MERGE

SWAN Catalog Platform UI/UX Audit

April 20, 2016

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Introduction

We have evaluated the SWAN Online Catalog usability based on how successful a library patron would be in finding and reserving a title in the format they want/need.

Library patrons of all ages and librarians have experienced difficulty using the SWAN Online Catalog platform. In the first section, we have outlined and rated all parts of the SWAN Online Catalog; those that work well as well as areas that are impeding patron success. The second section expands upon the main areas we believe are causing the most confusion for library patrons and that are the most critical to their success.

Scored Audit
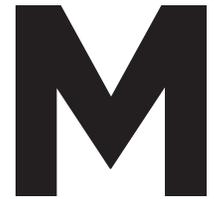
Evaluation Criteria

To quantify the relative usability of site content and design, pages and functionality of the catalog have been designated a score based on the following rubric:

2 **Usable and appropriate as-is**
Content and UI conform to accepted best practices and facilitate the experience of the user and the organizational objectives of The SWAN Online Catalog

1 **Usable with opportunities for enhancement**

Content and UI mostly adhere to accepted best practices, but with light modification could better facilitate the user and/or organizational objectives

0 **Neutral**
As many factors contribute to as detract from the success of content and UI, or, the page itself or adjustments thereto are inconsequential to user or organizational objectives

-1 **Usable after major changes**
UI or content flaws interfere with user and/or organizational objectives

-2 **Unusable; requires complete rebuild**
Missing, broken or otherwise frustrating UI components and/or content problems are so severe they thwart user and organizational objectives

Global Navigation

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Overall Organization
Audit Score: -1

What's Good
- Log in, My Account, My Lists, Library Information, Language Selection, Enable ADA Mode and Help are all clearly organized and listed at the top of every page.

What Needs Improvement
- There is some confusion around the library logo as "home" to that library's website and the "home" icon in the search bar as home to the catalog site specifically. It is not clear in global navigation that you are in the catalog, a separate site from the library site.
- The search bar as a global item is small and lacks any language to guide the user.
- The site footer does not reinforce and support any elements of global navigation. Could work harder to help the user navigate the site.

Log In/Log Out
Audit Score: 1

What's Good
- Log In/Log Out is positioned in a natural and intuitive place on the page.

What Needs Improvement
- Log In/Log Out is small considering the wide age range of users.

My Account
Audit Score: 0

What's Good
- My Account global is placed appropriately within the global navigation.
- On the My Account page, Personal Information, Checkouts, Holds and Fines are all clearly listed in a tabbed format.
- Overall view of "Status" is helpful

What Needs Improvement
- Within Holds tab, there are several buttons to cancel holds, edit pickup locations, suspend holds, and cancel hold suspensions. It is unclear why a user would want to suspend a hold. Having all four buttons at the top and bottom of list creates clutter.
- Each column in the Holds list can be sorted with very small up/down arrows. This is confusing and unnecessarily creates clutter.

Global
Navigation (Cont.)

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My Lists
Audit Score: 0

What's Good

- It's a nice feature for a user to save items to a list and organize multiple lists.
- The click and drag feature is a nice way to organize if a user has many lists.

What Needs Improvement

- The idea of creating a temporary list is confusing. Without creating a new list all items saved would go to the temporary list and will not be available to a user in another session. This is not overly clear and could frustrate the user.
- When arriving at My Lists, no list is featured until you click on it, creating an extra step for the user.

Library Information
Audit Score: 0

What's Good

- Including this in the global navigation is helpful to a user.

What Needs Improvement

- Placing the library location and hours within a narrow dropdown channel make this information hard to read. Linking to a new page is recommended for clearly presenting library information.

Language Selection
Audit Score: 2

What's Good

- Simple dropdown is clear and easy to use as is. SWAN may consider adding additional languages if the need presents itself.

Enable ADA Mode
Audit Score: 0

What's Good

- If a user is looking for this feature it is easy to find.

