Webpage Review Homework

Your task in this homework assignment is to find and critique two webpages. One of those should be a well-designed webpage, and the second should be a poorly-designed webpage (see the example below). For those of you that remember Siskel and Ebert, you'll understand well the "thumbs up" and "thumbs down" reference.

The salient points you need to include are the following:
1. A proper layout for an academic paper (e.g., your thesis);
2. The title as shown in the example ("Thumbs Up vs. Thumbs Down: Website Design");
3. An introduction, of course;
4. The URL of each site;
5. A short critique (note the nicely-done APA references!);
6. A screenshot of the website;
7. The same for the "thumbs down" website;
8. Any suggestions for improving the poorly-designed website (perhaps even an image as shown in the example); and
8. Your reference section.

As noted, this is due in Session #9 on June 4. Of course, you may submit this earlier if you'd like.

Website choice: Inasmuch as this particular session deals with the screen and website layout, feel free to use any two websites, one of which is designed well and one of which is not. While you may choose educational or technological websites, that is **not** required.

Please contact me if you have any questions.

[Your example / template for this assignment is on the following pages.]

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INF 385H: Digital Media Design
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<div align="center">Thumbs Up vs. Thumbs Down: Website Design</div>

Between our "thumbs up" site and our "thumbs down" site, the major differences can be summed up by a single theme: clutter. On one hand Google Maps has a minimalist design and provides the user with a simple interface with which to accomplish a singular task. On the other, Mr. Bottles, while being a potentially fantastic resource for its intended users, is severely impeded by its busy design, low readability, and general unpleasant user experience.

Thumbs Up Site – Google Maps (maps.google.com)

Google Maps is our exemplary "good" website, representing high standards for both functionality and design. It is one of the content-specific search sites produced by the behemoth corporation. Google Maps targets all Internet users that have a need to find a location or directions from one location to another. The scope of the intended audience is massive and thus the narrow focus of content delivery makes Google Maps representative of good website design. In focusing on one limited function, Google has produced a user-friendly, easy to navigate interface without much depth. It is this lack of complexity that is most valuable. In providing such a restricted method of content delivery, Google Maps successfully conveys its perceived usefulness. Many Internet users in need of a location or directions have come to perceive Google Maps as a tool that will help them perform this task (Davis, 1989). Dependent on mostly behind the scenes data, Google Maps consistently delivers correct and up-to-date directions, which furthers its perceived usefulness to users.

The limited functionality of Google Maps also leads to a clear perception of ease of use. The apparent lack of functional complexity works to create an impression of limited effort needed from the user to achieve the benefits of using the website (Davis, 1989). Google Maps is a simple interface, one that is not likely to be perceived as hard to use or overly taxing in order to be able to perform any given directional or mapping task (Davis, 1989). Additionally, the navigational options are clearly displayed. The simplicity in having two button options for "get directions" and "my place" helps to reduce any cognitive load put on the user in the form of unnecessary choices for functionality. Further possibilities are only revealed if necessary, keeping the site clutter free. For example, if a user desired directions, it is only after they select the "get directions" button that the options for type of transportation are revealed. This form of progressive disclosure is giving the viewer the information they need, only when needed (Weinschenk, 2011).

Google Maps' design features compliment the functionality from the visual perspective. Google Maps exhibits mid- to low-visual complexity, in both its structured and unstructured visual variation (Donderi, 2006; Tuch, Presslaber, Stocklin, Opwis, & Bargas-Avila, 2012). Generally, individuals have an increased likelihood for favorable evaluations of sites that are not as visually complex when information seeking or performing goal-oriented behavior (Stanaland & Tan, 2010). If one believes in object aesthetic evaluations, Google Maps displays a high level of three qualities associated with favorable evaluations: unity, balance, and sequence

(Altaboli & Lin, 2011). The interface is cohesively designed, displaying unity through its consistent treatment of colors, fonts, and design elements. A sense of balance is achieved from the use of white space to counter the visual heavy map. Sequences is followed through the typical left to right, top to bottom pattern of information that is expected in western cultures. Additionally, there are specific design features that are worth highlighting for the design contributions. These include the map itself and the placement of navigational menus and buttons.

The map allows users to choose between an iconic or indexical representation of their desired location (Messaris, 1997). This ability to choose allows users to customize the visual information for their needs. If someone is trying to interpret directions, they may opt for the iconic street view that reduces evidentiary detail to allow for the most efficient expression of the path for walking, biking, public transportation, or driving. Users with other purposes, such as virtually exploring a new city or to determine the shops surrounding their desired location, may choose the satellite or street view for a an index, or visual representation of what exists in that place.

