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Executive Leadership Team
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7500 W 110th Street
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Dear Executive Leadership Team,

Enclosed is a copy of the “Usability Study for YourBrandPartner.com”. This report provides details not included in the presentation of facts delivered on January 17, 2017. Copies of the presentation slides are included as part of the report.

The main purpose of this report is to provide detailed analysis in support of the improvement recommendations of the current YourBrandPartner.com blog.

The report also covers details on how I performed research on the user experience on the website, including scope and methodology, the research plan, data analysis, as well as expanded recommendations and improvements.

Thank you for your support in completing this project.

Sincerely,

Amy Wood
SPP Marketing Manager

USABILITY STUDY FOR YOURBRANDPARTNER.COM

Amy Susann Wood

Presented to the Executive Leadership Team
at Staples Promotional Products, Overland Park, Kansas.

January 2017

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ABSTRACT

YourBrandPartner.com exists to provide content to those seeking specific advice and information on purchasing custom promotional items. For this investigation, I conducted a usability test with a select user group to identify user experience issues.

The primary goal of this research was to conduct general usability testing through large group survey and a small in-person usability testing group. I designed surveys and tests to investigate if users experienced difficulties in finding the information they were looking for on the website.

Based on the results of this study, I recommend reviewing the visual design \ of the website, increasing site speed, creating a better experience between the blog and e-commerce interactions, and creating an environment that is more accommodating of where the user is in the buying process. This full report includes expanded participant feedback, methodology behind the study, and full recommendations for improvement.

INTRODUCTION

The focus of this study is to provide suggestions to improve the user experience for people searching for a product or idea on YourBrandPartner.com. The examination of YourBrandPartner.com focuses on usability. The study determines if the current website delivers an acceptable usability experience for customers and potential customers of Staples Promotional Products. The user's ability to locate the desired information and to complete simple search tasks on the website is of utmost importance.

Scope of Work and Deliverables

At the request of Staples Promotional Products, this study was performed September through October of 2016. There were 175 respondents to the initial online survey and 5 participants of the in-person testing. All survey participants were known users of YourBrandPartner.com. The 5 in-person testers had not used YourBrandPartner.com in the past.

I approached the usability study in two steps: 1) I conducted an online post-visit survey of those exiting the website, and 2) I performed a user experience study in-person. The online post-visit survey is a basic usability tool to gather feedback about their experience as they exit a website. The in-person user experience study is a more robust tool that asks a user to complete specific tasks in an observable, in-person environment. While the users worked, they were prompted to "think-aloud" and share their thought process while completing the tasks. I recorded their experience using TryMyUI.com. This program recorded on-screen movements, as well as clicks, in unison with their think-aloud comments. The users then completed the same usability survey as the other group.

The research compiled in this study provides valuable insight into the experiences of users who participated in the study. The raw research data and slide presentation is included in the appendix of this report.

Background

In 2008, StaplesPromotionalProducts.com was learning the value of fresh, relevant content in improving organic search results on their blog. In seeking to further improve results, the company found it needed to produce more content, post more often, and update the site quickly. Submitted blog posts often took weeks to be posted, and because of the maintenance requirements of the e-commerce website, the company had deprioritized the posting of blog entries. The team behind the blog chose to implement another option to host and manage the blog site with the intention that any buying opportunities would be transferred to the e-commerce site. This is how YourBrandPartner.com came to fruition.

The site has undergone several iterations in the past 8 years. The blog hosting has recently switched to WordPress. The blog team uses templates, along with various add-ons and widgets, to encourage search engine optimization. This change to WordPress hosting has not seen any user experience testing since it was upgraded in 2015. I developed a research structure for the usability study of YourBrandPartner.com to match our need for discovery of the user experience. I also designed the study to align our usability research with the marketing strategy to utilize the blog in lead identification and nurturing.

The website enables the identification of potential customers who visit the site due to organic web searches driven by the enormous content library of the website. With posts added to the site at an average rate of 4-6 per week, which meets Google's recommendation for organic search optimization. For this research design to achieve its goals, Staples Promotional Products must provide an easy-to-use interface that guides the user through the website so they feel comfortable providing their email address and giving permission to be contacted in the future.

While ease-of-use is a major component in determining the usability of the website, it is important to look for user-centered interfaces where the users' goals, tasks and experiences are easily executable and completed. According to ISO 9421 (1998), usability is defined as "the extent to which a product can be used by a specified users to achieve specified goals with effectiveness, efficiency, and satisfaction in a specified context of use." This is why it is important to look at both the hands-on user experience of non-users and the results of an online survey completed by known users.

The flow of information on the site guides a user to find more information or to exit the site into the shopping website. The site's ability to provide the information needed is critical to the user experience of the website. In an effort to determine any missed opportunities or bumps in the flow of information on the site, this research sought to identify the positives and negatives of a user's experience on the current website.

The research consisted of:

1. The online survey of 175 YourBrandPartner.com users administered through SurveyMonkey.com. Individuals participated by answering questions about the

- user experience of the website post-visit. Appendix A contains complete survey findings.
2. In-person usability tests administered to five first-time users through TryMyUI.com. TryMyUI.com recorded each user's on-screen movements and think-aloud speech, which allowed us to mimic the user experience of first-time visitors to the website. Appendix B contains a consolidated report from these tests.
 3. Analysis of the data complete with conclusions and recommendations.

Once complete, I presented the test results in PowerPoint to the Staples Promotional Products leadership team, including the vice-president of marketing. In this report, I provide additional details about the research, and how it was designed. I also describe, in-depth, the reasons for the recommended next steps. The presentation slides are available in Appendix F.

METHODOLOGY

Utilizing a mixed method approach, I analyzed and organized the collection of qualitative and quantitative responses in an effort to determine trends and issues in the usability of YourBrandPartner.com.

Research Design for Survey Only User Group

Surveys are one of the best and more economical options to gain user feedback, rate experiences and uncover needs as related to YourBrandPartner.com (Becker & Yannotta, 2013). It was imperative I gathered qualitative data to use as a research primer

for improvement and created a baseline of usability feedback from a wide-range of known users of the site.

I used Survey Monkey to build and track the survey results. It provided easy data gathering plus the opportunity to automate much of the data input and handling.

According to Survey Monkey, based on the fact that there are 1,750 visits to the site each week, 175 responses would provide the most accurate information with a margin of error of less than 10%. I collected online surveys between September 12, 2016, and September 29, 2016. I offered the surveys as users exited YourBrandPartner.com and provided a nominal 15% off discount code to use for future orders to online participants. The survey took less than 10 minutes to complete.

In compliance with Staples privacy policies, I collected limited demographic information. Participants were only able to access the survey through the pop-up received while on the website, ensuring users are website visitors. The limited information collected included:

- What industry do you work in?
 - Identification of industry verticals is an important piece of data. Our identified users are increasingly more often affiliated with specific industries, which can indicate the need for certain blog post topics.
 - Respondents indicating affiliation with Staples Promotional Products received an additional question addressing their responsibilities. This question asked if they work in sales, marketing, or an administrative role.

- What is your job title and how many employees at your company?
 - This information helped us determine who is using the site. Company owners, administrative, marketing or other job title indicators will assist us in assigning other users to demographic segments based on behavior.

The answers to the above questions provided insight into the average user on YourBrandPartner.com. As the website evolves, pinpointing industries, job titles and company size is an easy way to identify similar companies who would be interested in the same information. This also helped to shape the demographic information for the in-person usability studies. Table 1 outlines the tools and methods used to recruit actual website users to provide feedback, and also demonstrates what data was obtained from each activity.

Table 1 Summary of methods and tools for online survey only

Activity	Tools & Methods	Data Obtained
User Profile	- Define user based on their usage and previous visit or familiarity with YourBrandPartner.com	
User Recruitment	- Web Survey (Survey Monkey) - Pop-up post-site visit requesting participation in web survey	Survey Results from online users I know are familiar with the website
Task Analysis	- Survey Monkey provided aggregate data of participants - Open-ended questions coded for data analysis in Microsoft Excel	Survey results data
Survey Completion	- After-the-fact questions asked via Survey Monkey rating their experience - Open-ended questions asked to provide freedom in answers - Impression test questions were included, although these participants are clearly familiar with the website	Opportunity for detailed feedback due to open-ended questions. Survey results data

I based the survey questions on a previously executed 2012 survey at Staples Promotional Products. This former survey did not ask any questions in relation to usability. All questions had to be reworded to utilize the more discipline-based survey structure. The Likert Scale provides easier answer coding, which results in more accurate analysis of the responses. I intentionally kept the questions broad so the 5-point Likert Scale would remain a natural response to the short questions. The survey only group answered the same open-ended questions that would be posed to the usability testing group, so I could compare and contrast the answers based on a new user's experience on the website with those based on a known user's experience on the website.

