North Dakota State University

Is thenicecenter.org Nice Enough for Me?

A Website Usability Study

Kennedy Fields
Introduction to Writing Studies, ENGL 275
Professor Mary McCall
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Executive Summary

This report evaluates usability through a set of task scenarios and evaluation questions for the website thenicecenter.org, a domain of North Dakota State University that is designed to promote entrepreneurship and innovation. This usability test is meant to pinpoint improvements that can be made to the website. The five participants in the study were selected by proximity to and availability with the interviewer, and while they were all familiar with navigating website interfaces, they had not visitedthenicecenter.org before. I tested the users by asking several pre-survey and post-survey questions, along with having them complete three task scenarios. By collecting information about previous user experience with and knowledge about the website, participant expression, and ease of completion for assigned tasks, we can conclude that while thenicecener.org is a highly functioning interface, there are several improvements to be made that can enhance user experience and outreach for The Nice Center.

User challenges:
- No familiarity with this particular interface.
- Lack of inspiring material on the front page of the website.
- Frustration with and dismissal of elements that did not function as they should.

Possible solutions:
- Re-design the front page to include an article and event slideshow.
- Add hyperlinks and design boxes to promote a call-to-action.
- Add links to underlined words and phrases in introduction paragraphs.

Introduction

For this study, I used an interface called thenicecenter.org, a website for NDSU's entrepreneurship center located in the business school called The Nice Center. As shown below, the interface includes a homepage with a top bar and a mission statement on the front page and multiple pages within the tabs from the top bar like "Events and Programs," "Articles," "About," and "Contact."
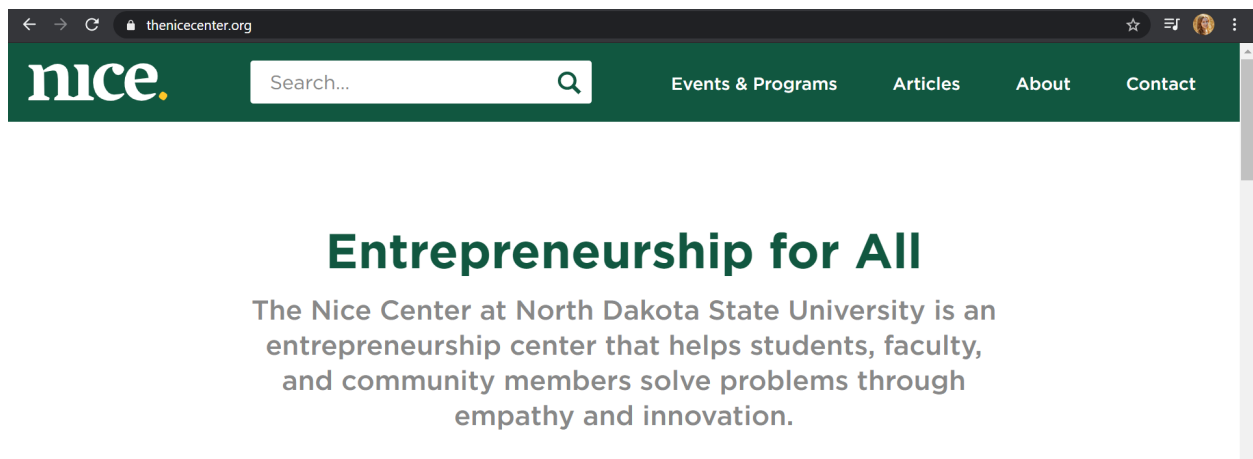
Image 1: Homepage

The goal of my study was to interview five participants to see if the website thenicecenter.org works as intended. I, Kennedy Fields, have worked at The Nice Center as a student fellow since Fall 2020, and I chose thenicecenter.org for this project because I wanted to test the useability design of this site. This would allow us to improve our outreach to students and faculty at NDSU and in North Dakota through innovation and empathy, as stated in our mission statement in the image above.

Methods

For this study, I asked five participants to review thenicecenter.org. Among these, participants one and two were sponsors and guardians of a student - participant one had a disability and participant two had 20+ years working with web design and customer support - participant three was a high school student, and participants four and five were college students at NDSU. I interviewed the third participant over zoom and the rest of the participants in person. All of these participants gave insightful feedback that related to their position in life and their interest in entrepreneurship.

To test the usability of this site, I used the three scenarios in the script to try and recreate real-life situations that potential entrepreneurs and sponsors may find themselves in. In fact, I based scenario one on a question one of my friends asked me: "I want to get involved in The Nice Center, but how can I do that?" These practical scenarios tested the basic usability of the website, and the feedback from these tests will be used to improve the usability of the website for future entrepreneurs.

Four of the five tests were performed in-person, and participants one and four opted to take the test on their mobile devices. I instructed each participant to complete the test on a device that was most comfortable for them to increase the accuracy of the findings of the study.

