

## ASSESSMENT OF THE CITY WEBSITE

3 March 2010

This assessment is commercial in confidence and is for the employees of City and their representatives.

### Introduction

Usability is a collection of concepts that aim to make the experience of using something intuitive and where possible simple. A good example was with the original VCRs where programming tended to be complex and certainly not simple. Since then programming has become easier, often with on-screen instructions, making the process much more usable.

With regards a website, usability is focussed on the navigation system and the ability to extract the desired information from a webpage.

Rule one for any website is to remember that the visitor doesn't care about you, they only care about how you can meet their needs. If you keep this single rule in focus then then you can objectively assess each aspect of the website to determine if it adds value to the potential customer.

### First Impressions

The homepage is very busy – there is no focus and it is difficult to determine exactly what is on offer. Visitors start to lose interest within a few seconds if the purpose of the site is not clear.

Looking more closely I see:

- A main navigation bar.
- A huge image on the left
- Welcome message
- Your Planner
- A Taste of City
- Book Your Trip
- Discover the Experiences of City
- Conferences / Gardens of Distinction / Zoo / Christmas
- Where we are
- Last Minute Accommodation

Nowhere on the page does it implicitly tell me about City. Someone interested in visiting a location usually wants first and foremost to know what is on offer in the city and its

environs. They may have heard about a specific event or occasion and want to find out more before deciding to investigate where to stay. The most important item on the home page seems to be the box asking me to 'Book Your Trip'.

### Page Title

It correctly describes the website but when seen in the SERPs doesn't attract the eye. Each page should have a title and description that accurately describes the content of the page.

For example: you have:

[Official Tourism Board for City](#)

Much better would be:

[Tourist Information for the Historic City of City](#)

### Logo

This needs to sell the city. Use a tagline or a motto and use an iconic image as the background. Simply repeating the domain name is pointless. The words: 'Stay, Explore, Relax, Indulge' look like they should be links but aren't.

### Main Navigation

The anchor text is fine but in the wrong order. Visitors to the site won't want to book accommodation until they know if they want to stay. Put the 'What's On' and 'Things to Do' links on the left. Add a 'Contact Us' link on the right.

Drop downs are not user friendly and on this site not necessary. In addition, the slight delay makes them more difficult to use.

### Left Image

On the homepage this rotates and often displays an image that has nothing to do with City (a pair of champagne glass for example). It also takes up a lot of space that could be used to promote the city.

### Welcome message

This is all wrong. It doesn't welcome tourists – the focus instead is on planning a trip and booking accommodation. The welcome message should promote the city. If you can attract the visitors interest they will then investigate accommodation options and day drips.

Note also that the style of the welcome message is unique to the home page – all the other pages look different. People don't like sites that change (more about this later).

Try something like:

*The ancient city of City offers a unique blend of history, culture, shopping, spas, sport and entertainment. With a lineage stretching back 2000 years the city has developed into a cosmopolitan society whilst keeping the icons that make this city unique in the North East of England. So please be welcome, explore all that we have to offer and be sure to visit us soon and experience City.*

People like to be greeted when they arrive, feel as if the site is all about them. If you can generate a comfort zone around the visitor using words and images then they are more

likely to stay.

### Book Your Trip

This is in a too prominent position on the page. I don't know if it converts well but I am unlikely to want to book a trip until I knew what was on offer. Try moving it off to the right to give more room for the main content.

What would be better however is on each relevant page, visitors could book tickets along with recommended accommodation and restaurants. For example. At Museum A there is link to the nearest hotel or guesthouse and a range of restaurants. At the same time, give details of the nearest bus service into the city centre. Give the visitor all the information they need to actually book a trip.

### A Taste of City

I would expect this to be links to the restaurants in City not hotels. Same on all other pages that have taste+City together.

### Discover the Experiences of City

This is the sort of thing that needs to be the focus of the homepage but is at present below the fold. If the main image is removed, the 'Book your Trip' box shifted to the right you could use nearly all the homepage to display 8 to 10 reasons to visit City.

Making the attractions of City the focus of the home page will encourage visitors to investigate further as the images and description will be first things they see as the page loads.

### Adverts

The last minute accommodation, conferences, gardens, zoos etc all look like adverts and will not been seen by most visitors (apart from the fact that they are below the fold). If it looks like an advert then people don't even register the content let alone click on the links. If you want to promote these activities then the links need to be in the main body (see point above).

### Where We Are

Pretty pointless since it doesn't provide much detail and doesn't lead me to a map (which is what I was expecting).

## Sub-pages

There is a curious mix of style that changes from one page to the next. Sometimes there is an image on the left or across the top, other times a menu or information box.

A key element to the usability of a website is consistency. If elements move around or the navigation changes, visitors begin to lose confidence and may leave the site altogether.

On the right the 'pink' boxes are different depending on the page but not always relevant. On the nightlife page for example the box allows me to search for food and drink rather than nightclubs (which is what I would expect).

You use a pink colour for links and the same for highlighted text in the main content.

## Visitor Information

The opening words on each page are vital to maintain interest for the visitor. On the wining and dining page you have:

*Wining and Dining is big in City. Eating out in City is popular and the standards are high*

They are just bland satements wheras the restaurant page has:

*If the mere mention of fine dining gets your mouth watering then get ready as we have listed some of our best gourmet treats, wonderful wines and fine dining experiences*

This is much much better but is let down by the subsequent text that builds anticipation but fails to deliver the expected list of restaurants.

Another example. On the Museums and Galleries page, you tell me that there are ' a broad range of museums and galleries to appeal to all ages' but then don't tell me about any of them or provide links to the attractions. This isn't helped by the links on the left that detail experiences such as City Designer Outlet which is neither a Museum or a Gallery.

To get details of the City Museum I had to do a search. This puts the onus on the visitor knowing what to do rather than the website leading the user to the correct page.

This is just the first part of a much longer review.

If you want an assessment of your own website visit: [website-assessments.co.uk](http://website-assessments.co.uk) or send an email to [mail@website-assessments.co.uk](mailto:mail@website-assessments.co.uk) or just telephone 01268 442171 or 07921 859802