Google Maps displays a high level of prototypicality. Prototypicality is derived from the user's mental model or the general expectations of the object category (Roth, Schmutz, Pauwels, Bargas-Avila, & Opwis, 2010). Google Maps follows that pattern of placement typically displayed on informational sites. The content provider's logo, which also functions as a link to the home page, is located in the top left corner, as users have come to expect. High levels of prototypicality allow users to orient themselves to sites more quickly, another desirable attribute of Google Maps (Roth et al., 2010; Roth, Tuch, Mekler, Bargas-Avila, & Opwis, 2013).
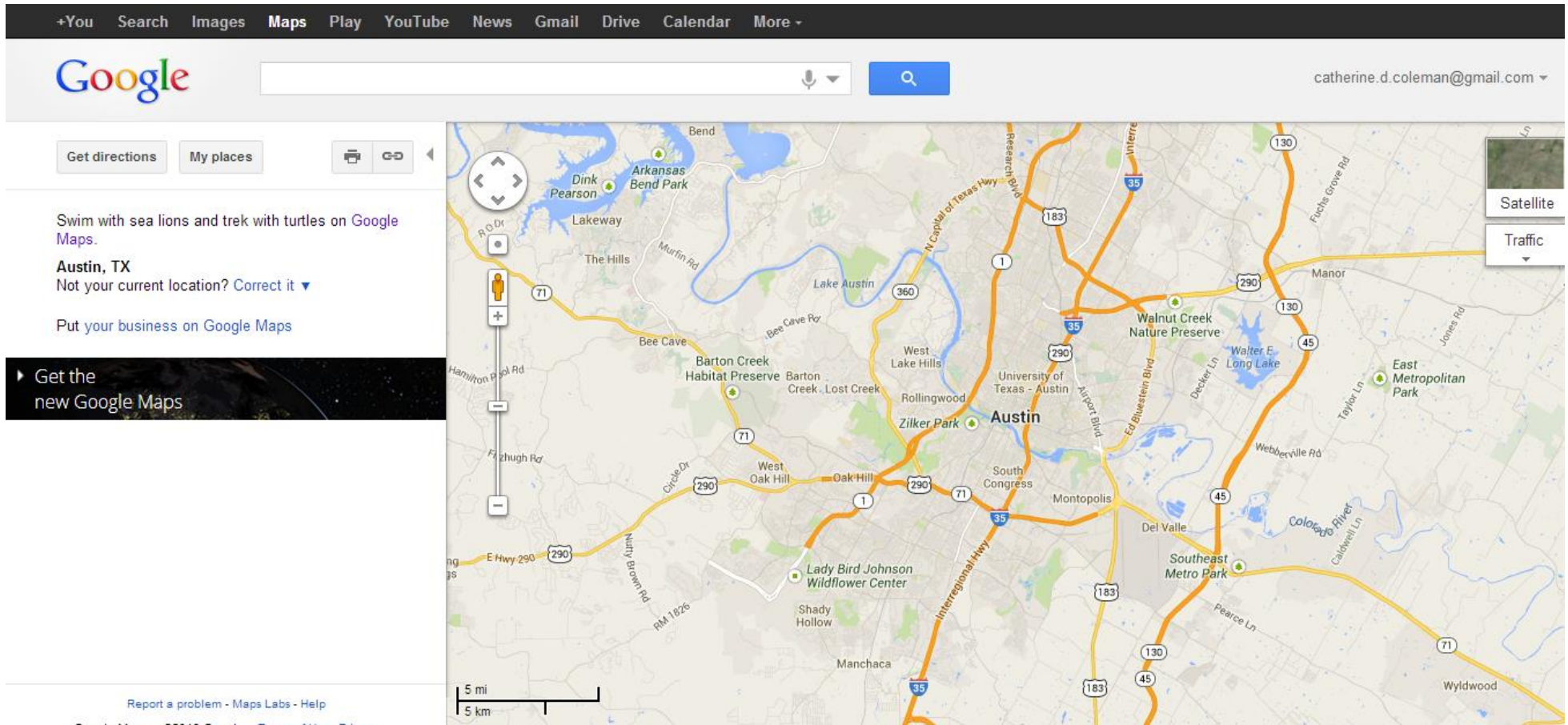
Fig. 1: Screenshot of Google Maps

Thumbs Down Site – Mr. Bottles (http://www.mrbottles.com/

We choose Mr. Bottles as our poorly designed website. While the content of the site itself is actually rather rich and nicely tailored to its prospective audience—those seeking experiences and knowledge pertaining to antique bottle collecting, particularly in the state of Wisconsin—the overall design of the site is very ineffective and would hinder any site visitor from being able to cleanly navigate the site's contents and locate information they were seeking.

The experience of visiting the site from the very start is overwhelmingly hectic. A "talking head" begins speaking immediately and there is no function available to turn it off, which may lead to frustration for some visitors. The talking head also comes in the form of a floating body that adds to the clutter of objects in the design.

From an aesthetic point of view, the site is very displeasing to look at. The static bottle background against the scrolling text makes it very difficult to read any of the information provided, not to mention the distracting "return to top" buoy graphic scrolling on the right side of the screen. The inner box with the reduced background transparency is simply put quite strange looking. The sheer variation in font style, size, color, and use of bold lettering also inhibits the readability of the site. Some of the entries are extremely lengthy and cause the site to appear text heavy and bogged down. Rather than the abundance of text lending to perception of the site's quality of information and apparent usefulness, it, combined with the difficult navigation, renders the site seemingly useless.

