What Works Best Right Now

Conversion-Focused UX [CUX] Guidelines for Ecommerce

247 user-testing and custom research-derived guidelines all related to optimizing ecommerce websites for higher conversions. *Bonus* - *C*UX benchmarking of 36 ecommerce sites

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Executive Summary

This report provides conversion-focused UX insights for web designers, optimizers, business owners, entrepreneurs, product managers, digital marketers, and all other professionals interested in maintaining high-quality, modern ecommerce websites.

The report shares 247 user-testing and custom research-derived guidelines all related to optimizing ecommerce sites for a higher conversion rate. We organize the guidelines into sections related the ecommerce experience with special emphasis on homepage and sitewide guidelines that are organized into four main dimensions UX: appearance, message clarity, credibility, and usability. Examples of websites adhering to and/or violating the guidelines are provided. Some guidelines are straightforward and do not require examples.

Complementary to the guidelines, we conducted a benchmarking study for 6 major commerce industries. 6 sites were tested within each industry, for a total of 36 sites studied. These sites are used as the guideline examples throughout the report. A condensed guideline checklist is also included.

Best practices & guidelines are starting points: it's not what you should end up with, but it's where you should start your optimization. Also, keep in mind that these are the *current* best practices. Trends are always changing, wins are always perishable. We recommend considering the guidelines of this benchmarking study with your specific website in mind.

Report Highlights:

1. **Conversion focused -** The guidelines are tagged under a 'conversion heuristic' mental model and categorized as Friction, Distraction and Focus, Motivation, and Clarity
2. **Includes quantitative metrics** for user perceptions of website quality under the dimensions of Appearance, Clarity (Value Prop), Credibility (Trust), Loyalty, and Usability
3. **Ecommerce subvertical benchmarking** - We quantify user perception differences among 6 sites for 6 ecommerce industries (apparel, home & garden, electronics, pets, nutrition, and recreation)
4. **Checklist** for 247 conversion-focused UX guidelines
5. **21 testing ideas** for ecommerce websites - Crafted by ConversionXL founder Peep Laja

Introduction » Background

Remember the old marketing adage, “half the money I spend on advertising is wasted; the trouble is, I don’t know which half”? Well, it’s the same with best practices. They work for half the websites, and you don’t know which half your website belongs to.

Blindly copying and implementing “best practices” isn’t intelligent nor is it resourceful. You’re essentially using somebody else’s solution to their problems for your (likely different) problems.

Best practices do have their place – as starting points. When in doubt about how to solve a particular design issue, draw from the experience of others and from usability research. Use these insights to form design hypotheses. The rest of your design choices should be driven by data.

It’s critical to understand that there is no single best layout for a product page or checkout page. And, there are unlimited ways to execute a checkout page using the exact same principles. There’s always a lot of room for interpretation as to how an idea should be implemented, and you need a great designer to pull it off.

Introduction »

Our Goal With This Report

Remember, not all best practices are created equally. They're mere starting points. The goal of this usability guideline report is to provide a go-to reference for researched-backed website usability best practices —or 'guidelines' as we'll call them— for *what is working now*.

Further, we didn't want these guidelines to be the simple results of qualitative user testing. Our goal is to expand current knowledge and to validate best practices with quantitative data on how users *actually* perceive a website in the specific dimensions of appearance, clarity, credibility, and usability. In other words, we want to benchmark the UX experience across the sites we do user testing on. This will allow each guideline to be placed into a perspective: not just on what a few people say they were frustrated with or enjoyed about a site, but also into a statistical model of how users perceived their experience.

Introduction » Our Goal With This Report » How it helps you improve your ecommerce sales

This report provides conversion-focused UX insights for people responsible for the website's bottom line results: digital marketers, product managers, web designers, optimizers, entrepreneurs, product managers, and the like.

The report shares 247 usertesting- and custom research-derived guidelines for optimizing ecommerce websites for a better customer experience and higher conversion rates.

These guidelines help you to:

- Know what website elements and practices affect the conversion heuristics of **Clarity, Friction, Motivation, Distraction** and **Focus**
- See how the websites studied implement guidelines to affect user perceptions of their site's **Appearance**, **Clarity, Credibility, Loyalty,** & **Usability**
- Learn how different sites compare to one another within and among 6 major ecommerce industries
- Check your ecommerce website against our research-backed & conversion-focused list of ecommerce guidelines
- Get our top AB testing ideas to start with on your own site

Introduction »

Research Summary

This report is the product of hundreds of hours of planning, recruiting, testing, analyzing, writing and production. Here's a summary of the major sources of data that contribute to the findings. (***See methods appendix at the end of this report for more details***)

The foundation of the data used to inform this report involved our own client and industry research by the in-house research team at the ConversionXL Institute and extensive remote user testing for 36 ecommerce websites performed in two ways.

- The first method was with remote user testing with the tool TryMyUI, where we recruited 10 users to think aloud while performing tasks and answering questions about their experience (for the top 30 out of 36 sites). We recorded the screen and voice of test participants as they used the site in their natural environment. (See method appendix at the end of this report for more details)
- The second major round of testing involved remote testing of all 36 sites. Tasks, questions, and responses were recorded without screen or voice recordings. A much larger panel of participants (compared to the think aloud user-testing) completed task milestone objectives in these tests. Additionally, we utilized a recently developed —yet highly-vetted and standardized— questionnaire with psychometrically-validated metrics. The questionnaire allows us to quantify and benchmark user experiences for the dimensions of usability, clarity, credibility, loyalty, and appearance.

Introduction » Research Summary »
UX Benchmarking - Quantitative Insights

As a major component of this user-testing based report, we corroborate qualitative data from the user-testing with quantitative data from the standardized questionnaire on user perceptions of website quality.

The features & benefits of this UX benchmarking approach:

- **Conversion Focused:** Developed with a UX dimension quantifying user perceptions of a website's value proposition, or why to buy from a site compared to its competition.
- **Quantitative**: Based on 100+ user datapoints for each site.
- **Generalizable and Transferable**: It can describe the quality of any website - so can be used for competitive benchmarking and is ideal for relative context, understand how scores relate to each other when measuring before and after a design change, or compared to a competitor.
- **Multidimensional**: This approach includes the main components for measuring user experience and the general quality of a website.
- **Standardized, Normalized, and Benchmarked**: It has been developed through extensive testing on a massive user-testing database (see the peer-reviewed paper on its foundation). The metrics produced for any one website can be compared relatively to its competition *and* relative to itself if retested after website changes.
- **Repeatable:** Benchmarking is ideal for quantifying a baseline for comparison against site design changes.
- **Ideal for Competitive Benchmarking**: Quickly and reliably know how your website is perceived (in dimensions of appearance, clarity, usability, and credibility) relative to the competition. Comparisons against multiple websites reveal what's working —and not working— to make inspired, hypothesis-driven design decisions.
- **Ideal alongside User-Testing Results**: 5-10 user sessions provide qualitative, open-ended responses about UX dimensions, ultimately providing actionable direction for design improvements.

Introduction » Research Summary »
UX Benchmarking - Quantitative Insights

The UX benchmark metric is adapted from the SUPR-Q: a comprehensive measure of the quality of the website user experience. Published in 2015 in the Journal of Usability Statistics, Jeff Sauro presents this new standardized survey metric that has four subcomponents to measure perceptions of a website's usability, credibility, appearance and loyalty. We modified this metric by adding an additional subcomponent, clarity. Website clarity, or specifically, clarity of the value proposition a website offers on its homepage, is a primary driver for customer motivations and thus extremely important to conversion rates and general customer perceptions.

The five subcomponents and their associated survey questions presented in a likert-scale format (strongly disagree - strongly agree):

USABILITY
This website is easy to use.
It is easy to navigate within the website.

CREDIBILITY (Trust)
I feel comfortable purchasing from this website.
I feel confident conducting business with this website.

LOYALTY
How likely are you to recommend this website to a friend or colleague?
I will likely visit this website in the future.

APPEARANCE
I found the website to be attractive.
The website has a clean and simple presentation.

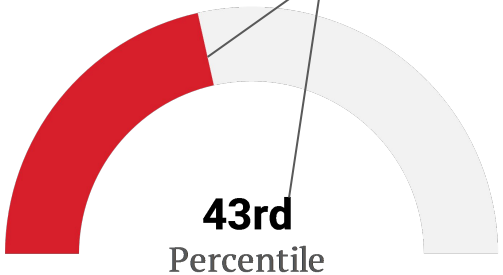
CLARITY (our additional question, not part of SUPR-Q)
I clearly understand why I should buy from this website instead of its competitors.

Introduction » Research Summary »

UX Benchmarking - Quantitative Insights

With the data from the survey questions across participants, we calculate percentile ranking for each website on all five UX dimensions (appearance, clarity, credibility, loyalty, and usability) and for a global metric. We also calculated metrics for each industry (clothing, electronics, home & garden, nutrition, pets, and recreation). The figures below are example visualizations of the data.

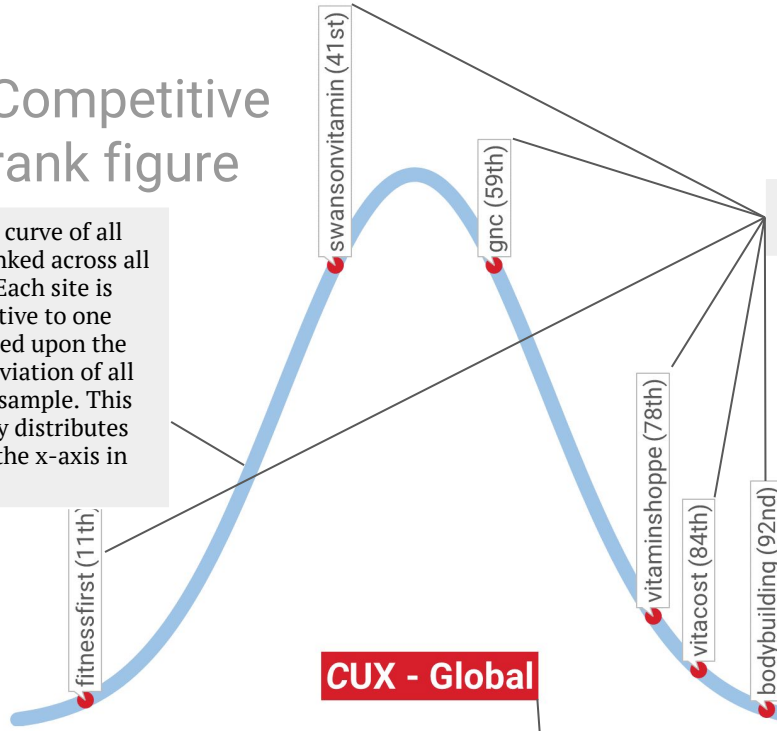
Standalone rank figure



Percentile Rank - In this case, 43rd percentile, meaning out of full database of websites ranked, 57% rank higher

CUX dimension - indication of global metric or subcomponent (appearance, clarity, credibility, loyalty, usability)

Competitive rank figure



Normalized curve of all websites ranked across all industries. Each site is plotted relative to one another based upon the standard deviation of all sites in the sample. This curve evenly distributes sites along the x-axis in balance

Sites within a subvertical

CUX dimension - indication of global metric or subcomponent (appearance, clarity, credibility, loyalty, usability)

Introduction »

How to Use This Report

First - Best practices & guidelines are starting points: it's not what you should end up with, but it's where you should start your optimization. You should be at least as good as these guidelines.

Also keep in mind that these are the current best practices. What used to work 2 years ago might not work anymore. Tactic fatigue is real. People, web technologies and marketing trends are always changing, wins are always perishable.

We recommend considering these guidelines, but also considering how your specific website fits into (or differentiates from) this benchmarking study. You can apply these guidelines on your site right away, although we recommend testing them. The guidelines won't apply in every case and there are likely unlimited ways to execute many of them, correctly or incorrectly.

Thus, the report is intended to be a benchmark list of user experience recommendations to consider as a foundation for a testing program. The real process of conversion optimization and user experience improvement comes after these low-hanging fruits.

Introduction »

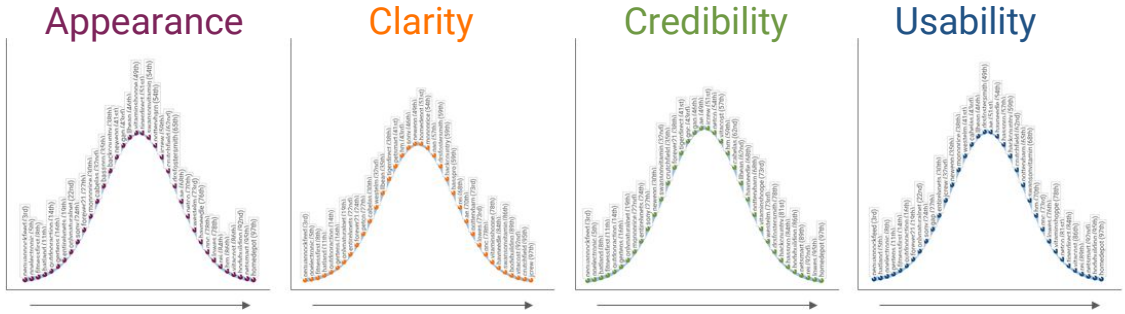
How to Use This Report

This usability report has two primary components:

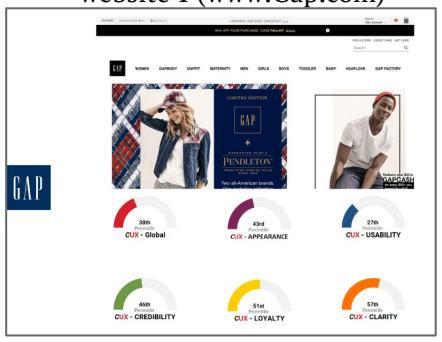
1. ACTIONABLE GUIDELINES based on user testing and custom research. Homepage & Sitewide guidelines are organized into four main UX dimensions of a website: appearance, message clarity, credibility, and usability. Other sections are organized by relevant site component.

2. CUX COMPETITIVE BENCHMARKING from the results of our custom user perception survey - the benchmarking provides quantitative data to rank websites UX generally (CUX Global) and within the UX subcomponents (Appearance, Message Clarity, Credibility, Loyalty, and Usability), and also serves to illustrate guideline adherence and provide examples throughout the report.

BONUS: A condensed guideline checklist and our 21 top testing ideas are also included for those who want to evaluate their own website.



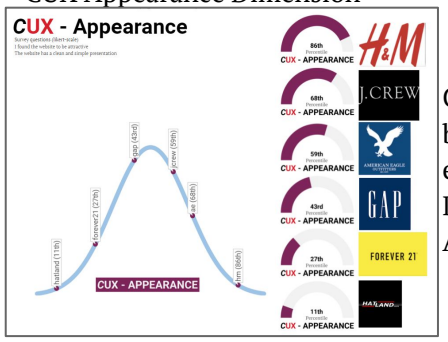
Example: Clothing&Apparel - website 1 (www.Gap.com)



Standalone benchmark example - website 1

Website (n=6) X Subvertical (n=6)

Example: Clothing&Apparel - CUX Appearance Dimension



Competitive benchmark example – CUX Dimension of Appearance

CUX Dimension (n=5 + global) X Subvertical (n=6)

Introduction > How to Use This Report > Guideline Grouping Categories

We've organized and tagged the following guidelines to help create a mental model for how to group, apply, and generally think about usability best practices through a conversion optimization lens. This categorization comes from our modified list of the SUPR-Q survey (described above) and is the foundation of the guideline organization.

1. UX Dimension

There are four dimensions categories used for guideline grouping on the Homepage & Sitewide section:

- **Appearance** - General appearance and feel of a website
- **Usability** - Ease of use of a website
- **Credibility** - Trust and confidence in purchasing from a site
- **Clarity** - How clearly does a website communicate the value to purchase from them and not a competitor

2. Site Component

Used to organized guidelines within sections other than Homepage & Sitewide and within each UX dimension described above, we group the guidelines into subcategories. The subcategories are relative to common website components or UX principles. Examples include but are not limited to:

- **Copy** - The words, phrasing, and language used
- **Design** - Elements including graphics, colors, images, etc.
- **Navigation** - Includes the content menu (e.g., about, faq, terms, etc.) and the transactional menu (product categories and subcategories)
- **Product Presentation** - The display of products and product categories
- **Promotions** - Advertisements, sales, featured products, etc.
- **Search** - Search boxes
- **Site Speed** - Factors that slow —or quicken— page load
- **Visual Hierarchy** - The visual prominence of website elements in relation to each other

3. Conversion Heuristic

To help place each guideline into a mental model of conversion optimization theory we tag each guideline with a 'Conversion Heuristic':

- **Motivation** - User-centric factors which speak to the desire or need to purchase
- **Clarity -** The coherence of messaging and copy
- **Friction -** Usability and trust factors, including mental and user-interface factors
- **Distraction & Focus -** Elements that sidetrack a user's attention from the goal of the page

CUX Guideline Checklist

Ecommerce Guideline Sections

- Homepage & Sitewide!
  - Appearance
  - Clarity
  - Credibility
  - Usability
- Category Landing Page
- Product List & Search Results Page
- Product Page
- Product Comparison Tool
- Cart & Checkout

CUX Guideline Checklist » Homepage & Sitewide » Appearance

Homepage & Sitewide > Appearance > Visual Hierarchy

- [ ] 1. Avoid meaningless, extra design elements that needlessly burden cognitive load.
- [ ] 2. Visual hierarchy should follow information hierarchy - show less important content further down the page, thumbnails decrease in size as you move down page)
- [ ] 3. Transactional menu should be higher up in the visual hierarchy than content menu
- [ ] 4. Value proposition should be located above the fold
- [ ] 5. Navigation menu should color contrast the rest of the page
- [ ] 6. Display product categories with thumbnails
- [ ] 7. Make separate content blocks look visually distinct, add enough white space in between
- [ ] 8. Avoid placing site promotions directly above product lists

Homepage & Sitewide > Appearance > Visual Hierarchy > CTA

- [ ] 9. CTA needs to be visually prominent: color contrasted, surrounding it with lots of whitespace, high in homepage's visual hierarchy
- [ ] 10. CTA buttons are usually better than links as they garner much more attention
- [ ] 11. If you have a secondary CTA, it should be less noticeable (secondary in visual hierarchy)
- [ ] 12. Draw more attention to the CTA with visual cues

Homepage & Sitewide > Appearance > Product Presentation

- [ ] 13. Make sure users know what you sell. Display a wide range of product types to communicate scope of your catalog.
- [ ] 14. Show the products and/or promotion with the widest appeal - in order to get them to click anywhere / interact with the page.
- [ ] 15. Show products in context, being used
- [ ] 16. Use high-quality photography and product images
- [ ] 17. Use bespoke imagery to maximize perceived value and first impressions
- [ ] 18. Don't show more than 4 products per row; bigger thumbnail images help people understand the product better
- [ ] 19. When using thumbnails with product pictures, sometimes a few products better represent a category than just one (i.e. for accessories category on shoe website, a thumbnail for shoe polish and shoe laces)
- [ ] 20. Don't let your site imagery or promotions look like advertisements

CUX Guideline Checklist » Homepage & Sitewide » Clarity

Homepage & Sitewide > Clarity > Copy

- [ ] 21. Use as few words as possible.
- [ ] 22. Avoid superlatives (e.g. "The best shoes on the planet"). Instead, use specifics ("Rated #1 by Runner's World Magazine")
- [ ] 23. Only use buzzwords if they're accurate and appropriate
- [ ] 24. Decide between "your" and "my" (i.e. "your account" or "my account") when copywriting the user interface and stick with it
- [ ] 25. Avoid generic phrasing
- [ ] 26. Mirror your customers' language: Look at social media mentions of your company/products/brand or survey customers
- [ ] 27. Maintain a consistent tone in copy across homepage

Homepage & Sitewide > Clarity > Copy > CTA & Value Proposition

- [ ] 28. CTA should be read and understood in five seconds or less
- [ ] 29. The CTA should answer customer's' principal need
- [ ] 30. Stick with just one CTA (unless for segmentation); if you need more than one, add the 2nd one as a secondary CTA
- [ ] 31. Don't ask for too much commitment with CTAs (e.g. Don't say "buy now")
- [ ] 32. Explicitly list the benefits of your offer, should focus on what they get instead of what they lose (e.g. "Get shoes" instead of "Pay $200")
- [ ] 33. Use bullet points to list benefits
- [ ] 34. Communicate what makes your offer unique and how you solve potential customers' problem (or improve their situation)

Homepage & Sitewide > Clarity > Design

- [ ] 35. The CTA's location should complement the customer's journey
- [ ] 36. Eliminate any design elements that detract from taking the "most wanted" action
- [ ] 37. Avoid placing advertisements (and content that resembles ads) in prime content locations
- [ ] 38. To avoid banner blindness, opt for relevant/specific promotions (seasonal promotions, sales for particular product categories)
- [ ] 39. Don't use prime real estate for social media icons; display them in the footer
- [ ] 40. Personalize homepage content when possible

CUX Guideline Checklist » Homepage & Sitewide » Credibility

Homepage & Sitewide > Credibility > Design

- [ ] 41. Maintain a modern, relevant design
- [ ] 42. Avoid cheesy stock photos

Homepage & Sitewide > Credibility > Copy

- [ ] 43. Avoid any copywriting errors
- [ ] 44. Verify and claims with citations or reference links
- [ ] 45. Instead of FAQ page answer questions in context (when they appear)
- [ ] 46. Avoid signups or purchases for your CTA

Homepage & Sitewide > Credibility > Content Menu

- [ ] 47. Return and refund policies should be visibly displayed; links easy to find
- [ ] 48. Show the "real" organization behind your site; show full office address, phone number, staff. Anonymity is a luxury for well known brands
- [ ] 49. The content menu (think footer or top menu) should provide the familiar basics, and be consistent throughout the site
- [ ] 50. Use live chat, and display it on the bottom right corner

Homepage & Sitewide > Credibility > Social Proof

- [ ] 51. If your product has been featured or endorsed, or if you have popular clients or associations, show it off
- [ ] 52. Emphasize user-generated content like reviews and ratings
- [ ] 53. Add trust marks/badges to the header and footer. Don't overdo it

Homepage & Sitewide > Credibility > Pop-ups and Advertising

- [ ] 54. Avoid pop-ups of any kind, advertisment or not....unless you want to make more money

CUX Guideline Checklist » Homepage & Sitewide » Usability

Homepage & Sitewide > Usability > Navigation

- [ ] 55. When you have to use icons, use widely accepted symbols (i.e. a shopping cart icon, a magnifying glass for search box)
- [ ] 56. Links should change in appearance when hovered and/or clicked on
- [ ] 57. The logo should be clickable and lead to the homepage
- [ ] 58. Place logo in top left corner of page
- [ ] 59. Place main navigation horizontally across top of page or vertically down left side of page
- [ ] 60. The main navigation bar should be sticky
- [ ] 61. Limit numbers of menu items to increase clarity and focus
- [ ] 62. Limit navigation options to one or two words each
- [ ] 63. Make dropdown menus easy to manipulate and to scan
- [ ] 64. Content menus and transactional menus should be visually distinct

Homepage & Sitewide > Usability > Navigation > Content Menu

- [ ] 65. Content menu items can be designed as a secondary navigation bar in the top right corner or in the footer
- [ ] 66. If you sell to multiple countries, denote language and currency in the top right corner
- [ ] 67. The shopping cart icon should indicate number of items in the cart and total price

Homepage & Sitewide > Usability > Navigation > Transactional Menu

- [ ] 68. If products are listed on a homepage use advanced sorting and filtering (Faceted Search, if product categories are listed, allow for users to easily see groupings of categories and subcategories with mega menus
- [ ] 69. Dropdown navigation should display at most the first three levels of products
- [ ] 70. Always have parent categories
- [ ] 71. Parent categories in transactional menu should be clickable
- [ ] 72. If a subcategory could apply to two different categories then include it under both (e..g "coffee tables" under "tables" and "living room")
- [ ] 73. Consider displaying main categories as homepage content (depends on industry and product scope)
- [ ] 74. Visually indicate any default site scopes (i.e. if a site is defaulted to "Women's" scope, highlight "Women's" product category in main menu)
- [ ] 75. Avoid vague product categories ("more", "miscellaneous", and "other") unless it dynamically displays more options without page load (in effort to reduce item number visually)
- [ ] 76. Consider adding additional information and resources alongside products or categories (e.g., inline descriptions, tooltips, and explainer articles), especially in specialty or ‘jargon-heavy’ product classes
- [ ] 77. Promoting subcategories on the homepage accelerates the search journey
- [ ] 78. Showcase special categories like ‘new arrivals’ and ‘sales & promotion’ groupings

CUX Guideline Checklist » Homepage & Sitewide » Usability (continued)

Homepage & Sitewide > Usability > Image Slider

- [ ] 79. Avoid automatic image sliders
- [ ] 80. Image Slider Content - What's in the slider images needs to be relevant and not look like an ad
- [ ] 81. Image Slider Interaction - it should rotate manually, and if it has to be automatically, then slowly, typically 5-7 seconds at minimum and more with heavy copy
- [ ] 82. Image Slider Interaction -it should have obvious controls and should freeze with ANY interaction including hovering

Homepage & Sitewide > Usability > Search

- [ ] 83. The search bar should be prominently located either in the center of the site, or top right of the page, and large enough for a moderately long search string
- [ ] 84. Label the search bar with the word "Search" or similar
- [ ] 85. The search bar should be sticky so users can search no matter where they are down the page.
- [ ] 86. The search bar should have autocomplete capabilities; fix spelling mistakes
- [ ] 87. Search should optimize itself to share most relevant information as well as share similar and/or popular searches as users type in the search bar.
- [ ] 88. Allow users the ability to press the enter key to search (instead of being required to click the "search" button only)
- [ ] 89. Allow for filtering/categories when using search bar to narrow down/simplify search
- [ ] 90. Include product images in site search window
- [ ] 91. Search should be localized, providing results in the local terminology

Homepage & Sitewide > Usability > Site Speed

- [ ] 92. Start using a CDN (Content Delivery Network)
- [ ] 93. Host your static files in the cloud that uses a CDN
- [ ] 94. Install Google PageSpeed on your server
- [ ] 95. Tell your hosting provider or system admin that you want Memcached installed
- [ ] 96. Optimize your images
- [ ] 97. Use a fast web host if not your own servers
- [ ] 98. Minimize round-trip times (RTTs)
- [ ] 99. Use caching
- [ ] 100. Compress your website with gzip
- [ ] 101. Add an Expires header
- [ ] 102. Switch off all the plugins or extras that you don't need or use

CUX Guideline Checklist »
Category Landing Page

Category Landing Page > Design

- [ ] 103. Consider whether your site requires a category landing page
- [ ] 104. Graphics and product thumbnails on your category landing page should represent the breadth of the category
- [ ] 105. Product images on the category landing page should lead to their corresponding product page
- [ ] 106. Popular filters and brands can be displayed on category landing page

Category Landing Page > Design > Category Hierarchy

- [ ] 107. Consider whether your categories should be a deep or shallow hierarchy
- [ ] 108. Users shouldn't have to search more than 4 levels into the hierarchy
- [ ] 109. Shallow parent categories will confuse users, avoid them

Category Landing Page > Design > Subcategories

- [ ] 110. Display both a left-hand vertical list of subcategories and a grid view with thumbnails
- [ ] 111. Offer thematic categories/subcategories (seasonal, sale, etc)
- [ ] 112. Aim to have 10 or less subcategories per category
- [ ] 113. Put subcategories under multiple categories when appropriate/necessary
- [ ] 114. Create an accessories subcategory for every category that has accessories

Category Landing Page > Category Naming & Copy

- [ ] 115. Category names should never suggest overlapping products (e.g. "lawn care" and "lawnmowers")
- [ ] 116. Category names should be descriptive and common ("about us" beats "company experience")

CUX Guideline Checklist »
Product List & Search Results Page

Product List & Search Results Page > Design

- [ ] 117. Carefully consider how many products per row to display
- [ ] 118. Product list page design (grid vs list) should match/correspond with product type
- [ ] 119. Consider the best page design for your specific product list
- [ ] 120. Show total number of products in list when product list is paginated

Product List & Search Results Page > Design > Product Image

- [ ] 121. Product thumbnail should reveal product in context, secondary thumbnail should reveal product on its own
- [ ] 122. Reveal additional product picture(s) that appear upon mouse hover, or as a gallery slider; photos can show all variations of a product, different angles/facets of a product, or hidden attributes of a product
- [ ] 123. Consider which product thumbnail would be more effective for the specific product at hand: a photo of the product itself, or of the product packaging
- [ ] 124. Product packages should be taken straight on to capture all small product details that are on the package
- [ ] 125. Take your product picture at an angle if you want to capture the product's physical depth

Product List & Search Results Page > Product Information

- [ ] 126. Design product lists so users don't have to pogo-stick
- [ ] 127. Top of product list should communicate variety of products available
- [ ] 128. Show only the most essential product attributes in product list
- [ ] 129. For combined categories (e.g. "sofas and loveseats"), display both product types at top of product list
- [ ] 130. For products in a package, show a price per unit in product list
- [ ] 131. Communicate all variations of a product on the product list (e.g. "available in 6 more colors")
- [ ] 132. Show compatibility (e.g. camera case fits camera model X) in product list
- [ ] 133. Offer a product comparison tool

Product List & Search Results Page > Trust Elements

- [ ] 134. Show ratings (and # of ratings/reviews) in product list
- [ ] 135. Products with ratings and reviews should be promoted upward
- [ ] 136. Avoid "zero results" page

CUX Guideline Checklist »
Product List & Search Results Page (continued)

Product List & Search Results Page > Filters

- [ ] 137. Offer filtering options
- [ ] 138. Don't confuse sorting and filters
- [ ] 139. Choose highly relevant filters; depends on product at hand
- [ ] 140. Learn how people use your filters, adjust them accordingly
- [ ] 141. Promote popular filters to the top of the list
- [ ] 142. Filters on the product list should be high in visual hierarchy
- [ ] 143. Filter values should have checkboxes
- [ ] 144. Allow users to select more than one filter
- [ ] 145. Show how many products apply to each filter choice in parentheses next to the filter choice
- [ ] 146. Only display filter values that apply to what's available
- [ ] 147. Offer themed filters ("fall sweaters" filter in sweaters and jackets product list)
- [ ] 148. Offer a “clear all” option for filter selections
- [ ] 149. Filter tools should be sticky, especially for endless scrolling and "load more" product lists
- [ ] 150. Horizontal filter menu and vertical filter menu should have the same top alignment
- [ ] 151. Horizontal filtering bar at top of product list (can be additional to vertical left filtering options) works best when there are only a few filtering options
- [ ] 152. Collapse long filtering lists after around 10 filtering values, and clearly indicate that it's collapsed with 'see more' text
- [ ] 153. Each filter selection should be a separate action in browser history (many users rely on the back button)
- [ ] 154. Auto-refresh search results after a filter has been selected (or deselected)

Product List & Search Results Page> Sorting

- [ ] 155. Follow convention: Design sorting options as dropdown box near top of page, labeled "Sort by"
- [ ] 156. When sorting a product list via customer ratings, take number of ratings into account
- [ ] 157. When sorting by price: offer sorting for item price and/or price per unit
- [ ] 158. Offer original date (of production, publication,etc) sorting option for products whose original date is relevant
- [ ] 159. Suggested scope and sorting can be helpful for large product lists

CUX Guideline Checklist »
Product Page

Product Page > Design & Copy

- [ ] 160. Product pictures should have a simple background (ideally white or grey)
- [ ] 161. Product page requires a CTA (usually "add to cart" type button)
- [ ] 162. If you offer in-store pickup, add a "Find in store" CTA to product page (and explain how it works)
- [ ] 163. Offer a "wish list" or “favorites” button in addition to “add to cart” button

Product Page > Product Information

- [ ] 164. Product page should show all possible variations (sizes, colors, models)
- [ ] 165. Product picture should offer as much information into the look & feel of the product as possible (3d view, zoom magnifier, etc)
- [ ] 166. Show products in accurate context and scale
- [ ] 167. If a product variation (e.g. size) is unavailable, this should be immediately apparent
- [ ] 168. Offer an email notification system for when out of stock items come back in stock
- [ ] 169. Offer link to size guide on product page (if applicable to product)
- [ ] 170. Color swatches should be accurate
- [ ] 171. Push urgency and/or scarcity
- [ ] 172. Consider adding product videos to the product page
- [ ] 173. Comparison info (e.g. dimensions, materials) for similar products should be presented in a visually similar format so people know where to look when trying to compare products
- [ ] 174. For expensive products: Display payment options
- [ ] 175. Social sharing is more effective on the "thank you page" than on the product page

Product Page > Product information > Product Description

- [ ] 176. Create unique product descriptions (don't use the manufacturer's)
- [ ] 177. Every sentence in the product description should tell buyers something they didn't know before (don't tell them it's chocolate if they're buying a box of chocolates)
- [ ] 178. Gather and analyze product reviews to see what people enjoy most. Include it in your product description
- [ ] 179. Product description should address fears, uncertainties, and doubts- figure out what these are
- [ ] 180. Write your product descriptions in the style of your target audience
- [ ] 181. Share features AND benefits
- [ ] 182. Use specific language in product description ("best value" vs "won X award 4 years in a row")
- [ ] 183. Be altruistic, sell for a "cause"

CUX Guideline Checklist » Product Page (continued)

Product Page > Product Information > Shipping & Returns

- [ ] 184. Display shipping and return policy on product page
- [ ] 185. Show estimated shipping time

Product Page > Trust Elements

- [ ] 186. Show reviews and ratings on product page
- [ ] 187. Don't be afraid to include a few negative reviews
- [ ] 188. Offer sorting options for reviews
- [ ] 189. Ask "was this review helpful?"

Product Page > Navigation

- [ ] 190. Breadcrumbs should be near top of page, following convention
- [ ] 191. On product page, offer hierarchy-based breadcrumb links

Product Page > Accessories & Related Products

- [ ] 192. Offer similar/recommended products to the product page
- [ ] 193. Offer accessories and add-ons to the product page
- [ ] 194. Link any other products to their rightful product pages
- [ ] 195. Similar products, recommended products, and accessories/add-ons should be in distinct and separate areas of the product page
- [ ] 196. Show "recently viewed items"
- [ ] 197. Allow users to clear or disable "recently viewed items"

CUX Guideline Checklist »
Product Comparison Tool

Product Comparison > Design & Interaction

- [ ] 198. Pick the right comparison method for your situation: Compare Tool, Filter Method, or Standalone
- [ ] 199. Show notification when a product is added to comparison list, then tell users what to do next
- [ ] 200. Comparison select indicator should be sticky or otherwise extremely accessible
- [ ] 201. Follow conventional design: Display a checkbox under or above the product image, indicate ‘select to compare’ or simply ‘compare’
- [ ] 202. Comparison tool should also be offered on search results pages
- [ ] 203. Add "add to cart" CTA for each product
- [ ] 204. "Close" or "Back to results" button should be visible
- [ ] 205. Allow users to email, print, & save comparison tables
- [ ] 206. Offer capability for users to mouse hover over technical phrasing/jargon to see a definition or description
- [ ] 207. Each product picture should be clickable, leading to product page
- [ ] 208. If there are many specs to compare, they should be organized, grouped, and easy to scan

Product Comparison > Product Information

- [ ] 209. Avoid product comparison if all differentiating product information is displayed on the product list page
- [ ] 210. Comparison page consistently shows the same specs for all products, consistent names, no empty cells, etc.
- [ ] 211. Prominently include rating and number of ratings for each product on the comparison page

CUX Guideline Checklist »
Cart & Checkout

Cart & Checkout > Cart Interaction

- [ ] 212. Consider next move after adding product to cart: Take to checkout screen or remain on product page?
- [ ] 213. If remaining on page, mini cart should appear whenever an item is added to the shopping cart
- [ ] 214. Keep shopping cart notification/contents open until the user clicks elsewhere or is taken elsewhere
- [ ] 215. Display essential information on cart page: product thumbnail, name, and price, etc.
- [ ] 216. Product thumbnail should display that appropriate variation (if customer ordered a BLUE shirt, the thumbnail should show a BLUE shirt)

Cart & Checkout > Checkout Navigation

- [ ] 217. Checkout process should be linear and clear
- [ ] 218. For checkouts with many form fields, accordion format works well
- [ ] 219. Show progress indicators throughout checkout process
- [ ] 220. Avoid "reset" and/or "clear" buttons
- [ ] 221. Avoid contextual words for CTA buttons (e.g. "continue")

Cart & Checkout > Trust Elements

- [ ] 222. Show security badges on checkout page
- [ ] 223. Visually reinforce credit card form fields
- [ ] 224. Provide link to privacy policy throughout checkout process
- [ ] 225. If payments are made secure with SSL, tell your customers
- [ ] 226. Provide contact info and live chat for any questions throughout checkout process

Cart & Checkout > Customer Accounts

- [ ] 227. Don't force buyers to register with your site before buying, offer guest checkout
- [ ] 228. Offer an incentive for OPTIONAL account registration upon checkout
- [ ] 229. When creating a password, requirements should be clearly displayed

CUX Guideline Checklist » Cart & Checkout (continued)

Cart & Checkout > Form Fields

- [ ] 230. When designing forms: Fields should be ordered easiest - hardest to fill out
- [ ] 231. Make typing easy: autoformat, support copy/paste, make suggestions (not always!), etc.
- [ ] 232. Indicate whether each field is required or optional, unless they're all required
- [ ] 233. If a required field has been missed or incorrectly filled out, immediately create a visual alert
- [ ] 234. Expiration date format in form and on credit card should match
- [ ] 235. Name and phone number fields should be one field, not multiple
- [ ] 236. Form should be a single column (not multiple columns)
- [ ] 237. Forms should offer radio buttons over dropdown box selection
- [ ] 238. Shoppers should be able to edit credit card information without pausing or leaving the checkout process
- [ ] 239. Don't make coupon code fields prominent

Cart & Checkout > Shipping & Billing

- [ ] 240. Total should be itemized: Price, taxes, shipping, discounts
- [ ] 241. Provide and clearly display shipping options (including in-store pickup)
- [ ] 242. Provide free shipping if possible or offer free shipping when spending $X or more
- [ ] 243. Billing address should be shipping address by default
- [ ] 244. Display acceptable payment options

Cart & Checkout > Gifting

- [ ] 245. Include a "this is a gift" checkbox to set up gift-wrapping options
- [ ] 246. Offer multiple gifting options like messages, e-gifts, wrapping options, and gift kits
- [ ] 247. Show customers what the gift will look like for the recipient

Top 21 ecommerce A/B test ideas: what works more often than not

There's nothing that always works and pretty much nothing that never works either. Websites are highly contextual.

That being said, there are tests that tend to have a very high win rate. These are test ideas that, while they don't work 100% of the time, work more often than not.

Naturally, everything depends on the specific implementation - a good idea implemented poorly will not yield any results.

The following 21 testing ideas come from a combination of the user-testing and research performed for this report and our own client-based research done over the years.

Testing Idea Checklist

1. One static image with a single value proposition is better than an auto-rotating slider
2. Proper value proposition beats no value proposition
3. Prominent contact information
4. Prominent free shipping info
5. Prominent section for sales and specials
6. Emphasize wide-appeal products
7. Make the search bar more prominent
8. Add a site-wide benefits bar below the header
9. Level-up your product description copy
10. Use Product videos and test auto-play with captions
11. Ask for email first on checkout
12. Make the shopping cart persistent
13. Create visually prominent and clear progress indicators during checkout
14. Clearly address purchase uncertainties
15. Expand your payment options
16. Cut form length
17. Don’t force people to register, add it in the backend
18. Display reviews more prominently
19. Upsell, intelligently
20. Clear, big calls to action
21. Test it; Do user testing, UX benchmarking, and your own A/B testing

Test idea #1. One static image with a single value proposition is better than an auto-rotating slider

In general, don't use auto-rotating sliders (aka carousels). Though there are undoubtedly examples of them working better than static images (rare as they are), for the vast majority of sites, they are a usability nightmare.

What's wrong with using carousels?

- The human eye reacts to movement (distracting us from the important stuff)
- Too many messages equals no message (clutter effect)
- They look like banners, which people ignore because they mistake them for ads and generally hate them (banner blindness)

Ultimately, users crave control, and auto-rotating carousels offer the opposite of that. The solution? Implement a simple, static hero image with a strong value proposition.

Test various images and messages that work together.

User quote - *"The constantly sliding imagines were very distracting, too fast, and made me feel like my computer was sliding off the desk -- I'd much rather see scroll arrows at each side of an image, so I can look through if I want to, and at my own pace. Also, they continued to slide around in the background, when i was obviously not looking at them, because I had a menu pulled down."*

Relevant Guidelines:

#16 (Appearance): Invest in high-quality photography and product images

#17 (Appearance): Implement bespoke imagery to maximize perceived value and first impressions

#41 (Credibility): Maintain a modern, relevant design

#79 (Usability): Avoid automatic image sliders

#96 (Usability): Optimize your images

Test idea #2. Proper value proposition beats no value proposition

A value proposition is a promise of value to be delivered. It's the primary reason a prospect should buy from you.

If you're Amazon, you don't need to explain yourself. Most ecommerce stores don't have that luxury and have a large portion of visitors that have never heard of them before.

You have to present your value proposition as the first thing the visitors see on your homepage, but should be visible in all major entry points of the site (category and product pages).

What should your value proposition convey? Relevancy, quantifiable value, and unique differentiation.

If you want to know more about crafting compelling value propositions, read this.

Relevant Guidelines:

#4 (Appearance): Value proposition should be located above the fold

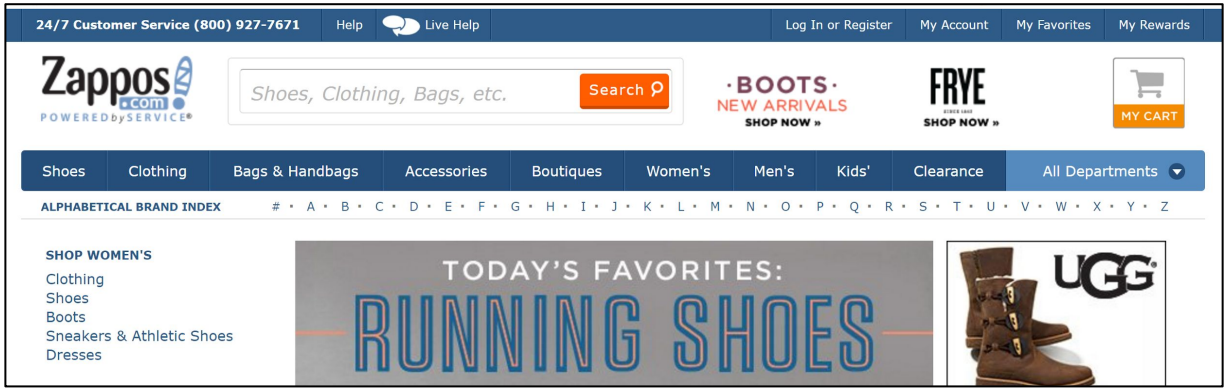
#33 (Clarity): Use bullet points to list benefits

#34 (Clarity): Communicate what makes your offer unique and how you solve potential customers' problem (or improve their situation)

Test idea #3. Prominent contact information

Even though it seems like a small thing, putting your phone number and email address on the top of your site usually boosts conversions.

It's a trust thing. People want to know that they can reach you. It's a simple fix that adds a lot of value in most cases. The famous example, of course, is Zappos. Along with their fanatical customer support, they've always featured their number prominently on their site:



Relevant Guidelines:

#48 (Credibility): Show the "real" organization behind your site; show full office address, phone number, and staff

#49 (Credibility): The content menu (think footer or top menu) should provide the familiar basics, and be consistent throughout the site

#50 (Credibility): Use live chat, and display it on the bottom right corner

Test idea #4. Prominent free shipping info

Charging for shipping is a conversion killer. At this point, the majority of companies offer some form of free shipping - and pretty much every ecommerce site competes with Amazon Prime.

If you're not one of them, start trying to figure out a way you can offer it.

Sometimes, it might be near impossible to make free shipping profitable. However, there are strategies you can experiment with:

1. Establish a Baseline: Compare conversion with and without a free shipping offer.
2. Create Thresholds: Increase the minimum order value required for free shipping, and test the improvement in margin.
3. Set Restrictions: See what kind of improvement you'll get by offering free shipping only on select products where it is profitable.
4. Enact Price Increases: Increase all your product prices to compensate for the loss you take on free shipping, and see how your profit compares.

Relevant Guidelines:

#32 (Clarity): Focus on what customers get instead of what they lose

#34 (Clarity): Communicate what makes your offer unique and how you solve potential customers' problem (or improve their situation)

#47 (Credibility): Shipping, return, and refund policies should be visibly displayed; links should be easy to find

#49 (Credibility): The content menu (think footer or top menu) should provide the familiar basics, and be consistent throughout the site

Test idea #5. Prominent section for sales and specials

Various studies have repeatedly found that about half the online buyers would only buy discounted products, except under exceptional circumstances. Around 60% say they are looking for a section that identifies sales and specials.

Ultimately do what's right for your brand, but it might be something worth experimenting with.

