

Project 3: Evaluation of “Life Without Plastic”

<https://lifewithoutplastic.com/>

Group 13

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INFO 202: Information Retrieval System Design

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May 13, 2024

Contents

Executive Summary	3
Introduction	3
Site Map of Existing Site & Discussion	4
Re-design Discussion	7
Recommendations	9

Executive Summary

This report evaluates and offers design modifications for the *Life Without Plastic* website. *Life Without Plastic* is a site dedicated to reducing plastic waste. It aims to raise awareness by providing information and tips to use in daily life that honor sustainable practices. It also educates users on the importance of plastic reduction to the environment, and how the environment has already been impacted. These design modifications demonstrate a more seamless user experience that enhances the goal of the site; to educate without overwhelming the user with too much information. *Life Without Plastic* does a great job at promoting its sustainable philosophy but occasionally overinforms with too many drop-down menus. The following design modifications assess which information is most important, and the order in which users should be introduced to resources and links. All of this is done in order to focus more precisely on main ideas and to better utilize web design for a stronger user experience.

Introduction

The site *Life Without Plastic* centers around a philosophy of avoiding fossil-fuel derived plastics. Largely acting as a retail hub, the site caters to those wanting alternatives to the single-use plastic items that tend to monopolize the market. Due to the negative impact that fossil-fuel derived plastics have on the environment and individual health, the founders of *Life Without Plastic* created the business to raise awareness about the dangers of widely used plastics, while also offering accessible solutions. Informative blog posts comprise a large portion of the site's pages, along with the individual item listings for sale. *Life Without Plastic*'s inception was a book published by the founders to give readers a concise summary of the current issues with single-use plastics and ways to mollify their effects. The book is for sale on the site, along with the individual items and kits that they market. A wholesale option is also available for retailers

interested in offering *Life Without Plastic* products for their customers. Considering all these aspects of the site, a wide variety of users must be catered to for their different needs. The primary issues we found with the site's navigation were the amount of dropdown options, the occasionally confusing sections, and the repetitive labeling in the navigation menu. A redesign would greatly improve the quality of user experience, especially with our focus to streamline the navigation menu and organization of pages.

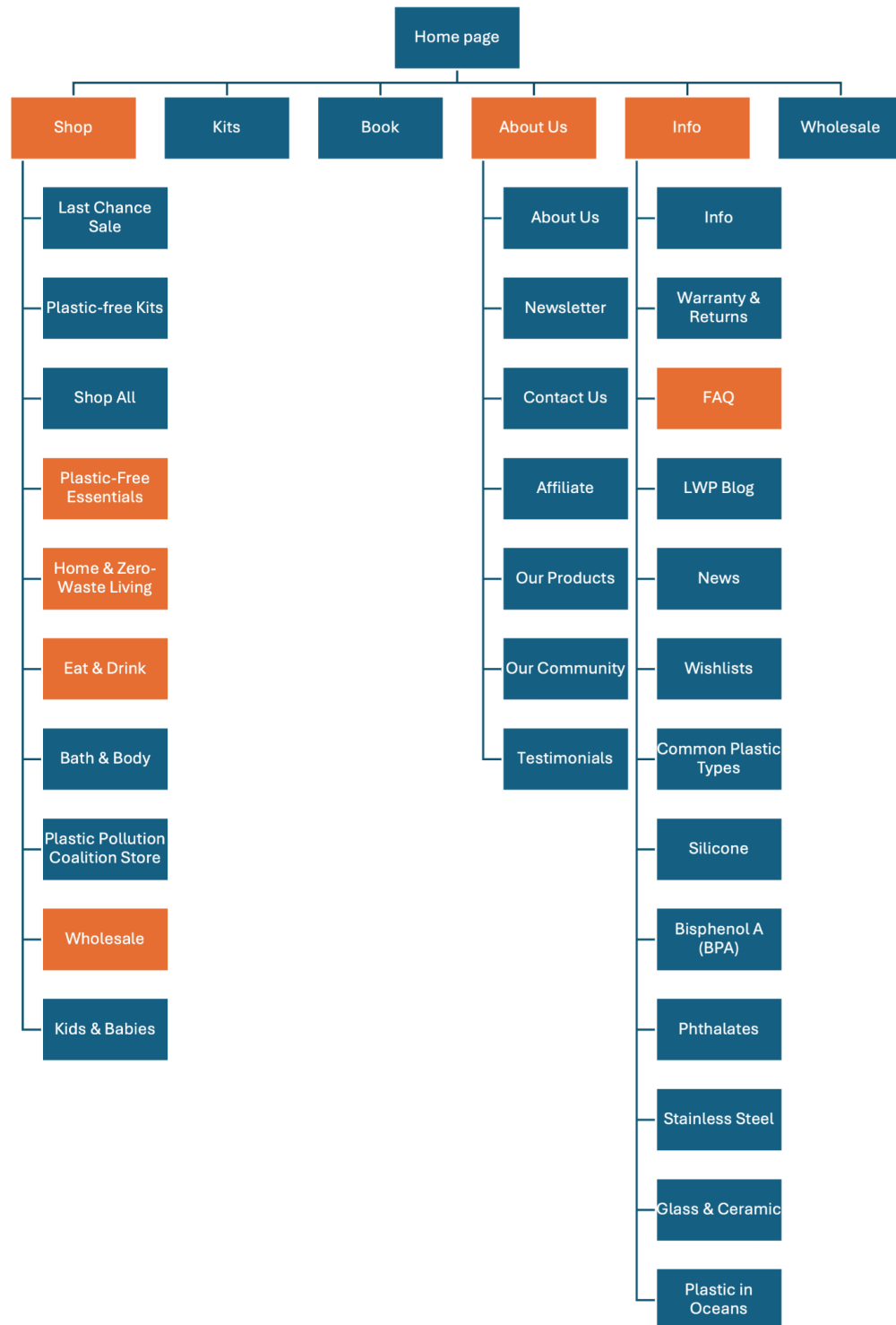
Site Map of Existing Site & Discussion

The home page for *Life Without Plastic* currently has a central navigation menu at the top, centered under a banner with the site logo. Some sections—namely 'Kits', 'Book', and 'Wholesale'—are links to a self-contained page that expands on the labeled topic. Other sections in the navigation menu, such as 'Shop' and 'About Us', expand into dropdown menus when clicked on. In the site map diagram below, links such as this that expand the menu (rather than link to a separate page) are marked in orange. Because of the plethora of site pages, this report will exclusively analyze the first two levels of the site hierarchy.

