

Volunteer Website for the Older Adult

Melissa L. McDonald

Iowa State University
Department of Graphic Design
297 College of Design Iowa State University 50010
Ames / Iowa, United States
mlm@iastate.edu

1 Introduction

The need for volunteering has always been high, and the desire to volunteer has also been equally as significant especially for those who have retired or are nearing retirement. For those in the senior age group, volunteering is one way to give back to the community and to stay active.¹ In this particular study, the ages of the participants ranged from 55 to 70. With this in mind, a prototype website for this particular age group was created that easily and efficiently found volunteer work around the area in which the individuals reside.

The primary objective of this website prototype is to introduce senior citizens to how technology can aid them in getting involved in their communities. With the use of this volunteer website, users are able to find ways to give back to their community with ease and as minimal confusion as possible.

2 Design Strategy

The website is password protected, and makes sign up and registration easier for its users. The users are able to find volunteer work with local organizations such as animal shelters or church groups. The organization is divided into two groups: “being a hero” or “need a hero.” Therefore, the website’s visitors are given an idea of whom it is they will be helping or who it is that will be helping them with a brief explanation. The inspiration for a tight knit online community came from that of Tharon W. Howard who said companies who concentrate their products online, “provide a space where users can go, ask questions, and get answers from other users,” in his book *Design to Thrive*.² As the users of the Trusting Hands website prototype continue to use the site to locate and connect with one another, users will feel comfortable with the navigation and feel this website keeps their information private and they are safe.

Much research was needed in order to better clarify the organization and navigation for the Trusting Hands website. Some of the sites were quite informative and

¹ <http://www.urban.org/publications/311325.html>

² Howard, Tharon W. (2010). *Design to Thrive: Creating Social Networks and Online Communities that Last*. Burlington, MA: Elsevier Company.

inspiring such as, <http://www.seniorcorps.gov/>, <http://www.seniorcorps.org/> and <http://www.dosomething.org/>. The Trusting Hands website prototype was created to function in an organized manner, and focus primarily on the volunteer pages, which are referred to as the “hero” pages.

3 Information Architecture

This section of the process for the Trusting Hands website was used in order to better understand the navigation of the entire site. Below is an image how the website functions:

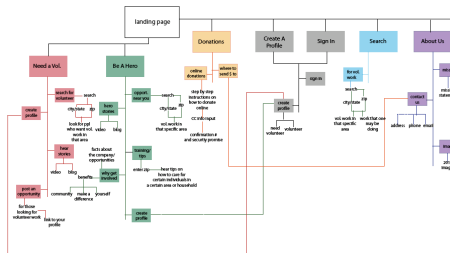


Fig. 1. Information Architecture for the Trusting Hands website

4 Usability Study

The usability study conducted with IRB approval, and five participants that met the age group requirements. The participants’ ages in the user studies were from 55-70 years old, with three people between ages 55-60, one person between 60-65 and one person between ages 70-75. The user study was started with a brief overview of the list of tasks they were to complete and the purpose of the website prototype in order to make them feel more comfortable when they started the user test. The tasks for “being a hero” were as follows:

1. Create a profile
2. Find your matches for people you could help around your area
3. Find opportunities near your area
4. Locate how to read hero stories
5. Find out what the benefits are for being a volunteer
6. Figure out how to look up tips on how to help individuals
7. Upload your volunteer story

5 Usability Study Results and Recommendations

The results were varied from participant to participant, and were highly dependent on each user's knowledge of technology and frequency of Internet use. The demography survey indicates that one participant (70-75) was less knowledgeable in technology; two participants, both between the ages of 55-60, were quite confident in their navigational skills; and the last two participants, one 55-60 and one 60-65, fell somewhere in the middle. Some of the tasks that were seen as more difficult to complete were: creating a profile, finding your matches for people needing help in the area, finding out what the benefits are for being a volunteer, uploading a volunteer story and getting back to the "hero's" profile page.

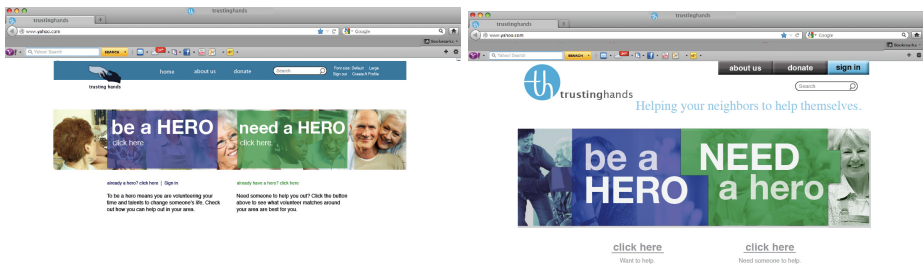


Fig. 2. 1st and 2nd prototypes of the homepage for the Trusting Hands website

When it came to the abilities of the participants, each was able to navigate around the site, but many times they would second-guess themselves. For the first task, "Create a profile," many of the user testers were uncertain where to click to move on to the next page. There were three participants that had to be assisted, but only one failed to click the correct link even with additional assistance; users 1 and 2 were able to complete the task after it was explained to them what each button meant, but user 4 was unable to find the correct button to click to get to the "create a profile" page. After further discussing with the participants, it was determined that the confusion was stemmed from the users not reading the description below the buttons. These descriptions gave a brief explanation of what each part of the site meant. However, all of the participants found the explanations to be too long and therefore did not read it. Because of this, they did not understand the difference between the two phrases and required assistance as to which button to click.