I asked each participant two pre-survey questions, three scenario questions, and two post-survey questions. I've included the script I used in appendix one on page 11. The first two questions I asked of each participant put them in the shoes of a high school or college student who was interested in entrepreneurship but hadn't visited thenicecenter.org before. The first task scenario asked the participant to "Look on thenicecenter.org to find a place to contact people within The Nice Center to ask for help with your idea and schedule a meeting with them." The second task scenario asked the participant to "Use thenicecenter.org to find an event or meeting you would be interested in attending and register for it." The third task scenario asked the participants to put themselves in the shoes of an NDSU alumnus who was an entrepreneur themselves who wanted to see what opportunities for entrepreneurship NDSU had created since they had graduated. They were tasked to "Use thenicecenter.org to learn more information about the mission of The Nice Center and see how you can get plugged in." These three task scenarios, along with pre-survey and post-survey questions, were the methods I used to evaluate usability.

The pre-survey questions that I asked each participant were: "Have you heard of The Nice Center, and if so, how would you describe it in one sentence?" and "To your knowledge, have you used thenicecenter.org's website in the past?" The post-survey questions that I asked each participant

were: "Have you learned more about The Nice Center through using the website? If so, summarize in one or two sentences what you have learned." and "As of this time of testing, do you plan on visiting The Nice Center's website again in the future? Why or why not? Did useability design play into this decision?" I used these four questions along with the task scenarios and a two to the three-minute window I provided for the participant to explore the website. These three tests were the main factors in my usability test.

A major secondary source I used was the usability testing script that we were given from class titled "Usability Testing Session." I modified this script to fit the needs of my study and based my questions on the prompts given in this script. This resource from the class was my main secondary source.

Limitations in my research included knowing the approximate amount of time it took the participant to complete each task scenario. Because I asked the participants to narrate their thoughts, opinions, and suggestions for thenicecenter.org as they viewed the site, I was unable to capture the exact amount of time it took them to complete each task. However, with the exception of participant one, who had a disability, each participant took approximately fifteen minutes to complete the entire study. Participant one took twenty minutes. Another limitation in my research included the limited experience that I have conducting research projects. However, I do not believe that these limitations hindered in any way the user experience of each participant in the study, nor did it affect their ability to give feedback.

Results

All of the participants noted that the simple organization of the website made it easier for them to find what they had been tasked to look for. Three of the participants viewed the top bar on their desktop as seen below in image 2, and two of the participants viewed the top bar (image 3, below) and the menu page (image 4, below) on their mobile devices. Each participant began task one, two, and three by clicking on one of the tabs at the top of the page.
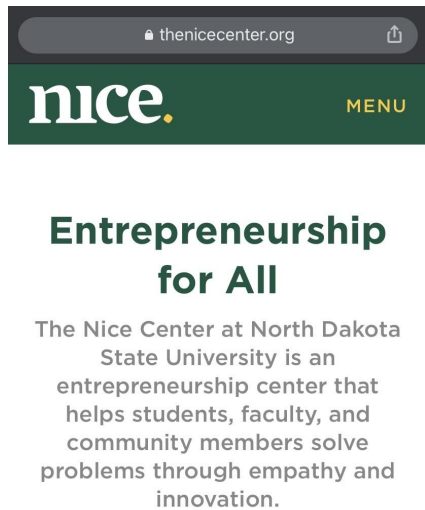

Image 2: Top Bar - Desktop

Image 3: Top Bar - Mobile
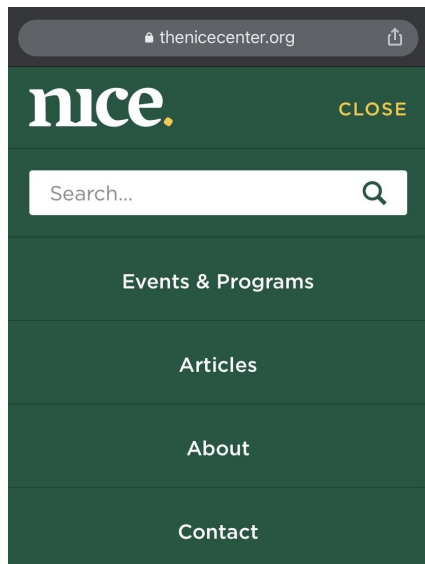
Image 4: Top Bar Menu - Mobile

       Before the test, I asked each participant if they had heard about The Nice Center, and how they would describe it. All of the participants had heard about it before, and participants two, three, and four noted that they had heard of it from me. I also asked them if they had used thenicecenter.org in the past; none of them had, and participant four noted that they planned to use it in the future.

