

XYZ Women's Health **website evaluation**

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1 executive summary

This report evaluates the current website for XYZ Women's Health, located at *XYZWomensHealth.com*. Our findings have been grouped into general and specific issues. Findings that are applicable site-wide are discussed in part 3 GENERAL USABILITY ISSUES, while findings limited to certain pages or sections are discussed in part 4 SPECIFIC USABILITY ISSUES. A technical assessment of the website is also presented in part 5.

Overall, the XYZ Women's Health Website contains a range of comprehensive and up-to-date information on women's health issues. Despite the the quality of information additional efforts can be made to better communicate this information on the website. The main areas pinpointed for improvement are:

1. Make site navigation more consistent and informative
2. Improve the scannability of site content
3. Strengthen the connection between the newsletter and the website
4. Maintain high and consistent levels of quality for all graphics and images
5. Make the entire website database-driven

The comments made in this report refer to the English version of the site, but they should be equally applicable to the French version.

2 introduction

The XYZ Women's Health Website was developed by "women's health experts from Women's Health Sciences Centre and the Centre for Research in Women's Health" to empower women "to make informed decisions about [their] health and [their] health care needs." It does this by providing "reliable, evidence-based and up-to-date information" on "women's health, diseases, and lifestyle trends."¹ In this respect, the website succeeds.

The health information on the website is comprehensive and up-to-date, providing a unique focus on women's health issues in Canada. However, while the information on the website is good, some changes can be undertaken to make it more accessible. For example, navigation within some parts of the *Health Centres* can be made clearer.

Health information on the site is contained in six main sections:

1. *Health Centres* – a collection of areas focused on specific conditions that affect women like cancer, diabetes, and osteoporosis
2. *XYZ Women's Health News* – timely news about research, diagnostic techniques, and treatments
3. *Interviews with Women's Health Experts* – discussions with some of Canada's leading figures in women's health
4. *Health Bytes*– a collection of short articles discussing a range of topics
5. *Resources* – lists of additional sources of information broken down by topic and separated into publications, websites, and organizations.
6. *Quizzes* – quizzes to educate and test visitors' knowledge about various topics and themselves

Information about the website's sister publication, XYZ Women's Health Newsletter, can be found on a separate website via a link on the XYZ Women's Health Website homepage.

¹ from the XYZ Women's Health Website <http://www.xyzwomenshealth.com>

3 general usability issues

3.1 Site Structure & Navigation

1. *Register for Updates* and *XYZ Women's Health in Print* only appear on the *homepage*, making them easy to miss.

recommendations

- mention the *XYZ Women's Health Newsletter* in the *About Us* section and possibly in the *Site Map*. (After several visits to the website, I finally noticed that the newsletter is also mentioned at the top of the *News* section.)
- increase the integration between the Newsletter and the Website. This is especially important if one of the mandates of the website is to promote the newsletter (see *4.8 connection between website and newsletter*).

2. Visitors must guess where some links will take them. For example, moving between the three diagnostic tests in the *Cardiovascular Health Centre* requires clicking on one of three small, non-descript arrows at the bottom of the page. The user is not provided with adequate cues to help them form a mental map of where they are in the website.

recommendations

- redesign the site navigation to provide cues that visitors can use to form a mental map of where they are in the website
- ensure that all links have either contextual or explicit descriptions of where they lead

3. Once in a specific *Health Centre*, the sections within that Centre (local navigation) replace the primary sections of the website (primary navigation) listed in the left-hand navigation. Visitors may be momentarily disoriented when they discover that the

continued on next page ...

3.1 site structure & navigation continued ...

sections they expected to find listed in that column have changed. This disorientation may be exacerbated by the appearance of the local navigation, which is identical to that of the primary nav.

recommendations

- maintain the presence of the primary sections of the website while providing an area to list the sections within the current *Health Centre*
- change the appearance of the local navigation so that it cannot be mistaken for the primary navigation

3.2 Scannability

1. The content has not been written in a manner that promotes scanning: many pages are long with few, if any, subheadings. Morkes and Nielsen (1997) found that 80% of participants always scanned unfamiliar text before reading it. When text was marked up for scannability, the measured overall usability of a website increased by 47%. Writing concisely increased the website's usability score by 58%.