What Needs Improvement

- It isn't obvious you are in the ADA Mode if the user has mistakenly clicked it. It could be helpful to display the mode you are currently in and make it more obvious that it has been changed.

Homepage

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Homepage Layout and Content
Audit Score: -2

What's Good

- The search bar, as a global element, is front and center on the homepage.

- The welcome message greets users.

- The idea of featured content is good.

What Needs Improvement

- The homepage lacks a clear content hierarchy. The welcome message and account access content areas compete with the featured books. Minimal whitespace contributes to this issue.

- The homepage is a missed opportunity to briefly guide the user through the catalog. Instead, links to a very long help page take the user away from the site.

- The carousel of featured book selections, which is navigated through a dropdown, is awkward. The additional UI of the play/pause button doesn't make sense here. If the goal is to visually highlight certain best sellers, this feature could work much harder to accomplish this.

Search

Initial Search Entry
Audit Score: -2

What's Good

- The search bar, as a global element, is front and center on every page.
- The field dropdowns help narrow the user's search from the start.

What Needs Improvement

- Search auto-populate is not very robust. It fails after typing a few letters even if there are titles that match.
- The first field defaults to all libraries, regardless of whether the user is logged in or out. The user's library is a more logical default so as to not provide a user with irrelevant results.
- If any words are incompletely entered into the search, the user will get no results; the system should be helpful even with user error.
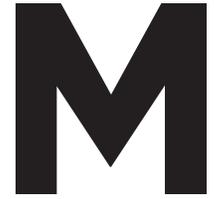
Search Results
Audit Score: -2

What's Good

- The layout, with a filtering channel on the left and the results on the right works well.

What Needs Improvement

- If any words are incompletely entered into the search, the user will get no results.
- The grid view shows no information aside from book image, making this view of little use to the user.
- In the list view, there is a lot of information with little hierarchy. Only the most important information should be visible here.
- The RSS Subscribe Icon/Functionality near number of search results found is strange and somewhat confusing. It also looks like a button and it is not. When clicking on it several times, we got a page full of code and not an actual list. How often is this feature used?
- Pagination is only visible on the top of the page causing the user to have to go back to the top to get to the next page.
- Format names are confusing. It is not clear what type of file you need or what you are getting if you download.

Search (Cont.)

Limit Search Results (Left Channel)
Audit Score: 0

What's Good

- The placement of the filter channel is intuitive.

- The new feature in which the search refines when you click on an item in the list is a good improvement from having to use the Include/ Exclude buttons.

What Needs Improvement

- Limit Search Results language is a bit unclear. Refine or filter are more common choices.

- Include/Exclude buttons are useless now the list filters automatically once you click on an item, thus creating unnecessary clutter.

- More and View All are actions that result in basically the same thing, showing the user more choices. Use just one to show all other options in one click.

- Publication date chart/slider is confusing for this content. One option will suffice and the one which lists the years makes more sense.

Help

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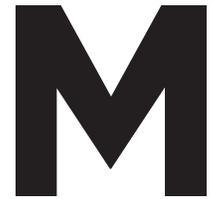
Layout and Content
Audit Score: -1

What's Good
- Robust content outlines site in great detail

What's Needs Improvement
- Content is so robust it seems to go on forever. There is no visual pacing or quick links to help the user more easily find what they are looking for.

Recommendations for Improved Usability

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Overview

There are changes, big and small, that will improve the usability of the SWAN online catalog. Here, we will discuss the areas that we think need the most improvement and once fixed, will have the greatest impact on improving user success. The areas addressed on the following pages include File Format Clarification and Guidance, Search Functionality and Visual Design, Layout, and the Implementation of Best Practices.

File Format Clarification and Guidance

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As a digital agency we have lots of experience using and developing online resources/systems and we are well-versed in various hardware and file types (iPad, Kindle, MP3 files, etc.). At the same time, we are new to the SWAN Online Catalog and were able to approach the user experience from the viewpoint of an average patron. The juxtaposition of these two perspectives gave us a particularly good vantage point to critically assess the Catalog.