The 5-point Likert Scale provides measurement choices from "Extremely" to "Not At All" (See Appendix E). These quantitative results and rankings are quicker to analyze because they eliminate the need process qualitative feedback (Morville, 2005). In addition, online surveys are relatively easy for participants because 1) they are typically only 5-45 minutes in length, 2) they can be performed anywhere that has an internet connection, and 3) the participant is able to perform a task during this time in an active way (Albert, Tullis and Tedesco, 2010). In this case, the survey participants were exiting from YourBrandPartner.com and likely had completed a task as part of their interaction with the website.

These self-administered surveys were convenient and provided valuable feedback, but also had disadvantages. In three cases, respondents skipped questions. Other participant answers appeared to be chosen at random and indicated no consistency in the user experience. For example, one individual survey respondent chose they are

“Extremely Likely” to recommend the website to a friend; however, the same respondent chose “Not At All Likely” when asked if they would return to the site again. Luckily, with the large sample size, inconsistent responses were lost in the law of averages. Careless responses are expected in any survey, and I only found three in the respondent data set.

Research Design for In-Person Usability with a Survey Group

In-person testing provides valuable information and feedback about usability that cannot be obtained through an online survey. Having defined the overall goal of the usability test, I needed to develop specific tasks for representative users to perform in a recorded environment. I focused on creating a short usability task list because the commodity nature of promotional products often equates to users preferring to spend as little time as possible completing their tasks. The focus is to find gross usability issues, and not to conduct a detailed analysis of the users’ experience. Think-aloud testing was the best course of action to gather this type of usability feedback.

The think-aloud protocol, according to Nielsen (1993), “may be the single most valuable usability engineering method.” Nielsen (p 185) goes on to state that receiving direct feedback and knowing how the user is thinking gives us insight into how users are interpreting the website.

I chose participants based on a pre-determined user profile, which were based on market research provided by Staples corporate office. Staples identified the user persona as a small business owner or mid- to large-size business administration employee, who is comfortable with the internet. The participants also had to be comfortable with

performing specific tasks on YourBrandPartner.com while being audio recorded by TryMyUI.com. I manually reviewed and coded the recordings of the user experience with their think-aloud comments based on the words they used, and also based on the inflection of the words as they perform the requested tasks.

I designed each research activity to provide specific data and used particular tools and methods to gather that data. Table 2 provides an overview of the activities and what data was obtained as part of the user experience testing.

Table 2 Summary of methods and tools for usability and online survey participant group

Activity	Tools & Methods	Data Obtained
User Profile	- Staples provided personas	- Job roles, company size, online shopping experience
User Recruitment	- Telephone recruitment of qualified representative users based on representative persona - Script for participant recruitment in Appendix E	- Identified 5 representative personas willing to participate in the study
Task Analysis	- Representative task assignments prepared through previous research, e.g. Performing a task on the website	
Survey Completion	- After-the-fact questions asked via Survey Monkey rating their experience - Open-ended questions asked to provide freedom to answer questions	- Opportunity for detailed feedback due to open-ended questions - Survey results data
Usability Tests	- Utilizing TryMyUI.com to record - Included “impression testing”	- Opportunity for detailed feedback due to think aloud protocol and recordings - Survey results data - Detailed UI feedback; time on task; mouse clicks, think-aloud transcripts, subjective data

The usability lab provided their database of volunteer subjects for participant identification. Using the persona information provided by Staples corporate, the lab was able to locate 55 potential study participants who matched the profile. I placed phone calls to qualified potential participants in random order, during which they were asked the questions included on the recruitment script available in Appendix E. The first 5 individuals who agreed to participate were invited to the in-person usability study.

Tests were completed by appointment at the lab. All phone-qualified participants were present at their designated appointment time. They each received a \$100 gift card to a local restaurant or retail store of their choice, as well as a nominal 15% discount to purchase custom promotional items on StaplesPromotionalProducts.com.

All 5 users invited to Overland Park, Kansas to participate in a usability study of YourBrandPartner.com attended their session. The testing lab environment provided participants a comfortable place to perform the tasks and answer the post-use survey without the distractions that might be present in their environments. I escorted participants to a private testing room where they read instructions for participation. Participants were told that once I left the room, no one would be immediately available to answer questions or provide clarification on the testing protocol. This reflects a real-world experience, as no one is usually available in the participant's home or the office to assist with completing the assigned task. This also encouraged testers to truly "think-aloud" in a private environment.

The testing was recorded by TryMyUI.com. The recording began once the participant was greeted and provided basic instructions (see Appendix D) for testing. These verbal instructions included a greeting, verification of their participation in the usability study, and then the introduction to the room they would be in to complete the usability study. This room was approximately 20 X 20 feet and included one entry door and two windows on the north-facing wall. It was equipped with a computer desk, monitor, keyboard, and CPU placed under the glass top desk. Two small cameras were wall mounted, facing the user at the computer desk, with a feed into an adjoining “observation” room. The computer used ran Windows 7 on a 1280 X 1024 pixel screen resolution and used the Google Chrome browser. TryMyIU.com was already running on the machine, which was set to a log in screen.

The performance of specific tasks on the website was recorded with TryMyUI.com software and a microphone placed on the desk. I manually reviewed the recordings of the user experience with their think-aloud comments and coded them based on the words used on the recording, and the inflection used when speaking those words. TryMyUI.com gave participants a quick introduction, which included a short paragraph on how think-aloud testing works and encouraged the participants to be honest and forthcoming with their thoughts. Participants had the option to complete a think-aloud sample test to familiarize themselves with how the protocol works. All 5 participants completed the sample test.

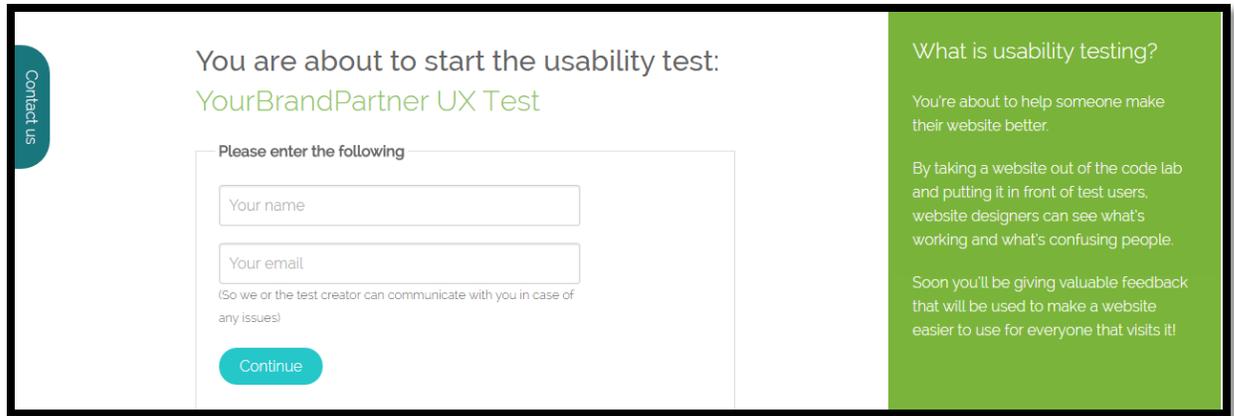


Figure 1: Log in screen for TryMyUI.com usability testing

In-person testing participants were asked to log in (Figure 1) to the TryMyUI.com interface upon arriving at the testing lab. Email and passwords were created by the participants. These credentials belong to the participant and their results are considered anonymous as results are pulled from the database for review.

The TryMyUI.com interface provided users with a “Frame of Mind” statement to help them understand what their goal is in visiting the website. Their Frame of Mind statement was that they are attending a trade show and need to find an appropriate giveaway item.

