



ExperienceLab

Design guidelines | Online music stores

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RESTRICTED COMMERCIAL

Summary

Serco ExperienceLab consultants conducted expert reviews of popular online music stores. The results were combined and used to produce the following set of guidelines to be used in conjunction with standard web design and usability guidelines (e.g. <http://usability.gov/guidelines>) when developing online music services.

Design guidelines

Set-up/registration

- It would be helpful to inform users about the system requirements necessary to use the online music service before installation or sign up.
- The media file formats available should be explained to the users in a way that enables them to decide whether the service is suitable for them.
- Users belonging to a range of age groups are likely to want to use the service to purchase music, it is important to consider providing users with different methods of payment, for example, consider users who do not have access to credit cards.
- Users can be nervous about providing their personal details online so reassure them that personal details entered will be secure, especially credit card details.
- It is important to make any form filling process run as smoothly as possible. Allow users to input details in different formats such as, spaces between phone numbers or using capitals instead of lower case characters, and ensure the tab sequence between fields is logical.
- It is beneficial to make the sign up process as quick and easy as possible. Consider restricting the registration process to three simple steps, such as:
 - Personal details
 - Payment details
 - Registration confirmation (including clear instructions on how to use the service)
- Ensure users are provided with personal login information via email, this assures users that they are registered and they have a record of subscription information.

Searching/browsing

- Important features, such as quick search, registration and login should be situated prominently on the homepage where the user can find them easily.
- Helpful browsing options such as charts, genres etc. that simulate the familiar high street shopping experience will help users find what they are looking for. However, too many can sometimes be overwhelming. If several options are available, consider prioritising the most useful browsing options.
- Services that provide other media formats such as audio books should have the appropriate search mechanism available to enable users find these products. For example, search by author.

- Try not to confuse users with unfamiliar icons or colour coding for controls that do not reflect their functionality. Where icons and colour coding are used it is important that users are provided with an explanation, this can be done in the form of a key.
- Consider providing alternative suggestions for search criteria where no search results have been found, for example if the search criteria had been misspelled.
- When users have confirmed a search entry the service should ensure that search results are presented in a comprehensive, relevant order. In addition, users should be able to manipulate the order of search results, by price for example.
- When results are presented refrain from showing a small number of results over several pages (i.e. 10 results per page over 50 pages) so as not to frustrate users.

Persuasive features

- Online music services are able to provide the user with added value additional information, such as biographies for artists and bands, etc. (something which high street stores could struggle to compete with).
- Provide users with relevant suggestions and recommendations accompanied with search results that could assist users with their purchases. For example 'People who bought this also bought...'
- When track samples are provided, the tracks should consist of an appropriate section of the track (i.e. the chorus not just the intro) so the user can decide whether it is the track they were looking for.
- Music services that offer special deals and discounts should promote these clearly not only on the homepage but also throughout the purchasing process (as they could persuade the user to come back for more).

Purchasing

- Familiar online shopping metaphors such as shopping baskets should be utilised, to allow users to store a collection of music, which they can manipulate and then purchase in one go rather than having to purchase single tracks consecutively.
- It is important to provide users with adequate warning when funds are being deducted from their account, this should be clearly stated and the amount being deducted should be given.
- It is helpful to explain the different downloadable file formats simplistically so users can decide which format they should select.
- Once music has been purchased provide instructions informing the user how to access and use the music they have downloaded. This is not always clear, especially when the files are automatically saved in a location that is not defined by the user.
- Users should be provided with a proof of purchase (either a receipt or account purchase history), which they can use to claim refunds or request to download a track again.
- Avoid confusing users by using a credit system, such as 100 credits = £1.00p. The number required for a song may not be clear. Instead stick to relevant currency, which will ensure familiarity.

Overall

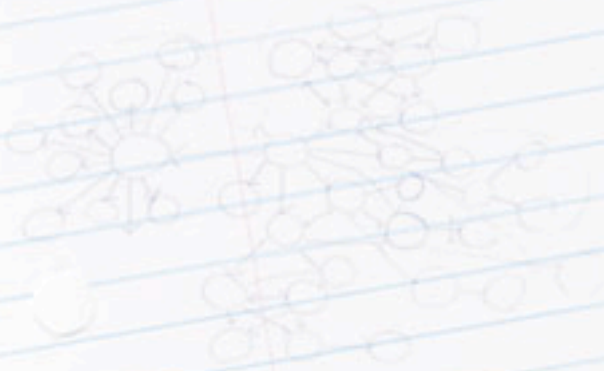
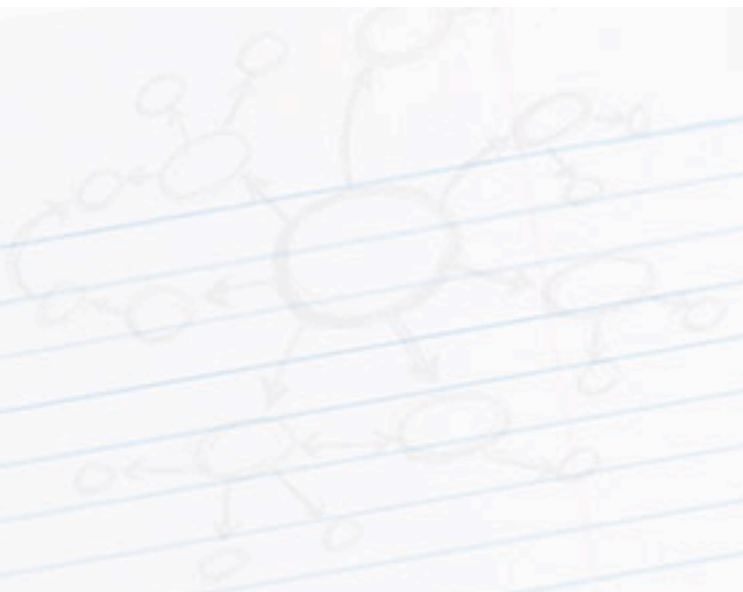
- Avoid confusing users with technical jargon, if necessary provide a glossary.
- Provide alternative options if an item cannot be found on the service, such as information about when it will be available or an option to request it.
- Support users by providing alternate means of assistance other than help and/or FAQ's. Offer an email address or phone number so they can communicate with a human being.
- Try to provide informative feedback when an error occurs (e.g. 'Madonna, Vogue download failed, please download the song again').

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.experiencelab.info), which features the latest thinking on experience design issues.



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