recommendations

- break-up large blocks of text by reducing word counts, shortening or breaking-up long paragraphs, using more levels of headings, and possibly dividing information into separate pages
- break-up long lists by grouping related items
- highlight key terms and information by using emphasis and bulleted lists

4 specific issues

4.1 Splash Page

1. The addition of the graphic for the *XYZ Women's Health Forum & Expo* on the splash page causes the page size to be slightly longer than what will fit on an 800 × 600 screen – visitors need to scroll down to see the “Developed by Women's Health Sciences Centre and the Centre for Research in Women's Health” information. While not a major issue, requiring the visitor to scroll down such a small amount on the splash page implies that little thought went into the creation of the site, reflects poorly on the professionalism of the design, and ultimately has a negative impact on the credibility of the site overall.

recommendation

- modify graphics and layout so no scrolling is required when the page is viewed at a screen resolution of 800 × 600.

2. The graphic for the *XYZ Women's Health Forum & Expo* has also been resized in the HTML for the page, degrading its appearance and further diminishing the professional demeanor of the site.

recommendations

- ensure that images and graphics are not resized in the HTML for the page
- ensure that all images and graphics used in the website meet a set quality standard

4.2 Homepage

1. Items on the homepage are not sufficiently differentiated from one another:
 - it is difficult to distinguish the content teasers (e.g., *Health Bytes, News, Resource Picks*) from section descriptions (e.g., *Updates, Print Publication, Resources*)
 - all headings are emphasized equally so none stand out. Part of the problem is that “XYZ Women’s Health” is used in three of the headings

recommendations

- redesign the layout of the homepage to emphasize frequently updated information such as the content teasers
- reduce the prominence of “XYZ Women’s Health” in some of the headings so that their differences are emphasized

4.3 Health Centres

1. The *other Health Centres pull-down menu*, placed in the upper right-hand corner of the *Health Centre* homepages, takes up a lot of space that could be better used to engage the viewer. Additionally, when sponsors are added to these pages, they can push the menu below the first screen, reducing its effectiveness as a rapid navigational aid.

recommendations

- better integrate (and reduce the size of) the *other Health Centres pull-down menu* in the *Health Centre* section of the website
- reduce the size of sponsor names and place them immediately under the *Health Centre* title
- design an engaging treatment for *Health Centre* homepages

4.4 Interviews With Women's Health Experts

1. Dates for the interviews would help readers gauge how recent the information is.

recommendation

- subtly include dates in either the list of interviews, the interview itself, or both.

2. The long list of interviews makes it difficult for visitors to scan for information relevant to them

recommendations

- group interviews by subject or interviewee to make it easier for visitors to find information and complement the search function of the site
- could also provide a brief teaser/intro about the most recent interview at the top of the page, similar to how new *News Bytes* are presented on the homepage

3. Although the inclusion of photos can help increase the credibility of an accompanying article, care must be taken with the quality of the images (Fogg *et al.* 2001a). The current photos are different sizes and of poor quality both of which reflect poorly on the professional image of the website and which, in turn, detract from the site's credibility.

recommendation

- ensure that all photos of interviewees meet a size and quality standard

4.5 Health Bytes

1. There are errors in the indexing of articles. For example, "A Guide to Hormone Replacement Therapy" is listed under "A" rather than "H" or "G" (for Guides).

recommendations

- investigate the use of multiple entries in the index to make it easier for visitors to find information they are looking for
 - double-check the indexing of articles
2. Rather than immediately presenting an index upon entering the *Health Bytes* section, treat it the same as the homepage with a brief teaser on the most recent *Health Byte* at the top of the page.

4.6 Quizzes

1. Little differentiation exists between topics and quiz names which reduces the scannability of the page.

recommendation

- change the appearance of quiz names so they do not blend in with the topic names

4.7 Resources

recommendation

- have a small teaser for the monthly resource picks be one of the first things a visitor sees upon entering the resource section.

