

Heuristic Evaluation of Team Betamax

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Overview Evaluation

Let's just state for the record that we like this a whole lot better than Blackboard. We liked that search results were loaded in the page rather than directing us to a different page. The color of clickable objects was consistent, and the customizable drag interface seemed fluid, minimal and intuitive. We had few issues with the matter in which data is displayed; for instance, tables of classes, or the calendar.

While we appreciated being able to drag and drop objects, for about half of us, the actual implementation was slow and clunky. We noticed that the fade effects took a long time and seemed showy. The use of purposely plain English to describe various user interactions, while engaging to the user, also struck us as overly verbose and distancing. As users, we didn't want to have a conversation with the portal, just to load it up with everything we needed. We had a few issues with the presentation of the search bar, including defining what exactly was being searched. Another issue was the customization menu, including its location and making it obvious that closed boxes could be restored.

Usability Violations

Usability violation	Heuristic	Severity	Times reported
The 'Configure me' interface pushes the rest of the portal windows down to create space for itself. Moving things around on the screen may be distracting.	H8	3	2
Performing a search brings up search results in the search window, but both the search results and the window itself have identical close buttons.	H4	2	3
The Weather window has an Edit option that does not exist in any other window. This may make it easy to overlook. Additionally, both 'Configure' and 'Edit' are being used for the same thing.	H4	2	2
When a window is closed, it is not immediately apparent that there exists an option to restore that window.	H3	3	2
Performing a search brings up search results in the search window, but both the search results and the window itself have identical close buttons.	H4	1	2
Multiple names for a single action or object are an overall issue. Also, using sentences where a word or two would do, referring to the system as 'me'. Generally distracting, confusing, distancing.	H4	2	4
Extraneous radio buttons when adding an RSS feed.	H7	2	2
It is not readily apparent what information can be obtained from the "What do you want to know?" box.	H6	2	3
When you are configuring your settings, the other boxes fade out, making it seem as though you can't interact with them, but you can (by accident, perhaps) click on the buttons or move them.	H5	3	2
Hitting the enter key does not perform the same action as clicking the Search button when performing a search, which is a functionality users used to other search engines may expect.	H2	2	2

Usability violation continued	Heuristic	Severity	Times reported
Having the system refer to itself as 'me' may create a psychological distance between the user and the system, when the real point of the system is to be an extension of the user.	H2	1	1
When you [X] out of a field or add a new field, there is about a second of fading that happens where no work can be done. You should implement some option that disables this for someone that just wants to get things done fast (or get rid of fading altogether).	H7	2	1
The "Configure Me" link is located within a box, which makes it appear like content. As such, the user must look for it. It (and the Logout link) should probably be displayed in a distinct fashion.	H8	2	1
An error condition occurs at some points when trying to add new content to the page, where neither the link for "I want you to keep tabs on a website..." or "I just want a bookmark" do anything. In addition, the "X" box in that dialog doesn't do anything. This seems to occur after all other types of content are already being shown on the page. Refreshing the page clears the error, but also loses all customization.	H5	4	1
After creating a bookmark, the system presents a dialog that requires the user to click "Done", which is extraneous.	H7	2	1
When "Keeping tabs" on a website, if one enters a URL for which no RSS feed can be found, the interface indicates this, and provides three choices. If a new URL is entered in the box next to "No. Here's the RSS URL.", and that button is clicked, the dialog disappears, but nothing else happens. If the user clicks "Yes" when asked if a bookmark should be added to cnn.com, its dialog disappears and nothing else happens.	H5	3	1
Bookmarks open in the same window, RSS feeds and Classes links open in a new window.	H4	2	1
When "Keeping tabs" on a website, if one enters a URL for which no RSS feed can be found, the interface responds with an option for "I'll just add a bookmark there instead." This use of "bookmark" is inconsistent with its use elsewhere in the interface. If you wanted to give the option to create a bookmark for non-rss sites, that might be good.	H4	2	1
When the "What do you want to know?" dialog is closed, the option to add it back reads, "I want my search bar back!". "Search bar" is not equivalent to "What do you want to know".	H4	2	1
When a dialog for RSS feeds or bookmarks is closed, its content is lost permanently. The content can be restored, but only if one creates a new feed or bookmark by re-typing the URL.	H3	3	1
The "what do you want me to do" dialog has two links separated by something that looks like it should be a link, but is actually a description of the link above, which is confusing.	H8	2	1
Table headings are underlined, making them look like they ought to be links.	H4	1	1
The buttons to close the dialogs are small targets.	H7	1	1

Heuristic	Number of violations
H1: Visibility of system status	0
H2: Match between system and real world	2
H3: User control and freedom	2
H4: Consistency and standards	7
H5: Error prevention	3
H6: Recognition rather than recall	1
H7: Flexibility and efficiency of use	4
H8: Aesthetic and minimalist design	3
H9: Help users recognize, diagnose, and recover from errors	0
H10: Help and documentation	0

