User Test Results

Metra D8 Redesign

Summary

The following document includes results of a usability test that tested the functionality and aesthetic look for Metra's website redesign. We created a high-fidelity prototype that assessed user navigation to a number of Metra specific content such as ticket pricing, Metra career opportunities, parking details and Metra leadership content.

Our specific goals for this test included:
- Understanding how users navigate Metra's redesigned website.
- Understanding how users like and/or dislike the overall appearance of the redesign.
- Understanding how young adults interact with web content.

Four participants were provided by Metra and completed four separate tasks. Overall participants described the redesign as informative and easy to navigate.

Testing participants had the following characteristics:
- Age – 25-30 years old
- Familiar with Metra current site
- Use mobile apps and online websites on a daily basis

The test was conducted in person. Participants used a laptop, provided to them by the moderator and were asked to explore a high-fidelity InVision prototype. Each participant was asked to do the following:

- "Think Aloud" – participants talked through their thought process while performing each task.
- Participants were asked follow-up questions between tasks
- Participants were observed performing each task without interruptions.
- Participants answered a short questionnaire at the complete of the test to gauge overall impressions

Current web design trends

According to Forbes, "minimalism is the name of the game in 2020." Content "framed by white spaces is one of the best ways to ensure all of the visitor's focus is on the actual product or service" (Oziemblo). Other trends include an emphasis of function over form, accessibility considerations (font size and color use), and familiar navigation schemes.

CURRENT TRENDS

Clean designs with ample white space *(p45)*

Balanced style and function, with an emphasis towards function. (p54)

Limited color use. (p55)

Limited use of large photography. (p57)

Familiar navigation schemes (p69)

How these trends apply to young adults

Recognized globally as a leader in research-based user experience, The Nielsen Norman Group conducted multiple studies to determine how young adults use websites. Their research leveraged insights from 91 participants (42 men, 49 women), aged 18 to 25 years, from seven countries. Participants tested 372 websites and applications. Results from the studies are compiled in the publication "Designing for Young Adults".

CURRENT TRENDS	YOUNG ADULTS
Clean designs with ample white space *(p45)*	Young adults **appreciate flat design** (p9)
Balanced style and function, with an emphasis towards function. (p54)	Young adults **demand simplicity** in interfaces (p21)
Limited color use. (p55)	For young adults, **visually attractive designs don't necessarily have to be overly trendy or colorful** (p55)
Limited use of large photography. (p57)	Young adults are impressionable and **careful photography selection is a must**. (p57)
Familiar navigation schemes (p69)	For some young adults, the **horizontal top navigation pattern** has been dominant on the web for as long as they've been alive. (p 69)

Does our D8 redesign meet user expectations?

To ensure we were following best practices for modern web design, we rated our success on how we met or failed to meet user expectations.

CURRENT TRENDS	YOUNG ADULTS	D8 REBUILD & USER EXPECTATIONS		
Clean designs with ample white space *(p45)*	Young adults **appreciate flat design** (p9)	🟢	**Meets Expectations**	"I think it very clean, crisp, modern—it looks awesome." *Courtney*
Balanced style and function, with an emphasis towards function. *(p54)*	Young adults **demand simplicity** in interfaces (p21)	🔵	**Partially Meets Expectations**	"It looks crisp and cool, unlike other transit agencies, which are dense with buttons and random words. This is easy to find what I am looking for." *Courtney* "This image is useless. I want to know what's going on right now." *Carlo*
Limited color use. *(p55)*	For young adults, **visually attractive designs don't necessarily have to be overly trendy or colorful** (p55)	🟢	**Meets Expectations**	"I am fine with the colors—they look nice" *Sylvia* "The heavy-colored borders caught my eye" *Katie*
Limited use of large photography. *(p57)*	Young adults are impressionable and **careful photography selection is a must.** (p57)	🔵	**Partially Meets Expectations**	"If I came to the homepage—especially on a phone—and saw this image, I'd be pissed." – Carlo "I'd like to see the hero image replaced with tools." – Katie "The photography is crisp, clean, and fits aesthetically. It feels professional and makes me feel like I would want to ride this train" – Courtney
Familiar navigation schemes (p69)	For some young adults, the **horizontal top navigation pattern** has been dominant on the web for as long as they've been alive. (p 69)	🟢	**Meets Expectations**	"I used my knowledge of the existing website to help me navigate." – Katie "I like having these tools at the top" – Carlo

Were users able to complete essential tasks in the redesign?

All 4 users completed all 4 tasks successfully, within a reasonable timeframe and perceived ease. Upon task completion, users were asked to rate the "ease of use" on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being very difficult and 5 being very easy.

