

Smart Chart: A Cool Tool Gets Cooler

Spitfire Strategies, the company that brought you the Smart Chart Strategic Communications Planning Tool, is using the web to make a good thing better. The brand new "Interactive Smart Chart" (www.smartchart.org) automatically guides users around the roadblocks that can throw communications off track and helps them make critical

choices that will guide them toward their goals.

Through a series of prompts, this easy-to-use program plots a communications strategy complete with goals and objectives, decision-makers and target audiences, messages and messengers, and benchmarks for measuring your success along the way. It even has a built-in evaluation tool that allows users to double-check their choices and make sure they are on the right course. Finished charts can be saved, printed and revised as needed. The Interactive Smart Chart is an effective, secure, easy-to-use tool for mapping out your communications strategy, and best of all—it's *free!* ■



Click. Damn. Click. Damn. Click. Goodbye!

Smart CHART

Helping Nonprofits Make Smart Communications Choices

This Web site is an interactive tool to help you make smart communications choices. Interactive Smart Chart 2.0 helps you assess your strategic decisions, if you are:

- Just starting the communications planning process,
- Evaluating a communications campaign already in progress, or
- Reviewing an effort you've wrapped up.

It's free for all non-profit organizations.

Start Now

Let Smart Chart help your communications plans

Effective

The Smart Chart 2.0 has already helped hundreds of non-profit organizations around the world clarify their communications goals and make strategic decisions to achieve them.

Easy

- Straightforward log-in and save features
- Simple evaluation techniques so you can judge your answers
- Tips and examples to guide you, and
- A final report that you can save, print and modify

www.smartchart.org

Take a look at your web site's home page. There are five questions it should answer for each new visitor. Do you know what they are?

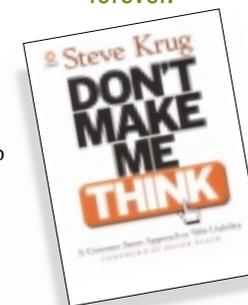
And how about the navigation bar that appears (or should) on every page of your site: does it feature the five elements that every navigational tool should have?

It will if Steve Krug has anything to say about it. After working for such tech sector giants as AOL, Apple, and Netscape, Krug launched his own consulting firm in 1995 to help clients design genuinely user-friendly web sites. Five years later, he published *Don't Make Me*

Think: A Common Sense Approach to Web Usability "so I could double my consulting rates," he says with a conspiratorial chuckle. Page through Krug's book, however, and you'll find plenty of clear, actionable advice that can help you improve your site *without* the aid of high-priced consultants.

Recently, I called Krug at his Boston office to see if the lessons he learned working on commercial sites applied to the public interest variety. They do, he assured me, and while we talked further, he surfed several nonprofit sites to sample the state of the art. Inside this month: excerpts from Krug's book and our free-ranging conversation. ▶

Getting people to visit your web site is one thing. Keeping them there is another, and if they don't find it easy to use, they're gone—probably forever.



Free-range thinking™ is a monthly newsletter for public interest groups, foundations, and progressive businesses that want to reach more people more effectively. For a free subscription, send your request to: andy@agoodmanonline.com or call 213.386.9501. Back issues are available on the web at www.agoodmanonline.com.

Newsletter edited by Carolyn Ramsay.



a goodman

GOOD IDEAS FOR GOOD CAUSES

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Krug's Three Rules of Usability

1. Don't make me think.
2. It doesn't matter how many times I have to click, as long as each click is a mindless, unambiguous choice.
3. Get rid of half the words on each page, then get rid of half of what's left.

AG (Andy Goodman): What's the most common way organizations violate rule #1?

SK (Steve Krug): Half the sites out there, you can go to the home page and not have a clue as to who these people are and what they have to offer without parsing the content yourself. This comes from the assumption that everyone already knows who you are and it's a waste of space telling people what they already know.

AG: Rule #2 surprised me. I always thought the conventional wisdom was "No more than three clicks to find what you're looking for."

SK: That probably relates to tasks such as booking flights that have to be repeated, so limiting the clicks saved time on tests, but it doesn't apply to most web sites.

AG: Do you get much resistance to rule #3?

SK: Usually from marketing people who are trying to repurpose what they use in print. Writing short is work, and most of the people doing it are not professional writers, so they simply aren't sure how to do it. What you need is an editor who knows how to be reasonable but ruthless.

Five Questions Your Home Page Must Answer

1. What is this?
2. What do they have here?
3. What can I do here?
4. Why should I be here and not somewhere else?
5. Where do I start?

AG: Do nonprofit sites have trouble answering any of these questions?

SK: Lately I've noticed problems with "Why should I be here and not somewhere else." Some nonprofits do a very good job on this because they know their very existence relies on this kind of differentiation. But I'm looking at an environmental group's web site right now and they've completely dropped the ball.

Five Required Elements of Navigation

1. Site ID
2. Sections
3. Utilities
4. A way home
5. A way to search

AG: What are the most common mistakes with navigation?

SK: The trickiest one is finding the right wording for navigation. You're trying to break down all of your content into categories, and since category names have to fit into a navigation space, they have to be short. It's difficult to come up with clear names that suggest all the content that's underneath them. One way is to find other organizations in the same ballpark and see

what they've done. Then test the category names you select with three or four people. Another way is to give people cards describing different pieces of content and ask them which categories they would put them into. And if you can't find the perfect category name, remember you can always put the same content in more than one place.

How We Really Use the Web

When we're creating sites, we act as if people are going to pore over each page, reading our finely crafted text, figuring out how we've organized things, and weighing their options before deciding which link to click. What they actually do most of the time (if we're lucky) is *glance* at each new page, scan *some* of the text, and click on the first link that catches their interest or vaguely resembles the thing they're looking for. There are usually large parts of the page they don't even look at.

AG: Have you seen research confirming how *little* time people spend on each page?

SK: There are stats and eye-tracking studies, but anybody who's done user testing can tell you that people are just breezing

through this stuff. Rather than go look for the research, just watch somebody use your site for ten or twenty minutes. There's a tendency for people who are being observed to read more than they would, but even at that, they still go so fast and miss so much, you immediately get it.

AG: Besides your book, any other resources you'd recommend for readers wanting to improve their sites?

SK: *Homepage Usability* by Jakob Nielsen and Marie Tahir. The first thirty pages of guidelines are worth the price of the book. *Information Architecture for the Worldwide Web* by Louis Rosenfeld and Peter Morville is excellent. And there's always useful content at Jakob Nielsen's web site, www.useit.com.

AG: And if someone wants to attend one of your workshops?

SK: There's information on my site at www.sensible.com/workshops.html.

AG: You mean, if they can find it.

SK: (stony silence) ■

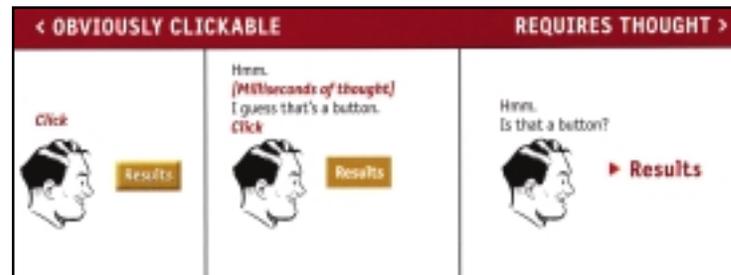


Illustration by Mark Matcho

Links that aren't "obviously clickable" cause us to stop and think, Krug says in his book, and those minor delays can fuel a frustration that ultimately compels a visitor to leave.

