

BCcampus Website Usability Test Report

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Summary of Recommendations

Critical Priority

- Do a complete overhaul of the search tool.
- Add a section on our site about open educational resources.

Serious Priority

- Investigate why entering a query into search bar while on the BCcampus News home page returns a “page not found” error.
- Display an event’s description next to its title/link on the header menu, and explain the acronyms and terms we use.
- Make more obvious what services we provide and what projects we support.

Medium Priority

- Categorize events into conferences, webinars, etc.
- Improve the way the list of blog tags is displayed on the BCcampus news page.
- Link back to the BCcampus main site on all of our satellite sites.
- Improve the report generation interface on reports.bccampus.ca.

Minor Priority

- Link the blue titles in the carousel to the corresponding slide’s story.
- Make it clearer that the four middle buttons in the header (About Us, News, Events, and Contact) are themselves links.
- When a user hovers over the external links to our services and programs on the home page, display a description of the service.
- Change the green Open Agenda button on the home page to point to the OER section instead.
- At the top of each page of each of our satellite sites, display a menu bar that states the site is a BCcampus service or program.
- Move the Upcoming Events section from the right column to the left side so that the two sections don’t blend together.

Suggestions

- Send out multiple newsletters containing different stories based on categories, and allow users to choose which newsletter(s) to subscribe to.
- Add a newsletter subscription box on the home page.

Introduction

Following a month and a half of planning, we visited eight post-secondary faculty members, administrators, and other staff at their workplaces from March 5 to 14 to perform a usability study. In addition, between March 21 and 23, we did an additional round of testing with three participants remotely over Adobe Connect.

The goal of the study was to find out usable the BCcampus main website is, how well our target audience performed typical tasks, and to discover new usability problems. These were the main topics we wanted to address:

- Content understanding: Was the basic information that our target audience was mostly likely to come to the site to look for, such as what BCcampus does or what kinds of services we provide or support, accessible and clear?
- Navigation: Were users able to easily navigate the site?
- Relevance: Was the content relevant to our target demographics' needs and wants?
- Efficiency: How much time was required to complete typical tasks?
- Information design: How well were the layout, graphics, etc. presented to the user?

Overall, our usability study found numerous issues with various levels of severity. The most serious issues, such as the inadequate search function and the lack of information about open educational resources on our site, were able to impede or prevent users from successfully completing one or more common tasks. However, there were also many aspects of the site our participants remarked positively about.

The main focus of this report is to discuss the issues uncovered through our usability testing: what the issues are, and our recommendations on how to resolve them. By taking steps to improve the usability and content of our website, we will make significant progress towards achieving the main goal of the BCcampus website content plan: to increase site traffic by 10 per cent by the end of 2013.

User Profile and Recruitment

Target Audience

Typical users of bccampus.ca include:

- Higher-level administrators: presidents, vice-presidents
- Faculty, many of whom are not currently teaching online
- Academic administrators and student services staff (e.g., directors of teaching and learning centres, registrars, academic advisors) who need a high-level overview of what we do and sometimes a primer on the innovative projects undertaken by BCcampus
- Information technology staff
- Other educational workers (e.g., instructional designers, librarians)

Recruitment Method

We wanted to gather participants that fit our website's target audience. We invited participants by sending out a plaintext email through our newsletter mailing list, which had 398 subscribers when we sent it out on February 25. Only participants who worked at post-secondary institutions in the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island were sought.

A total of thirty people responded with interest in participating, which was a much higher number than we expected. When selecting whom we would choose to include in our tests, we tried to select participants from as many educational job roles as possible. Furthermore, we selected both participants who were familiar with BCcampus activities, as well as those who were not. All participants selected for a site visit were given a \$10 gift card to Starbucks following the test as a token of our appreciation.

Given that we had such a large number of interested individuals, we invited eight people didn't get selected for in-person testing to our second round of testing, which was done remotely over the Internet. We were able to schedule three tests for this round.

Participant Profiles

Participant 1 is an assistant registrar at a smaller university that focuses on professional programs. He knows a little about what BCcampus does.

Participant 2 is a web strategist from a large university's Teaching and Learning Centre. He is familiar with BCcampus.

Participant 3 is a librarian/project coordinator working for one of our partner systemic services.

Participant 4 is a program director at a large university. He typically visits the BCcampus website to keep up on the latest news.

Participant 5 is an instructional designer at a large university. He is not very familiar with BCcampus, but is a member of ETUG.

Participant 6 is a senior administrator at a large research institution, and is unfamiliar with BCcampus.

Participant 7 is a student system coordinator at a research university with a post-grad/teaching focus. She is not very familiar with BCcampus.

Participant 8 is a manager of distance education services at a research institution. She is familiar with BCcampus.

Participant 9 is a learning technology specialist, also from a large research institution. She knows little bit about BCcampus' shared services.

Participant 10 is an assistant registrar at a community college. She uses the Applied Business Technology site.

Participant 11 is a librarian who works at a larger college. She participates in SOL*R.

Questionnaire Results

We gave the site visit participants a closed-ended questionnaire before they begin the tasks, so that we could get a better idea of the demographics of people using our site. The list of questions asked can be found in the Appendix of this report.

A chart summarizing the results of Questions 2–6 is below; answers to Question 1 are already listed in the Participant Profiles section. Note that due to time constraints, we didn't ask Participant 6 during his in-person test, or Participants 9, 10, or 11 during their remote tests, to fill out a questionnaire.

#	Number of years working in post-secondary	Computer / internet knowledge level (1 = low, 5 = high)	Do you have LMS experience?	Do you have OER experience?	Where would you look for more OER info?
1	21–25	4	No	No	University home page
2	11–15	4.5	Yes	Yes	Google it
3	11–15	4	No	No	My library website!
4	16–20	4	Yes	Yes	-
5	< 5	5	Yes	No	Google
7	21–25	4	No	Yes	-
8	> 25	3.5	No	Yes	-

Methodology

As mentioned earlier, testing was done in two rounds: the first involved a site visit to each participant's workplace, while the second involved remote usability testing via web conferencing.