Relevant Guidelines:

#14 (Appearance): Show products and/or promotions with the widest appeal - in order to get them to click anywhere/interact with the page

#38 (Clarity): Relevant/specific promotions (seasonal promotions, sales for particular product categories) should not resemble banner ads

#77 (Usability): Promoting subcategories on the homepage accelerates the search journey

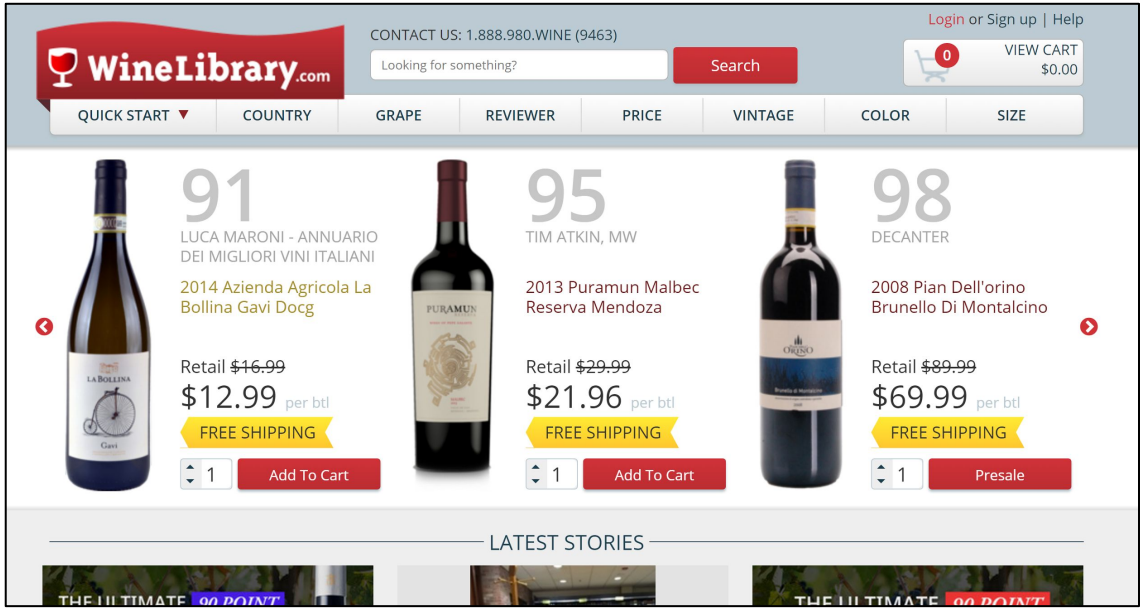
#78 (Usability): Showcase special categories like 'new arrivals' and 'sales & promotion' groupings

Test idea #6. Emphasize wide-appeal products

The goal of the homepage is to get the people off the homepage. The best way to do it is to get them to click on an offer they're interested in.

Look at your best-selling products or best deals and emphasize them on the homepage above all other (make them #1 in the visual hierarchy).

Here's how WineLibrary makes it hard to miss these 3 great deals:



Relevant Guidelines:

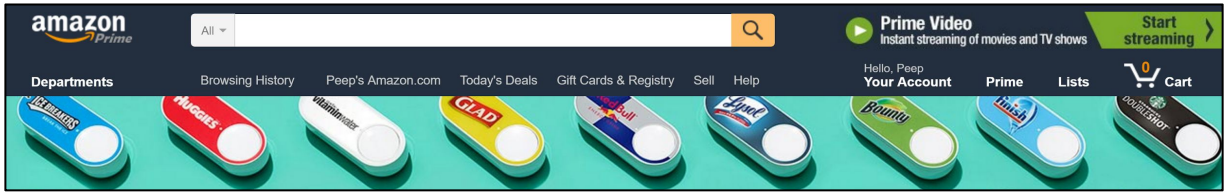
#14 (Appearance): Show products and/or promotions with the widest appeal - in order to get them to click anywhere/interact with the page

#51 (Credibility): If your product has been featured or endorsed, or if you have popular clients or associations, show it off

#87 (Usability): Search should optimize itself to share most relevant information and similar/popular searches as users type in the search bar

Test idea #7. Make the search bar more prominent

If you sell products that people know to search for, making the search bigger and more prominent tends to work great. Think Amazon-style search bar - the center of it all.



Relevant Guidelines:

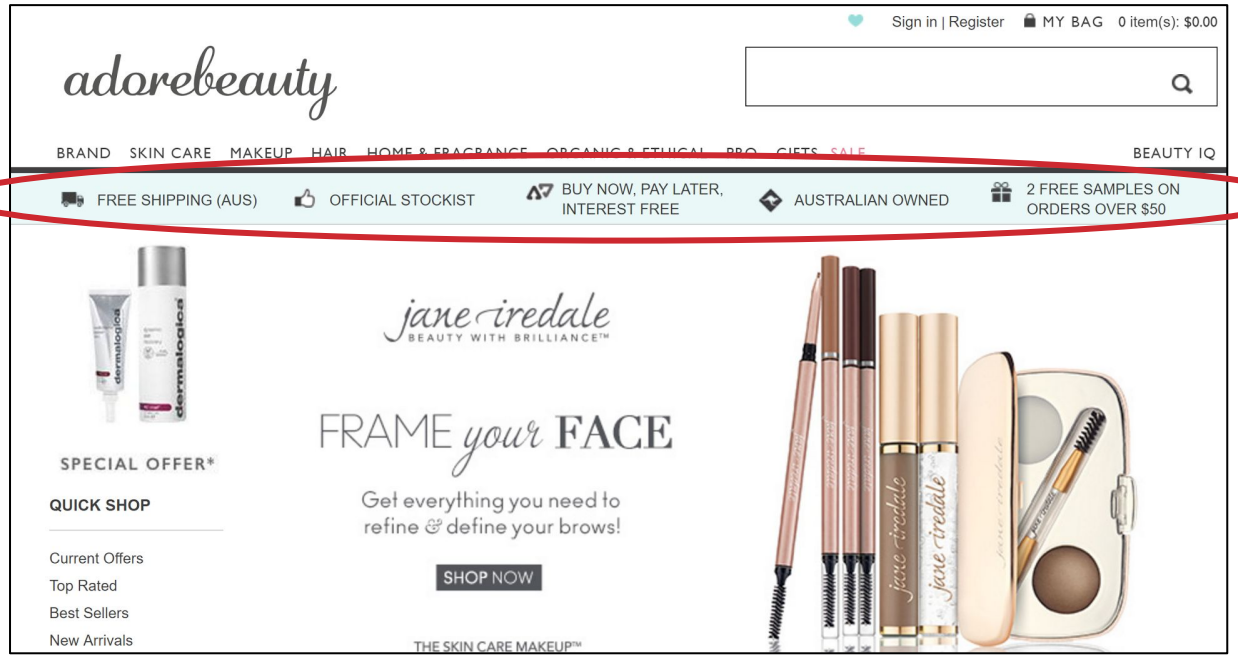
#2 (Appearance): Visual hierarchy should follow information hierarchy - Show less important content further down the page, thumbnails decrease in size as you move down page

#83 (Usability): The search bar should be prominently located either in the center of the site, or top right of the page, and large enough for a moderately long search string

#85 (Usability): The search bar should be sticky so users can search no matter where they are down the page

Test idea #8. Add a site-wide benefits bar below the header

"Why buy here and not from Amazon" is a question that all ecommerce sites need to answer. A prominent benefits bar above the fold is one way to make your case.



Relevant Guidelines:

#32 (Clarity): Focus on what customers get instead of what they lose (e.g. "Get shoes" instead of "Pay $200")

#33 (Clarity): Use bullet points to list benefits

#34 (Clarity): Communicate what makes your offer unique and how you solve potential customers' problem (or improve their situation)

Test idea #9. Level-up your product description copy

Relevant Guidelines:

#177 (Usability): Every sentence in the product description should tell buyers something they didn't know before

#178 (Credibility): Gather and analyze product reviews to see what people enjoy most. Include it in your product description

#179 (Credibility): Product description should address fears, uncertainties, and doubts- figure out what these are

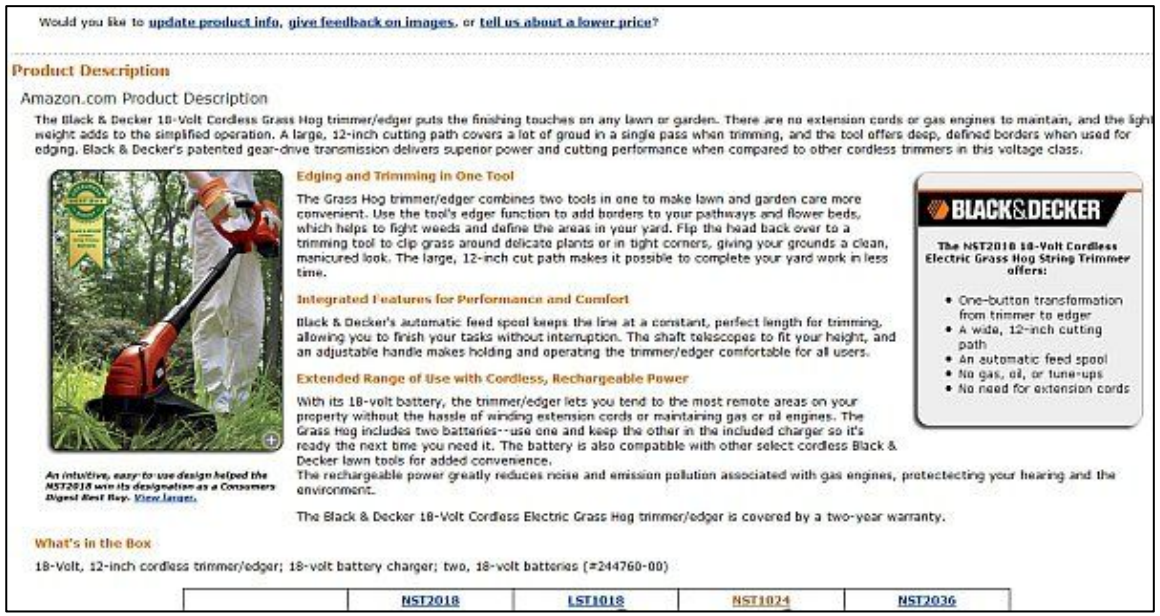
#180 (Credibility): Write your product descriptions in the style of your target audience

#181 (Clarity): Share features AND benefits

#182 (Credibility): Use specific language in product description ("best value" vs "won X award 4 years in a row")

Product descriptions matter. The role of product copy is to give buyers enough information, so they could convince themselves this is the right product for them. *Clarity trumps persuasion.*

Amazon version has proper text for humans, turns features into benefits and even provides a comparison table. Technical info is provided too.



Would you like to update product info, give feedback on images, or tell us about a lower price?

Product Description

Amazon.com Product Description

The Black & Decker 18-Volt Cordless Grass Hog trimmer/edger puts the finishing touches on any lawn or garden. There are no extension cords or gas engines to maintain, and the light weight adds to the simplified operation. A large, 12-inch cutting path covers a lot of ground in a single pass when trimming, and the tool offers deep, defined borders when used for edging. Black & Decker's patented gear-drive transmission delivers superior power and cutting performance when compared to other cordless trimmers in this voltage class.

Edging and Trimming in One Tool

The Grass Hog trimmer/edger combines two tools in one to make lawn and garden care more convenient. Use the tool's edger function to add borders to your pathways and flower beds, which helps to fight weeds and define the areas in your yard. Flip the head back over to a trimming tool to clip grass around delicate plants or in tight corners, giving your grounds a clean, manicured look. The large, 12-inch cut path makes it possible to complete your yard work in less time.

Integrated Features for Performance and Comfort

Black & Decker's automatic feed spool keeps the line at a constant, perfect length for trimming, allowing you to finish your tasks without interruption. The shaft telescopes to fit your height, and an adjustable handle makes holding and operating the trimmer/edger comfortable for all users.

Extended Range of Use with Cordless, Rechargeable Power

With its 18-volt battery, the trimmer/edger lets you tend to the most remote areas on your property without the hassle of winding extension cords or maintaining gas or oil engines. The Grass Hog includes two batteries--use one and keep the other in the included charger so it's ready the next time you need it. The battery is also compatible with other select cordless Black & Decker lawn tools for added convenience.

The rechargeable power greatly reduces noise and emission pollution associated with gas engines, protectecting your hearing and the environment.

The Black & Decker 18-Volt Cordless Electric Grass Hog trimmer/edger is covered by a two-year warranty.

BLACK&DECKER

The NST2018 18-Volt Cordless Electric Grass Hog String Trimmer offers:

- One-button transformation from trimmer to edger
- A wide, 12-inch cutting path
- An automatic feed spool
- No gas, oil, or tune-ups
- No need for extension cords

An intuitive, easy-to-use design helped the NST2018 win its designation as a Consumers Digest Best Buy. View larger.

What's in the Box

18-Volt, 12-inch cordless trimmer/edger; 18-volt battery charger; two, 18-volt batteries (#244760-00)

	NST2018	LST1018	NST1024	NST2036

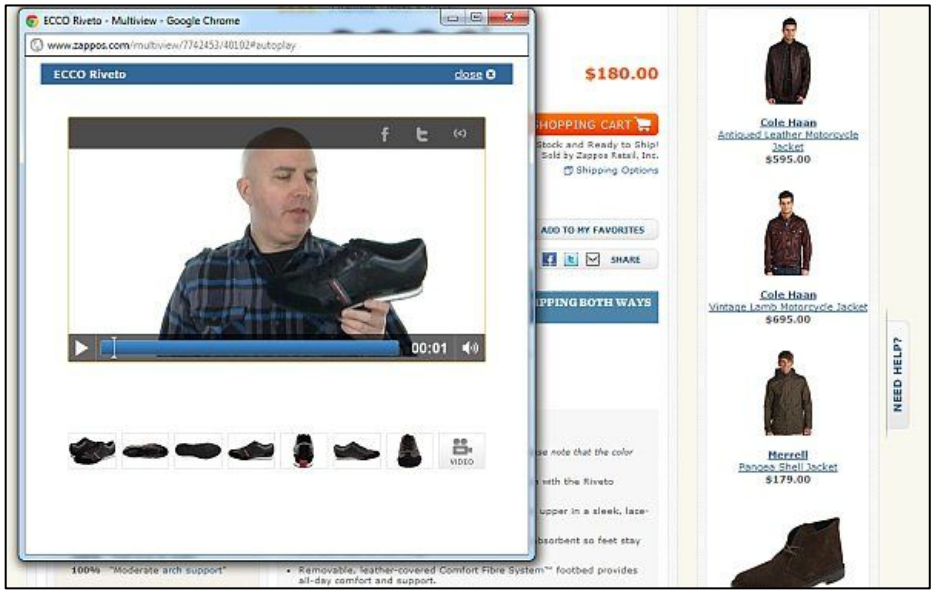
If you sell stuff you don't make, don't just repeat the manufacturer's canned descriptions. Add your personal touch and recommendations – tell the customer why you personally recommend this product and how it will help them.

Test idea #10. Use product videos and test auto-play with captions

Images are good, but everything indicates that video is the future. Photos have their limitations, video is the next step before actual touching and feeling.

If you're not doing product videos yet, do them for at least part of the inventory and see if it makes a difference.

Zappos has videos for almost all of their product, such as this:



Read my post on how using video increases conversions. Our own split tests have suggested that auto-play videos work well for complex, high ticket items.

Relevant Guidelines:

#165 (Appearance): Product picture should offer as much information into the look & feel of the product as possible (3d view, zoom magnifier, etc)

#166 (Appearance): Show products in accurate context and scale

#172 (Appearance): Consider adding product videos to the product page

Test idea #11. Ask for email first on checkout

This is so you are able to send follow-up emails if they do not complete their orders. This is the screen people are taken to on Amazon when they're ready to check out:

Make sure the first follow-up email goes out ASAP. If they complete the purchase somewhere else, it's over. If the purchase take place, send one or two more follow-up emails (might include a coupon). Track the effectiveness of those emails (open, clickthrough and conversion rates).

Many ecommerce platforms such as Magento, 3DCart, and Volusion offer integrated cart abandonment solutions. There are also several add-on software providers out there that can do this. Here are 2 to start with: Rejoiner & SeeWhy

Relevant Guidelines:

#217 (Usability): Checkout process should be linear

#218 (Usability): For checkouts with many form fields, accordion format works well

#227 (Usability): Don't force buyers to register with your site before buying, offer guest checkout

Test idea #12. Make the shopping cart persistent

People comparison shop. A common behavior is that they add products to cart on a site, so they could return later. If upon their return they discover that the contents of the shopping cart have expired, they will not start from scratch (too much hassle).

The solution: persistent shopping cart. Done with persistent cookie, this shopping cart will be right there even a day or a week later.

Save the cart

An alternative to this is the option to save the shopping cart contents, so the user can retrieve it later after they're done with comparison shopping.

Giving the option to send the cart contents to email (later retrievable through a link) is a smart way of staying on the shopper's mind.

Relevant Guidelines:

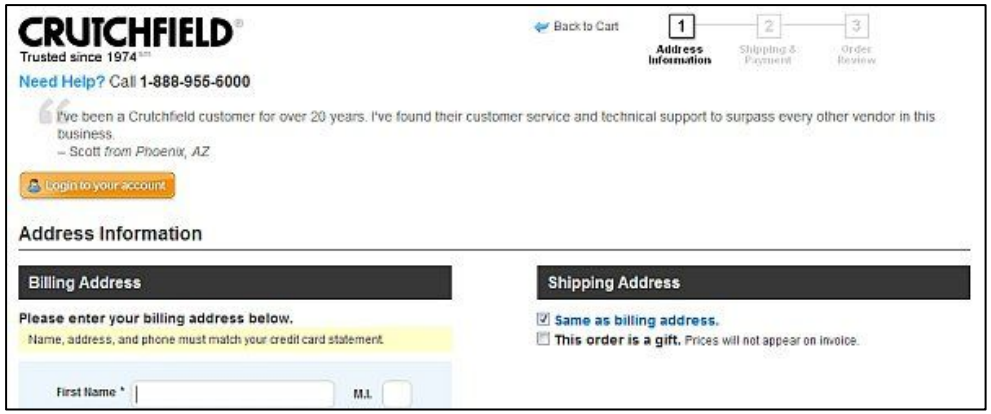
#215 (Clarity): Display essential information: product thumbnail, name, and price, etc.

#216 (Clarity): Product thumbnail should display the appropriate variation (if customer ordered a BLUE shirt, the thumbnail should show a BLUE shirt)

Test idea #13. Create visually prominent and clear progress indicators during checkout

People like to be in control and to be in the know. Are we there yet? We want to know how much longer something is going to take. This is why numbered lists are better than unordered lists and why you should have clear progress indicators on your site.

Crutchfield has it in the top right corner, but I think it's quite small and may go unnoticed by many:



Crate&Barrel's approach is better, with more more prominent steps (1,2, and 3):

Relevant Guidelines:

#217 (Usability): Checkout process should be linear

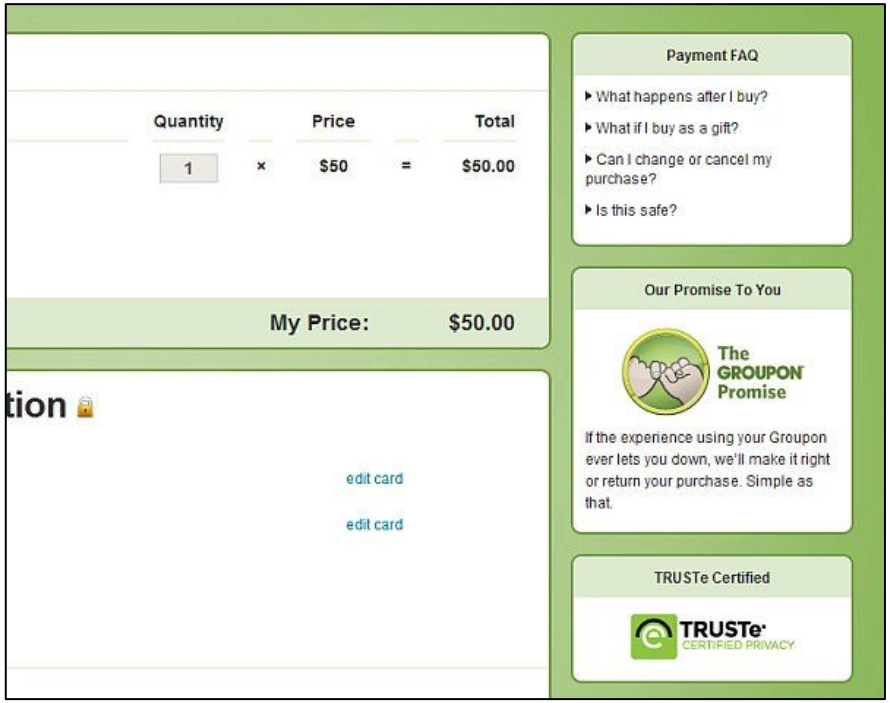
#219 (Usability): Show progress indicators throughout checkout process

Test idea #14. Clearly address purchase uncertainties

Is this safe? Can I do returns? When will I get my stuff?

If the visitor has never ordered from you, he will have several uncertainties you have to deal with. Make a list of the most common objections and doubts, and address them on product pages and in the shopping cart.

Here's how Groupon deals with this (look at the sidebar):



Relevant Guidelines:

#184 (Appearance): Display shipping and return policy on product page

#185 (Credibility): Show estimated shipping time

#222 (Credibility): Show security badges on checkout page

#223 (Credibility): Visually reinforce credit card form fields

#224 (Credibility): Provide link to privacy policy throughout checkout process

#225 (Credibility): If payments are made secure with SSL, tell your customers

#226 (Credibility): Provide contact info and live chat for any questions throughout checkout process

#240 (Credibility): Total should be itemized: Price, taxes, shipping, discounts

#241 (Credibility): Provide and display shipping options (including in-store pickup)

#244 (Credibility): Display acceptable payment options

Test idea #15. Expand your payment options

Options are good. 2 reasons:

- Given the scandals about credit card information theft, some people are wary of using credit cards for online payments (especially on a site they've never used before).
- A 2009 survey of 2000 online British adults found that 50% of those who regularly shop online said that if their preferred payment method is not available, they will cancel the purchase.

These people are not the majority, but adding payment options like PayPal or Amazon Payments to credit card payments will help you win over some customers you would lose otherwise.

Checkout how Moosejaw.com does it:

Relevant Guidelines:

#244 (Credibility): Display acceptable payment options

Test idea #16. Cut form length

Eventually, people will add some stuff to the cart and they're ready to check out. Your success in leading them through this depends a lot on the forms. The more fields they have to fill in, the more friction there is.

This is the very reason people prefer to buy from Amazon. Their shipping and credit card information is already there, so they will save themselves from the hassle of filling in forms. They're even ready to pay a higher price just to save a couple of minutes (I know I am!).

I've seen stores ask for shipping address for digital downloads. Ugh! Just stick with the essentials.

You don't need the customer's title or middle name!

Bottom line: do not ask for information you don't absolutely need.

Relevant Guidelines:

#218 (Credibility): For checkouts with many form fields, accordion format works well

#219 (Usability): Show progress indicators throughout checkout process

#227 (Usability): Don't force buyers to register with your site before buying, offer guest checkout

#231 (Usability): Make typing easy: autoformat, support copy/paste, make suggestions (not always!), etc.

#232 (Appearance): Indicate whether each field is required or optional, unless they're all required

#233 (Appearance): If a required field has been missed or incorrectly filled out, immediately create a visual alert

#235 (Usability): Name and phone number fields should be one field, not multiple

#236 (Appearance): Form should be a single column (not multiple columns)

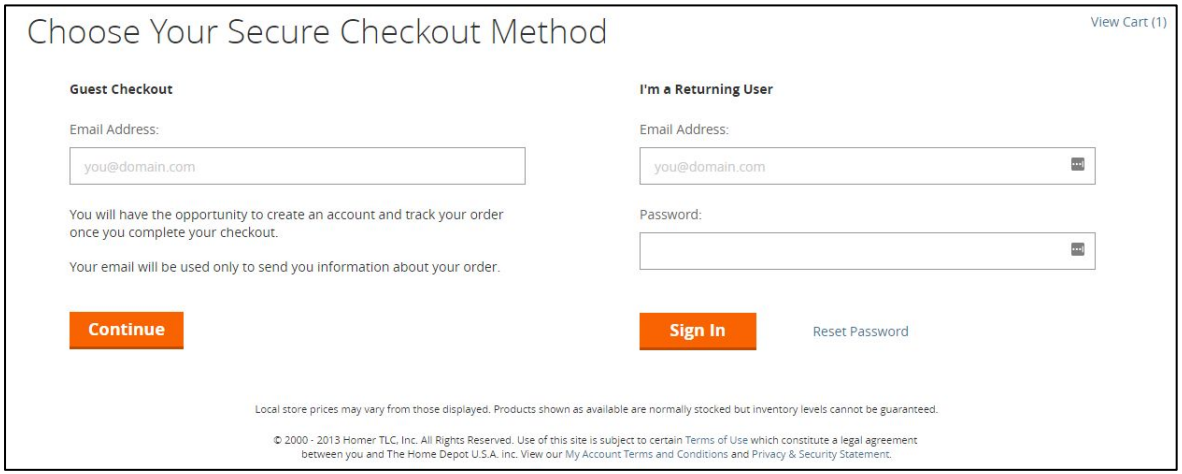
#237 (Appearance): Forms should offer radio buttons over dropdown box selection

Test idea #17. Don’t force people to register, add it in the backend

Surely you know the $300 million dollar button story. Don’t force people to register.

Instead, offer the option to register if they want, but create an account anyway for those who opt for guest checkout. They will enter their email and name anyway. You just have to generate a password and email it to them once they complete their order.

Home Depot plays nice and offers guest checkout as the first option:



Relevant Guidelines:

#227 (Usability): Don't force buyers to register with your site before buying, offer guest checkout

Test idea #18. Display reviews more prominently

People use reviews, a lot. Even while they're shopping in brick and mortar stores they read online reviews. Probably you're doing it too. I know I am.

Nearly 60 percent of online shoppers consult reviews prior to purchasing consumer electronics and 40 percent of online shoppers claimed that they would not even buy electronics without seeking reviews about the product online first.

Bottom line: Start gathering and showcasing reviews on your site.

If you sell commodity products and can't get users to write many reviews, you might want to look into pulling reviews from an external site to have more of them.

Don't delete negative reviews – they actually help sales if there are only a few of them.

Relevant Guidelines:

#186 (Credibility): Show reviews and ratings on product page

#187 (Credibility): Don't be afraid to include a few negative reviews

#188 (Usability): Offer sorting options for reviews

#189 (Usability): Ask "was this review helpful?"

Test idea #19. Upsell, intelligently

Upselling and cross-selling will boost your average order size. Apple knows this and immediately after adding an iPad to your cart, it tries to upsell you:

The rule of upselling is this: you only offer related products (Apple offers smart cover for iPad, and doesn't try to sell you an iPod), and the offer must be at least 60% cheaper than the product they just added to their shopping cart.

So if they're buying pants, upsell a belt.

Brick and mortar supermarkets will try to upsell you while you're checking out (grab a candy bar while you wait). Online, don't do it. Focus on getting them to check out.

Relevant Guidelines:

#192 (Usability): Offer similar/recommended products to the product page

#193 (Usability): Offer accessories and add-ons to the product page

#194 (Usability): Link any other products to their rightful product pages

#195 (Appearance): Similar products, recommended products, and accessories/add-ons should be in distinct and separate areas of the product page

#196 (Usability): Show "recently viewed items"

Test idea #20. Clear, big calls to action

The user experience in your store needs to be smooth. Smooth in the sense that they should never have to look for something. It should always be obvious how things work.

If people need to look for “add to cart” or “checkout” buttons, you’re failing miserably. Those two are the most important buttons in your store. You want them big, bold and prominent. Avoid text links.

The wording and color of the button also matter, but you need to test it. Bigger buttons are better.

Check out how patagonia has evolved their product page. Notice the newer design on the left, and the red color that sticks out is the add to cart button and the cart itself.

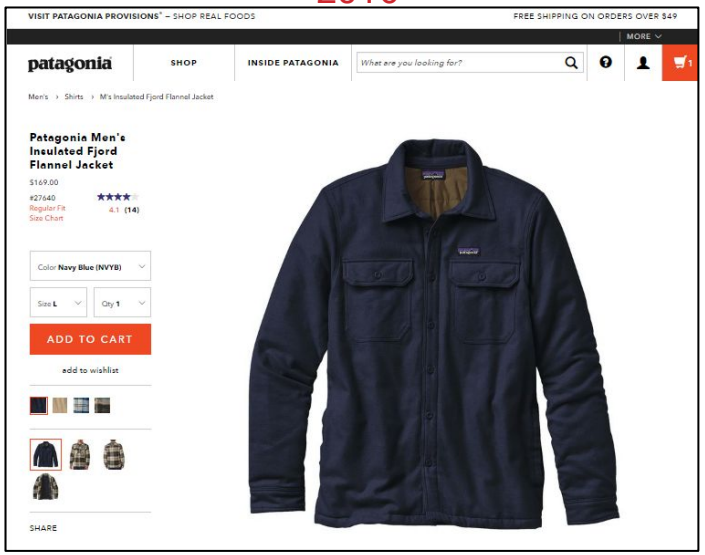
Relevant Guidelines:

#161 (Appearance): Product page requires a CTA (usually "add to cart" type button)

#162 (Appearance): If you offer in-store pickup, add a "Find in store" CTA to product page (and explain how it works)

2012

2016



Test idea #21. Test it; Do user testing, UX benchmarking, and your own A/B testing

Usability is your best friend. I strongly recommend you conduct user testing on your ecommerce site to find problems with your interface you might not be aware of. Give people some tasks (e.g. find X, and buy it), and have them comment out loud while they're browsing your site. You either watch over their shoulder or watch the screen recording of it.

TryMyUI is what we used for our user testing. Try them out. 15 people will discover 99% of the problems. Even testing one target user is better than testing none at all.

Want to get some quantitative data? Try standardized surveys via UX benchmarking. We have our own methodology that was used in this report. You can try that, or use your own approach. One benefit of UX benchmarking is that it is increasingly useful as you repeat, either as a comparison after a design change, or against competitors to see where you are falling behind.

Finally, take the ideas in this report and test them. Take our advice. Then do your own testing.

Relevant Guidelines:

#161 (Appearance): Product page requires a CTA (usually "add to cart" type button)

#178 (Credibility): Gather and analyze product reviews to see what people enjoy most. Include it in your product description

#179 (Credibility): Product description should address fears, uncertainties, and doubts- figure out what these are

#180 (Credibility): Write your product descriptions in the style of your target audience

#181 (Clarity): Share features AND benefits

CUX Guideline Sections

Ecommerce Guideline Sections

- Homepage & Sitewide
  - Appearance
  - Clarity
  - Credibility
  - Usability
- Category Landing Page
- Product List & Search Results Page
- Product Page
- Product Comparison
- Cart & Checkout

Homepage & Sitewide CUX Guideline Chapters

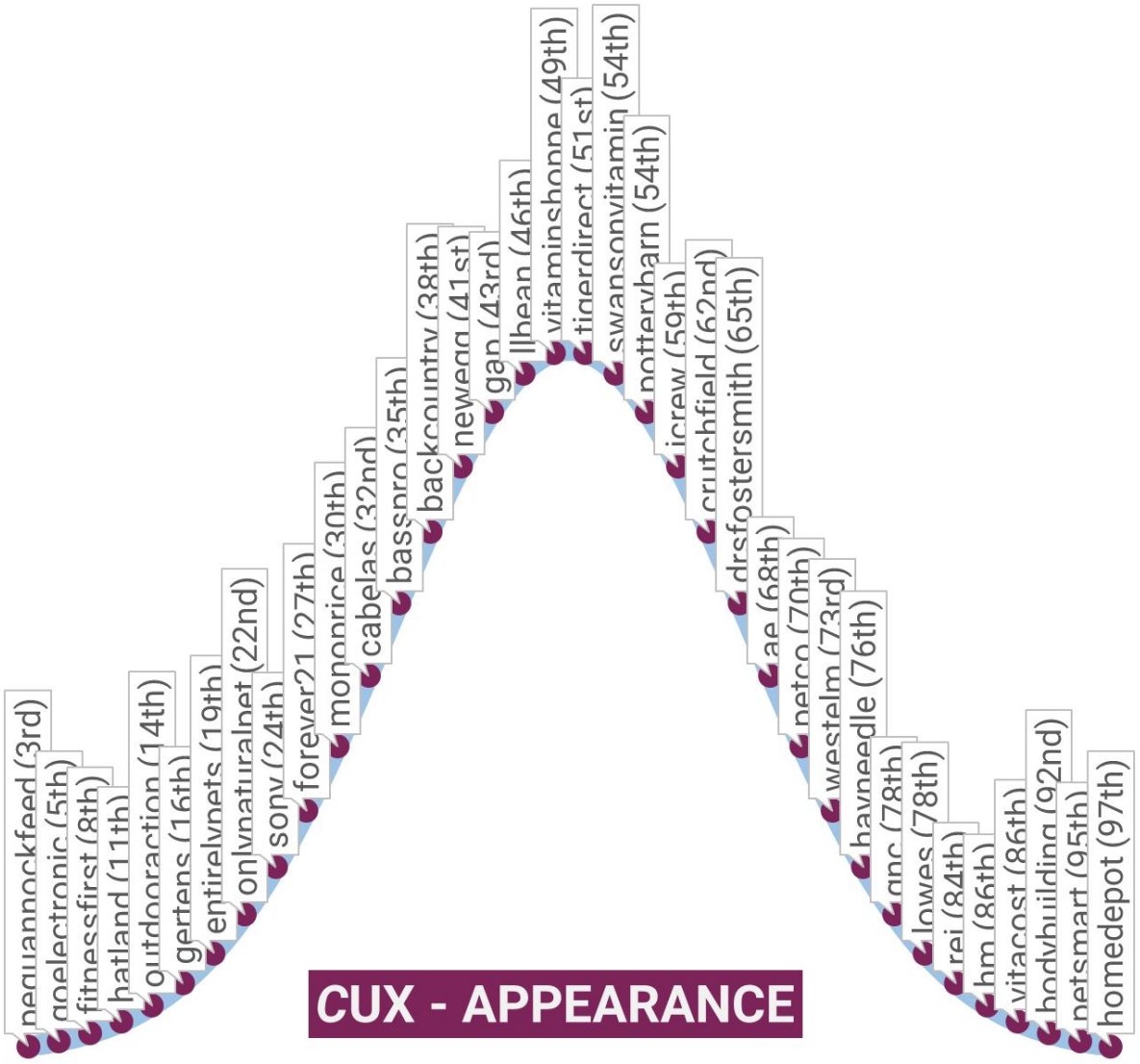
Appearance

Clarity

Credibility

Usability

CUX Appearance Guideline Chapter



Subvertical	Website	CUX Appearance Rank
Home & Garden	homedepot.com	97
Pets	petsmart.com	95
Nutrition	bodybuilding.com	92
Clothing	hm.com	86
Nutrition	vitacost.com	86
Recreation	rei.com	84
Nutrition	gnc.com	78
Home & Garden	lowes.com	78
Home & Garden	hayneedle.com	76
Home & Garden	westelm.com	73
Pets	petco.com	70
Clothing	ae.com	68
Pets	drsfostersmith.com	65
Electronics	crutchfield.com	62
Clothing	jcrew.com	59
Nutrition	swansonvitamins.com	54
Home & Garden	potterybarn.com	54
Electronics	tigerdirect.com	51
Nutrition	vitaminshoppe.com	49
Recreation	llbean.com	46
Clothing	gap.com	43
Electronics	newegg.com	41
Recreation	backcountry.com	38
Recreation	basspro.com	35
Recreation	cabelas.com	32
Electronics	monoprice.com	30
Clothing	forever21.com	27
Electronics	sony.com	24
Pets	onlynaturalpet.com	22
Pets	entirelypets.com	19
Home & Garden	gertens.com	16
Recreation	outdooraction.co.uk	14
Clothing	hatland.com	11
Nutrition	fitnessfirstusa.com	8
Electronics	goelectronic.com	5
Pets	pequannockfeed.com	3

Appearance Guidelines

Guidelines related to homepage appearance. These guidelines focus on the look and feel of a website with its business objective in mind. They provide insights on appearance-related factors that facilitate effortless exploration. These guidelines also deal with visual hierarchy and product presentation:

Appearance > Visual Hierarchy

1. Avoid meaningless, extra design elements that needlessly burden cognitive load
2. Visual hierarchy should follow information hierarchy - Show less important content further down the page, thumbnails decrease in size as you move down page
3. The transactional menu should be higher up in the visual hierarchy than content menu
4. Value proposition should be located above the fold
5. Call attention to the navigation menu by making it visible and color contrasted against the rest of the page
6. If you have the space, display pictures or thumbnails next to product categories
7. Make separate content blocks look visually distinct, add enough white space in between
8. Avoid placing site promotions directly above product lists

Appearance > Visual Hierarchy > CTA

9. CTA should be visually prominent: color contrasted, surrounded by lots of whitespace, and high in the homepage's visual hierarchy
10. CTA buttons are usually better than links as they garner much more attention
11. If you have a secondary CTA, it should be less noticeable (secondary in visual hierarchy)
12. Highlight the CTA with visual cues

Appearance > Product Presentation

13. Make sure users know what you sell. Display a wide range of product types to communicate scope of your catalog
14. Show products and/or promotions with the widest appeal - in order to get them to click anywhere/interact with the page
15. Show products in usage context
16. Invest in high-quality photography and product images
17. Implement bespoke imagery to maximize perceived value and first impressions
18. Don't show more than four products per row; bigger thumbnail images help people understand the product better
19. When using thumbnails with product pictures, sometimes a few products better represent a category than just one (i.e. for accessories category on shoe website, a thumbnail for shoe polish and shoe laces)
20. Design site promotions to resemble the rest of the website. Site promotions should never look like advertisements

Appearance » Visual Hierarchy

8 Guidelines

Appearance > Visual Hierarchy

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2. Visual hierarchy should follow information hierarchy - Show less important content further down the page, thumbnails decrease in size as you move down page
3. The transactional menu should be higher up in the visual hierarchy than content menu
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6. If you have the space, display pictures or thumbnails next to product categories
7. Make separate content blocks look visually distinct, add enough white space in between
8. Avoid placing site promotions directly above product lists

Squeaky wheels get the grease and prominent visuals get the attention. Visual hierarchy is one of the most important principles behind effective web design. It's the order in which the human eye perceives what it sees.

Strong visual hierarchy is required for an effective homepage. We recommend starting with your business objective - Rank the importance of elements on your homepage based on your business objective. Where do you want people to click? Which pricing plan do you want them to choose? Which information do you absolutely need them to read?

When you're fully aware of your priorities, you can set the visual hierarchy right – make sure that important stuff stands out and less important elements are lower in the visual hierarchy.

Keep in mind that certain elements of a website are more important than others (forms, calls to action, value proposition etc.) and you want those to get more attention than the less important parts. If your website menu has 10 items, are all of them equally important? Where do you want the user to click? Make important links more prominent.

When it comes to testing different colors, know that it's all a waste of time and effort. There is no one best color. What matters is that you use colors that stand out from the rest of the layout for the important stuff. It's always about visual hierarchy, not color.

Want to learn more? Take our Persuasive Design Course and Visual Hierarchy Lesson.

Guideline #1. Avoid meaningless, extra design elements that needlessly burden cognitive load

In a study by Google in August of 2012, researchers found that not only will users judge websites as beautiful or not within 1/50th – 1/20th of a second, but also that "visually complex" websites are consistently rated as less beautiful than their simpler counterparts.

Moreover, "highly prototypical" sites – those with layouts commonly associated with sites of it's category – with simple visual design were rated as the most beautiful across the board.

In other words, the simpler the design, the better.

The reason less "visually complex" websites are considered more beautiful is partly because low complexity websites don't require the eyes and brain to physically work as hard to decode, store, and process the information. The more color and light variations on the page (visual complexity), the more effort required for the eye to send information to the brain.

This is why it's important to remember that *every* element –typography, logo, color selection, etc.– communicates subtle information about a brand. When these elements don't do their job, the webmaster often compensates by adding unnecessary copy and/or images, increasing visual complexity and detracting from the overall aesthetic.

Optimizing a page for visual information processing –minimizing the amount information traveling from eye to brain – is about communicating as much as you can with as few elements as possible.

Check out our study on homepage layout and value proposition

Site Component - Visual Hierarchy
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction

User quote - *"The lack of graphics and abundance of words is extremely distracting and does not point the user to where they should be looking. I would replace some of the text with graphic tiles."*

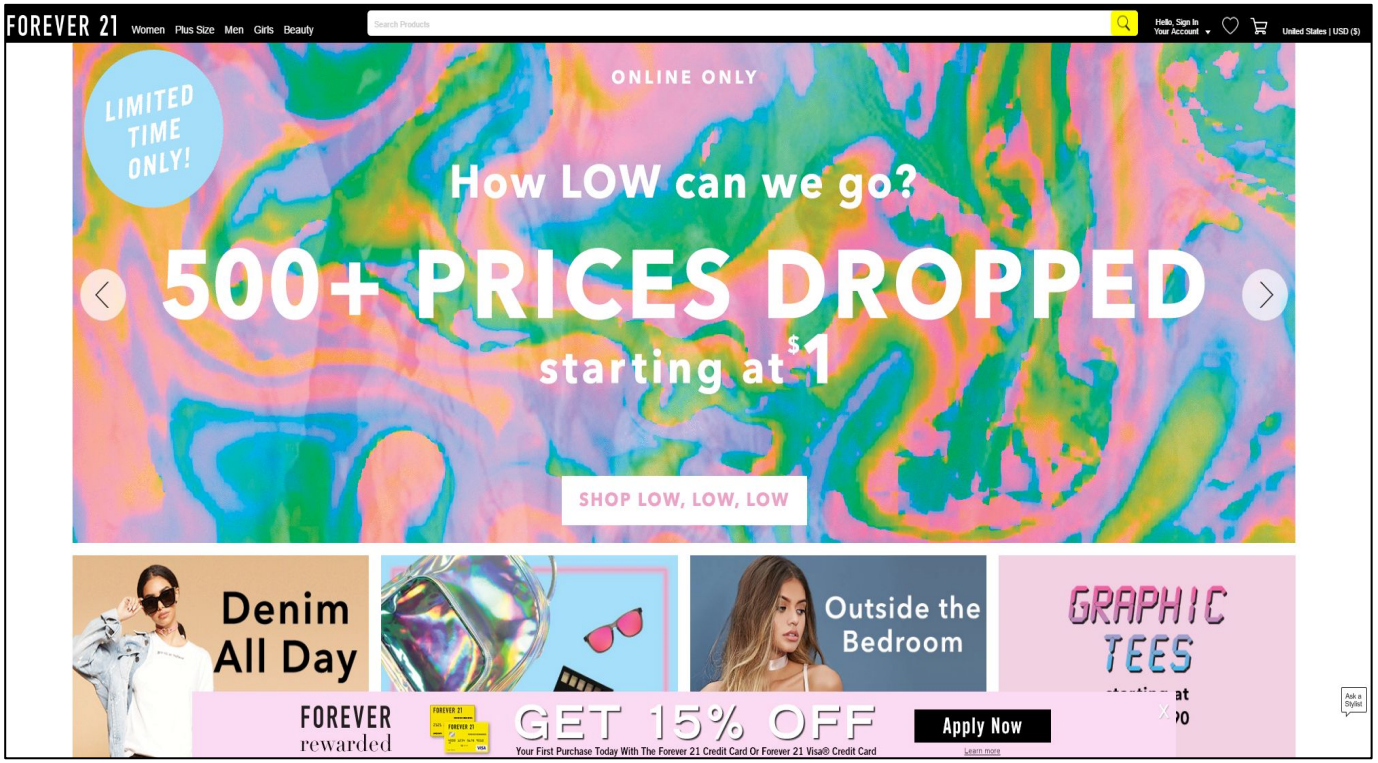
User Quote - *"I liked that imagery was controlled and not overly distracting like on other websites."*

User quote - When asked what they liked most about a website, *"The layout was clean and concise".*

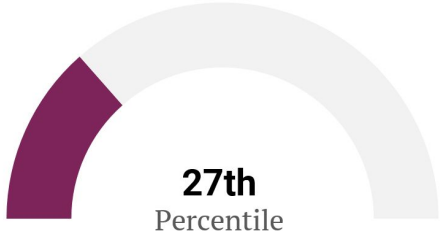
User quote - *"I would reduce the number of clickable images and options on the homepage. it's information overload".*

Non-adherence example

Guideline #1. Avoid meaningless, extra design elements that needlessly burden cognitive load

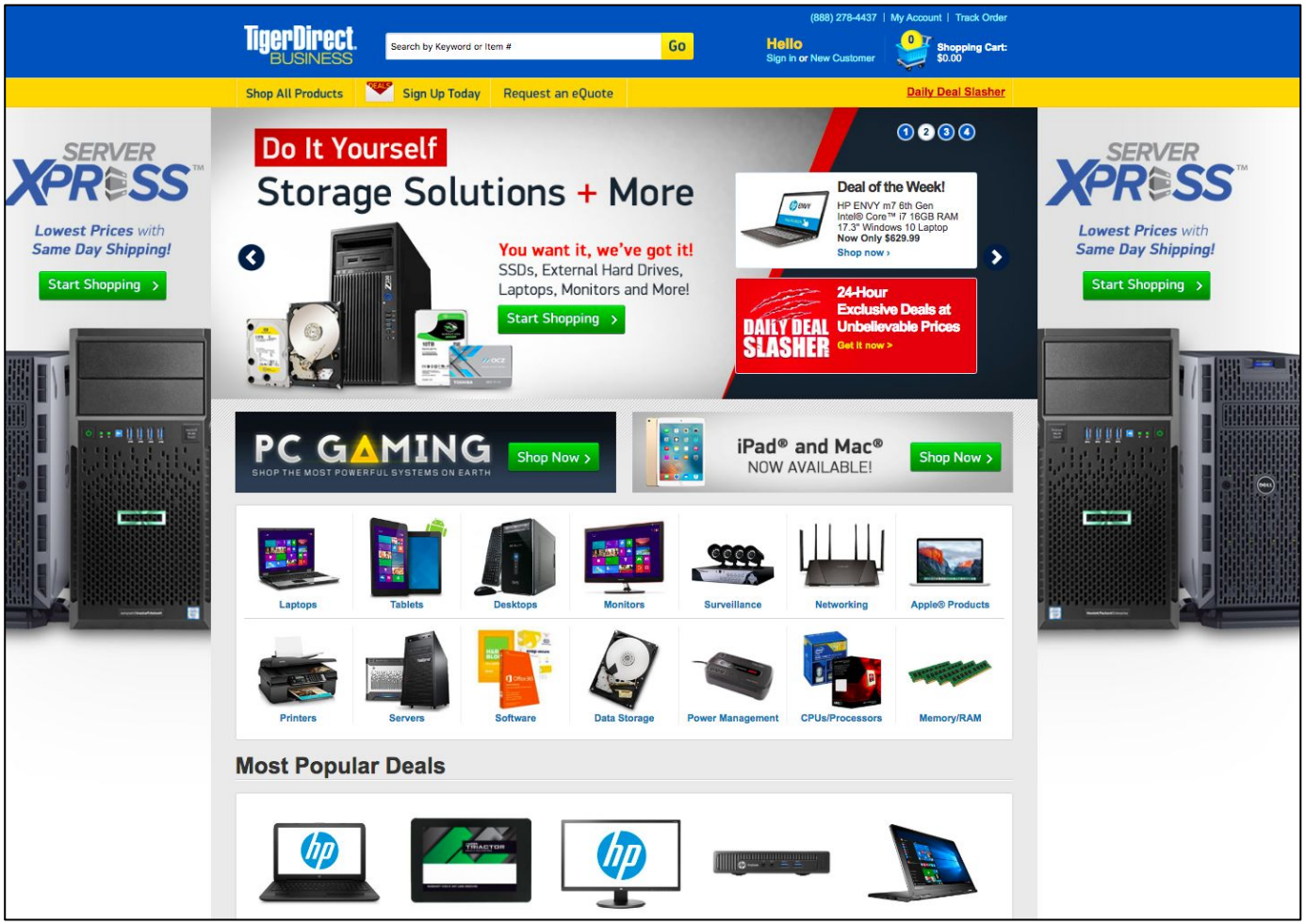


Forever 21: Ranked in bottom 27th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. This homepage incorporates several moving graphics, bright colors, and an auto-rotating carousel.



