

Site Audit Summary

ICANN.org



Audit Principles



OVERVIEW

The purpose of a Site Audit is to highlight areas where the site can improve based solely on usability best practices. The following are some of the practices that the site was evaluated by with suggestions for how to correct these errors.

AUDIT CRITERIA

The first set of criteria are based on visual perception as that is the first level of evaluation of any design. These are immediate and subconscious and therefore can be difficult to overcome if executed poorly. The second set of guidelines are based on usability of the interfaces themselves, focusing on their learnability and understandability. Without these, a system can be visually clear, but cognitively confusing, preventing users from forming mental models of where content is and how features function.

VISUAL

Gestalt Principles

Creates perceptual organization based on how the brain interprets images and are considered natural and unlearned:

- Proximity: the closeness of objects are interpreted as a sign of relatedness and connection
- Similarity: elements that share basic characteristics are considered more closely related
- Continuity: simplest, continuous contours form figures more readily than more complex forms
- Closure: the eye tries to complete partial shapes into wholes, further defining relationships
- Area: the smaller of two overlapping shapes is perceived as being foreground while larger is seen as background
- Symmetry: grouping of objects based on the whole of them as a shape rather than each individual part

Retinal Variables (perceived immediately and without effort)

Perception types (across size, value, hue, orientation, texture, shape and position)

- Associative: does not affect the visibility of other dimensions in the elements to which it is applied; size and value are dissociative because they dominate perception and disrupt the processing of other correlated dimensions
- Selective: if the grouping is immediate and effortless, to be able to ignore everything but the target; shape requires focused attention
- Ordered: a natural ordering that is clearly apparent; texture is somewhat ordered in the granularity of the texture.
- Quantitative: the amount of difference between two ordered values is approximately apparent

USABILITY

Location: Wayfinding and Orientation

- Users are more comfortable when they have a sense of place and direction
- Help users build mental models of systems, processes and organizational structures
- Landmarks help users orient themselves so they know where they are and where they want to go; adding text to let users know where they are and the purpose of the page reduces confusion

Consistency

- Be consistent in the system, follow standards
- Only introduce new concepts when needed
- Have similar functions or content interact in similar ways; i.e. things that look the same should act the same, things that look different should act different and vice versa, things that act the same should look the same and things that act different should look different

Visibility: Interface Visibility

- Recognition rather than recall : keep system items in view, don't make users remember where things are, provide cues
- Encourages exploration when functionality is visible and chunked

Efficiency: Of system and user

- System: latency reduction, allow users to commit parallel actions e.g. allow users to start tagging photos while waiting for images to upload.
- User: Fitt's Law, GOMS, Hick's Law

Clarity: Present information clearly and in the expected manner

- Avoid jargon, simple, straightforward language for instructions
- Use models appropriate to audience
- Do not let experts design content for amateurs
- Copywriters help meet correct tone and voice

Organize: Organize and Categorize content appropriately

- Use Location, Alphabet, Time, Categories, and Hierarchy to show relationships of content
- Make sure that the above principles are not presented in a contradictory fashion as these will be inferred by default

User control and freedom

- Control can be both a blessing and curse without the feeling of freedom
- Freedom is about confidence: undo, redo, save work, ability to exit, error prevention then error recovery, provide default states: track user state (1st time, last visit, favorite functions)
- Wizards limit control and understanding, but are effective in help situations or for novices

Anticipation

- Wherever possible, anticipate the users' needs and provide the necessary tools and information; give contextual help or functionality; utilize hover states as an indication of interest
- Do not make user search for tools when the need is clear

Status: Visibility of system status

- Give vision into background system actions; give confidence to user that actions are taking place
- Set expectations allows user to manage time; during long processes, give users something else they can do

Flexibility: Flexibility and ease of use

- Allow experts short cuts, but design for all types of users from novice to expert
- Flexible tools rather than set paths (use wizards when necessary)

Help: Help and documentation

- Allow for users to escalate any situation
- When in an agitated state, little things become big things (finding a phone number)

Accessibility

- Color blindness, full blindness, hearing impaired, internationalization
- Convey information in more than one way (not only color, nor only sound)
- Make system accessible by different means: use alt tags, provide closed captioning

Familiarity

- Metaphors (human-interface objects)
- Learnability (progression from novice to expert)

Summary



GENERAL FINDINGS

Overall it was clear that there is a lot of valuable information available on the website and that the site provides multiple paths for users to find the content they are looking for. This is both a blessing and a curse because users need to be able to form mental models of sites in order to remember where to find things and a large part of that is understanding the path they took. Otherwise, each visit to the site starts from scratch and causes users to trudge through long lists and search attempts to find what it was they were looking for in unfamiliar surroundings. Providing both clear local navigation breadcrumbs and landmarks will help as well as a URL structure that reflects the organization of the site.

