Sears Usability Test

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Contents

Introduction:

Sears is a chain of department stores that dates back more than a century. It was once the largest retail store in the United States. Sears currently sells a wide range of items from appliances, tools, electronics, to toys, clothes, and tires.

A initial usability test was conducted on the Sears.com website by 15 participants of the MEJO 433 UX Design class at the University of North Carolina. The test was self-conducted and administered via a questionnaire with questions that ranged from determining the websites value proposition and customer segments, the visual hierarchy of the site layout, the overall ease of use and navigation, and others that could determine any major paint points and pleasure points of the website's experience on both desktop and mobile. Two additional rounds of testing were conducted with 5 unique participants in each round. A more in-depth usability testing session was conducted in a 1-on-1 in person environment with each round progressively honing on the major pleasure and pain points experienced on the Sears website.

Executive Summary:

The initial 15 participants completing the usability tests were self-conducted between February 12, 2023 and February 19, 2023. The initial questionnaire contained questions relating to the following topics:

- Participants age and demographics
- Sears.com initial impressions
- Sear's perceived value proposition and its clarity
- Perceived target audience, customer segment, and services offered
- Tone, approach, visual hierarchy and aesthetics of Sears.com
- Navigation
- Overall design, perceptions, and ease of use of Sears website

Round 1 Overview:

Following an initial qualitative and quantitative analysis of the 15 participants, four major pain points were identified:

1. The website design was "busy" and "overwhelming"
2. Most users (67%) used negative language towards the usage of popups, advertisements, and deals
3. Very few users could identify the products that Sears sold without looking more deeply into the website – 14 out of 15 participants (93%) labelled Sears as an organization that sold appliances (many users reported appliances and another such as tools)
4. There was no clear consensus on Sears customer segment, but almost all users placed the target demographic for Sears as older people (professionals out of college) and are homeowners.

Most users found the Sears website to have the following pleasure points:

1. Consistent and pleasant color scheme
2. Fairly easy to use navigation tool and search bar
3. Users could find what they were looking for via the task and search bar

An additional two rounds of testing were conducted with a traditional 1-on-1 user testing interview using a semantic differential questions (SEQ) as well as qualitative survey questions.

Round 2 and 3 Overview

Following and additional two rounds of testing the following pain points were identified:

1. Frustration with the amount of popups, both when participants entered the website and that appeared throughout their experience
   a. No participants clicked on any ads, deals, or advertisements
2. Participants did not spend any significant time on the homepage, whether to view ads or make use of the categories that were below the ads – some made reference to the large bodies of text when quickly scrolling down, but they did not read it
3. Even older participants who had shopped previously at Sears were surprised by some categories of items that were sold, these could not be found without deep searching
4. Participants could not easily find specific categories or types of items using the navigation menu (even though navigation was scored highly)

Participants were found to have the following pleasure points in rounds 2 and 3:

1. All participants spoke highly of the color scheme, overall visual and aesthetic of the website.
2. Participants like the larger pictures of the items in ads in the home screen but did not find the ads to be appealing to them.
3. Users thought that it was easy to find the search tool and navigational menus

This document contains the results of the initial survey of 15 participants and the additional two rounds of user testing interviews. One of the major pain points and one of the major pleasure points will each be redesigned in a high fidelity mockup to alleviate users pain point and exemplify what was good about the website.

Methodology

First round User Testing Questionnaire

Second Round User testing SEQs and Survey

Third Round User testing SEQs and questionnaire

The 15 original participants of the user test submitted their results anonymously. The user tests were done independently by completing the first round questionnaire (linked above). These usability tests took approximately one hour to complete.

The second round of testing used 5 unique participants and the participants were recruited mainly through convenience sampling. User testing was completed on a 1-on-1 basis and the tests took roughly 10-15 minutes to complete. Each participant was given 6 semantic differential questions (linked above) that allowed them to rate various parts of the website. These questions were crafted based on the pain points and pleasure points that were determined from the results of the original user testing questionnaire. A file with 22 additional questions were prepared and only asked when applicable depending on the actions that were taken by the user during Participant 16's session. Any question that was not asked during Participant 16's session was removed and not used for the remaining four user testing sessions in round two. Participants were also asked to explain each of their answers as they filled out the semantic differential questions and probed to use specific examples as much as possible when answering.