4.8 Search

1. Replacing the search link on the homepage with a search box could lead to increased utilization of the website's search function. Jakob Nielsen (2001) found that using a search box instead of a link on his website, *www.useit.com*, led to a 91% increase in use of the search engine.

recommendations

- replace the search link with a search box on all pages
- enable visitors to filter search results by the categories on the current search page

2. Once on the *Search* page, users may have to scroll down to get to search box.

recommendation

- place the *Search Box* and *Search Button* at the top of the page followed by the *Max Results Per Page pull-down menu* and finishing with a label saying "*Search In...*" categories

4.9 Connection Between Website & Newsletter

1. Currently, the connection between the website and its sister publication is weak: the only link between the website and newsletter is a small blurb on each homepage and in the *Links* page of the newsletter site

recommendations

- re-examine the goals of the website in relation to the newsletter
- increasing the tie between the two sites may help drive traffic from one site to the other
- the sample article for the current print newsletter could be used as one of the feature stories on the website
- it may be worthwhile to combine the two sites depending on how closely related the website and the publication are

4.10 Banner Ads

1. The placement of banner ads at the top of each page in the website reduces the amount of useable screen real estate. At a resolution of 800 × 600, the banner together with the page header takes up from $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ of the screen. When the navigation along the left side of the screen is included, the space left for content is only about $\frac{2}{5}$ of the screen.

recommendations

- consider alternative ad sizes and placements
- place the "*Advertisers and sponsors*" link beside the banner ad rather than above it

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4.10 banner ads continued ...

- investigate having the banner ad and page header more closely integrated
- redesign the layout of the items on the homepage so that more information is visible on the first screen. (Currently, at 800 x 600, none of the content teasers are visible on the first screen of the homepage.)

caveat

- care must be taken to ensure that only high-quality, reputable advertisers are allowed to advertise on the XYZ Women's Health Website. Fogg *et al.* (2001b) found that the presence of ads from "low-quality" advertisers like online gambling had a significant negative effect on a website's credibility.

4.11 Colour

Although purple & teal may be the colours used in the print newsletter, judicious use of additional colours could be used for emphasis and provide relief from the current colour scheme.

4.12 Incorrect Links

In *Site Map: Sponsors* and *Terms Of Use* link to the wrong pages

5 technical assessment

The functions of the current XYZ Women's Health Website are tangibly more limited than those covered in the *XYZ Women's Health Outline Specifications Draft 3* (printed May 26, 1999).

If the project specifications had been executed as laid out and the entire site served up from a database (with the use of strong content management tools and techniques), this site could have legitimately cost what was charged. Unfortunately, assuming our suppositions regarding the use of hard-coded 'chunks' of html are correct (see below), the client was likely over-charged for what they received.

DATABASE-DRIVEN VS. HARD-CODED HTML

1. There is a mix of hard-coded and Cold Fusion-driven pages on the site. There is no technical reason for executing the site using a mixture of both methods. Are there back-end technology issues with the Sunnybrook servers that a developer needs to be made aware of before work on the project starts (that would have led to the site being executed this way)?

assessment

Most content management systems use Cold Fusion or ASP to build pages on the fly. Other systems build pages offline, usually at night when traffic is low or non-existent. Given that most of the content on the XYZ Women's Health Website is static HTML (and likely not being generated on the fly by a content management tool), it is surprising to note that the format of the static HTML is so standardized. One of three things is happening:

1. Templates are being used and the content producers for the site are very good at keeping their HTML good, clean, and standardized.
2. A database is being used in the back-end that writes all of the HTML files at night.

continued on next page ...

database-driven vs. hard-coded HTML continued ...

3. All pages are being hard-coded with server-side includes – to mimic a database-driven site (likely)

recommendation

- make the website fully database-driven, cleaning up the implementation of the site and making it easier to update

SEND THIS SITE TO A FRIEND

1. Functionality is limited to sending the base web address for the XYZ Women's Health Website

recommendation

- expand function to enable visitors to send a link to a single page or article

4 references

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appendix a: about fusion interactive

Fusion Interactive is an award-winning Internet professional services company. With 8 years of experience delivering strategy, branding, design and technology solutions, we add value to our customers' businesses by developing creative, precisely-targeted applications that position clients to prosper in this rapidly-evolving economy.

Our services include concept and strategy development, and designing, building, and growing digital businesses.

Our key strength is being able to utilize the Internet and related technologies to demystify and sell complex ideas, products and services.