The current layout of the site hierarchies is fairly narrow and has a deep set of levels to click through. There are six primary navigation sections that users can browse, half of which expand into extensive menus of several related pages. Since most users visiting the website will be primarily interested in shopping for products, the current navigation is not ideal because of the confusing nature of its classification. While the sections 'Kits' and 'Wholesale' are included as hyperlinks in the first level of the navigation menu, they are also listed under the 'Shop' dropdown. There isn't a clear reason for this inclusion and it seems unnecessarily repetitive for users that want central and succinct navigation. This is just one example of a disadvantage of the current site navigation, but the overarching issue does seem to lead back to the sheer depth of

levels included in a single menu. This can be overwhelming to users browsing the site for the first time, as they may not know where to start.

In terms of meeting the basic needs of users, *Life Without Plastic* does suffice in displaying the sections that most viewers will be interested in. Users are presented with a stationary menu that persists at the top of the screen, including links for their products and further information on the company's background and current endeavors. An advantage here is the current division of levels within the shop: the most relevant subcategories like 'Kits' and 'Wholesale' are emphasized in the navigation menu. This narrow structuring of the first level of navigation sufficiently avoids overwhelming users with too many categories of information; however, issues warranting a redesign become apparent when accessing the subsequent levels of navigation.

Figure 1*Current Sitemap for lifewithoutplastic.com*

Note. Items marked in orange expand a dropdown menu rather than link to a separate page.

Re-design Discussion

Some of the issues with the current design are the dropdown menu labeling, and the placement of the linked pages under the top menus. The current dropdown menus, specifically 'Shop', 'About Us', and 'Info', have a lot of options for users to choose from. Along with this, some of the placement of the subcategories are a bit confusing. Having too many options for the user can cause them to become overwhelmed and deter them from clicking through, or leave them confused as to where the information they are looking for might be located. To help with this, we suggest making changes to the names and categories of the top menu items and the categorization of the linked pages, or subcategories, that are listed underneath.

For example, removing 'Kits' and 'Wholesale' from the top menu simplifies the menu banner for the user and removes redundant information from the website. These two pages can then be nested under the main 'Shop' menu for users who are looking to shop for items on the site. The top menu option 'Book' can likewise be nested under the 'Shop' menu, to clean up the cluttered top menu and better indicate to users that the page is specifically for the book that is available to purchase on the website. This also helps with consistency in the menus, allowing the user to now expect that clicking on the top menu items will lead to a submenu of clickable pages on the website.

The 'Info' menu currently contains all of the website's available information about plastic, alternative materials, shop information, warranty information, a wish list feature for users, a blog, and news articles about the organization. Relabeling the 'Info' menu to 'Education' will better express the main purpose of this menu, as the majority of the pages nested under this menu contain information meant to educate the users about the use of plastic and alternative materials. Along with this, we suggest adding a new top menu labeled 'Stay Connected.' This

menu can contain pages such as the newsletter, blog, social media links, news, and the ‘Contact Us’ page. This will make it easier for new and returning users to get the latest information all under one well-labeled menu.

Figure 2

Proposed New Sitemap for lifewithoutplastic.com



Another recommendation to help with consistency and clarity for the user is to remove the third level of menu options. For example, rather than clicking on the top menu option ‘Shop’, then ‘Eat & Drink’, and then choosing from a third tier of options, users should be able to have a much easier time landing on a page that contains what they are searching for. We suggest removing this third tier menu and sending the user to new pages that contain links to subpages if necessary. The user will not see the subpage links on the navigation menu, making determining what to click on a simpler process.

Removing the dropdown menu format altogether and having the second-tier links go directly to separate pages is another thing to consider. This would remove the overwhelming number of menu options from the main page. Instead, the user would have a list of subpages on the second-tier pages. For example, the “Shop” button on the menu, rather than expanding the menu, would go directly to a page that displays all items listed in the shop. This “Shop” page would have a list of links to the different shop categories listed on the diagram. The disadvantage to this, however, would be that the user would have to navigate to these second-tier pages to find the relevant sub-pages, rather than having the dropdown menu links on every page of the website.

Recommendations

In conclusion, *Life Without Plastic* can greatly benefit in a redesign of the menu structure as a whole. Doing so will improve the organization, clarity, and usability of the website. As of now, the site’s menu hierarchy and structure can potentially overwhelm or confuse the user, resulting in a loss of sales and website traffic. By restructuring the menus, simplifying the submenus, omitting redundant information, and aggregating similar concepts, we can make the user’s experience on the website much more streamlined and enjoyable.

More discussion and research would be beneficial to ensure a website that meets users' needs. We recommend interviewing potential users about the site design and performing a card-sorting exercise to allow users to identify how they feel the website should flow. This will help the webpage design team get a better idea of how the site should be structured. Another way to test user experience is to present potential users with two or three proposed sitemaps and have them identify which one makes the most sense to them. Implementing these changes can further encourage browsing, searchability, and website traffic.