subscribing to listen to the podcast (for free).

This was on the homepage & not hard to find.

Scenario 3:
You want to check to see if there is a live show of Welcome to Night Vale playing in the state you live in sometime this year and find where to buy/book tickets for it.

Found this on the main tab.

User #1 (Jim) - page 3

TWC 421 User Testing Probing & Wrapping Up

Have you listened to podcasts before?

Yes

Are there any that you listen to regularly or subscribe to?

Yes

Did you know exactly what a podcast was before this?

Yes

Do you like to listen to anything regularly?

Yes

How many days per week do you usually use a computer?

Every day

How many hours per day?

M - F = 8 hours Weekend < 2 hours

How often do you use internet access to play music, podcasts, or other media?

Every day on the way to & From Work

What confused you the most about this site?

Trying to Find an example podcast w/o subscribing
The twitter button was weird

Was anything about this site awkward or difficult to use?

The FAQs page has hidden links to pages not easy to Find elsewhere

What do you think could be made better?

This [arrow drawn pointing to the above response to preceding question]

Wrapping Up
Do you have any questions you would like to ask before you go?

No

Thank you for your participation. You did a great job and helped find what we were looking for (especially if you were confused).

User #2 (Chelsea) - page 1

TWC 421 User Testing Homepage Tour Questionnaire

Have you been to welcometonightvale.com before? Have you heard of it before?

No

Please try to stay on the homepage and focus on critiquing the homepage during this stage of the testing.

What strikes you about the home page?

Plain looks complicated to use

Whose site you think it is?

I don't know. It doesn't give me a detail of what podcast it is.

What you can do here?

can go home store, membership, but I don't know what it is.

What is this site used for?

[I noticed the user doesn't know how to use the controls of my laptop very well for moving the mouse and clicking]

I don't know. It just says spy in the desert. But There's not enough details & the text is small.

User #2 (Chelsea) - page 2

TWC 421 User Testing Task Phase

Tasks
1. Find a few podcasts to listen to on this website to check to see if you like it or not.
2. Find out where to subscribe to “Welcome to Night Vale Podcasts”
3. Check to see if there is a live show playing near you this year.

Scenario 1:
You are looking for a new podcast to listen to while working on something. You are not familiar with Welcome to Night Vale and have not heard their podcast before. You want to find a few podcast episodes to listen to so you can see if you like it or not. Find a few podcasts on this website to start listening to for a sample without subscribing and without leaving the website.

Clicked through podcast
Clicked Play on “161 - The Space Race”
before end of the inro she changed to playing “A spy int he desert - Out Today!” instead before end of intro and before episode actually started. (Maybe because she’s actually trying to see if she’s actually trying to see if she likes it because I didn’t word things the same as I wrote it like I did on the last participant). I’m letting her continue anyway to see if I can learn anything different from her doing it with a different goal and approach than the last participant.

Scenario 2:
You have decided (whether or not you actually have) to subscribe to the Welcome to Night Vale Podcast. Find where to subscribe to this podcast and select your preferred method of subscribing to listen to the podcast (for free).

This was on the homepage & not hard to find.

Scenario 3:
You want to check to see if there is a live show of Welcome to Night Vale playing in the state you live in sometime this year and find where to buy/book tickets for it.

Found this on the main tab.

User #2 (Chelsea) - page 3

TWC 421 User Testing Probing & Wrapping Up

Have you listened to podcasts before?

No

Are there any that you listen to regularly or subscribe to?

N/A

Did you know exactly what a podcast was before this?

Yes

Do you like to listen to anything regularly?

Music - Usually on Youtube

How many days per week do you usually use a computer?

1-3 days/week

How many hours per day?

12 hours

How often do you use internet access to play music, podcasts, or other media?

On the phone - every day

What confused you the most about this site?

The homepage - the structure of it - the organization - podcasts hard to find. Subscription hard to find.

Was anything about this site awkward or difficult to use?

The structure

What do you think could be made better?

The structure, design & organization. Where you can find things - What is Nightvale? I want to know what Nightvale is & the site needs more details.

Wrapping Up
Do you have any questions you would like to ask before you go?

What is Night Vale? [I answered her question and explained what it is at the end of the user test]

Thank you for your participation. You did a great job and helped find what we were looking for (especially if you were confused).

User #3 (Carol) - page 1

TWC 421 User Testing Homepage Tour Questionnaire

Have you been to welcometonightvale.com before? Have you heard of it before?

No

Please try to stay on the homepage and focus on critiquing the homepage during this stage of the testing.

What strikes you about the home page?

Like the welcome - dark hooded figures caught my attention. I would put "New to Night Vale Start Here Who we are What's new After Latest updates.

Whose site you think it is?

A private business enhancing community: Night Vale?

What you can do here?

Check out news, community update: happening fantasy podcasts possibly scifi.

What is this site used for?

Reality news, social updates & events and fiction quests.