It is also worthwhile to shorten lists as much as possible as users will start choosing the first item in a long list that is close to what they want, and will end up being frustrated by taking the wrong path, only to return to a long list to try again.

Even with these in place, users can become confused when the division of the main navigation is not clear. The differences between Policy, Current Topics, Processes and Documents are small and nuanced. Page descriptions will help, but if Documents is the master repository, and Policy Current Topics and Processes are sub-sets, then the navigation structure should show that relationship too. Similar to the treatment of Site Map and Site Index as utility main navigation links, the visual language for the main navigation elements could show hierarchy.

Throughout, consistency will help users learn to trust that when they click on a link, they know what it will do and where it will go. Names of links should be consistent with the page titles that they link to and links that open new windows, are document links, or separate ICANN affiliate sites should be clearly labeled to help develop that trust in the overall linking system.

The ability to find the latest news on the homepage can be extended throughout and create a common place in all sections where users can find the latest documents and information as well as adding sections for common and important historical links.

There is also a large effort to translate many documents and sections of the site to multiple languages. Currently, these documents are found in varied places. Similar to the concept of grouping the newest documents, there should also be a grouping for all documents for each of the languages to help cut out the seek-and-find process non-english users currently go through.

Based on a preliminary review of the site survey, there are many users that come to the site rarely or for the first time. They may only have a cursory knowledge of what ICANN does and therefore need more orientation cues and explanations for site structure. Short descriptions on each main page will help, but the survey results may clearly state a need for a section of the site to be dedicated to orienting novices, including information about what ICANN is and does.

No matter what steps are taken though, users will always have instances where they need help. Resources in the footer provides this facility implicitly, but when users are in distress they need Help to be clear, explicit, and easy to find. There is room in the top navigation bar for a Help link and a subset of the Resources content could be moved to a page for this purpose as well as FAQs and links to sites for common needs such as domain disputes. The need for help could also be extended to the choice of language for the site. The user may not find the tool there and as the goals of ICANN's multi-lingual initiatives increase, this tool will become even more important.

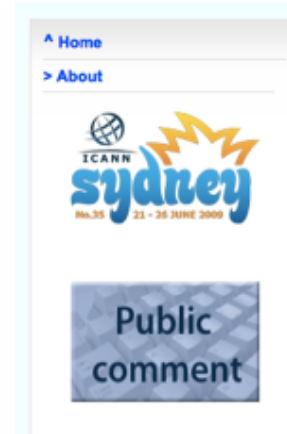
Static Top Bar

- **EFFICIENCY:** Consistent navigation and landmark usage is important but there is a lot of dead space, pushing content down the page a significant amount; there is a large empty blue area of over 47,000 pixels that can be utilized more without sacrificing spacing completely.
- **EFFICIENCY:** Quick Links is a very long list to the point of scrolling; when scrolling it is difficult to keep track of placement and prevents easy alphabetical binary search of the list, slowing the processing of it significantly.
- **CLARITY:** The difference between Site Map and Site Index is not clear.



Left Nav Bar

- **LOCATION & CLARITY:** Need clearer distinction between the navigation area versus the content. The homepage can be different than subsequent pages but there is little utility for repeating the Home link when it is in the top navigation bar already. The left column may contain other content without confusion as long as there are strong visual cues showing groupings and breaking up the area into distinct chunks.



Links and promotions are mixed in one visual container, the gray box. The box is a very strong visual cue misleading users to think that they are related and connected.

- **CONSISTENCY:** Top Navigation lists section as Current Topics, but the left navigation on the page lists the section as Topics.
- **CONSISTENCY:** Current section is listed by > as New gTLD Program, page title is "Welcome to Revised..." and does not match, leading to uncertainty about current location.
- **ORGANIZE & CONSISTENCY:** If the body of the page has many links, it would seem appropriate to show these subsections in the navigation area such as Background and Structure.
- **ORGANIZE & PROXIMITY:** Links in left navigation area should only link deeper within that section or have a clear distinction between section links and related links that are included; e.g. Policy Update jumps to the Current Topics section of the site. The proximity of the links to the hierarchy infers a relationship so links that do not meet that relationship should not be in the same "box".
- **ORGANIZE:** Hierarchy and indentation indicate a close relationships between headings and the sub links.
- **ORGANIZE:** Top level sections imply that all major content for that topic are found there, this seems to be the opposite of how some sections behave.