       Before I asked the task scenario questions, I instructed each participant to look around the page and narrate what they saw. Participants one, two, four, and five noted that they liked the simplicity of the page and the directness of the words "entrepreneurship" and "innovation," and

participant three said that they liked the photo on the front page but that they felt the page in all needed a bit more structure or organization. The third participant is also considering pursuing an education in graphic design, so it makes sense that they would be the most critical of the design of this page. After two or three minutes, I moved on to the task scenarios.

In the first task scenario, all of the participants clicked on the "Contact" as shown in image 5 below. Participant two termed this tab and the information within as "adequate," and the rest followed the consensus. Participant five noted that there was a newsletter that they could sign up for to learn more about The Nice Center. Participant four said that they would probably call the number listed on the page because "I don't have the patience to send my info and wait for them to get back to me." All participants were able to complete the first task scenario with ease.
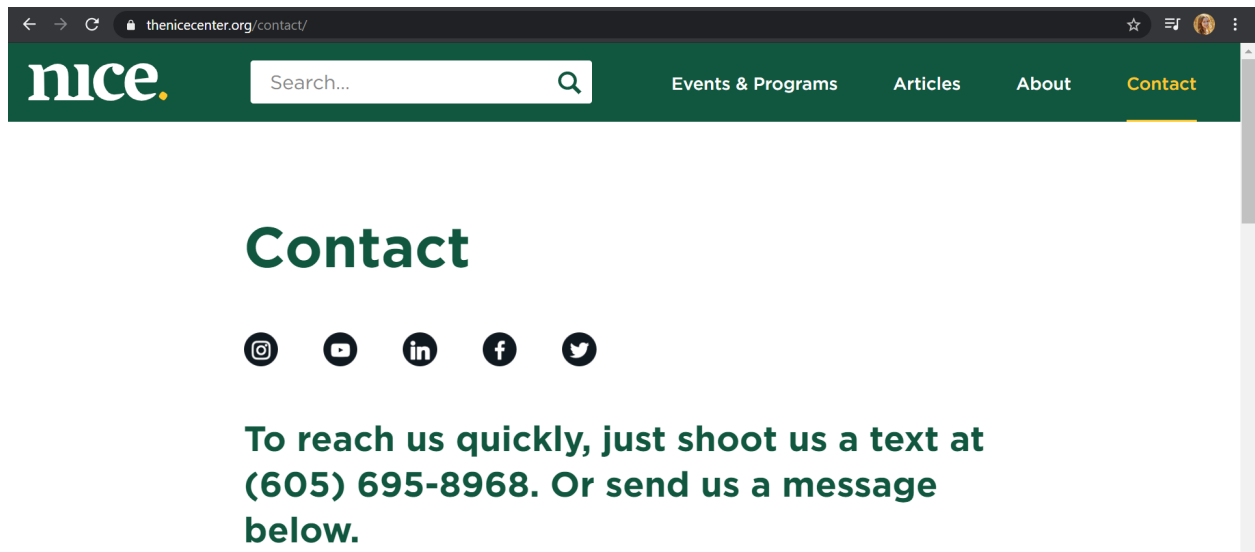

Image 5: Contact Page

The second task scenario was the most difficult task scenario for participants to navigate. The calendar on the events page began listing events from February, and below that from March, and below March, April, and so on. The participants had to scroll down the page to find current events that interested them. Participant one questioned why the page did not list events in calendar format, but then said that might be "too small to fit much information" but also was not sure if that was strictly a mobile issue (as they were on their phone.) Once the participants had found an upcoming event that interested them or that they chose at random, they had no difficulty clicking on the event. One on the event page, the registration tab appeared to them immediately, and it was easy for each participant to find where they would register for the event.

Participant two noted that once they were on the event page for registration, there was no path back to the main page. The "nice" logo in the upper left-hand corner had disappeared, and they said they had to click the "back" button on their browser to return to the previous page, which was something they said hindered usability.

Participant five clicked on the "programs" and "events" hyperlinks in the beginning paragraph of the "Events and Programs" page as pictured in Image 6 below. This led them to the NDSU page where they could sign up for entrepreneurship classes. They saw electives and courses and "a bunch of different programs." This was a practical page that led them to be able to register for NDSU entrepreneurship classes if they wanted to.

Learn more about us, view our upcoming events and programs, or read the latest articles to see what we're up to.

Image 6: Events and Programs

Task scenario three had varying results. Unlike the previous two task scenarios, participants each went to different tabs to begin this scenario. Participant one went to "Calendar of Events" and looked to see what programs there were. They then looked at articles and found a "contact us" button. Participants two through five visited the "About" page first. Most of them noted that the "Nice Leadership Council," "students," and "faculty" hyperlinks in the first paragraph - pictured in image 7 below - did not lead anywhere when they clicked on them. They said this was misleading and saw this as a major flaw on the page. (All of the topics from the hyperlinks were located below, but the participants didn't directly find them because the links did not work.)