Test Procedure: In-Person Site Visits

Each test was designed to take 45 minutes at most, although some of them ran longer. This was despite the fact that dry test runs were done prior to the actual tests, and as a result, was already slightly shortened. For Participants 2 and 8, we had to leave out a few of the tasks and debriefing questions near the end since we ran low on time. Participant 5's session also ran about 10 minutes longer than the allotted 45 minutes, although he completed all the tasks. During Participant 1's session, the test took nearly twice as long as planned as a result of our website loading pages extremely slowly¹, although he decided to complete all the tasks anyways. We had also specifically designed an abbreviated test with fewer tasks for Participant 6 due to his busy schedule.

During each session, we had one facilitator, who focused on managing the session and paying attention to what the participant is doing and saying, and one observer, whose main role was to take detailed notes. I was the facilitator of each session, while Tori was the observer of every test except for Participant 5's; a colleague, Sung Lee, was the observer for Participant 5's.

We visited each participant at the academic institution they worked at. Firstly, we set up a DSLR camera (a Canon Rebel T3) mounted on a tripod so that we could capture video of the participant's screen and record audio; these recordings were to be used to review the session in case we missed anything during live testing. We then did an introduction of the test: the purpose of the test, the roles of the facilitator and observer, and some key ideas to keep in mind. We then had the participant fill out the waiver form and the closed-ended questionnaire, which would allow us to collect more information about our website user demographics.

At this point, we started filming with the video camera, and went through the tasks. We verbally told them what the task was, and also gave them a sheet of paper with the task written down. We tried to go through all nine tasks whenever possible.

Once the tasks were complete, we did a debriefing. This was where we discussed with the user some key observations specific to each test – for example, some things the user had a lot of trouble with – as well as give them an opportunity to bring up

¹ We later found out that our website experienced a distributed denial-of-service attack while we were doing the first test.

comments of their own. We also asked eight questions about their overall experience with the website; this part was more of an open-ended post-test questionnaire. Once the debriefing was complete, we turned off the video camera, thanked them for participating in our usability test, and gave them the gift card.

Test Procedure: Remote Testing

This test method was used for three participants following the conclusion of the in-person tests. Remote testing was used as a supplement for the in-person tests, so these were not required to be as in-depth as the previous ones. As a result, we made the remote test to be an abbreviated version of the in-person tests, with a target completion time of 25 minutes. To achieve this, we used only four tasks taken from the full-sized test. The debriefing was also much more condensed, asking four questions out of eight.

Remote testing was conducted using the Adobe Connect 8 conferencing service, which we already had a license for. The main benefit of Connect was the ability for the participant to share the contents of their screen with observers over the Internet, as well as voice chat. In addition, it was possible to record the screen sharing and audio for future playback.

I was the sole facilitator/observer of these three sessions.

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

Issues are classified into four levels of severity: critical, serious, medium, and minor, with an additional category for suggestions. These issues are classified by conceptualizing “red routes”, which describe user activities that are frequent and important to the site’s functionality². Issues that impede the red routes are given a higher severity rating than those that are not, and should be addressed as soon as possible.