User #3 (Carol) - page 2

TWC 421 User Testing Task Phase

Tasks
1. Find a few podcasts to listen to on this website to check to see if you like it or not.
2. Find out where to subscribe to “Welcome to Night Vale Podcasts”
3. Check to see if there is a live show playing near you this year.

Scenario 1:
You are looking for a new podcast to listen to while working on something. You are not familiar with Welcome to Night Vale and have not heard their podcast before. You want to find a few podcast episodes to listen to so you can see if you like it or not. Find a few podcasts on this website to start listening to for a sample without subscribing and without leaving the website.

I can listen to books love that
Like the weather announcements

Scenario 2:
You have decided (whether or not you actually have) to subscribe to the Welcome to Night Vale Podcast. Find where to subscribe to this podcast and select your preferred method of subscribing to listen to the podcast (for free).

I Like the store!
Reasonable $ on all levels of membership
I would start at $10

Scenario 3:
You want to check to see if there is a live show of Welcome to Night Vale playing in the state you live in sometime this year and find where to buy/book tickets for it.

Easy - went right to info

User #3 (Carol) - page 3

TWC 421 User Testing Probing & Wrapping Up

Have you listened to podcasts before?

Yes

Are there any that you listen to regularly or subscribe to?

Yes *No I'm cheap*

Did you know exactly what a podcast was before this?

Yes

Do you like to listen to anything regularly?

Yes *Encounter (Christian) Meditation*

How many days per week do you usually use a computer?

7 days

How many hours per day?

1-3 hours

How often do you use internet access to play music, podcasts, or other media?

1 - 3x day news weather phone app

What confused you the most about this site?

I didn't go what your all about first & I selected update on spy in the desert

Was anything about this site awkward or difficult to use?

I think "New to Night Vale Start Here" should come after welcome and before subscribe on:

What do you think could be made better?

[arrow drawn pointing from above answer to preceding question to handwritten answer to this question] answers both

Wrapping Up
Do you have any questions you would like to ask before you go?

No

Thank you for your participation. You did a great job and helped find what we were looking for (especially if you were confused).

Recommendations

I am familiar with the Night Vale Podcast because before I ever even saw or visited any website about it, I already listened to it on iTunes. To me (as a user who already knows what Night Vale is), the most awkward thing was that it seemed like it took too long to find where to play the podcasts on the website. Most other podcasts I listen to by playing them directly from the website, but apparently, that was not how the Welcome to Night Vale podcast worked. Years ago, I could only play a few select episodes for a sample that was difficult to find. The website didn't have their whole podcast series available on their website like most podcasts do and simply instructed users to listen to them on iTunes. I do not think that is user-friendly at all. Most podcast websites are much easier to navigate and provide the podcast to listen to. Most podcast websites also make it easy to find and access podcast episodes to listen to.

Now I notice the podcasts are more accessible on the website than Welcome to Night Vale's old website was, but it still seems very awkward. It is not very well organized. There is some small grey text on the homepage that says to "subscribe" and lists several external to listen to the podcast on several external sources. Users have to read at least several sentences or a paragraph to get to that part (which is what the site should primarily be about) before they can find the links. Users didn't even know what the links were or what the site was about unless they already heard of the Welcome to Night Vale podcast before and knew what it was before visiting the website in the test. I listen to the podcast on iTunes, but I was hesitant to click on any "subscribe" links to their various sources like Apple, Google, etc because it sounded to me like I would need to subscribe on any other platform I clicked on and I was not familiar with those platforms for listening to podcasts.

Most users who eventually found out how to play a podcast started by clicking on one of the links under the text that said "subscribe" in the content of the homepage. Those links went to external pages that had a nice list of podcast episodes that were easy to play without signing up for anything on an external platform. I was a little surprised because there was no actual "subscribing" by signing up for some kind of subscription like I thought there would be. (I don't normally use the website when I listen to podcasts, despite being familiar with listening to Welcome to Night Vale podcasts).

On the first user test, user #1 (Jim) was instructed to find where to play the podcast without subscribing or leaving the website. Apparently, there is a link in the FAQ page to a list of podcast episodes that can be played on the actual welcometonightvale.com website instead of one of several links to external places where Welcome to Night Vale podcast episodes are listed. I noticed when he started playing one of the podcast episodes on that internal page of welcometonightvale.com instead of on an external page, it continued playing while he navigated to other internal pages of the welcometonightvale.com website. I thought it was a nice feature that allowed users to listen to a podcast while they navigated to other pages on the website within the same tab, but now that I think of it, I didn't see how to turn it off. I should have checked a little closer to see if clicking one of those links opened an external tab where the audio of the podcast started playing or if it just played without any access to controls for it at all. Either way, it would be better if there was a part of the website that allowed the user to access controls to the audio they were playing within the same tab of the website they are navigating while they are listening to it. The user should both have access to and also know/ be made aware that the option exists to pause, scrub, skip, replay, and exist playing audio for a podcast. If it does play in a new tab, the user might not even be aware that a new tab has opened up and might not know how to stop it or control it. Additionally, not all browsers will respond the same way to code written to open links in new tabs.