We pursue this goal by teaching, training, and supporting students, faculty and community members. We are pursuing the future of higher education alongside an incredible group of educators and innovators in our Nice Leadership Council. As a land-grant institution, our role is to serve the entire state of North Dakota, which is why we are here to serve North Dakotan entrepreneurs, no matter their age.

Image 7: Non-Functioning Hyperlinks

Participant five found the advertisement for "Nice Corps," which is a new program that The Nice Center has been promoting for recent college graduates. Each participant found their path that they believed would be the best to get in contact or learn more about The Nice Center.

After I had completed the task scenario questions, I asked each participant a series of post-test questions (as shown in appendix one on page 11.) The first question asked if the participant had learned more about The Nice Center through using the website. All of the participants responded that they had learned something. Participants one, two, three, and five noted that they had learned more about the Nice Center's mission and overall ideas about entrepreneurship. Participant four stated that they "did not know they had events and programs."

The second question that I asked each participant was if they planned on using The Nice Center's website again in the future and if usability design played into that decision. Only participant four said they would visit the website again because "I'm the scenario one person:" in other words, they were the target audience of the website, and they believed that The Nice Center had something to offer them. Usability design did not dissuade them from re-visiting the website.

The other four users decided that they did not plan on visiting the website for various reasons, but the main reason being that they were not interested in entrepreneurship. They would never have a personal or business reason for visiting the website. They all stated, however, that if they wanted to re-visit this website, usability design would not dissuade them from visiting it either.

Discussion

As stated in the introduction, the goal of this study was to interview five participants to see if the website thenicecenter.org works as intended. I chose thenicecenter.org for this project because I wanted to test the useability design of this site, which would allow us to improve our outreach to students and faculty at NDSU and in North Dakota through innovation and empathy. By asking our participants specific questions about their understanding of The Nice Center and asking them to go through the website during task scenarios, I believe that I can conclude that The Nice Center functions as a website promoting entrepreneurship and it accomplishes the goal of reaching out to and providing adequate information for students in North Dakota. However, this study pointed out some aspects of the website that could be improved to enhance the user experience.

The first page of thenicecenter.org opens with a mission statement: "Entrepreneurship for All," as pictured in image 8 below.

Entrepreneurship for All

The Nice Center at North Dakota State University is an entrepreneurship center that helps students, faculty, and community members solve problems through empathy and innovation.

Image 8: Mission Statement

This page succinctly states the goals of The Nice Center, but there is no direct message to the visitor of where visitors should go once they visit the page. thenicecener.org would benefit from a rotating article banner at the top of the page to advertise recent articles published and current events. The Spectrum, the NDSU student newspaper and an NDSU-sponsored domain, pictures current and relevant articles at the top of the page and as the viewer scrolls down the page. They also have a menu bar at the top of the page as pictured below so that visitors still have access to the rest of the website's content.
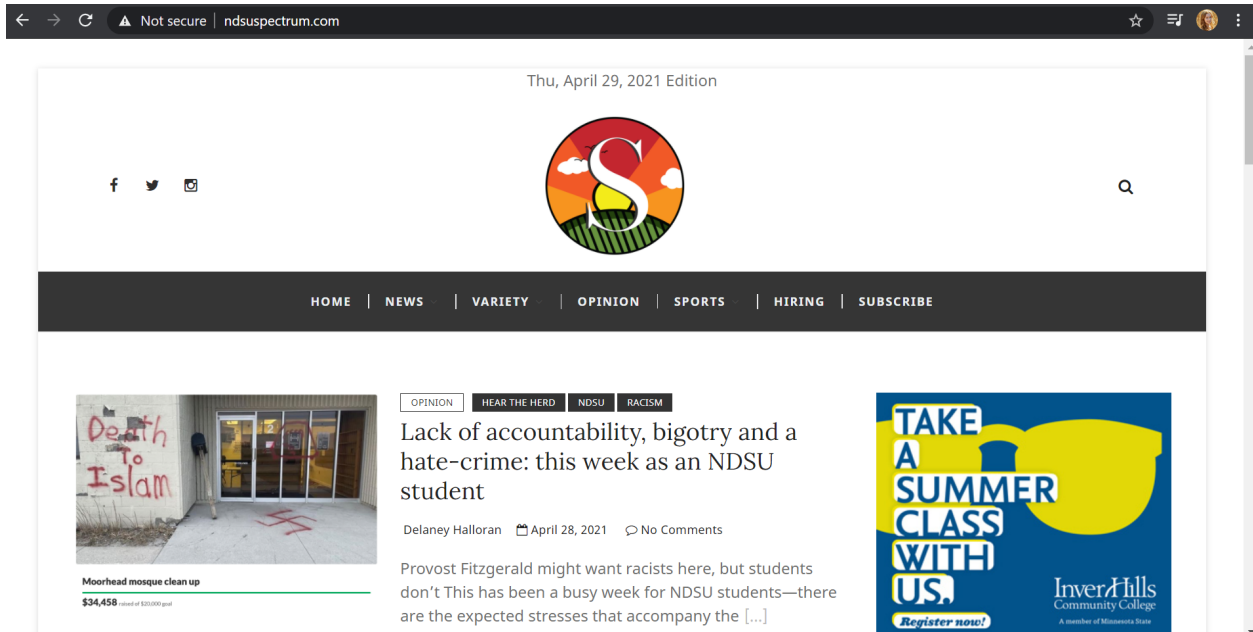
Image 9: The Spectrum Example