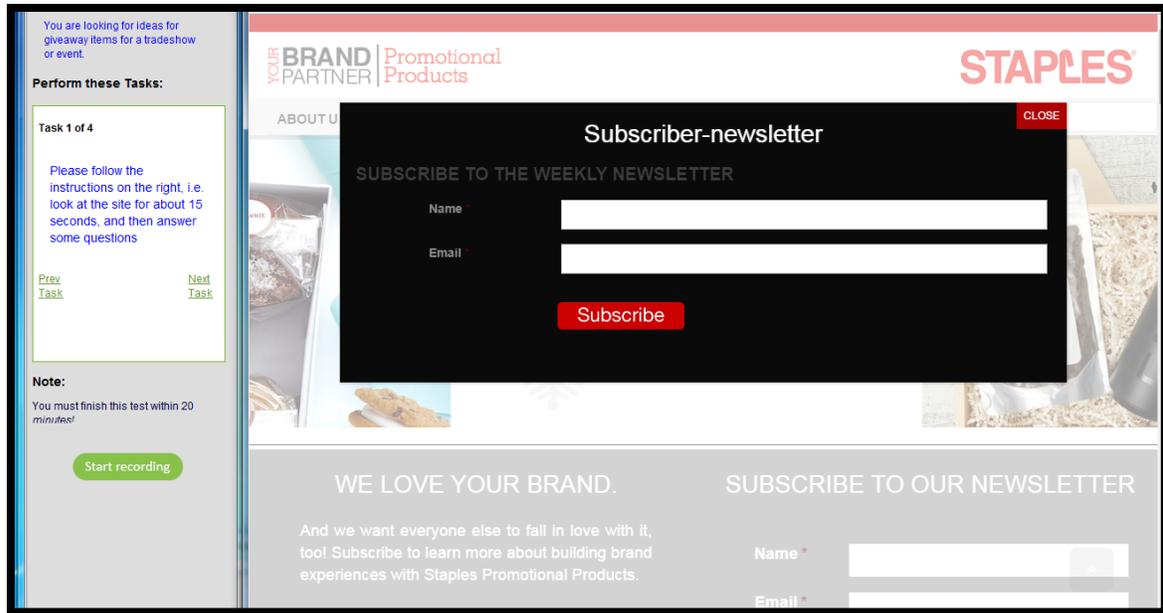


Figure 2: Screenshot of impression test with TryMyUI.com interface on the left side of the screen.

The participant read the frame of mind statement out-loud before proceeding in the study. Participants were reminded of the “frame of mind” statement regularly when completing the rest of the testing. The first exercise participants were asked to complete was an impression test.

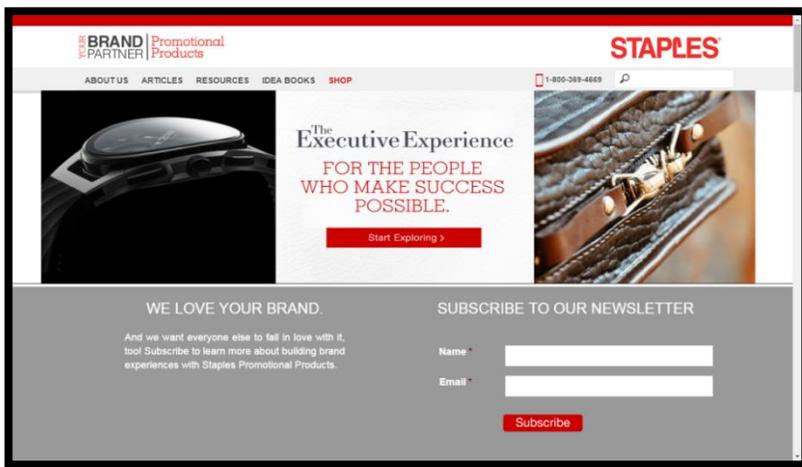


Figure 3: Current website home page viewed during usability testing with TryMyUI.com interface removed from left sidebar.

The 15-second impression test provides valuable feedback in relation to the layout of the website. Consumers today often visit a website and make split-second decisions as to the value of that website, and more importantly, they determine if the website will provide them the information they need within seconds. The 15-second

impression test, performed as part of this user experience testing protocol can quickly identify issues such as slow page loads, visual design issues, layout problems, and other indicators that might cause a representative user to bounce from the page before digging into the site. Content must be easy to consume and there must be a logical flow to the website. This “journey” provides a breadcrumb experience to users, as they maneuver the content of the site to find the information they need (Lemon, 2016).

Once the impression test is completed, the participants provided key words to describe what they saw during that 15 second flash of the website. Appendix B contains results of the 15-second impression test.

Next, TryMyUI.com provided the parameters for their two tasks. For the first task, the instructions read: “You are tasked with finding promotional items for an upcoming tradeshow. Use this site to research that task and choose an item to recommend to the tradeshow decision makers for that upcoming show.” The second task’s instruction was, “Utilizing YourBrandPartner.com, purchase the item you would choose for the event or tradeshow.”

Once the think-aloud portion of the usability study was concluded, participants completed the same survey the online survey group completed.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Data analysis is essential for understanding the results acquired from both the online survey and in-person usability testers. The data revealed some known, yet previously unverified, issues with the website. In addition, surprise data was found as

most of the visitors who completed the post-use survey were Staples associates. The data confirmed previous suspicions that site speed is a huge concern.

A look at the demographic information, plus a review of the respondent results and findings, provides insight to the website and supports the reasoning behind the suggested recommendations.

Demographic Information

Those who completed the online survey only were mostly associates of Staples Promotional Products and were active on the website in an effort to assist their prospects and customers in finding ideas for their events or trade shows. I found most searches were related to the following top 5 industries: Healthcare, Financial Services, Non-Profit, Construction, and Education. The average person was searching for ideas for companies with between 20-50 employees, and the next largest group of users was searching for ideas for those with 5-9 employees.

I identified participants for the in-person usability testing more specifically. None of the participants had visited YourBrandPartner.com in the past, and none were familiar with the website or its offerings.

Table 3 User Profile for Usability Testing

User	Sex/Age	Job Title/Company	Business Type	Internet Experience	Ordered Promotional Products Online
1	M/30-39	Co-Owner, Catering Company	Service 20-50 employees	Advanced, Shops online often, Built company website	Yes
2	F/40-49	Office Manager, Auto	Service, 10-19	Intermediate, Shops online, Hired other to build company	No

		Body Repair Shop	employees	website	
3	F, 40-49	Receptionist, Dental Office	Service, 5-9 employees	Intermediate, Shops online, Hired other to build company website	No
4	F, 30-39	Executive Assistant, Financial Services Company	Service, 200+ employees	Advanced, Shops online, Buys online for work	Yes
5	F, 20-29	Office Manager, Plumbing Company	Service, 20-50 employees	Advanced, Shops online, Manages company social media and webpages	Yes

Overall Usability Issues

Usability is often subjective; however, in the controlled environment of usability testing, and especially think-aloud testing, usability issues are readily identified by reviewing the data. Though analysis of both the survey results and usability testing in a lab environment the difficulty users experienced on the site became clear and specific.

Users did not immediately understand:

- The website belongs to a company that sells promotional products. Users clicked “About Us” because they were not sure what product or service was being sold on the website. Part of this issue is because the blog posts rarely provided a link to the e-commerce version of the site where the products are available for purchase.
- The site is scrollable: Users were greeted with a large image, and bold navigation; however, it was not intuitive they could scroll down. It was described as “messy” and “hidden.”

- The navigation does not indicate new content is available. Several users were not aware the site is a blog where new content is posted 4-5 times per week.
- The main opportunity for improvement was site speed. All users, including both online survey takers and in-person testing participants, mentioned slow loading pages and lagging navigation.

The usability testing uncovered many specific issues the survey did not. While Survey Monkey results reported signs of website slowness, the usability testing revealed the escalated nature of frustration experienced by the participants.

The most important feedback from a new customer perspective is likely the 15-second impression test performed as part of the TryMyUI recorded test. When users were asked their initial reaction to the home page during a 15-second view of the site, they were asked to provide three words they either saw on the site, or their own words that describe what they saw. In both the in-person testing and online survey results, *promotional products* were the most used phrase to describe the site, followed by *Staples*. The third word identified to describe the site differed between the two groups. For online participants, the word *ideas* were the key word. For those participating in the usability test, *high-end* and *executive* were more prevalent. This is an important difference. Those who participated in the usability study had never visited the site before, while the survey participants had just visited the site and likely spent more time getting to know the content.

Although the usability study participants used the words *promotional products* and *Staples* in their 15-second impression of the site, their initial recorded comments

uncovered confusion, including mentally questioning the website and their own behavior. The participants asked themselves questions, trying to figure out what the site was about and very often making observations that were negative and did not indicate a desire to continue to use the website.

