Visual Interface Design

Project 3: The Ecommerce Website: DJenerates.com

Now that we've learned about the basic elements of user experience and put those elements into practice with a web form in Project 2, it's time to build something of greater complexity and sophistication: an ecommerce website.

For this website, you will design *all* the planes of the elements of user experience: Strategy, Scope, Structure, Skeleton, and Surface. (The business strategy is provided on the next page.)

Like Project 2, I don't want to see each plane broken out or described, just the final website and the deliverables leading up to it (as outlined below). Also like Project 2, the website does not need to work (ie. it won't be a working prototype, just a paper one).

In order to create this site, we'll be stepping through the design process that is typically used by professional designers (with some variations). We'll start by looking at users and finding out their needs and goals. We'll create user personae and scenarios, then a task analysis. Mental and Conceptual models will follow, leading up to a Site Map and Task Flows. These will help generate wire frames and three distinct look and feels for our site. A chosen look and feel will be used for generating a style guide. There will also be time to revise any or all of these documents after the critique.

You will likely use multiple pieces of software to make the many documents for this project. I want to impress upon you how important it is that those documents look professional. Design is about making arguments: "It should look like *this*. It should work like *this*." Your documents support those arguments.

Due Dates

Thursday, February 12: Personae, User Scenarios, Task Analysis

Tuesday, February 24: Conceptual and Mental Models

Tuesday, March 2: Site Map and Task Flows

Thursday, March 18: Wire Frames

Tuesday, March 23: Visual Treatments

Thursday, March 25: Style Guide

Tuesday, March 30: Critique

Thursday, April 1: Revised Documents

Business Strategy

The proliferation of MP3 players such as the iPod has created an increased demand for digital music. Apple has solved this problem by creating iTunes, but this is an incomplete solution because it only works with the iPod. Microsoft is starting a Windows-based music store. Other businesses are springing up, trying to compete against iTunes with a music store that works for all MP3 players, on all platforms.

DJenerates.com is one such music store. DJenerates' strategy is this: they have assembled an impressive roster of independent music labels to contribute music. They will be selling the songs for $0.50 a song and/or $5.00 dollars an album—half the price of iTunes—and a larger share of the profits will go to the artists themselves, not the record labels. They think with prices that low, and with more money going to the musicians, that there will be less music piracy.

DJenerates thinks that there is a large enough collection of independent music listeners to support such a venture. They don't expect to do the massive amounts of volume that iTunes or Musicmatch will do, but that's fine: they are a boutique store. They think of themselves a lot more like a rarities/vinyl record store than, say, Sam Goody.

The DJenerates network is comprised of music labels that produce jazz, classical, rock, hip hop, electronica, punk, and world music. There are nearly 30 labels in the network, with a combined catalog of about 10,000 songs and 1,000 albums. There are about equal number of songs and albums in each genre. More labels are likely to join if the site is successful.

DJenerates knows that it is catering to a small, rabid user group of serious record collectors and people who seek out alternative music, so they are very interested in cultivating a community around the site. "The Amazon of independent music" is how one executive put it. They are very interested in a personalized experience for their customers. They would like to keep track of their users' information and their preferences in order to show them items they might be interested in and to save them time when buying songs.

Market research has revealed one main group of customers: high school and college aged music buffs who seek out independent and alternative music. The site should appeal to these users, visually and functionally. It should have a feel like a rarities record store, where customers search through organized bins for obscure gems.

DJenerates would like to promote new artists and special records, and they plan to have an in-house critic for each genre who will write reviews and make other editorial decisions about their area ("Best New Jazz Albums for June"). They also want customers to contribute their own reviews and recommendations.

In keeping with their independent spirit, they won't be accepting any outside advertising on the site. Nor will they promote one label over another (in search results, say).