



ExperienceLab

Design guidelines | WAP services

January 2000

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RESTRICTED COMMERCIAL

Summary

In January 2000, Serco ExperienceLab carried out independent research in association with a major UK network provider. The study focussed on WAP services available at the time using a Nokia 7110e. This includes news, weather, travel, entertainment and UK business telephone numbers. Participants in our research familiarised themselves with the phone, before being asked to find particular kinds of information.

The study revealed important design issues, especially regarding the design of WAP services for small-screen devices. They are presented here as a set of general guidelines to help designers of WAP services.

Design guidelines

Provide appropriate content

Not all content types suit the WAP environment. Our users had very clear ideas about how they would use a WAP service, and what they would use it for:

- Content that doesn't require browsing - our research suggests users are not inclined to browse using the current small screen phones.
- Content suited to bookmarking – so that the amount of time spent looking for appropriate information, is justified by the benefit of being able to revisit it (e.g. a local cinema listings page).
- Content that is time-critical - where there is a real need for the user to check information before reaching home or the office or while on the move.

Streamline navigation

With small screen devices, it is more important than ever before to design for economy of navigation. Users will be frustrated by scrolling through long lists of options, filling out complex search forms, and clicking successive links to drill down through a category hierarchy.

- Structure information to support the users' most likely tasks.
- Use clear and unambiguous category links, so users can easily decide what path to take.
- Structure the information to avoid long lists of options that require too much scrolling, and also to avoid requiring the user to drill down too many layers.
- Provide related cross-links to catch users who go down the 'wrong' path.

Content should be easy to use

- Present list items in a logical order, and indicate the length of the list.
- Present the most important content first. Only place critical links and links accessed frequently off-screen when there is clear indication of the size of a page. Users will miss links at the bottom of long pages without these cues.
- There must be sufficient space between list items that are links to other pages. Links closely grouped together may be misinterpreted as a single link.

- Clearly indicate to users how to select items in WAP content. In the absence of cues indicating otherwise, users will transfer their experience from conventional phone interfaces to WAP services.
- Remember that users will see this as an enhanced phone service - do not assume users will understand computer terminology (e.g. 'empty cache').
- Make sure that error messages are meaningful, reassuring and helpful (e.g. 'Connection cancelled' rather than 'Unknown Abort X5C'). A service that provides clear feedback will win users' trust more quickly.

Searching should be intuitive

Searching should be a step-by-step, logical process. Participants in our study had great difficulty setting up searches, and then using the generated results list.

- Beware of search models that require users to jump between various screens to fill in a master search screen. Using successive screens will give the user a stronger impression of forward movement towards an end goal (setting the search going and getting results).
- Where possible, allow users to type directly in to search fields without being taken to another screen. If moving to another screen is necessary to fill in a search field, ensure that the next step appears to be a forward one.
- Provide useful defaults (e.g. current region) and search shortcuts (e.g. postcode or ZIP code fields) to help the user in the search environment.

Search results must be easy to scan

- Keep search results to a minimum and construct them to facilitate scanning. The title of the result and a short (e.g. one line) abstract of the content should do this.
- Order search results logically and communicate the order to users.
- Where possible allow users to shortcut to a list item. For example, in an alphabetical list the keypad could be used to go directly to the first letter of a target word.

Provide clear on-screen billing feedback

- Most users will not use a service if they feel that they have no control over how much it will cost them. Participants in our study were not aware of how or when they were being charged for connection to the WAP service.

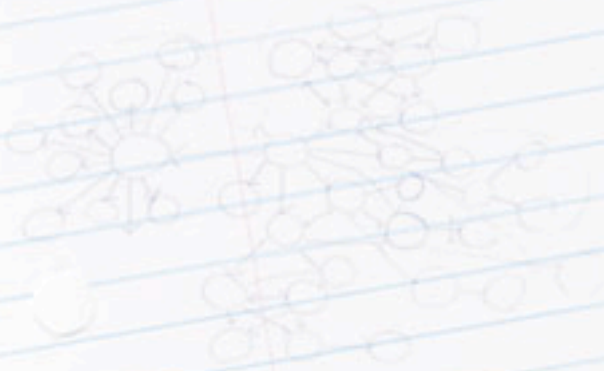
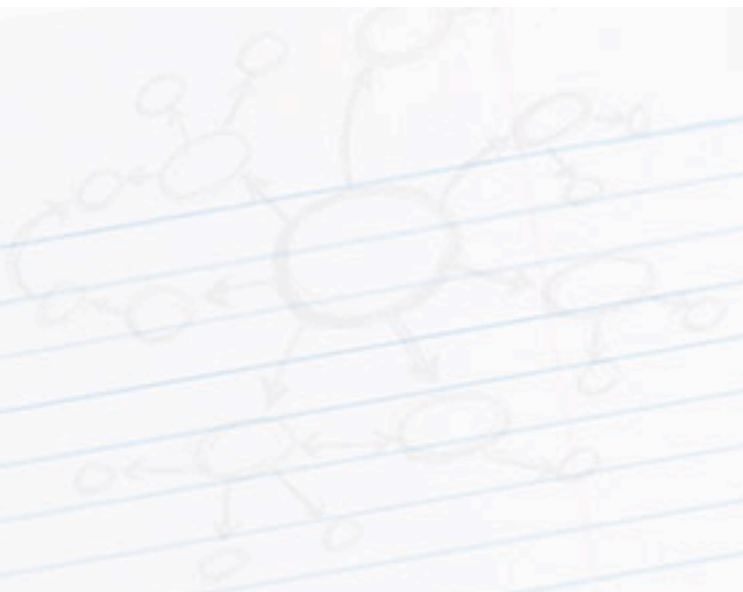
About ExperienceLab

ExperienceLab (formerly Serco Usability Services), are a global experience design research agency. They help organisations optimise their customer experiences, from web to TV and mobile, from advertising to physical environments. They've been doing this for a while, pretty much since the first computers and networks were created, so they know a thing or two about how to make people, processes and technologies work in harmony.

ExperienceLab use a wide range of techniques to tailor a research solution that fits your business objective, including ideation sessions, proposition analysis, customer needs mapping, usability

testing, benchmarking and touch point integration studies. As a co-founder of the UXalliance we also provide research on a global scale.

Why not visit the ExperienceLab blog (www.expericelab.info), which features the latest thinking on experience design issues.



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