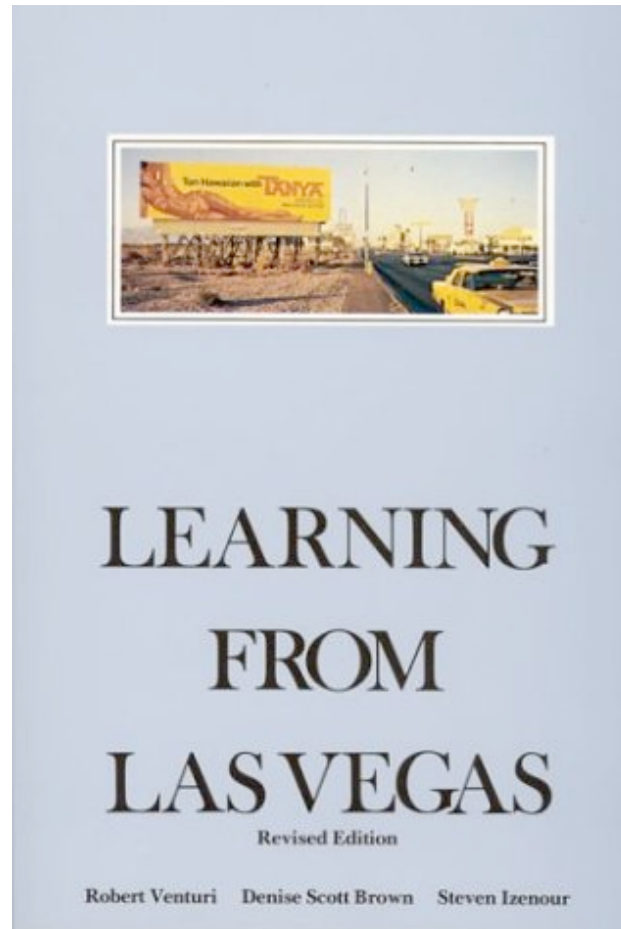


Learning Interaction Design from Las Vegas\$

Dan Saffer



Learning from Las Vegas

Any unattributed quotes I'm referencing in this talk all come from this seminal book by Robert Venturi, written in the late 1960s and revised in the early 1970s.



This is a city?

When I talk about Las Vegas for this talk, I am mostly talking about The Strip. Las Vegas certainly isn't a traditional city (although certainly the surrounding areas certainly are). On the Strip, there are no things we expect from a main street: no post office, schools, hospitals, etc. There's very little attractions to see in Vegas--the city itself makes the attractions. It seems like everything is chaotic.



Learn from this?!?



Learn from this?!?

Withholding judgement may be used as a tool to make later judgement more sensitive. This is a way of learning from everything.

The first lesson from the Learning from Las Vegas book. We need to look around us with clear vision. Tibor Kalman said he only found inspiration in high art and what he called the vernacular. Las Vegas is about as vernacular as it gets.