A Review of Respondent Results

The top three words provided during the online survey to 175 individuals are listed on the line marked "online survey" (Appendix A). These are the three words I expected to see in response to the question; however, the usability participants were less consistent in their answers than those who completed the post-visit survey. I assume those who completed the post-visit survey had time to internalize what they experienced on the site, and took away the main theme of the website: *Staples, Promotional Products, Ideas*. The blog was created to reinforce those three words to someone deciding where to shop.

The overall response to the site included the use of words such as *Corporate, Professional, Expensive, and High-End*. While these words are indicative of some brands, the Staples brand promise does not include any of these words or phrases. It indicates the website is not on-brand and when switching from the home page to the e-commerce site, there is a visual disconnect. A full visual review of the site could uncover these same issues, but since this is not a functionality problem, those issues are beyond the scope of this project.

I also identified issues for the usability testers when it came to completing the tasks they were requested to perform on YourBrandPartner.com. Only 40% of users were

able to complete the two tasks. While more than half of the users could not complete either of the two tasks requested of them, those same people considered the tasks “easy to complete.” This was contradictory to the actual results of the in-person usability study. See Table 4 for the results of each participant.

Table 4 Task Completion Rates

Participant	Task One Completed: Search for a product or idea to recommend for purchase for use at a trade show or event.	Task Two Completed: Purchase the recommended item on YourBrandPartner.com (Make entry into the e-commerce site to purchase chosen product.)
1	Yes	No
2	No	Yes
3	No	No
4	Yes	No
5	No	Yes
Success	2	2
Completion Rate	40%	40%

Online participants were not asked about completing specific tasks; however, their ratings followed the same vein as those who tested in-person. Utilizing the Likert Scale, both groups identified “finding the information they needed” as an area of improvement. The ratings of 1.4 and 2 out of 5, respectively, between the two groups of participants, indicate a severe negative response to the statement that they could easily find the information they are looking for on the website.

With usability testing, “the point of frustration” (Hoppmann, 2007) was easily identified in the recordings. The comments included confusion about what they were seeing on the screen and what they expected from a website about promotional products.

Several participants showed concern over the high-end and expensive products that were shown. While these are not technical issues within the site and how it works, a visual review needs to be performed to determine if the site is on-brand with the Staples branding guides.

The aggregate responses from the Survey Monkey survey completed by all parties provide insight into the experiences of users on the website. It seems many of the users experienced a learning curve during the initial time of interaction with the site.

Fresh, relevant content was often available; however, the users had trouble finding that new content. When entering search key words into the search boxes, users retrieved older blog posts. Fresh, more relevant, blog posts often appeared at the bottom of the search. The search box function needs to be improved to return fresher content.

Confusion related to having two search boxes on the internal pages of the blog was mentioned several times. Figure 4 shows a zoom of the two search boxes, placed directly on top of each other on the right side

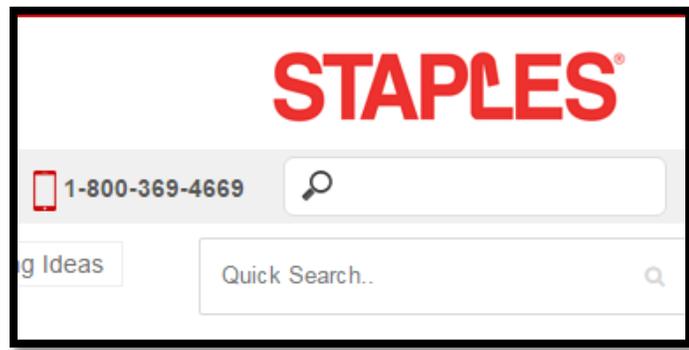


Figure 4: Screenshot of duplicate search box. Once users navigate away from the front page, there are two search boxes available on the right hand side. One is on top of the other.

of the page. Three of the five usability testers noticed the two search boxes, and they laughed it off, with one of them mentioning that they “probably do the same thing.”

The most popular terms to describe the site by users were *professional* and *business-like*. The marketing and brand group identified these are not the words they

want to be associated with the website. The brand group has identified the words *fun*, *friendly and relevant* as the words that should come to mind when visiting the blog. While these words do appear, and were chosen by participants, less than 10% of them associated those words with the website. This is definitely a brand disconnect, but once again, is not a functional disconnect on the site.

The Surprise Finding

As a public-facing website, Staples Promotional Products assumed YourBrandPartner.com was a website used by the public. However, because of the questions asked in the initial stages of the online survey through Survey Monkey, I learned that 57% of those who participated in the exit survey were employees or affiliates of Staples Promotional Products.

Sales associates often use the website to provide links to advise to their prospects. Understanding how the site is used by company associates provides insight that was not expected. While catalogs and customer-facing support materials are readily available on the website, these tools are also housed on a locked down website only accessible to sales associates. Additional research is needed to determine if YourBrandPartner.com can serve as a replacement to the password-protected website that houses much of the same material. It seems possible associates do not want to take the time, or perhaps are not sure which resources on the protected site can be used in customer interactions, and which cannot. By linking directly to articles and resources already available on a branded company site, associates are simply sharing something that is already public, and they reduce the risk of inadvertently sharing “internal use only” documents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Each recommendation in this section includes a severity rating. I assign these ratings based on the impact a recommendation may have on the ease of use and on its ability to address the areas where participants experienced problems or found the structure of the website unclear or misleading. A red dot severity rating means the item should be addressed immediately. An orange dot severity rating means the item should be addressed soon. A green dot severity rating means the website functions without the issue being addressed, but that addressing it should still be on the radar.

Perform a Visual Design Review

Severity rating: ○

Many of the usability issues mentioned in this report were caused by problems with the visual design. Participant feedback on color, image choices, and placement of elements on the page are all related to visual design.

The visual design review should include improved navigation, consistent color palettes and image styles, and the implementation of guidelines for making design decisions in relation to the e-commerce site. This review can be completed internally or sent to an outside agency that provides visual design review services.

Increase Site Speed

Severity rating: ○

Multiple participants indicated issues with site speed. I performed a quick site speed test through Google and uncovered several opportunities to increase the site speed.

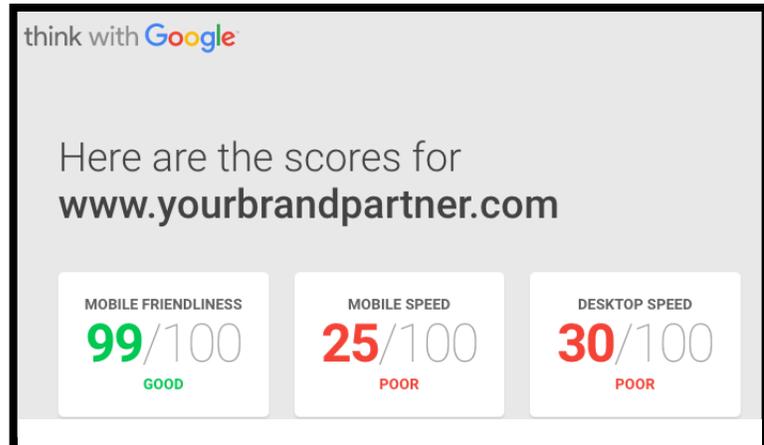


Figure 5: Google site speed report. Google site speed testing for YourBrandPartner.com

- Enable compression
- Minify JavaScript
- Eliminate render-blocking JavaScript and CSS in above-the-fold content
- Reduce server response time
- Optimize images
- Remove query strings within the site that include '?'
- Specify a vary on publicly cacheable, compressible resources
- Repair or remove redirects
- Remove redirect chains

Google publicly states increasing the site speed is a major factor in organic search. Simply increasing the page load time by freeing up server space and improving the back end of the site improves user experience, and also causes the site to perform better in online searches.

Better Experience Between Blog and E-Commerce

Severity rating: ○

Test participants experienced confusion when jumping from the blog site (WordPress) to the e-commerce site. The visual review will likely uncover an opportunity to bring cohesion to the relationship between the research and purchase sections of the website.

Address Continuity Issues

Severity rating: ○

Most visitors to YourBrandPartner.com are outside sales representatives for Staples Promotional Products. Their visits are usually in an effort to find information to pass onto a client. For example, they search the site for articles about event trends and new promotional item releases, or to send links to a catalog or themed flipbook. When end-users find themselves on the site, they often struggle with initial browsing and can feel alienated from the site, like the site is not for them, especially if it is a small or medium size business.