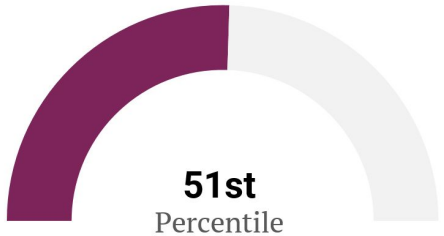
Non-adherence example

Guideline #1. Avoid meaningless, extra design elements that needlessly burden cognitive load



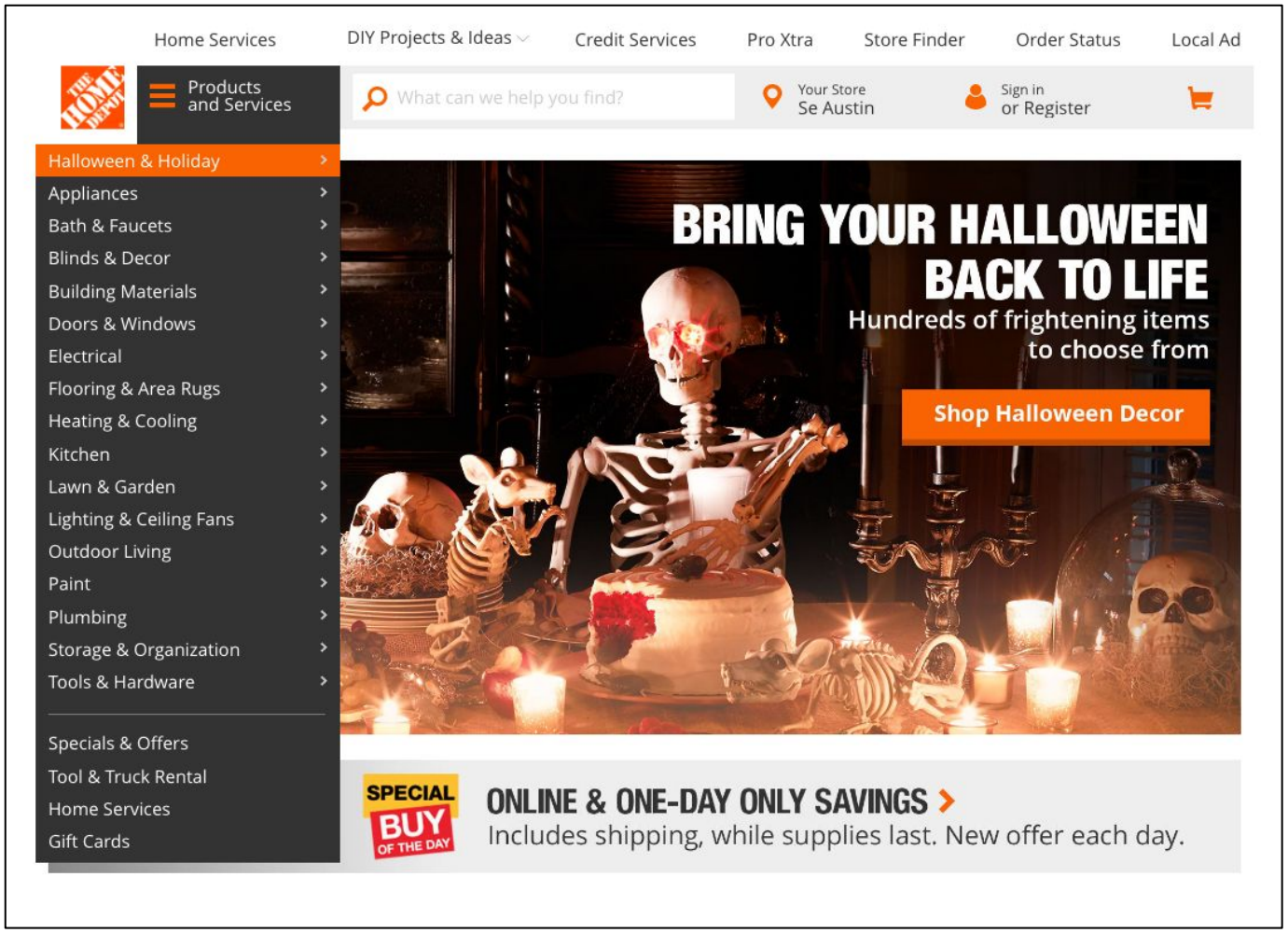
TigerDirect: Ranked in the 51st percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. This incredibly busy homepage could stand to lose quite a few design elements (logos, graphics repeated across the page, text elements, etc.).

User Quote - *The main page was slightly busy. It seemed to put more emphasis on, "Hey! Look at all the stuff we have!" rather than helping the user navigate to what type of items they may want to purchase.*



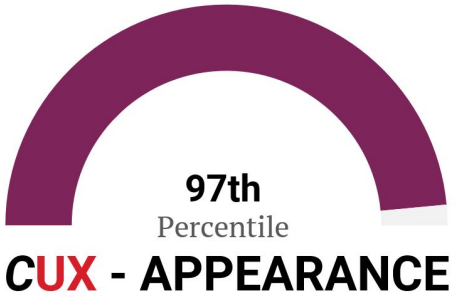
Adherence example

Guideline #1. Avoid meaningless, extra design elements that needlessly burden cognitive load



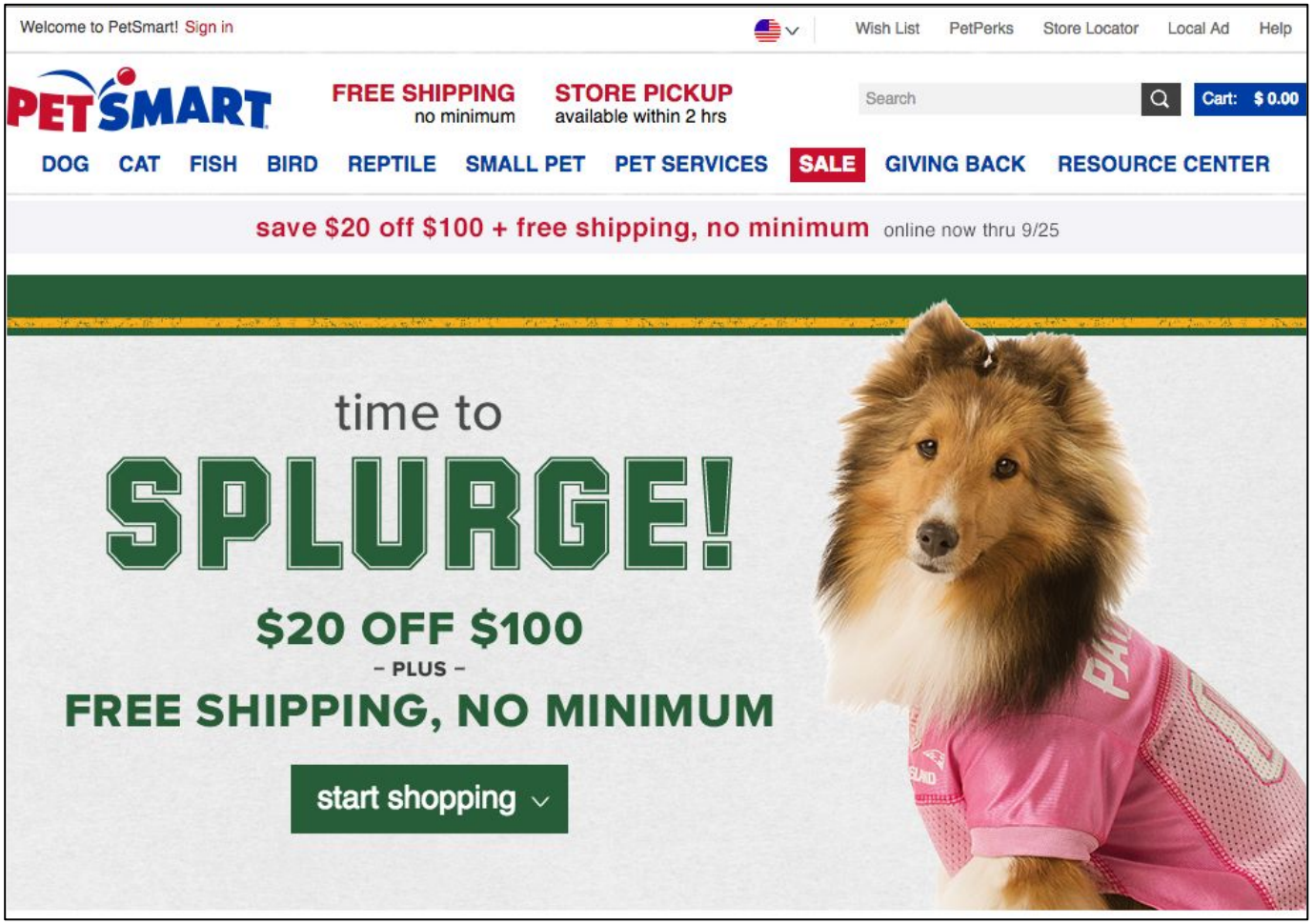
Home Depot: Ranked in the top 97th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. This homepage follows prototypicality, uses lots of whitespace to minimize distraction, and has no excessive design elements.

User Quote - *"I like that the pictures of the products were big, and it looks very clean".*



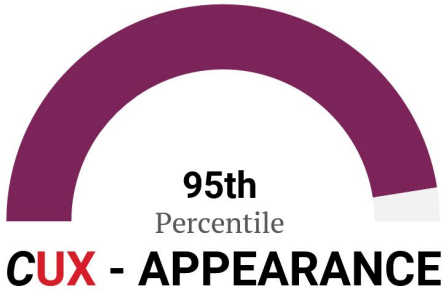
Adherence example

Guideline #1. Avoid meaningless, extra design elements that needlessly burden cognitive load



Petsmart: Ranked in the top 95th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. This simple homepage has a clear visual hierarchy and follows conventional design.

User quote - *"I like how everything was laid out and you didn't have to go around guessing where things were."*



Guideline #2. Visual hierarchy should follow information hierarchy - Show less important content further down the page, thumbnails decrease in size as you move down page

When it comes to size, the biggest elements on a page get the most attention. When it comes to location, elements on the top of a page get the most attention. Apply these common sense visual hierarchy principles to homepage elements.

Place the most important content (logo, CTA, value proposition, navigation menus, etc.) above the fold, and make them big. Correspond the size and location of content with its relative importance.

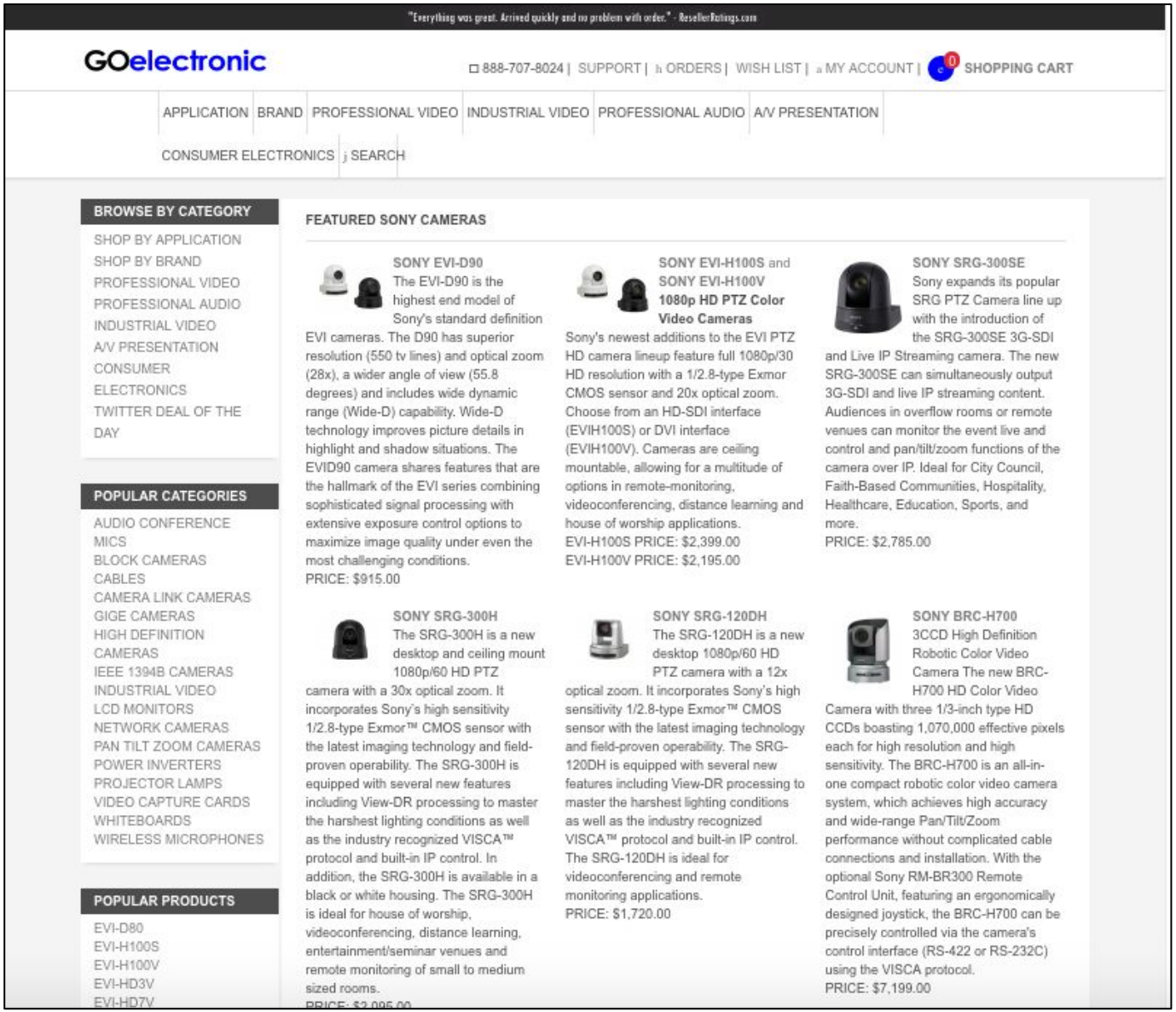
Check out our study to see which parts of a webpage people look at the most.

Site Component - VIsual Hierarchy
Conversion Heuristic - Motivation

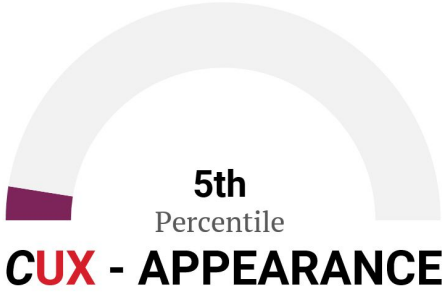
User quote - *"I would reduce the number of clickable images and options on the homepage. it's information overload".*

Non-adherence example

Guideline #2. Visual hierarchy should follow information hierarchy - Show less important content further down the page, thumbnails decrease in size as you move down page



GO Electronic: Ranked in the bottom 5th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. It's impossible to tell what the most important element on this page is.

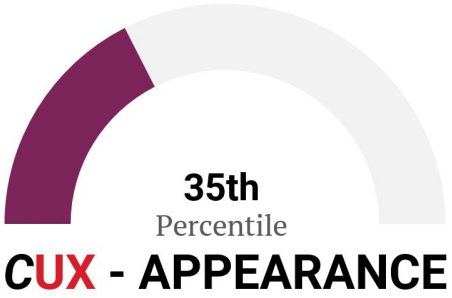


Non-adherence example

Guideline #2. Visual hierarchy should follow information hierarchy - Show less important content further down the page, thumbnails decrease in size as you move down page

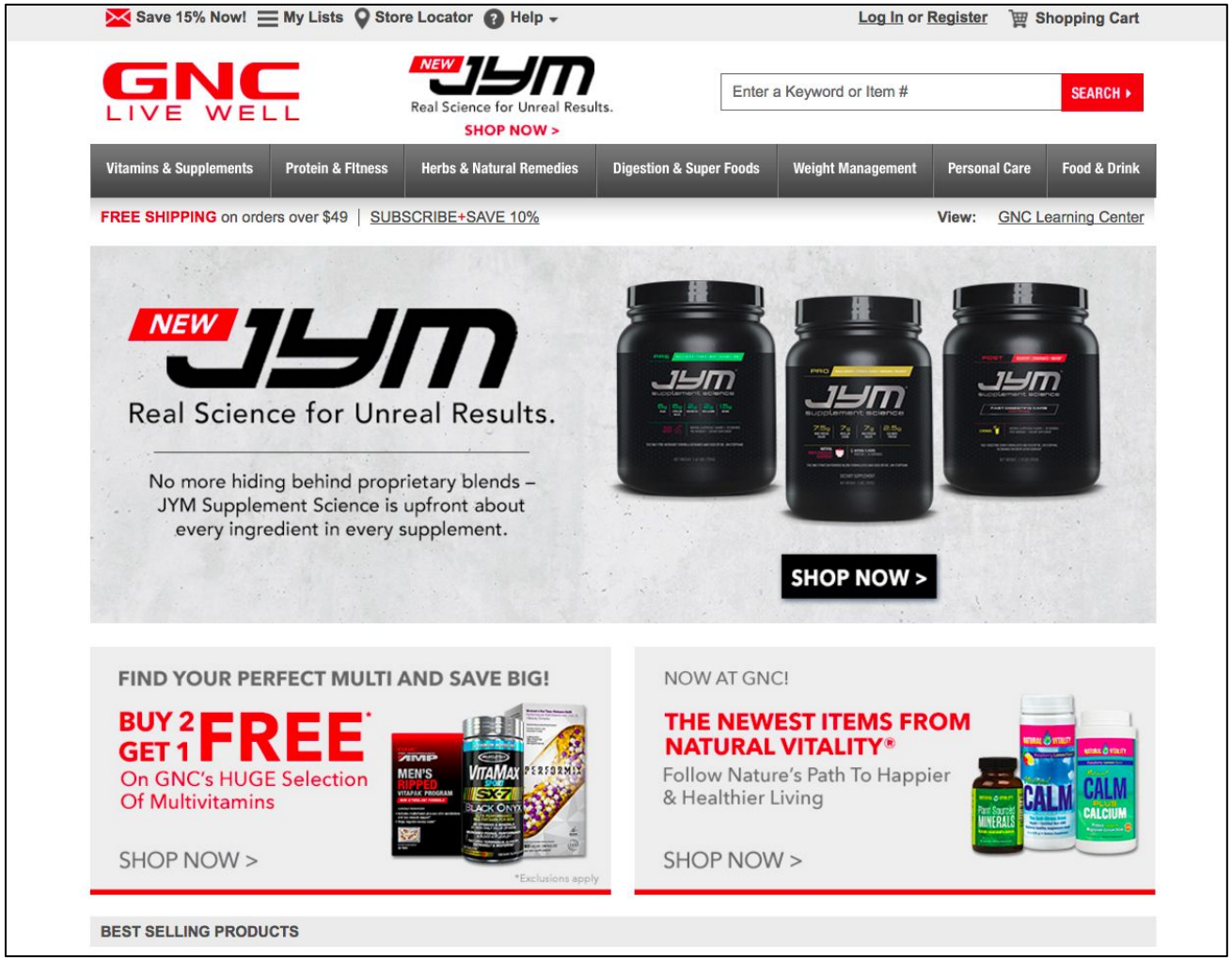
Bass Pro Shops: Ranked in the bottom 35th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. There are so many bright colors and words fighting for attention on this page that it's hard to look at just one, much less tell which is most important. Two sales graphics may cause confusion, as users won't know where to click. Aside from visual hierarchy, the multiple "free shipping" graphics are a waste of space: When done right, once is enough.

User quote - *"The landing site is not at all welcoming, or giving any sense of the site's "personality." Instead, it's just a swarm of ads for a site the user is already on. The banners and boxes are all jampacked together, and each one is packed to the gills with colors and pictures and text of all different fonts and sizes, some of it blinking or moving, and most of it YELLING AT THE USER IN ALL CAPS."*



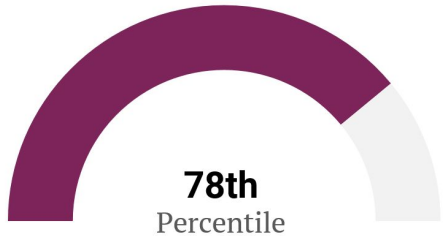
Adherence example

Guideline #2. Visual hierarchy should follow information hierarchy - Show less important content further down the page, thumbnails decrease in size as you move down page



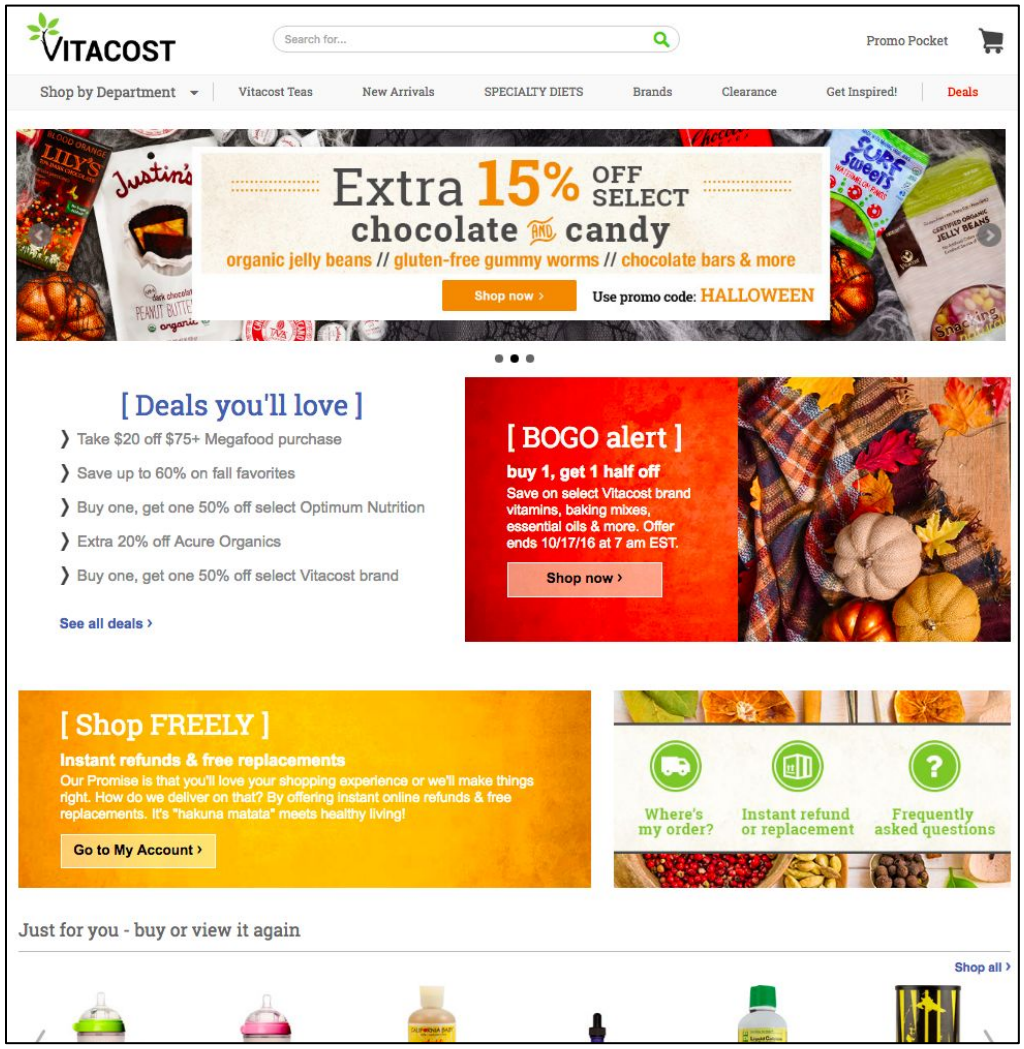
User Quote - *"I like how everything was laid out and easy to understand. I didn't have a ton of places to go to look for whey protein. It was clearly labeled."*

GNC: Ranked in the top 78th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. The visual hierarchy on this homepage creates a natural path, directing users from the most important elements at the top of the page downward. There is no repetition of sales promotions or shipping information



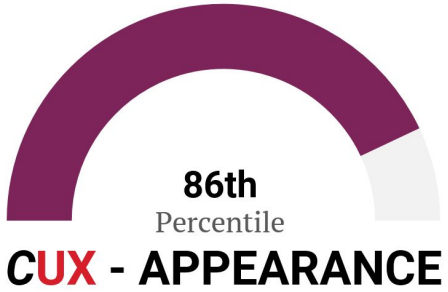
Adherence example

Guideline #2. Visual hierarchy should follow information hierarchy - Show less important content further down the page, thumbnails decrease in size as you move down page



Vitacost: Ranked in the top 86th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. The exemplary correspondence between element size and page location communicates an intuitive visual hierarchy.

User Quote - "[I liked the] *Colors and neatness/simplicity. Good layout and design*".



hierarchy than the content menu

Consider which is typically more desired on a homepage: the FAQs page (content menu) or the site's product list (transactional menu)? Because transactional menus are accessed more often than content menus, they should be higher in the visual hierarchy.

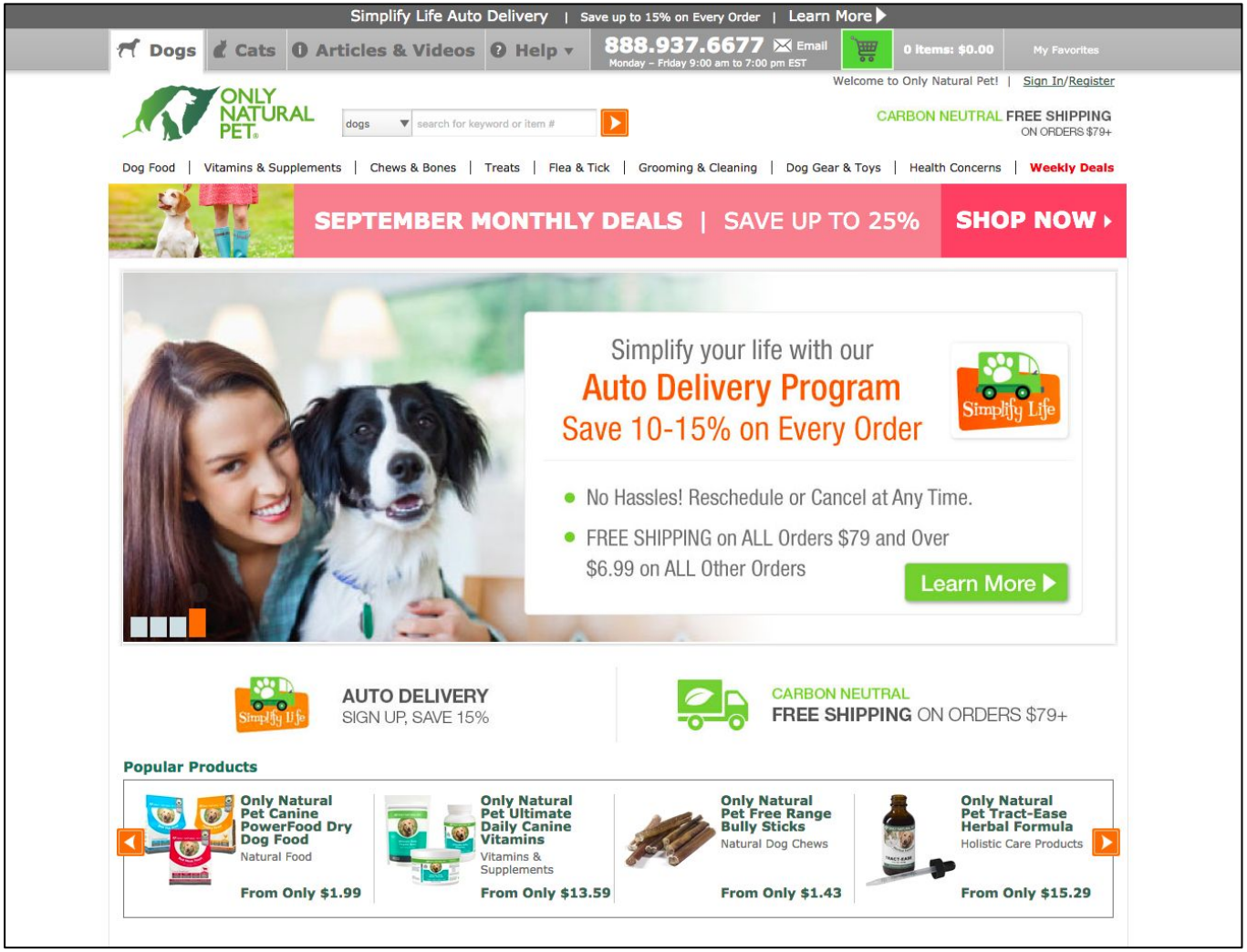
Follow convention to determine the best placement for a transactional menu. Typically it's located front and center on the homepage, but can also be found as a vertical menu down the left side of the page. The transactional menu should be larger in size than the content menu.

To draw attention to the transactional menu, place it in a colored banner contrasting the background. Alternatively, design a border around the menu for a similar effect. Leaving ample white space around the transactional menu is another viable technique.

Site Component - Visual Hierarchy
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

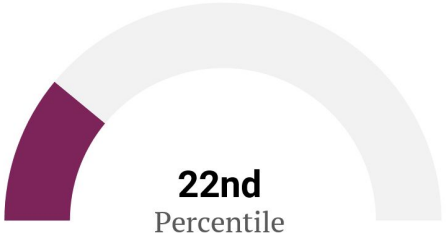
Non-adherence example

Guideline #3. The transactional menu should be placed higher in the visual hierarchy than the content menu



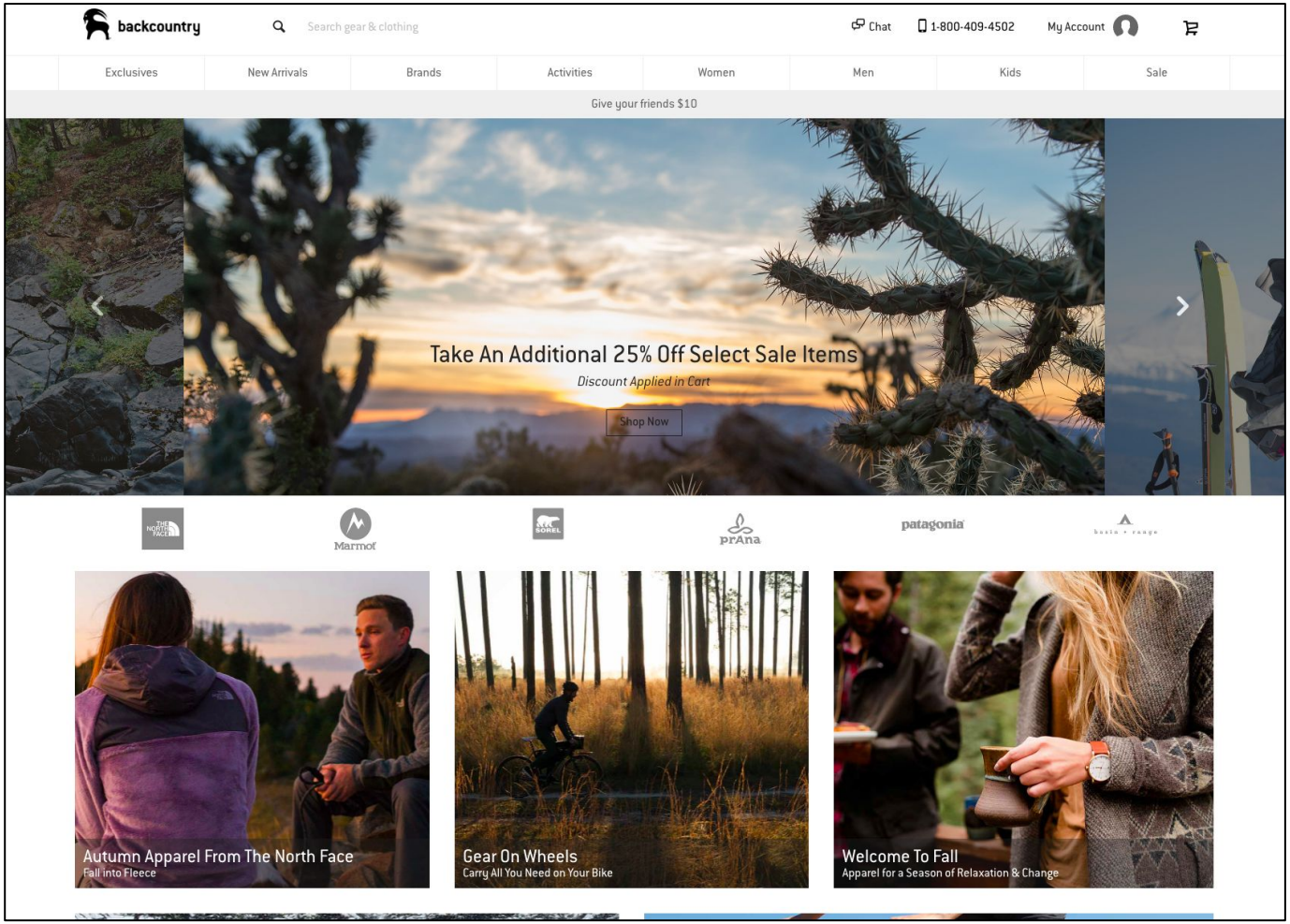
Only Natural Pet: Ranked in the bottom 22nd percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. The content menu ("Help" link and contact phone number) at the top of the page is prominently highlighted in a grey banner. Meanwhile, the small transactional menu below it isn't accentuated in any way. This site's menus violate visual hierarchy and conventional rules.

User quote - *"It was very cluttered on the homepage and on the Dog main page".*



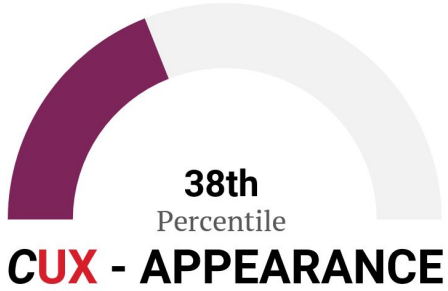
Non-adherence example

Guideline #3. The transactional menu should be placed higher in the visual hierarchy than the content menu



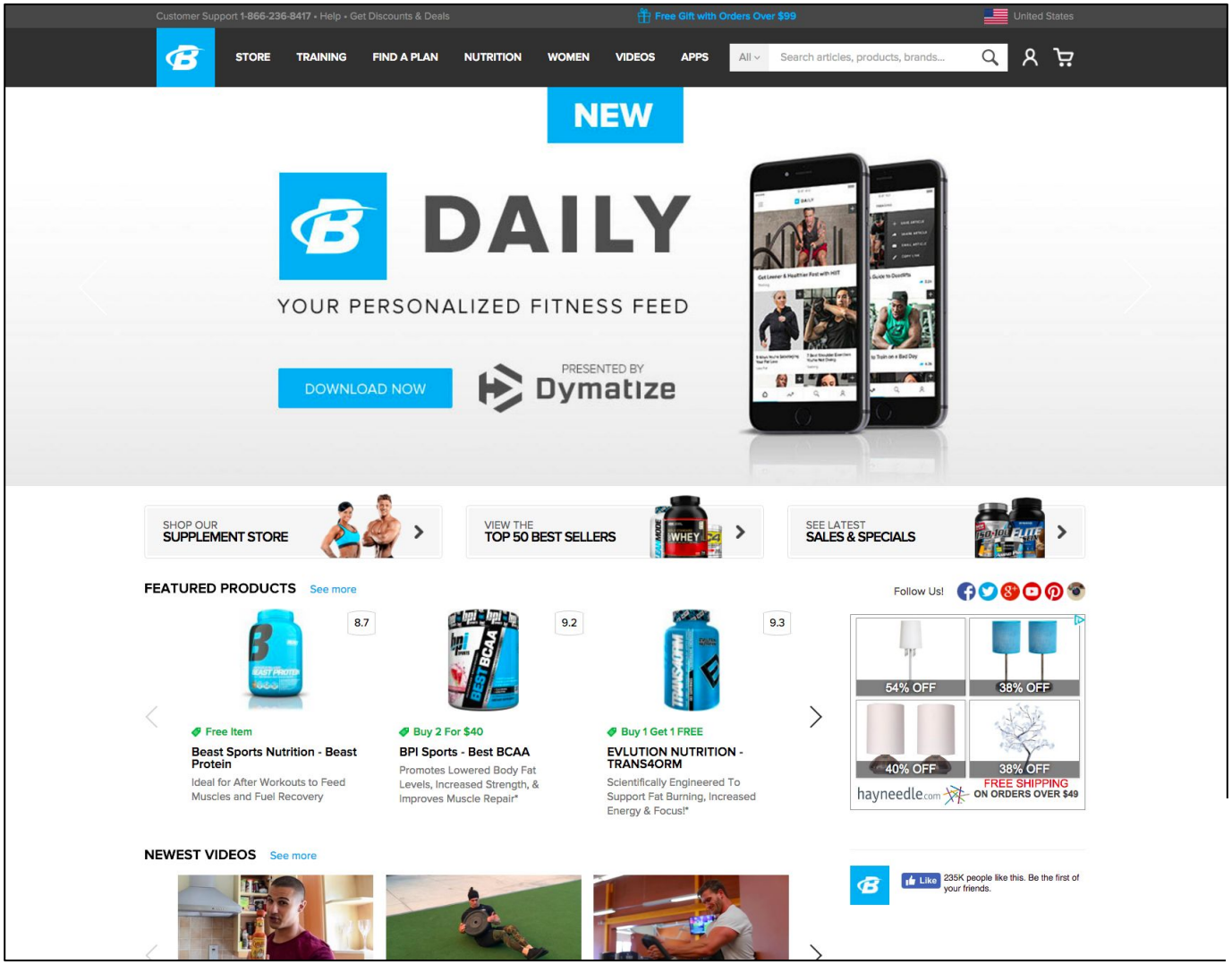
Backcountry: Ranked in the bottom 38th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. The content menu in the top right is more highly contrasted (black text against white background) compared to the transactional menu (grey text against white background). It's important to note, however, that the conventional placement of these menus does help with overall homepage usability.

User quote - *"Instead of putting all the categories, like Men's, Women's, Children's at the very bottom of the page it would be easier to see them as tabs at the very top of the page. I don't like to have to scroll all the way to the bottom of the webpage for that info, it should be right at the top---the first thing you see".*



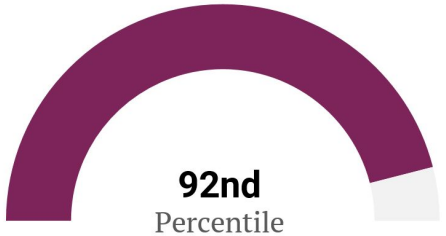
Adherence example

Guideline #3. The transactional menu should be placed higher in the visual hierarchy than the content menu



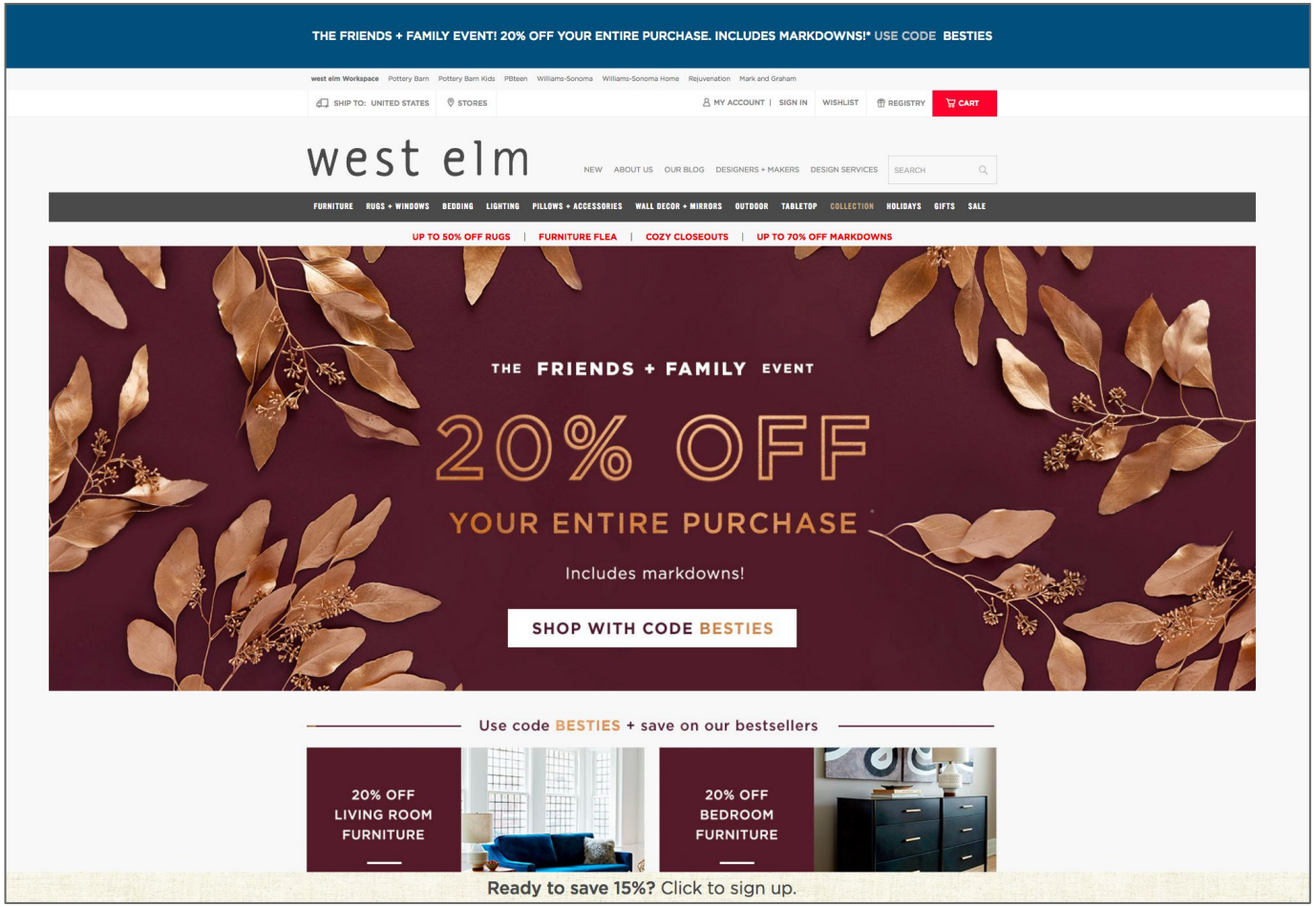
BodyBuilding.com: Ranked in the top 92nd percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. The content menu (in the dark grey banner at the very top of the page) is smaller and less noticeable than the larger transactional menu right under it. Both the content and transactional menu are placed in conventional locations.