Task	Ease of Use Average	Sylvia		Carlo		Courtney		Katie	
Task 1: **Fares**	**3.625**	✓	3	✓	3	✓	4	✓	4.5
Task 2: **Careers**	**4.25**	✓	5	✓	3	✓	5	✓	4
Task 3: Board **Minutes**	**4**	✓	4	✓	3	✓	4	✓	5
Task 4: **Parking**	**4**	✓	5	✓	3	✓	4	✓	4

Insights and actions

Overall insights

- All 4 users completed all 4 tasks successfully, within a reasonable a timeframe from the main menu.
- The "Maps & Schedules" button in toolbar never met user expectations.
- Stylistically, users felt the design was modern, clean, and professional.
- Main menu terminology was useful and clear.
- Workflows were intuitive.
- The existence of a hero image could potentially create a bad user experience.
- All users liked the varied placements of "Contact" information

Action items

- Provide additional homepage options that emphasize function over style
- Clearly define internal and external tools in toolbar
- Add "Fares" to toolbar
- Change "Leadership" to "Board Meetings"
- Add a "Careers" link to footer

Works Cited

Andrew Oziemblo. "10 Website Design Trends For 2020." Forbes. 4 March 2020. https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2020/03/04/10-website-design-trends-for-2020/#175260176455

Loranger, Hoa, Kate Moran, and Jakob Nielsen. "Designing for Young Adults (Ages 18-25)." 3rd Edition. Nielsen Norman Group. https://www.nngroup.com/reports/designing-for-young-adults/

Appendix

Summary of usability recommendations per Nielsen Norman Group

- **Attract young adults with clean designs and ample white space (p45)**
  - They appreciate visual designs that appear modern
  - For young adults, visually attractive designs don't necessarily have to be overly trendy or colorful.
  - A clear visual hierarchy is critical.
  - When users were presented with too much information on a page, they had difficulty finding what they were looking for.
  - The use of white space on your site is important and should not be overlooked. White space helps set apart sections and allows your content to "breathe."
    - These visual gaps among groupings facilitate scanning, which is the dominant way people read online.
  - Most young adult users are looking for designs that are clean and easy to use

- **Use signifiers (visual clues) to let young adults know which elements are clickable in interfaces (p48) – FLAT DESIGNS**
  - Flat designs should incorporate clickable elements with strong visual cues (like glossy, 3D buttons or field with heavy drop shadows)
  - Elements without such strong visual cues were probably not clickable or interactive (p49)

- **Feature a visual design that matches your brand. Sites that appear unprofessional or dated receive strong criticism from young adults. (p50)**
  - Regardless of your industry or budget, your website should look professional and modern. Young adults make snap judgements based on design before diving into content.

- **Balance style and function with a lean towards function. (p54)**
  - Many young adults like to kill time on social and entertainment sites but when it comes to most other tasks, they're serious information seekers.
  - They want to accomplish tasks, solve problems, and find answers to questions as quickly as possible

- **Use colors sparingly. Excessive colors are overwhelming. (p55)**
  - Young adults are vocal about their color preferences for websites.
  - Color should not be gaudy or overpowering.

- **Be cautious when featuring large images on your organizations' homepage. (p57)**

- Using large background or hero images on your homepage can be a powerful tool for creating a dramatic impression with your young adults.
  - If the content of the image doesn't accurately reflect the organization's identity and purpose, young adults are likely to get the wrong impression.
  - Be conscious of false floor effects – a visitor arrives at a page with a full-width image and doesn't realize there's more content below the fold.

- **Use relatively large fonts sizes (10 points or higher) (p64)**

- **Choose navigation schemes that are familiar (p69)**
  - Follow standard navigation schemes for your website regardless of the age of your target audience.
  - Most websites display main navigation across the top of the page and secondary navigation on the left side of the page
    - For some young adults, the horizontal top navigation pattern has been dominant on the web for as long as they've been alive.
  - Sites that deviate from this standard create confusion and require people to learn a new pattern

- **Avoid presenting important content using pop-ups. (p77)**
  - Young adults hate them, and tend to close them automatically without reading

- **Offer a reasonable number of choices. (p79)**
  - Too many options can deter people from making the correct decisions or from making a decision at all.
  - Less is more. When surfing the web, young adults are torn between wanting all the information they're interested in up front and not wanting to have to make too many navigational choices.
    - The necessary balance to strike is to offer very few options up front to lead young adults in the right direction and then offer them a good overview of the information they're interested in once they get there
  - **All participants in our study preferred sites with very simple homepage navigation structure.**
    - Limiting their options keeps them from becoming overwhelmed and disengaged. Simpler pages often signal less work, which is attractive to young adults

- **Use category and link names that actually describe where they lead. (p84)**
  - Links that contain keywords that match the user's tasks get click on; generic or imprecisely labeled links get ignored.

- **Use icons sparingly and only when they have meaning (p92)**