Critical Issues

Search Function is Inadequate

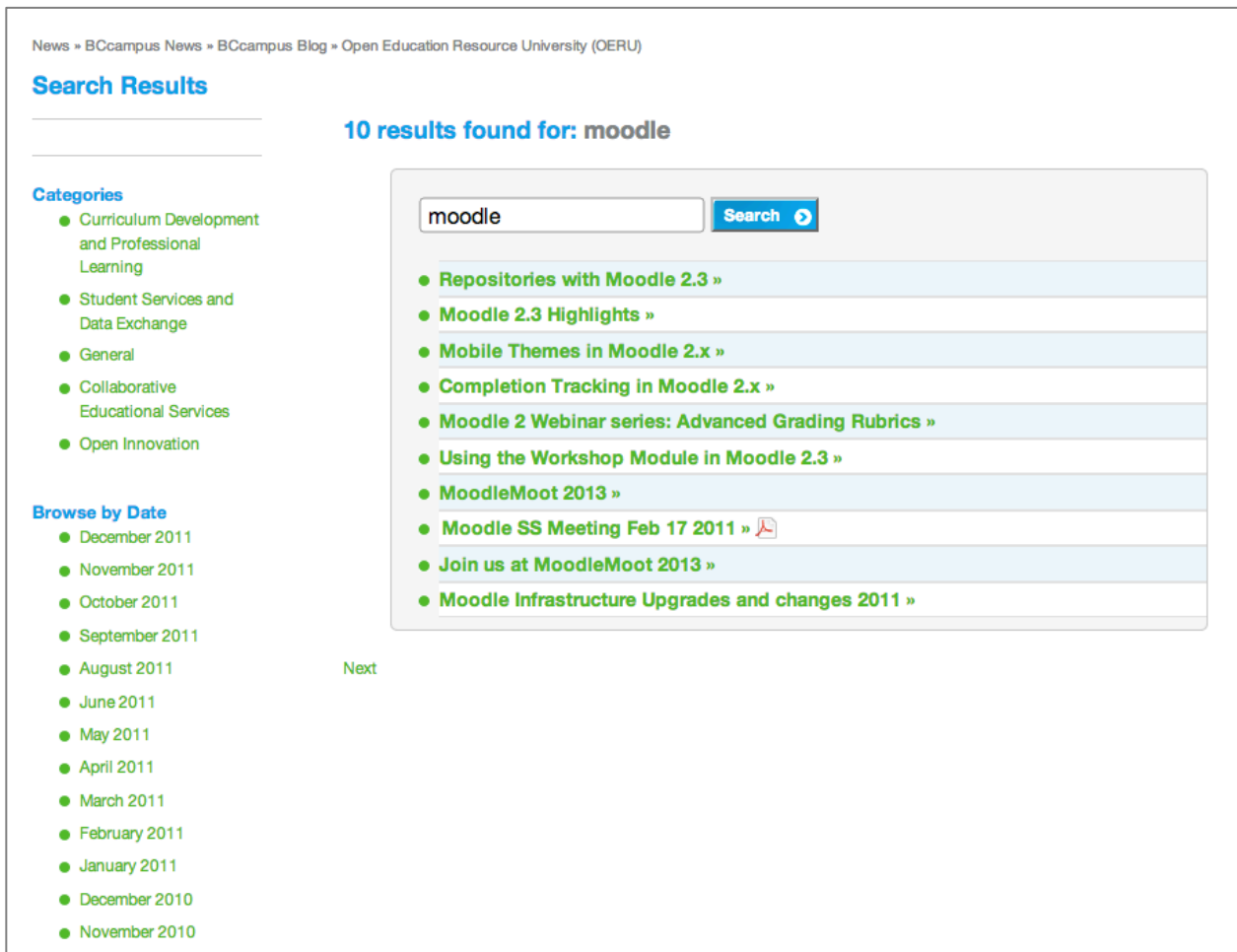


Figure 1: A search done from one of the news blog posts page.

² For more information about red routes, see <http://www.userfocus.co.uk/articles/redroutes.html>.

We designed the test so that users would use the search function at one point or another, especially for Tasks 6 & 7. Indeed, our results confirmed our predictions: nearly all participants had complaints about the search.

One issue is the quality of the search results. For example, on Task 7, users were prompted to look for information about what Moodle is. When users searched for the term "Moodle", the search results were not too useful for them. For the top ten results:

- The first seven results were pages for expired events;
- The eighth result was for a PDF about a BCcampus Moodle shared service meeting from 2010;
- The ninth result was a news blog post about the MoodleMoot 2013 conference;
- The tenth was a news blog post from 2011 about technical upgrades involving Moodle.

There was another page of results, but none of the results gives clear information about Moodle, either. There were several pages on our website which did contain the answer to the question, but they were not in the results. Overall, there appears to be an issue with how pages were indexed.

Another issue that caused users to spend more time searching than necessary was the lack of a contextual description of what each result link was about. This is a standard feature of nearly all search engines. For our current search engine, all we are given are the titles of the page; it doesn't give a summary of what each search result is about as context.

Meanwhile, some common search terms also do not return proper results. For example, entering the term "SFU" into the search bar yielded no results at all, while "Simon Fraser University" returned several pages worth. Similarly, the search term "news letter" instead of "newsletter" yielded no suitable results.

Another issue is related to the design of the search page. If a search term yields more than ten results, it will show "10 results found" regardless, which is confusing for users. However, there is also another page of results, which can be reached by clicking "next". Participant 5 mentioned that the page was too busy and cluttered on the left-hand side. This was the result of him doing a search from a news blog post (as shown in the screenshot above). The left sidebar is very "busy": it shows the left sidebar of wherever the user used the search bar, which is not necessary.

Recommendations

To improve the quality of both the search engine results and design, it is recommended that we do a complete overhaul of the search function. We may either use a third-party search engine service, or use a framework that our in-house staff or contractors can maintain.

For the search engine service option, we can adopt Google Site Search. Everyone has used Google at one point or another, so familiarity with the functional, reliable search engine is a positive factor. However, the option is not free if we don't want advertisements displayed: it costs \$100 per year with a maximum of 20,000 search queries. In addition, the search results are not necessarily better than our current search engine's due to the way our pages are currently indexed.

Another option would be to build our own search engine, but instead use an enterprise search platform, such as Apache Solr. One advantage Solr has over Google Site Search is that we can customize the search engine better. For example, one can do a search based on category, such as including/excluding event pages or news blog posts in their results. Furthermore, Solr is free and open source. Compared to the Google option, it will require more work on our part to build for our site and to maintain.

No Section about Open Educational Resources

The whole premise of BCcampus is to *be* an open educational resource. However, there is little discussion of the topic on our site.

Task 6, the task that asked about OER, was the task that resulted in the most user confusion in the usability test. Participants 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, and 10 – more than half of the participants – felt they did not find enough information to complete the task. Those who did complete it mainly got their information based on our old and mostly outdated blog posts and reports. For example, the “Open Education Resource University (OERU)” news blog page³, published in early 2011 to advertise a meeting, was one of the most accessed pages during this task, as it is one of the top results when doing searches for terms related to OER.

Some participants, such as Participant 1, had no knowledge about what open educational resources were at all. Our site doesn't have a good, easily locatable explanation of what they are, aside from a short definition in the glossary. To make matters worse, the search results for “OER”, “open educational resources”, and related terms don't bring up the glossary page. Ideally, our site should be able to inform people about OER in terms a layman could understand, in addition to more in-depth discussions about them.

Several participants ended up browsing our subsites, such as SOL*R, open.bccampus.ca, and SCoPE, to try to look for more information about OER, since we lacked good information on our own site.

Recommendations

Given how much BCcampus promotes and emphasizes open educational resources, we must make information about OER more visible.

³ <http://www.bccampus.ca/open-education-resource-university-oeru/>

Firstly, the website needs to add this information. We are in the process of creating a new section on our website to discuss the topic of open educational resources. The section should address the following questions, and more:

- What are they?
- Why should everyone adopt them?
- How does BCcampus support and promote their use?
- What is the latest news about OER?

Furthermore, the website needs to make this section accessible to site visitors by linking to it from the front page. One way to work this into our current home page design is to swap out the Open Agenda green button (right below the carousel) with one that links to OER section.

open.bccampus.ca contains a lot of useful information that is specific to the Open Textbooks project. Much of the content from this subsite can be ported to the new OER section on the main BCcampus domain. However, it will be likely that we would want to fully integrate the contents of open.bccampus.ca into the main BCcampus site, given the amount of content from there that would be time-consuming to manually export. However, this integration would take significant time and effort; porting everything over must be done manually. This is because bccampus.ca uses SilverStripe as its content management system, while open.bccampus.ca uses WordPress. However, we are also currently deciding whether to switch our website's CMS from SilverStripe to WordPress; if we do switch, open.bccampus.ca will be much easier to port.