Severity	Number of violations
0: Not a usability problem	0
1: Cosmetic problem	4
2: Minor usability problem	13
3: Major usability problem	5
4: Usability catastrophe	1

Recommendations

Many of our recommendations are stated or implicit in our analysis of problems. Some are worthy of further discussion:

- We suggest that you minimize the “cuteness” in the interface. All of us found this extremely distracting and annoying. We have no objection to using natural language and defining terms, however, the interface tends to use multiple phrases to describe the same thing, and some of them obscure your intended meaning. Perhaps you could consistently use accurate terms and provide context-sensitive help or pop-up definitions.
- In this vein, none of us were clear on the functionality of the search box. Some clarifying text would be extremely helpful here.
- We don’t see any particular reason why the Customize menu can’t just appear in the same box as the link to it. Many of its current behaviors tend to break the interface or disrupt the user. Also, we suggest that one shouldn’t be able to easily close the Bookmarks box and lose all of their bookmarks – perhaps the user should be able to individually delete them and the box disappears if empty?

Appendix: Individual Reports

Eric’s Report

1. **H8 Aesthetic and minimalist design** (Severity 2)

The “Configure Me” link is located within a box, which makes it appear like content. As such, the user must look for it. It (and the Logout link) should probably be displayed in a distinct fashion.

2. **H8 Aesthetic and minimalist design, H4 Consistency and Standards** (Severity 2)

When adding an RSS feed, the interface asks “Is this what you wanted?”, and then presents a choice of radio buttons as well as OK/Cancel buttons. This requires one more click than should be necessary. Radio buttons are not used elsewhere in the interface.

3. **H5 Error Prevention** (Severity 4)

An error condition occurs at some points when trying to add new content to the page, where neither the link for “I want you to keep tabs on a website...” or “I just want a bookmark” do anything. In addition, the “X” box in that dialog doesn’t do anything. This seems to occur after all other types of content are already being shown on the page. Refreshing the page clears the error, but also loses all customization.

4. **H1 Visibility of System Status** (Severity 2)

After creating a bookmark, the system presents a dialog that requires the user to click “Done.” The action is already committed, so the “Done” button click is extraneous.

5. **H5 Error Prevention** (Severity 3)

When “Keeping tabs” on a website, if one enters a URL for which no RSS feed can be found, the interface indicates this, and provides three choices. If a new URL is entered in the box next to “No. Here’s the RSS URL.”, and that button is clicked, the dialog disappears, but nothing else happens. If the user clicks “Yes” when asked if a bookmark should be added to cnn.com, it dialog disappears and nothing else happens.

6. **H4 Consistency and Standards** (Severity 2)

Bookmarks open in the same window, RSS feeds and Classes links open in a new window.

7. **H6 Recognition Rather than Recall** (Severity 2)

It is not readily apparent what information can be obtained from the “What do you want to know?” box.

8. **H1 Visibility of System Status** (Severity 1)

When a query of “haley jacobs” is entered in the “What do you want to know?” search dialog, the system responds with, “You searched for: ‘Haley’s Phone Number’”. (In fact, this response occurs regardless of what is entered in the search box, which indicates that this is probably just unimplemented, but just in case...)

9. **H4 Consistency and Standards** (Severity 2)

When “Keeping tabs” on a website, if one enters a URL for which no RSS feed can be found, the interface responds with an option for “I’ll just add a bookmark there instead.” This use of “bookmark” is inconsistent with its use elsewhere in the interface.

10. **H3 User Control and Freedom** (Severity 2)

When a box is closed with the “X” button, there is no immediately apparent means of undoing that action.

11. **H4 Consistency and Standards** (Severity 2)

When the “What do you want to know?” dialog is closed, the option to add it back reads, “I want my search bar back!”. “Search bar” is not equivalent to “What do you want to know”.

12. **H8 Aesthetic and Minimalist Design** (Severity 1)

When many dialogs are closed, the list of “I want my blank back!” is wordy. It takes additional time to scan each sentence to find the keyword for the dialog that the user wants to restore.

13. **H3 User Control and Freedom** (Severity 3)

When a dialog for RSS feeds or bookmarks is closed, its content is lost permanently. The content can be restored, but only if one creates a new feed or bookmark by re-typing the URL.

Connor’s Report

1. **H8 Aesthetic and minimalist design** (Severity 3)

The ‘Configure me’ interface pushes the rest of the portal windows down to create space for itself. Moving things around on the screen may be distracting and lead to situations in which windows change location while the user is trying to interact with them.

2. **H4 Consistency and standards** (Severity 1)

Performing a search brings up search results in the search window, but both the search results and the window itself have identical close buttons. This may be confusing or seem odd.

3. **H4 Consistency and Standards** (Severity 2)

The Weather window has an Edit option that does not exist in any other window. This may make it easy to overlook. Additionally, both 'Configure' and 'Edit' are being used in the Welcome and Weather screens, respectively.

