

Heuristic Evaluation

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About this Document

A heuristic evaluation is an informal usability inspection technique in which interface elements are evaluated to see if they conform to generally accepted principles (heuristic). The purpose of reviewing in this manner is to assess the degree to which user and organizational/accessibility requirements are being achieved, identify best practices, and provide feedback in a form that can be used for future development.

General and End User Information

The following review has been conducted to evaluate that usability of the FareCast web site. The purpose of this review is to identify usability issues based on commonly agree upon usability heuristics, evaluation checklists, best practices.

About FareCast.com

Fare Cast is a travel web site that assists individuals in predicting future air fare prices. Based on these predictions the user can then buy tickets at the present time or wait until a future date when the prices are predicted to go down.

The web site uses a good bit of web 2.0 technology and is still in a beta version.

About the Audience

Audience: People who are researching airfares with the anticipation of buying tickets sometime in the near future. Ticket price is probably one of the more important aspects to these individuals.

Knowledge of the Domain

These people have probably traveled a fair amount and are familiar with the concept of buying tickets for air travel. They are also familiar with airports, checking in and the basic elements of travel.

Technical knowledge

These individuals have at least some College education and use computers fairly often both at home and at work. They are open to new technology and don't get intimidated too easily.

Visibility of System Status		
Location feed back is obvious (Where am I)	Always	Location feedback and search criteria are displayed for the current results in the upper left corner of the page. Functions are broken into 2 sections (All times listed and Selected times) and displayed in tabs at the top of the page. The selected tab is highlighted to display status in a dark gray color.
Sense of orientation is obvious (Where can I go)	Always	Once a search is done the selection links appear in blue which, make it obvious that they are clickable links. However, once these links are clicked a new browser window is opened and takes the user to the selected airlines booking site.

Match Between System and Real World		
Site structure is simple	Rarely	Due to the amount of advanced filtering options (including sliders,

+ understandable		radio buttons, check boxes, etc), the site can seem quite complex and a little overwhelming at first glance.
Navigation is clear and understandable	Rarely	There are too many navigation elements in this section. Its hard for the user to understand which action they should take. Furthermore, the site contains a lot of sponsored advertisements that look like navigational elements or site components.
Workflow or processes are natural and/or follow logical order	Sometimes	For a travel/airfare site the workflow is fairly consistent within the industry, user searches for fares, selects a ticket then purchases the ticket. However, the workflow is slightly awkward and due to the overwhelming amount of filtering options and because the user is taken off of the site to purchase tickets.
Main objects are easily identifiable	Rarely	It is not immediately apparent where to begin when taken to the home page. The highlight or main area of focus on the home page is the left section of the page which consists of a promotional graphic that is not clickable. The right area of the page that displays the search box is not as prominent and tends to get lost.
Information is relevantly chunked	Always	Information is chunked and there are clear sections within the page. The left side of the page consists of filter options, the center consist of results and the right side consist of advertisements. However, the advertisements are designed in a way that makes them appear as banner ads.
Labels are simple + understandable	Always	Labels appear to be consistent with industry standards
Main tasks are supported	Always	Users can search for air fares, filter results, and purchase tickets.
Links are not broken	Never	No links clicked were broken
Search is available	Always	Both a standard and flexible search are available. However, there is not a search help or tips function.

User Control and Freedom

User Freedom	Always	The site uses web 2.0 technology and the user can change or manipulate there results at any time and get real-time feedback. The site has many advance filtering options.
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Consistency and Standards

Conventions are in	Frequently	Links, buttons and text elements are treated consistently across
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place and followed		the site.
Labeling is consistent	Frequently	Labeling is consistent both within the site and within industry standards
Buttons have consistent look and action	Sometimes	Buttons have the same consistent look however, some have different actions. For example some of the links open within the same browser window and some take the user to another web site. Both link types are visually treated in the same manner
Content is well – written, relevant, and related to topic	Always	Content is relevant to purpose. Tone and voice is appropriate.
Content is formatted for online reading	Frequently	(Home page & Search results) Most content appears within short sets of list items which, makes it easy to scan
Language is appropriate to site & Uncommon jargon is avoided	Frequently	(Home page & Search results) Language is consistent with other travel related web sites.

Error Prevention

Natural language is used to describe errors	N/A	Was unable to produce an error when moving through the site.
Action to resolve error is presented & actionable	N/A	See above

Recognition Rather Than Recall

Instructions are visible and easy to understand	Sometimes	Instructions are available on the home page and search results page. However, they are not displayed in a way that is visibly apparent to the user.
Actions are easy to understand and intuitive	Rarely	There are no explicit indications on how to move through a process.

Flexibility and Efficiency of Use

Highly important information is apparent	Frequently	Search results are presented prominently within the middle of the page with the filtering options on the left.
Highly important	Sometimes	Search boxes on the home page are not as apparent as the

actions are apparent		promotional content elements. Furthermore, the ability to modify a search is not visually apparent on the search results page.
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Aesthetic and Minimalist Design		
All “pages” elements perform a role (no clutter)	Sometimes	Site design is very minimal as far as colors and layout are concerned. However, there is a lot of information displayed on the search results page can be a little overwhelming. The advertisements on the right column of the page tend to look a little too much like site functionality.
Visual design is appropriate to the site	Always	The visual design is simple, minimal and is appropriate for the site
Visual design supports navigation and info design	Always	The visual design is simple with a minimal color scheme and a consistent treatment of elements within the page.

Help with Errors		
Easy to locate	Sometimes	Help documentation is available on the home page and within certain features of the search results page. However, this information is not displayed in a visibly apparent way. There is also a support link in the footer of the page that provides contact information, FAQ's, beta limitations, privacy policy and terms of use
Easy to understand & actionable	N/A	N/A
Contact names & information are available	Sometimes	A general contact form is available through a "support" link within the footer of the page.

Provide Help (if needed)		
Content is easy to understand and follow	N/A	N/A