Videos are sprinkled throughout the website; however, to watch the video, the user is taken away from YourBrandPartner.com and transferred to YouTube. This is not the path you want users to take on the website. The videos need to

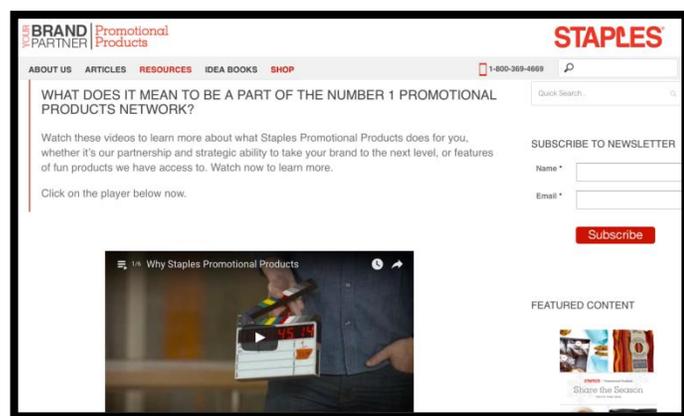


Figure 5: With videos becoming an important part of the content available on the website, the video needs to be embedded on the page, instead of taking a user away from YourBrandPartner.com and onto YouTube.com.

be embedded, instead of linked to outside websites for viewing.

Participants were often confused as to the next steps required in their visit to the website. They may have found something they wanted, but could not be transported to the e-commerce site to purchase it, or they found the information they needed but were not given a clear call-to-action. The participants in the in-person usability testing were given specific tasks, and in many instances, they were not able to complete those tasks based on frustration and bad navigation options.

Conclusion

The site follows best practices for user-friendly content delivery in some areas. Browser caching is properly set by serving static content from a cookie-less domain, bad requests have been avoided, non-visual file sizes are at a minimum, and there is a specific cache validator in place. The site is mobile friendly, providing a positive environment for mobile browsing. Most visits to YourBrandPartner.com take place from a desktop, which means while mobile-friendliness is important, it is more important to provide a faster page load and user experience for desktop users.

Most of the participants considered the website to be professional and corporate, which is not on-brand with Staples corporate guidelines. With words such as “high-end” and “corporate” being associated with the style of the website, the recommendation to perform a visual design review will surely uncover additional opportunities to improve usability.

Implementing the current recommendations and continuing to work with actual users will ensure the website remains focused on user needs. Additional user experience

testing should be performed with each iteration of the website. This will ensure the website remains high-functioning as more content is added.

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APPENDIX A: ONLINE SURVEY ONLY RESULTS REPORT

Provide three words that you remember from your site visit, or that you would use to describe the site. (Top 4 answers.)

56 Staples/Staples Promotion Products/SPP

38 Swag/Giveaways/Promotional Products

22 Ideas/Creativity/Resources

15 I don't know

What is this site about?

66 Promotional Products/Swag/Giveaway/Tchotchkes/Stuff with a logo

33 Marketing Your Business/Tools

29 Research/Looking for promo ideas

20 Custom/High End Products to give away

What is the feel of this site? (*e.g., professional, fun, small-company, corporate?*)

56 Education/Informational

44 Corporate

33 Professional

3 High End

10 Boring

3 Stuffy

2 Knowledgeable

Does YourBrandPartner.com appear easy to navigate?

66 Extremely Easy

23 Very Easy

20 Somewhat Easy

14 Not so easy

8 Not at all easy

How easy is it to understand the information on YourBrandPartner.com?

44 Extremely Easy

- 35 Very Easy
- 16 Somewhat Easy
- 33 Not so easy
- 5 Not at all easy

How likely are you to return to YourBrandPartner.com?

- 66 Extremely Likely
- 74 Very Likely
- 15 Somewhat Likely
- 12 Not so Likely
- 8 Not at all Likely

How likely are you to recommend YourBrandPartner.com to someone you know?

- 22 Extremely Likely
- 33 Very Likely
- 26 Somewhat Likely
- 46 Not so Likely
- 12 Not at all Likely

Did you experience any of the following problems at YourBrandPartner.com?

- 87 I did not experience any problems
- 3 The site crashed or stop responding
- 6 The site was missing features I needed
- 0 The site was confusing to use
- 67 The site was not mobile friendly
- 10 The site was visually unappealing
- 34 The site loaded slowly
- 0 Other (please specify)

If you could make any changes to YourBrandPartner.com, what would it be?

- 87 Less busy looking

- 23 Scrolling too much to see all content
- 69 Way to connect with someone (no phone number, email, chat)
- 23 Too many stock photos
- 67 Need it to be mobile-friendly
- 36 Need more interactive content
- 10 The site was visually unappealing
- 56 The site loaded slowly
- 4 The blog is called articles

APPENDIX B: USABILITY TESTING RESULTS REPORT

Key participant initiative comments during 12 second impression test, Task #1:

1	That's a big intro image. It's so bold, like almost offensive.
1	Where's everything else? I have to scroll. I see. It's clean, I guess. But so crowded.
2	Let's see here. It looks like a website template they just filled in. I'm not excited, it's pretty serious-looking.
3	They love my brand, do they? I don't know if I believe that. And why do they keep talking so stuffy, it's pens and stuff. Have a little fun with it. This site is so serious.
3	What kind of resources do they have? It's a busy page. Not intuitive.
4	Books of ideas? I'm into that. I hate they keep saying "brand." I'm a brand, but I'm not a marketing person.
5	I don't need all this stuff. How do I shop? Oh, there it is. It's red.

Initial reactions during site exploration to complete Task #2:

User	Main Comment
1	What does this site do exactly? I can't tell what they're selling. Really? Oh. Really? Where do I go with this? Why is it running slow? It took a few seconds to load. Easily a few seconds. This looks like a free template in WordPress. I like the way the video plays behind the header. That's cool.
2	What's with this pop up crap? I hate them. A video. I'm gonna click that. Oh, it went away from the site. I'm on YouTube now. That's not good. Do I just go back? It looked like it was going to play on the page, not take me to another page. Why is the sign up over there? It should be up here. On top.
3	I should have used the drop menu instead of clicking on just Articles. There's a lot going on here. They're selling giveaway items. Pens and mugs and stuff with my logo. I see. I get it. That picture makes no sense. Why is it there? It looks staged anyway. I wouldn't mind getting their emails, I think I can use this advice. The ideas are good.
4	What are these? It's like a bunch of images. Do I click on them? Let's try. These catalogs pages don't click to anywhere. They're just there. No link to anything. Wow. I'd expect more from a website from Staples. This is pretty out of the box. Generic images. They don't look like real people.
5	Let's just go directly to shop. Oh, it took me to another website. That's weird. Is that supposed to happen? I'm going to search for some products I'm looking for at work.

The following was completed as part of the post-use survey:

Provide three words that you remember from the site, or that you would use to describe the site

User	Word #1	Word #2	Word #3
1	High end	Promotional Products	Staples
2	Staples	Your Brand Partner	Clean
3	Resources	Ideas	Executive
4	Staples	Experiences	Promotional Products
5	Promotional Products	Brand	Shop

What is this site about?

User	Comment #1	Comment #2
1	Promotional Products	Expensive watches
2	High end items	Executive gifts
3	Promotional Product Ideas	Out of the box ideas
4	Corporate advice	Big company logo products
5	I don't know	

What services and/or products are offered on this site, and for whom?

User	Comment
1	Ideas for giveaway items for those who buy them
2	High end gifts for corporations to give away
3	Logo items that are expensive and out of reach for most buyers
4	Company-based swag to give away for purchasers
5	It looks like expensive give away items, but I can't tell if you can put your logo on it?

What is the feel of this site? (e.g. professional, fun, small-company, corporate?)

User	Word #1	Word #2	Word #3
1	Corporate	High End	Clean
2	Professional	No Fun	Confusing
3	High End	Expensive	Corporate
4	Stuffy	Professional	Corporate
5	Corporate	Templated	High End

What was the worst thing about your experience?

1	Nothing
2	Slow load time
3	Slow load time
4	Some of the articles didn't have products I would buy. It was ideas from 2015. I had to search to find anything. The menu wasn't intuitive
5	I couldn't find the product to purchase. I tried to look for it on the main site, but got sent to another website when I clicked "shop."

What other aspects of the experience could be improved?

1	N/C
2	The link I clicked to order an item took me a shopping site with one option.
3	I went straight to shopping. There was no reason to read through the whole site.

