Harford County

Improving the “Visit Harford” Website Experience
INST 710, Fall 2018
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PALS - Partnership for Action Learning in Sustainability
An Initiative of the National Center for Smart Growth

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The Team

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Problem Statement

The client’s goals

- Identify the shortcomings of the Visit Harford website and app
- Expand the website’s reach beyond 30-40 year-olds
- Lay more emphasis on engaging business and leisure visitors
- Identify visitors’ wants and translate them into features and offerings
Our Process

- Background Research
- Field Research
- Wall Walk
- Ideation
- Product Concepts
Montgomery County Website
- Clean, modern interface
- “How do you like to travel?”
- Blog articles with tags like “see+do”
- “Get Inspired” section

Lancaster Tourism Website
- “Getaway guide”
- Trip planner option at the top
- “Create a memory”—different approach to main attractions
- Option to sign up for the newsletter

Prince George’s County Website
- Clean interface
- “Stories”: for latest county updates
- Navigation bar: “Play,” “Stay,” “Dine,” “Events” with useful sub-categories
Background Research

Common themes

- All reviewed websites have a modern, intuitive UI
- Sections like “How do you like to travel?” and “Create a memory” add a personal touch
- Option to sign up for a newsletter
- Social media integration
Background Research

What we learned

- Focus on the website experience for ages 20-30 years
- Learn how and when users pick “navbar” options
- Understand the user’s personality to determine a relevant information structure
- Focus on effective ways to incorporate social media
**Target Audience**

**Individuals:**
- In their 20s
- 8 people from different backgrounds:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship Status</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Student (undergrad)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In a relationship (unmarried)</td>
<td>Student (grad)</td>
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<tr>
<td>In a relationship (married)</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Interview Focus

Interviews focused on

- User’s intention in using the website
- Understanding what information they’re looking for
- App and website features they interact with
- Steps they take to navigate through the website and apps
- Other resources/apps/websites they use to inform their decisions
- Visitors’ preconceived ideas about Harford County or its websites
Our User’s Story

Why I travel?
- Factors that affect where I go

How do I plan?

What makes planning easier for me?

Deciding what to do

Website features important to me
User Personalities

- Detailed Planner
- Experimenter
- History Buff
- Social Traveler

- Safe Planner
- Thrifty Spender
- Nature Lover
- Improviser
- No-nonsense planner
Why I Travel

• I look for unique experiences
  ○ I like exploring new places
  ○ I don’t like artificial or touristy places

• I like to relax and take it easy
  ○ I want peace and quiet
  ○ I like to walk around

• I travel for very specific reasons
  ○ I travel to visit friends
  ○ I go on trips to accompany others
Related User Personalities

Experimenter
- I look for new places to visit
- I like to explore nearby places
- I prefer local restaurants
- I don’t care about popular opinion
- I would rather go to peaceful places than crowded, touristy spots

Social Traveler
- I like to have a good time with people when I’m traveling
- Being with my friends is important to me

Nature Lover
- I enjoy spending time in nature
- I don’t like to go to artificial places like malls
Actionable Items

Personality quiz to determine best choices
Factors That Affect Where I Go

- I rely on reviews to make a decision
  - I want the county website to have reviews
  - I read reviews before making a decision to visit a place
- External factors before I travel
  - Weather influences my decisions
  - Cost is important to me
Factors That Affect Where I Go

- I want to see pictures of real people, professional pictures feel impersonal
  - I want to see authentic pictures
  - I want to see pictures by real people, not professionally shot images
Related User Personalities

Safe Planner
- I want reviews and recommendations from trusted websites
- I don’t like professionally shot pictures

Thrifty Spender
- I want to see prices while booking
- I look for cheaper options whenever possible
Actionable Items

Reviews and recommendations
filters and sorts based on cost
How do I Plan

- I improvise instead of planning ahead
  - I plan in the moment
  - I go with the flow
- I use external apps to plan
  - I prefer to use specific external apps for planning
  - I use external apps to find out what to do first
- I save interesting places to visit
  - I make a travel itinerary
  - I take notes of places I want to visit or save for later
- I plan with/for others
  - I plan for others
  - Friends and family plan for me
  - I plan with friends and family
## Related User Personalities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Detailed Planner</th>
<th>Improviser</th>
<th>Safe Planner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● I like to plan a trip well in advance</td>
<td>● I go with the flow and tag along with people on trips</td>
<td>● I need to see posts from people who have actually visited the place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● I like to have a final itinerary before booking</td>
<td>● I just plan and book the important stuff before leaving</td>
<td>● I want reviews and recommendations from trusted websites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● I take a note of all the interesting places</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Actionable Items

Customizable planner
Day-wise itinerary
What Makes Planning Easier For Me

- I want more pictures on the website
  - I expect pictures and want more pictures
  - I want to see people engaged and having fun
- I want things to be more organized
  - I like alphabetically organized lists
  - I want clear navbar options
- I want to find information quickly
  - I don’t want redundant info
  - I don’t want information immediately
- I need more information on the website
  - I want more information about pictures
  - I want more information on each trip idea
  - I did not find what I was looking for on the website
Related User Personalities

No-Nonsense Planner
- I want to get all my information upfront and quickly
- All relevant information should be consolidated in one place

Detailed Planner
- I want to know everything there is to know about a place
- I want to have more control over navigation