The Spectrum also has ads placed along the side: this is not a part of the website that I would recommend duplicating.

Another alteration that I would recommend would be to add a call-to-action in some form on the first page of the website. The first page currently does an excellent job of describing the mission and goals of The Nice Center, but it does not provide much information about how to get involved or what a student could use The Nice Center for. One of the aspects of The Nice Center that I'm currently working on as an employee is extending outreach to students by telling them what The Nice Center can do for them. Through social media marketing, I am extending a virtual hand to innovative students to encourage them to use the resources we have to jump-start their ideas. I believe this is something the first page of the website should include with blog posts, side comments or advertisement boxes, or a more interactive interface. This would become possible if the first page included a scrolling banner at the top of the page that rotated current blog posts and events, other clickable options that might interest a student entrepreneur, and a clear mission statement.

There are several small recommendations that I would make from the user experience of the participants in the survey. First of all, in the "Events and Programs" page, the first paragraph includes several hyperlinks that do not work. The information that the hyperlinks are supposed to include is located further down on the page, but none of the participants realized that as they looked through the page.

Second, further down on the "Events and Programs" page, I would recommend organizing the events with the current events at the top of the page or using a calendar format to display the dates of the events. Each participant mentioned that they had to scroll down to find the current events, and each took several seconds to stare at the page to decide how it was laid out and determine where they should go to find current programs.

A third suggestion I would make would be to provide more direct contact points for each of the staff and fellows of The Nice Center. All of the participants went to the "Contact" page on the top banner to complete the first task scenario. However, in a conversation with Scott Meyer, my boss and the founder of The Nice Center, he encouraged me to point students to the "About" page to "schedule a meeting" with him. None of the participants found this button option. I would recommend changing the "Contact" page to include individual people for viewers to contact.

Another change I would recommend within the "Contact" and "About" pages would be to streamline the contact method for people on the Nice Leadership Council. Some of them have LinkedIn contact buttons in their biographies while others have different forms of contact. Streamlining them to be the same or similar forms of contact would confuse the visitor less and allow for a greater outreach for people who are interested in Entrepreneurship.

These recommendations would improve user experience, allowing The Nice Center to reach a greater number of aspiring entrepreneurs.

Recommendation Summary

Change	Rationale	Severity
Add a scrolling blog banner on the front page.	The website needs a way to grab the viewer's attention when they first visit the page. This banner would advertise recent articles, events, and relevant people.	Medium
Include a call of action on the front page.	This would direct visitors to a place or person instead of wandering around the website.	High
Add links to underlined text on the "Events and Programs" page.	Users get confused when the hyperlinks do not lead anywhere.	Medium
Provide direct contact points with staff and fellows.	If it is easy to contact someone, visitors will be more likely to do it.	High
Streamline contact methods for Nice Fellows.	Again, if it is easy to contact someone, visitors will be more likely to do it.	Medium

Chart 1

Appendix
Appendix One: Usability script (with color-coded participant responses)

Participant One
Participant Two
Participant Three
Participant Four
Participant Five

Hi, _____. My name is Kennedy, and I'm going to be walking you through this session today.

Before we begin, I have some information for you, and I'm going to read it to make sure that I cover everything.

You probably already have a good idea of why we asked you here, but let me go over it again briefly. We're asking people to try using a website called thenicecenter.org that we're working on so we can see whether it works as intended. The session should take about 15 minutes.

The first thing I want to make clear right away is that we're testing the site, not you. You can't do anything wrong here. In fact, this is probably the one place today where you don't have to worry about making mistakes.

As you use the site, I'm going to ask you as much as possible to try to think out loud: to say what you're looking at, what you're trying to do, and what you're thinking. This will be a big help to us.

Also, please don't worry that you're going to hurt our feelings. We're doing this to improve The Nice Center's website, so we need to hear your honest reactions.