4	It seemed slow to load each page. I couldn't find just normal items like pens and mugs. It was all high-end.
5	The site I was on and the shopping site looked completely different.

What did you like about the website?

1	N/C
2	I found some ideas.
3	I didn't really use the site.
4	Nothing really. It was a typical blog with too much reading and not enough actual product.
5	Great ideas. I found an original idea in seconds.

What comments do you have for the owner of the website?

1	Make sure I can buy the product when I find it.
2	Slow to load
3	None.
4	Everything on the page was so big. It was overwhelming.
5	Make sure you can order the items you want before posting on the website.

Whose website is this?

- 2 Staples
- 2 Staples Promotional Products/SPP
- 1 Your Brand Partner
- I don't know

Who do you think the intended audience is?

- 1 Me
- 3 Marketing/Marketers
- 1 Research/Looking for promo ideas
- 0 No response

What do you think is the purpose of YourBrandPartner.com?

- 5 Education/Information
- No response
- Sales
- Content Provider
- Entertainment

Other (Marketing)

Other (SEO)

Does YourBrandPartner.com appear easy to navigate?

- 4 Extremely Easy
- 1 Very Easy
- Somewhat Easy
- Not so easy
- Not at all easy

How easy is it to understand the information on YourBrandPartner.com?

- 1 Extremely Easy
- 3 Very Easy
- 1 Somewhat Easy
- Not so easy
- Not at all easy

How likely are you to return to YourBrandPartner.com?

- 1 Extremely Likely
- 1 Very Likely
- 2 Somewhat Likely
- 1 Not so Likely
- 0 Not at all Likely

How likely are you to recommend YourBrandPartner.com to someone you know?

- 0 Extremely Likely
- 1 Very Likely
- 1 Somewhat Likely
- 3 Not so Likely
- 0 Not at all Likely
- 5 Responses

Did you experience any of the following problems at YourBrandPartner.com?

- 2 I did not experience any problems
- 0 The site crashed or stopped responding
- 0 The site was missing features I needed
- 0 The site was confusing to use
- 0 The site was not mobile friendly
- 1 The site was visually unappealing
- 2 The site loaded slowly
- 0 Other (please specify)
- 5 Responses

If you could make any changes to YourBrandPartner.com, what would it be?

- 2 Less Busy Looking
- 2 Scrolling too much to see all content
- 0 Way to connect with someone (no phone number, email, chat)
- 0 Too many stock photos
- 3 Need it to be mobile-friendly
- 2 Need more interactive content
- 0 The site was visually unappealing
- 2 The site loaded slowly
- 0 The blog is called articles

APPENDIX C: ONLINE SURVEY

Introduction:

This quick 5-minute survey tells us a little about your business and promotional needs. Your feedback lets us know what you expect from YourBrandPartner.com and will be used to bring you a faster, easier experience. All survey participants are chosen randomly, and private or personal information is not attached to any of the responses from this survey. Your anonymous, honest feedback is important to us. After completing the survey, you'll get a special discount to use on your next promotional products order. Thanks for participating!

Survey:

(Open ended questions)

Provide three words that you remember from the site, or that you would use to describe the site

What is this site about?

What services and/or products are offered on this site, and for whom?

What is the feel of this site? (*e.g., professional, fun, small-company, corporate?*)

What was the worst thing about your experience?

What other aspects of the experience could be improved?

What did you like about the website?

What comments do you have for the owner of the website?

(5-point scale responses)

Whose website is this?

Who do you think the intended audience is?

What do you think is the purpose of YourBrandPartner.com?

Does YourBrandPartner.com appear easy to navigate?

How easy is it to understand the information on YourBrandPartner.com?

How likely are you to recommend YourBrandPartner.com to someone you know?

Did you experience any of the following problems at YourBrandPartner.com?

If you could make any changes to YourBrandPartner.com, what would it be?

Conclusion:

Thank you for taking the time to fill out our survey. As a thank you gift, please use the coupon code below on your next purchase.

COUPON CODE: 16FEEDBACK

Valid on your next order only, by phone at 1-800-369-4669 or online at StaplesPromotionalProducts.Com. Offer applies to standard list pricing shown on StaplesPromotionalProducts.Com and may not be combined with any other coupon. 1-color decoration included in price. Offer excludes golf balls. Maximum order value of \$5,000 applies. No cash/credit back. Not valid on prior purchases or purchases already in progress. Contract customers are not eligible for this offer. Promotional products purchases do not contribute toward the minimums required for free delivery of other Staples product purchases. Offer ends: 12/31/2016.

APPENDIX D: USABILITY TESTING PARTICIPANT TASKS

Participant tasks will be provided to them for the in-person interaction. Think aloud speech and screen movements will be recorded by TryMyUI.com software.

Task 1

You will perform an impression test. In it, you will have 15 seconds to view the website, and then will be asked a series of questions on what you saw. Please answer the following questions:

Say three words that you remember from the site, or that you would use to describe the site

- What is this site about?
- What services and/or products are offered on this site, and for whom?
- What is the feel of this site? (*e.g., professional, fun, small-company, corporate?*)

Task 2

Scenario: You are looking for ideas for giveaway items for a tradeshow or event.

- 1) You are tasked with finding promotional items for an upcoming tradeshow. Use this site to research that task and choose an item to recommend to the tradeshow decision makers for that upcoming show.
- 2) Buy that item online utilizing YourBrandPartner.com

APPENDIX E: RECRUITMENT SCRIPT FOR USABILITY TESTING

Hello, I am (NAME HERE). I am calling today on behalf of Staples Promotional Products dot com.

I have been asked to recruit participants for an upcoming Usability test on YourBrandPartner.com, the blog that Staples Promotional Products dot com utilizes to provide content and leads to funnel potential orders through the shopping site.

The participants will be asked to use the website and provide comments and feedback about the site and how it functions.

These 1-hour or less usability test sessions are being scheduled in October. As a thank you for your time, you will receive a \$100 gift card from a local Kansas City restaurant or store at the end of the session.

Would you be interested in participating?

Yes

No [Thank them for their time and terminate the call.]

The study session will be recorded through a monitoring software program. Only the team working on this project will use the recording. Your name will not be associated with the recording or other data in any way. You will be briefed on your rights as a participant and may be asked to sign an informed consent form.

Are you willing to have the session recorded and to sign a consent form?

Yes

No (OK, but best if they agree to be recorded)

How would you like the directions to the study location sent to you?

Email: _____

Over Phone: _____

Not needed

If, for any reason, you are not able to keep this appointment, please let us know as soon as possible by calling name: _____ at phone: _____.

APPENDIX F: SLIDE SHOW OF RESULTS FOR PRESENTATION



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Usability Results &
Recommendations:
YourBrandPartner.com
October 19, 2016
Amy Wood, SPP Marketing Manager

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Executive Summary



In September/October 2016, Staples Promotional Products administered 175 online survey, and 5 usability testers to evaluate the usability of YourBrandPartner.com

Positive Findings:

- 8 out of 10 participants rated the overall website at extremely or highly likely to return to YourBrandPartner.com.
- Test participants quickly realized how the site was laid out and how to navigate it.
- Test participants quickly identified the “shop” navigation as a path to purchase.

Areas of Improvement:

- A visual design review is highly recommended.
 - Create a streamlined experience when switching between YourBrandPartner.com and the e-commerce site (StaplesPromotionalProducts.com)
- Improve site speed and basic structure of the site.
- Manage the customer journey in a more efficient way



Presentation title | Section Name

Corporate Restricted



2

Agenda



- Goal of Usability Study
- Background & Methodology
- Survey & Usability Study Participants
- Findings
- Recommendations



Presentation title | Section Name

Corporate Restricted



3

Goals

Goal

The goal of usability testing on YourBrandPartner.com is to improve the user experience through uncovering actionable disconnects between how humans interact with the site, and how it was designed to work. Through a combination of online surveys and an in-person usability study, YourBrandPartner.com has displayed some issues that can be easily fixed and will improve the user experience on the site.

