

These are my findings of the usability of the site politifact.com. This report begins with a brief list of aspects of the site that I considered positive. Following that, I evaluated the site by creating three imagined user scenarios and describing the results. For the final part of this report, I compared the site to ten heuristic principles suggested by Jakob Nielsen in his book, *Usability Engineering*. (1993)

Positive notes:

- Site's logo is prominently and consistently displayed in the upper left of every page. The logo also functions as a home link, as expected.
- Site takes advantage of conventions to make its evaluations of statements easy to read by employing a "Truth-o-meter".
- In addition to a search box, the site provides alphabetical lists categorized by issue, truth rating, and other options.
- Search results are divided into categories as 'stories', 'statements', and 'promise updates,' which is useful in helping to choose a result to view.

Scenarios:

3. A user searches for the evaluation of a statement they read or heard in the media.

I was unable to locate any information about the topic of damage caused by protestors to the WI State Capital by browsing by subject, as once I navigated from the national pages to the WI edition, there was no longer that option available. I was able to find information by using the search box with the terms "capital damage."

2. A user wishes to suggest a topic or statement for evaluation by PolitiFact.

Unable to find information about whether WI Governor Scott Walker stated that he intends to reverse the smoking ban, I was easily able to locate contact information and e-mail PolitiFact requesting information. I was able to accomplish this by selecting one of two e-mail options from a standard menu titled "How to contact us:" located on the right of every page for PolitiFact National. I received feedback for my query in the form of a direct, individual e-mail.

3. A user wishes to browse for information or ratings related to a general topic.

It is easy to browse topics by using the drop down menu labeled "truth-o-meter." Scrolling over the "truth-o-meter" tab reveals a drop-down menu with a category labeled 'by subject'. All that is required is an understanding of the conventions used by this site to rate the truth of statements.

1. Ease of use and navigation

- Navigation tools are clear and consistent across all main pages, but the links to items such as contact and subscription information disappears from deeper pages.
- Navigation headings at the top of each page appear as tabs, but are in fact drop down menus. Using the headings as tabs would help users to know where they are located on the site at any time.

2. Intuitive and easy to understand vocabulary

- Vocabulary is clear for any user familiar with the conventions used by the site, however more detailed information about the ratings system and terms are difficult to locate. I found the information by selecting the link "About PolitiFact", located at the bottom of the page. I would expect this type of link to contain information about the sites creator, publisher, funding, etc, not directions for the sites use.
- User experience could be improved by providing directions and information to how ratings work in a more prominent location, such as in the "truth-o-meter" menu.

3. Minimize user memory load

- Site does not use bread crumbs or other conventions to help the user remember their location within the site, but is navigable from any page.

4. Consistency

- The appearance of menus, links, and general format is consistent throughout the site.

5. Shortcuts or search function

- This site has no redundant activities that would be made more efficient with the use of shortcuts.

6. Feedback

- Site does not provide feedback to let user know that a search is in progress, or when no results are found. When no results are found, the results page simply remains blank.
- The user should not need to rely on the browser to indicate that a search is in progress. In addition, informing the user that a search yielded zero results would help prevent confusion, such as the user thinking that the site crashed or the browser lost contact.

7. Error recovery

- There is a home link at the top of every page.

8. Prevent Errors

- The only preventative measure I found was spell check for the search box. For this site, I believe that is sufficient.

9. Aesthetic appeal

- This website is clear and easy to read. Colors, fonts, and graphics are consistent and clear. There are ads, but nothing distracting.

10. Help and documentation

- A link to explanations for how the ratings work and other features of the site are found at the bottom of the page labeled "About PolitiFact." I think the key would be better located on each page, in a segment on the side. This way, if someone arrives at the site by any way other than the first page, it will be clear how it works.

Sources:

Nielsen, Jakob. *Usability Engineering*. San Diego, CA: Academic Press, 1993. Book.

Politifact.com. St. Petersburg Times. 2011. Web. 04 April. 2011.

<<http://www.politifact.com/>>