The third round of user testing largely had the same setup as the second round. The semantic differential questions were adjusted from the second round to adjust for possible poor timing of questions and to further hone in on certain pain and pleasure points. The participants were also randomly recruited via convenience sampling and were not questioned or chosen based on any criteria. User testing sessions again lasted roughly between 10 and 15 minutes. The additional questions that participants were asked in addition to the SEQs were also refined and the total possible number was reduced to 17. Participants were also asked to explain their reasoning behind their ratings for the SEQs. In both round 2 and 3 testing, users were also timed on how long they spent on the homepage, if they clicked any of the deals or advertisements, and if they read any of the popups before removing them from the page.

The questions were used to gather participants actions, feelings, attitudes, and opinions surrounding the following topics:

- Did they participant find anything on the homepage to be useful or did they immediately look to the navigational tool bar?
- How hard was it to find a specific prompted good?
- Their opinions on the size and location of the navigational toolbar
- The ease of using the Sears navigational menu to find specific categories and items
- Their opinions of the overall design and aesthetics of the website

Participants were also asked:

- If they utilized mail lists (based on the initial pop-up)
- Their feelings on the number of advertisements they were shown and if they spent any time looking at them.
- Why they did not spend any time on the homepage
- Their feelings on the color scheme
- If they found items sold by Sears that surprised them

Participants

Round 1 testing had 15 participants were undergraduate and graduate Students at the University of North Carolina making their age ranges to be likely from 18-35, however it was not a part of the questionnaire.

Round 2 and 3 both had 5 participants each. The participants were randomly chosen and selected through convenience. Each participant was a Wake County Public School Teacher or employee of the county. Most of the participants live and work in Wake Forest, North Carolina. The ages of the participants ranged from 18 years old to 72 years old. The average age of the participant was 43.7 years old.

Participant	Participant Ages
Participant 19	18
Participant 25	26
Participant 16	31
Participant 17	44
Participant 21	44
Participant 22	46
Participant 20	48
Participant 23	52
Participant 24	56
Participant 18	72
Average Age:	43.7

Results

The questionnaire results will be shown as both a quantitative and qualitative analysis. The responses were generally categorized into these five different topics to allow for data analysis. The positive comments were categorized into the following five topics:

Round 1 Testing:
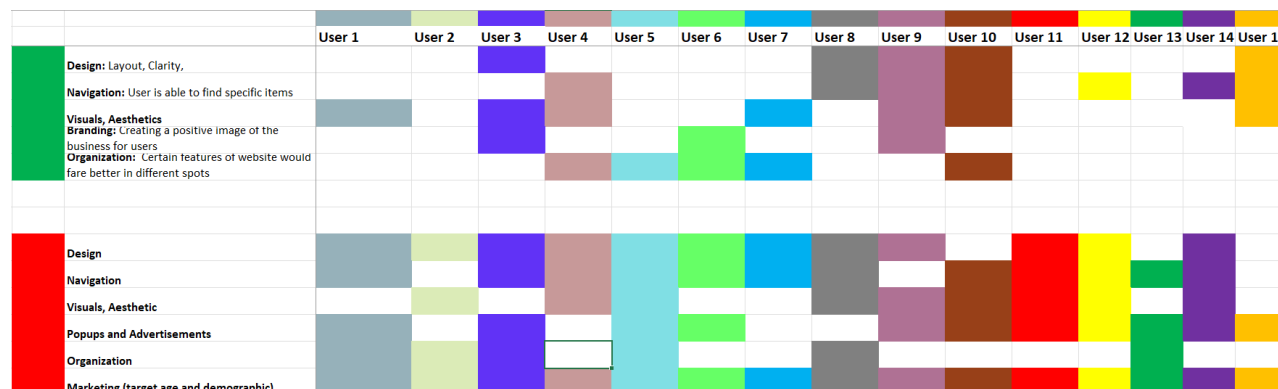
Positive comments by a user were categorized in the five following topics:

Design	Navigation	Visuals, Aesthetics	Branding	Organization:

Negative comments made by a user were categorized in the following 6 topics:

Design	Navigation	Visuals, Aesthetic	Popups and Advertisements	Organization	Marketing

A rainbow spreadsheet used with these categories to create a visual and allow the testers to see which categories held the highest numbers of positive and negative comments, color coded by participant. A full copy of this spreadsheet can be viewed here.

		User 1	User 2	User 3	User 4	User 5	User 6	User 7	User 8	User 9	User 10	User 11	User 12	User 13	User 14	User 15
	Design: Layout, Clarity,															
	Navigation: User is able to find specific items															
	Visuals, Aesthetics **Branding:** Creating a positive image of the business for users															
	Organization: Certain features of website would fare better in different spots															
	Design															
	Navigation															
	Visuals, Aesthetic															
	Popups and Advertisements															
	Organization															
	Marketing (target age and demographic)															

Each topic was given different criteria so that responses were added in a consistent manner. Each response for the different categories were then looked at to further break down the qualitative data into several different pain points and pleasure points.

