

Project 1 Beta Prototype Evaluation

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INFO 202

October 5, 2022

Group 16 wrote a Statement of Purpose that identified their target users, and people searching for candles and explained their habits while backing their claims with research. Their database design reflected their stated objectives with fields aligned to the user's information needs. We found the database submission page easy to use and experienced little difficulty with inputting candle products, and then finding our products on the search page afterward. The rest of this paper will provide suggestions on how to optimize the database design and include the questions and confusions we encountered while working on the beta design.

First, selecting "Brand" as a field for the database seemed wise to our group because people can become dedicated to specific brands of candles and can even act as collectors, snatching up limited-edition releases of their favorite brand. However, after inputting a candle with the brand "Mrs. Meyer's Clean Day," we noticed an issue that searchers could encounter when typing in that name into the search field: if the searcher drops the apostrophe in *Meyer's*, the product will not appear. Since the database was efficiently designed with the Search Page Form Element *Contains*, if the searcher types in just *Mrs.* or *Clean*, the product will appear. But as dropping a comma could be a common error for users to commit, we suggest trying to improve that aspect of the database.

The second field that we found to be appropriate for the user's needs was "Seasonal," as candles often change their scent profile if geared towards a specific time of year or holiday. We appreciated the simplicity of the four seasonal options, which precludes the need for values such as "Christmas" to be specified, and therefore keeps the database more inclusive to all, and not tied to a specific cultural tradition.

When searching via the price of one of the candles that we submitted to the database, we came across a problem that the developers had overlooked. Prices that were over \$10, and under

\$11, were not represented in the values. Our product cost \$10.99, and therefore did not appear when searched for in the <\$10, and \$11-\$20 values. Additionally, when inputting the product's price, we noted that the rules did not specify to record the *manufacturer's price*, rather than a Sale or discounted price. The rule states: *Enter the for the price based on what is listed on the packaging or label of the candle. If the candle is purchased in-store and the price is not listed on the label, look at the shelf where the candle was placed and look at the shelf/price tag.* By clarifying that if two prices are offered, choose the higher number or the manufacturer's price, this issue could be resolved.

Another glitch we discovered was in regard to the Type of Wax Base field. The Search Page form limits how the user can search for a specific wax base. For example, we inputted a candle with a soy and vegetable base wax. Since vegetable base wax was not an option in the Dropdown, we selected "Other" and "Soy." Yet, when we searched for the candle in the database by selecting only "Soy" as the wax base, our product did not pop up. Then, when we selected "Soy" and "Other," it appeared. Changing the Search Page form to contains could alleviate this issue.

When reading Group 16's rules, we found that a few of them were too vague or subjective, and could lead to issues for an indexer. For instance, the rule regarding the field Scent states: *Select the scent of the candle based on what is found on the product's packaging or label, or one's judgment.* Asking the indexer to guess if the scent is not provided on the packaging could lead to inaccurate information being inputted as scent can be subjective and fluctuate depending on the indexer's health or sensitivity to smell. Additionally, within the Dropdown options for the Scent field, we noticed some potentially confusing values. For instance, "Pumpkin" and "Pumpkin Carving" were listed as values, and are too similar for both to be

included. Also, the values “New York,” and “Cashmere,” were offered on the dropdown, but those terms do not denote a particular smell. After visiting the Homesick “New York” candle’s manufacturer’s site, we read the description of the candle’s scent: *“A crisp fall afternoon in the Adirondacks. Pumpkin patches lined with hay. Nutmeg and cinnamon complement freshly picked apples.”* Therefore, the term “New York,” in the candle’s name refers to the Upstate area, certainly not the smells of an urban metropolis. The scent “apple,” “pumpkin,” “nutmeg,” and “cinnamon” would be more appropriate values for this product. Similarly, after visiting the Quince “Cashmere” candle’s site, it appeared as if “coconut,” would be a more appropriate value to define the product’s scent.

Another issue that we came across was in regards to the field Scent Type, which had the values, “Natural,” “Artificial,” and “None.” We discussed how the term “Natural” does not always have a standardized meaning, and that perhaps using more specific terms, such as “Essential oil based” vs. “Synthetic Fragrance oil” could be more concise. Additionally, the rule commands the indexer to select “None” if they cannot find whether the scent is natural or artificial, which could create confusion for the user while searching for the product. If they search for the scent type “None,” they could believe that they were searching for an unscented candle. Using the term “Unknown” instead of “None” could resolve this confusion.

A larger problem for our group was navigating the “Use” field. Its rule gave too much freedom to the indexer, asking that the indexer name the candle’s use based on, “the list of ingredients or one’s own preferences.” The rule provides some options of potential uses: “e.g. relaxation, fragrance, lighting,” but the term “lighting” could apply to every candle, and “fragrance” already has a field of its own (“Scent” and “Scent Type”). Perhaps a better field could be “Effect” rather than “Use” since some candles do promise a specific effect, like helping

you relax, lifting your mood, or masking a bad smell. We selected “None” with each product we inputted because we could not determine appropriate use.

Potency was the field we found most problematic. Potency is highly subjective. Sensitivity to scent varies dramatically from person to person. It’s potentially like salad dressing...where one person’s “heavy” is another person’s “light”. Since we did not have access to the candles we inputted and were thus unable to judge the candle’s potency, we selected “None,” for each submission, as a selection was mandated by the database. However, the rule states to select “None” only if the candle does not have a scent. Therefore, our submissions reflect inaccurate information due to the constraints of this field.

We encountered other issues with regards to the value “None,” in other fields, such as Type of Wick. By selecting “None” to indicate that the type of wick cannot be determined, could mislead the user into believing that the candle did not have a wick. Again, by using the term “Unknown” instead of “None,” this confusion could be resolved.

Size was another field that seemed troublesome to our group. We discussed how users may want to search by candle type, rather than size: votive, taper, pillar, novelty, glass, or tin container, etc. rather than weight. Users also may be more interested in the candle’s burn time (a detail we found included in the description of several of the candles we researched), rather than weight, as the burn time relates directly to the product’s value-how long will this candle last?

As we conclude our evaluation, we would like to leave Group 16 with two final notes. First, we believe that a Color Field could be helpful for users while searching for a candle. People very commonly look for candles based on color to match their décor or the theme of a party or holiday celebration. Secondly, we did not find information regarding pet-friendliness or hypoallergenic properties within any of the candles we submitted. We wondered if

“hypoallergenic” candles would simply be unscented candles and would therefore be searchable by the “Scent” field. Several of the products were labeled “Non-toxic,” implying that the product is pet friendly, so that could be a more appropriate field. The definition for “Pet Household Friendly” seems to conflict within itself, “*Whether the candle is suitable for pets to be around or to eliminate pet odors,*” leaving the indexer to note both whether the product is safe for pets, and if its scent is strong enough to mask pet odors. We suggest rethinking this field and its definition.

Group 16, congratulations on completing your Beta, and thank you for sharing it with us. We enjoyed trying it out.