User quotes - *"Clean interface, super easy to use"* & *"its very well organised everything is easy to find."*



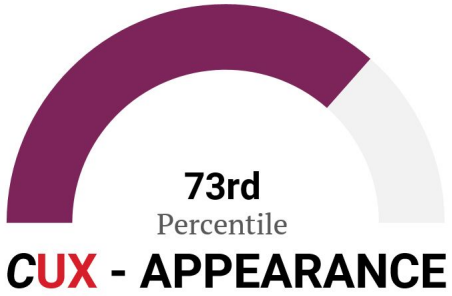
Adherence example

Guideline #3. The transactional menu should be placed higher in the visual hierarchy than the content menu



West Elm: Ranked in the top 73rd percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. The transactional menu is prominently highlighted in the black banner contrasting against the white background. The content menu is appropriately tucked into the upper right corner where one would expect to find it.

User quotes - *"I liked how easy it was to navigate to the types of items I wanted to see. I liked how the filters were set up. Really made it easy to search for the item I wanted and it really wasn't overwhelming when I was doing that so I really liked that part of my experience."*



The value proposition should be located above the fold

"Above the fold" is the part of the website that people see without scrolling down. The name comes from newspapers that were (many still are) folded in half, so newspapers put all the top news and pictures in the top half, above the fold.

When you're designing a long page, it's critical that you prioritize content: Serve the most important information first, least important last.

The value proposition is a central component of any homepage. It communicates the purpose of a site and how a company is different than —and superior to— its competitors. As a homepage cornerstone, value propositions should be placed above the fold where they have the highest chance of garnering attention.

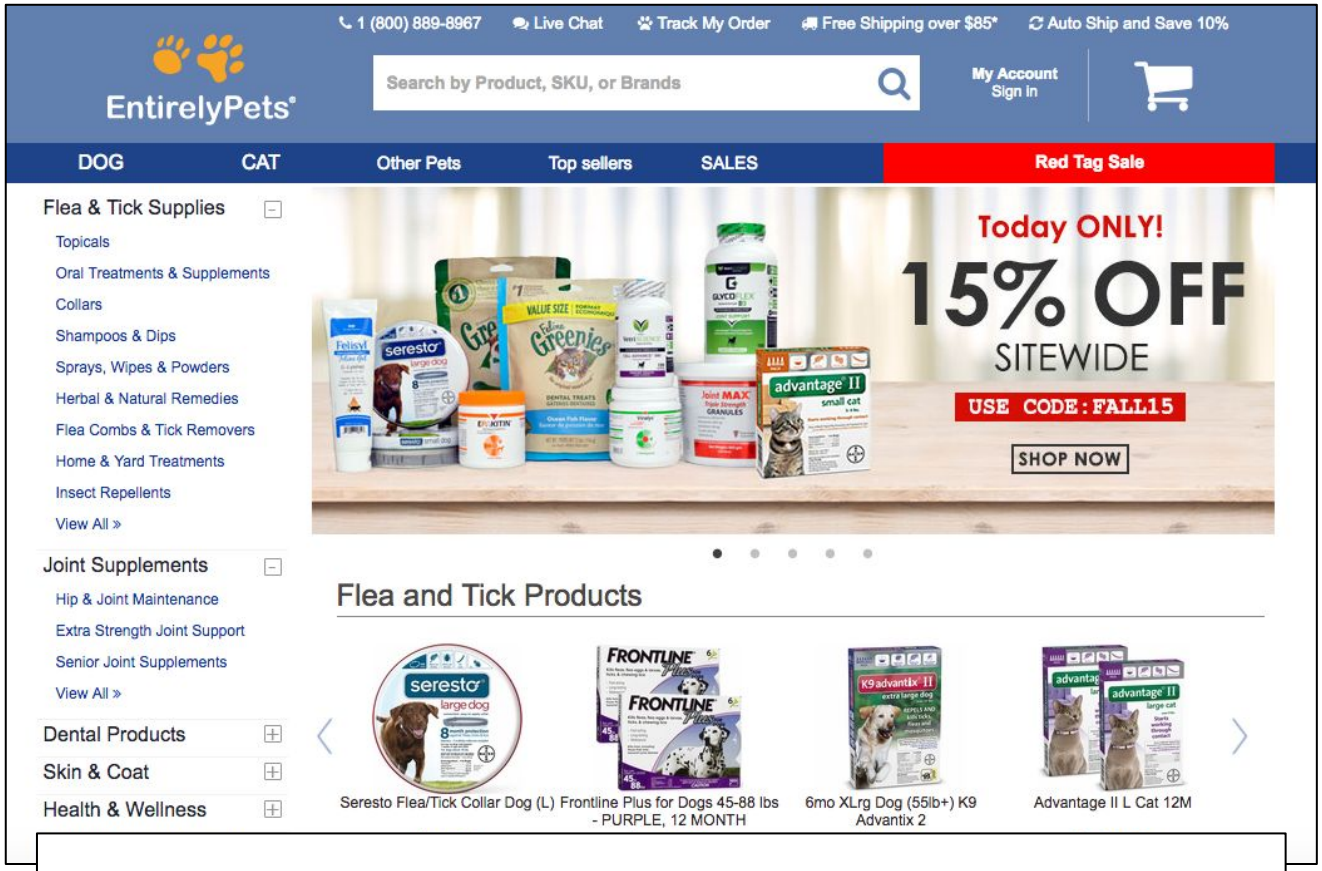
Some tips on above the fold placement.

Site Component - Visual Hierarchy
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

User quote - *"I really couldn't notice any areas that point out why this company is different. There were areas that would note specials going on or different promotions, but many stores have deals all the time, so to me, that doesn't set it apart. I didn't see any sections that say things like "more protein powder per dollar" or other headlines that would make me think I was better off purchasing here."*

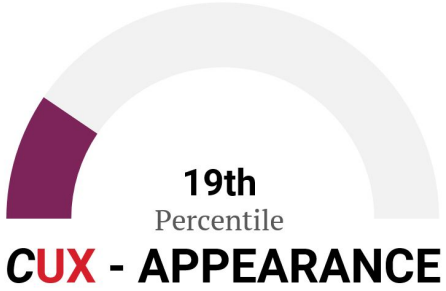
Non-adherence example

Guideline #4. The value proposition should be located above the fold



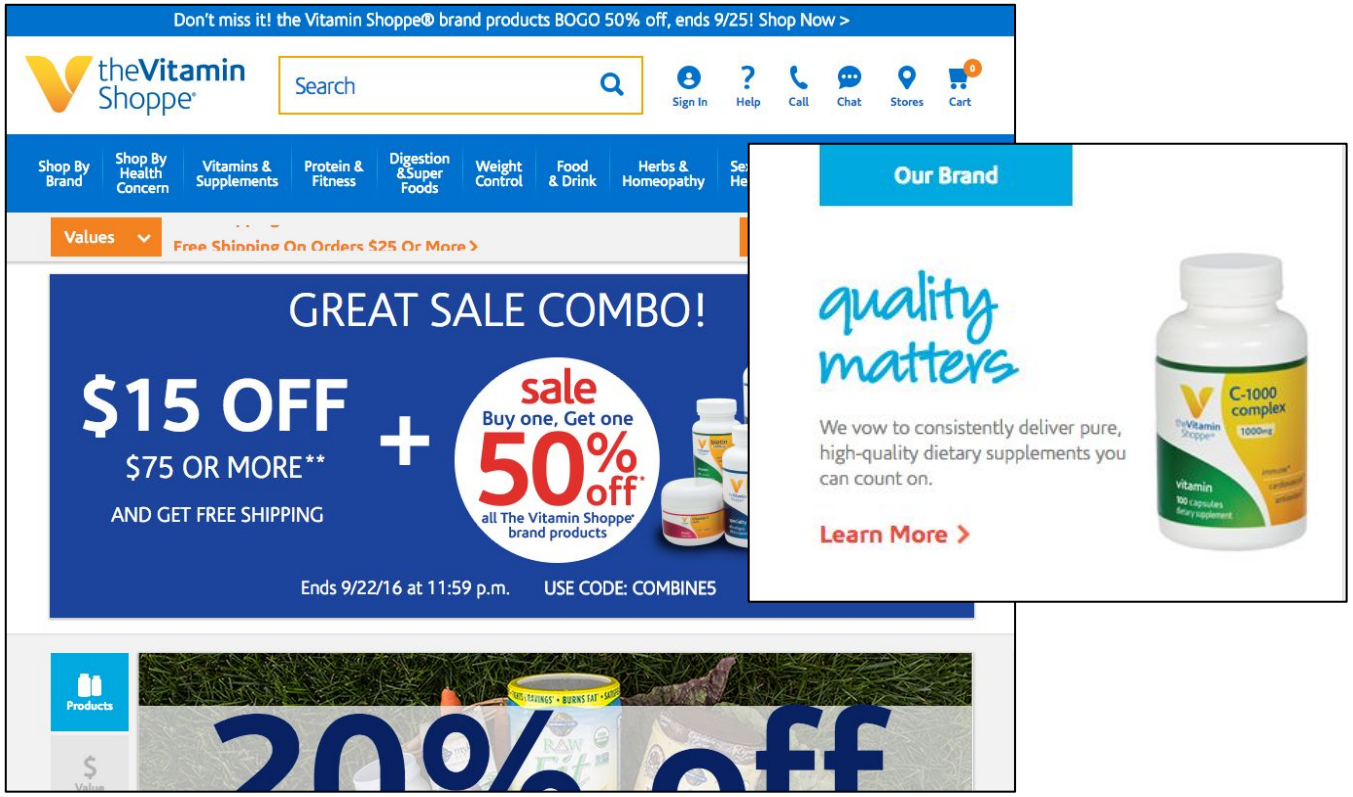
Entirely Pets: Ranked in the bottom 19th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. The value proposition is found near the bottom of the homepage where few people will read it.

User quote - *"I don't really see any benefits such as low prices, good quality, etc. While that might be true, they should focus more on what makes them stand out from their competitors!"*



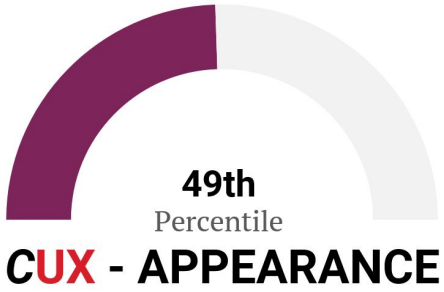
Non-adherence example

Guideline #4. The value proposition should be located above the fold



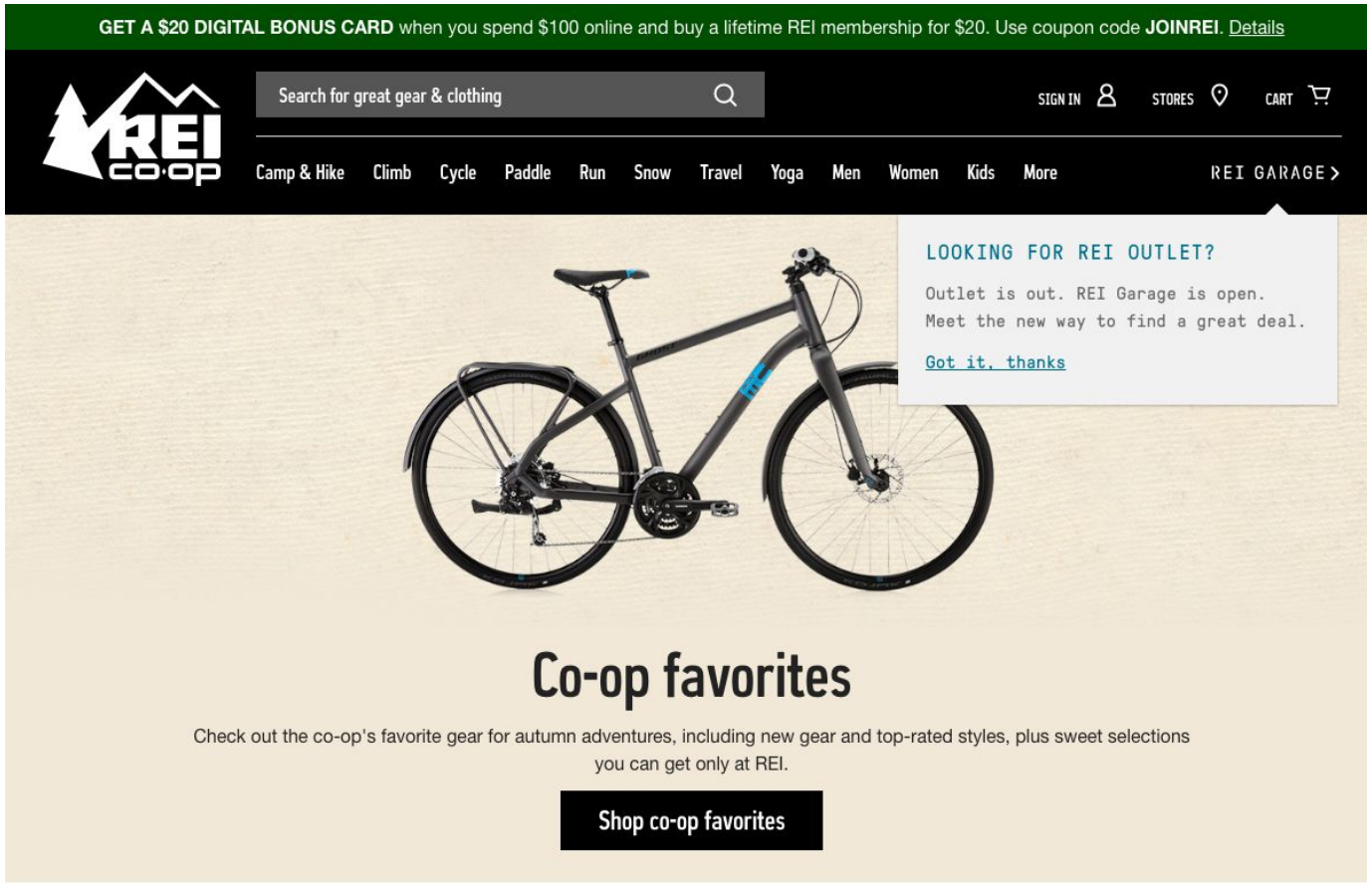
Vitamin Shoppe: Ranked in the bottom 49th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. The value proposition ("quality matters: We vow to consistently deliver pure, high-quality dietary supplements you can count on.") was found roughly three folds down the homepage.

User quote - When asked if/why they would buy from this site and not a competitor: *"I didn't see an indication of why I should buy from this website." & "I don't at all. There didn't seem to be a differentiating factor."*



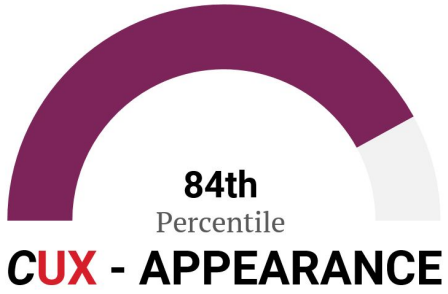
Adherence example

Guideline #4. The value proposition should be located above the fold



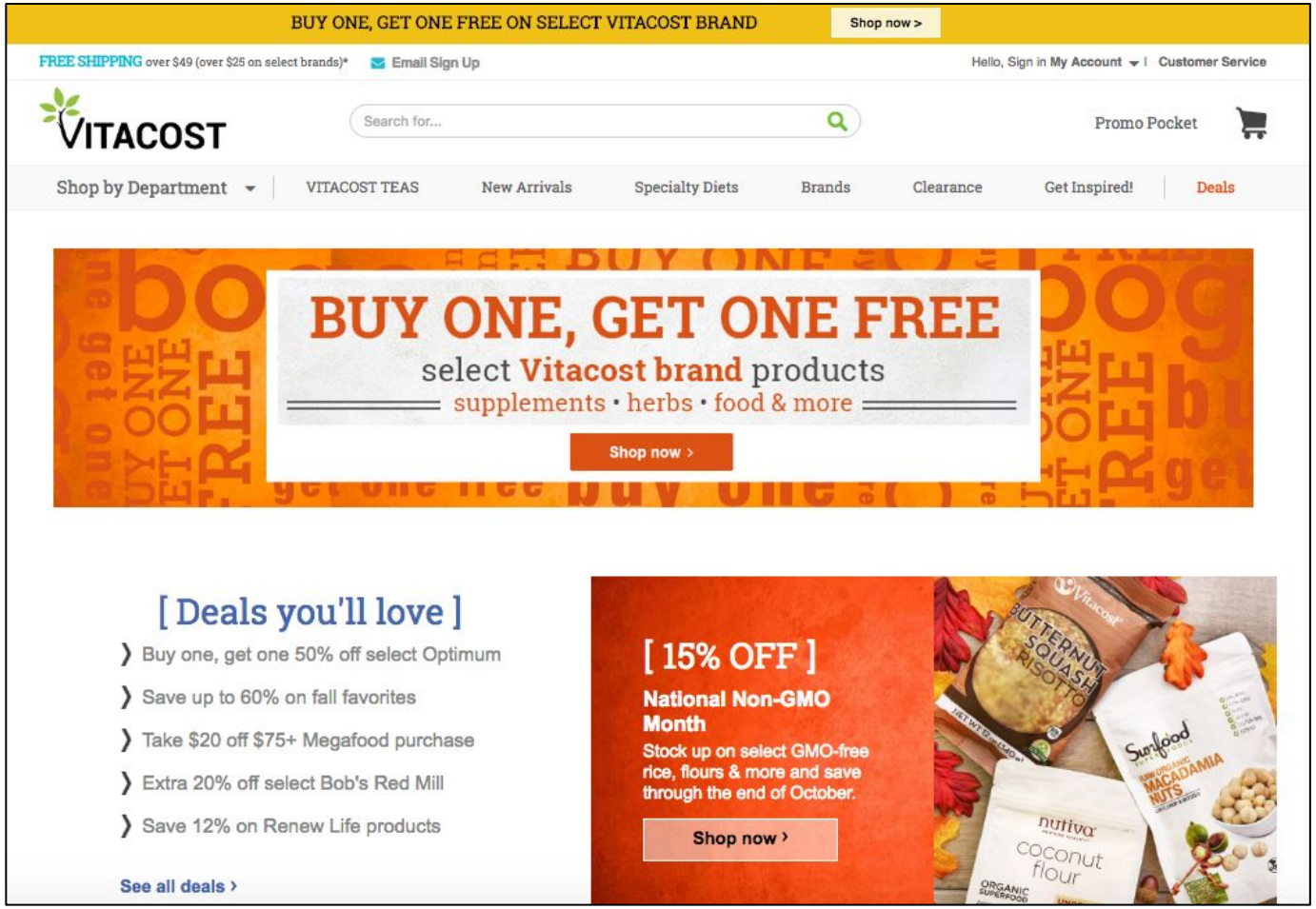
REI: Ranked in the top 84th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. This value proposition boasts new, top-rated, and appealing products exclusive to the company. It naturally attracts attention as one of the few bits of copy above the fold on the minimalistically designed page.

User quotes - *"I understood that I should buy from this website because of the selection and prices".*



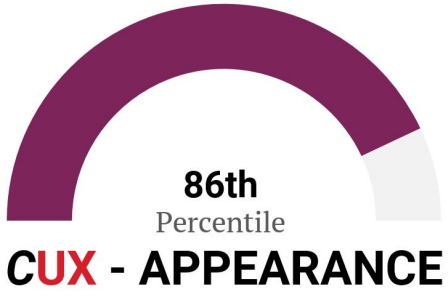
Adherence example

Guideline #4. The value proposition should be located above the fold



Vitacost: Ranked in the top 87th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance.

User quotes - *"I saw a lot of sales on this site and so that made it pretty clear to me as to why I buy from this website instead of other ones".*



Guideline #5. Call attention to the navigation menu by making it visible and color contrasted against the rest of the page

The navigation menu is another critical component of any homepage. Many users ignore the contents of an entire homepage and go directly to the navigation menu.

Recently, web designers have been experimenting with hidden and partially-visible navigation menus. However, research shows that hiding the navigation menu hinders user experience and content discoverability.

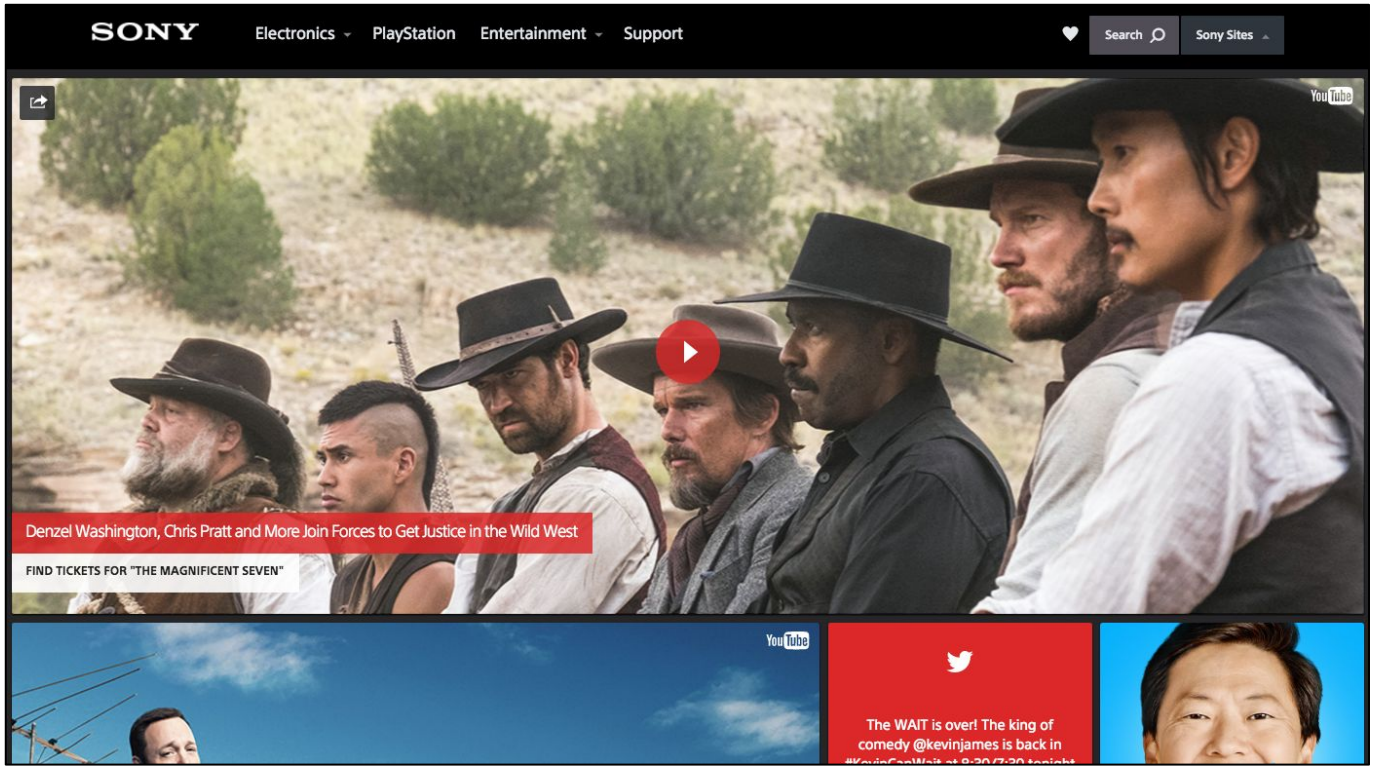
For these reasons, the navigation menu needs to be one of the most noticeable elements on the page. Use a banner, box, or contrasting colors execute this guideline.

Site Component - Visual Hierarchy
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

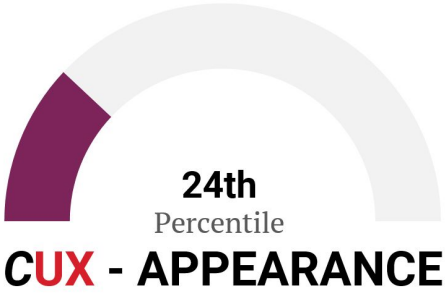
User quote - *"liked that all my options were clear to view, I could easily navigate through the website and find what I was looking for."*

Non-adherence example

Guideline #5. Call attention to the navigation menu by making it visible and color contrasted against the rest of the page

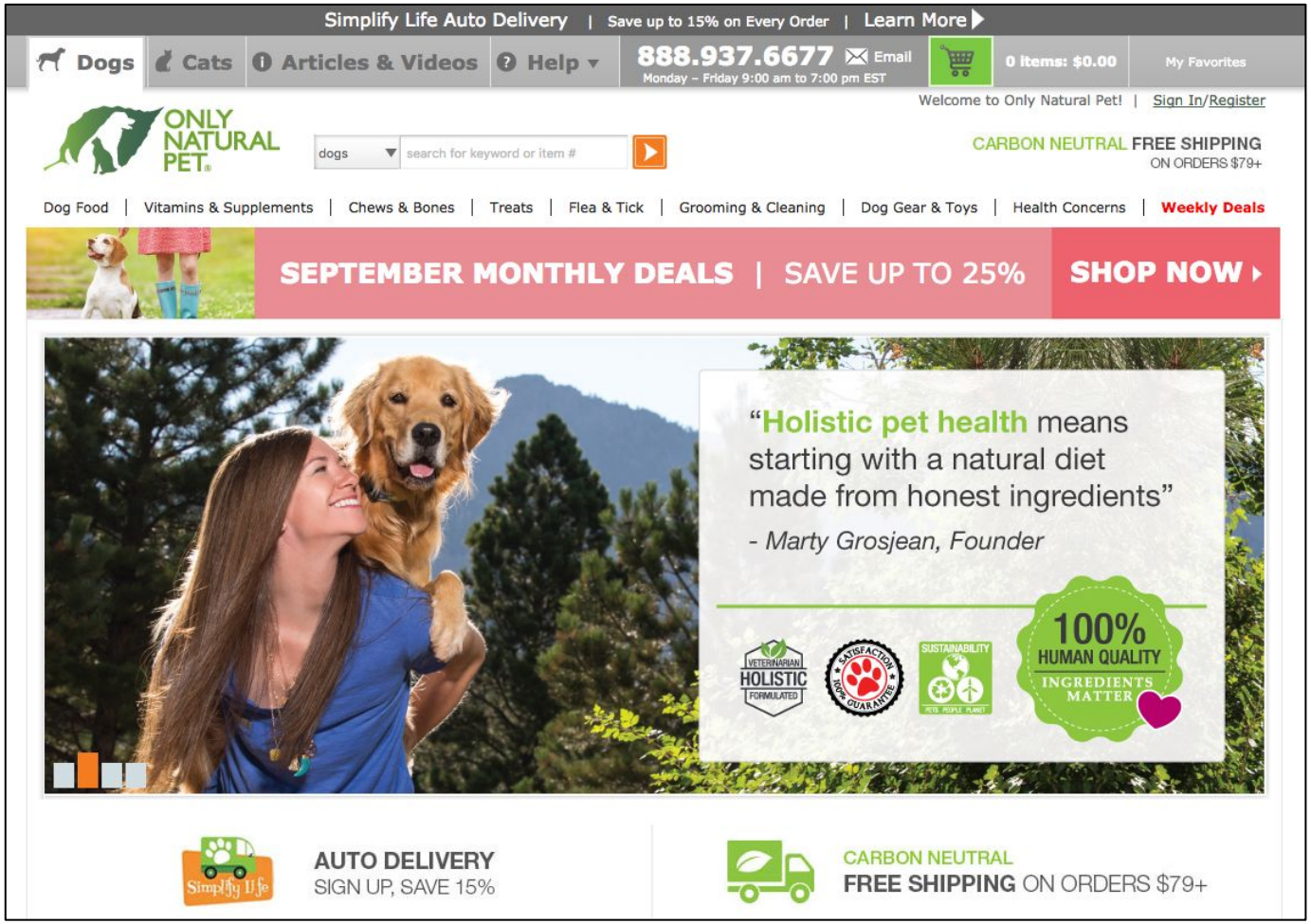


Sony: Ranked in the bottom 24th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. The navigation menu is not highlighted in any way. Noticing the navigation bar isn't too difficult considering there's barely any other copy on this atypically designed homepage. On conventionally designed homepages with more copy, however, the menu would be hard to spot.



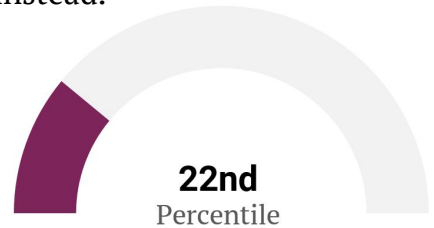
Non-adherence example

Guideline #5. Call attention to the navigation menu by making it visible and color contrasted against the rest of the page



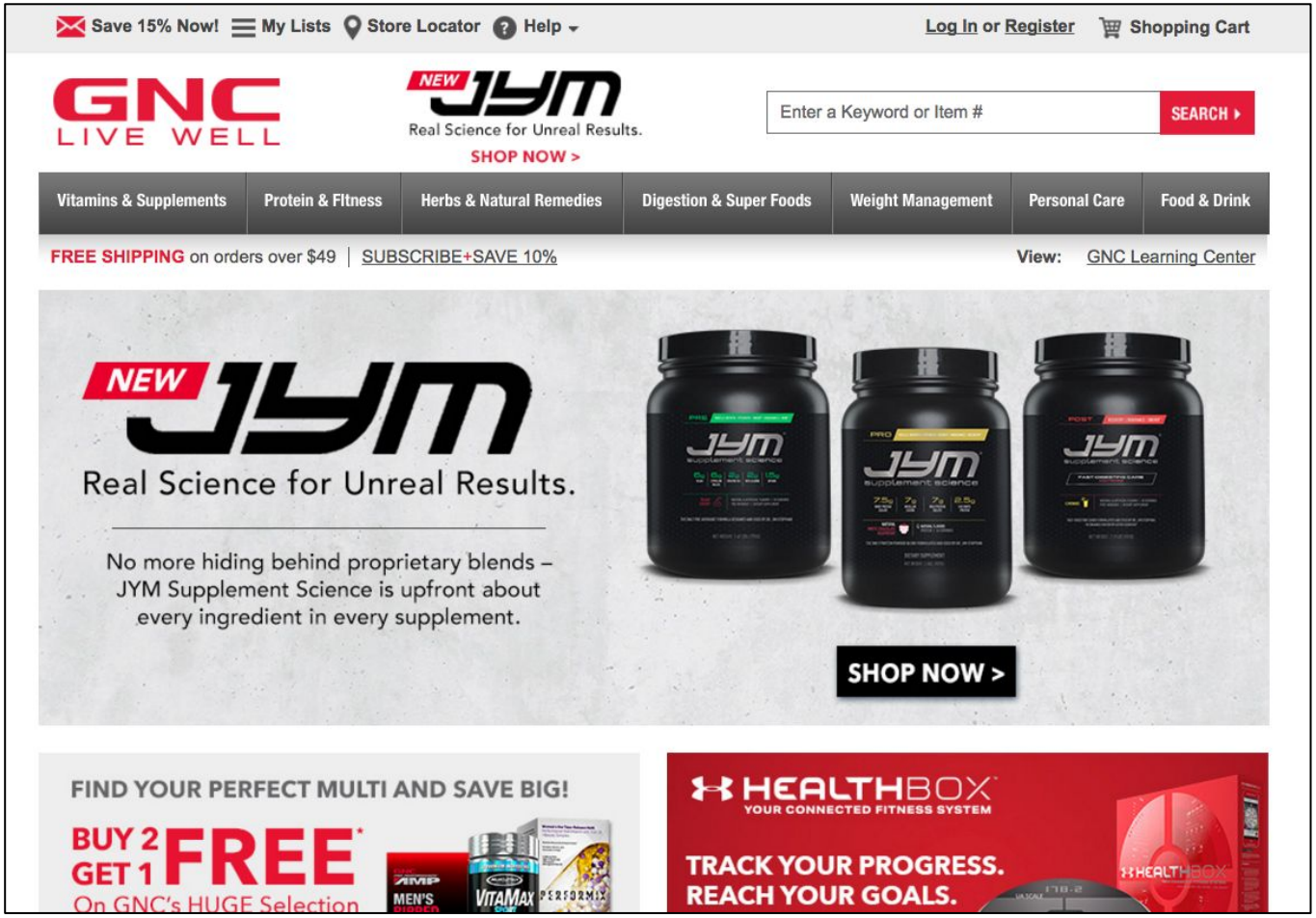
Only Natural Pet: Ranked in the bottom 22nd percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. The top navigation menu, clearly highlighted in a grey banner, presents two main product categories (Dogs and Cats) along with some general information. Regardless of the effective banner, users may become distracted and confused by the secondary navigation menu below it. This secondary navigation menu lists the subcategories for the Dogs product category. The navigational organization would be much more clear if the subcategories were presented as a dropdown menu instead.

User quote - *"The sub-headers within the menu really blended in and did not stand out. The sub-headers would have been helpful if I would have realized they were there from the beginning, but since they blended in I didn't notice them at first."*



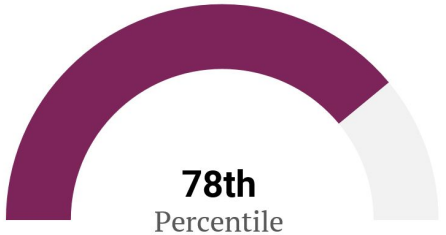
Adherence example

Guideline #5. Call attention to the navigation menu by making it visible and color contrasted against the rest of the page



GNC: Ranked in the top 78th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. The black banner contrasted against the white background highlights the navigation menu. This homepage provides a great example of white space use.

User quotes - *"I like how everything was laid out and easy to understand. I didn't have a ton of places to go to look for whey protein. It was clearly labeled."*



product categories

Site Component - Visual Hierarchy
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

"The job of the eyes is not only to get the information into the brain, but to allow the brain to think about it rapidly enough to know what you should look at next."
- Mary Potter, MIT professor of brain and cognitive sciences

Humans are intrinsically visual creatures. This is not news. UX researchers discovered that users can find items in a list approximately 37% faster when the items are paired with icons. What's more, Potter's research found that it only takes 13 milliseconds for your brain to see and comprehend an image.

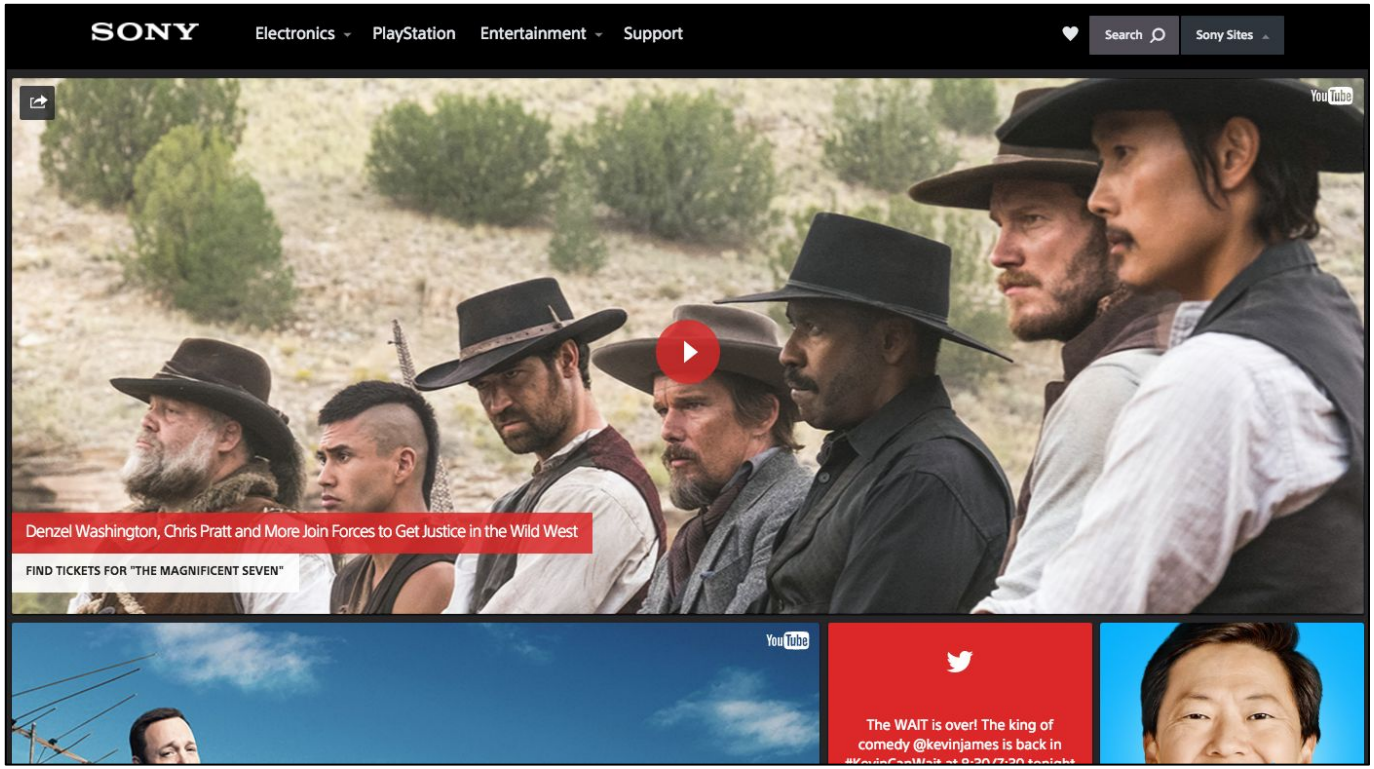
Not convinced yet? Images on a web page receive 94% more views than pieces of text. In a CXL Research study, we used to eye tracking to find out how long and what elements of a webpage people look at. The *only* element of the page that 100% of people looked at was the image.

Images are quicker and more innate than text. Displaying thumbnails next to product categories creates intuitive search flow and lowers cognitive load.

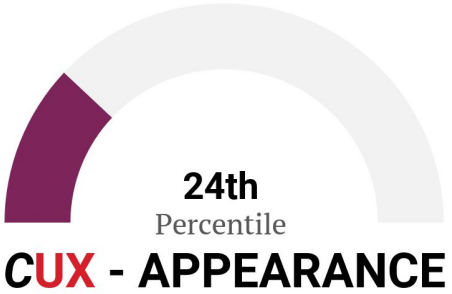
Avoid this guideline if your homepage doesn't have space for complementary thumbnails.

Non-adherence example

Guideline #6. If you have the space, display pictures or thumbnails next to product categories

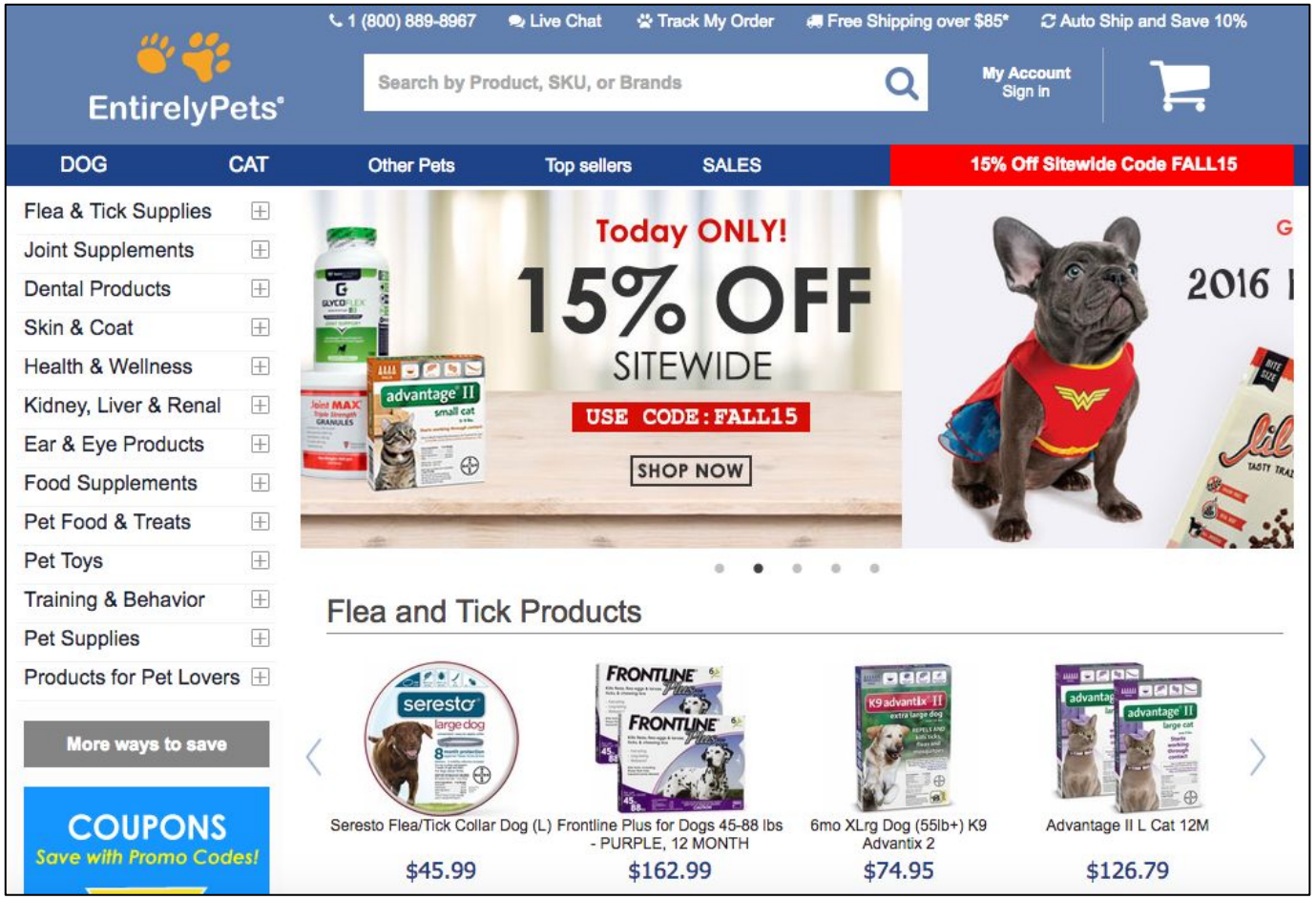


Sony: Ranked in the bottom 24th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. With such ambiguous categories, this homepage would greatly benefit from complementary thumbnail pictures.