Disorder is only an order that we cannot see. —Henri Bergson

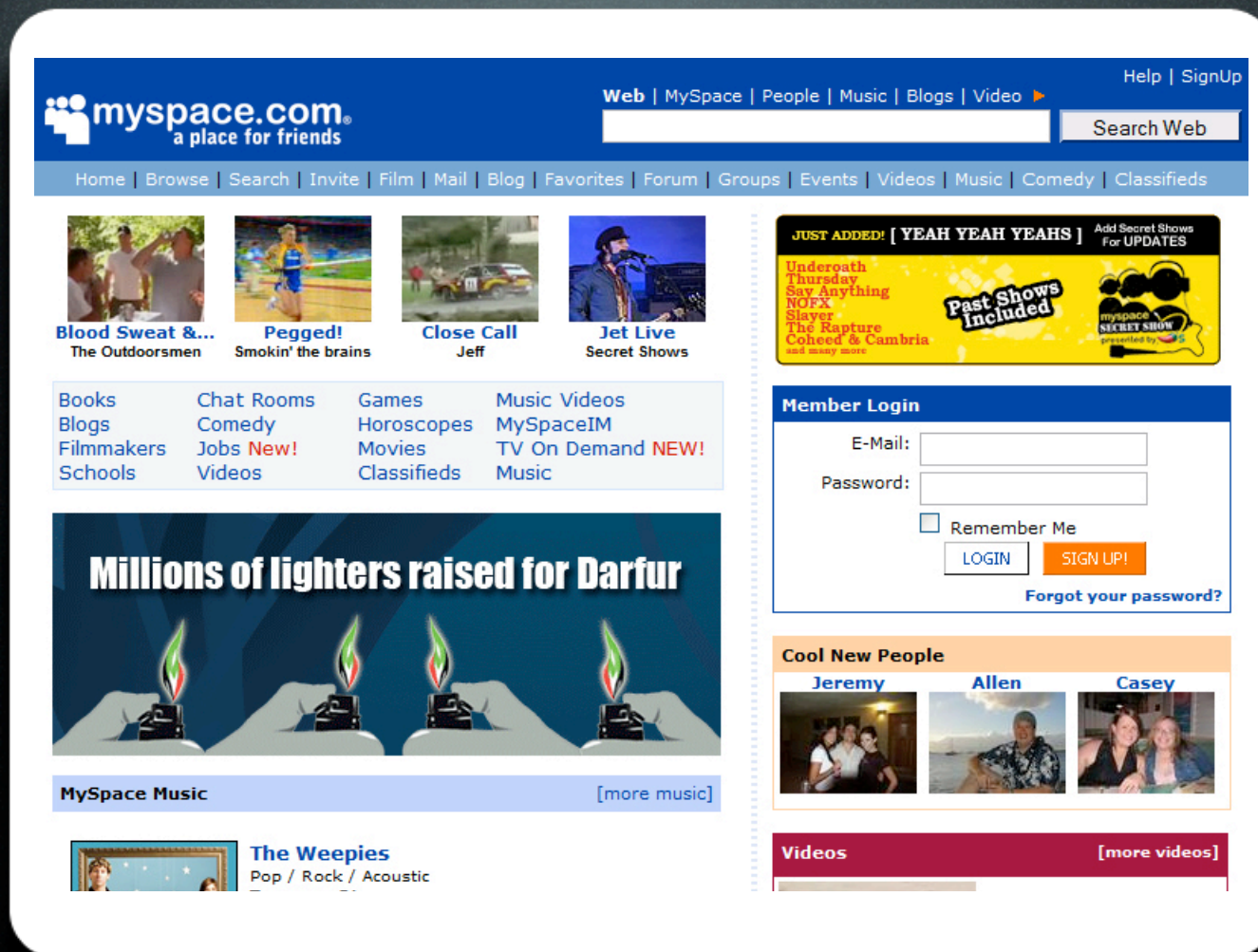
The second lesson about learning from Las Vegas. We need to sometimes look through the “junk” and what we perceive as “bad design” to see what is really going on.



An Order We Cannot See

It's not a big leap from this...

to this!



An Order We Cannot See

It's not a big leap from this...

to this!

MySpace isn't designed.
—Tim Brown, IDEO CEO

Designers now treat MySpace the same way architects used to treat Las Vegas. You get ridiculous statements like this one. I suppose MySpace sprung from the head of Zeus? What he means is MySpace isn't designed the way I would design it.



Class

You can't talk about Vegas without talking about class. But not this kind of class, babycat.



Class

This kind of class. All you can eat buffets for overweight schlubs.

Making the correct design choices sometimes means designing so it is appropriate for the audience: an audience that is unaccustomed to “fancy” design--that is, design that we as designers would consider “good” design.

Does this mean that we should discard our design sensibilities when designing now? I’ll come back to that.

As Experts with Ideals, who pay lip service to the social sciences, **they build for Man rather than for people**—this means, to suit themselves, that is to suit their own particular upper-middle class values, which they assign to everyone.

Venturi says this about Architects, but it easily applies to designers as well.

In other words, designers spend time designing for an idealized person—a person that not surprisingly turns out to be someone almost exactly like ourselves.

We need instead to design for people.