Finally, improving the search function would have a noticeable effect on making information about open educational resources more easily locatable.

Serious Issues

Search Bar on BCcampus News Page Doesn't Work

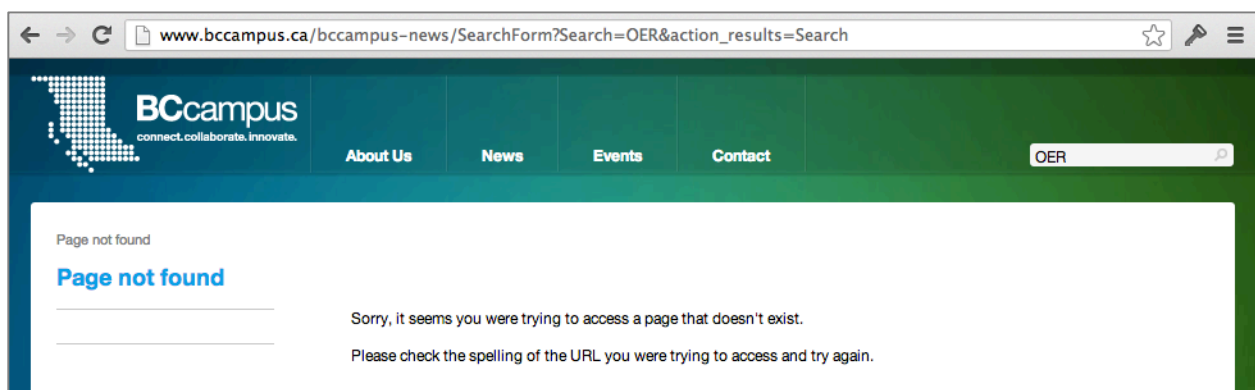


Figure 2: The error page that shows up when searching from the main BCcampus News page.

This issue came up during the tests with Participants 5 and 11. When they tried to use the search bar from the BCcampus News page, the site brought up the “page not found” error page.

We were able to reproduce the error afterwards. It only occurs on that page, and not on any of the pages linked, such as the individual news posts. Furthermore, using the search bar while on the “page not found” page *will* work.

Recommendations

Have Webbuilders Group investigate the issue.

Event Titles Aren't Clear Enough When Shown in the Header's Drop-Down Menu

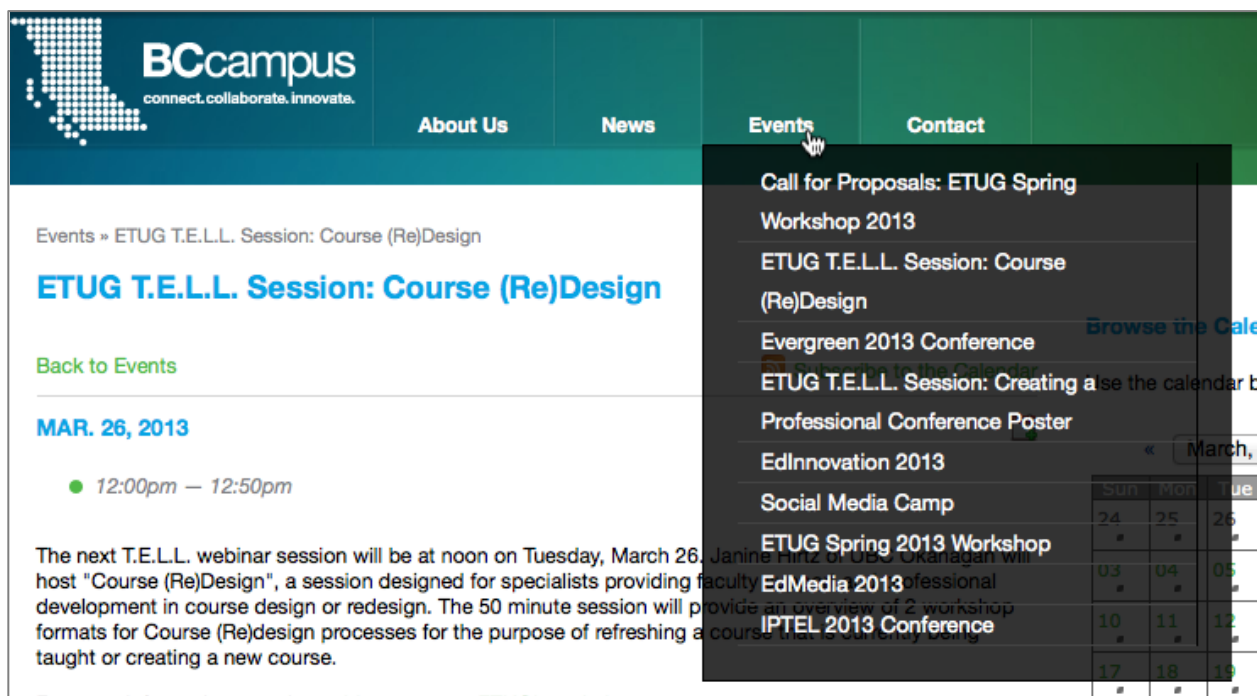


Figure 3: The Events header menu.

Our website is targeted towards a broad audience group, with post-secondary faculty and staff from different backgrounds, specialties, and interests. This especially creates a problem when creating event pages and descriptions.

It can be difficult to give a concise title to an event, yet still have everyone understand what the event is about. Several of our participants have mentioned that they had no sense of what the majority of events were about when they glanced over the events only through the drop-down menu in the header by hovering over the Events link. To get an idea of what each event was about, participants had to look at the full descriptions. As Participant 5 stated:

“If you’re coming here for the first time, you actually have to dig deeper to find out what they are.”