During the user testing, I noticed that users involved in the user testing who were not already aware

of what Welcome to Night Vale was didn't even know they were looking at a website for a podcast! That is a very serious UI design problem! I thought the website looked graphically nice, but functionally awkward before, but I was able to see the problem was even worse than it initially seemed to me when I tested users who were not familiar with the Welcome to Night Vale podcast.

User #2 (Chelsea) asked "What is Night Vale?" at the end of the user test, which indicated that even after spending time navigating the site, playing podcasts, reading and looking at features throughout the site, she still didn't know what it even was! User #3 (Carol) seemed to think the website was made to serve a real community called Night Vale by providing news about the community, updating the community on news, weather, and events with podcasts, and also provided some reality shows and fiction audiobooks for entertainment for the community. I'm not sure if she even figured out Welcome to Night Vale was just one continuous podcast series about a fictional place called Night Vale.

Most of the users noticed the graphic for "A Spy in the Desert" a lot more prominently than they could tell what the overall website was supposed to be about, but they also still didn't know what "A Spy in the Desert" was either.

The homepage does have a text description explaining what the website is about, but no one really seemed to notice it or understand it. Most probably skipped over it. User #2 Chelsea said the text was too small. I think the fact the text is small and grey makes it look like unimportant legal gibberish that most people would ignore.

This is what the text says: "WELCOME TO NIGHT VALE is a twice-monthly podcast in the style of community updates for the small desert town of Night Vale, featuring local weather, news, announcements from the Sheriff's Secret Police, mysterious lights in the night sky, dark hooded figures with unknowable powers, and cultural events.

Turn on your radio and hide.

Subscribe on:
Apple Podcasts | Google Podcasts | RadioPublic | Stitcher | RSS"

The biggest problem with the website is the fact that it seems to have no clear explanation whatsoever besides that one small sentence on the homepage that most people apparently didn't notice or understand. I think the website would be a lot more successful at letting people quickly and easily know what it is for if the title graphics included the word "Podcast" large and prominent. People notice large graphics, not small light-colored text somewhere on the page. Images are usually much faster and better at communicating. The purpose of a title and branding at the top of the page is for users to identify the page, so it is the most natural place to have a short description or label as part of the title displayed in a way users will actually notice first.

Besides users just being able to tell that Welcome to Nightvale even is a podcast, users should ideally also be able to tell more easily what genre the podcast is about. A prominent label or graphic describing it as supernatural sci-fi fiction would be helpful.

The text that says, "Subscribe on" implied to me that I would need to log in or sign up for a membership on an external website or app and register for something in order to listen to the podcast if I clicked on and used any of the links below "Subscribe on". The text "Subscribe on" should be changed to something more like "Listen on" instead.

When User #3 was instructed to find a way to listen to the podcast, they were confused by the word subscribe and thought subscribing to be a patron on Patreon was what they meant. She found an internal page on welcometonightvale.com asking for one time donations on Patreon or options to subscribe to be a monthly donor on Patreon with different rewards for people donating specific amounts on a monthly subscription basis. The podcast itself is free to listen to and subscribe to. Donation is optional. This user was apparently confused by the two different types of subscribing described on the website (subscribing to listen to the podcast on a platform like Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, etc and subscribing to be a monthly Patreon donor). Maybe using a different phrase for the two different processes might be helpful or possibly think of a separate name and graphic for subscribing to be a listener and becoming a monthly Patreon donor. Graphics should be employed to create a separate distinction because users notice graphics and colors more easily than text descriptions.

Most websites for podcasts have a podcast playlist embedded on the homepage that is one of the first things visitors will see. It is a bit confusing that there are so many different links to play podcasts, but there are almost no podcasts embedded into the welcometonightvale.com website itself and none of them are embedded on the homepage. The homepage seems more like an eclectic collection of news, products, merchandise, shows, etc that seems to confuse users. It could be more effective if the information was organized differently and the homepage made focus on the podcast itself more prominent. The news, products, and events could still be prominent features on the homepage, but the podcast itself should be made the main feature.

User #1 also mentioned the twitter icon placement looked a bit weird to him. I agree it would be better if the social media icons were placed a little more consistently. Most websites also have social media buttons for more pages than just twitter. He also thought it was weird they only had twitter. I can understand an organization minimizing the amount of social media pages they have for the sake of time or budget, so that is a smaller concern, but I agree the placement of the twitter icons could be more consistent. He thought it was odd there was a section of the website with a button to “follow on twitter” on the left side and then lower on the page there was a twitter icon to the right. He thought they should both be centered on consistency. I think this is the least of the problems on the website, but I’m mentioning this as well just to thoroughly go over all comments and concerns observed.

The biggest UI problem that needs to be addressed is the fact users don’t know what the website is about or what Night Vale is. The second biggest problem is efficient and non-confusing access to users being able to play the podcast.