USABILITY EVALUATION OF THE IIT MANDI WEBSITE

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Abstract

This report aims at evaluating the usability of the IIT Mandi website in terms of navigation, functionality, etc. based upon a survey taken amongst the students of IIT Mandi who form a major section of its users. The website has also been subjected to testing using the Cambridge Simulator, which in addition to the above mentioned target group of students, also grades the website from the viewpoints of other users who have special needs (differently abled users).

Introduction

The redesign of a website is a prime opportunity to make important changes to content, navigation, and functionality. Also, the objectives of a firm’s website may change with time adapting to the current areas of its interest. Hence, it's good to step back and analyse the business objectives of the site and overall internet efforts, as well as to develop a long-term plan for getting the most from this communication channel.

Excellent sites have great design and navigation. It is important to make sure that the website is clear in terms of its contents and functionality. Doing a website usability evaluation will help highlight areas where site visitors are expected to experience problems, and it provides a thorough analysis of the website's usability strengths and weaknesses.

The IIT Mandi official website is fully designed and managed by its students. The website has gone through a lot of minor changes since its inception based on individual views of the students involved in the Website Information and Networks Group (WING) of IIT Mandi and also from the suggestions of faculty members. But the major sections of the users who use the website are its current and prospective students (at the time of seeking admission into the college). Thus, this report does the job of evaluating the current IIT Mandi website with the survey taken among its current students on various aspects of the website namely, interaction, ease of navigation etc.
Method

❖ Participants –
  o The current students of IIT Mandi
  o The current faculty members
  o Administrative employees of IIT Mandi
  o Some prospective students aiming to gain admission into the college

❖ Materials –
  o The survey/feedback taken from the mentioned participants
  o The Cambridge simulator
  o IIT Mandi website (test target)

❖ Procedure –
  o Assessing the website’s objectives and its intended target group
  o Interacting with the website by posing as prospective and current customers
  o Identifying the website’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (through a survey)
  o Creating a detailed report showing where the site falls short of best practice, and provide actionable site optimization recommendations

❖ Evaluation –
  o Survey - This grades the website in terms of effectiveness, efficiency, reliability and compliance. There are several key performance categories that are used to audit website performance. They include: Marketing, Design, Navigation, Page Layout, Site Content, and Site Features / Technology. These points have also been taken into account.
  o Cambridge Simulator - The general methodology followed can be summarised as under:
    ▪ Run simulation using Cambridge simulator
    ▪ Fetch website usage data from the web server
    ▪ Interpret simulation results and relate them to website logistics
    ▪ Conduct a survey on user satisfaction with the current website
    ▪ Evaluate survey results and relate them to research on website usability guidelines, and determine the shortcomings
    ▪ Design a new prototype accounting for the above limitations
    Evaluate new website to ensure improved performance
Summary of findings

The website is user-friendly in terms of its conciseness, and ease of use.

❖ Strengths
  o Overall user interface is good – the site structure and appearance is simple yet eye-catching.
  o The contents are concise, precise and to the point for all groups of users – simple language.
  o The website is updated regularly (Adding new information)
  o Simple in terms of navigation – optimally interlinked – clear and constant link to the homepage.
  o Lesser time taken for loading – webpage size around 100kb.
  o Good speed while navigating within the website
  o No additional plug-ins are required – animations are avoided
  o Supported by all popular browsers
  o The frequency of encountering with errors like “Page Not Found”, “Connection Timed Out”, etc. is very less.
  o Consistency – the website is internally consistent. Global elements (such as ‘search' fields and navigation) are in the same position throughout the website.
  o Website follows conventions - the visitor does not have to learn a new interface or interaction style to use the website.
  o Website is easily traceable from popular search engines – Google, Yahoo, Bing etc.
  o Research shows that website users do not like to scroll – and almost all the pages of the IIT Mandi website conform to this.

❖ Weaknesses
  o Though the website is being updated regularly, it is not complete. New information is put up but the old information which are no more relevant have not been scrapped off
  o No clear indication of the current location within the website.
  o Not satisfactory in terms of error handling – though the frequency of an error popping out is small, an error once it appears is not handled properly, i.e., no clear links given to get back to the previous normal page viewed.
  o The visual clarity of the website is not good. There are some pages which look cluttered with words wrapped around images.
  o The images used in the website do not have an ‘alt’ attribute – which implies the description of the image given to special user groups (blind) is not good
  o Some links are misleading – the webmail link does not give access to the students webmail account.
  o There are no links for major platforms of student interaction like Facebook, Twitter etc.
Simulation results using Cambridge Simulator

The current IIT Mandi website is as below

Upon doing simulation for visually impaired persons in the Cambridge Simulator for two different degrees of impairment, we get the following two results:
We thus can conclude from the above figures that the contrast of the website is not good enough for visually impaired users.

Conclusions
From the survey, the strengths and weaknesses of the current website is analysed and the corrections were incorporated in the next version of the website. The figure below gives a rough idea of the new website prototype.
Credits

- Prototype Designed by: Shiv Sankar
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