

Interface for KBMotorsports Project Team Website

Overview

This report explains why an interface I designed is effective. The interface is a website used by a project group while building a user centered website for KBMotorsports. KBM is a business that refurbishes alternators for the muscle car and classic show car market.

Purpose

The purpose of this site is to document the group's progress while developing a website for KBMotorsports. The website serves as the definitive historical record of the project, and is accessible to the team 24 hours a day.

It also serves to show progress to the client and to the supervisors who likewise have 24 hour access. The team decided not to limit access to outsiders, so the website is open to all visitors and can serve as a resource or inspiration to other project teams. That website is located at www.pcexpressions.com/kbmotorsports.

Target Audience

The target audience is college educated ranging from senior year through doctorate holder. It consists of sophisticated computer users with little tolerance for slow loading, extraneous detail such as animation, difficult navigation and poor organization. They are the authors and reviewers of all the information linked to the site. They are located up to a thousand miles apart and rely on the accuracy and timeliness of updates to the website.

Message

This web site is informational. It is not intended to sell the team, but a professional and well-organized appearance makes an important first impression that could engender a feeling of trust from the client and instructors/supervisors.

Information Design

Organization is important to everyone who uses the website for reference and to review the team's progress. The purpose of menu and navigation names must be self-evident, because we don't want to teach a visitor how to use the website.

Date Order

The documentation page has special needs for organization. I knew that in addition to reports, I would be listing meeting notes and recorded chat sessions. The chat sessions are the primary means of team communication and project organization. I soon realized however, that some business was also being conducted via email, and decided to memorialize the email in some fashion as well.

The end product of the first phase of the project included a summary report and various miscellaneous supporting reports that we determined to post on the documentation page and incorporate via links from our report. A section was created for miscellaneous reports.

Each section on the documentation page was ordered by descending date. See figure 5, Documentation Listing – Before.

Navigation

I started with a very simple, shallow navigation scheme based on the current phase of the project and the work breakdown (figure 1). The pages I chose were:

- **Home** - declaration of the purpose of the site and a simple marketing spiel of the client
- **Team Info** - a place to highlight responsibility areas for each team member, contact information, and their photos
- **Proposal** - the original proposal which won the assignment for a team project
- **Site Mission** – purpose of the project from the clients point of view
- **Documentation** - the meat, as far as the team was concerned, where all our historical evidence would be posted for display

As we progressed to the third phase of the project, the list of documents became unwieldy and it was hard to find the latest information because it was located too far down the page or in a section too far down the page. The principals of grouping were violated and I sought a new method to organize our work. We also had situations where documents, listed in date order, would be in the wrong phase of the project.

I found that I had oversimplified the structure of tasks as the documentation page became a long list of work products. I had to reevaluate. There were several ways I could reorganize. I could categorized by project phase, but found that the current project phase has twice the number of objects than the previous and subsequent phases.

There are definite areas of work and responsibility of team members so it made sense to split the documentation page into work products along these lines:

- Project Reports
- Content
- Usability
- Documentation (meeting notes, email, chat, and other)

Project reports are intended for the instructor/supervisor. Content is intended for the final website and those people working with text, graphics, and page coding. Usability is for testing procedures, lo fidelity models, survey results, lab results, use case scenarios, and summaries of findings. Documentation is still a catch all of other communication and reports. See figures 6 & 7 for examples of new organization.

Within the old and new documentation pages, I bridged the gulfs of execution and evaluation by using a short description of the document, indicating what type of document is linked, and the size of the document. This way, the length of time to download or open the document can be estimated. The group that has been described as main users of this site have agreed upon the document types that are acceptable. They understand the document extensions used in the descriptions. I have also noted that all documents will open in another window. If there is a problem with opening the document, the visitor can simply close the new window and be back to the link or starting point.

Schema

This website uses some terminology specific to the project, such as “site mission” (figure 4) and “usability” (figure 7). It would be necessary to possess a user centered web site design schema or be a member of the team’s community to understand the navigational links without resorting to trial and error. But anyone who possesses such a schema should be able to guess where to find the specific information they are seeking.

Screen Design

Standards

My secondary design goal was to save time in maintenance. I knew that as the gatekeeper, maintenance of this website could take a lot of my time. I decided to stick with simple styles and I created a cascading style sheet to make set-up and upkeep easier. I changed colors of the link variations and set the font family and color using the style sheet. I decided not to stray far from standard headings, and I used tables for the page layout. In discussions with the group, class discussions, and my own experience, we decided that using frames was counter to successful design.

Standardization was also paramount, since it promotes consistency and reduces the decision-making and creativity required during coding.

Graphics

The KBM owner mentioned that he uses checkered flags in black and white, and the colors blue and orange for marketing material. I created a graphic for the team name using a checker fill reminiscent of the finish line flag, a race course, and though not intended, even tire tread. All these things are related to the muscle cars theme. I selected the font EnviroD because it is clear, bold, and complimentary to the theme. I thought the graphic would tie our team website to our client’s product. See graphic in figure 1.