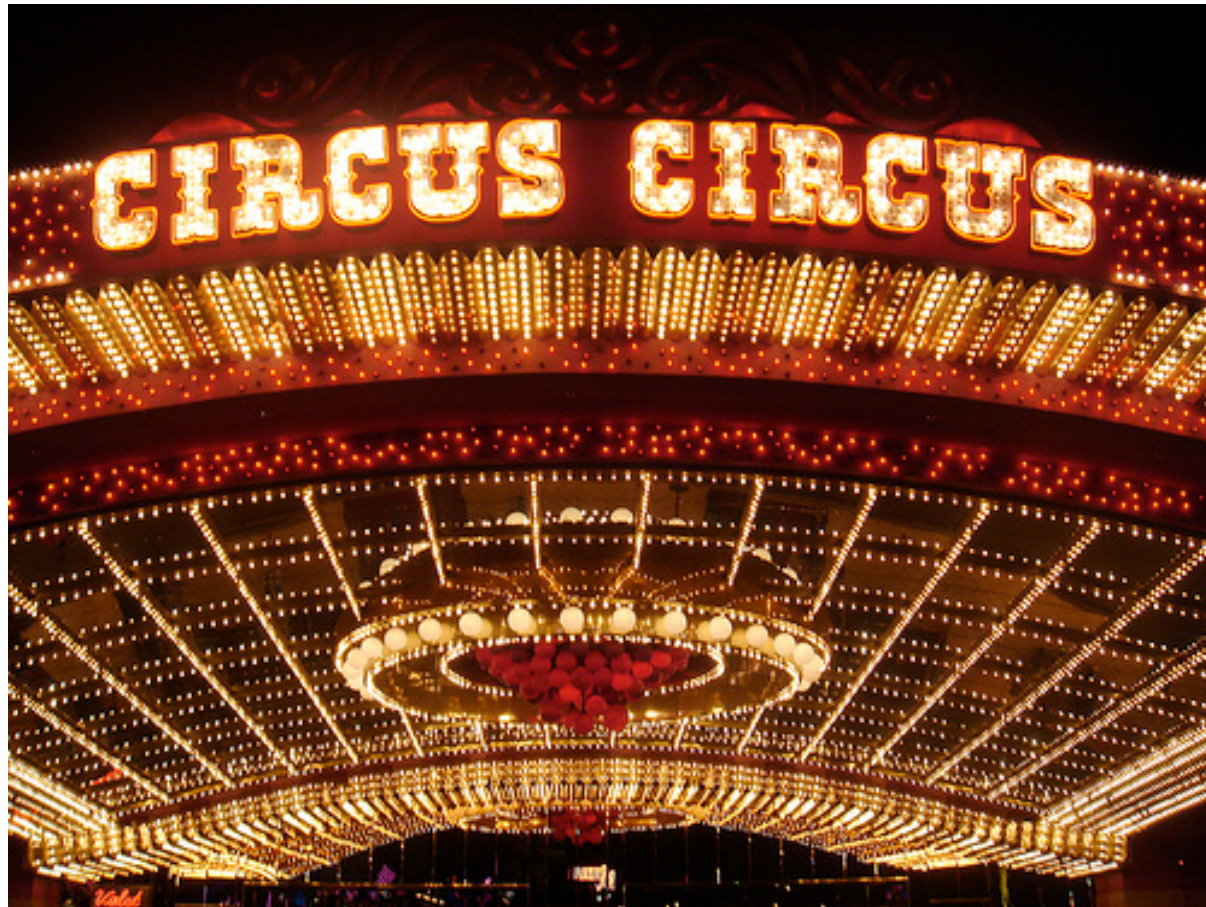
Ceci n'est pas Paris

Could it be that our technologies are getting too complicated? That people want to use them without the hassle of using them? A different program for Email, IM, Blogging, listening to music, etc. In other words, why go to Paris when you can go to Paris? Put aside your snobbery.



Abandoning Pure Form...

Las Vegas abandon's the pure form, like this pretty standard (in the US) motel...



...for Mixed Media

The buildings on the strip never do only one thing. They are hotels, restaurants, casinos, theme parks, concert halls, and probably a host of other things as well.

Less is more.

—Ludwig Mies van der Rohe

This is what we're taught as designers, isn't it. A mantra. Less is more, less is more...Simplicity!

Less is more.

—Ludwig Mies van der Rohe

Less is a bore.

—Robert Venturi

This is what we're taught as designers, isn't it. A mantra. Less is more, less is more...Simplicity!



More is More

MySpace permits users to do almost anything to the look of their profile pages, and the prevailing aesthetic is decidedly "more is more": more color, more animation, more typefaces, more sound, more of everything makes a better profile page.