Non-adherence example

Guideline #6. If you have the space, display pictures or thumbnails next to product categories

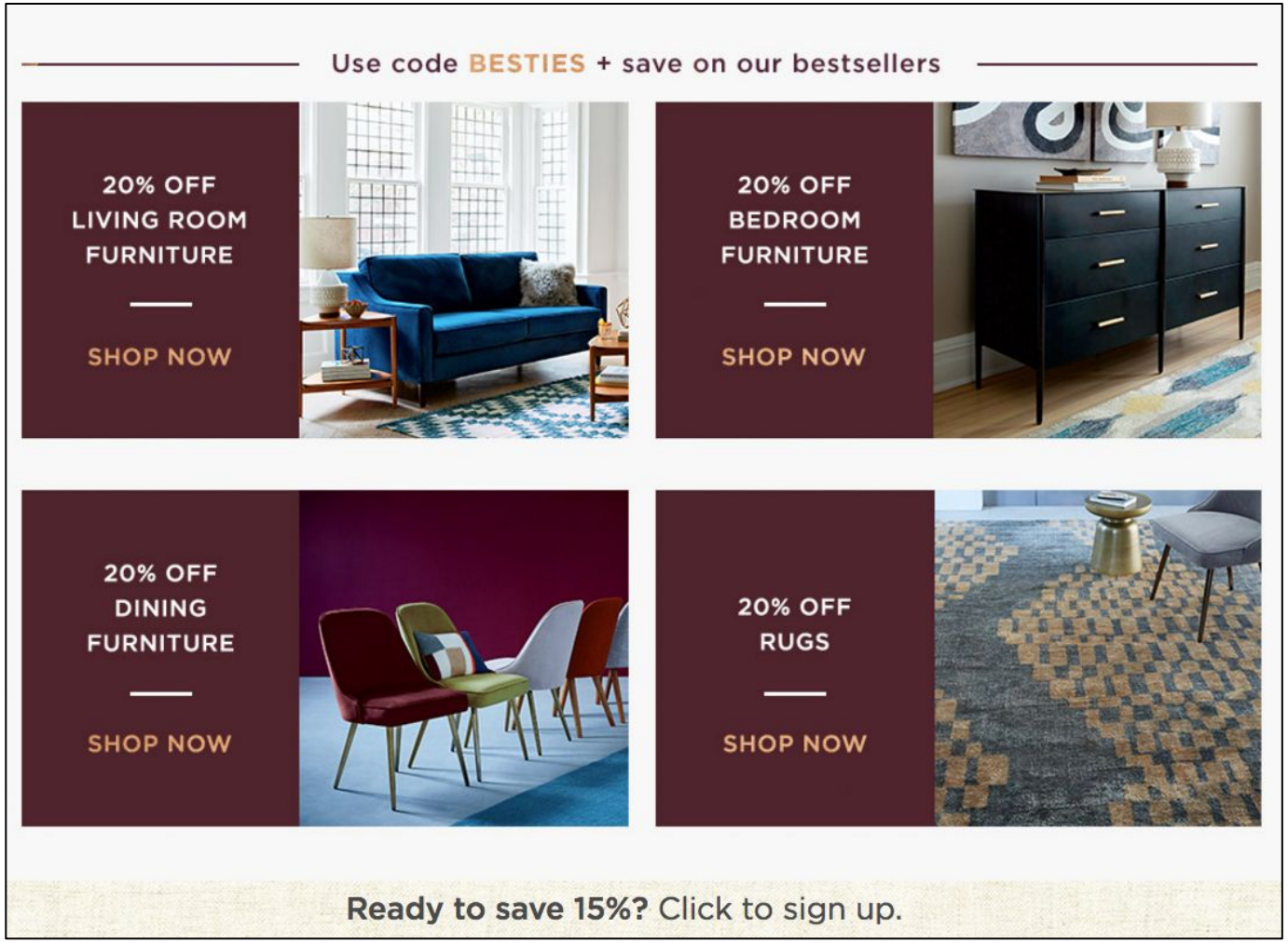


EntirelyPets: Ranked in the bottom 19th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. EntirelyPets gets straight to displaying the Flea & Tick category. Displaying parent categories with thumbnails on the homepage would be more clear and effective than the products from just one category.

User quote - *"The site had a clutterly feel to me. I would clean it up a bit".*

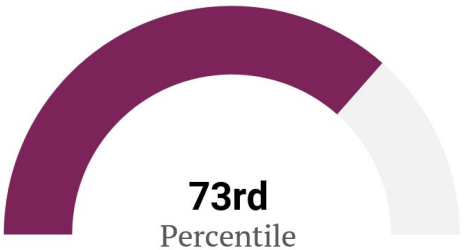
Adherence example

Guideline #6. If you have the space, display pictures or thumbnails next to product categories



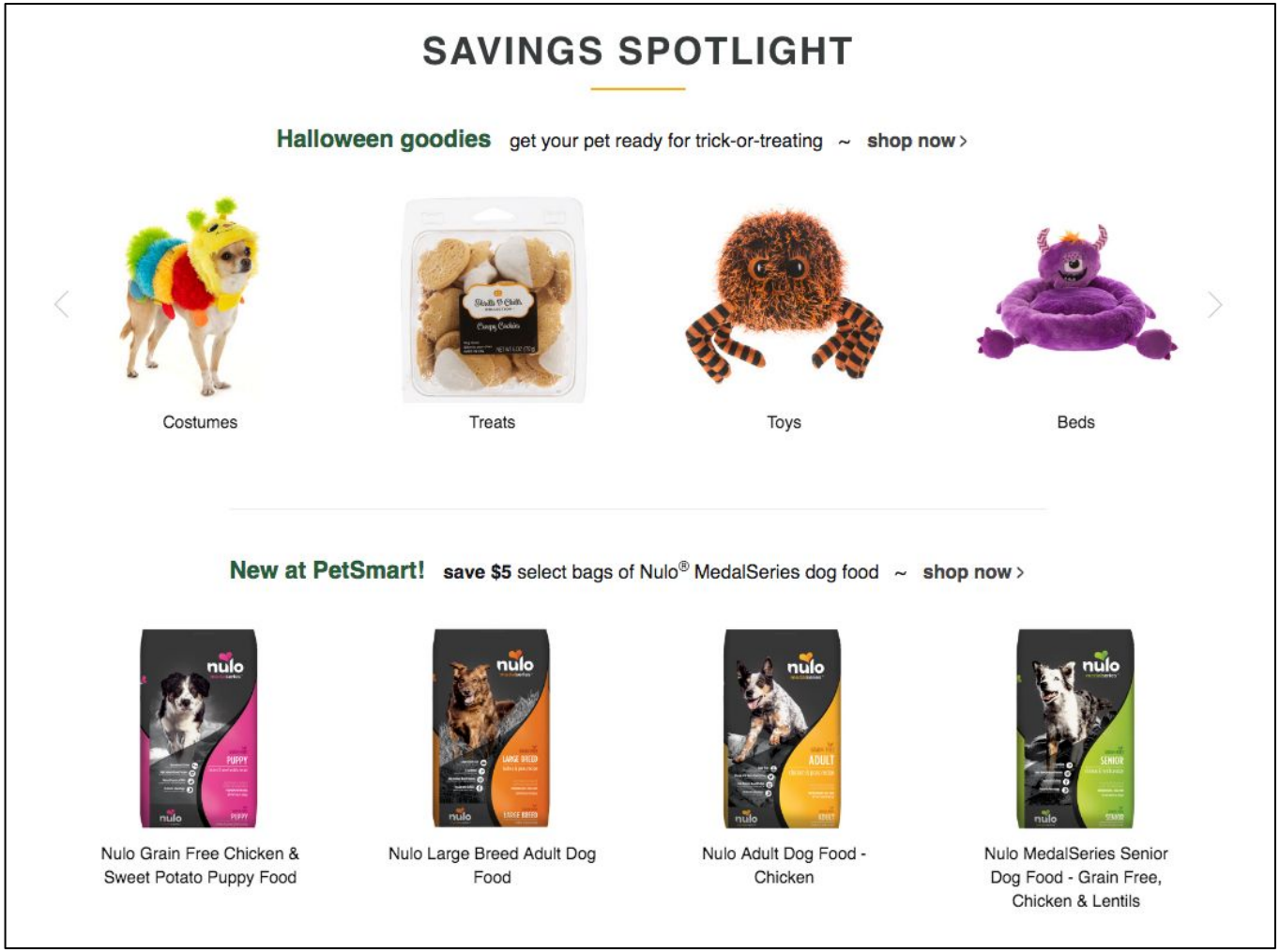
West Elm: Ranked in the top 73rd percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. These high-quality thumbnails clearly communicate what users will expect to find in each category.

User quote - *"I was easily able to find and add the specific items that I wanted based on the pictures."*



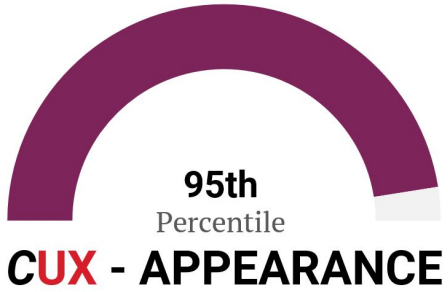
Adherence example

Guideline #6. If you have the space, display pictures or thumbnails next to product categories



Petsmart: Ranked in the top 95th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. These simple thumbnails not only effectively communicate product categories, but advertise the seasonal Halloween collection. The dog food thumbnails are helpful for customers who can quickly recognize the bag that they're used to purchasing.

User quote - When asked what they liked about the site: *"1. Overall content 2. Good number of options 3. Very well organized".*



Guideline #7. Make separate content blocks look visually distinct, use whitespace

Content should be visually separate so that users understand what's related and important (and what's not). A sale promotion sitting atop a product picture can mislead users into thinking that product is part of the promotion.

There are a few ways to visually separate content:

Whitespace is sometimes referred to as negative space. Essentially, it's the unmarked part of your site (e.g. margins, gutters and space between text/images). If you want to be sure something comes across clearly, be sure there is enough white space surrounding it, eliminating the threat of distraction and miscommunication.

Minimalistic lines, borders, and grids between can also create fenced boundaries between content blocks without looking too obtrusive.

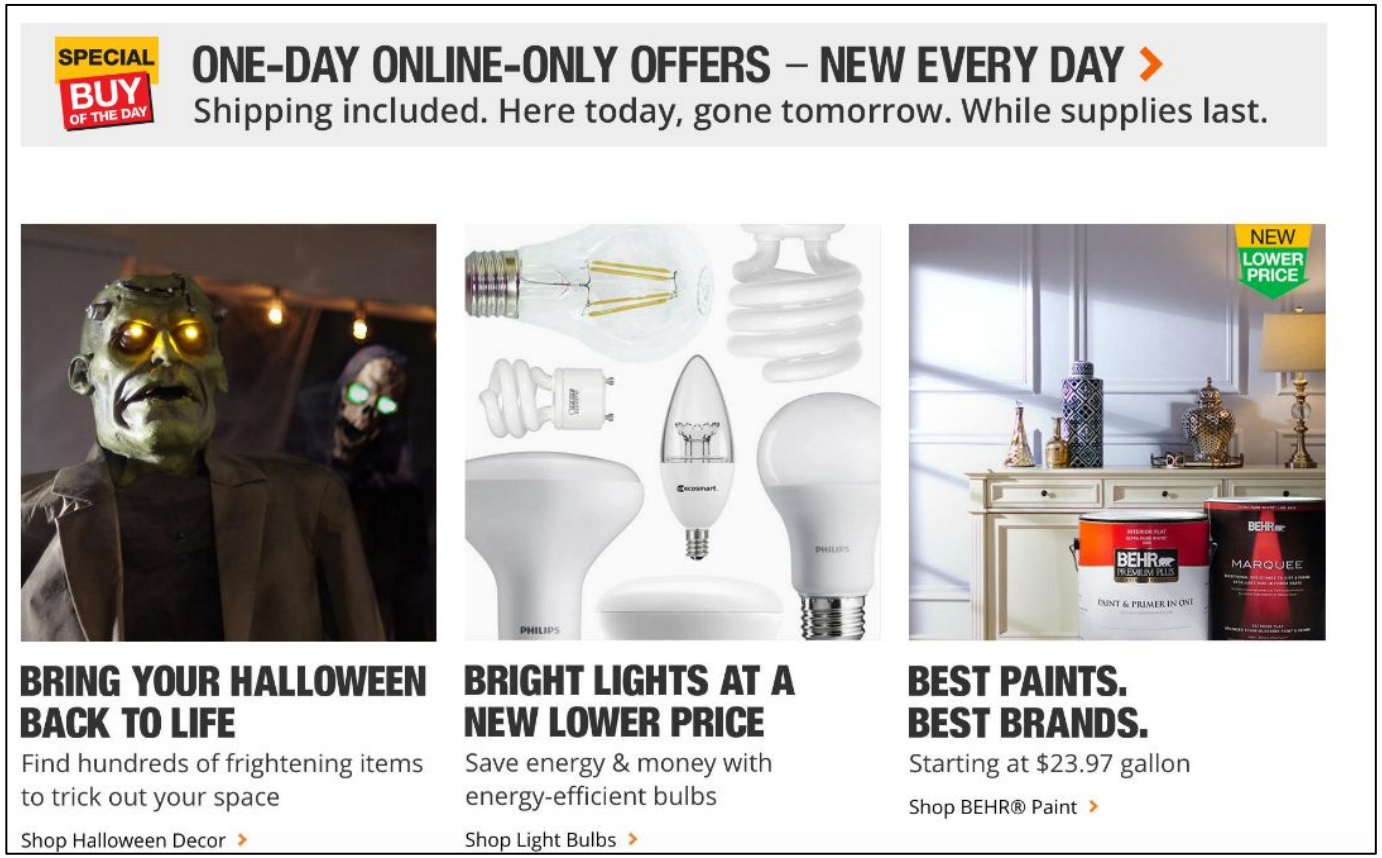
Site Component - Visual Hierarchy
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

visually distinct, add enough white space in between

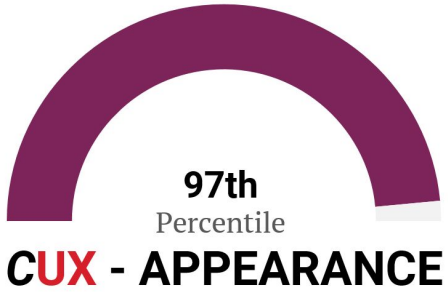
Hatland: Ranked in the bottom 11th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. It's difficult to tell whether these hats are part of the Columbus Day Sale or not.

Adherence example

Guideline #7. Make separate content blocks look visually distinct, add enough white space in between



Home Depot: Ranked in the top 97th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. The grey box around the One-day only offers makes it clear that the promotions below it are not one-day offers.



Guideline #8. Avoid placing site promotions directly above product lists

Similar to the previous guideline, this guideline aims to avoid confusion when discriminating between page elements.

If a site promotion is displayed directly above a product list, there's a chance that users will confuse the promotion as part of the product list. For example, if a promotion "Select sweaters 20% off" is placed above the product list for all sweaters, site visitors might mistake this product list as being the "select" sweaters that are on sale.

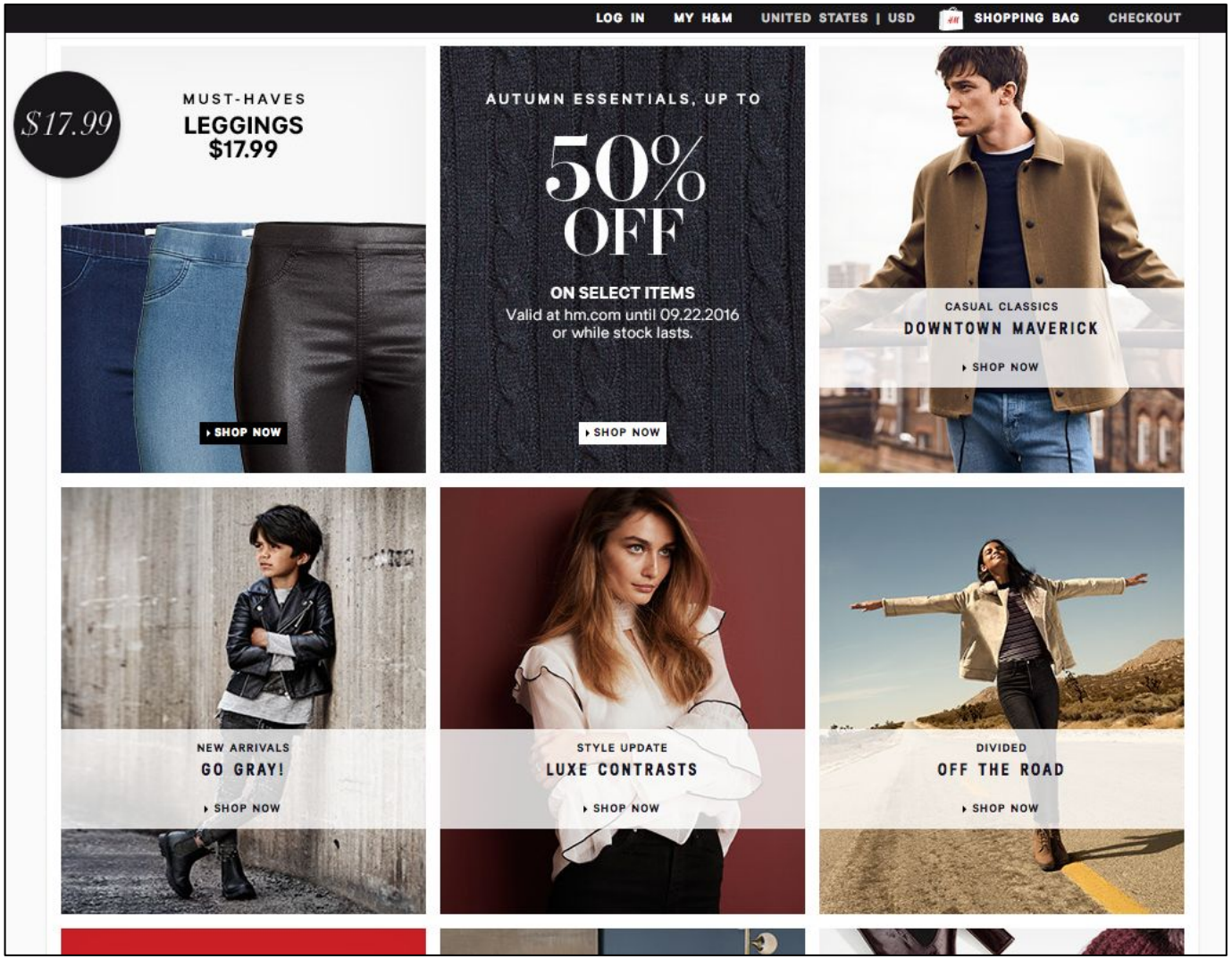
It all depends on how the elements are designed. Displaying a promotion above a product list is acceptable so long as the two are clearly distinguishable. Use borders or other visual cues that say, "these two things are not related".

Site Component - Visual Hierarchy
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

User quote - *"The landing site is not at all welcoming, or giving any sense of the site's "personality." Instead, it's just a swarm of ads for a site the user is already on. The banners and boxes are all jampacked together, and each one is packed to the gills with colors and pictures and text of all different fonts and sizes, some of it blinking or moving, and most of it YELLING AT THE USER IN ALL CAPS. I think of camping, hunting, and fishing as serene activities in beautiful settings, with not much yelling. I'd rather my site feel like a better match to that."*

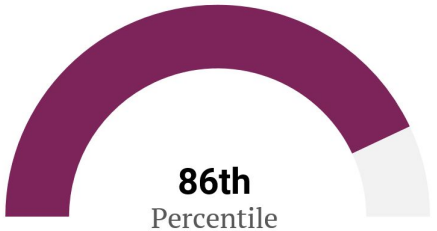
Adherence example

Guideline #8. Avoid placing site promotions directly above product lists



H&M: Ranked in the top 86th percentile for the UX dimension appearance. The 50% off promotion is visually contained in a box *and* explains that the discount applies to select items only so as to not be confused with the surrounding inspirational product categories. The 17.99 leggings promotion clearly only applies to the Leggings product category.

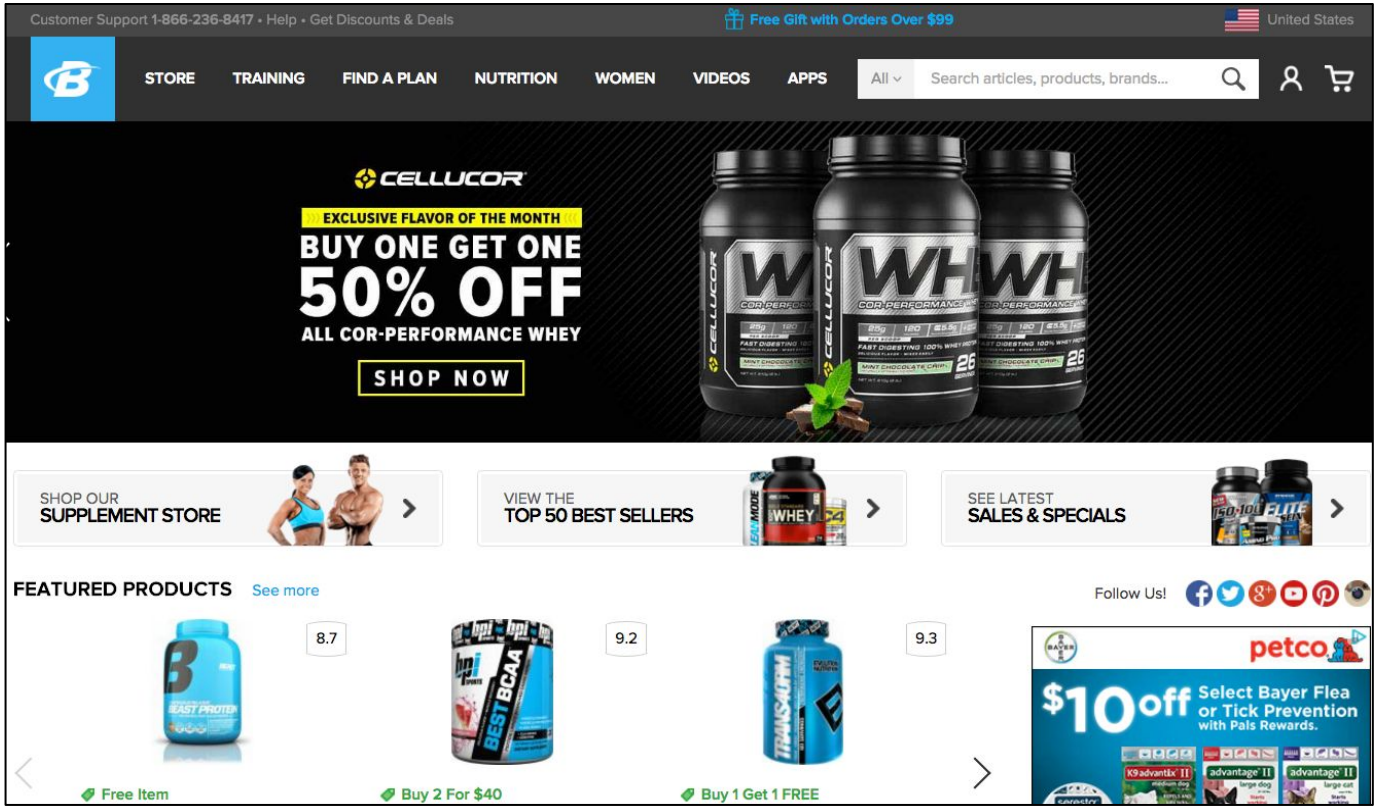
User quote - *"Clean, thoughtfully laid out. Easy to hone in on what i'm looking for without being overwhelmed".*



CUX - APPEARANCE

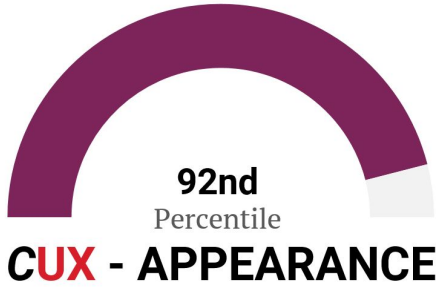
Adherence example

Guideline #8. Avoid placing site promotions directly above product lists



BodyBuilding.com: Ranked in the top 92nd percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. The buy one get one 50% off promotion is visually distinct from the featured products.

User quote - *"Its very well organised everything is easy to find."*



Appearance » Visual Hierarchy » CTA

4 Guidelines

Appearance > Visual Hierarchy > CTA

9. CTA should be visually prominent: color contrasted, surrounded by lots of whitespace, and high in the homepage's visual hierarchy
10. CTA buttons are usually better than links as they garner much more attention
11. If you have a secondary CTA, it should be less noticeable (secondary in visual hierarchy)
12. Highlight the CTA with visual cues

"Don't make me think": This phrase is familiar to most people. Calls to action minimize hesitation – "now what" – and guide visitors to the next obvious step. Our goal as optimizers is to make it clear what the next step should be.

How likely are users to take action on a CTA? It depends on three factors:

1. They notice the CTA to begin with
2. The next step is obvious and makes sense
3. They see value in the next step

We consider these three main factors when evaluating calls to action.

CTA guidelines

Guideline #9. CTA should be visually prominent: color contrasted, surrounded by lots of whitespace, and high in the homepage's visual hierarchy

Site Component - CTA
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

The CTA is often the most important element on a homepage. For a CTA that users actually click on, design a button simply cannot be missed.

Some ways to ensure your CTA is seen:

- Make it BIG
- Place it above the fold
- Color contrast the CTA button against the background
- Surround the CTA with whitespace
- Make it the most —and first— noticed element on the page

Avoid competing graphics:

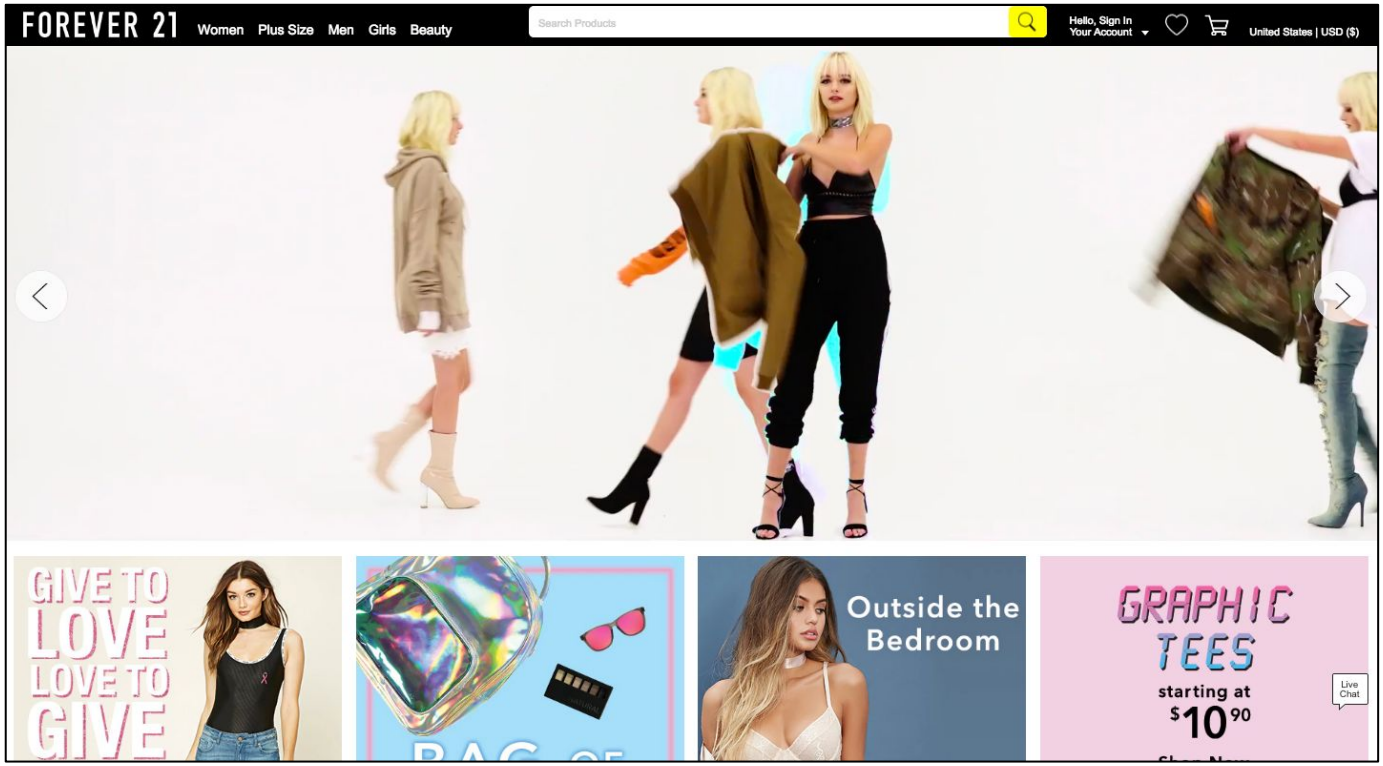
- Large navigations that take up lots of space
- DIstracting fonts and colors
- Moving images
- Additional CTAs with high contrast colors

In 2000, the average human attention span in Canada was 12 seconds. By 2013, that number had fallen to 8 seconds, which also happens to be a second shorter than a goldfish. You know, the fish notorious for being unfocused.

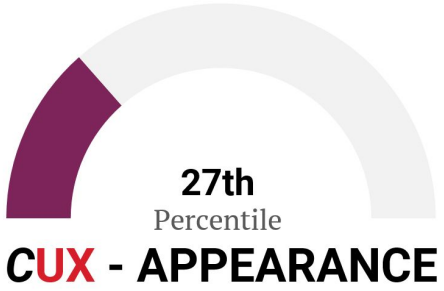
Design the CTA with our affinity for distraction in mind.

Non-adherence example

Guideline #9. CTA should be visually prominent: color contrasted, surrounded by lots of whitespace, and high in the homepage's visual hierarchy

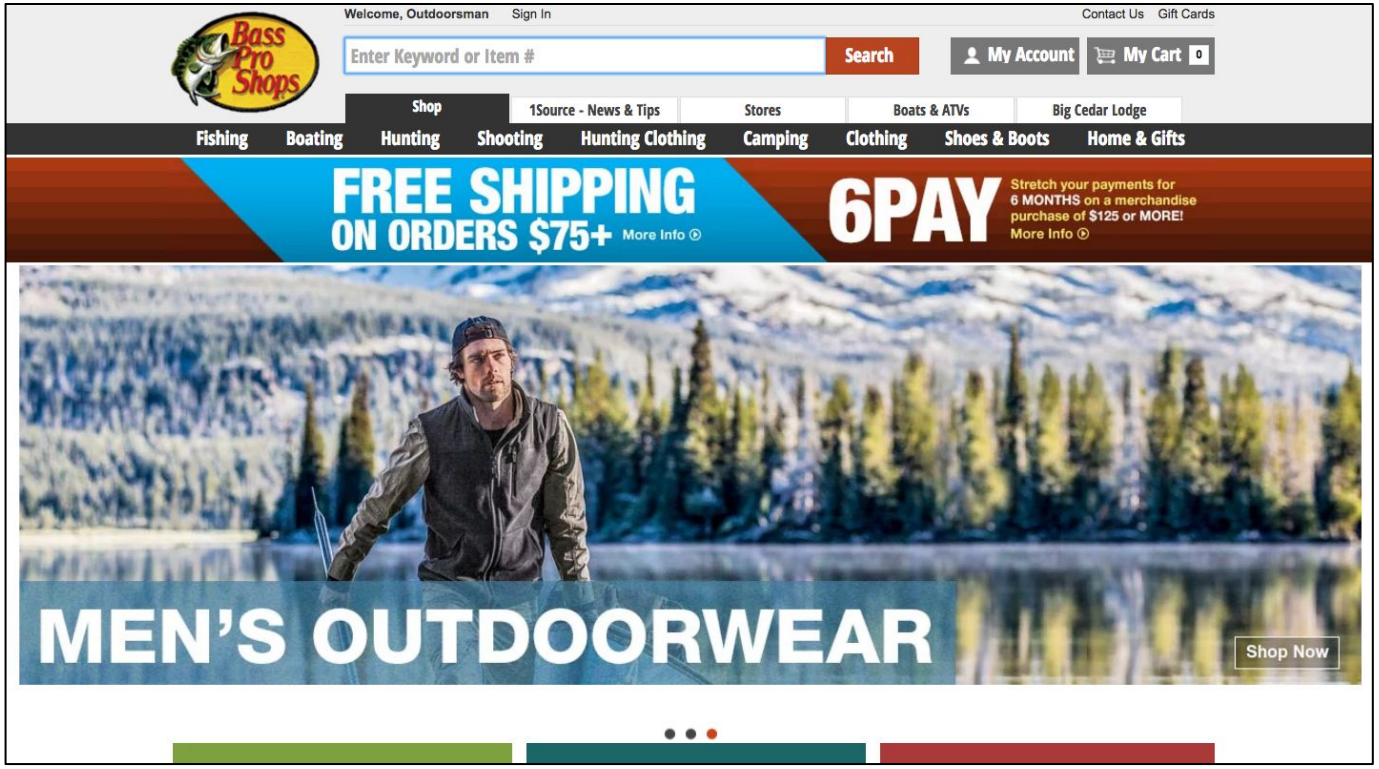


Forever 21: Ranked in bottom 27th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. The large rotating slider featuring various gifs takes up the majority of the space above the fold, offering no room for a CTA.



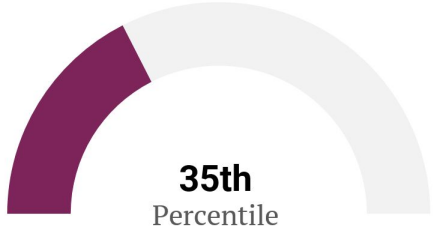
Non-adherence example

Guideline #9. CTA should be visually prominent: color contrasted, surrounded by lots of whitespace, and high in the homepage's visual hierarchy



Bass Pro Shops: Ranked in the bottom 35th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. The "Shop Now" CTA, small and not visually prominent in any way, is hidden in the right corner of the auto-rotating slider.

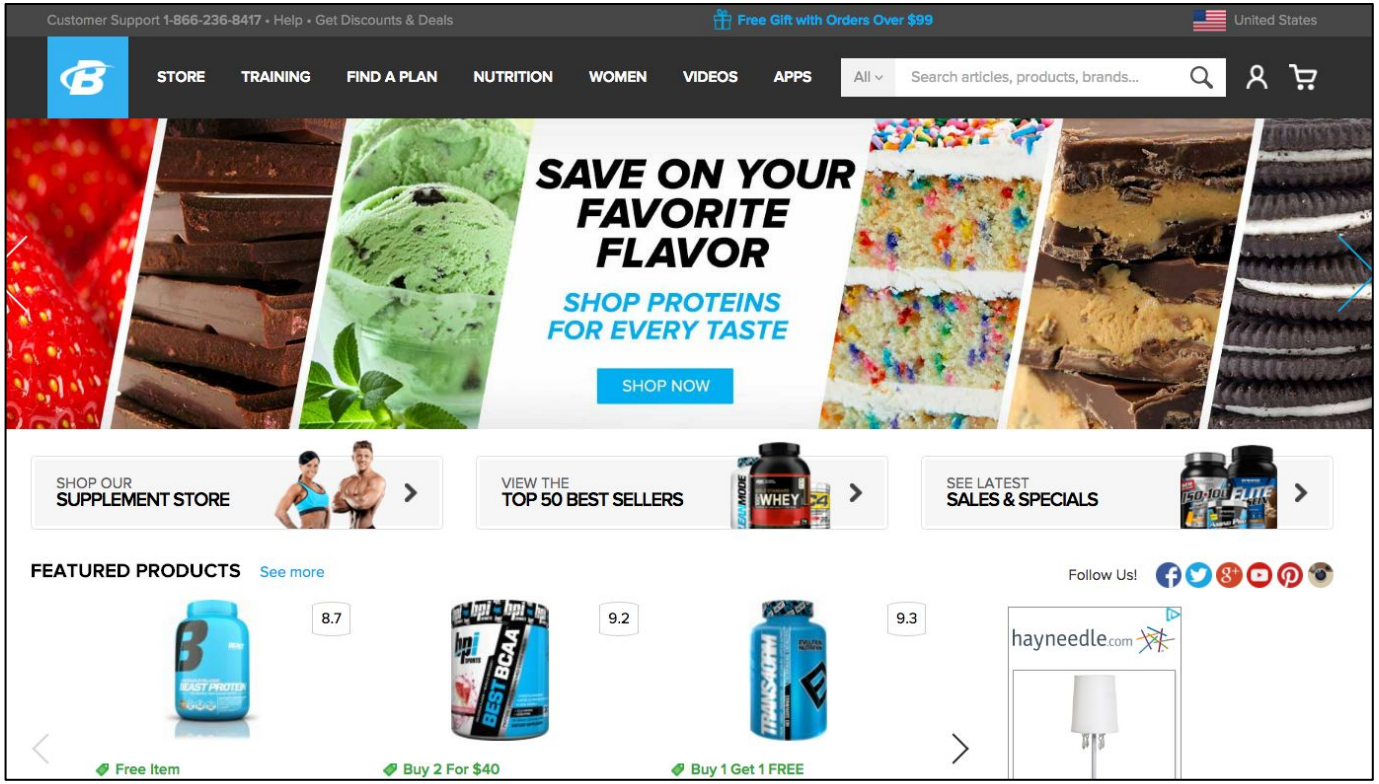
User quote - *"The landing site is not at all welcoming, or giving any sense of the site's "personality." Instead, it's just a swarm of ads for a site the user is already on. The banners and boxes are all jampacked together, and each one is packed to the gills with colors and pictures and text of all different fonts and sizes, some of it blinking or moving, and most of it YELLING AT THE USER IN ALL CAPS"*



CUX - APPEARANCE

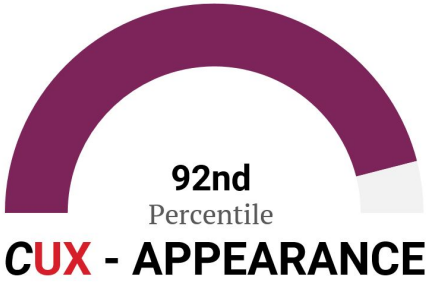
Adherence example

Guideline #9. CTA should be visually prominent: color contrasted, surrounded by lots of whitespace, and high in the homepage's visual hierarchy



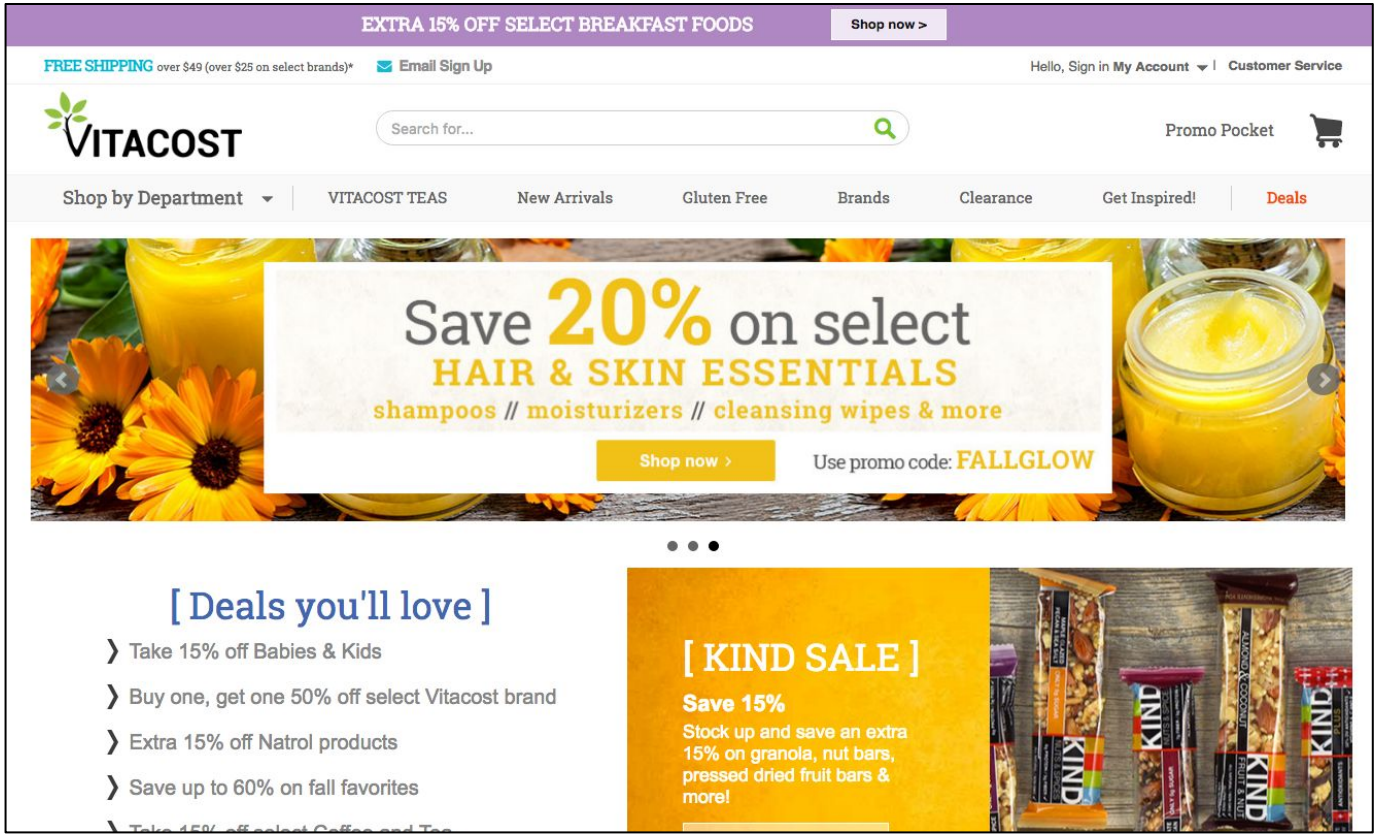
BodyBuilding.com: Ranked in the top 92nd percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. The "SHOP NOW" CTA is located in the top middle of the page, is brightly colored, and is surrounded by whitespace.

User quote - *"Loved the promotions- makes me want to buy from them since I feel like I am saving money!"*



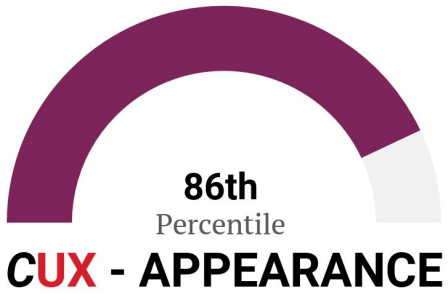
Adherence example

Guideline #9. CTA should be visually prominent: color contrasted, surrounded by lots of whitespace, and high in the homepage's visual hierarchy



Vitacost: Ranked in the top 92th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. Once again, the "Shop now" CTA is located in the top middle of the page, is brightly colored, and is surrounded by whitespace.

User quote - *"I saw a lot of sales on this site and so that made it pretty clear to me as to why I buy from this website instead of other ones."*



Guideline #10. CTA buttons are usually better than links as they garner much more attention

Site Component - CTA
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

"Affordances are clues about how an object should be used, typically provided by the object itself or its context. For example, even if you've never seen a coffee mug before, its use is fairly natural. The handle is shaped for easy grasping and the vessel has a large opening at the top with an empty well inside. The object 'affords' being picked up, meaning that it is *able to* be picked up. It also affords drinking out of. These are the things it's designed to do, and that's also what it *looks* like it's designed to do."
-Nick Pettit, Treehouse

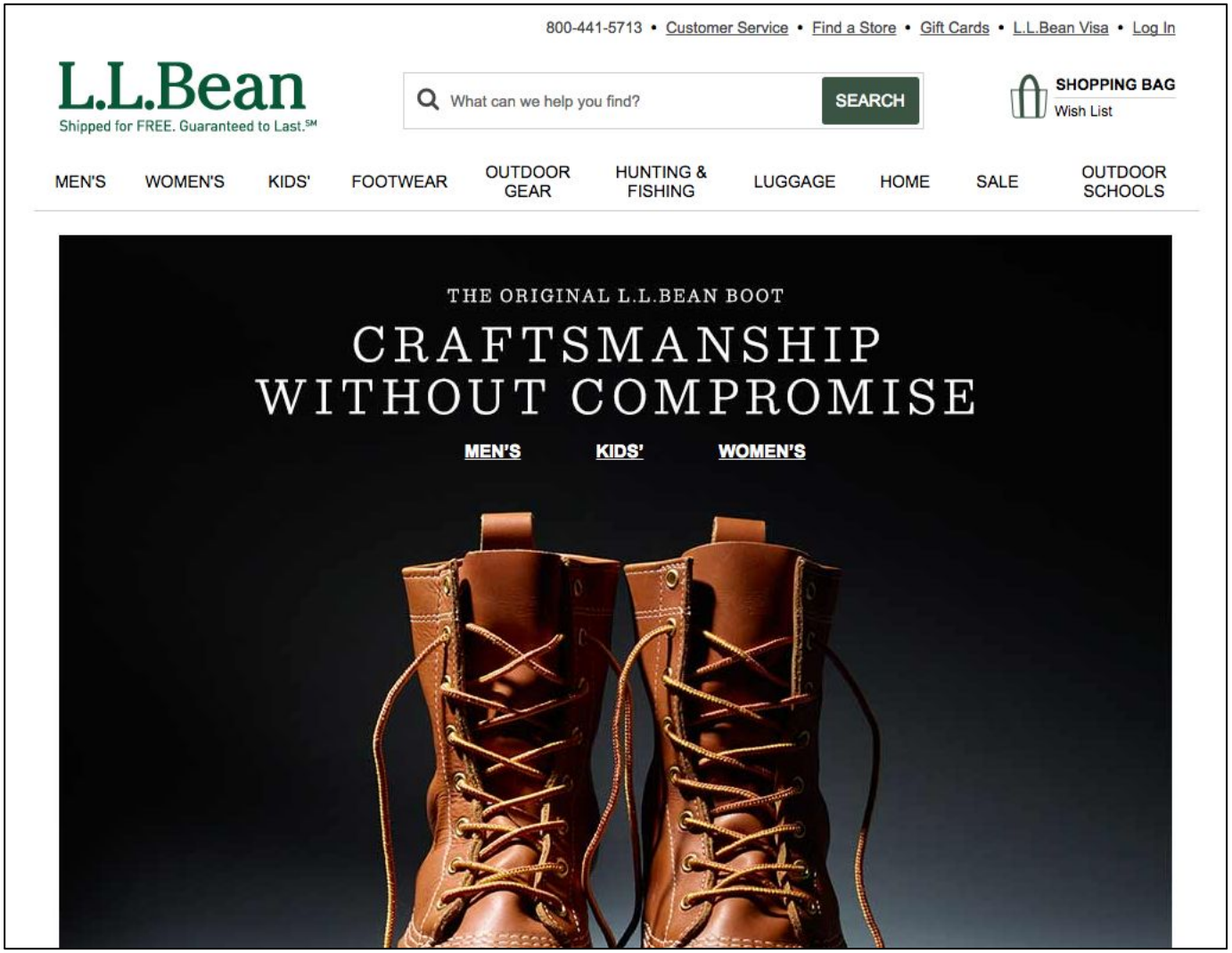
Buttons are designed to be clicked. Their affordance communicates so.