Another issue that arose on the first task was the size of the type. Because the text was too small, the participants were uncertain of where to click and became self-conscious in their decision-making.

In an effort to alleviate the confusion caused by these two issues, the wordings of the definitions were shortened to one sentence each and the text was made bigger. By shortening the length of the explanation the users were more apt to read the full description and obtain the necessary information they needed to determine which button to click.

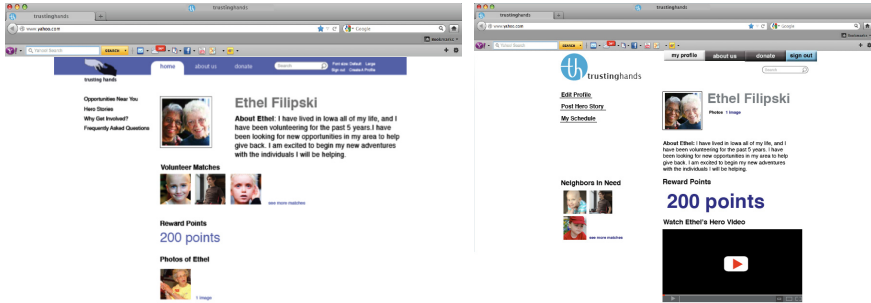


Fig. 3. 1st and 2nd prototypes of the profile page for the Trusting Hands website

For the second task, “Find your matches of people you could help around your area,” all of the participants had difficulty locating this task because it was not located in the side navigation where they wanted it to be. For this particular task, all of the testers took a while looking around the page, leading their mouse over to the side navigation. After they had made their decision a few users realized their mistake and found the correct path to take on their own. However, one applicant was still uncertain where to navigate to and was unable to complete the task without assistance.

In order to resolve the confusion, rearrangement of the profile page was recommended. This made it appear more organized and more easily navigable. The text and imagery were also optimized to make information more easily readable to the site’s users. Taking the advice of the user testers, the “Volunteer Matches” link was recommended to move over to the side navigation, but it was kept separate from the other links, which allowed it to remain part of the main profile page.

In addition, it was advised for the side navigation to be more connected to the content of the page. Instead of having the secondary navigation on the profile page the tabs changed to correspond more with the individual’s profile. The new tabs were: “Edit Profile,” “Post Hero Stories,” and “My Schedule.” These tabs related to the profile page better, and allowed easier navigation.

In the fifth task, “Find out what the benefits are for being a volunteer,” two tabs confused many of the applicants. In particular: “Why Get Involved” and “Frequently Asked Questions”. Users 1 and 4 were uncertain on where to go. Each participant commented of their hesitation, and talked about clicking the “Why Get Involved” tab, but decided on the “Frequently Asked Questions” tab instead. This was not an issue with the tabs or the set up of the page itself, but instead was a misunderstanding of the question asked.

For the seventh task, “Upload your volunteer story,” there were certain testers who were uncertain how to navigate to the hero stories page. When each participant clicked on the “Hero Stories” tab, they did not realize there was a link at the bottom of the page that would allow them to navigate to the upload a hero story page. Although only two participants were unable to complete the task, each user commented on the small size of the text, and said they did not realize there was a link.

In order to better structure the website, the secondary navigation was moved to the “About Us” tab where the users had been looking for it at first. Once the secondary navigation was moved, the Trusting Hands website became more distinct and better organized for its users.

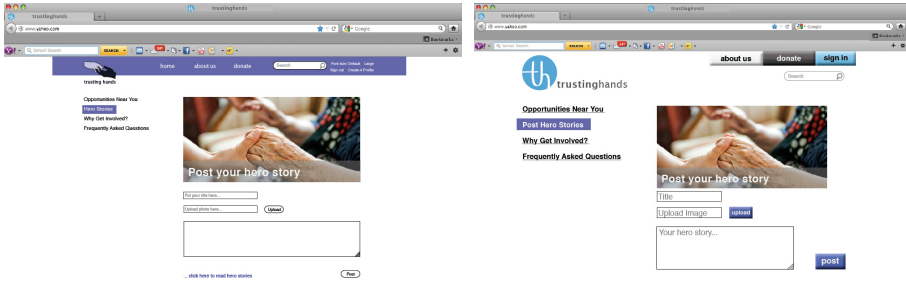


Fig. 4. 1st and 2nd prototypes for the hero stories page of the Trusting Hands website

6 Conclusion

This study found informative facts, and taught me a lot about how to organized a website for seniors. To create a more effective website for seniors, the following should be considered: make text larger, put more readily understandable terminology in the tabs and organize the website in a more efficient manner. The Trusting Hands website was redesigned into a more legitimate website that appeared trustful, which is an issue many seniors have with websites today. This revised prototype website needs a second round of a usability study to investigate how the changes work for the targeted user group.

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References

1. Howard, T.W.: Design to Thrive: Creating Social Networks and Online Communities that Last. Elsevier Company, Burlington (2010)
2. Zedlewski, S.R., Schaner, S.G.: Older Adults Engaged as Volunteers. (May 30, 2006), <http://www.urban.org/publications/311325.html> (February 28, 2013)