

## DauidsGuides.com - Book Summary

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**Book Title:** Don't Make Me Think

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### Summary:

#### - Introduction

- The good news is that much of what I do is just common sense, and anyone with some interest can learn to do it.
- Like a lot of common sense, though, it's not necessarily obvious until *after* someone's pointed it out to you.

#### - Chapter 1 - Don't make me think!

- It means that as far as is humanly possible, when I look at a Web page it should be self-evident. Obvious. Self-explanatory.
- I should be able to "get it"—what it is and how to use it—without expending any effort thinking about it.
- Well, self-evident enough, for instance, that your next door neighbor, who has no interest in the subject of your site and who barely knows how to use the Back button, could look at your site's Home page and say, "Oh, it's a \_\_\_\_." (With any luck, she'll say, "Oh, it's a \_\_\_\_\_. *Neat.*" But that's another subject.)
- All kinds of things on a Web page can make us stop and think unnecessarily. Take names of things, for example. Typical culprits are cute or clever names, marketing- induced names, company-specific names, and unfamiliar technical names.
- You may be thinking, "Well, it doesn't take much effort to figure out whether something's clickable. If you point the cursor at it, it'll change from an arrow to a pointing hand. What's the big deal?"
- The point is, when we're using the Web every question mark adds to our cognitive workload, distracting our attention from the task at hand. The distractions may be slight but they add up, and sometimes it doesn't take much to throw us.
- Granted, most of this "mental chatter" takes place in a fraction of a second, but you can see that it's a pretty noisy process. Even something as apparently innocent as jazzing up a well-known name (from "Search" to "Quick Search") can generate another question mark.

- Your goal should be for each page to be self-evident, so that just by looking at it the average user<sup>3</sup> will know what it is and how to use it.
- **Chapter 2 - How we really use the Web**
  - When we're creating sites, we act as though people are going to pore over each page, reading our finely crafted text, figuring out how we've organized things, and weighing their options before deciding which link to click.
  - What they actually do most of the time (if we're lucky) is *glance* at each new page, scan *some* of the text, and click on the first link that catches their interest or vaguely resembles the thing they're looking for. There are usually large parts of the page that they don't even look at.
  - We're thinking "great literature" (or at least "product brochure"), while the user's reality is much closer to "billboard going by at 60 miles an hour."
  - One of the very few well-documented facts about Web use is that people tend to spend very little time *reading* most Web pages. Instead, we scan (or skim) them, looking for words or phrases that catch our eye.
  - The exception, of course, is pages that contain documents like news stories, reports, or product descriptions. But even then, if the document is longer than a few paragraphs, we're likely to print it out because it's easier and faster to read on paper than on a screen.
  - Why do we scan?
  - **> We're usually in a hurry.** Much of our Web use is motivated by the desire to save time. As a result, Web users tend to act like sharks: They have to keep moving, or they'll die. We just don't have the time to read any more than necessary.
  - **> We know we don't need to read everything.** On most pages, we're really only interested in a fraction of what's on the page. We're just looking for the bits that match our interests or the task at hand, and the rest of it is irrelevant. Scanning is how we find the relevant bits.
  - Like Ginger, we tend to focus on words and phrases that seem to match (a) the task at hand or (b) our current or ongoing personal interests. And of course, (c) the trigger words that are hardwired into our nervous systems, like "Free," "Sale," and "Sex," and our own name.
  - When we're designing pages, we tend to assume that users will scan the page, consider all of the available options, and choose the best one.
  - In reality, though, most of the time we *don't* choose the best option—we choose the *first reasonable option*, a strategy known as satisficing. As soon as we find a link that link that seems like it might lead to what we're looking for, there's a very good chance that we'll click it.
  - I think the answer is simple: If your audience is going to act like you're designing billboards, then design great billboards.
- **Chapter 3 - Billboard Design 101**
  - Since a large part of what people are doing on the Web is looking for the next thing to click, it's important to make it obvious what's clickable and what's not.

