Thumbs Up/Thumbs Down

Songza

Fact Monster™

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INF385H - Digital Media Design
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Thumbs up to Songza.com for its simple, attractive design, flexibility amongst platforms, intuitive interactions, and general ease-of-use; Thumbs down to FactMonster.com for its hideous design aesthetic, unclear intention of use, horrible information architecture, lack of visible credibility, and inappropriate/distracting use of advertisements.

Group Members: Eliza Barry, Lauren Claymon, and Rae Gibbs

Our Thumbs Up goes to Songza.com, an online music streaming service curated by Songza's own music "concierge." The site is free and does not require the user to create an account to use. The design translates well across PC and mobile platforms, alike.

Our Thumbs Down goes to FactMonster.com, a reference site for children. FactMonster uses a hideous color scheme, is difficult to parse, and is marred by various types of clutter and counter-intuitive navigation interactions. The intended audience of the site is also unclear and its credibility as an academic reference is not obvious. To top it off, FactMonster splashes large, inappropriate advertisements, deterring further from its credibility.
Songza.com is a free music streaming site which is also available as an app for mobile devices. It presents playlists that have been curated by music experts (Songza calls them “music concierges”) for a wide variety of musical tastes, activities, and moods. It also allows registered users to submit playlists for editorial consideration. Songza is an excellent example of a site that integrated design, utility, and ease of use into a well-integrated and highly functional package. This site earned the thumbs-up from our group for the following reasons:

- The design aesthetic is simple, modern, and clean, and the home page instantly provides first-time visitors with a clear call to action via large buttons which pair a descriptive image with a text label (Dual Coding Theory).
- The music options presented on the Songza home page change according to the day of the week and time of day at which the site is accessed. For example, in the middle of the day during the week, playlists are formed over common activities for that time of day such as working (with lyrics), doing housework, boosting your energy, etc. At night, the playlist suggestions shift to activities such as unwinding, cooking, eating dinner, or going to bed.
- The simplicity of the design lends itself to various platforms and achieves a cohesive style whether on smartphone, tablet, web app, or PC.
- The design is also scalable, it's easy to add content and expand categories using the site's foundation.
- The clean design and ease of navigation allows the user to navigate the site quickly and intuitively.
- Songza is easy to browse. Users browse playlist categories by activity, time of day, or moods. Users can also use the smart search to locate playlists that include specific artists or songs.
- Songza does not require users to register for an account but registration grants users more privileges such as customizing playlists, creating original playlists, and favoriting music.
FactMonster.com is a reference site for children, primarily those in what is considered to be the “middle grades”—third through eighth grades or late elementary through middle school. As such, it contains information on a wide variety of topics traditionally found in school curriculum as well as information tested on high-stakes accountability exams. This site earned our thumbs down for the following reasons:

- It has a truly hideous design aesthetic. The graphics are terrible, the arrangement of the icons and links on not only the home page but also the information pages is cluttered and confusing, and the color scheme is jarring and unappealing.
- The navigation of the site is confusing and would be difficult for children to follow. If the site’s intended purpose (which is unclear) is to enable children to search for reliable information on their own without a supervising adult, it fails due to its totally non-intuitive interactions.
- The site lacks immediate credibility for parents and educators due to its lack of a clear association with a reliable source. It is produced by Pearson Education, the creators of the statewide standardized tests for Texas and many other states, but the only way a visitor would know that is by scrolling to the bottom of the home page and reading the very fine print found there.
- As a reference source, it lacks credibility because once you drill into the subject pages, there's no bibliographic information to support the material or any documentation of sourcing.
- The tasks the site is intended to complete are unclear. It appears to be a “ready reference” tool that will enable children to quickly find the necessary facts and figures to complete research assignments, but this is not immediately evident to first-time visitors.
- The layout of the advertisements is distracting for users and possibly inappropriate for an educational site aimed at children.
We proposed to renovate FactMonster.com by focusing on reorganizing the categories to reduce clutter and simplify information retrieval as well as by creating a design and layout conducive to not only “ready reference” interactions but also more in depth research assignments. We also increased the profile of Pearson Education’s logo to let parents and educators connect a known source with the information being presented and broke up much of the blocky text into more manageable chunks of information for intermediate readers. We visualized the workflow of typical middle--grade assignment—a report on a selected president of the United States—and reworked the pages necessary to complete said assignment.