Improviser
- Mobile websites should cater to on-the-go needs
Actionable Items

Mobile responsive website
Social media Integration (Instagram)
Gallery images with added info
Deciding What To Do

- **External factors after I arrive**
  - Proximity of attractions to each other matters
  - Duration of stay is important
  - I’m bounded by time

- **My personal preferences**
  - I like to shop
  - I don’t like drinking alcohol
  - Food is an important factor

- **I’m influenced by popular opinion**
  - I make choices based on popular opinion
  - Ranking of results is important

- **I take recommendations from people around me**
  - I seek recommendations from people who have previously visited
  - I seek recommendations from friends
Related User Personalities

**History Buff**
- I want a way to talk to local people about the history of the place

**Safe Planner**
- I look for familiar places
- I want suggestions based on personal preferences
- I want links to external travel websites

**Social Traveler**
- I want to be able to plan with my friends collaboratively
- I want an option to share my itinerary with friends

**Nature Lover**
- I look for more outdoorsy trip ideas

**Thrifty Spender**
- I want to know about the estimated cost of visits upfront
Actionable Items

Links to external travel website
Lists like “25 best things to do”
Website Features Important To Me

- I don’t like information to be text heavy
  - I find the website too text heavy

- Visual design matters to me
  - I like it when the website and its features are not dated
  - I judge the overall feel of the website based on its visual design
  - I want a personalized experience

- How information is organized is important to me
  - The information on the home page should be captivating enough to make me want to explore more
  - I want to see the most important results on top
Related User Personalities

No Nonsense Planner

- I don’t want redundant or irrelevant information
- List the best places on the home page
- I tend to look at the top few links while searching
Actionable Items

Clear navigation
Scannable text
Consistent visual and interactive design
A Typical User’s Journey

Before getting to the website

↓

Explore places to visit on the website

↓

Explore places to visit on the website: other options

↓

Research more about specific places and options

↓

Review and make an itinerary

↓

Done looking
Issues

Organization of content is problematic

- Organization of content on the navbar is confusing
- Difficult to locate relevant and important info
- Redundant navigation (bar and boxes)
- Misleading landing image (because it shows on other pages)
- “Plan A Trip” navigation is misleading
Issues

Issues with website features

- outdated UI
- broken external links
- travel guide is a PDF
- too text heavy
- website feels impersonal
- bad SEO
- textual direction not useful
- no customizability
- irrelevant information
- no nearby option
- no means of collaboration
Issues

Website lacks information

- lack of filters and sorts
- lack of related info on
  - Gallery images
  - trip ideas
  - attractions
- lack of trip ideas
- no reviews
Hot Ideas
Hot Ideas

Planner
- Favorites
- Day-wise itinerary
- More trip ideas
- Real-time collaborations
- Option to make trip idea public
- Display nearby options
- Wish list
- How to get there

Personalized Trip Ideas
- Personality quiz to determine best choices
- Season-wise ideas
- Time-wise ideas
- AI chatbot
- Similar things to do

Lists of each nav bar item
- Walkability score
- Image carousel
- Sorts and filters
- Favorites
- Interactive map of all the places
Hot Ideas

**Standalones**
- Guided tours
- SEO and SMM
- Tab-based navigation b/w website sections

**Images**
- Social media linked
- Latest images
- Gallery images information
- More images for places

**Travel Guide**
- Frequently/dynamically updated
- Accessibility (older population)

**Recommendations**
- List of best/top places
- Recommendations from locals
- Reviews from external websites
- Similar things to do
Chosen Design Ideas

**Planner**
- Favorites
- Day-wise itinerary
- More trip ideas
- Real-time collaborations
- Option to make trip idea public
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**Personalized Trip Ideas**
- Personality quiz to determine best choices
- Season-wise ideas
- Duration-wise ideas
- AI chatbot
- Similar things to do
Planner - I:
Product Concepts
Home Page

- Things to do in Harford County
- Upcoming events
- Personalized trip ideas
- Build your own trip
- My list
My List

- List of activities added by the user
- Option to remove activities
- Share with friends
- Option to build an itinerary
Individual Activity

- Photos with relevant details
- Description of activity
- Food and Lodging options nearby
- Directions
- Add to “My list” option
Home Page

- Things to do Harford County
- Upcoming events
- Personalized trip ideas
- Build your own trip
- My list
Things to Do in Harford County
Home Page

- Things to do in Harford County
- Upcoming events
- Personalized trip ideas
- Build your own trip
- My list
Events Calendar

- Calendar to choose dates of visit
- A list of events on selected dates
- Option to filter the list
- Option to add events to “My list”
Home Page

- Things to do in Harford County
- Upcoming events
- Personalized trip ideas
- Build your own trip
- My list
Personalized Trip Ideas

- Questions to find out user preferences
- A list of trip ideas, activities and events based on the answers
Personalized Trip Ideas

- Questions to find out user preferences
- A list of trip ideas, activities and events based on the answers
Build Your Own Trip

- User selects
  - duration
  - traveling with
  - interesting activities
  - travel season
- A list of recommended activities is generated
Activities

- Activities filtered based on user preferences
- Ratings and other relevant details
- Option to add to “My list”
Itinerary

- List of activities added by the user on the left
- Day-wise itinerary on the right
- User can drag and drop activities