The first and most critical pain point is the naming and organization of title format types. Second to the title itself, the format is the most important type of categorization within the online catalog. We believe the format names do not clearly communicate the format of the file.

Here is a list of format descriptions (In orange are our questions regarding each):

Audio compact disc (Is this a Music CD?)
Blu-ray, Blu-ray feature film (Why two Blu-ray types, is there a difference?)
Book (Is this a hardcover or a paperback?)
Book new (Why is new a feature added here?)
CD spoken (Is this an audio book? Or a comedy CD or something like that?)
Compact disc new (What's the difference between this and an audio compact disc?)
DVD, DVD feature film, DVD feature film juvenile, DVD feature film new (the distinctions would be better served in title)
DVD boxed set
Database (What is this?)
Large type, Large type new (Why is new a feature added here?)
New or rental item (What is this?)
Paperback (How is this different from a book?)
Preloaded audio (This is a book loaded into a hardware device, correct?)
Reference book
Spoken recording (Is this a hard copy CD, not a download? Is it an audio book?)
Spoke recording new (Why is new a feature added here?)
ebook reader (Are people renting kindles or iPads? Is that was this is? With titles on them?)

Unclear formats types, combined with hardware options, left us not knowing what we needed to be looking for.

File Format Clarification and Guidance (Cont.)

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Furthermore, there is an additional level of knowledge needed when downloading a digital file from the catalog. For example, when a user is looking for a "Downloadable Format" and chooses "Kindle", you have four options to choose from including Adobe Digital Editions, HTML, Kindle and PDF.

Even we, experienced digital professionals, did not know which file to choose. We believe that most users, from reading level children to seniors, will run into similar roadblocks.

Our Recommendations

1. Reorganize/rename file formats to be more clear (and create an iconography system that more clearly supports the file formats) and/or provide a simple explanation for each.
2. Use the homepage and the search bar as opportunities to infuse guidance into the site, addressing what file formats will meet a user's needs.

Search Functionality

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Users need and expect help when searching for information on the Internet. You can type one letter into Google's search and you will get a plethora of common results that auto-populate below and refine as you type in more letters. The current SWAN Online Catalog search functionality does very little, if anything, to guide users to the correct title. Furthermore, if any part of a title is missing, it will produce no results. This impediment, in the crucial beginning of a user's interaction with the catalog, could end up frustrating a user and cause them to leave the site altogether.

Our Recommendation

1. Troubleshoot and enhance the search functionality to create a robust search that works hard to connect users with the titles they are searching for even with imperfect inputs.

Visual Design, Layout, and Implementation of Best Practices.

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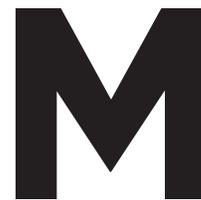
There are several ways to improve upon the SWAN Online Catalog visual design and layout. Overall, extra clicks, unnecessary buttons, little white space and a lack of consistent icons and color usage force the user to really hunt for the information and actions they are looking for.

Our Recommendations

1. Rework the site header and logo to more clearly communicate that the user is in the catalog. Add a global link back to the library website instead of using the logo for this.
2. Redesign the search bar so it is more prominently featured on each page and better guides the user.
3. Redesign the homepage to better introduce users to the site and featured titles (as mentioned in the first recommendation.)
4. Decide on an "active" color and use it consistently throughout site. An "active" color would be one that A) Stands out among the other colors on a site (often bright colors) and B) is used consistently to represent Calls to Action (CTAs) like Download, Place Hold, or Add to My Lists. On the current site, the site colors and buttons are all red and therefore, nothing stands out.
5. Create an icon system that clearly represents formats and actions and then use consistently throughout site.
6. Clean-up layouts by eliminating redundant buttons, unnecessary clicks and any other elements that are either confusing or not useful.