4. **H3 User Control and Freedom**(Severity 3)

When a window is closed, it is not immediately apparent that there exists an option to restore that window. The option is not difficult to find in the Configure Me menu, but it may not be obvious to a user who believes they know the full functionality of that menu before closing a main window.

5. **H2 Match between system and the real world** (Severity 2)

Hitting the enter key does not perform the same action as clicking the Search button when performing a search, which is a functionality users used to other search engines may expect.

6. **H2 Match between system and the real world**(Severity 1)

Having the system refer to itself as 'me' may create a psychological distance between the user and the system, when the real point of the system is to be an extension of the user.

Becky's Report

1. **H5 Error prevention** (Severity 2)

When I'm closing the "what do you want me to do" dialog, during the time when the dialog is fading I'm moving the mouse to what I want to click next. Then the dialog closes and what I was about to click on jumps, perhaps causing me to click on the wrong link.

2. **H1 Visibility of system status** (Severity 2)

The search box gives me no indication of what I'm searching. It was the last thing I tried when I was looking for the phone number because I assumed I was searching the web since I hadn't been told otherwise.

3. **H8 Aesthetic and minimalist design** (Severity 3)

The "what do you want me to do" dialog makes me read sentences when words could do the job. I don't think "I just want a bookmark" is more informative than "bookmark," but it takes longer to process.

4. **H8 Aesthetic and minimalist design** (Severity 2)

The "what do you want me to do" dialog has two links separated by something that looks like it should be a link, but is actually a description of the link above, which is confusing.

5. **H1 Visibility of system status** (Severity 2)

When the "what do you want me to do" dialog is open everything else is faded, suggesting I can't interact with the other dialogs. I can. That's weird.

6. **H4 Consistency and standards** (Severity 2)

After I've searched for something, the search dialog has 2 close buttons: one to close the window and one to remove the results. While I understood what the second button was going to do, it looks weird hanging out in the middle of the dialog.

7. **H4 Consistency and standards** (Severity 1)

Table headings are underlined, making them look like they ought to be links.

8. **H7 Flexibility and efficiency of use** (Severity 1)

The buttons to close the dialogs are small targets.

9. **H0 Implementation problem** (Severity 3)

Through some sequence of actions (sorry, I'm not sure quite what I did) I managed to make everything stay faded, even after the "what do you want me to do" dialog was closed. It then un-faded when I opened the dialog again and faded when I closed it.

10. **H9 Help users recognize, diagnose, and recover from errors** (Severity 2)

When I asked it to "keep tabs on" CNN, it gave me an automatic error message that isn't very intuitive.

11. **H9 Help users recognize, diagnose, and recover from errors** (Severity 3)

When I added <http://hfid.olin.edu/> as a bookmark it gave me an error even though it added the bookmark.

Chris's Report

1. **H8 Aesthetic and minimalist design** (Severity 1)

You have two labels for some actions, like "I'm Not Gordon! (Log Out)", which is unnecessary. "Log Out" would be sufficient.

2. **H5 Error prevention** (Severity 3)

When you are configuring your settings, the other boxes fade out, making it seem as though you can't interact with them, but you can (by accident, perhaps) click on the buttons or move them. If you accidentally delete one while they are faded out, the option to put it back doesn't immediately show up in the configure box, so you might not even notice.

3. **H4 Consistency and standards** (Severity 2)

The [X] box always closes the window except in one place. When you search something, a second [X] box appears that clears the search results instead of closing the box. Consider using a different symbol.

4. **H5 Error prevention** (Severity 2)

After you add an RSS feed, it asks you whether you are sure, and has two radio buttons. The system allows you to click "OK" without selecting one of the two options (there is also a bug that occurs if you do this, but it shouldn't allow you to say "OK" to nothing in the first place).

5. **H1 Visibility of system status** (Severity 3)

The search field offers no indication of what it is actually searching (www.olin.edu? the internet?).

6. **H4 Consistency and standards** (Severity 3)

Any time you enter something in a text field and press enter, the box goes away and nothing happens. You should make hitting enter do the same thing as actually clicking on the submit button.

7. **H7 Flexibility and efficiency of use** (Severity 2)

When you [X] out of a field or add a new field, there is about a second of fading that happens where no work can be done. While this does look cool, it lowers efficiency. You should implement some option that disables this for someone that just wants to get things done fast (or get rid of fading altogether).

8. **H4 Consistency and standards** (Severity 3)

To change most things you go to the "Configure Me" window, but then there are [Edit] buttons on some windows (which currently don't work). Since I don't know what they are supposed to do, I don't know if it is an issue, but make sure that they don't do the same thing (or just get rid of them altogether and make all preference changes take place in the "Configure Me" window). The RSS feed and bookmark windows have [Edit] buttons, but I don't see any reason for them.