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# Web Anatomy

Interaction Design Frameworks that Work

PRODUCT GALLERY

USER ID

PASSWORD

SIGN IN

CONTENT

Robert Hoekman, Jr.  
Jared Spool

NEWS

NEWS

New  
Riders

VOICES THAT MATTER™

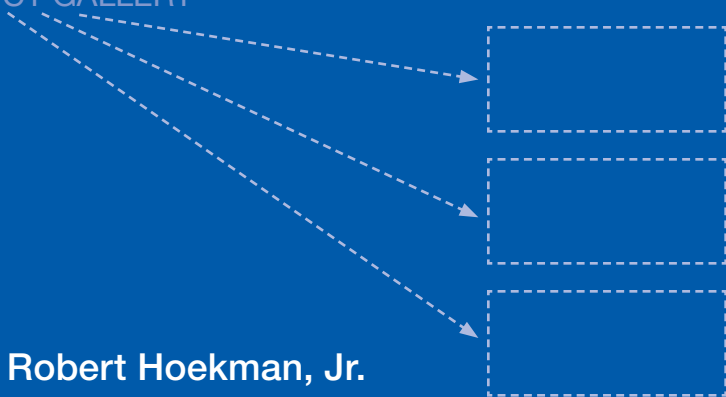
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That probably works well if you already know exactly what you need, but what about home buyers facing these terms for the first time? How do they decide? It seems Citibank's designers assumed users would pogo-stick through the two choices to figure it out.

Clearly, it's important to include as much information on the gallery page as is necessary to inform a user's decision. For Sony Ericsson and Motorola, this could mean providing a short list of features next to the photo of each phone. For Citibank, it could mean briefly describing each type of mortgage, or dividing the page into subgroups, such as First-Time Buyers and Current Owners, to help the user better determine which mortgage is appropriate. On a news site, it could mean writing informative headlines that offer a glimpse into the story's content or displaying a snippet of the story itself.

Another bank, Wells Fargo, took a slightly different approach to its gallery of mortgage options. While it offers the same content, its galleries (and there are multiple versions, depending on which path you take through the site) provided copy to help users decide which link to click (for example, "Gives all qualified buyers the opportunity of putting only 3% down on a primary residence and taking advantage of flexible qualifying guidelines.")

It doesn't end there, however—the order of the items on the gallery page is also relevant. According to UIE's research, users expected the most important items to always be listed first in the gallery. In fact, they often didn't even realize when a list was sorted alphabetically—if the first few items weren't of interest, they often assumed the rest would be even less interesting.

Regardless of its effectiveness, it is from the gallery page that a user makes her selection and moves on to the content itself.

## Content page

The content page, also called the details page (as in, Product Details), is where a user can finally validate her choice. She can finally review the content she stepped through the site to find. She can add the book to the shopping cart. She can read the article. She can scan the reviews and decide whether or not to purchase the digital camera.

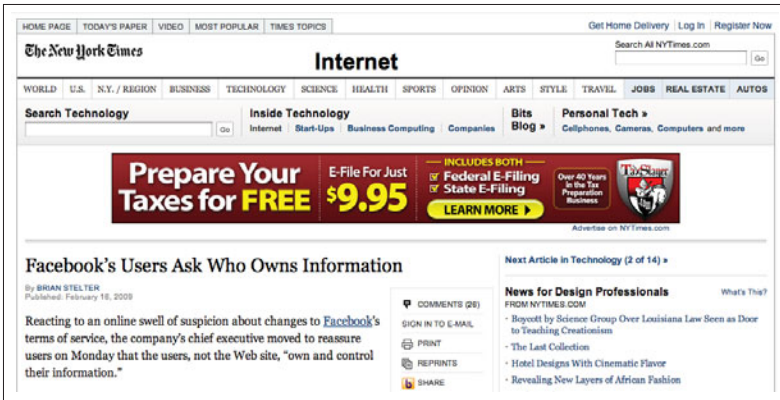
In other words, the content page delivers the prize at the end of the hunt. On commerce sites, it may feature user reviews, information on relevant promotions, usage and maintenance data, configuration options, and much more. On a news site, in addition to the desired article, it may offer sharing options, an RSS feed for the item's parent category, and perhaps even reader comments.

On Gap.com, as shown in **Figure 3.10**, the content page provides a short product description and information about how to care for the item, options to choose a size and color, and an option to view a larger image of the product.

**Figure 3.10**  
Content pages on the Gap offers descriptions, images, and more.

On NYTimes.com, as shown in **Figure 3.11**, the content page offers a way to click through to the next article in the parent category, a link to the most popular articles for the category, and a commenting system so readers can discuss the story.

But content pages don't always deliver what a user needs to validate his or her decision.



**Figure 3.11**  
NYTimes features links to other articles and a commenting system.

A common practice in the online consumer electronics industry, for instance, is to require retailers to hide a product's price from the shopper until she has put it into her shopping cart. Only after the shopper puts the product into the shopping cart is the price revealed. If the shopper then decides she doesn't want the product, she has to remove it from the cart to avoid purchasing it.

While watching people shop on sites that employ this practice, UIE's researchers have seen many shoppers show extreme frustration at the practice. When asked why they think the retailer does this, they feel it's some sort of trick—that the retailer hopes they'll make a mistake and buy an unwanted item by accident.