Since the CTA is the most wanted action on a homepage, designing it as a button should be your chief approach. Especially if there are no other visible buttons on the page, the CTA will clearly be the next course of action for site visitors.

Wondering how to create an "affordable" CTA? Use embellishments and borders. Check out this article for more button design inspiration.

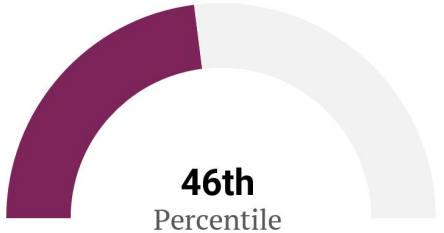
Non-adherence example

Guideline #10. CTA buttons are usually better than links as they garner much more attention



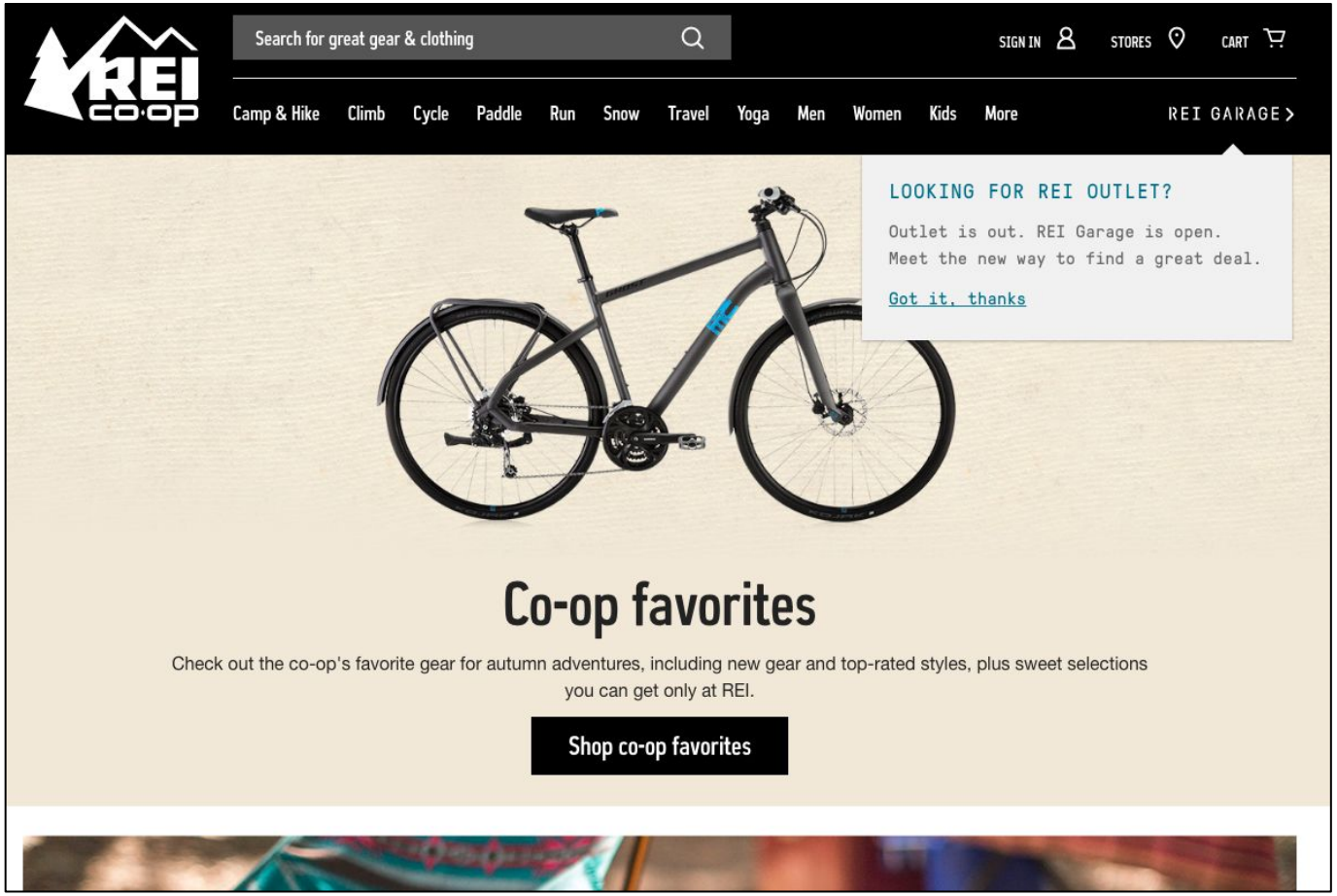
L.L.Bean: Ranked in the 46th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. The CTAs for Men's Kids' and Women's categories within the image might be more noticeable —and would get more clicks— as buttons, not links.

User quote - *"The home page was very long and i know they were showcasing their new boots as a seasonal item i would guess, but there was nothing that was showing me any collection or line of items that may just catch my eye in addition to what i came to the site to purchase."*



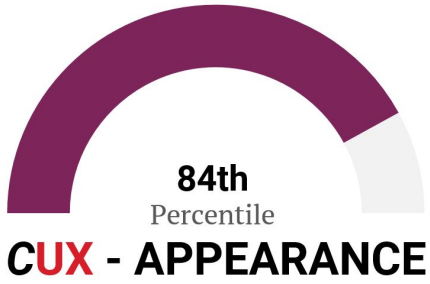
Adherence example

Guideline #10. CTA buttons are usually better than links as they garner much more attention



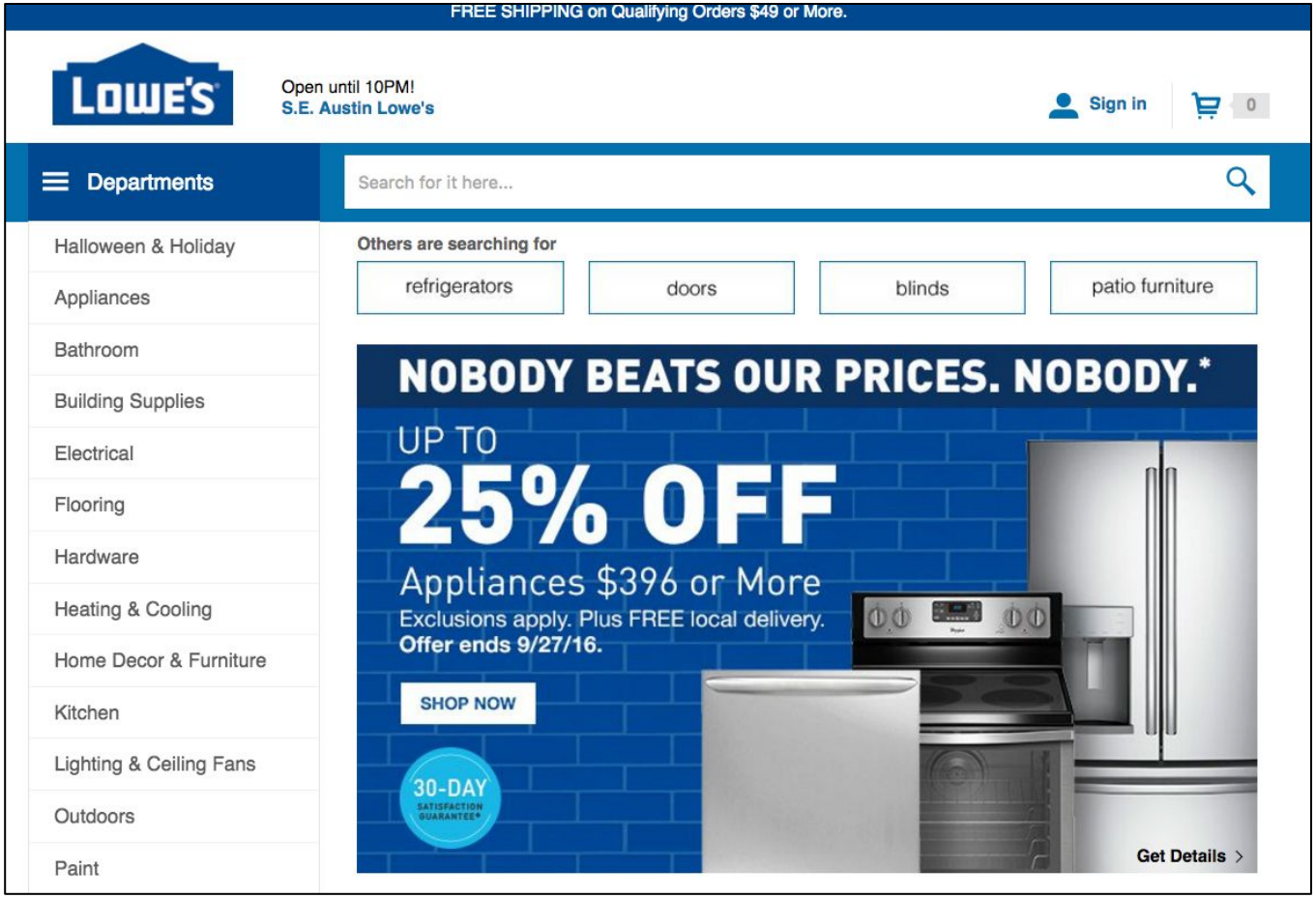
REI: Ranked in the top 84th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. The noticeable "Shop co-op favorites" CTA is obviously a button.

User quote - *"I liked that the site had a good appearance and it was easy to navigate through and find the items I needed to."*



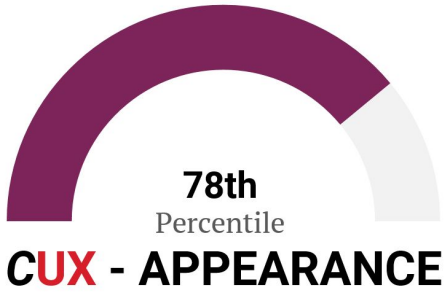
Adherence example

Guideline #10. CTA buttons are usually better than links as they garner much more attention



Lowe's: Ranked in the top 78th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. The prominent white "Shop Now" CTA button tempts visitors to explore the kitchen appliances sale.

User quote - *"Not distracting at all. The site was well laid out, the items were prominent, not crowded and navigation was user friendly."*



Guideline #11. If you have a secondary CTA, it should be less noticeable (secondary in visual hierarchy)

The purpose of a CTA is to draw attention to the most desired action on a page. When there are two or more CTAs, users are no longer being directed to the single most important action. Instead, it becomes their duty to mentally process each CTA and try to sift out differences between them.

The most important action should always be the most noticeable. However, this doesn't mean that a secondary CTA must be avoided at all costs. Instead, a secondary CTA should also be second in the visual hierarchy. The goal is to *naturally* direct users to actions and areas of importance without imposing cognitive load on them.

Visual hierarchy is the third principle of persuasive design.

Site Component - CTA
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

User quote - *"The site had a clutterly feel to me. I would clean it up a bit".*

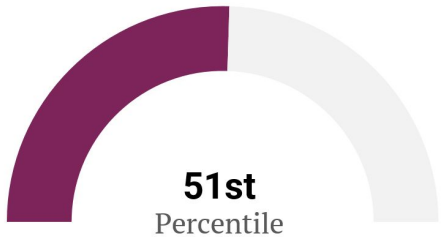
User quote - *"Simplify, unclutter, create some negative space. The pages were too jam packed, either with external ads crunched too close in the products, or else internal ads for other products, in banners both above AND below the item being looked at."*

User quote - *"It was very cluttered on the home page."*

Non-adherence example

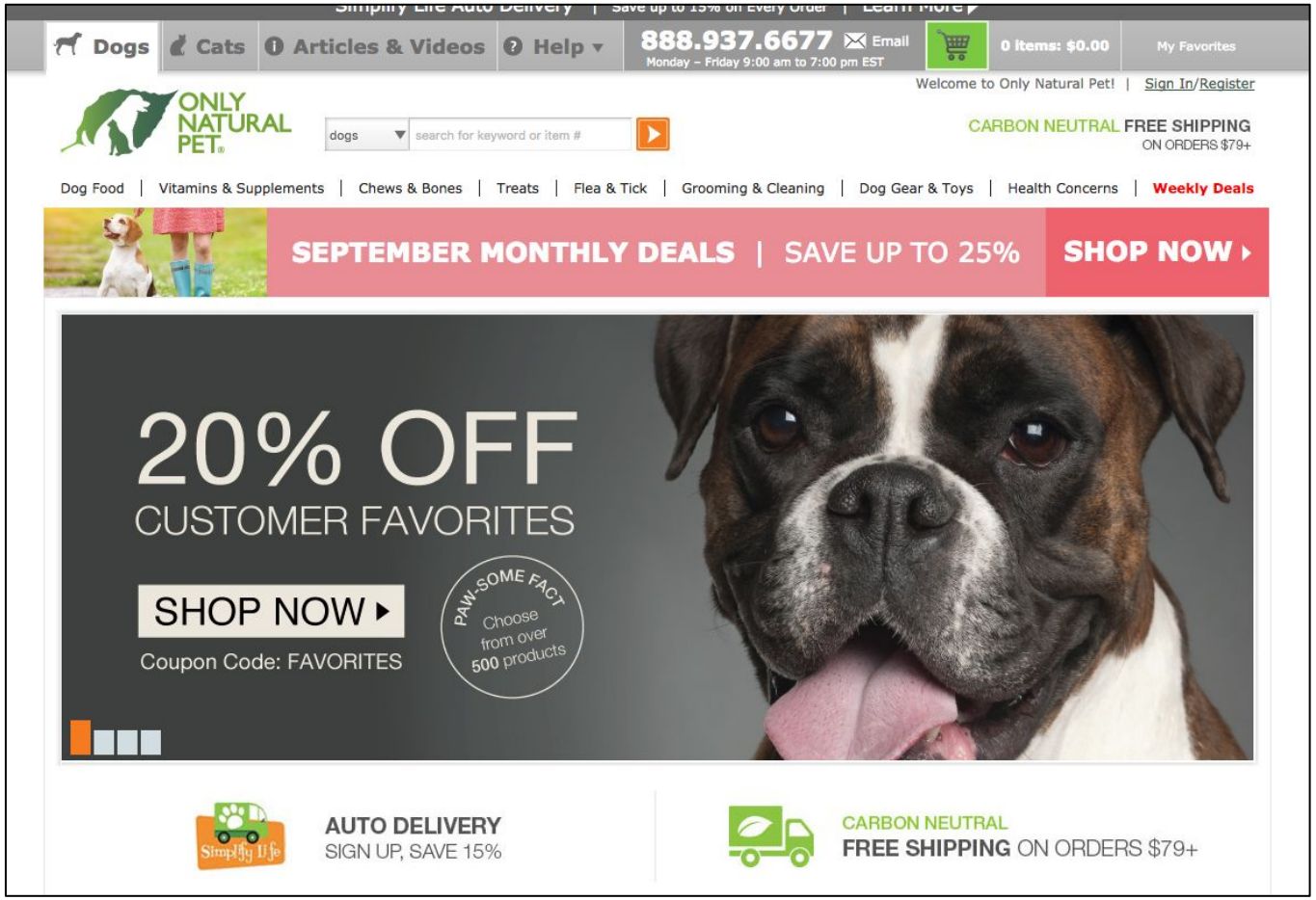
Guideline #11. If you have a secondary CTA, it should be less noticeable (secondary in visual hierarchy)

TigerDirect: Ranked in the 51st percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. This homepage displays five of the same CTAs above the fold. The power of the green CTA button is lost. Users won't perceive it as a visual cue to take an action, but an annoying obstacle they need to get around.

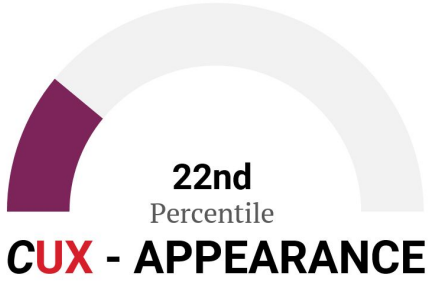


Non-adherence example

Guideline #11. If you have a secondary CTA, it should be less noticeable (secondary in visual hierarchy)

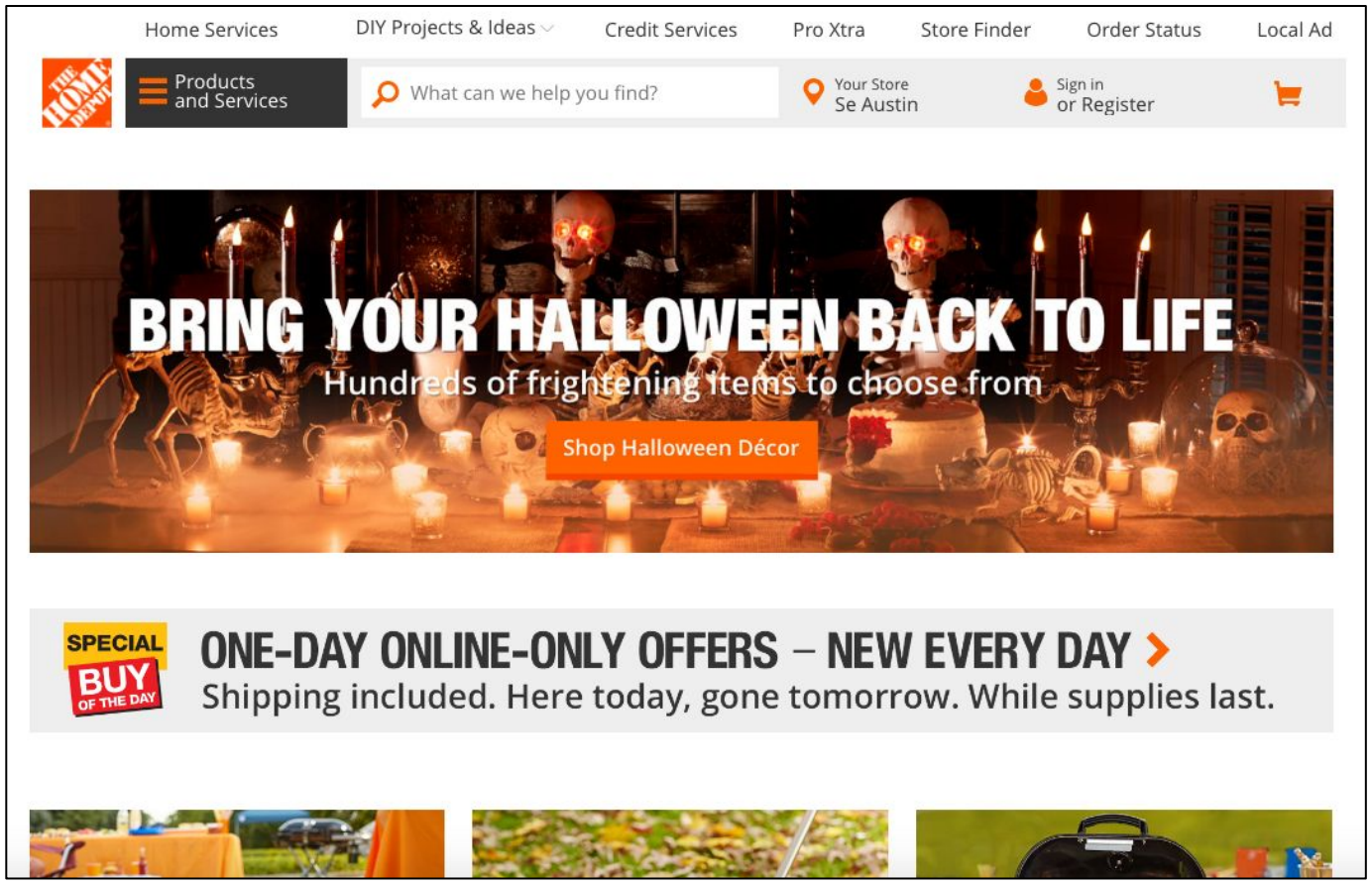


Only Natural Pet: Ranked in the bottom 22nd percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. There are two Shop Now CTAs above the fold on this homepage. Although the CTAs are not identically designed, they are similar in other ways. They're both attention grabbing and advertise the same message: Click this button to begin shopping with a discount. Because the CTAs are so similar in appearance and message, users have to decipher the difference between the two before taking an actions. The buttons have lost their efficacy.

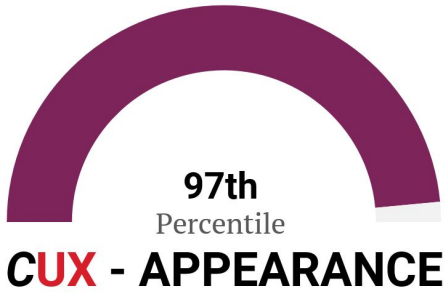


Adherence example

Guideline #11. If you have a secondary CTA, it should be less noticeable (secondary in visual hierarchy)

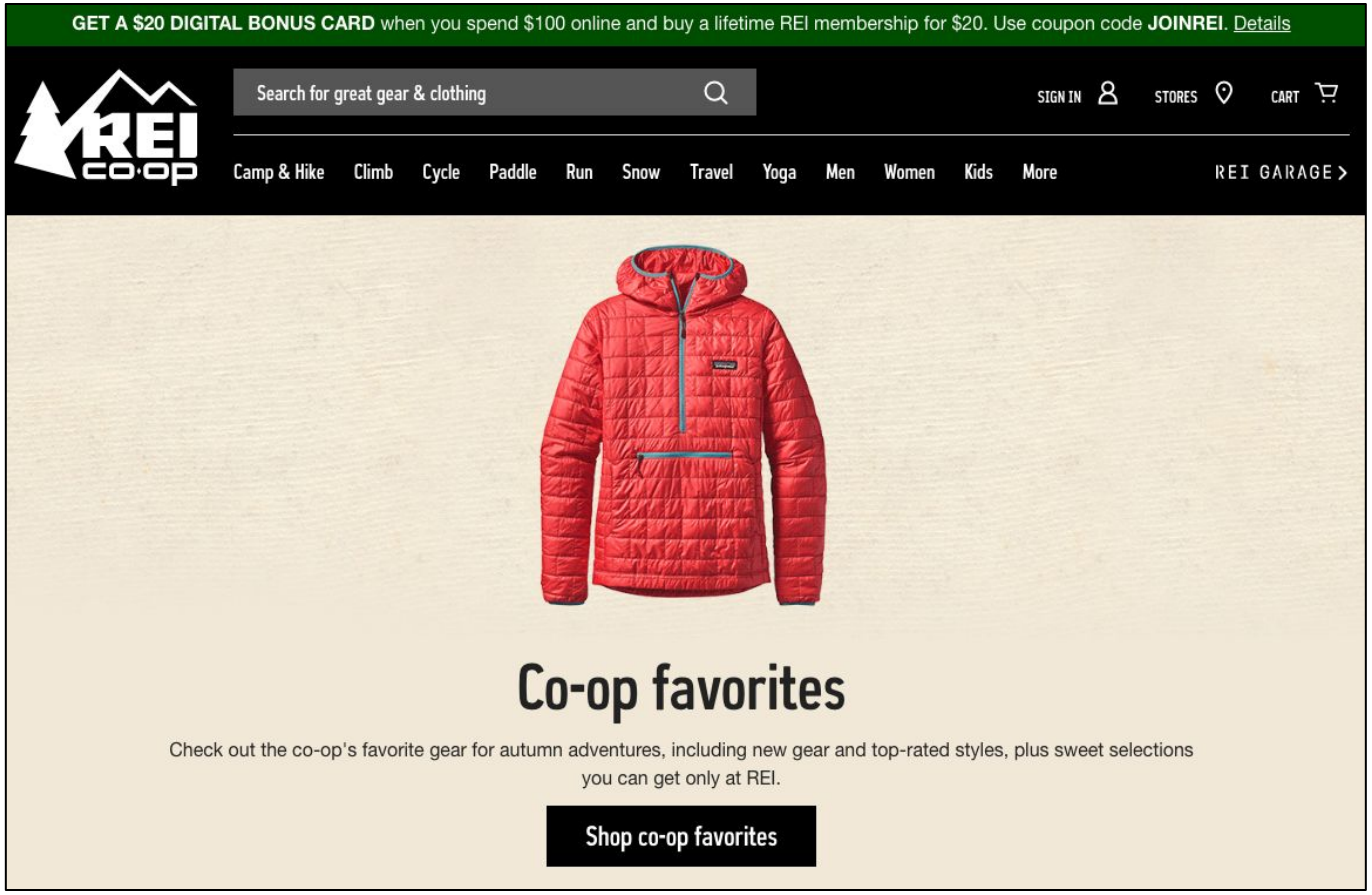


Home Depot: Ranked in the top 97th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. The foremost CTA, bright orange and in the middle of the page, invites users to Shop Halloween Decor. The secondary CTA tucked in the top left corner highlights the dropdown menu, where users can start browsing products and services.

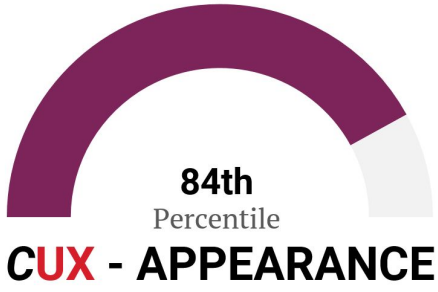


Adherence example

Guideline #11. If you have a secondary CTA, it should be less noticeable (secondary in visual hierarchy)



REI: Ranked in the top 84th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. The first CTA, Shop co-op favorites, is unmistakably the most important on the page. The top green banner promoting REI memberships is less noticeable, but delivers an enticing proposition to the users who take notice.



Guideline #12. Highlight the CTA with visual cues

Site Component - CTA
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

Add visual cues to draw attention and importance to the CTA. Through our own research with ConversionXL Institute, we found that people spend significantly more time looking at a CTA when there's a visual cue highlighting it.

Out of the cues tested in our research, we found the a hand drawn arrow directed the most attention to the CTA. The second most effective visual cue was a simple line pointing towards the CTA.

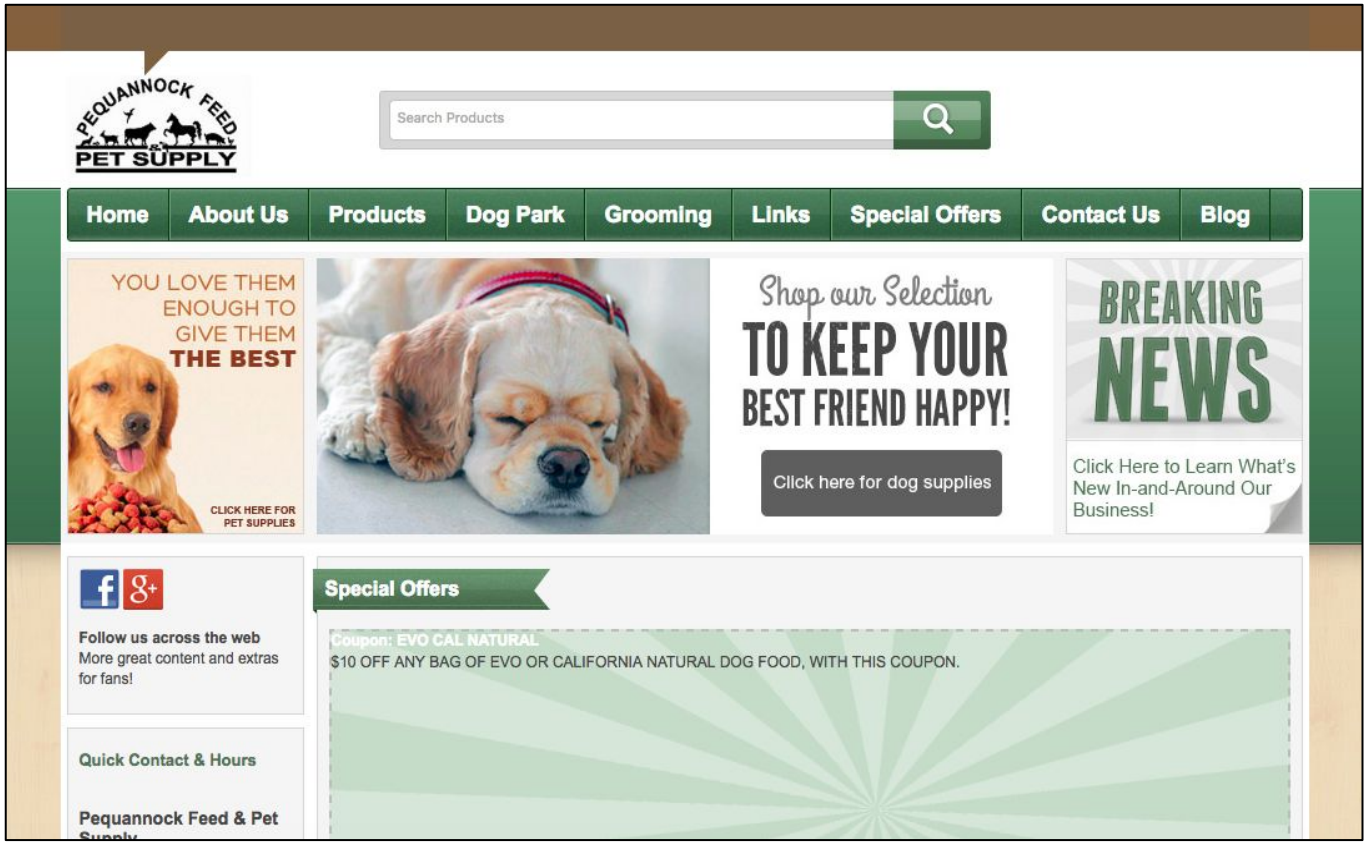
In a study testing different visual cues, we found a hand-drawn arrow to be most effective.

Not sold on the hand-drawn arrow? Here are some other visual cues to test out:

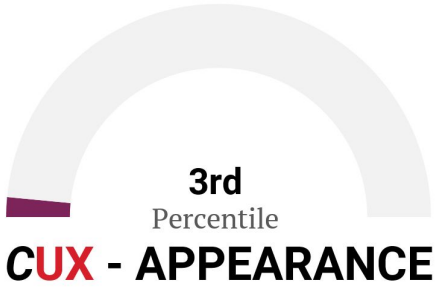
- A person looking at the CTA
- A graphic pointing towards the CTA (can be a variety of shapes: a line, a triangle, etc.)
- A CTA that's visually highlighted from the background (e.g. a bright blue border that contrasting a white background)
- Borders or boxes around the CTA

Non-adherence example

Guideline #12. Highlight the CTA with visual cues

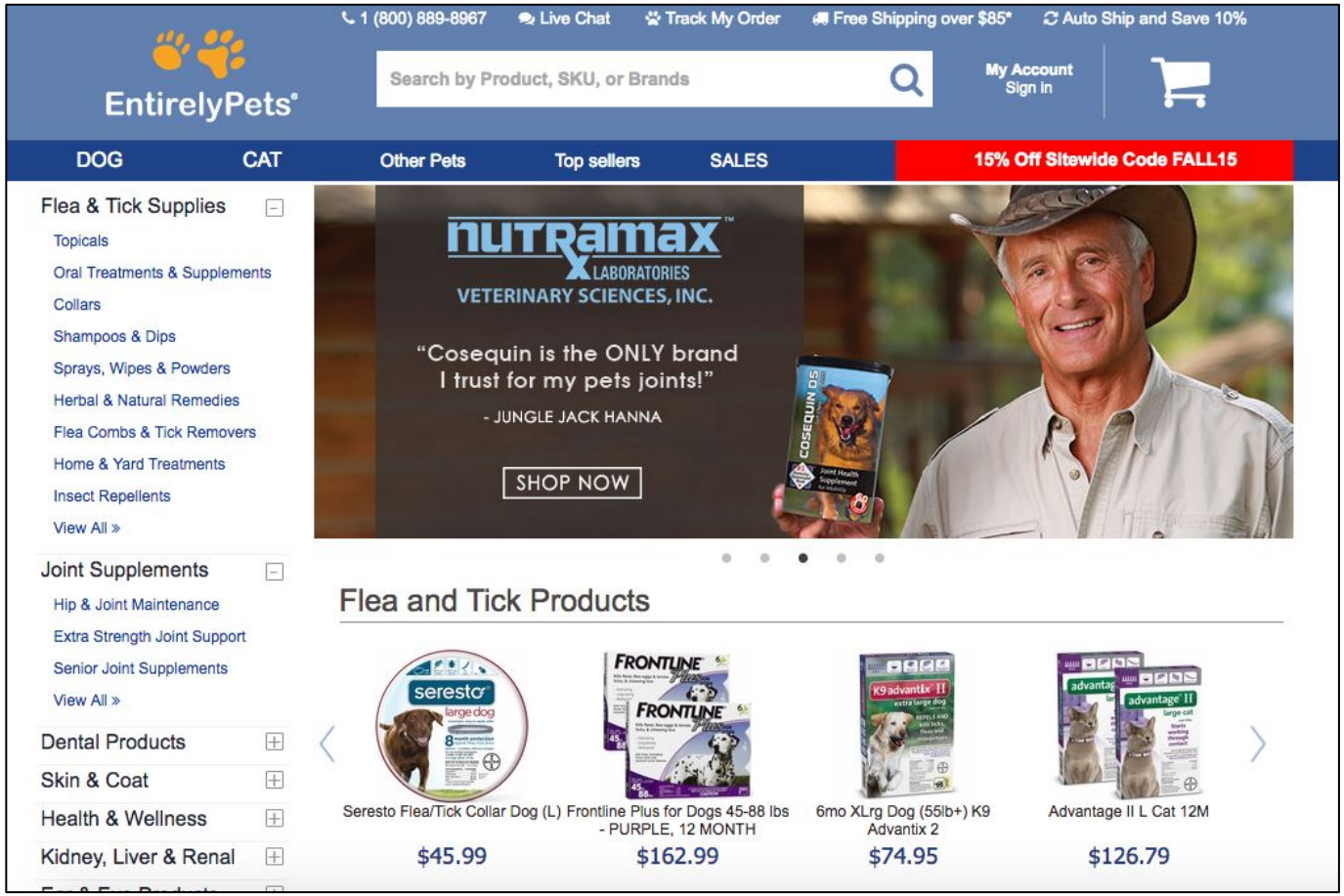


Pequannock Feed: Ranked in the bottom 3rd percentile for the UX dimension. The black CTA button "Click here for dog supplies" would greatly benefit from a few visual cues.



Non-adherence example

Guideline #12. Highlight the CTA with visual cues

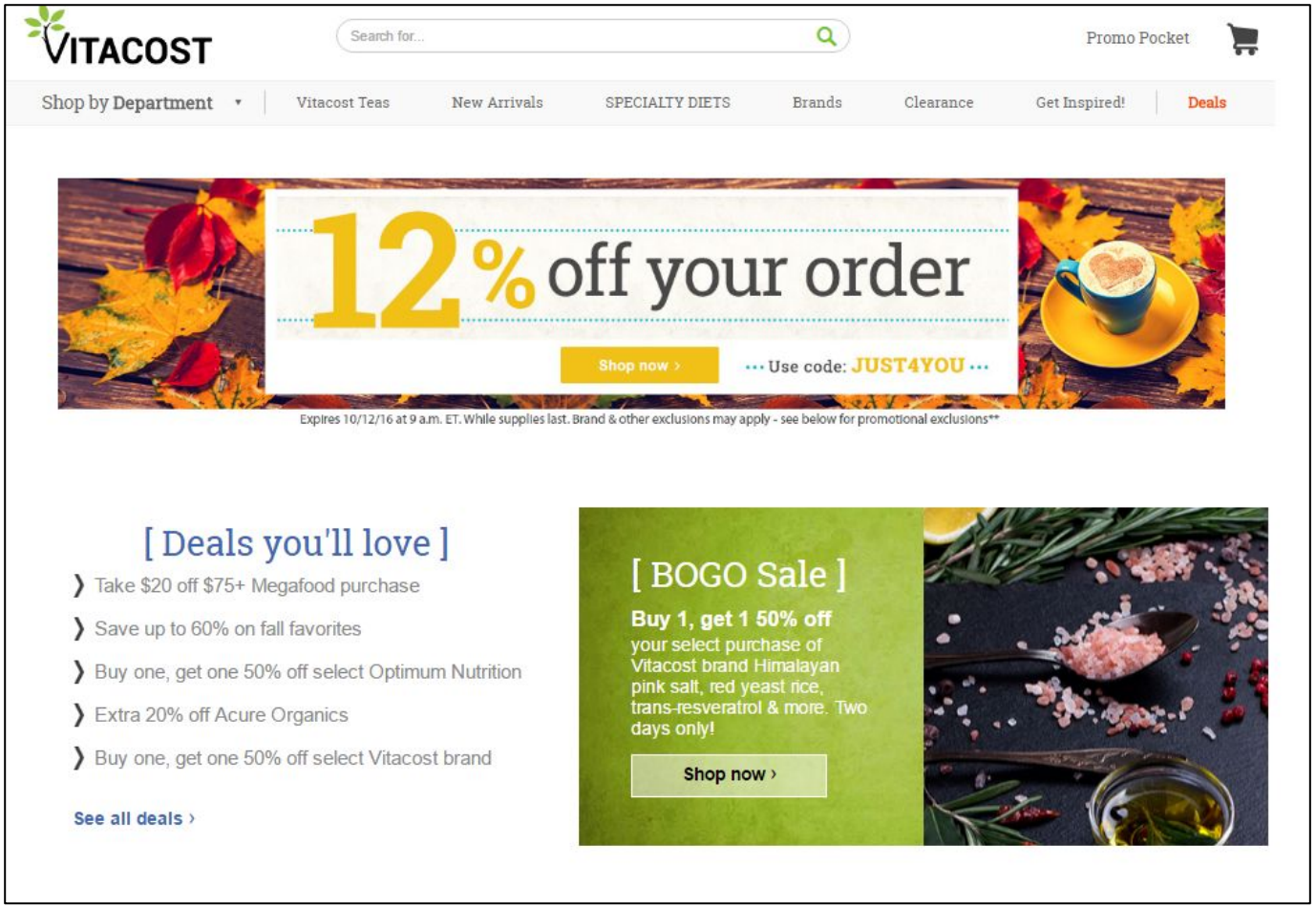


Entirely Pets: Ranked in the bottom 19th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. Once again, there are no cues or graphics drawing attention to the SHOP NOW button.

User quote - *"The site had a clutterly feel to me. I would clean it up a bit".*

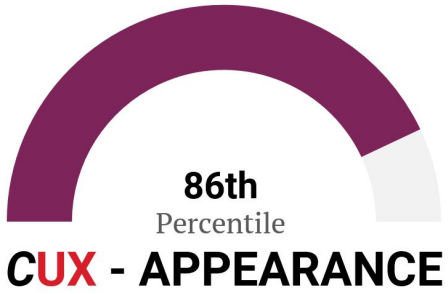
Adherence example

Guideline #12. Highlight the CTA with visual cues



Vitacost: Ranked in the top 87th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. Both "Shop now" CTAs are highlighted in a lightly colored box that contrasts against the background color.

User quote - *"I like how the promotions were all displayed at the front page."*



Appearance » Product Presentation

8 Guidelines

Appearance > Product Presentation

13. Make sure users know what you sell. Display a wide range of product types to communicate scope of your catalog
14. Show products and/or promotions with the widest appeal - in order to get them to click anywhere/interact with the page
15. Show products in usage context
16. Invest in high-quality photography and product images
17. Implement bespoke imagery to maximize perceived value and first impressions
18. Don't show more than four products per row; bigger thumbnail images help people understand the product better
19. When using thumbnails with product pictures, sometimes a few products better represent a category than just one (i.e. for accessories category on shoe website, a thumbnail for shoe polish and shoe laces)
20. Design site promotions to resemble the rest of the website. Site promotions should never look like advertisements

Proper product display is a key component of a satisfying user experience. Recent research has shed light on the importance of product display: 67% of users who participated in the research study reported that clear, detailed product photos were “very important”, more important than the product information/description and customer ratings.

Moreover, content including “compelling” images receives 94% more views than content without them. These findings apply to homepage content.

Images on a homepage have utility as well. Product photos can communicate different product categories and the breadth of products available within each category. Images, naturally eye-catching, can direct users eyes to important content on a homepage.

The way product pictures, thumbnails, and promotions are designed impacts the perceived attractiveness of a site and ultimately influences the entire user experience. Follow these guidelines to ensure that you’re presenting products on your homepage optimally.

Guideline #13. Make sure users know what you sell. Display a wide range of product types to communicate scope of your catalog

This guideline is particularly important for companies selling a wide range of products. If only one or two products are displayed on the homepage, users may assume these are the only two product types available.

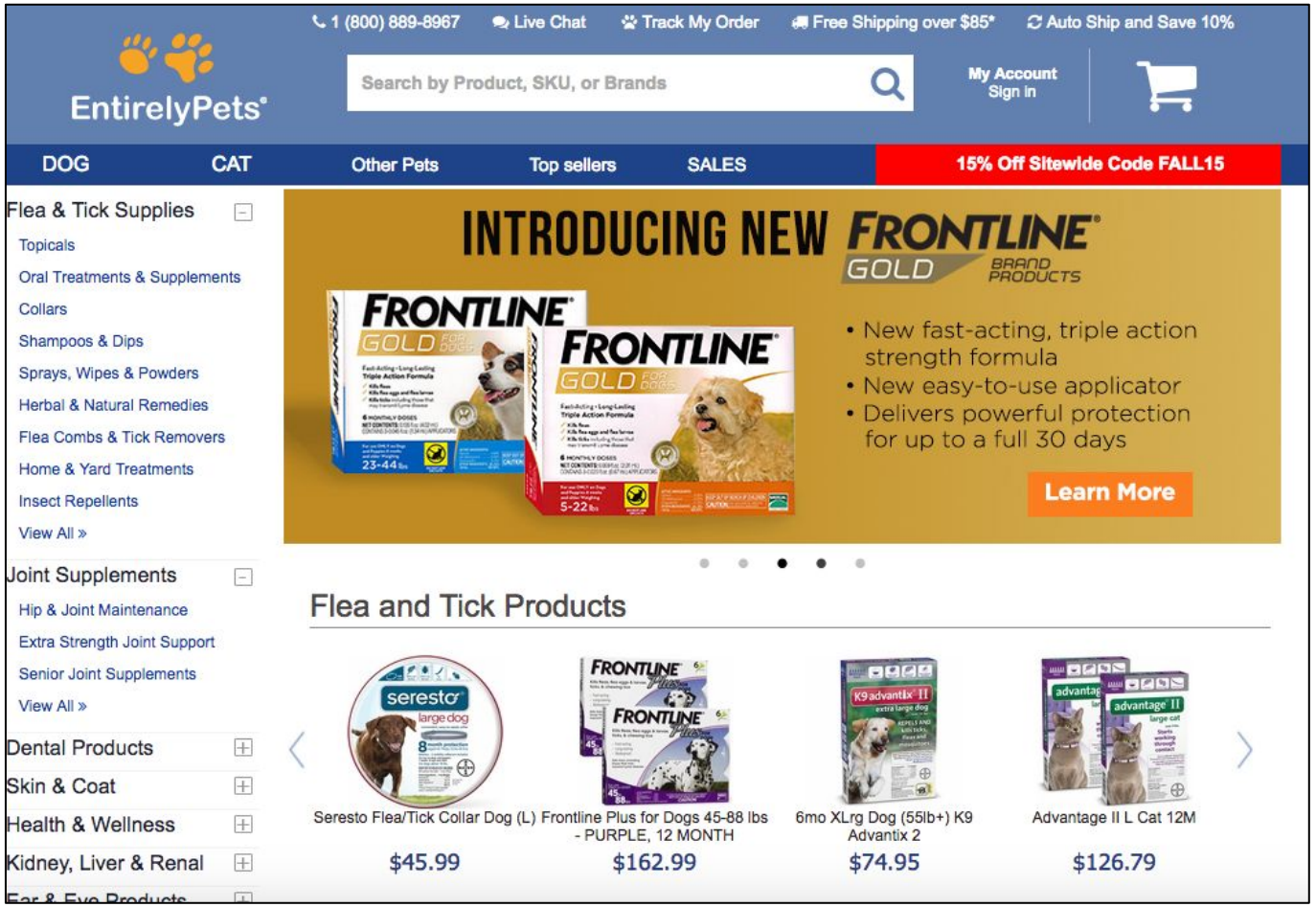
Display as many products as feasibly possible to communicate the breadth of your product selection. Be careful not to create a page that's too busy, however.