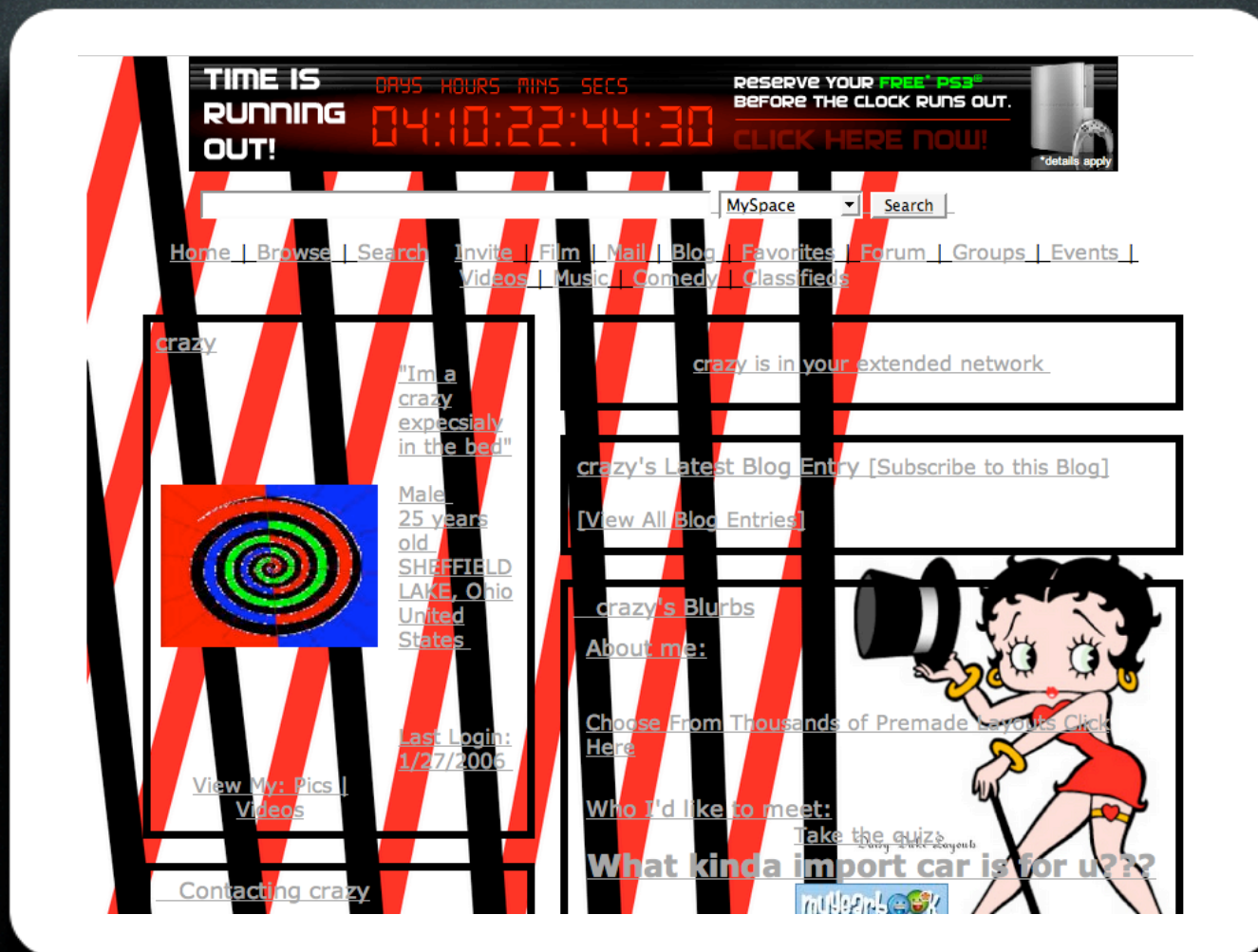
You can use this tool to present yourself however you want.



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Role Playing

Role playing has a big part of the Las Vegas experience. You don't have to be Bob from Accounting in Las Vegas. You can be Bobrius, the gladiator.



Role Playing

Just like online you can be Grond the troll. Or Elexa Wondergirl on MySpace.