The pages we chose to display were based on an assignment a child might have: to research a U.S. president. The following screenshots display the current path that the user would currently take.
Biographies of the U.S. Presidents

Barack Hussein Obama
William Jefferson Clinton  George Bush
William Jefferson Clinton George Herbert Walker Bush

George Walker Bush
Ronald Reagan  Jimmy Carter
Barack Hussein Obama, Jr.
The Democratic president was re-elected in 2012

by Beth Rowen and Jennifer Wood

After a historic and bruising 22-monthlong campaign, Sen. Barack Obama was elected the 44th president of the United States on Nov. 4, 2008. He prevailed over Sen. John McCain in what was probably the most pivotal U.S. election since World War II. He took the oath of office on Jan. 20, 2009, and became the first black U.S. president.

Four years later, on Nov. 6, 2012, Obama was re-elected, narrowly defeating Republican nominee Mitt Romney. Obama prevailed in both the electoral college (303 to 206) and the popular vote (51% to 48%), buoyed largely by taking several crucial battle states, including Colorado, Iowa, Ohio, New Hampshire, Virginia, and Wisconsin.

Obama's First Term

On his second day in office in January 2009, President Barack Obama signed executive orders to suspend military tribunals of terror suspects, close all secret prisons and detention camps run by the CIA—including the infamous Guantanamo Bay prison—and ban coercive interrogation methods. He, however, did not rule out the use of tribunals, saying he would review the Bush administration’s policies on handling detainees. In March 2011, Obama reversed course on two fronts, allowing military tribunals to move forward at Guantanamo, thus admitting that the prison will remain open for the foreseeable future. His decision followed legislation passed in 2010 that prevents prisoners from being transferred from the prison to the U.S. for trial.

Obama's orders also said that the C.I.A. can only use the 19 interrogation methods mentioned in the Army Field Manual. The move ended Bush's policy of allowing the C.I.A. to use methods that were not permitted by the military. "We believe we can abide by a rule that says we don't torture, but we can effectively obtain the intelligence we need," Obama said.
Popular Categories

- Biographies
  - George Washington
  - John Adams
  - Thomas Jefferson
  - James Madison
  - James Monroe
  - John Quincy Adams
  - Andrew Jackson
  - Martin Van Buren
  - William Henry Harrison
  - John Tyler
  - James K. Polk
  - Zachary Taylor
  - Millard Fillmore
  - Franklin Pierce
  - James Buchanan
  - Abraham Lincoln
  - Andrew Johnson
  - Ulysses S. Grant
  - Rutherford B. Hayes
  - James A. Garfield
  - Chester A. Arthur
  - Grover Cleveland
  - Benjamin Harrison
  - William McKinley
  - Theodore Roosevelt
  - William Howard Taft
  - Woodrow Wilson
  - Warren G. Harding
  - Calvin Coolidge
  - Herbert Hoover
  - Franklin D. Roosevelt
  - Harry S. Truman
  - Dwight D. Eisenhower
  - John F. Kennedy
  - Lyndon B. Johnson
  - Richard Nixon
  - Gerald Ford
  - Jimmy Carter
  - Ronald Reagan
  - George H.W. Bush
  - Bill Clinton
  - George W. Bush
  - Barack Obama

- People Fun Facts
- Biographies
- Women of Influence
- U.S. Presidents
- Special Features
- Games & Quizzes

Browse Biographies (by last name)

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

Search Biographies

Search by first name, last name, country, or year

search tips

Research Tools

- Almanac
- World Atlas
- Dictionary
- Encyclopedia
- Timelines
- Thesaurus
- Bibliography & Citation Guide
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