For example, people unfamiliar with ETUG or their T.E.L.L. sessions have no idea what the acronyms mean. However, even most people who have some familiarity with BCcampus wouldn’t know what IPTEL is. Aside from overusing acronyms, a title such as “Evergreen 2013 Conference” is too vague for all our users to understand what the event is about by looking only at its title, unless they had heard about it beforehand.

Recommendations

While the website content editors can try to create better titles that are more explanatory and use fewer acronyms, there simply isn’t a way to always have titles that are descriptive, yet concise. Therefore, one solution would be, when a user hovers over an event link in the header drop-down menu, a submenu with the description of the event would appear to its right. We can ask Webbuilders Group, or one of our in-house technical staff, to implement such a solution on our website.

In addition, the description pages themselves should also be explaining the certain acronyms, terms, and so on. For terms that we may use a lot, but may not be obvious to all users, such as ETUG or MOOCs, we can make use of the <abbr> tag in HTML⁴. When a term enclosed in an <abbr> tag is hovered over, a tooltip will appear with our explanation of what the term means.

What BCcampus Does Isn’t Clear Enough

Participant 6, the senior academic administrator who was not too familiar with BCcampus, stated the following:

“When I go to the Cornell University website, I have a pre-loaded notion of what it is because it’s a university. But with you, I have no idea what you do, so I need that information front and centre.”

Participants 1, 2, and 11 shared a similar opinion that we need to make it clearer who we are, what we are about and what we do, especially on the home page. Visitors to the site often do not have much time to explore it, so we have to communicate this information up front.

We seem to also have issues with the About Us page being too well hidden on the home page. The two main ways of reaching the About Us page from the home page – the blue subheading below the green buttons, and the option in the heading’s menu bar – do not make it obvious enough that those are hyperlinks. (See the “Header Titles Aren’t Clear Enough That They’re Links” and “Services Links on Front Page Aren’t Clear Enough” sections below.)

⁴ More information can be found at W3Schools: http://www.w3schools.com/tags/tag_abbr.asp.

Recommendations

Make it clearer that the blue subheading and the About Us text in the header menu are links; see the discussion of the two issues later on in this report for more information.

We can also make better use of the About Us section on the front page and/or improve its visibility. One way to do so would be to make the “learn” image clickable, linking to the About Us page. Alternatively, we can swap the stock image with another Creative Commons-licensed graphic that better illustrates what we do. Another way would be to move the section to be above the carousel, with the same width it; the image can be shrunk or removed entirely.

For those who are not familiar with BCcampus’ organizational structure, we can help make more obvious what services we provide and what projects we support. This can be done by displaying a submenu listing the services and projects to the right of the menu that opens under About Us in the header when one of the three categories is hovered over with the mouse.

Participant 3 also suggested that we make it clearer where users can find things that are relevant to them. Instead of presenting services and programs using the three official organizational categories, which would be more confusing for our users, gear them towards types of users: services for institutions, services for students, and services for faculty.

Medium Issues

Events Lack Categorization

Currently, all events are grouped and displayed together, regardless of the type of event. Participant 5 encountered this issue, and found that this made navigation more difficult and time-consuming; it should be easier to tell whether a certain event is a conference, a workshop, a webinar, a call for proposals, and so on.

Recommendations

Have Webbuilders Group look into implementing a system to categorize events in a way similar to how the news blog categorizes the blog posts. However, in case an event falls into more than one category, we should also be able to add to more than one category. Some categories that can be included are:

- Conference
- Workshop
- Webinar
- ETUG Call for Proposals
- General

Ideally, it should be easy for users to sort events while in the Events page. The Events header drop-down menu should also be changed so that the menu displays the categories first, and each category may be hovered over to display the events in each category.

Tag List Takes Up Too Much Space



Figure 4: The tag list on the BCcampus News page.

When Participant 9 was browsing the BCcampus News page, she found our “wall of tags” at the bottom of the page. This list of tags, which contained every tag we had ever used since we started the news blog, almost completely filled up her entire screen.

In addition, there is no attempt to emphasize which tags are used most often in our posts; the obscure “TAACT” tag, used in a single post, is given the same priority as “ApplyBC”, which was used in five posts.

Recommendations

A better way to manage tags would be to emphasize only the tags most used, much like how open.bccampus.ca does now. It makes the best use of space, and is visually appealing, since the tags with the highest amount of use are emphasized with a large font size.



Figure 5: The tag list on open.bccampus.ca.

Lack of Commonality Between bccampus.ca and open.bccampus.ca

Participants 2 and 9 were also questioning why open.bccampus.ca was a separate site. Despite how tightly integrated the contents and ideologies of open.bccampus.ca and the main BCcampus site, they found it somewhat confusing that they had to browse a completely different site, with a completely different layout and little appearance of affiliation with bccampus.ca, to try and find the information they needed to solve the task.

A few participants found the existing method of getting to open.bccampus.ca from our site – through a link in the featured section under the heading “Priority” – to be somewhat confusing. The term “priority” didn’t mean much to them, and to get to open.bccampus.ca, they had to go to an intermediary news blog posting.

Recommendations

As we will be merging open.bccampus.ca with the main site, this will no longer be a problem. However, it would be useful to take the feedback from open.bccampus.ca and apply it to our other satellite sites – see the related “Unclear Purpose of BCcampus Sites” section under Minor Issues.

Difficult to Go to BCcampus Main Site from Our Satellite Sites

For some participants, after they opened a link to one of our projects and services (for those where the target audience is for academic professionals), they noticed that it was difficult to go back to the main BCcampus site without clicking the back button on their browser or manually re-opening the site.

On SOL*R, there is a “this site supported by BCcampus” notice at the top of every page. However, this notice does not actually link back to the main site. There is a link back at the very bottom of the footer, but it is not very easily noticeable. SCOPE’s header also has a BCcampus logo on the right-hand side, although it doesn’t link back to the main site. There are similar issues on Learn Together Collaboratory, BC Moodle Users, and Provincial Practical Nursing Program CoP, although none of the test participants visited those three satellite sites.