Pre-Test Survey:
Have you heard of The Nice Center, and if so, how would you describe it in one sentence.
It's very nice.
Yes; it's about entrepreneurship.
I heard about it from you (me.)
I have heard of it, and all I know is that it is the entrepreneurship center.
Yes.
To your knowledge, have you used thenicecenter.org's website in the past?
No.
No.
No.
I have not, but I plan to in the future.
No.

Have the participant bring up The Nice Center's website on their computer screen: thenicecenter.org

First, I'm going to ask you to take 2-3 minutes and look at this page and tell me what you make of it: what strikes you about it, whose site you think it is, what you can do here, and what it's for. Just look around and do a little narrative.

You can scroll if you want to, but don't click on anything yet.

Looks like a school website. For people interested in entrepreneurship. Good use of repeating the word "entrepreneurial."

I like the simplicity. I don't really understand what is meant by "empathy" and "innovation," but reading more, it's adequately described in the next paragraphs. More info is pretty straightforward. First impression: I don't see enough on it to make you want to know more. There is no hook. What kind of problem has been solved or innovation has been facilitated? I should have something that grabs me right on that front page.

NDSU, the picture is cool. For me, it's a lot of words. I know it's summarized, but… The beginning is a lot of words. It seems a little long for a brief description. My graphic design is like, I feel like one of the top words needs to have a box around them or be different fonts to differentiate them because they look really similar.

A really nice picture, I like how there are a lot of faces showing a lot of different emotions. I like that everything is kept short and gets to the point. Subscribe to learn more!

Cool picture. I see that it's an entrepreneurship center at NDSU. I see a picture with a bunch of people, some look like students others like older adults. Talks about teaching people about entrepreneurship through action and doing things. Looks like there's a lot of events.

Thanks. Now I'm going to ask you to try doing some specific tasks. I'm going to read each one out loud and give you a copy.

I'm also going to ask you to do these tasks without using the Search box or Google. We'll learn a lot more about how well the site works that way.

And again, as much as possible, it will help us if you can try to think out loud as you go along.

Task Scenario #1

You are a college student who has an entrepreneurial idea and are interested in entrepreneurship, but you do not know where to start. You heard about The Nice Center, and you thought you would like to visit the website to see what it's all about and to see how you can get connected. Look on thenicecenter.org to find a place to contact people within The Nice Center to ask for help with your idea and schedule a meeting with them.

Clicked on contact, scrolled down. Found a dialogue box with a name, email, and message. Contact is usually at the bottom of a website.

Go to "contact,' he can call or leave a message. Adequate. You can also reach out through social media.

I clicked on the menu, maybe contact? I mean I feel like I could schedule a minute with that. I like how when you click on the nice center it just goes back to the homepage.

I would click the menu, contact, reach us and then I would probably call because I don't have the patience to send my info and wait for them to get back to me, because usually most places take a business day.

Go to contact, You could text or send a message through the boxes. You could also subscribe to find out more about the nice center.

Task Scenario #2

You are a high school or college student who has heard about The Nice Center and want to see what it is all about, and how The Nice Center can help you with your career and ideas. You want to see if there are classes, workshops, or meetings that you can attend that would teach you more about entrepreneurship and starting a company, but you have never visited the website before. Use thenicecenter.org to find an event or meeting you would be interested in attending and register for it.

Clicked on events and programs at the bottom of the page, scrolled down, looking through highlighted reading. Looking through monthly events. Why don't you have it in calendar format, but that might be too small to fit much information. Not sure if it's a mobile issue. Calendar is chronological, date number. Looking for a date in February first, but someone might be looking for contact instead of a date. Why doesn't it go to current dating? If it went to a current date, rather than to leaf through old dating, it might be easier to find events. One of the events isn't underlined, Nice alumni conference isn't underlined as well (no hyperlink.)

Clicked on the next one after the entrepreneurship club. Reading description. Patrick Wolf, who is he from? What's he going to talk about? Found registration link at the bottom of the page. "How to be a million-dollar teacher." Reading event info, this one has event info, why didn't the other one? Easy registration links.

Funny how they bring you to 'nice idea' right away.

Clicks on events and programs, the first thing on the menu bar. Calendar for Feb, March, April. Only feedback, he would put the most recent month at the top. I'm starting in February and think it's out of date, but then scroll down and sees more recent information.

Ideas research workshop on Friday, May 7th. Found a more recent one on April 23rd.

He can enter his name and email and click the Register button. He doesn't have a path back to the homepage. Clicked the back button, which he doesn't think he should have to do. Have the Nice logo on every page.

I'm going to the menu and then events and programs. Um. Why does it say passport events? Do you have to sign up for it? Let's go to one in May. OK, that's pretty simple once you click on it. I did it.