No Need for an Undo

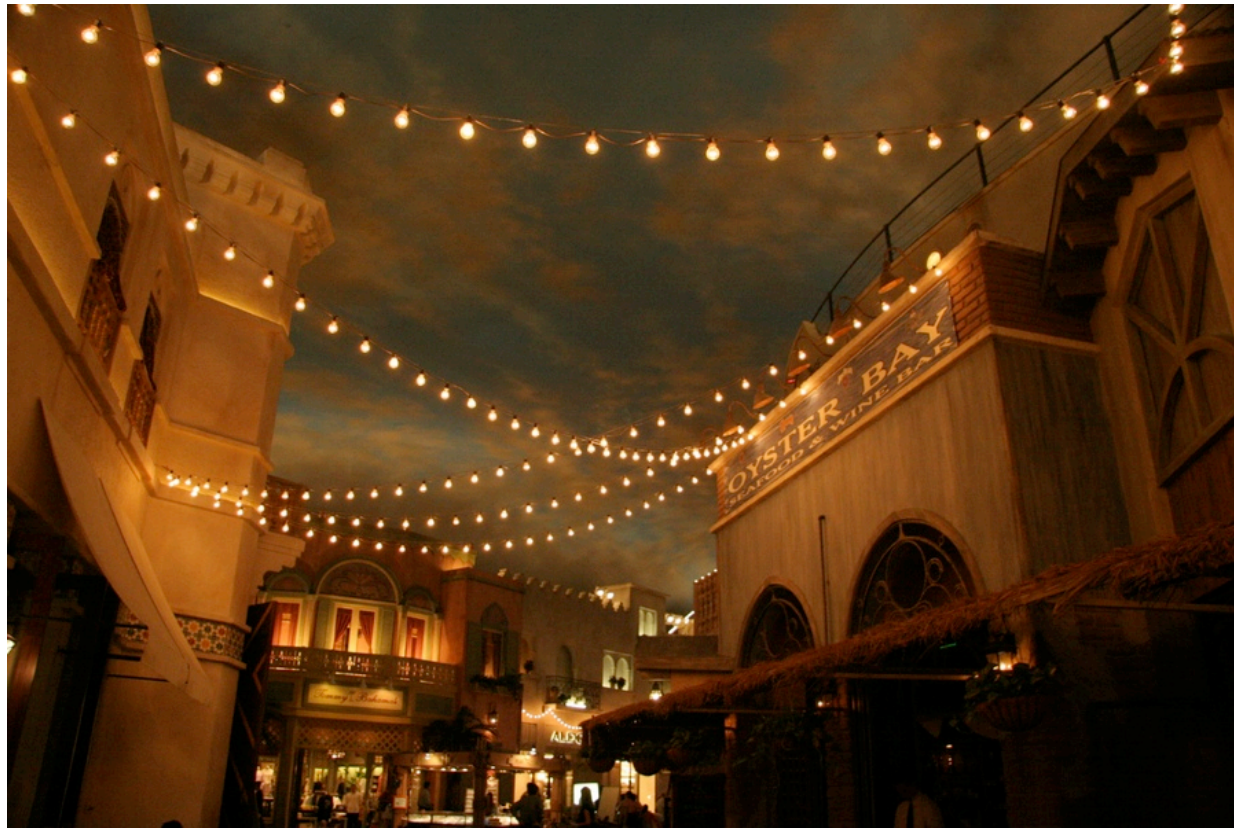
You can't break Las Vegas. Vegas even promotes this with its "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas" ad campaign. Can you imagine another city (except maybe New Orleans) promoting sex and violence and chaos with such abandon? You don't need an Undo button here. Everything you do is ok (supposedly). You can't break Vegas.

The familiar that is a little off has a
strange and revealing power.



Strange and Revealing

Look, for instance, at the Statue of Liberty. I'm sure you've seen it thousands of times. But probably not at half size with a roller coaster behind it. In a different context, it allows us to see it in a different way.



