

Usability Test for Humboldt Houseplants

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Introduction

Humboldt Houseplants is a plant business operating out of Humboldt County, California. Established in early 2022 by couple Shelise and Jeff, the website offers an extensive catalogue of plants and details services provided by the business. All content was written by the owners whom have vast knowledge of plants ranging from basic houseplants to more exotic ones. The homepage opens up with an inviting message and button that prompts users to shop. Plants and other related products are featured as one scrolls. In the navigation bar, content pages are listed from most important to less important, also including a search function, user profiles, and cart. The products button expands into “All Plants”, “New Arrivals”, other types of plants, and plant accessories. The “Plant Care and Design Services”, “Our Packaging”, “About Us”, and “Contact” pages are very minimal and straightforward. Aesthetically, the site is well formatted with thoughtful colors, spacing, font choices, and visuals.

This usability study was intended to identify a new audience’s ability to navigate the Humboldt Houseplants without guidance. Participants were comprised of family members and they were instructed to shop for their favorite plants, look for information on landscaping services, and send in a contact form. Those participating in this study provided helpful user feedback which includes: 1) providing more detailed descriptions of plants and other goods (fully equipped with watering schedules and soil types), 2) updating website colors in order to minimize fatigue, and 3) link social media handles through icons located in the footer and contact us page.

Methodology

Using Humboldt Houseplants’s website as a base for our main operation, our participants are expected to be able to easily navigate the web store and hypothetically make purchases. In order to improve upon what we are building, we must conduct tests that expose glaring issues, successfully compete with other sites, and understand whether or not we are offering a usable design (Krug, 2010, p. 22-26). Our participant demographics are located on the following page:

PARTICIPANT	AGE	GENDER	EDUCATION
PARTICIPANT #1	19	Male	High School Diploma
PARTICIPANT #2	45	Female	High School Diploma
PARTICIPANT #3	25	Female	Bachelor's Degree

Testing was done within the household, where the researcher conducted tests with participants one by one in private rooms. In-person testing helped assure that computer systems and programs were being utilized successfully. Apple screen sharing was used by users in communication with the researcher. Screens and audio were recorded with the Quicktime Player software provided with all Apple operating systems.

Cameras were used, however are the participants were uncomfortable with this exposure, video was ultimately eliminated. Facial recordings did not ultimately impact our research. Before opening the website, participants were given a welcome speech by the researcher in order to put out initial feelers for this project (Appendix A). An initial written survey was given to participants to observe their feelings about Humboldt Houseplants home page (Appendix B, C, & D). A final survey was also given at the end of the research session in order to gather the main takeaways by participants (Appendix E, F, & G).

One by one, the researcher followed along as the participant navigated the website, shopping for plants and perusing other features. Three specific tasks were given to participants, with general information provided about the website, their mission and purpose. Each participant received the same exact questions, being read aloud by the researcher in order to clear up any confusion. The researcher was available to answer any technical questions as well. The following tasks were given to our participants:

Task 1) Your grandmother has been feeling super lonely since your grandfather passed. She has been filling the void with several exotic plants. In your phone calls she mentioned wanting to find a Stromanthe Triostar. Find this plant on the website and put it into your shopping cart.

Task 2) You are navigating this site, but have several questions that are not answer by any web page. Locate the contact form and send in suggestions or concerns.

Task 3) Environmental impact concerns you. You want to find the most sustainable option for buying plants in bulk. Find the packaging page and explore your options.

No time limit was enforced on participants, and they wound up moving through the selected tasks swiftly. Navigating the website, participants shared their ideas and critiques for both features and aesthetic. Timing was not an issue as the general consensus was that the website was very easy to use. No participant was confused to left stuck on tasks to the point of needing help. Most suggestions were about minimal improvements that could improve the site. Follow-up questions regarding site layout, navigation bar, and design were asked.

Results

As participants completed their tasks and answered researcher questions, responses were recorded accordingly. From this information, the research found little improvements here and there that would impact the sites overall usability.