Site Component - Product Presentation
Conversion Heuristic - Motivation

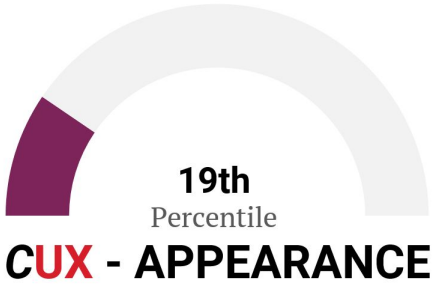
User quote - *"The homepage was very long and i know they were showcasing their new boots as a seasonal item i would guess, but there was nothing that was showing me any collection or line of items that may just catch my eye in addition to what i came to the site to purchase".*

Non-adherence example

Guideline #13. Make sure users know what you sell. Display a wide range of product types to communicate scope of your catalog

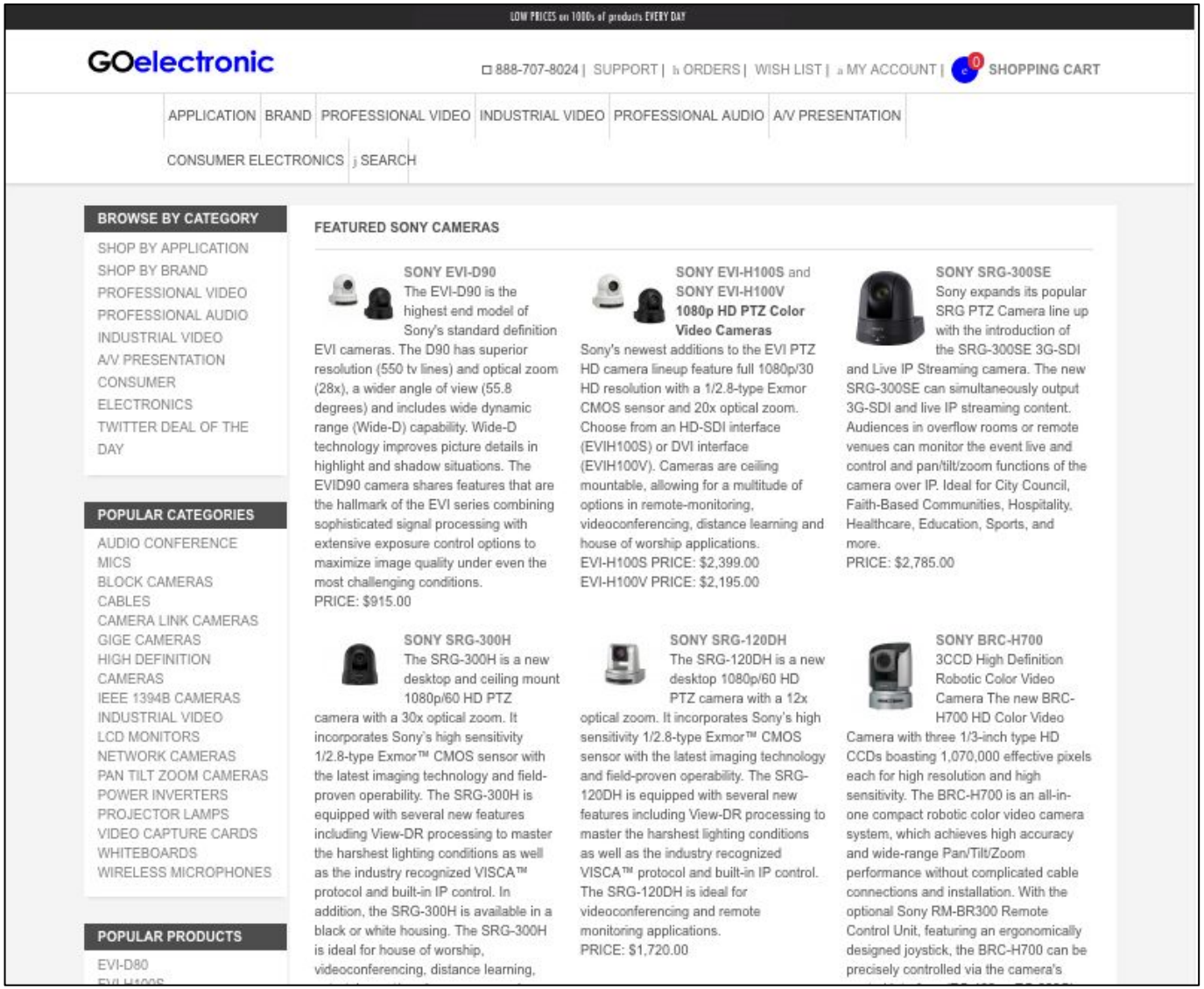


Entirely Pets: Ranked in the bottom 19th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. If it weren't for the extensive product list running down the left side of the page, users might look at this homepage and think this website only sells flea and tick medicine.

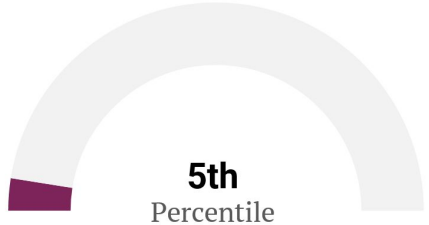


Non-adherence example

Guideline #13. Make sure users know what you sell. Display a wide range of product types to communicate scope of your catalog

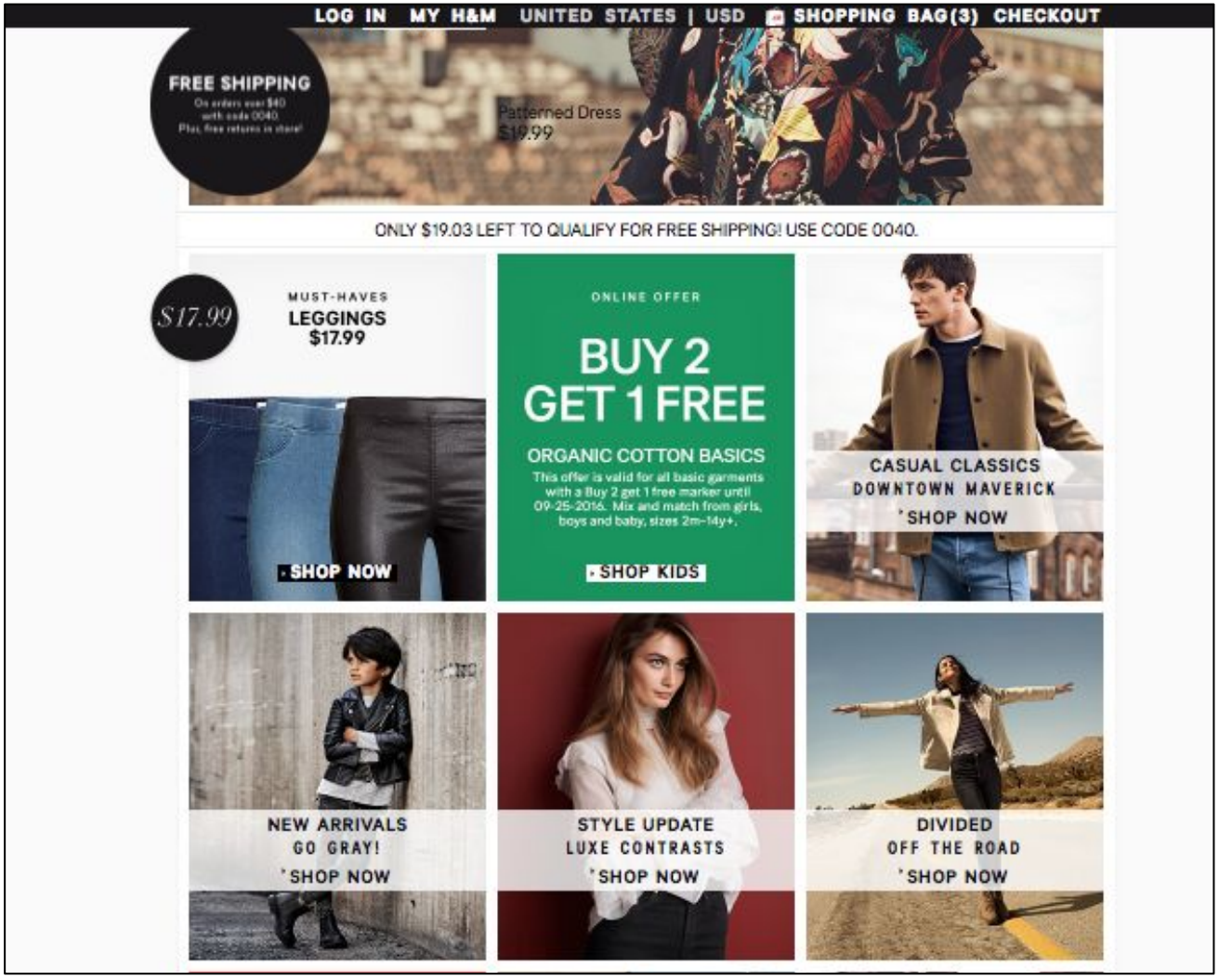


GO Electronic: Ranked in the bottom 5th percentile for the UX dimension appearance. Although this website sells a huge variety of products, the homepage only displays Sony cameras.



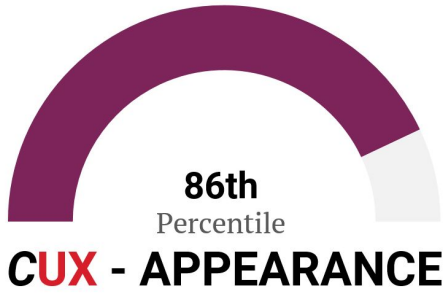
Adherence example

Guideline #13. Make sure users know what you sell. Display a wide range of product types to communicate scope of your catalog



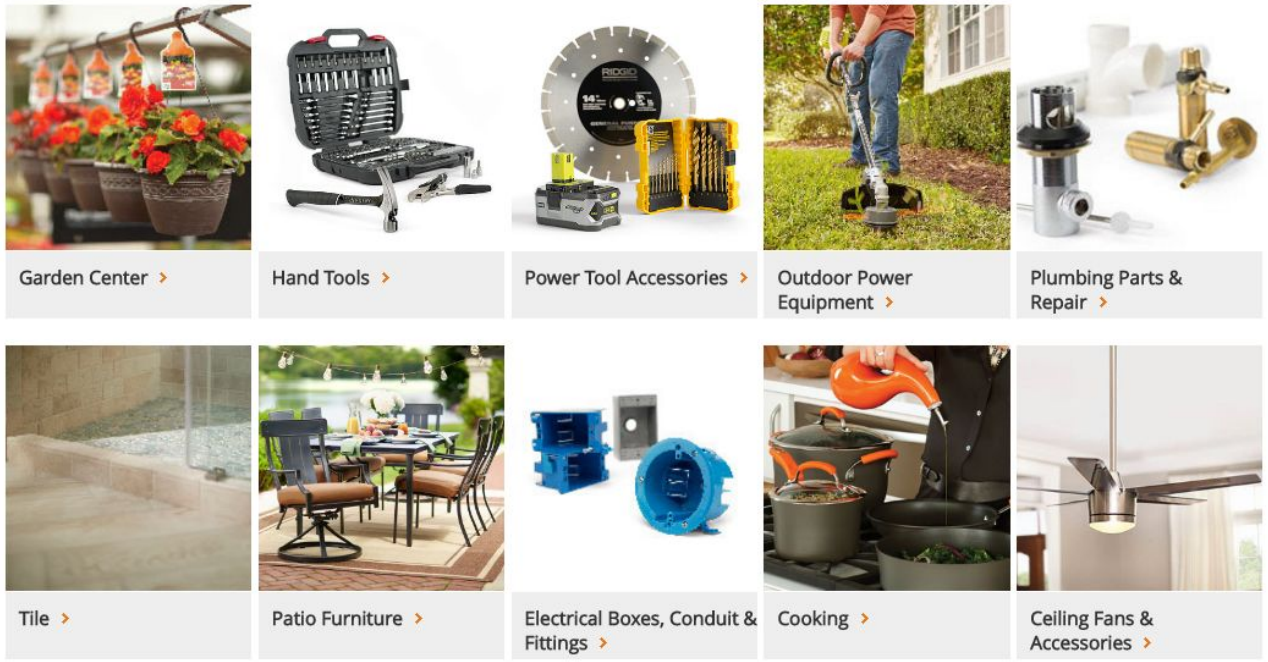
H&M: Ranked in the top 86th percentile for the UX dimension appearance. This homepage includes a grid of product thumbnails. Users can see that H&M sells clothes for men, women, and children along with home furnishings. The page shows that there's a product for everyone.

User quote - When asked what they liked about the website: *"Clean, thoughtfully laid out. Easy to hone in on what i'm looking for without being overwhelmed with page after page of options."*



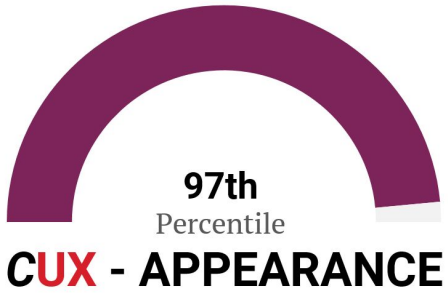
Adherence example

Guideline #13. Make sure users know what you sell. Display a wide range of product types to communicate scope of your catalog



Home Depot: Ranked in the top 97th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. These photos on Home Depot's homepage show a huge variety of product categories available. It's clear that the company sells much more than tools.

User quote - *"The site offers a ton of items at good prices with lots of reviews to look at."*



Guideline #14. Show products and/or promotions with the widest appeal - in order to get them to click anywhere/interact with the page

If you have especially popular products or a great promotion going on, these should be displayed —with pictures— on the homepage. Users will be enticed to click on these pictures, ultimately leaving the homepage and beginning to shop.

While it's important to display your most popular items, you need to display other products, too. First time visitors might think you only sell this one product. Display a variety of popular products and/or promotions.

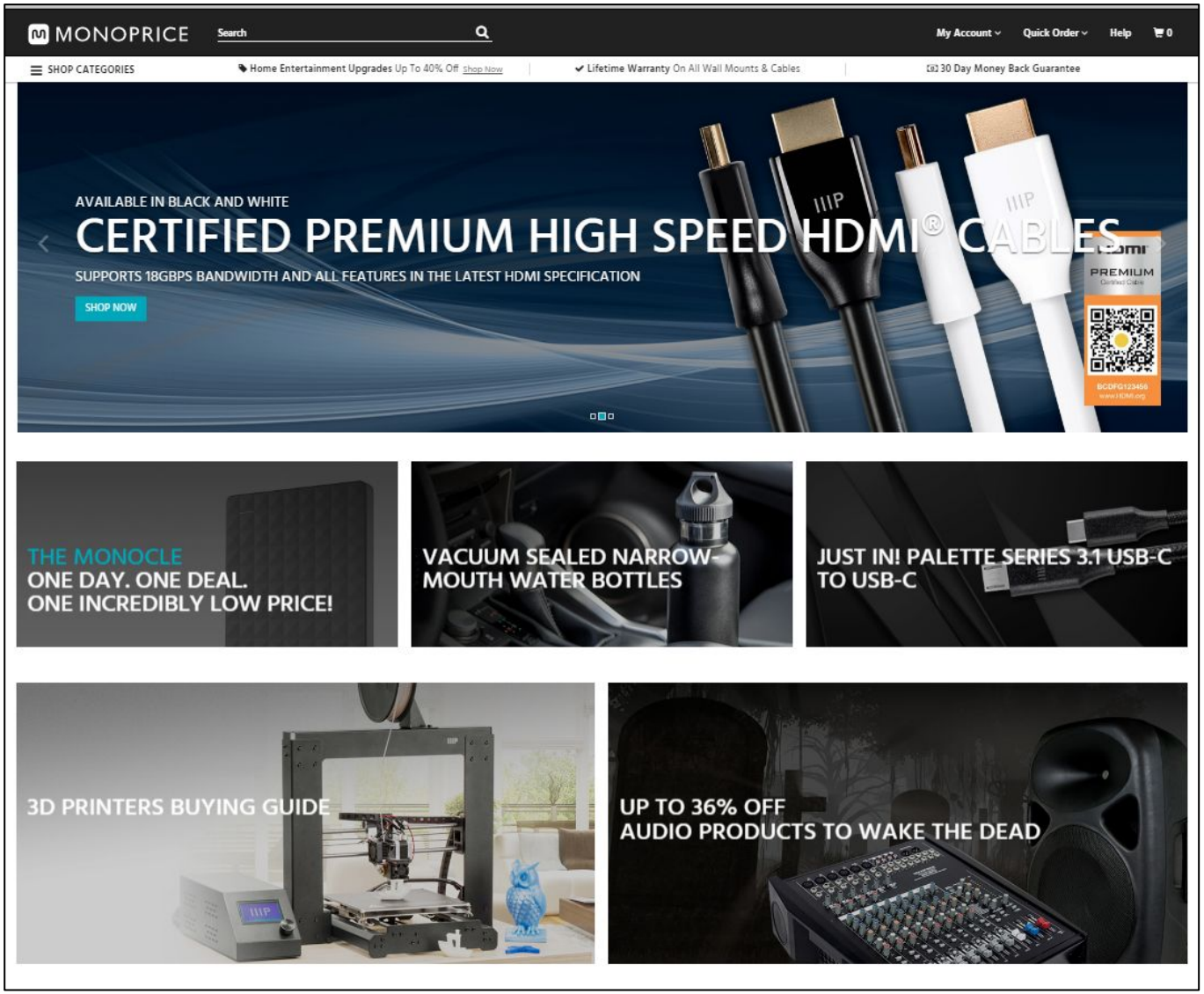
Site Component - Product Presentation
Conversion Heuristic - Motivation

User quote - *"The homepage was very long and i know they were showcasing their new boots as a seasonal item i would guess, but there was nothing that was showing me any collection or line of items that may just catch my eye in addition to what i came to the site to purchase".*

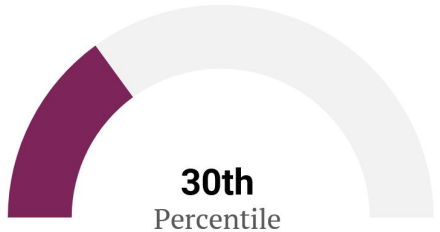
User quote - *"The site was very easy to navigate and find what I was looking for. The menu choices were very clear and I was able to get to what I was looking for without having to use the search function".*

Non-adherence example

Guideline #14. Show products and/or promotions with the widest appeal - in order to get them to click anywhere/interact with the page

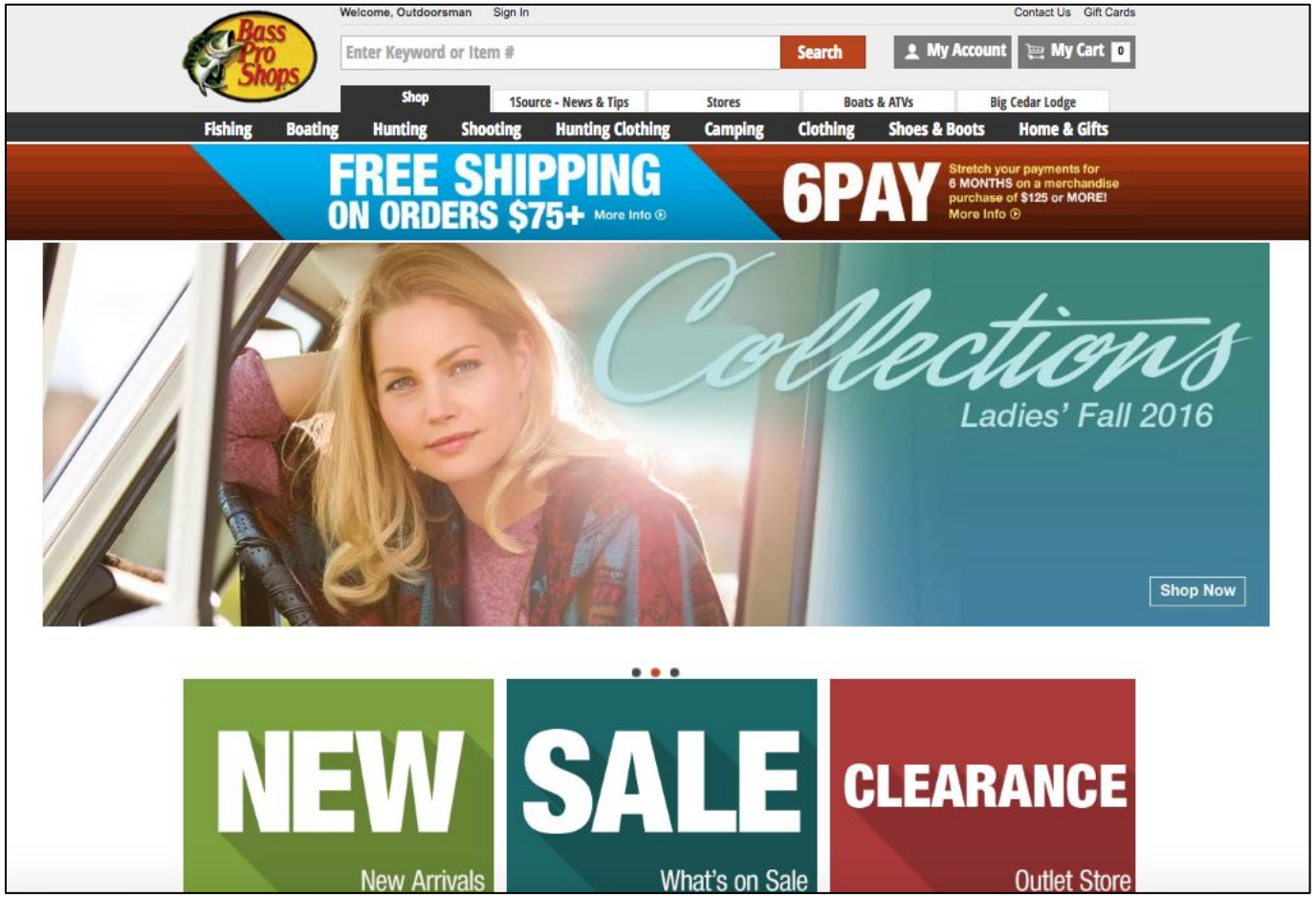


Monoprice: Ranked in the bottom 30th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. Monoprice is displaying their current promotion on the majority of the homepage above the fold. While the promotion is there, the background photo of a sunset provides zero motivation or temptation for users to start shopping the promotion. Photos of popular products instead would be more enticing.



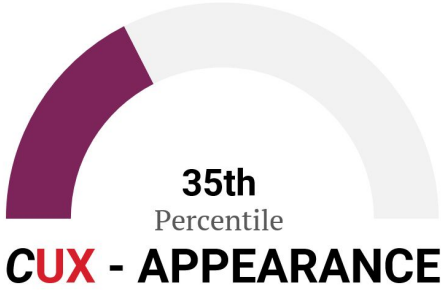
Non-adherence example

Guideline #14. Show products and/or promotions with the widest appeal - in order to get them to click anywhere/interact with the page



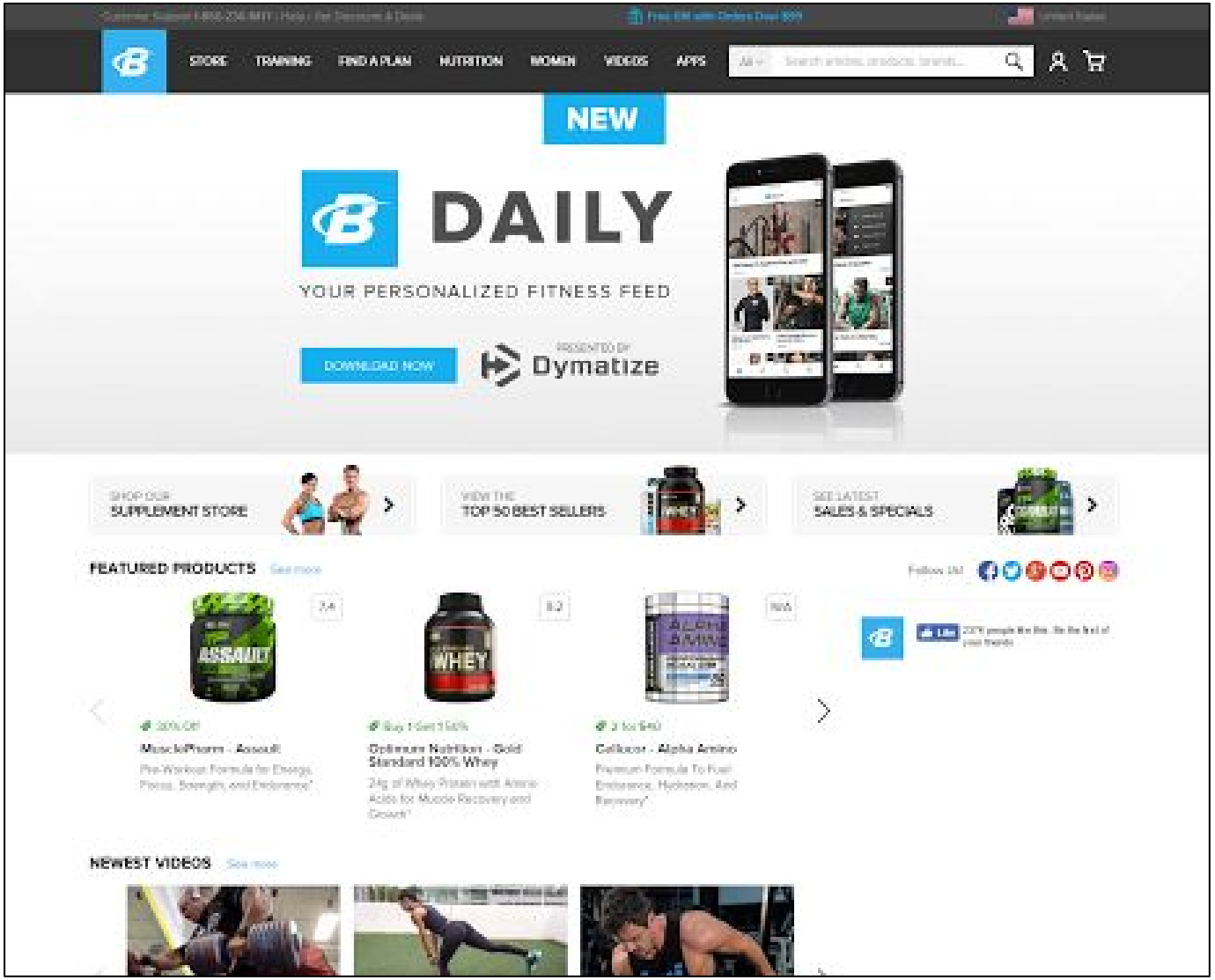
Bass Pro Shops: Ranked in the bottom 35th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. The three categories New, Sale, and Clearance would greatly benefit from being paired with complementary pictures. If users can preview what they'll be getting a discount on by looking at a photo, they'll be much more likely to shop the category.

User quote - *"The landing site is not at all welcoming, or giving any sense of the site's "personality." Instead, it's just a swarm of ads for a site the user is already on. The banners and boxes are all jampacked together, and each one is packed to the gills with colors and pictures and text of all different fonts and sizes, some of it blinking or moving, and most of it YELLING AT THE USER IN ALL CAPS."*



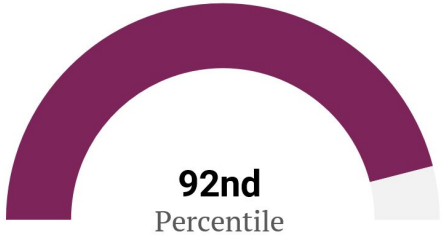
Adherence example

Guideline #14. Show products and/or promotions with the widest appeal - in order to get them to click anywhere/interact with the page



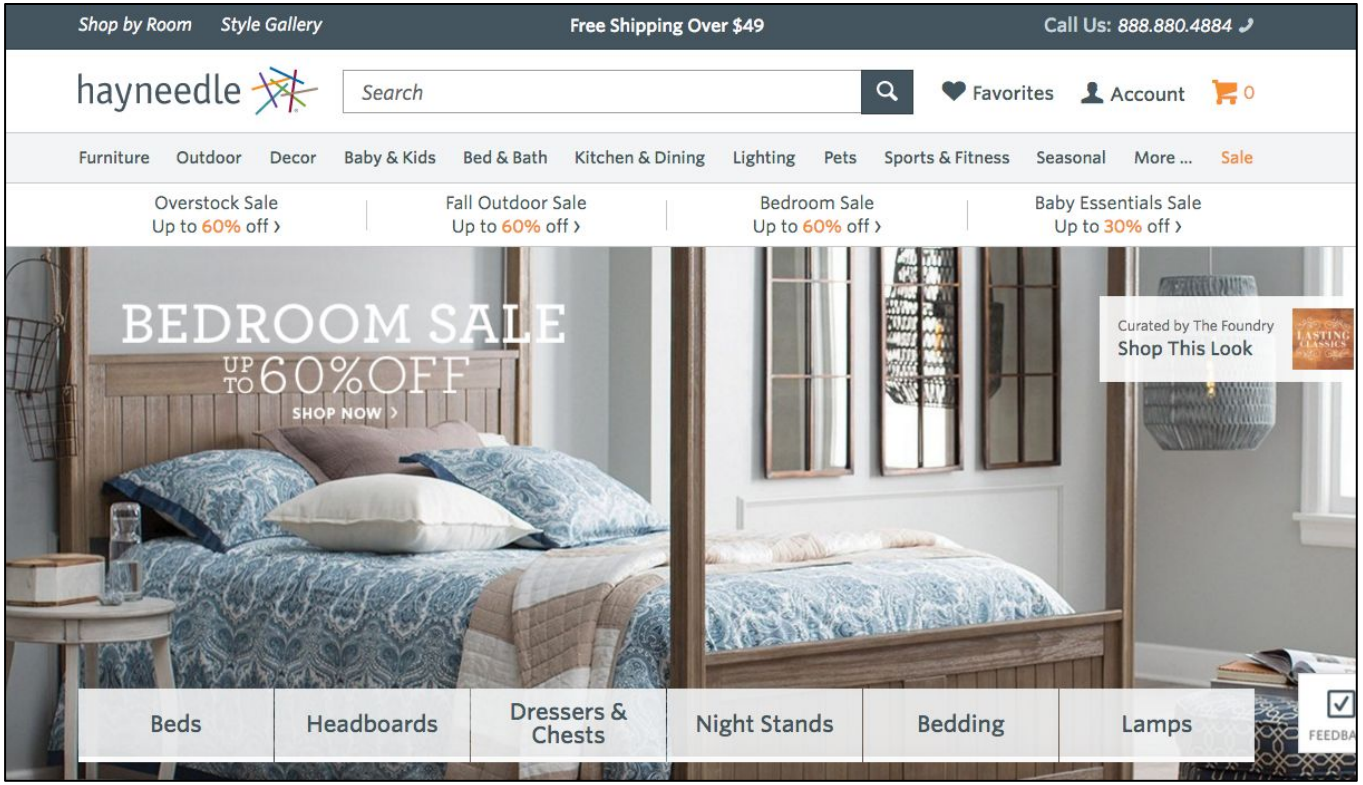
BodyBuilding.com: Ranked in the top 92nd percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. There is a prominent link to the 50 most popular products, paired with photos of various products in the list. The Sales & Specials category is also paired with various product pictures. The high quality food photography tempts shoppers to check out one of the website's most popular product categories as well.

User quote - *"I like that it's a one-stop-shop for everything that I need for the gym."*



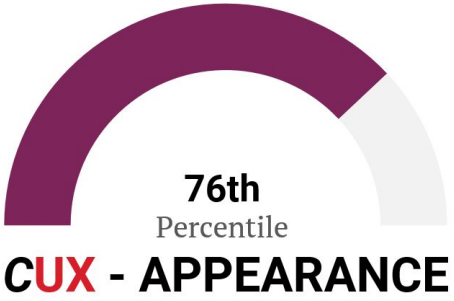
Adherence example

Guideline #14. Show products and/or promotions with the widest appeal - in order to get them to click anywhere/interact with the page



Hayneedle: Ranked in the top 76th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. Hayneedle does a great job coupling their bedroom promotion with photography showcasing various products. Users will get inspired by this bespoke imagery *and* will understand that the sale applies to a variety of products in the bedroom category.

User quote - *"I like the format and the ease of finding general categories. Things like furniture or home decor were easy enough to find before I started working through the subcategories."*



Guideline #15. Show products in usage context

Imagine a photo of a sofa with a plain white background. You might wonder how big the sofa is relative to other elements of a living room. You may also wonder about the actual color of the sofa, and whether it's soft or firm.

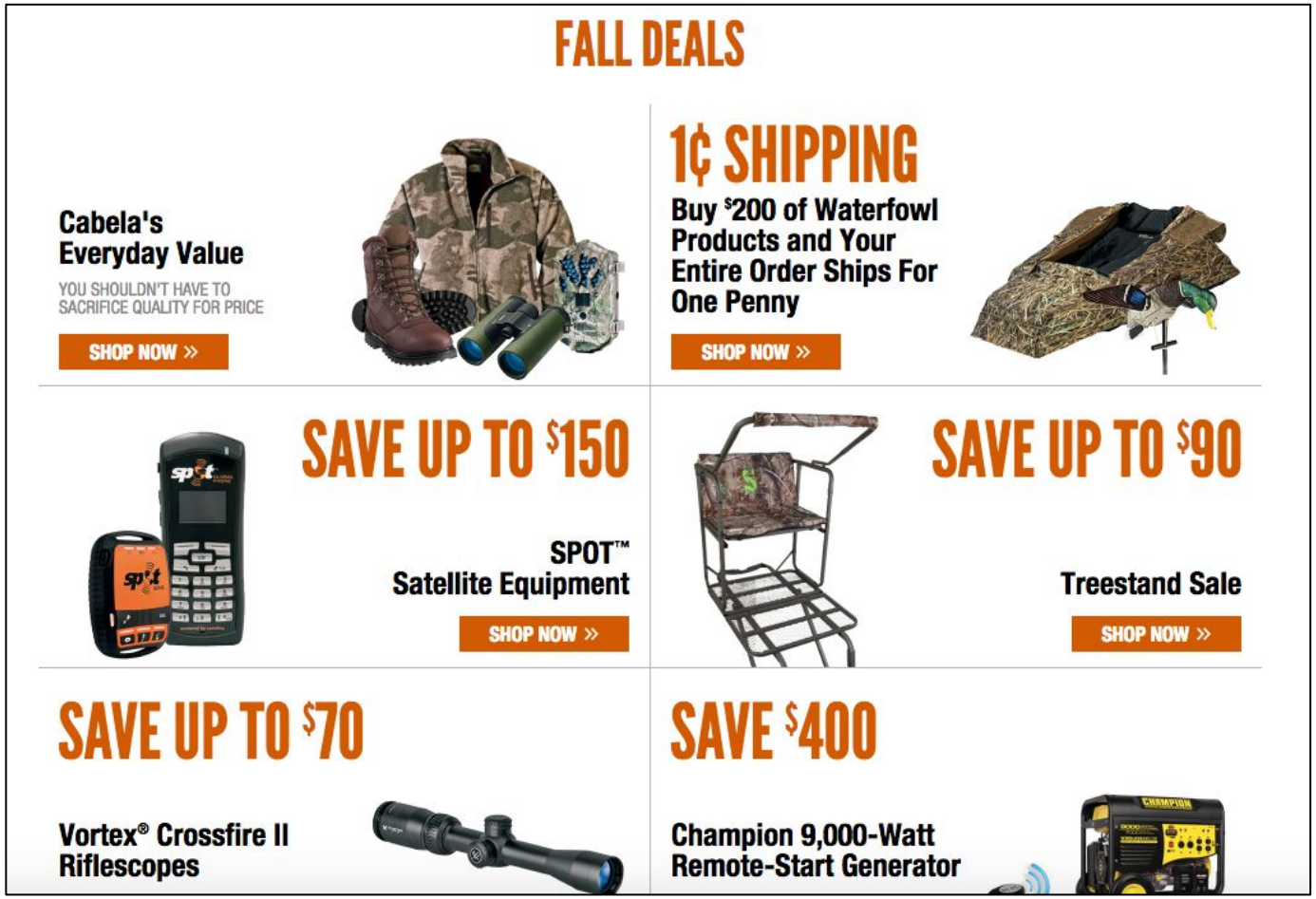
Now imagine a picture of the same sofa in a living room with a couple relaxing on it. There's a throw blanket and some accent pillows. You can tell by the couple that the sofa is big enough for three people to comfortably sit on, and that the cushions are soft and yielding. You can tell the sofa's color is a cool tone.

When put in context, users can better visualize what a product will be like in their own lives. They immediately understand aspects of the product that they'd have no knowledge of without context.

Site Component - Product Presentation
Conversion Heuristic - Motivation

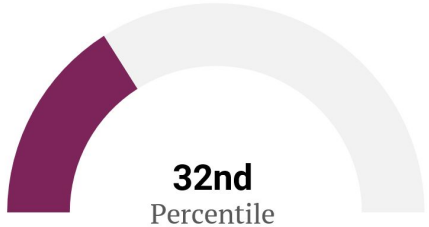
Non-adherence example

Guideline #15. Show products in usage context



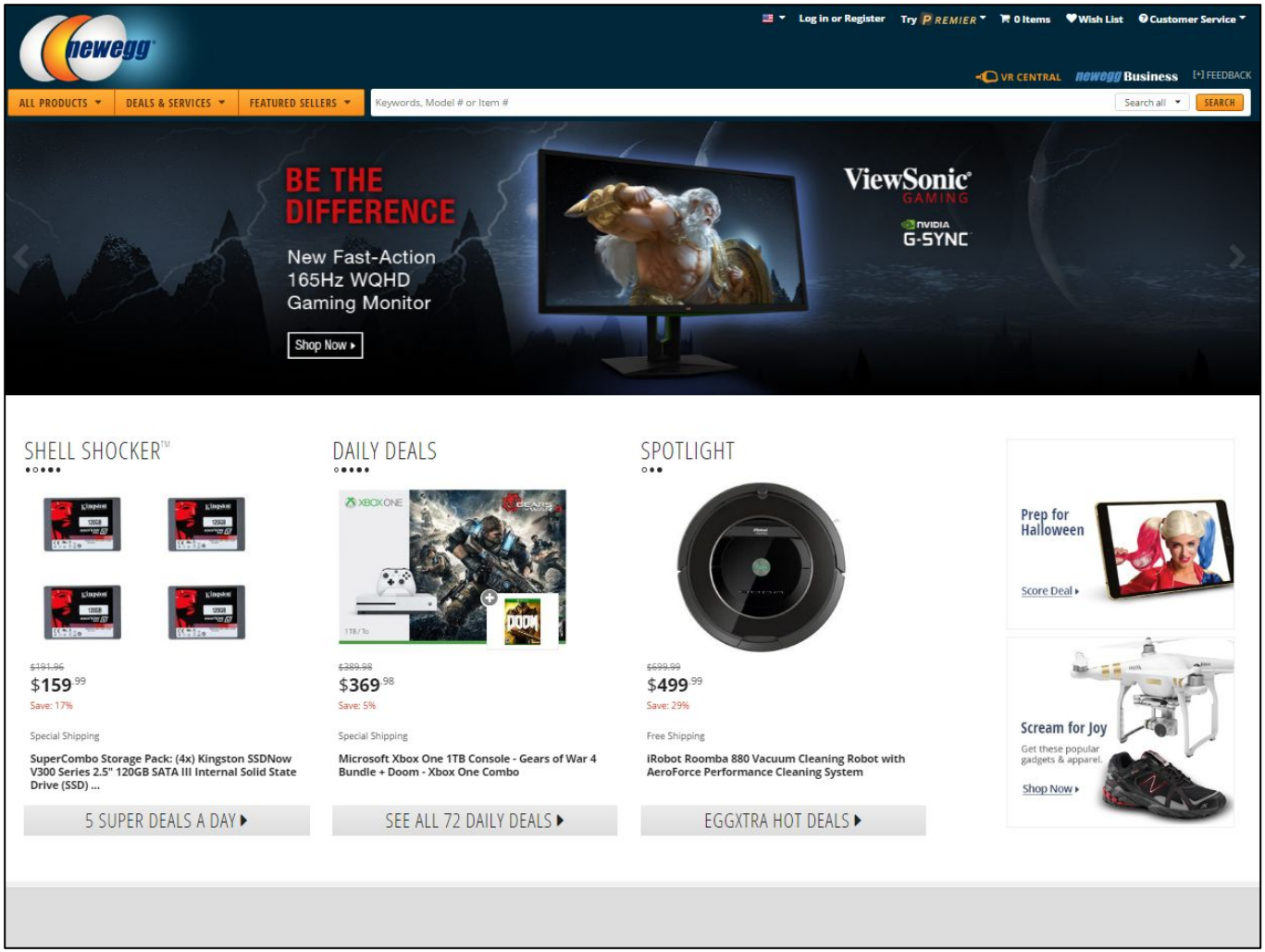
Cabela's: Ranked in the bottom 32nd percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. These product pictures would be more enticing and informational in context.

User quote - *"There isn't anything particular that would make we want to buy this this website instead of the competitors. The main thing that stood out was that it is a one stop shop for all camping needs, but it didn't seem to be any better than other companies that provide the same items."*

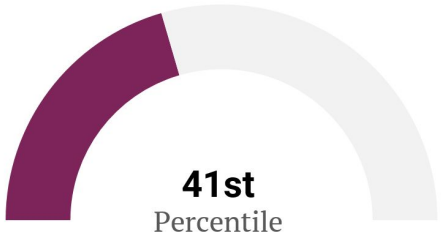


Non-adherence example

Guideline #15. Show products in usage context



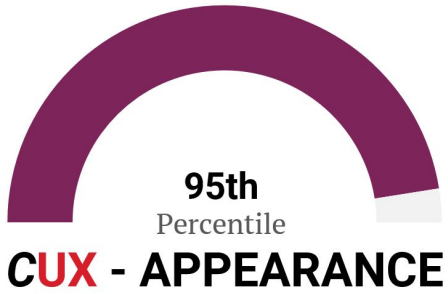
Newegg: Ranked in the bottom 41st percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. This picture would be much better off in an accurate context for Newegg's TV promotion. If the products were in a living room, site visitors could better understand how big the TVs really are and what they'd look like in their own homes.



Adherence example

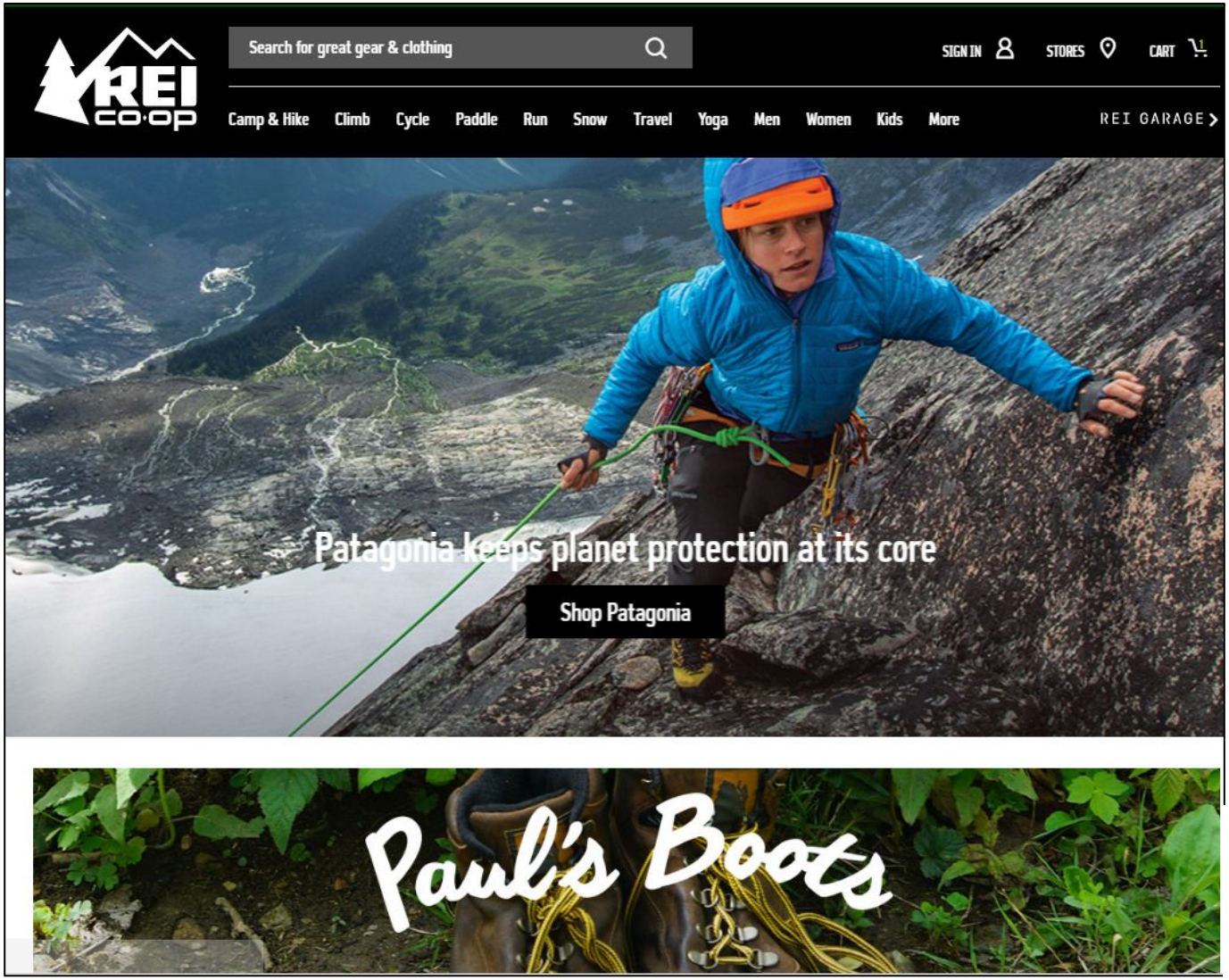
Guideline #15. Show products in usage context

Petsmart: Ranked in the top 95th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. These costume product pictures show users just how adorable their pets would look in Petsmart Halloween garb.