Neither ETUG nor open.bccampus.ca has this problem. ETUG (which is not hosted on the bccampus.ca domain) has a “supported by BCcampus” notice in the footer, and links back to the main site. open.bccampus.ca has the same BCcampus notice as SOL*R’s, but it does link back to the main site. reports.bccampus.ca also has a link back in its logo. Even then, we found occurrences of testers not realizing the logo was also a link back to our site (such as Participant 7).

In addition, Participant 9 got to the open.bccampus.ca site through our “Priority” notice on the front page. The link to open.bccampus.ca opened in the same browser tab by default. As she didn’t notice that the BCcampus logo at the top was clickable, she was

stuck, and had to go back to our main site using the back button on her browser. There often isn't an indication that a link is an external link.

Not everyone had issues, however. Participant 3 remarked that it was easy to get back from the open.bccampus.ca site, although she was more familiar with BCcampus and its services.

Recommendations

Each satellite site should link back to the bccampus.ca main site through a clickable logo or a prominently sized link. In addition, each link to external sites should be opened in a new window, and should have mouseover text that mentions that is an external link.

For the student services sites, such as ApplyBC and CoursesBC, this is not an issue, since their users are typically not part of bccampus.ca's target audience.

reports.bccampus.ca Interface is Unintuitive, and Other Issues

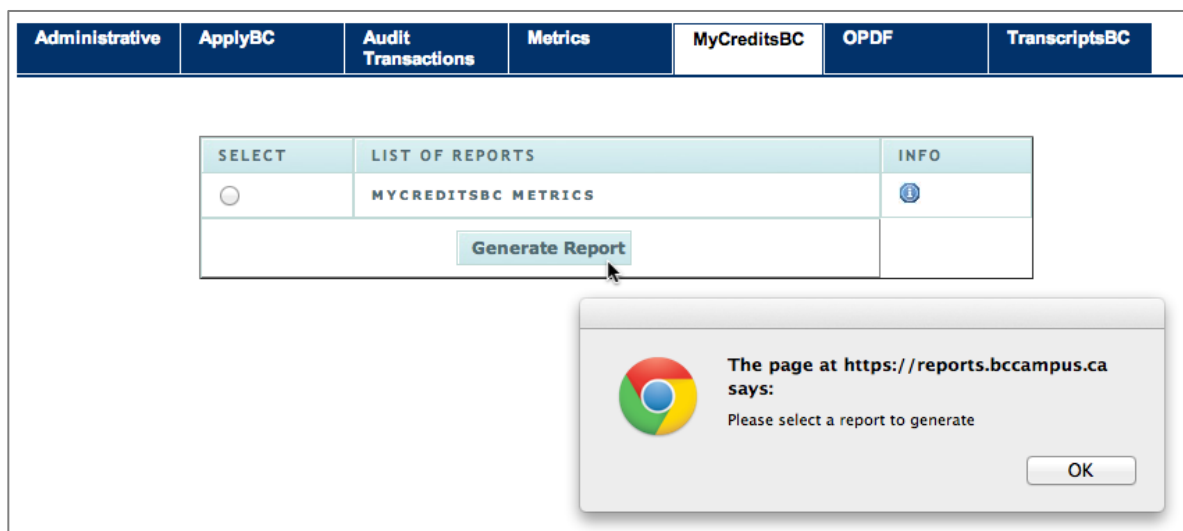


Figure 6: Attempting to generate a MyCreditsBC report without clicking the radio button.

While reports.bccampus.ca was not officially included within the scope of our usability testing, numerous participants did visit the subsite during their various tasks. While there, we observed numerous issues while using that site.

Firstly, if the user tries to generate a report without selecting a report, a pop-up dialogue box will state, "Please select a report to generate". Participants 7 and 8 encountered this issue, and spent a lot of time trying to figure out the error until they realized they had to select a report using the radio buttons on the left hand side.

Secondly, while the Info button for each report – which provides a description when clicked – was visible enough to participants, we found that the users had to constantly

click the buttons. This was because the titles didn't provide them with enough information for what each report was about.

In addition, Participant 7 encountered a problem where she was trying to generate a MyCreditsBC Metrics report using Internet Explorer. When she tried to generate a report, nothing appeared below the grey box; only the white window was showing. She tried with different institutions, but nothing turned up. Since we were unable to reproduce the error on any browser two weeks after the test, we believe that it may have been a server issue that occurred on the day of testing, or was an issue that was fixed after we did testing with Participant 7. Note that MyCreditsBC reports were the only ones this participant tried to generate.

Recommendations

One way to fix the first issue would be to do away with the radio buttons and the Generate Report button, and instead generate a report by clicking on the report title. This method requires fewer mouse clicks by the user. Another way is to disable the Generate Report button until a report has been selected; in addition, the radio buttons to select the reports can be made more prominent and obvious to users.

For the second issue, we suggest removing the Info button, expanding the width of the table and the column, and displaying the description text from each Info button below the title. The goal of this fix is also to reduce the amount of unnecessary mouse clicks.

Minor Issues

Carousel's Title Does Not Act as a Link

One minor issue that one of our participants found was that the blue text on each slide in the front page's carousel was not actually a link. To read more about the carousel story, the user had to click the little green "more" link to the right of the description text underneath the title.

Recommendations

Make the blue title be a clickable link to the slide's story. Ask Webbuilders to modify the carousel code.

Header Titles Aren't Clear Enough That They're Links

Web users are used to the convention that hyperlinks are clearly indicated, and stand out from regular, non-linked text. The drop-down menus for About Us and Events in the header abide by this convention: they turn green when hovered over, and remain white when they are not.

However, this is not the case for the four link regions in the header menu: About Us, News, Events, and Contact. Their text remains white, even when the region/text is hovered over. (See Figure 3 as an example.) Participant 11 didn't notice at first that About Us was a link: she only noticed the links inside the drop-down menu since they turn green when hovered over, and wasn't able to find the About Us page until we pointed it out in the debriefing. She listed this as among the biggest issues she had with the site.