For the paragraph about "learn more" or "view our upcoming events," I would click that. I would read the paragraph at the top, link at the top. There's a decent list of events that there are. There are a couple things going on in April and may. And if that wasn't enough – goes back to the menu – events and programs, which takes me to the same place. Clicks on a random one.

Oh, it's pretty simple, you just click on it and register. I did it!

Click on events and programs, It talks about all the events in April and mya coming up. Click on them to learn more about them. I could register if I wanted to.

Also, click on programs, talk about programs, learn more [courses,] a bunch of classes, click on the intro to entrepreneurship class, take her to the NDSU page where she could sign up for the class. Entrepreneurship electives, back to the NDSU page. Looking at all the classes. Courses. Events and programs. Bunch of different programs. Women's entrepreneurship week. Video brought her to a different website. See all the speakers. Past events.

Task Scenario #3

You are an NDSU graduate, and you want to see what opportunities NDSU has made since you graduated for students to get more involved in entrepreneurship. You have started your own business, and you are looking for ways to get plugged in to help future NDSU grads. Use thenicecenter.org to learn more information about the mission of The Nice Center and see how you can get plugged in.

Look at the calendar of events, and what programs there are. Look at articles. Scrolling through. Clicks on "about." Scrolling through. You could schedule a meeting and it has their calendar, but it would be nice if it had a "contact me" button instead or just use the general "contact us." It would be nice to be able to contact a specific person.

Going to "about." We have a nice leadership council. Team Nice. If I really wanted to get involved as a young or old graduate, I see a lot of people I could reach out to within my age range. It looks like a place I could get plugged in. Could schedule a meeting or "learn more" with the rest of the people. Could connect through social media or remains within the nice center's website.

Ran into "try premium for free" gets a linked-in ad. Has to have a premium version of linked in to connect with these people. Amanda Haymen's site is different from Melissa Kosling, there was a message button with Melissa. It's probably whether or not they are on Linkedin. If I wanted to message them, I would have to have a premium version of LinkedIn. That's a little sketchy.

So menu, maybe about, I'm gonna look what that is. It has the Nice team, maybe you would like to schedule a meeting with one of them. Oh, the mission is in about. Ooh if you click on the nice center leadership council, what does that do? It's not doing anything. It doesn't work. I'm gonna go back to events and programs. You would probably go to contact and then just say you're a grad and be like "hey I wanna help people."

Ooooooooff. On the home page. I would go to "learn about us," student-faculty. Nice. OK. Lots of pictures and people. See how I can get plugged in. In about us, I would just explore that, student-faculty, what's that? The links for students, faculty aren't working. Nice student council isn't taking me anywhere either. I don't know! Events and programs, I feel like that would be a good place to start. Attend one and meet more people there. I can't see what's in the students and faculty place.

I'd go to about, can't click nice leadership council or I could go and work there and be a part of the faculty, faculty button doesn't work. Clicked on articles, resources. I don't know how I would get involved as a graduated student. Recent grads for Nice Corps.

Contact someone, reach out, and say hey I'd like to learn more about this, or go to events and programs and find one that looks like it would suit me, and it looks like there's a lot of resources for that. Co-starters to start a small business, and a lot of these programs look like they could be good for alumni.

Post-Survey Survey:

Have you learned more about The Nice Center through using the website? If so, summarize in one or two sentences what you have learned.

It's about entrepreneurship. What does Nice stand for? Is it only about entrepreneurship? Learned more through the calendar, events, and programs page.

Sure! I understand the high-level mission of the nice center, and I understand if I wanted to find out more, there are multiple avenues for doing so like newsletters, looking at events, contacting people, and I haven't even read any articles yet.

Yes, I have, I learned that the nice center is an entrepreneurship center where NDSU students can get plugged in and learn more about entrepreneuring.

College students. I guess it didn't really say, since I thought it was just college students because it was from NDSU that it was just for NDSU students.

I did not know they had events and programs.

I have learned that there's a lot more to the nice center than I thought there was. There are a lot of cool events and programs that can help you get connected to other people in the business world and help you learn more about entrepreneurship. And I've learned that there are a lot of ways the nice center can connect you to through classes and through NDSU.

As of this time of testing, do you plan on visiting The Nice Center's website again in the future? Why or why not? Did useability design play into this decision?

No, because I'm not an entrepreneurial person. Not a college student.

Probably not because I'm not an entrepreneur or have e-ideas, but might check out my daughter's work. It is simple – I like that. Give me something that grabs me on the front page about a success story – needs to be short with links with more information.

Probably won't because I'm not into entrepreneurship and I won't be in ND anytime soon, but the website is nice and simple so that doesn't keep me from using it.

Yeah probably, because I'm the scenario of one person you wrote this question on so I wanna get my ideas out there and see where I can go from there!