The owner of the business has reviewed the site, and asked that my graphic be incorporated into the heading in his final website.

Animation and extraneous graphics were considered non-essential and detractors from the goals of fast loading and easy to use pages.

Colors

The colors used have specific meanings. Black is used for textual content and produces a good, readable contrast against a white background. Blue identifies navigational links to other pages, to other reports, and to email. Gray indicates visited links, is a major part of the graphic, and is used as a background color for section headings and lines that delineate sections. Orange is used for the company name and was selected by the client. Orange could be used for highlighting, but there has been no need so far. White is the background for pages and tables.

Text and Grouping

The text is standard black in a sans serif font on a white background. For special section headings, I used black text on gray backgrounds. These choices were for readability.

Chunking is used to add plenty of white space. This makes it easy for visitors to return to where they left off especially after clicking on links from the documentation page or the team member page. Grouping helps them scan the content by headings or first line to get a quick idea of whether to spend more time reading the paragraph or detail. The Team Info page (figure 2) is a good example of this.

Hierarchical indenting is used to show sections and subsections on the team info page and on the documentation pages.

Page Titles

I felt it was important to show the visitor which page they are viewing. There is a clear title in the upper left of the body section that matches the menu name in the navigation bar. I considered but did not implement a method of highlighting the current page name in the navigation bar. My decision was based on time to implement versus impact and ease of use of the site. The site map is very simple with little depth and there is little chance of getting lost within the site.

Links

I modified the blue color for links only slightly. I decided the violet for visited links didn't coordinate with the color theme, and chose a medium gray instead. Some people believe that we should leave the standard link colors no matter the color scheme, but that offends my sense of color coordination and impact. I have found that the unvisited links should stand out and the visited links should recede. Whenever possible the unvisited links should be blue. In addition, once the link scheme was determined, I took pains to make sure nothing else on the page mimicked a link if it wasn't really a link.

Pamela P. Cote
October 31, 2002

Personalization

Adding the team photos lends a personal touch. I was the first one to implement this idea in our community, and I think it added to the sense of teamwork by putting a face with each team member's name. Most of us have not actually met the other members of the team in person.

Conclusion

This website design, after some modifications, should prove usable throughout the duration of the team project. I intend to conduct some usability tests with specific scenarios and tasks with the expectation of improving the website.

Attachments

Figure 1 Home Page



Figure 2 Team Page



Figure 3 Proposal

(Note: I didn't reformat the proposal to my content design guidelines – it is presented on the page as submitted when a paper report.)

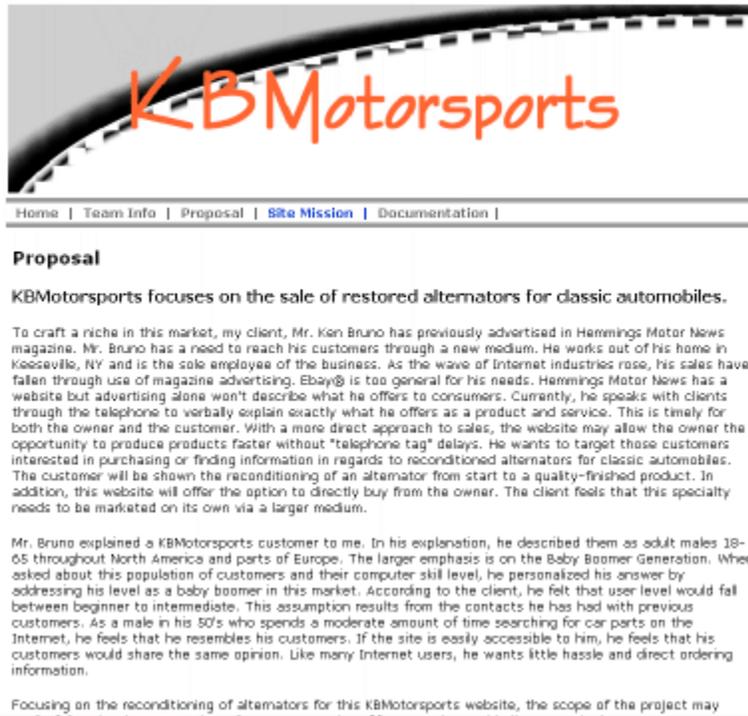


Figure 4 Site Mission



Figure 5 Documentation Listing - Before

Documentation (All documents open in a new window.)