Round 1 Summary

Pain Points:

- The testers made note of the fact that 15/15 users (100%) labeled Sears as a service that sold appliances. Some users also mentioned one other category that they could see that Sears sold such as tools or lawn and garden items, but each user reported that these items were not clear without further digging into the website
- The second highest reported pain point was the overwhelming, busy, or cluttered design of the homepage.
- The third highest reported paint point was the initial pop-up that appears as soon as a user enters the website. The website has a large number of advertisements and deals both for Sears and other websites

Pain Points	Reported Frequency
Website design was busy, overwhelming, or cluttered	12
Too many Popups, advertisements, and deals	11
Unknown value proposition	15

Customer segment confusion	9
Navigation via homepage	7

Pleasure Points:

- The most frequently reported pleasure point of Round 1 participants was the overall design and aesthetic of the website. 8/15 users (53%) reported that they were fond of the color scheme and overall look of the website
- 40% of users also made positive comments on the search functionality, its prominence on the homepage, and the ability to easily find items using the navigation menus in the shop section on the toolbar.

Pleasure Points	Reported Frequency
Color Scheme and Coherence	4
Navigational Tool Bar and Search Tool	6
Overall Design/Aesthetic	8
Branding	3

Round 2 Testing:

In round 2, the participants continued to rate the visual and aesthetics of the website very highly. When prompted via the semantic differential questions, users rated the likelihood of them returning to the website the lowest. For our design purposes here, we will be choosing to focus on the 2nd lowest ranking (website design) and be able to address pain points in the design in the hopes that a more positive experience will elicit more users to return.

Round testing results summary:

- Participants continued to take issue with the number of popups and advertisements.
- Even participants that said they like to look at the deals on websites, no user spent more than around 30 seconds on the homepage looking at the deals, all users continued to search using the navigation toolbar.
- Participants continued to praise the color scheme and overall feel of the website.
- Many participants also commented on the size of the buttons.

Participant	Website Design	Homepage appeal	Ease of Use (navigation)	Task	Returning User Likelihood	Visual and Aesthetics
Participant 16	5	6	7	6	3	7
Participant 17	6	7	6	6	6	7
Participant 18	7	7	7	7	7	6
Participant 19	4	6	4	7	1	7
Participant 20	6	4	5	6	2	6
						7
Average Score:	5.60	6.00	5.80	6.40	3.80	6.60
Standard Deviation	1.02	1.10	1.17	0.49	2.32	0.49

Round 3 Testing:

In round 3, participants had more specific tasks to be completing, and were asked more direct questions on the identified pain and pleasure points. Even though round 1 participants had made positive comments on the navigational menu in the "Shop" toolbar, when users were asked to find specific items or to find items that Sears listed for certain age groups, they struggled. Users continued to complain about the number of popups and their intrusiveness in trying to complete the tasks. On more than one occasion, while a participant was trying to navigate through the menus, a popup would block the button that they were trying to click and make their task more difficult. Participants continued to not utilize anything on the homepage even when given time to explore. No participant did anything more than glance at any of the long blocks of test below the categories of goods being sold.

Participant	Design Coherence to items sold	Specific Task (age group) using filter	Navigation tool button sizes	Specific Item w/o search tool	Visual and Aesthetics
Participant 21	4	5	6	4	7
Participant 22	5	5	7	5	7
Participant 23	5	4	5	6	6
Participant 24	3	6	6	6	7
Participant 25	7	5	6	5	6
Average Score:	4.80	5.00	6.00	5.20	6.60
Standard Deviation	1.33	0.63	0.63	0.75	0.49

Round 2 and 3 Testing results summary:

- Participants thought that was very little coherence between the different items that Sears sold and what was shown on their homepage.
- Participants spent an average of **16 seconds** on the Sears homepage before using the navigational toolbar to continue browsing
- On average, each participant clicked out of 4 popups or advertisement banners in their 10 minute session
- 0/10 Round 2 and 3 participants (0%) read the initial popup before clicking out of it
- 10/10 (100%) participants expressed negative views on the amount of popups and their locations
- Only 2 out of 10 (20%) participants said that they ever sign up for the mailing lists that the initial popup is asking participants to do
- Half of all round 2 and 3 users (50%) said that they do usually look immediately at the deals on the website but only 1 out of 10 (10%) participants clicked any deals, advertisements, or banners.
- Users relied on the navigational toolbar to complete 100% of tasks given to them

The full data for Rounds 2 and 3 can be found here.