Recommendations

When the user hovers over the title of one of the four buttons in the header, have the title turn green. This can be changed in the CSS markup.

Services Links on Front Page Aren't Clear Enough

The front page contains "badges" that lead to our sites for programs and services. However, not everyone will know what each of these services is for. For example, Participant 1 did not know all our services too well – especially those for Professional Learning – although the presence of the badges do help him understand that they (likely) were external links to the services' sites. He felt that having a brief description of what each linked service is about would have helped.

On a related note, some participants did not realize that the text in the blue subheading were hyperlinks that led to pages on our site containing more information about the services.

Recommendations

Insert some functionality in the website HTML/CSS code so that when a user hovers over the badge, a tooltip appears, with a short description of what each service is about.

In addition, the Online Collaborative Programs should also be changed from text links into badges for consistency, since they are also external links to their respective program subsites.

Finally, much like the issue with the header menus as mentioned earlier, there should be a visual cue that those blue subheadings are links. For example, make the blue region pop out, or have the text change colour.



Figure 7: The external links on the home page.

Open Agenda as a Green Button: Should Not Be the Highest Priority

The majority of participants found the green buttons on the home page to be very helpful. They stand out amongst other things on the page well; they are often the first things seen on the home page when they first arrive, and shows up as links to places they want to go.

From what we had seen, the Reports button was highly used by our participants. Contact and Collaborative were used to a lesser degree, mainly because the pages they linked to were easily locatable using the header or footer navigation. However, the Open Agenda link appeared to be the least helpful for users, as it was simply the corporate mission statement. While the page was useful for our users to find out more about the company beyond what was on the About Us page, many of our site's visitors don't have a lot of free time to spend on our site.

Recommendations

We should change the Open Agenda button so that it points to a page that deserves to be more visible. As mentioned earlier, the most ideal link in the long term would be to the new Open Educational Resources section on the site.

Open Agenda is a subpage of About Us, so it can still be accessed through the left sidebar while browsing that section; it can also be accessed using the link in the footer.

Unclear Purpose of BCcampus Sites

Participant 2 also asked us a good question about how we want to present the purpose of our main site and subsites.

- a) Do we want to have each of our satellite sites be more aligned visually so that we can push our brand more?
- b) Do we want to have the BCcampus site be more of an annual review kind of site, where the audience is upper-level, not end users? Branding is not important for the satellite sites; instead, what is more important is that the service is available.

He noted that right now, we're trying to be both. The side effect of this is that our sites do not do a particularly good job for either purpose.

Recommendations

It is suggested that we go with the option to align the branding of our satellite sites to some degree. This can be done as easily as placing a common header/footer menu bar that states the site is part of the family of BCcampus services or programs, and allow the user to navigate to our other sites using the menu bar.

Latest News and Upcoming Events Sections on Home Page Look Too Similar

Participant 9 found that the Latest News and Upcoming Events sections looked too similar due to their identical layouts.

Recommendations

Move the Upcoming Events from the right column to the left extra-wide column, and change it to a more horizontal format.

The screenshot shows two sections: 'Latest news' and 'Upcoming Events'. Each section contains a list of items with dates, titles, and brief descriptions. Each item also has a 'Comments' and 'Read More' link.

Section	Date	Title	Description
Latest news	26 MAR	BCcampus Partner Spotlight: Lambda Solutions	While BCcampus is known for innovation in connecting British Columbia's post-secondary institutions, we can't do it all alone.
	22 MAR	7 YouTube Channels to Make You Smarter	It's the third Friday of the month and we're trying some new here at the BCcampus blog.
	21 MAR	Planned Outages	The following BCcampus websites will not be available on Thursday, March 28, 2013, from approximately 4:30 am - 8 am,...
	20 MAR	Lessons from Connecticut: how eTutoring works	Distance and online learning has changed, and so has the need to support online learners.
Upcoming Events	27 MAR	Moodle Webinar Series: Taming the Gradebook	The Moodle Gradebook can be a teacher's best friend or worst enemy.
	10 APR	Evergreen 2013 Conference	BCcampus is pleased to be a sponsor of the Evergreen 2013 Conference, taking place at the Morris J.
	16 APR	ETUG T.E.L.L. Session: Creating a Professional Conference Poster	The April 16th T.E.L.L. webinar session, hosted by Linda Apps, will focus on the construction of a professional conference poster.
	01 MAY	EdInnovation 2013	Our colleagues at Athabasca University will be hosting the EdInnovation 2013 conference in Calgary, which will bring together education technology...

Figure 8: The layout of the right column on the home page, containing the news and events sections.

Suggestions

The following are features that either we, or the participants believe would be “nice to have”, although are not necessary.

Different Newsletters Based on Top-Level Taxonomies

At the moment, we have a single newsletter that is sent out to everyone who is subscribed on our mailing list. Participant 2 mentioned it would be great if the signup asked him what kind of information he was interested in.

Recommendations

We can send out multiple newsletters containing different stories, and allow users to choose on our signup page which newsletter(s) to subscribe to.

The signup page can list of a series of checkboxes, each corresponding to one newsletter, based on BCcampus' organizational structure:

- General: a mix of different news stories, like it is currently
- Student Services and Data Exchange
- Curriculum Development and Applied Research (including OER news)
- Shared Services and Collaborative Programs

Alternatively, the signup page can ask what topics the user is interested in receiving news about, such as OER, news and stories about shared services, or maintenance alerts. However, it may not always be possible that we will have enough news posts to fill up an entire category-specific newsletter to send out every two weeks. In addition, there is no easy way to dynamically generate custom newsletters with different stories when a user selects more than one interest category.

For our current subscribers, we can advertise the ability to customize our stories as the top headline on one of our newsletters, and have them go to a page on our site to choose which categories to subscribe to. For those who decide to subscribe to new categories and deselect the General one, we will need to remove them manually.

Not all of the newsletter categories need to be sent out at the same time. Perhaps stagger the timing so that two categories are sent out per week. Regardless, do not create too many mailing lists; otherwise, the newsletter will become difficult to manage and to allocate time for.