- For example, on Senator Orrin Hatch's Home page<sup>3</sup> during his unsuccessful 2000 presidential bid, it wasn't clear whether everything was click-able, or nothing was. There were 18 links on the page, but only two of them invited you to click by their appearance: a large button labeled "Click here to contribute!" and an underlined text link ("full story").
- The rest of the links were colored text. But the problem was that *all* of the text on the page was in color, so there was no way to distinguish the links at a glance.
- It's not a disastrous flaw. I'm sure it didn't take most users long to just start clicking on things. But when you force users to think about something that should be mindless like what's clickable, you're squandering the limited reservoir of patience and goodwill that each user brings to a new site.
- One of the great enemies of easy-to-grasp pages is visual noise. There are really two kinds of noise:
  - > **Busy-ness.** Some Web pages give me the same feeling I get when I'm wading through my letter from Publisher's Clearing House trying to figure out which sticker I have to attach to the form to enter without accidentally subscribing to any magazines.  
When everything on the page is clamoring for my attention the effect can be overwhelming: Lots of invitations to buy! Lots of exclamation points and bright colors! A lot of shouting going on!
  - > **Background noise.** Some pages are like being at a cocktail party; no one source of noise is loud enough to be distracting by itself, but there are a lot of tiny bits of visual noise that wear us down.
- For instance, MSNBC's menus are a powerful and slick navigation device that let users get to any story in the site quickly. But the lines between items add a lot of noise. Graying the lines would make the menus much easier to scan.
- Users have varying tolerances for complexity and distractions; some people have no problem with busy pages and background noise, but many do. When you're designing Web pages, it's probably a good idea to assume that *everything* is visual noise until proven otherwise.
- **Chapter 4 - Animal, Vegetable, or mineral?**
  - One of the choices, Language, is relatively painless. It takes only a tiny bit of thought for me to conclude that "English, US" means "United States English," as opposed to "English, UK."
  - The problem is that it refers to "NAV for Windows 95/98." Now, I'm sure that it's perfectly clear to everyone who works at Symantec that NAV and "Norton AntiVirus" are the same, but it requires at least a small leap of faith on my part.
  - And even though I know for certain that I'm using Windows 98, there's at least the tiniest question in my mind whether that's exactly the same as "Windows 95/98." Maybe there *is* something called "Windows 95/98" that I just don't know about.
- **Chapter 5 - Omit Needless Words**

- *Get rid of half the words on each page, then get rid of half of what's left.* —krug's third law of usability
- Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts.
- Happy talk is like small talk—content free, basically just a way to be sociable. But most Web users don't have time for small talk; they want to get right to the beef. You can—and should—eliminate as much happy talk as possible.
- The other major source of needless words is instructions. The main thing you need to know about instructions is that no one is going to read them—at least not until after repeated attempts at “muddling through” have failed. And even then, if the instructions are wordy, the odds of users finding the information they need is pretty low.
- Your objective should always be to eliminate instructions entirely by making everything self-explanatory, or as close to it as possible. When instructions are absolutely necessary, cut them back to the bare minimum.
- **Chapter 6 - Street signs and Breadcrumbs**
  - Some people (Jakob Nielsen calls them “search-dominant” users) will almost always look for a search box as soon as they enter a site. (These may be the same people who look for the nearest clerk as soon as they enter a store.)
  - For everyone else, the decision whether to start by browsing or searching depends on their current frame of mind, how much of a hurry they're in, and whether the site appears to have decent browsable navigation.
  - **Eventually, if you can't find what you're looking for, you'll leave.** This is as true on a Web site as it is at Sears. You'll leave when you're convinced they haven't got it, or when you're just too frustrated to keep looking.
  - **Forms.** On pages where a form needs to be filled in, the persistent navigation can sometimes be an unnecessary distraction. For instance, when I'm paying for my purchases on an e-commerce site you don't really want me to do anything but finish filling in the forms. The same is true when I'm registering, giving feedback, or checking off personalization preferences.
  - Utilities are the links to important elements of the site that aren't really part of the content hierarchy.
  - Having a Home button in sight at all times offers reassurance that no matter how lost I may get, I can always start over, like pressing a Reset button or using a “Get out of Jail free” card.
  - Given the potential power of searching and the number of people who prefer searching to browsing, unless a site is very small and very well organized, every page should have either a search box or a link to a search page. And unless there's very little reason to search your site, it should be a search box.
  - **Every page needs a name.** Just as every corner should have a street sign, every page should have a name.

- **The name needs to be in the right place.** In the visual hierarchy of the page, the page name should appear to be framing the content that is unique to this page. (After all, that's what it's naming—not the navigation or the ads, which are just the infrastructure.)
- **Chapter 7 - the home page is beyond your control**
  - On a Web site, the tagline appears right below, above, or next to the Site ID.
  - Good taglines are **clear** and **informative**.
  - Bad taglines are **vague**.
  - Good taglines are **just long enough**. Six to eight words seem to be long enough to convey a full thought, but short enough to absorb easily.
  - Good taglines convey **differentiation** and a **clear benefit**.
  - Saving time, money, and sanity are all clearly good things. But they don't tell us anything about the site.
  - Mottoes are lofty and reassuring, but if I don't know what the thing is, a motto isn't going to tell me.