	Read initial popup	Expressed Negative opinions on popups	User signs up for mailing lists	User looks for deals when entering website	User clicked on any advertisements or deals on homepage
Participant 16	FALSE	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	FALSE
Participant 17	FALSE	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE	FALSE
Participant 18	FALSE	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE	FALSE
Participant 19	FALSE	TRUE	FALSE	FALSE	FALSE
Participant 20	FALSE	TRUE	FALSE	FALSE	FALSE
Participant 21	FALSE	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE	TRUE
Participant 22	FALSE	TRUE	FALSE	FALSE	FALSE
Participant 23	FALSE	TRUE	TRUE	FALSE	FALSE
Participant 24	FALSE	TRUE	FALSE	FALSE	FALSE
Participant 25	FALSE	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE	FALSE

% of Users = true	0%	100%	20%	50%	10%

Recommendations

Based on the data gathered from the 25 different participants, the recommendations to increase the prominence of what user's liked about the website and remove issues that had a negative impact on the site experience are as follows:
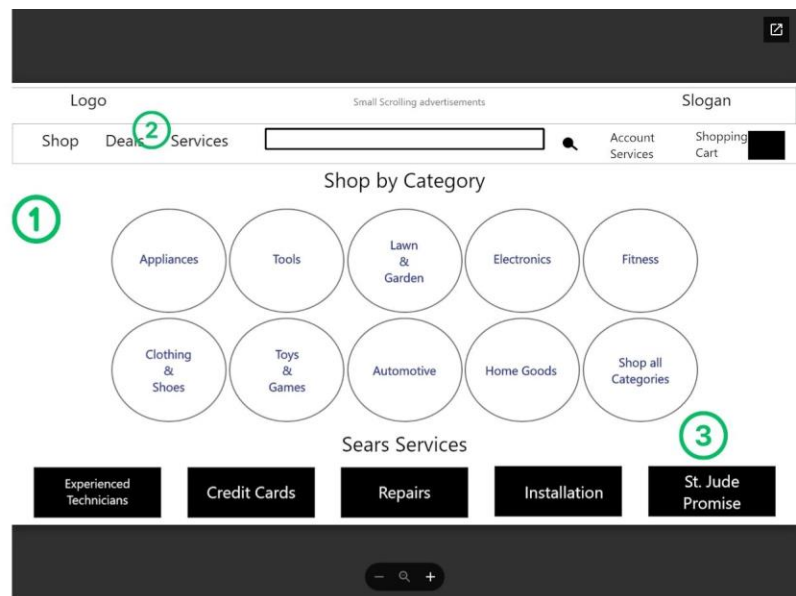
1. The amount of advertisements both immediately featured on the homepage and in popup form were excessive. When given time to explore, multiple users reported (shown above) that when they shop online they immediately go to see what the deals are. In 0% of cases did these same users make use of any of the popups, banners, or home-paged featured advertisements. In several cases, the popups or advertisements obstructed the participants views while they were navigating the website. My recommendation in the redesign is to significantly reduce the annoyances caused by the advertisements and feature it elsewhere on the site. The users that were shopping for deals used the deals button on the toolbar to search rather than what was shown on the homepage. When many users think that Sears only sells appliances and then the only deals that are shown are for appliances, then Sears should not expect to sell large quantities of other goods.

2. All of the services that Sears provides cannot be found either on the homepage or in their services dropdown on the toolbar. Some services such as garage door repair are hidden on the website and should be more prominently featured if users should know about these.

3. Every participant found at least one category, but more usually, there were many categories that they had no idea that Sears sold these items. In the area where the tests were conducted, there is not a brick and mortar store close by where users can browse or see signs of what is offered. A redesign is needed that will more prominently feature the different categories so that Sears can increase it's revenue in categories other than appliances (if that is the intention).

4. There were large, seemingly random, blocks of text on the homepage that no user wanted to read. These could be buttons that users can click if they want to learn more about a certain category or service but they provide unnecessary clutter on the homepage.

5. After an average of 16 seconds, users left the homepage to go elsewhere. Users like the toolbar design, but 2 users had to put on reading glasses to check which button was which. It is my recommendation to use contrasting colors on the toolbar and enlarge the main dropdowns on the toolbar.

6. Users liked the location of the search bar but commented on its large size. The size should be reduced to make room for the increased toolbar dropdowns.

7. Participants experienced issues when prompted with, "find an item for someone under the age of 6 years old." When using the shop dropdown, a user has to click **three** times before they enter a page with items. The dropdown should allow a secondary screen to appear when a user hovers over the main category, and additional functionality should be added that will ease a user's ability to filter items by price, age, etc.