Evaluate the usability of YourBrandPartner.com in two steps:

- Post-visit survey administered to those at they exit the website (known users)
- In-person usability study (new visitors)

Background & Methodology

Background & Methodology

Survey vs. Usability Testing

A survey:

- Gathers attitudes, beliefs and perceptions
- Requires large numbers of participants to reduce sampling errors
- Will provide feedback that is different from how users actually behave
- Can be time consuming because of the sheer amounts of data collected
- Survey participants rated usability (functions) on 5-point scale of ease

A usability test:

- Tests participants' abilities to complete a task
- Typically requires 5 users, because it's the task being tested, not the user
- Observes user behavior and is not comprised of opinions
- Short user testing sessions can reveal immediate results
- Usability testers would complete same survey, but participate in think aloud protocol while attempting to complete specific website tasks

Methodology

Survey Takers Only

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Representative Users

- Users recruited through site exit pop-ups

Realistic Task

- Participants were exiting the site after completing their own visit

Remote Usability Testing

- Survey administered through Survey Monkey and taken on their computer

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Methodology

Usability Testing

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Representative Users

- Met demographic requirements for ideal persona of user

Realistic Task

- Participants completed a 15 second impression test
- Participants were then asked to utilize the website to find ideas for giveaways at the next trade show or event
- Participants were then asked to complete the purchase of the item they identified in the first task

Remote Usability Testing

- Interactions and “think aloud” responses were recorded on TryMyUI.com

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Survey & Usability Participants

User Profile

Survey Taker

Activity	Tools & Methods	Data Obtained
User Profile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Define user based on their usage and previous visit or familiarity with YourBrandPartner.com 	
User Recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Web Survey (Survey Monkey) - Pop-up post-site visit requesting participation in web survey 	Survey Results from online users we know are familiar with the website
Task Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Survey Monkey provided aggregate data of participants - Open-ended questions coded for data analysis in Microsoft Excel 	Survey results data
Survey Completion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - After-the-fact questions asked via Survey Monkey rating their experience - Open-ended questions asked to provide freedom to answer questions - Impression test questions were included, although these participants are clearly familiar with the website 	<p>Opportunity for detailed feedback due to open-ended questions.</p> <p>Survey results data</p>

User Profile

Usability Tester

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Activity	Tools & Methods	Data Obtained
User Profile	- Staples provided personas	Job roles, company size, online shopping experience
User Recruitment	- Telephone recruitment of qualified representative users based on representative persona - Script for participant recruitment in Appendix	Identified 5 representative personas willing to participate in the study
Task Analysis	- Representative task assignments prepared through previous research, eg. Performing a task on the website	
Survey Completion	- After-the-fact questions asked via Survey Monkey rating their experience - Open-ended questions asked to provide freedom to answer questions	Opportunity for detailed feedback due to open-ended questions. Survey results data
Usability Tests	- Utilizing TryMyUI.com to record - Included "impression testing"	Opportunity for detailed feedback due to think aloud protocol and recordings Survey results data Detailed UI feedback; time on task; mouse clicks, think-aloud transcripts, subjective data

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Findings

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Completion Rates

What were the obstacles?



Participant	Task One Completed: Search for a product or idea to recommend for purchase for use at a trade show or event.	Task Two Completed: Purchase the recommended item on YourBrandPartner.com (Make entry into the e-commerce site to purchase chosen product.)
1	Yes	No
2	No	Yes
3	No	No
4	Yes	No
5	No	Yes
Success	2	2
Completion Rate	40%	40%

Forty percent of user were unable to complete their tasks

- This shows a major issue with usability
- We must uncover WHY users could not complete their tasks



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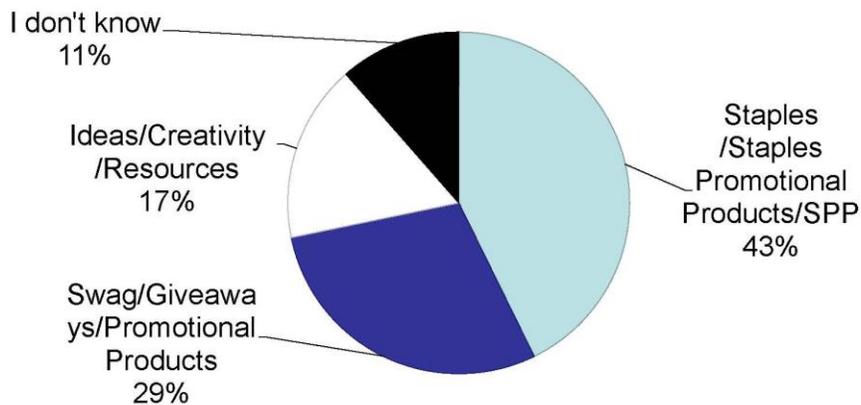
14

Survey Findings

Top 4 Responses



Provide three words that you remember from your site visit, or that you would use to describe the site.



Presentation title | Section Name

Corporate Restricted



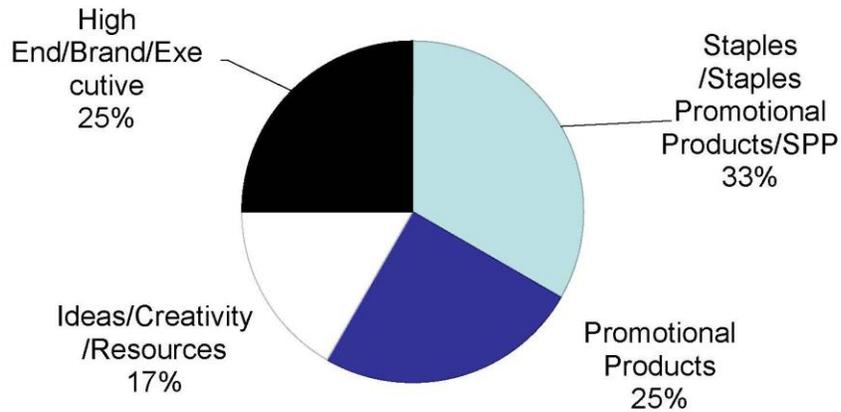
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Usability Findings

Top 4 Responses

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Provide three words that you remember from your site visit, or that you would use to describe the site.



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Presentation title | Section Name

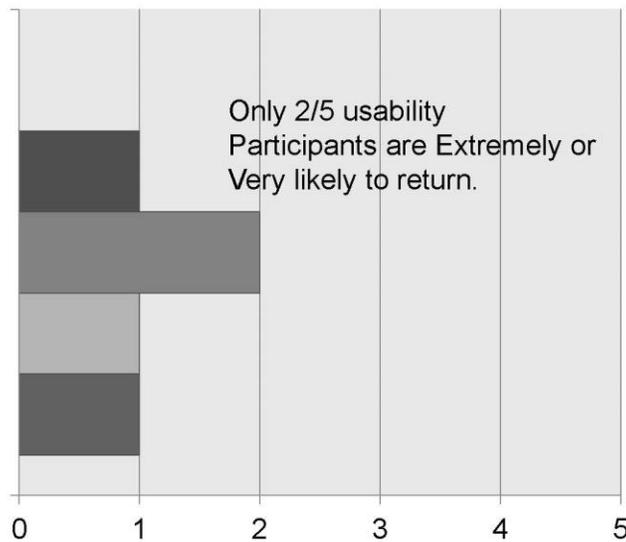
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Usability Findings

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How likely are you to return to YourBrandPartner.com?



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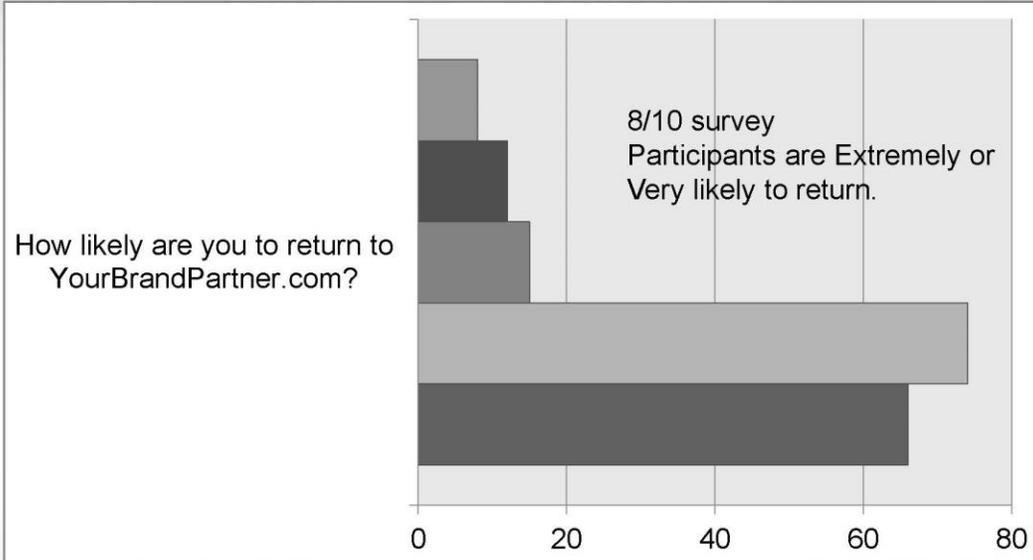
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Survey Findings