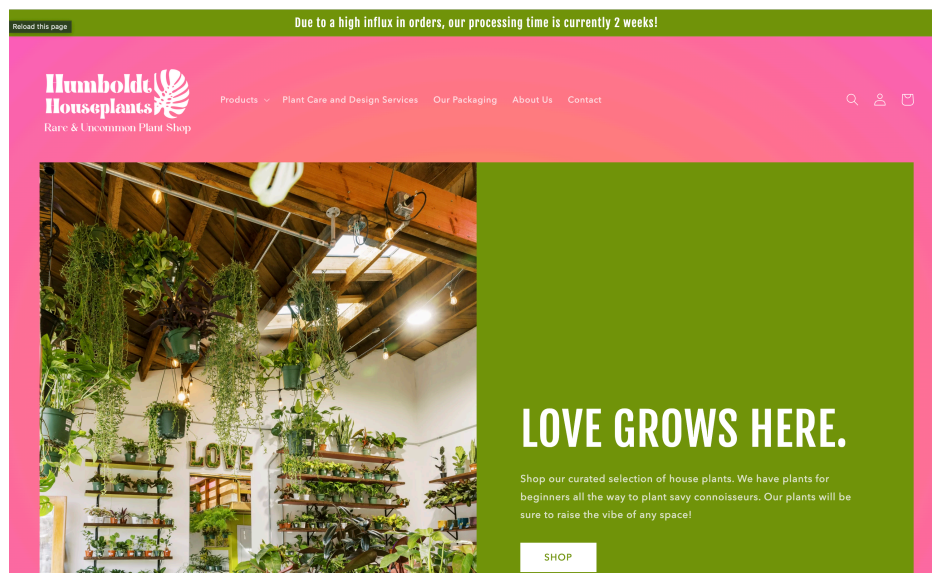


Figure 1. Humboldt Houseplants home page.

Humboldt Houseplants’s landing page features a navigation bar (complete with a search function, account button, and shopping cart), welcome message, and featured products. Each link within the navigation bar takes users to pages of interest, ranging from most to least important. The products button expands into “All Plants”, “New Arrivals”, “Easy Care”, “Rare Plants”, “Pet Friendly Plants”, and “Pots & Accessories”. Plants and accessories are laid out in a clean and friendly matter. Nothing jumps out or is promoted to the point of being overkill.

Two participants expressed the need for products to have an expand description area in order to provide details on proper plant care (water, sunlight, soil, etc.) or usage details for accessories (Appendix E, F, & G). All participants noted that the opacity of the words in the navigation bar made it hard for them to read.

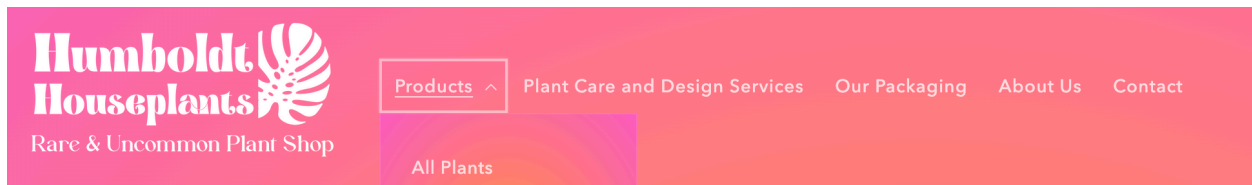


Figure 2. Humboldt Houseplants navigation bar.

Scrolling down to the footer, the vibrant lime green also made the text below difficult to read. All tasks given had to do with the usability of the site and whether or not the participants would likely revisit.