Project 3

Misc. Reports and Drafts

- [Project Timeline, 10/1 draft \(.htm\)](#)
- [Pre/Post Questionnaire, User Testing, 10/9 draft \(.doc\)](#)
- [Use Case Diagrams, 10/9 draft \(.doc\)](#)
- [Lo Fidelity Model #1, 10/10 draft \(.pps\)](#)
- [Lo Fidelity Model #2, 10/10 draft \(.pps\)](#)
- [Lo Fidelity Model #3, 10/10 draft \(.ppt\)](#)
- [FAQ, 10/10 draft \(.doc\)](#)
- [first group composite, 10/10 \(.htm, 71K\)](#)
- [Raw Survey Data 15 responses, 10/13 \(.doc 80K\)](#)
- [Survey Spreadsheet, 10/13 \(.xls\)](#)
- [Order/Request Form Items, 10/18 \(.doc\)](#)
- [Graphic with checks, no text 10/20 \(.gif - 9K\)](#)
- [composite of before photos 10/22 \(.htm - 76K\)](#)
- [composite of after photos 10/22 \(.htm - 49K\)](#)
- [About KBM, 10/24 \(.doc - 19K\)](#)

Relevant Emails

- [October 1 - 6, 2002 \(.doc - 21K\)](#)
- [October 6 - 24, 2002 \(.doc - 70K\)](#)

Meeting Notes

- [October 2, 2002 \(.doc - 32K\)](#)
- [October 3, 2002 \(.doc - 42K\)](#)
- [October 6, 2002 \(.doc - 38K\)](#)
- [October 10, 2002 \(.doc - 36K\)](#)
- [October 17, 2002 \(.doc - 36K\)](#)
- [October 21, 2002 \(.doc - 36K\)](#)
- [October 24, 2002 \(.doc - 39K\)](#)

Chat Logs

- [October 2, 2002 \(.doc - 54K\)](#)
- [October 3, 2002 \(.doc - 73K\)](#)
- [October 6, 2002 \(.doc - 50K\)](#)
- [October 10, 2002 \(.doc - 63K\)](#)
- [October 17, 2002 \(.doc - 37K\)](#)
- [October 21, 2002 \(.doc - 22K\)](#)
- [October 24, 2002 \(.doc - 64K\)](#)

Project 2

- [** Project Presentation, 9/30 ** \(.pps - 61K\)](#)
- [** Project Report, 9/30 ** \(.doc - 64K\)](#)

Misc. Reports

- [Alternator Restoration Process, 9/20, see Current Project](#)
- [Answers to Site Mission Questions, 9/20 \(.rtf - 13K\)](#)
- [Customer Contact List, 9/20 \(.xls - 17K\)](#)
- [Benchmark Sites, 10/3 \(.htm - 2K\)](#)
- [User Survey Questions, 9/21 \(.doc - 23K\)](#)
- [Online User Survey, 9/23 \(.htm - 21K\)](#)
- [Raw Survey Data, 10/2 - updated, see Current Project](#)
- [User Survey Summary, 9/30 \(.doc - 22K\)](#)
- [Team Assignment Details, 9/30 \(.doc - 23K\)](#)

Relevant Emails

- [September 13 - 30, 2002 \(.doc - 115K\)](#)

Meeting Notes

- [September 18, 2002 \(.doc - 41K\)](#)
- [September 21, 2002 \(.doc - 35K\)](#)
- [September 26, 2002 \(.doc - 29K\)](#)

Chat Logs

- [September 18, 2002 \(.doc - 35K\)](#)
- [September 21, 2002 \(.doc - 68K\)](#)
- [September 26, 2002 \(.doc - 70K\)](#)

Project 1

- [** Project Proposal, \(html link to this site\) 9/5](#)

Figure 6 Documentation Listing - After,
Navigation Bar Splitting Out the Different Types of Documentation

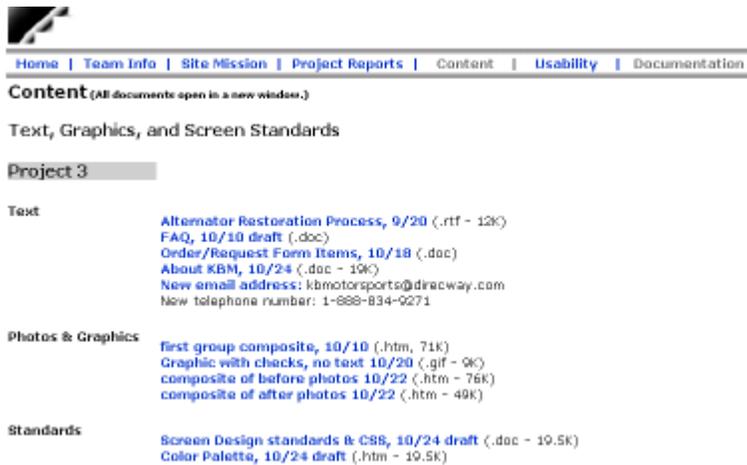


Figure 7 Documentation Listing - After,
Usability related material on it's own page