If I ever decide that I need some business/entrepreneurship experience, I would go here. However, that's not the route I'm going but If I know anyone who is a business major/wants to go in that direction, I would recommend it.

Appendix Two: Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

This is a sample form used for class and not part of a formal research study.

Purpose of Research
The purpose of this research is to test the usability of thenicecenter.org. Students are completing this research as part of coursework for ENGL 275.

Specific Procedures to be Used
Participants will fill out a demographic survey, complete task-based protocols on the
web site to find information, and fill out a post-test questionnaire.

Duration of Participation
The usability test session should take about 15 minutes.

Benefits to the Individual
Participants will learn about usability testing and about using 15. I may contribute to a body of knowledge that supports innovation in web writing and usability research.

Risks to the Individual
Risks for participating in this study are minimal and are no more than I would
encounter in everyday life or in the course of my studies at North Dakota State University.

Compensation
Participants will not receive any compensation for this study.

Confidentiality
Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed because of the nature of large groups of the class.
Participant responses cannot be guaranteed to be anonymous because the instructor, Mary McCall, cannot guarantee that other classroom participants will not disclose my participation in the study. Aggregate results and data compiled from test responses will be shared with the class and included in usability reports that will be submitted in electronic form to Mary McCall. The researchers will remove any personal information (e.g. your name) at your request and no information from this course-based study will be published in peer-reviewed venues.

Voluntary Nature of Participation
While the usability testing is part of the class requirements, I understand that I can stop
the testing process at any time without penalty.

Participant's Signature and Date

_____

Works Cited

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Kennedy Fields
Professor Mary McCall
Reflection Essay 3
9 May 2021

<div style="text-align:center">Pencil to Cursor to Published: My Theory of Writing</div>

In February, I had stared at my blinking cursor on a blank page and wondered how I was

supposed to define my theory of writing in a short essay. No class or professor had ever

challenged me to answer this question, and while I thought I had a good understanding of what

writing was, I realized I was lost when it came to putting it on a page. In unit one, I struggled to

define my theory of writing. I saw the act of writing as something that a student, journalist, or

book writer did to explain their ideas, convey information, and entertain others. However,

through these three units in class, my theory of writing has expanded in many ways.

Writing has always been a natural form of expression for me. Since I was young and had

dreams to write novels on notebook pages, I have understood writing to be a creative means for

conveying information. Since Unit One, however, I have learned about the great potential that

writing holds through our conversations about audience, genre, and rhetorical situation. By

understanding how my writing is being perceived, I've grown in the ability to cater to my

audience. In our unit about professional writing, I learned that I can use my writing abilities to

convey to a professional audience. These units have improved the ease with which I have

always been able to write while giving me a good idea of how to cater to different audiences.

My theory of writing reflects several concepts that we have discussed in class, namely

threshold concepts 1.4: "Words Get their Meaning from Other Words;" 3.4: "Disciplinary and

Professional Identities are Constructed Through Writing;" and 5.1: "Writing is an Expression of

Embodied Cognition." The first threshold concept emphasizes how the context of writing

greatly influences an audience's understanding of the topic and the writer's ability to convey information. The second threshold concept portrays how writing skills can transfer to professional careers. Both of these encompass the main idea of threshold concept 5.1: writing is both a cognitive and emotional activity. This last threshold concept ties in most with my theory of writing because I have realized that the passion for writing that I've had since I was young, combined with the wealth of knowledge that I have access to in college and beyond, can create a writing experience that caters to many aspects of life and the world.

Using writing to cater an effective communication method to others is a skill that cannot be taught, only learned and experienced. As I've experienced while doing a usability study on thenicecenter.org, I've seen that the way something is written can have a great impact on the audience and on the view that the audience holds about the subject of the usability study. Concepts of professional writing have impacted my writing theory by showing me that writing is not just a creative means of expression, but is a common way to communicate professionally. In the usability study, my audience saw writing used in advertising to lead users to a website that uses writing to share their mission with the world. My understanding of technical communication has been enhanced by a foundation of professional writing. Writing is not just about stories and characters; it is about informing, advertising, and equipping others.

Through this reflection, I have put together the puzzle pieces of information about writing that I have learned in this course and applied them to my personal theory of writing. I have been challenged to apply my understanding of audience, genre, rhetorical situation to my own writing, and I have used my new understanding of usability and professional writing to expand my knowledge about the many uses of writing. I feel greater equipped to pursue a career using

writing, and through these assignments, I have not only grown as a consumer and viewer of written information but also as a writer who puts information out into the world.

Sources

Adler-Kassner, Linda, and Elizabeth A. Wardle. *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies*. Utah State University Press, 2016.

Bazerman, Charles, and Howard Tinberg. "5.1 Writing is an Expression of Embodied Cognition." *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies*, by Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth A. Wardle, Utah State University Press, 2016.

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