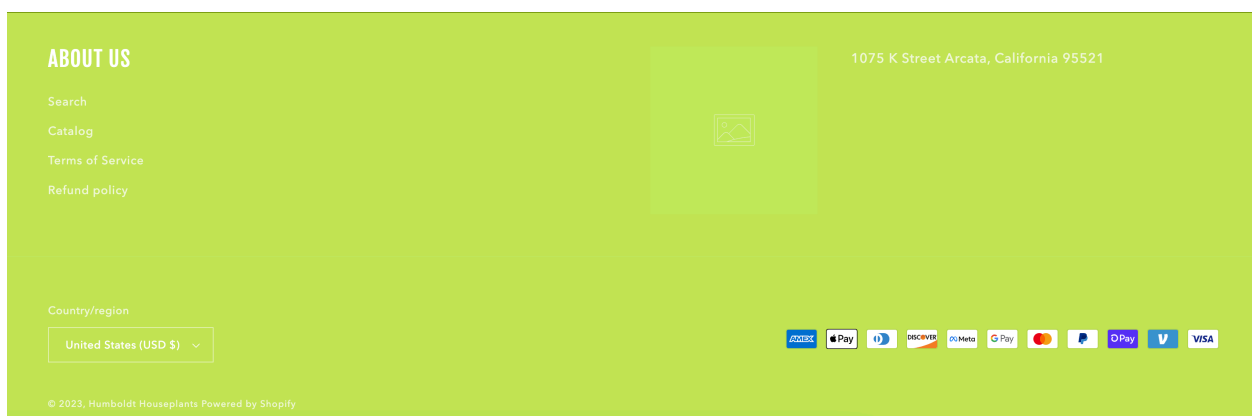


Figure 3. Humboldt Houseplants footer.

Recommendations

Based on feedback from all participants in our usability study, we suggest the following changes be made in order to accommodate new users of Humboldt Houseplants' website.

Adding Supplementary Details for Plants & Products

Humboldt Houseplants collection is cultivated by plant experts, so their website should reflect the knowledge and information they have. People want to know what they are purchasing and how to maintain the lifespan of their plant purchases. Including specific details about plant care: soil type, watering frequenting, sunlight exposure levels, humidity, air quality, and air flow are all things that will help customers keep their plants alive and coming back to make future purchases. Having usage and cleaning care details about plant accessories, such as pots, hangers, and watering cans would help prolong the lifespan of these products.

Updating Website Colors to Minimize Fatigue

Right off the bat, the navigation bar is hard to read due to the opacity chosen for the white text. This decision makes viewing the navigation bar annoying for users who might be visiting the website for their first time. It can be argued that the most important feature of a website is a simple, but useful navigation bar. When we make text harder to see, we alienate patrons who want to read things clear and simple. We could also alienate those with vision impairment or other disabilities. This same issue is found at the footer of the page, where the white text offset of the lime green background creates a bad contrast. Both colors are too bright, making the content appear as washed out. A better suggestion would be an earthy toned color such as brown, which would also make sense considering the color theme being related to plants and nature. The participants that brought up this issue referred to important color selection considerations such as hues and saturation.

Promote Social Media Links

In the digital age, social media is the largest tool to grow businesses. Having a large following on social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram are not necessarily attributed

to into large outgoing traffic from the website. Users should be able to move between social media handles and main business websites with ease! This is where the solution of having social media icons come in. At the footer, we could easily incorporate white, minimal social media icon buttons that take users directly to those respective pages. These icons could even be implemented in a larger format on the contact us page because that is where users are likely to go in search of social media content. All three participants brought up the lack of social media promotion on this business's website.

References

Humboldt Houseplants. (n.d.). Humboldt Houseplants. <https://www.humboldthouseplants.com/>

Krug, S. (2010). Rocket Surgery Made Easy: The Do-It-Yourself Guide to Finding and Fixing Usability Problems. New Riders.

Appendix A

Welcome Speech

Hello. You are here today because we are looking for individuals to help us complete our website research and development. Over the next hour or so, I will be observing you as you navigate through our selected website. We are testing for usability, not to get a personal read on your skills in navigating a computer. Our intention is to gain insight into the effectiveness of the website's layout and basic functions. With your consent, our interactions will also be recorded in order for our research team to be able to pinpoint and develop issues on our chosen website. Before this usability text begins, please fill out this entry survey. Let us know if you have any questions or concerns before we begin.