It is difficult to navigate to the other pages in the website because the links come in varying shapes and aren't necessarily intuitive, or even visible, unless your mouse happens to be hovering over the general area. For instance, the "Need an Appraisal?" link is displayed within the bottle on the top navigation bar, but its design does not clearly suggest that it will navigate to another page for further information.

The search functionality can also be greatly improved upon. Once you search for a term, the pages shown do not highlight the text to indicate why it these results are returned from the given query. There is also no way of sorting the posts on the front page, as they are simply provided as a long running list of entries without further descriptive metadata.

In order to improve the site's design, we propose to simplify the overall design by clearing the cluttered home page, creating congruity between the text styles and making the page more intuitive in its navigation. The posts will also be created with additional metadata, including dates and categories, so that a visitor or even the site owner can easily search the archives or through a specific term. The links to the categories and archives can be provided in a side bar adjacent to the posts, as shown in our redesign
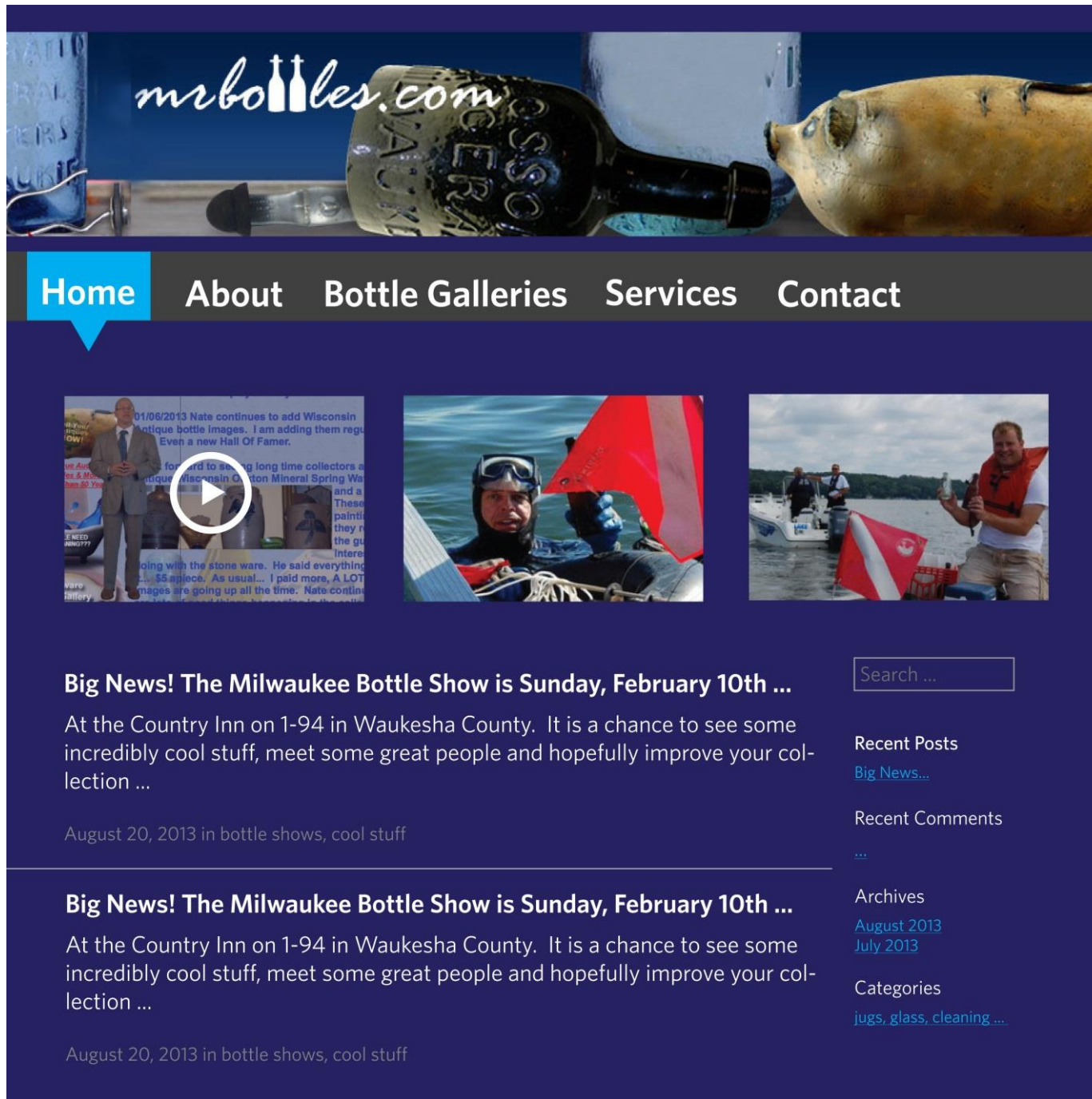
Fig. 2: Screenshot of current Mr. Bottles site

Fig. 3: Re-designed Mr. Bottles website

References

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