It isn't a trick, but rather a contractual requirement that the retailer has with the manufacturers. It's called the Minimum Available Pricing (MAP) policy and it allows large-volume retailers to sell products at a discount.

The agreement goes back decades, put into place to give smaller mom-and-pop retailers a competitive advantage against big box retailers. The original idea was that the big retailers couldn't advertise their lower prices (which are lower because of their huge ordering capability), but could share the price once the customer was in the store. When these retailers went online, the shopping cart had to emulate the in-store experience.

The retailers are trying to follow the rules and give their customers great prices, but the customers think there's something devious about it.

The designers at BestBuy.com came up with a clever workaround. They still require that the user take special action to see the price—as necessitated by the agreement—however, instead of showing the shopper a shopping cart with the product in it, they display a pop-up that has the price and two buttons: Checking Price—Remove from Cart and I Want To Buy—Keep in Cart.

Behind the scenes, BestBuy.com puts the product into the shopper’s cart for the duration of the pop-up. If the user indicates she is just checking the price, the system automatically removes it from the cart. Only if she indicates she wants to buy the item does it remain in the cart.

When UIE’s researchers measured brand engagement before BestBuy.com implemented this solution, they found a large dip in shoppers’ perceptions of the brand after encountering a MAP situation. After making this change, UIE saw the brand strengthen. By investing in the new design, shoppers now feel BestBuy.com is on their side and is not trying to deceive them. Clearly, it’s very important that the right information is conveyed to users as they try to validate selection decisions.

Once again, a variety of design patterns can be used to facilitate this task and influence the user’s behavior. When it comes to a user’s need to validate her item selection, in fact, the list of patterns is quite long. Following is a summary of many of these patterns.

### **Long Item Description**

Building on the short description from the gallery page, the long item description simply provides an extended overview of the product, potentially including things like technical information for electronics equipment, editorial reviews for books, and so on.

### **Image Gallery / View Larger Images**

In commerce sites, image galleries (usually containing just a few images) are often offered so the user can see the product in several ways, either in different contexts (clothing worn on different body types, for example) or at different angles (front, back, and so on). This type of gallery generally offers a View Larger option so that thumbnail images can be shown by default, thereby conserving screen real estate, while still providing a way for users to see larger versions of each image.

## Fulfillment Details

This information lets users know how much an item costs and how quickly it can be delivered.

## Availability

Item availability, in addition to simply providing status information, is often shown on a Content page to instill a sense of scarcity. A user who thinks a product has limited availability may believe the item is more valuable and therefore feel more compelled to order it.

An example from outside the world of goods and services is event sites. A professional conference may have a maximum capacity of 200 people. As seats are purchased, that number continually decreases, potentially making the remaining available seats more enticing to interested visitors who remain undecided.

## Lists

On commerce sites, wish list and simple shopping list features can be provided to give users a way to mark items for future reference. This pattern can build commitment on the part of the user—the act of compiling a list increases the likelihood that the user will return to the site.

## Configurator / Configuration Options

A pattern more complicated than most, the Configurator enables users to select from a series of customization options for a product. On a clothing site, the user may choose a size and color. When ordering a drum set, the user can choose the type of cymbals, drums, stands, and sticks she wants. On MiniUSA.com, a user can fully configure a Mini Cooper, save the result, and use it to order the Cooper of her dreams. By giving the user various ways to choose the exact configuration she wants, this pattern helps her feel comfortable that she indeed made the right product choice.

## Social Influence patterns

Social influence patterns include *review*, *rating*, *recommendation*, and *referral* features—patterns used to influence a user by way of social behavior. Reviews are frequently offered on product pages to quell a user's concerns about a product. Ratings offer a fast mental shortcut for deciding whether or not the product is of reasonable enough quality.

Recommendation functionality gives users a way to put their stamp of approval on a product without getting so involved as to write a review. And a referral function enables users to tell their friends and colleagues about a product.

Again, the patterns used within the catalog framework can vary greatly depending on the purpose of a site and a user's goals at a particular moment, and it's vital that these patterns be chosen carefully.

Regardless, the Content page represents the end of the trail—the point at which the user finally makes a decision about whether or not to purchase an item, read an article, or something else. The user starts with an array of choices, she makes a selection, and she gets the information she wants.

Category. Gallery. Content.

*Winnow. Select. Validate.* Simple as that.

## Guided links

In another study conducted in 2001, UIE looked at how to get users to find valuable content that they weren't already aware of upon first visiting a site.

This is an important problem when dealing with large sites in particular, because these sites are constantly adding content. E-commerce sites add new products. Product-support sites add hints for successful use. Intranets add new information to help employees be more efficient. How does a user discover the new content?

UIE's research showed that users were three times more likely to find this additional content if they used the category links on the home page instead of by using the site's search function. In an effort to understand more about why this was happening, UIE's researchers dug a little deeper into the data.

It turns out that one main clue is what people do *after* they find their target content.

**Target content** is the information that people come to a site to find. Studies show that most site visitors have a purpose on a site. For example, few people go to [www.ups.com](http://www.ups.com) just to see what UPS is all about. Instead, they