Appendix B

Entry Survey (Participant #1)

Based upon your initial observations of Humboldt Houseplants, please answer these questions. Please refrain from navigating to other pages.

1. Who do you believe is the main audience of this website?

Plant experts, young adults, and old people.

2. What is the purpose of this website we are viewing?

The purpose of this website is to sell plants.

3. How do you feel about the format and design choices of this home page?

The colors are vibrant and fun, but a bit bright in certain areas. Some colors clash with the chosen text. The font choices are fine and overall, the home page is super clean.

Appendix C

Entry Survey (Participant #2)

Based upon your initial observations of Humboldt Houseplants, please answer these questions. Please refrain from navigating to other pages.

1. Who do you believe is the main audience of this website?

Millennials, the elderly, and plant fanatics.

2. What is the purpose of this website we are viewing?

To sell plants, accessories, and landscaping services.

3. How do you feel about the format and design choices of this home page?

The color choices make sense because they are colors found in nature - greens, pinks, whites. The home page is very captivating and inviting. The photos provided really tie the visual elements together.

Appendix D

Entry Survey (Participant #3)

Based upon your initial observations of Humboldt Houseplants, please answer these questions. Please refrain from navigating to other pages.

1. Who do you believe is the main audience of this website?

The main audience of this website is probably plant fans, young adults, or older people.

2. What is the purpose of this website we are viewing?

The purpose is to sell plants and landscaping services.

3. How do you feel about the format and design choices of this home page?

The colors are a bit too bright in some areas and clash with the text. The white again bright greens makes it really difficult to read. Even in the bar on top, the opacity of the text makes it blend right into the background and not a good way.

Appendix E

Exit Survey (Participant #1)

Based upon your initial observations of Humboldt Houseplants, please answer these questions. Please refrain from navigating to other pages.

1. How difficult was it navigating this site on a scale from 1-10?
It was not difficult to navigate this site whatsoever. 2.
2. What was your favorite aspect of this website?
I loved how fun and colorful the website is. It was also super simple to use.
3. Do you feel like you had to make an account in order to make a purchase on this site?
I did not feel forced to make an account or do anything I did not want to do.
4. Would the main users of this site be able to easily navigate it?
I'd imagine it would be super easy for their regular audience to navigate.
5. What changes would you make to the website?
I would definitely add more information about the plants, like how to care for them and instructions like that. Social media handles are also important and should be easily accessible on the site.

Appendix F

Exit Survey (Participant #2)

Based upon your initial observations of Humboldt Houseplants, please answer these questions. Please refrain from navigating to other pages.

1. How difficult was it navigating this site on a scale from 1-10?
This site was not hard to navigate at all, so I will say 1.
2. What was your favorite aspect of this website?
I love the extensive catalogue offered by this business and how effortless the check out process was.
3. Do you feel like you had to make an account in order to make a purchase on this site?
There were no weird pop ups or messages telling me to sign up for anything!
4. Would the main users of this site be able to easily navigate it?
I would imagine so.
5. What changes would you make to the website?
I would edit a lot of the text and colors in order to make the visuals more balanced. The contrast needs work.

Appendix G

Exit Survey (Participant #3)

Based upon your initial observations of Humboldt Houseplants, please answer these questions. Please refrain from navigating to other pages.

1. How difficult was it navigating this site on a scale from 1-10?
I would say a 3? It wasn't that difficult to navigate but there is always room for improvement.
2. What was your favorite aspect of this website?
I liked how photo visuals were incorporated into the website and that I could see what I was purchasing. Shopping on this website would be so easy. The simplicity of the site is also very appealing.
3. Do you feel like you had to make an account in order to make a purchase on this site?
I did not feel inclined to make an account, but now I'm thinking about it.
4. Would the main users of this site be able to easily navigate it?
Yes, navigating this website would be easy to those already familiar with it.
5. What changes would you make to the website?
I would change some of the colors as they burn my eyes, unfortunately. I would also add social media links and product descriptions.