Vega\$ understands UX

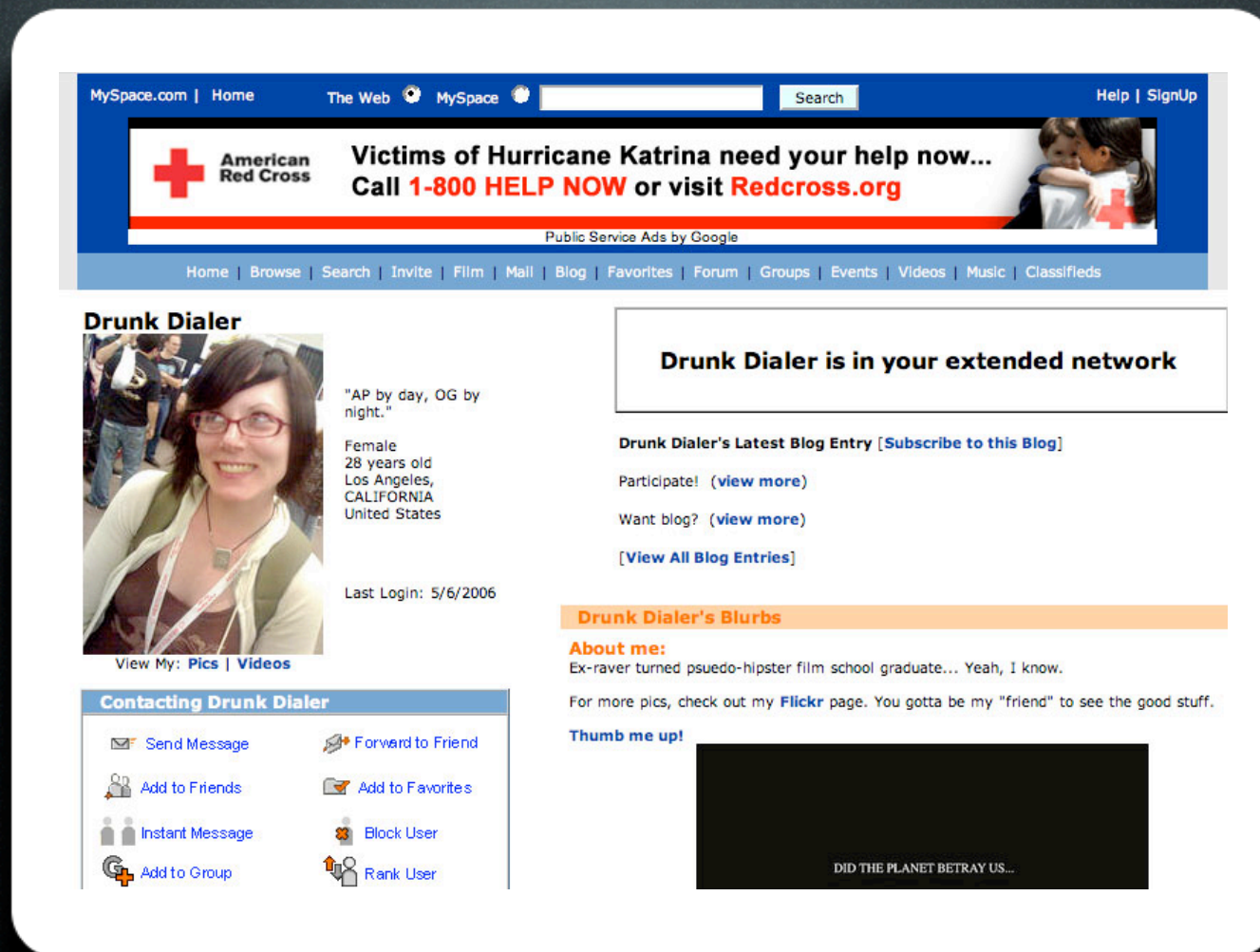
Aside from Disney, very few people were thinking about the total experience like Las Vegas does. The carpets are designed to keep you trapped. Oxygen is pumped into the casinos. No clocks are ever visible. Lately, some casinos have taken to painting the ceiling to be like the sky so you are further disoriented.

Las Vegas understands UX at both this sort of macrolevel and also at the microlevel as well. Let's talk about the macrolevel first.



A Pattern of Activities

The third lesson from Las Vegas. The area around the Las Vegas Strip and inside the casinos certainly isn't organized like other cities, or at least not obviously so. Especially not modern cities with their grid-like patterns. Las Vegas is arranged around patterns of activities.



A Pattern of Activities

Isn't MySpace too just a pattern of activities? One might say it's a mega-pattern of activities, trying to collect in one space everything that one might do elsewhere on the web--IM, bulletin boards, blogging, photo sharing, email--all in one place.



Tiered Functionality

Look at the increasing levels of difficulty in Vegas. Anyone can come in, put a nickel in a slot machine and play. Slightly more sophisticated go to craps or blackjack. Up and up to high-stakes poker games. But they have made each level of the experience compelling in its own right. Yes, higher stakes people are treated better, but slot machines have become the bread and butter of casinos.



Attention to Crazy Detail

Going down to the microlevel, let's examine slot machines. A well-designed model can bring in \$1b year! Slot machines gross more every year than McDonalds, Wendy's, Burger King, and Starbucks. Combined! Players typically initiate a game every six seconds!

- designed for a specific audience: women over 55 with disposable income
- many small, positive reinforcements and constant feedback. Gives out a variety of rewards: small pays, medium pays, and huge jackpots
- infrequent random reinforcement or intermittent reward
- built on a flexible platform, games and winner/loser ratios can always be tweaked
- every detail is carefully created. there is even a sweetener to the sound of money falling. some machines have up to 400 different sound events



Irony

How do we overcome the class divide that often separates designers from normal people? Las Vegas's final lesson is this one: the use of irony as a design tool. We're often too serious about our designs. We need more winks and nudges and boldfaced Delight. This is what Vegas, past and present and hopefully future has in spades.

Thanks. Viva Las Vegas!

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