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Recommendations

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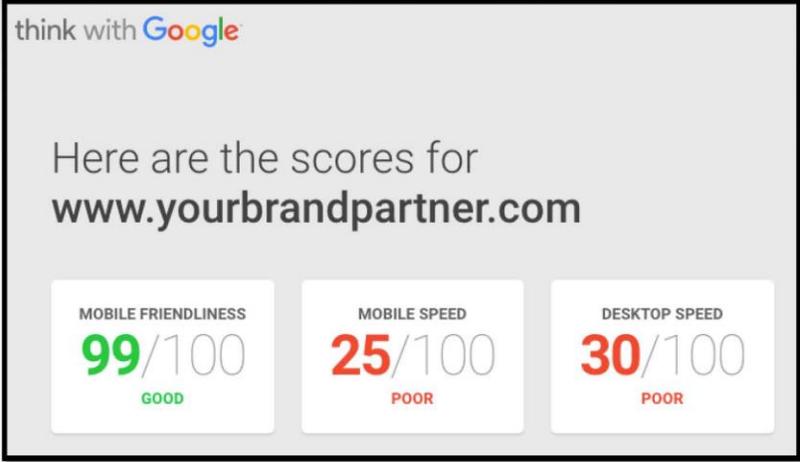
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19

Recommendations

Clearing the Obstacles

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think with Google

Here are the scores for
www.yourbrandpartner.com

Metric	Score	Quality
MOBILE FRIENDLINESS	99/100	GOOD
MOBILE SPEED	25/100	POOR
DESKTOP SPEED	30/100	POOR

Site speeds needs to be improved

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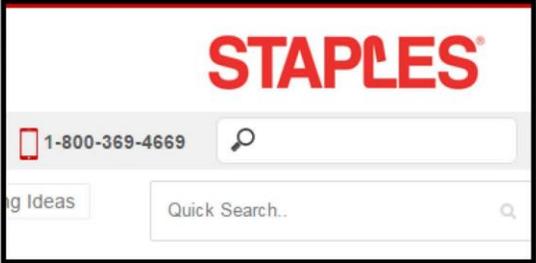
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Presentation title | Section Name Corporate Restricted 20

Recommendations

Clearing the Obstacles

**MAKE
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g Ideas Quick Search..

Remove one search bar.

- 3/5 usability testers voiced concern or confusion over having two search boxes located in close proximity to each other
- Recommendation to remove one of the search boxes
 - Consider A/B testing with "search" based task protocol to determine which search box yields the best user experience

Search returning older blog posts before newer blog posts.

- Update search protocols within WordPress to return fresher content first

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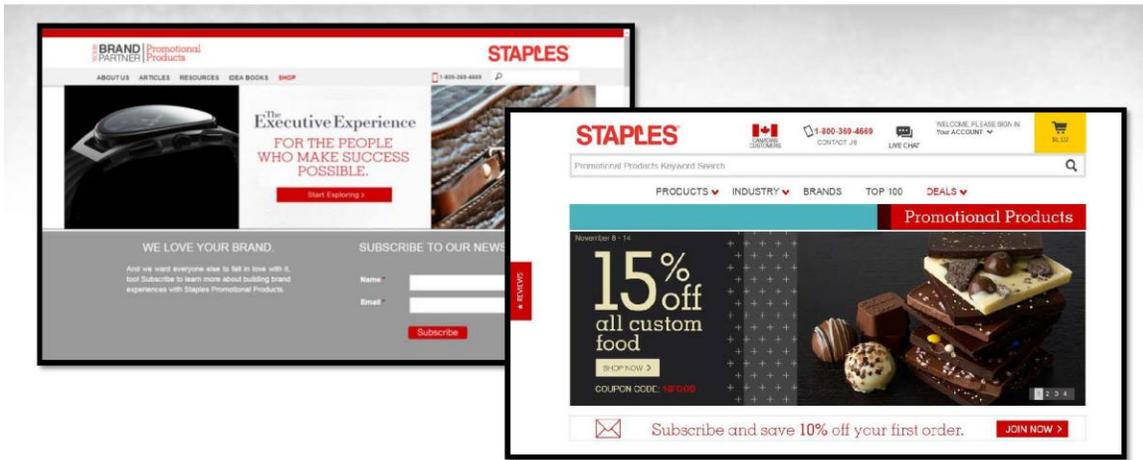
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Presentation title | Section Name Corporate Restricted 21

Recommendations

Clearing the Obstacles

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Better Experience Between Blog and E-commerce

- Usability testing participants who made the jump between blog and e-commerce all voiced confusion

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Presentation title | Section Name

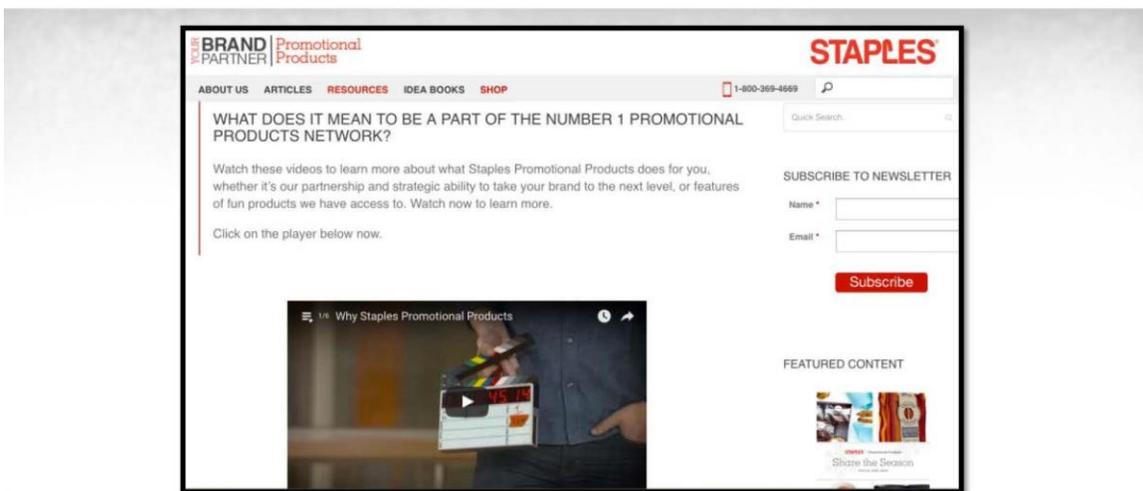
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22

Recommendations

Clearing the Obstacles

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Managing the Customer Journey

- Have a customer journey in-mind for website visitors

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Presentation title | Section Name

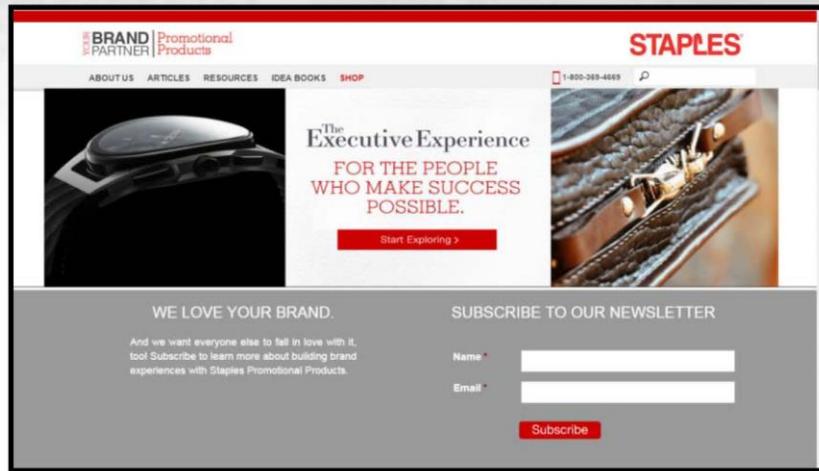
Corporate Restricted

23

Recommendations

Clearing the Obstacles

**MAKE
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HAPPEN**



Perform a visual design review

- Concerns were voiced over use of stock footage, and “templated” layouts.

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Thank you

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