Wireframes and Design Mockups

Based on the above pain and pleasure points, a mid-fidelity wireframe was created for both that would alleviate issues identified as having a negative impact on the user's shopping experience on Sears.com and featured the things that a user liked about the website more prominently. These wireframes were then mocked up into high-fidelity designs that follow the Sears branding.

Pain Point Mid-fidelity Wireframe – The full size wireframe and annotations can be viewed here


Continued on next page

Pain Point Design Mockup – The full Sears website design mockup can be viewed here

1. Redesigned Homepage to remove large banners/advertisements. Kept one advertisement banner that features a larger 'x' to close out of it and does not ruin shopping experience

2. Featured services on homepage as participants did not know services offered by Sears without searching

3. Moved categories to be prominent on the homepage. Users did not know which items Sears sold outside of appliances. Added additional categories to better match goods that were offered

4. Increased the size of buttons on the navigational toolbar. This was the first part of the website used but older participants had trouble seeing clearly

5. Retained original color scheme and overall aesthetic as it was highly liked by participants
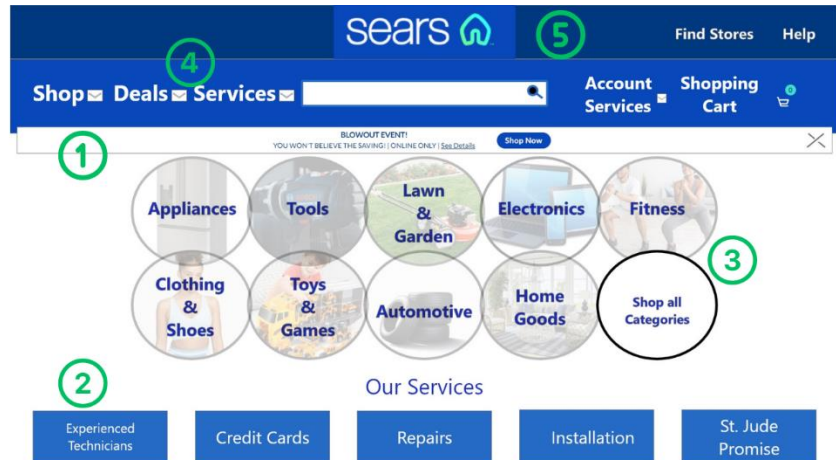
Pleasure Point Mid-Fidelity Wireframe – Full-size mid-fidelity wireframe can be viewed here

1. The navigational menus were a major pleasure point for most participants. They praised the ease of being able to find items and different categories. However, when given more specific tasks and items to find, users struggled to filter or quickly find items without the search bar. Additional filtering capabilities were added to improve search functionality

2. The size of the search bar was slightly reduced and size of toolbar items were increased.
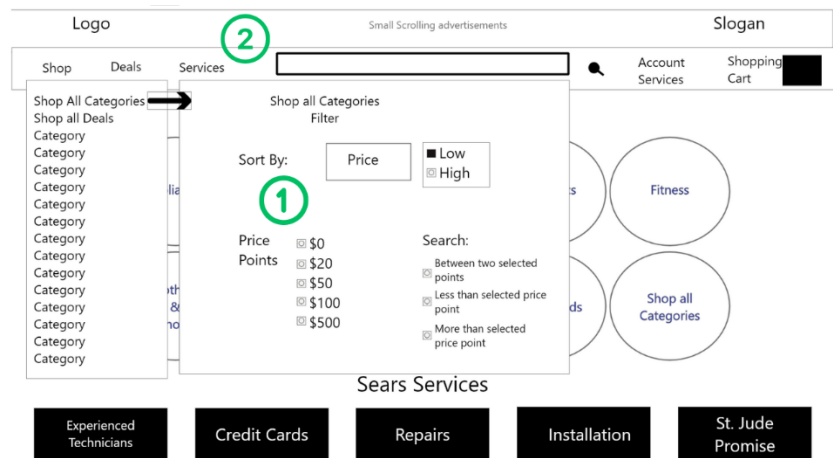
Pleasure Point Design Mockup – [Full size design mockup can be view here](#)

Navigational menus were a pleasure point for users but they struggled with it's currently layout. Menus will now show additional page to right of category when mouse hovers over category.

(1)

Added additional search functionalities that allow users to search more easily for categories or by price point. Can also sort by age range, and whether items have warranties or can be serviced by Sears techs

(2)

Color scheme was a major pleasure point, scheme was kept largely in tact, following branding throughout redesign

(3)

Additional features added to ease searches in menu, can search between different categories, or less than or man than specificied value

(4)