Middle Content

- **ORGANIZE:** Long and scrolling pages without any hint of what content is found on this page. Either an index at the top should be added to show users a summary of what they will find on these pages, or break the content up into separate pages/tabs.
- **ACCESSIBILITY & TECHNICAL:** Opportunity to create more SEO links by exposing more of site architecture / site map while also help accessibility.
- **CLARITY:** what the activities mean is needed, not just how to subscribe
- **ORGANIZE:** Lists of links with no obvious order to the list, forcing users to read each line to evaluate which is the correct one; listing the most recent policy discussions would likely be beneficial.
- **FAMILIARITY:** Purpose of pages is unclear, a short one sentence description can help users determine if they are on the correct page and whether they should spend time reading the full listing.
- **CONSISTENCY:** The heading should fit the content.
- **CONSISTENCY:** Center aligned main header in blue versus left aligned sub-heads in black makes hierarchy unclear.
- **ORGANIZE & CLARITY:** For Meetings, Future and Upcoming are synonyms, so why is Future listed before Upcoming (no order to list is apparent)?
- **CLARITY:** Resources appear to be utility functions, but are hidden in the middle of the page and have the same visual treatment as other content. Hiding their unique purpose.
- **CONSISTENCY:** Page title does not match navigation selection and may cause confusion.
- **CONSISTENCY:** Mixing of links and files confuses the understanding of the links themselves.
- **ORGANIZE:** For lists that are not that long nor needs to be so wide, a 2 column layout shortens the page to fit everything above the fold without sacrificing readability
- **CLARITY:** Link titles can be renamed to be more readable, putting differentiating text first; for example, "Information for ccTLD Managers" could be renamed "ccTLD Managers Information"; this allows users to determine whether a link applies to them or not more quickly, without having to read the full text.

Design

- ACCESSIBILITY: Language options are difficult to read and have low contrast, see WCAG 2.0 guidelines.
- ACCESSIBILITY: Often, current section highlight is not contrasted greatly from default state, for those with low vision this can be problematic.
- ACCESSIBILITY: Video player navigation has tabs that are too subtle in differentiating selected and non-selected tabs.

Forms

- SYMMETRY: Form alignment off, fields cause a jagged, unpleasing, back-and-forth movement of the eye, keep labels right justified.
- CONSISTENCY: Use of * used for multiple purposes, one symbol should equal one purpose.
- CLARITY: Instruction text is confusing, language should be more direct. The text seems to contradict the fields for Category below with accreditation, comment and question listed. E.g. "This form is to solicit information from ICAAN. For complaints, comments or questions about accredited registrars, please use the Complaint Form."
- ANTICIPATION: For forms asking for email and delivering Newsletters and Alerts, it is beneficial to explicitly tell users how often they will receive email and provide examples of the content to show value and encourage sign up.
- ORGANIZE & CLARITY: For selections, instead of duplicating each entry with both plain text and HTML (be explicit) list each type of newsletter preceded by 2 checkboxes in columns listing format (HTML vs Plain Text); this allows users to quickly read down a column and see which types and formats they are subscribed to.
- CLARITY: Does language at the top also choose language of the Newsletters? If so, should be part of instructional text.
- CLARITY: If all fields are required, state this is so with instructional text.

Documents

- CLARITY: Titles should use different treatments to denote different levels of hierarchy and importance.
- CONSISTENCY: Some documents are PDFs, others are HTML pages, and others that are charts. Links should hint at the content and destination, especially between deep links and links to other sites or files. E.g. an icon for PDF links.
- CLARITY: Posted time should be clear for all documents.

Latest Content

- CLARITY: Dates should be attached links where time is important, either appended to the end of the line or the spacing should be adjusted so that the proximity of the title and date are significantly closer than to other subsequent entries.
- CLARITY: Scope is not clear, if it is simply the 8 latest, state so and set expectations; without a clear understanding of scope, users come to distrust what the terms mean

Timely Content

- VISIBILITY: When something has a close date (for comments), there should be a direct way to act.
- ANTICIPATION: Users will want to know when a date is soon, highlight the content that is expiring or has a small time window for action. Visually, all dates are treated with the same weight, color or bold could be used for highlight. Date could also be relative, such as "2 days left" to help users calculate immediacy.
- FAMILIARITY: For new users, the purpose and framework of Public Comment is not clear, adding a little explanation text can help users verify this is the right list to assess.