Add a Newsletter Subscription Box on the Home Page

Participant 5 stated that there should ideally be a way to sign up to the newsletter on the home page so that users don't have to go searching for it.

Recommendations

Add a newsletter subscription box on the left section of the home page near the bottom of the page. If we also allow subscribing to newsletters based on categories, find a way to present those subscription choices compactly.

Conclusions

More than thirty people responded to our test invitation, the facilitation of the sessions went smoothly, we obtained a good quantity of feedback and data, and we got answers to the main topics we wanted to address. Therefore, we consider the study to be a success.

As predicted, we found a large number of issues with the website. Some were critical issues that impeded users' ability to complete common, important activities and tasks, while other issues were more minor. In the following months, we will implement the recommended changes to our website to improve usability.

Nonetheless, our participants also gave a fair amount of praise about our website. The most significant points are listed below.

- As discussed earlier, the green buttons on the home page were highly visible, and for the most part, they drew users down to the information they needed quickly.
- The newsletter signup process was clear, simple, and error-free.
- Participants agreed that the appearance of the website was professional-looking. The colours are warm, the layout was generally clean, and there was enough whitespace.
- The phone number to general inquiries was easily locatable.
- The carousel on the home page was a useful way for participants to read up on the latest news.
- The site appeared fresh and up-to-date with the latest news and events.

I personally would also like to note a few things to consider the next time usability testing is done.

- Setup time could definitely be improved. Practice setting up the camera and tripod, so that time is not wasted getting them both setup.
- If using our Canon Rebel DSLR, video must be recorded using the lowest resolution (640 by 480 pixels) to avoid problems with the camera stopping recording prematurely, which happened during testing with the first two participants⁵. In addition, the camera is also limited to recording no more than 30 minutes of video. In the future, consider borrowing another DSLR camera or a true video camera, or if we supply our own computer for participants to use during testing, stick to using a screen-sharing program, such as ScreenFlow.
- We did not test any faculty members; we did not select any for site visits, while none of the faculty members invited during the remote testing round were available. In addition, we had a suggestion during in-person testing that we

⁵ We later discovered that the camera could not record files larger than approximately four gigabytes; as we were initially recording high-definition video, which took up a lot of space, this limit was reached quickly.

should do some usability testing with staff from the Ministry of Education, since they may have a very different perspective on the website. Therefore, if we do more usability testing for our corporate website in the future, we should make sure to include members from this group.

- Adobe Connect is a good program to do remote usability test over. However, be sure to factor at least five minutes in to account for technical issues, and to give detailed instructions; all three participants had issues at the beginning, which caused the test to exceed 25 minutes.

Appendix A: Pre-Test Questionnaire

Note that the original questionnaire, testing script, and observer form documents used during testing may be downloaded from the Marketing and Communications space on Confluence.

Question 1

Which of the following best describes your current educational job role? Select all options that apply.

- a. Faculty
 - b. Academic administrator (e.g., director of teaching and learning centres, registrar services)
 - c. Information technology staff (e.g., systems administrator, IT director, IT support)
 - d. Other educational worker (e.g., instructional designer, academic advisor, librarian).
- Please specify: _____

Question 2

How many years have you worked in the post-secondary education sector?

- a. Fewer than 5
- b. 5 – 10
- c. 11 – 15
- d. 16 – 20
- e. 21 – 25
- f. Greater than 25

Question 3

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 meaning “little to no knowledge” and 5 meaning “advanced knowledge”, how experienced are you with computers and Internet usage in general?

1 2 3 4 5

Question 4

Have you taught previously taught a course in which a learning management system (e.g., WebCT, Moodle) was used, or managed or implemented an LMS?

Yes No

Question 5

Have you used, or have been involved with online educational resources (OER)?

Yes No

Question 6

If you answered “no” to Question 5, where would you look for information to help you get started with OER? _____

Appendix B: Testing Tasks

These were the nine tasks given during the in-person test. The abbreviated remote test used only tasks 3, 5, 6, and 8.

1. For the first task, please open the BCcampus home page. I'll give you around 45 seconds to freely explore this page without interruption. After the time is up, I'll be asking you a few questions about the home page, though you may continue exploring the page. During the task, please do not click on anything just yet. Again, please remember to think out loud.
2. I'm going to give you 3 minutes to freely explore the rest of this website. Again, please remember to speak aloud as you do so (this is critical). I will tell you when the 3 minutes are up.
3. You need a summary of what services we currently offer to students and academic professionals (such as yourself). Using this website, find out how you can get this information.
4. You need to phone BCcampus to confirm when a (theoretical) seminar we are sponsoring will be taking place, since you've been given conflicting information about its date. Using this site, locate information about which phone number you should call.
5. You are interested in attending professional development events to get better at educating online. Using the website, find out if there are any events that suit your needs.
6. A colleague of yours mentions hearing something about "open educational resources" but he isn't sure what it is. Using this site, determine whether or not it contains information that would address his question.
7. A colleague of yours mentions hearing something called "Moodle" but she isn't sure what it is. Using this site, determine whether or not it contains information that would address her question.
8. You need a detailed overview of which of the BCcampus services your institution uses/participates in, as you need to summarize this data in a report you will be writing. Find out whether this information can be found on the site.
9. You would like to stay updated with BCcampus activities. Go through the complete process of subscribing to our newsletter, including confirming your email address.

Appendix C: Debriefing Questions

Only questions 1, 5, 6, and 8 were used during the remote test.

1. What is your overall impression of the website?
2. If you had to give the website a grade, from A to F, where A was exceptional and F was failing, what grade would you give it, and why?
3. Was it easy to find your way around the website? Why?
4. Was the most important information, such as what services we provide, was easy to locate? Why?
5. What are two things you like best about the website?
6. What are two things you like least about the website?
7. If you could make one significant change to this website, what change would you make?
8. Do you have any other comments, suggestions, or questions?