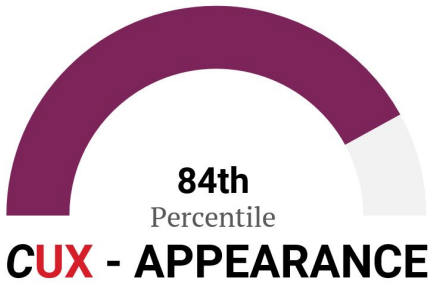
Adherence example

Guideline #15. Show products in usage context



REI: Ranked in the top 84th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. This product picture instantly communicates the product's true colors, textures, and relative sizes.

User quote - *"Layout looks nice and good pictures."*



Time after time, research has shown that high-quality photos have a powerful effect. A low-quality image communicates a brand that isn't concerned with quality, and probably makes cheap products. One of the smartest investments to make is in professional photography.

Joann Peck & Suzanne B. Shu of UCLA published a study called "The Effect of Mere Touch on Perceived Ownership" that found that when the imagery of an object was vivid and detailed, it increased consumers' perceived ownership of the product.

If you don't have the revenue to hire a professional photographer, there is absolutely still hope. It's amazing how much quality is packed into smartphones and other less expensive camera options. With a little planning and some basic knowledge on how lighting and composition work, you can take unique, high quality photographs that better represent your brand.

Site Component - Product Presentation
Conversion Heuristic - Motivation

User quote - When asked why they would buy from this website and not a competitor: "*The images sell the brand and the products. They look to be of quality*".

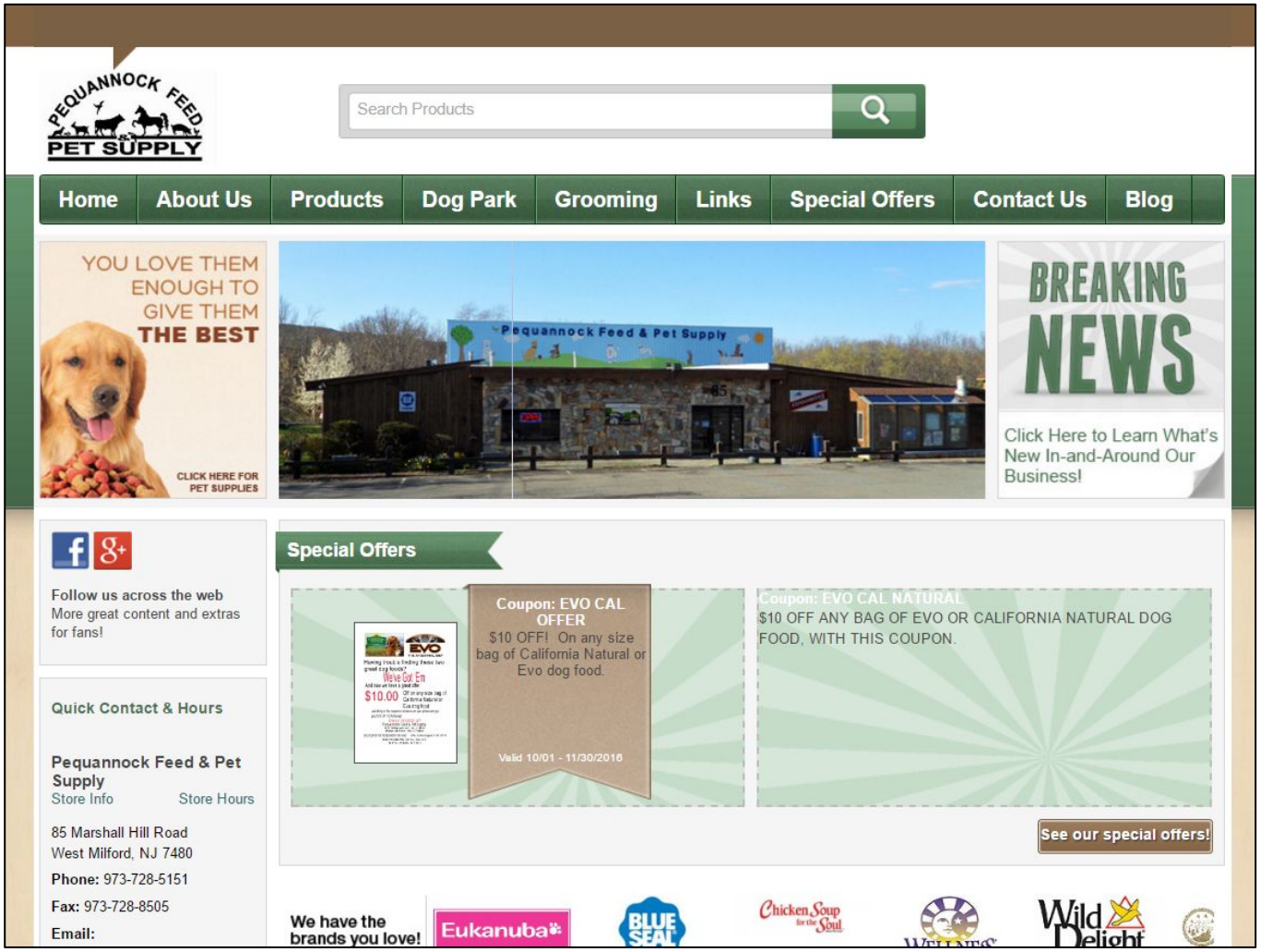
User quote - "*image on the website spoke to the craftsmanship of the product*".

User quote - "*I like that the pictures of the products were big, and it looks very clean*".

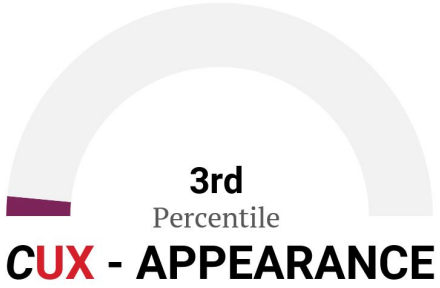
User quote - "*Nice wide array of products with good pictures*".

Non-adherence example

Guideline #16. Invest in high-quality photography and product images

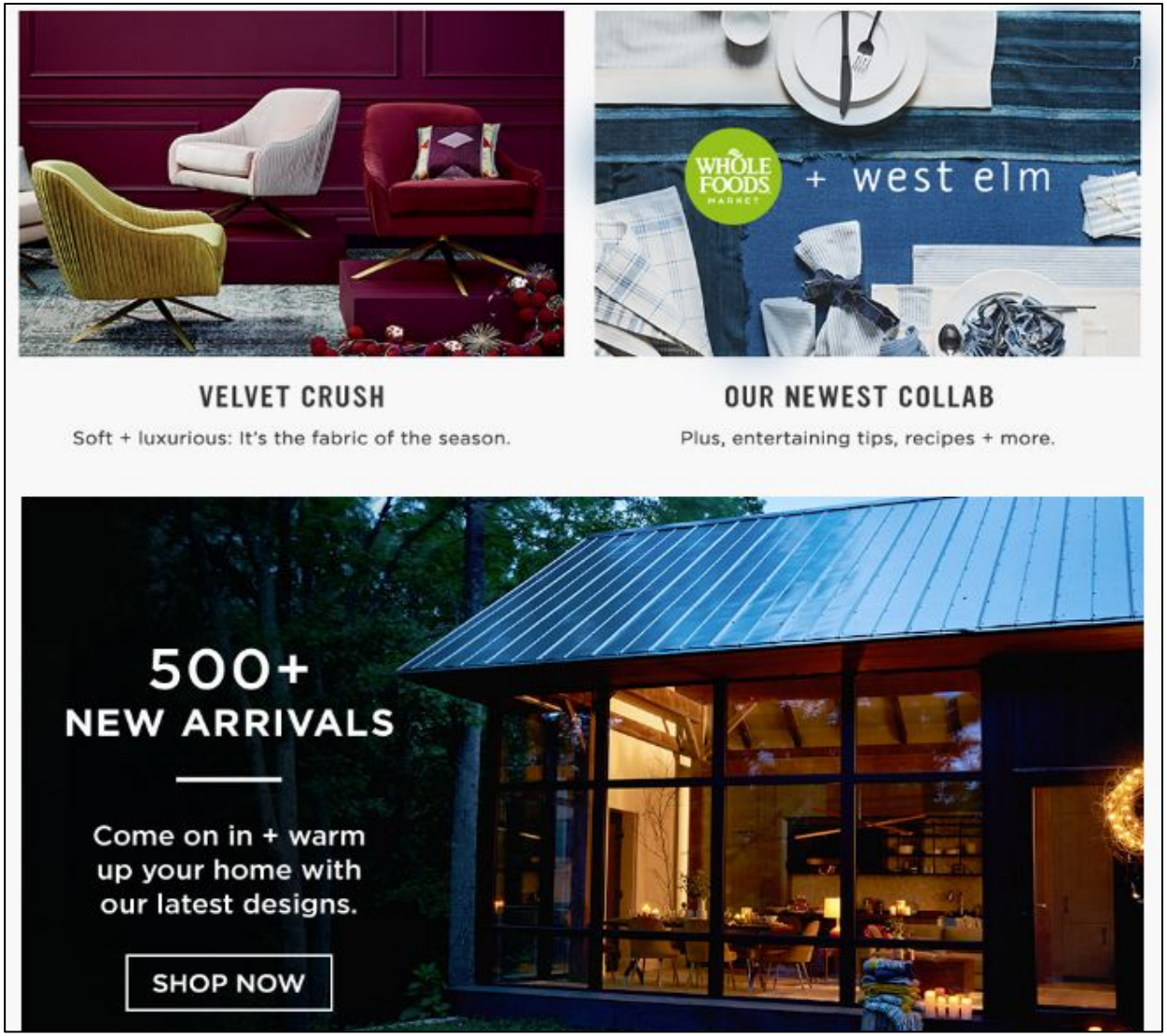


Pequannock Feed: Ranked in the bottom 3rd percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. The amateur photo of the brick and mortar location brings down the overall quality of this website.



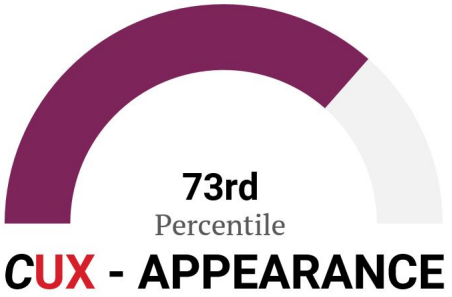
Adherence example

Guideline #16. Invest in high-quality photography and product images



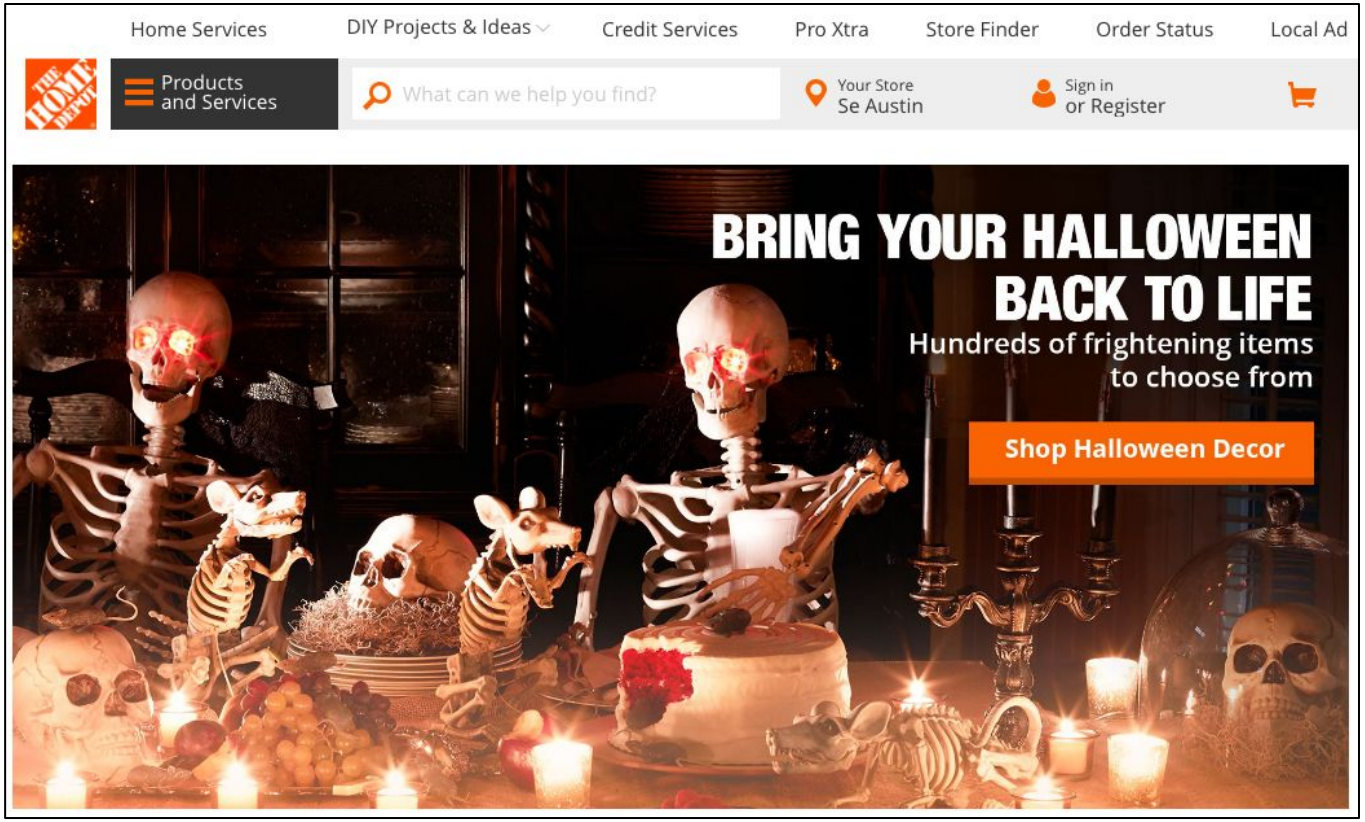
User quote - *"I was easily able to find and add the specific items that I wanted based on the pictures."*

West Elm: Ranked in the top 73rd percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. These are some product photos from the homepage. The photographs are high-quality not just in terms of the resolution but also the composition techniques involved. These photos are a strong argument for hiring a professional photographer.

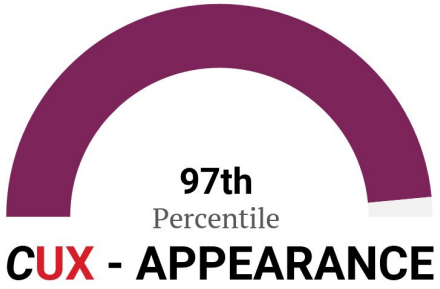


Adherence example

Guideline #16. Invest in high-quality photography and product images



Home Depot: Ranked in the top 97th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. This expertly executed product picture manages to combine many products. The photographer set a fun scene perfectly suited for the Halloween decorations.



Guideline #17. Implement bespoke imagery to maximize perceived value and first impressions

When it comes to online imagery, it's not so much about having images, as it is about making sure those images to give the visitor a sense of texture, size, scale, detail, context & brand.

According to MDG Advertising, 67% of online shoppers rated high quality images as being "very important" to their purchase decision, which was slightly more than "product specific information," "long descriptions," and "reviews & ratings."

Bespoke imagery has a strong, positive influence on first impressions of a website. High-quality, custom photography communicates value to first time site visitors. Use bespoke imagery to create positive first impressions of a website.

Take our lesson on The Importance of Visual Design.

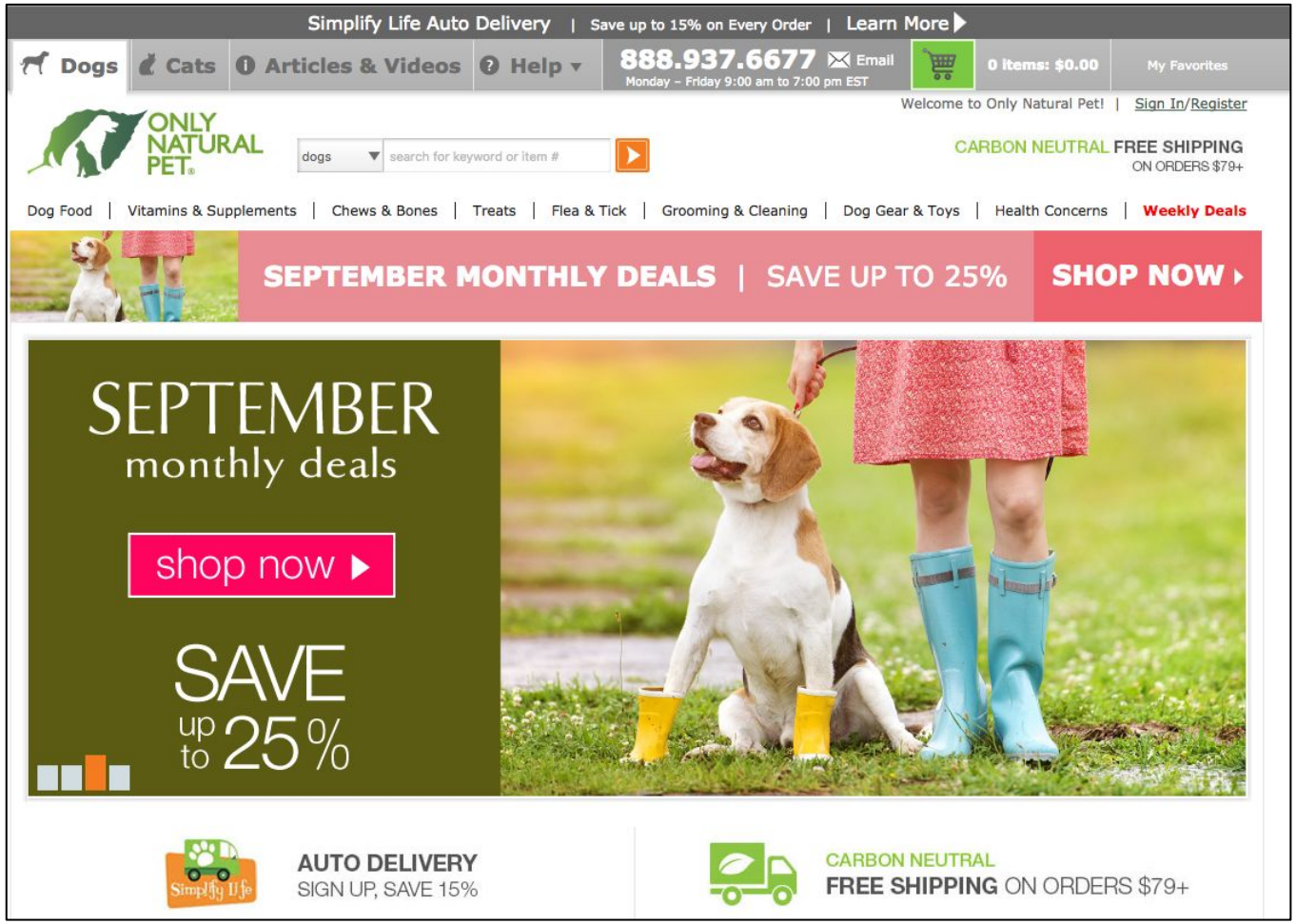
Site Component - Product Presentation
Conversion Heuristic - Motivation

User quote on what they liked about a site - *"The photos: The models where each individually photographed, not stock images. And there was an ethnic diversity which I like as well. The color scheme: The scheme was simple and easy on the eyes."*

User quote - *"the first image on the website spoke to the craftsmanship of the product".*

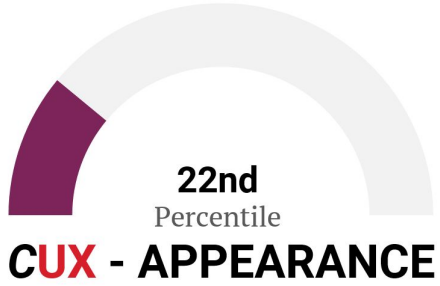
Non-adherence example

Guideline #17. Implement bespoke imagery to maximize perceived value and first impressions



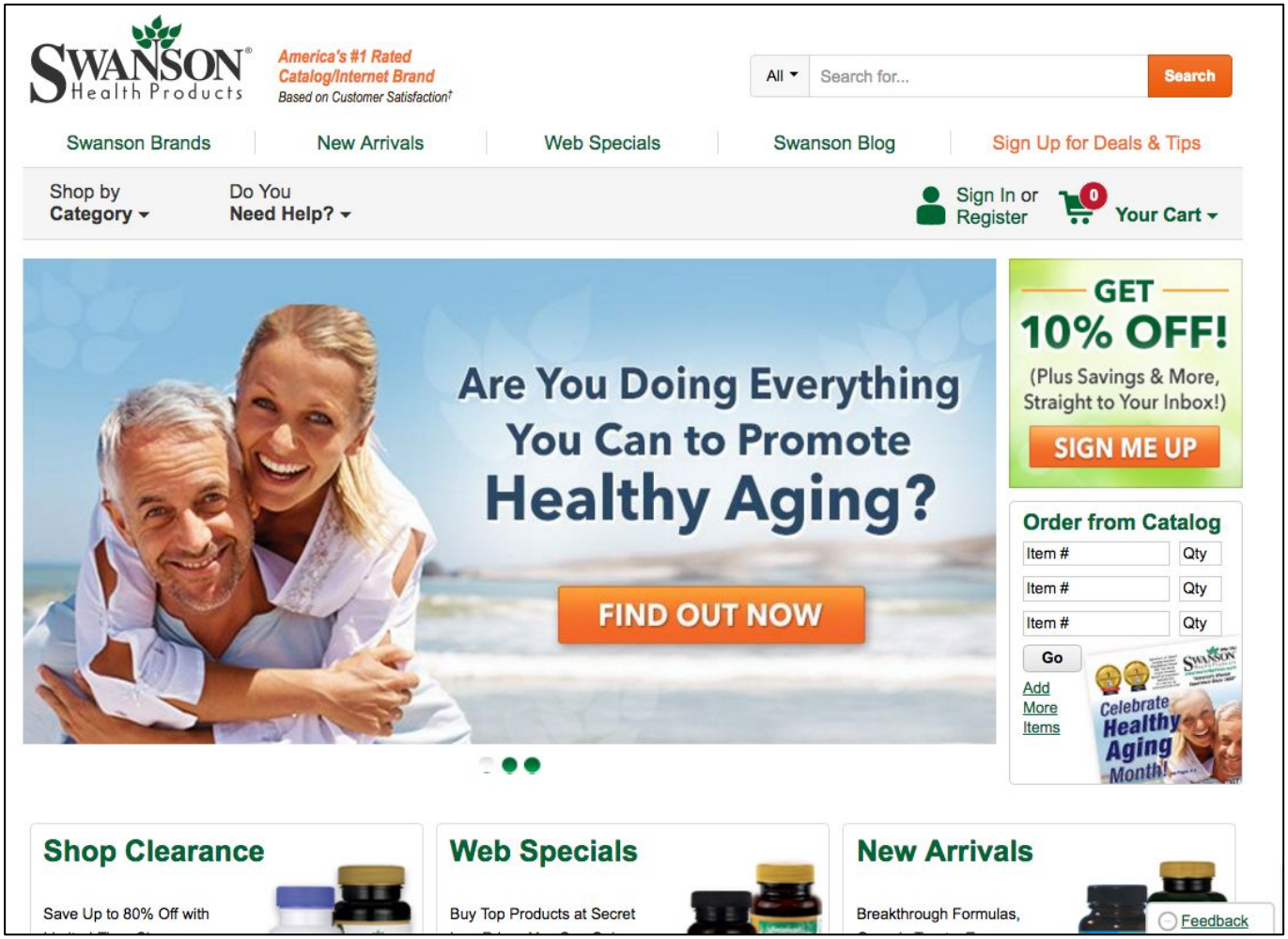
Only Natural Pet: Ranked in the bottom 22nd percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. The same stock photo is used twice above the fold on this homepage. Not only is the photo contrived and irrelevant (are they selling dog shoes?), but the repetition of the same image creates a careless, poorly-executed design.

User quote - *"It was very cluttered on the home page".*



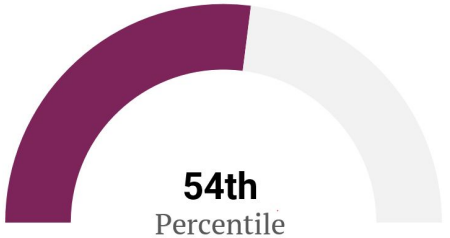
Non-adherence example

Guideline #17. Implement bespoke imagery to maximize perceived value and first impressions



Swanson Vitamins: Ranked in the 54th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. The stereotypical stock photo does little for this homepage. The real estate it takes up should be more wisely used for other content.

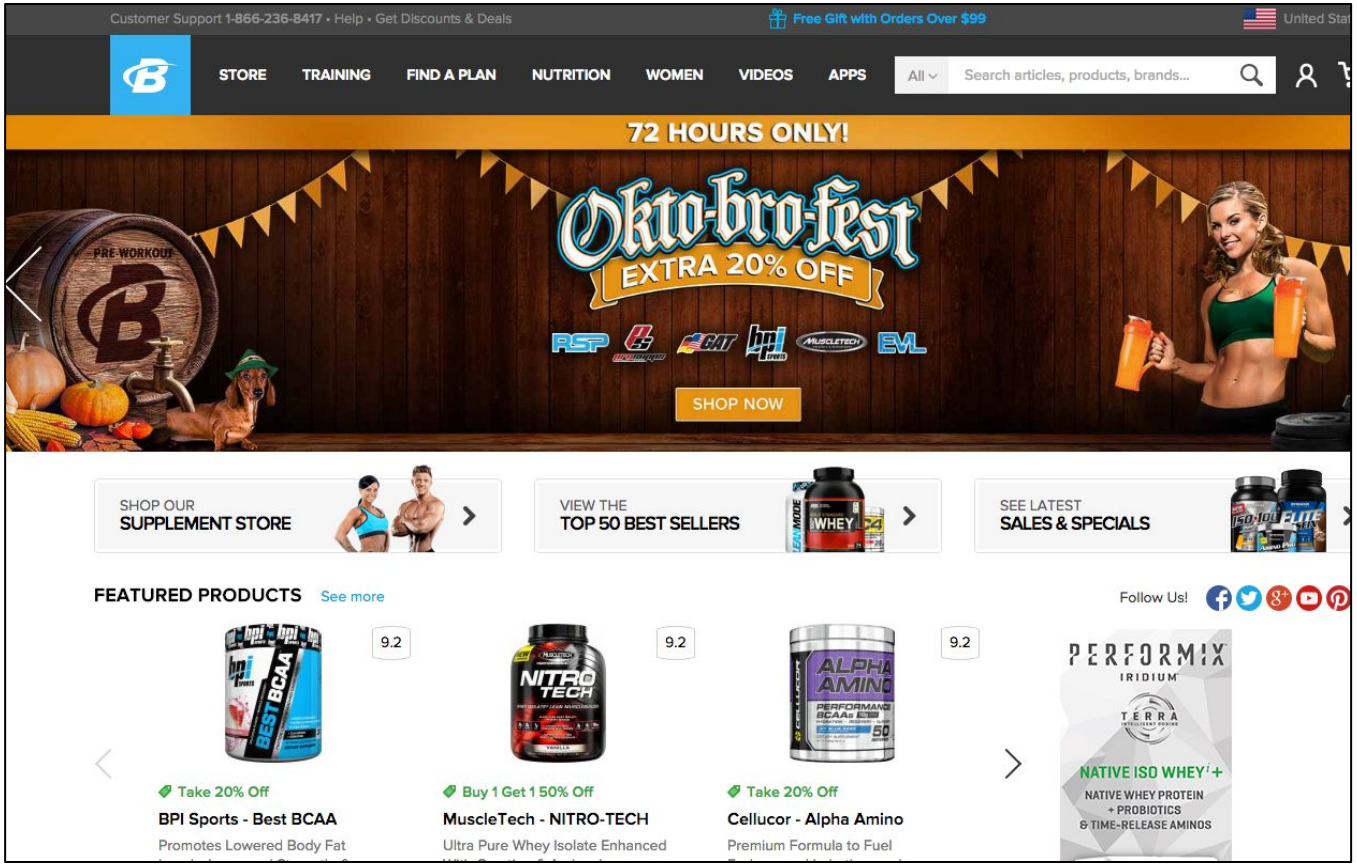
User quote - When asked what they would do to improve the site: *"I would update ... As it is now the site gives me the impression that it is tailored to a more elderly clientele"*



CUX - APPEARANCE

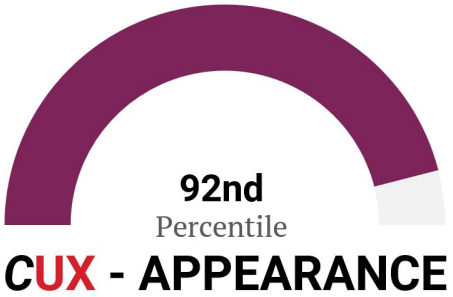
Adherence example

Guideline #17. Implement bespoke imagery to maximize perceived value and first impressions



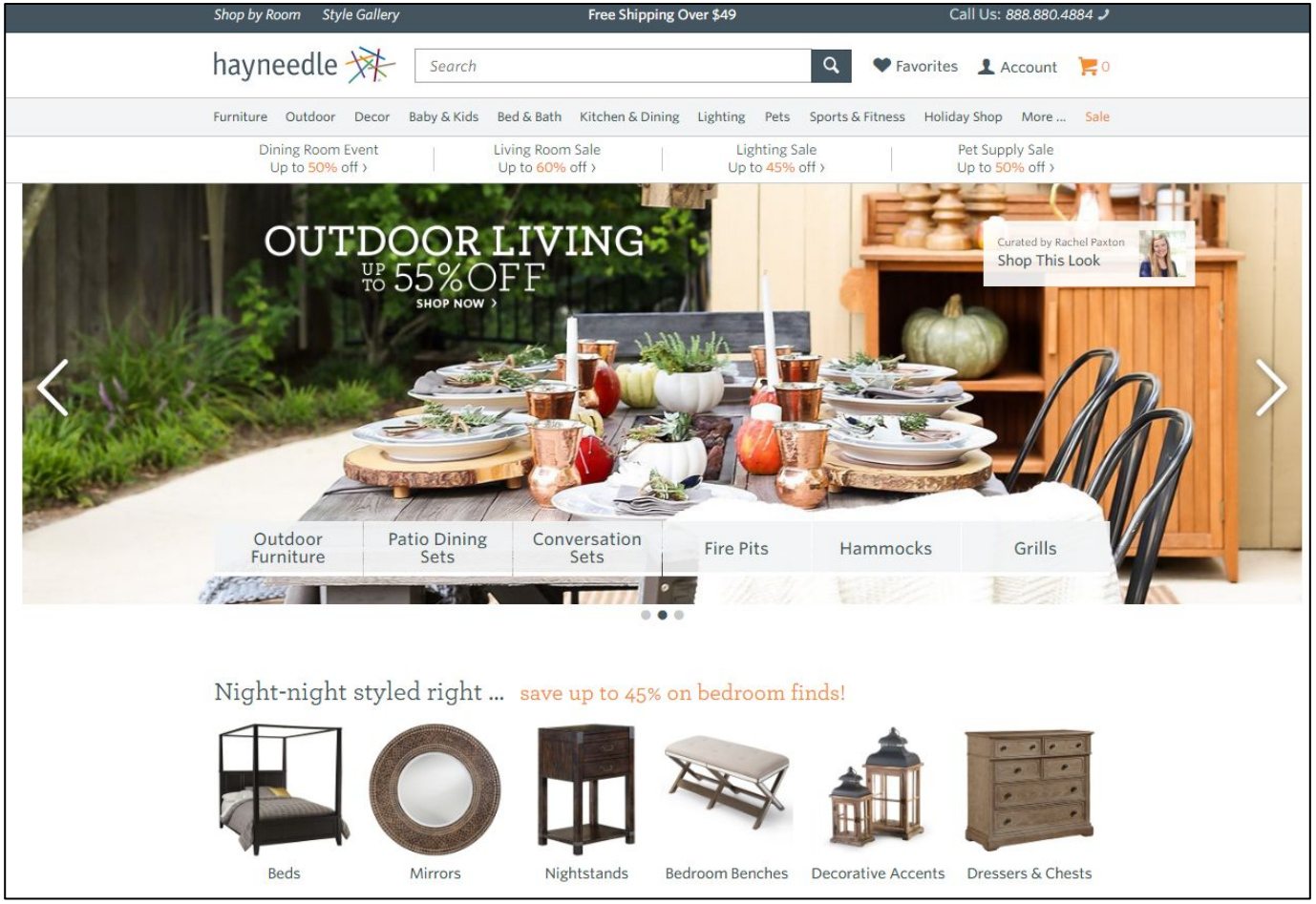
BodyBuilding.com: Ranked in the top 92nd percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. The large "Okto-bro-fest" banner has been tailored for the site's current seasonal promotion. The graphic design communicates a brand that is well acquainted with its audience.

User quote - *"There were a lot of engaging images and the fonts were bright and easy to see."*

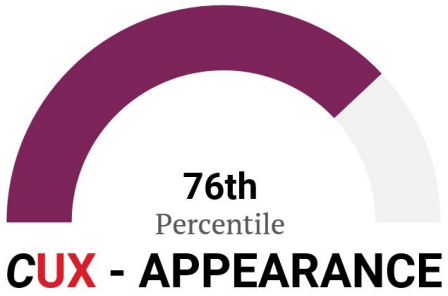


Adherence example

Guideline #17. Implement bespoke imagery to maximize perceived value and first impressions



Hayneedle: Ranked in the top 76th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. This photo captures the fall season by incorporating warm autumn tones and festive pumpkin decor. The high-quality photo also includes a wide variety of sale merchandise. Users who see this bespoke imagery will be impressed by its quality and relevance, and will ultimately be interested in exploring the fall sale.



Guideline #18. Don't show more than four products per row; bigger thumbnail images help people understand the product better

Site Component - Product Presentation
Conversion Heuristic - Motivation

One straightforward way to advertise your product selection to site visitors is by displaying product thumbnails on the homepage. Thumbnails instantly communicate what products look like and jump starts product browsing. People want to see a product before they buy. They'd actually like to try it out, give it a spin, but since you can't do that online, images have to do the trick. Because the purpose of a thumbnail is to display a product's design or appearance, it should be big enough to see.

Using large product photos is a low-hanging fruit, especially if you sell wearables – clothing, jewelry, shoes, watches and so on. It helps users determine if the product is right for them, a crucial function of ecommerce.

As a rule of thumb, product thumbnails should be displayed at a maximum of four products per row (three thumbnails per row is preferable). Users should to be visually engaged and interested in the thumbnails. This won't happen if they're small and insignificant.

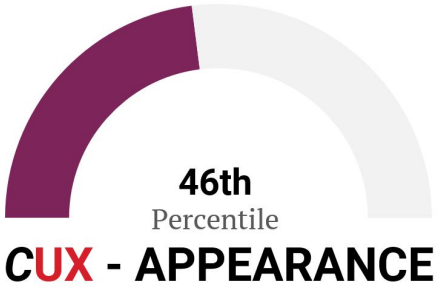
Non-adherence example

Guideline #18. Don't show more than four products per row; bigger thumbnail images help people understand the product better

L.L. Bean: Ranked in the 46th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. This thumbnail list is displayed towards the bottom of the homepage. The thumbnails are so small that, although these products are top items, they're not tempting to click on or look into.

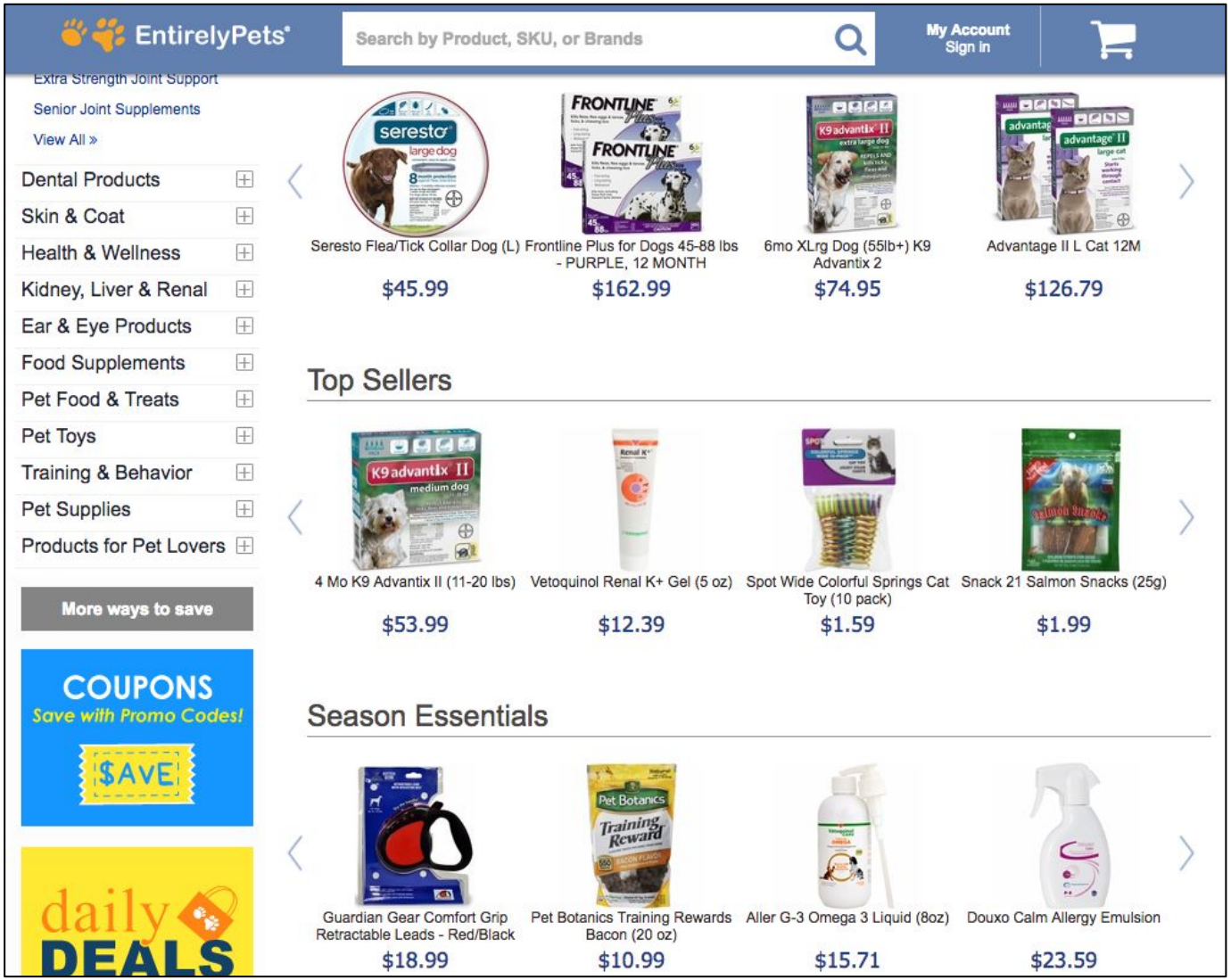
User quote - When asked what one thing they would change about the site: *"Small print. My eyes are starting to show early signs of aging. I don't particularly love the size or type of text used."*

User quote - When asked what one thing they would change about the site: *"The site is small in its width with current standards and there is more of the page that is usable and viewable with modern day monitors."*



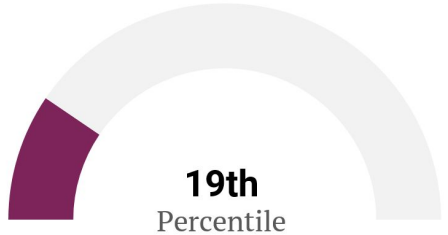
Non-adherence example

Guideline #18. Don't show more than four products per row; bigger thumbnail images help people understand the product better



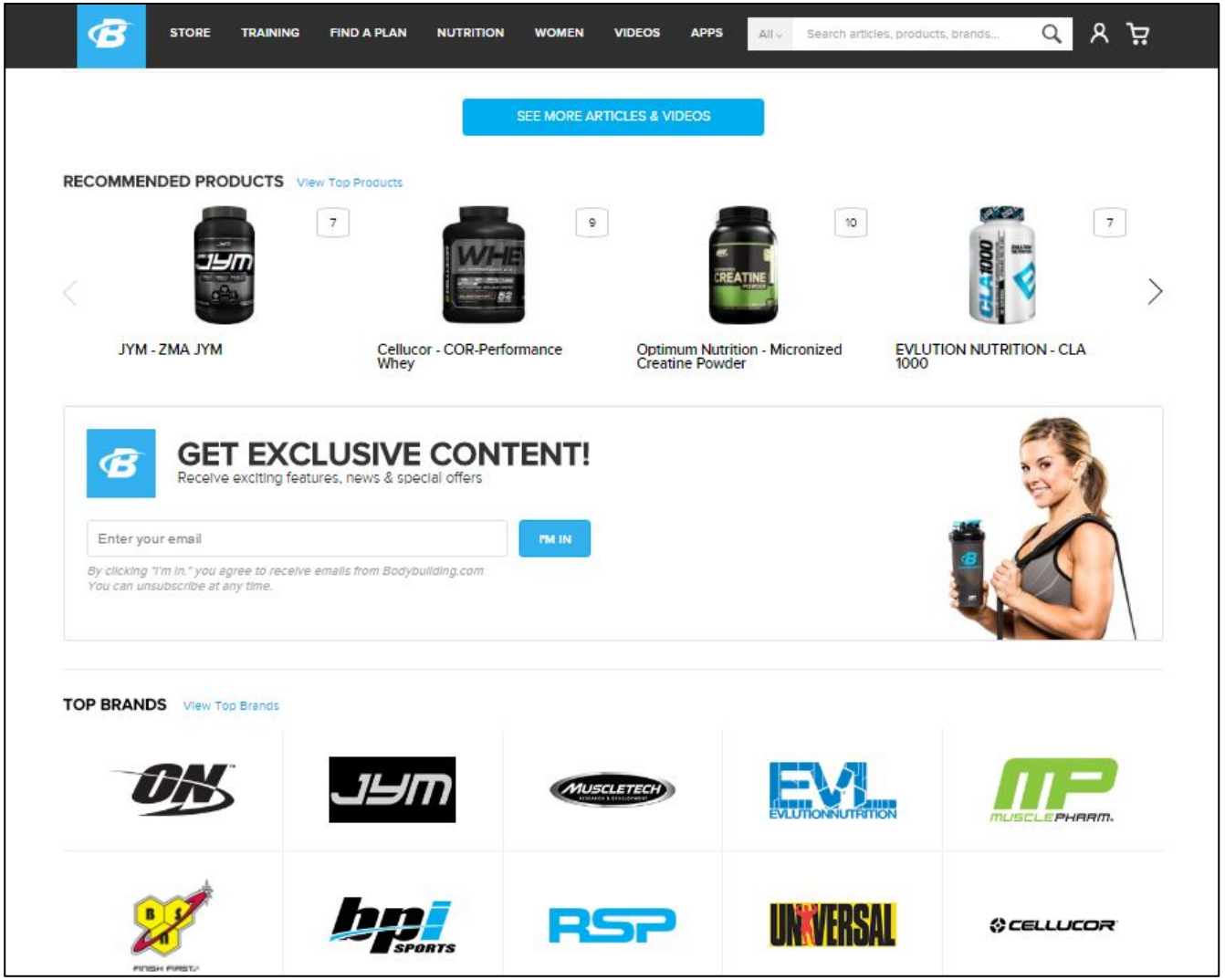
Entirely Pets: Ranked in the bottom 19th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. This is a great example of instances in which four products per row is still too many. Some products are so small —with cut-off text descriptions— that it's impossible to understand the product's purpose. Three, or perhaps even just two, products per row would be more visually appealing and understandable to shoppers.

User quote - *"The site had a clutterly feel to me. I would clean it up a bit"*



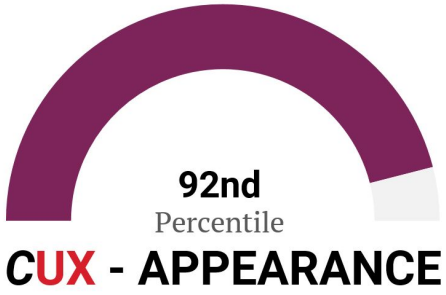
Adherence example

Guideline #18. Don't show more than four products per row; bigger thumbnail images help people understand the product better



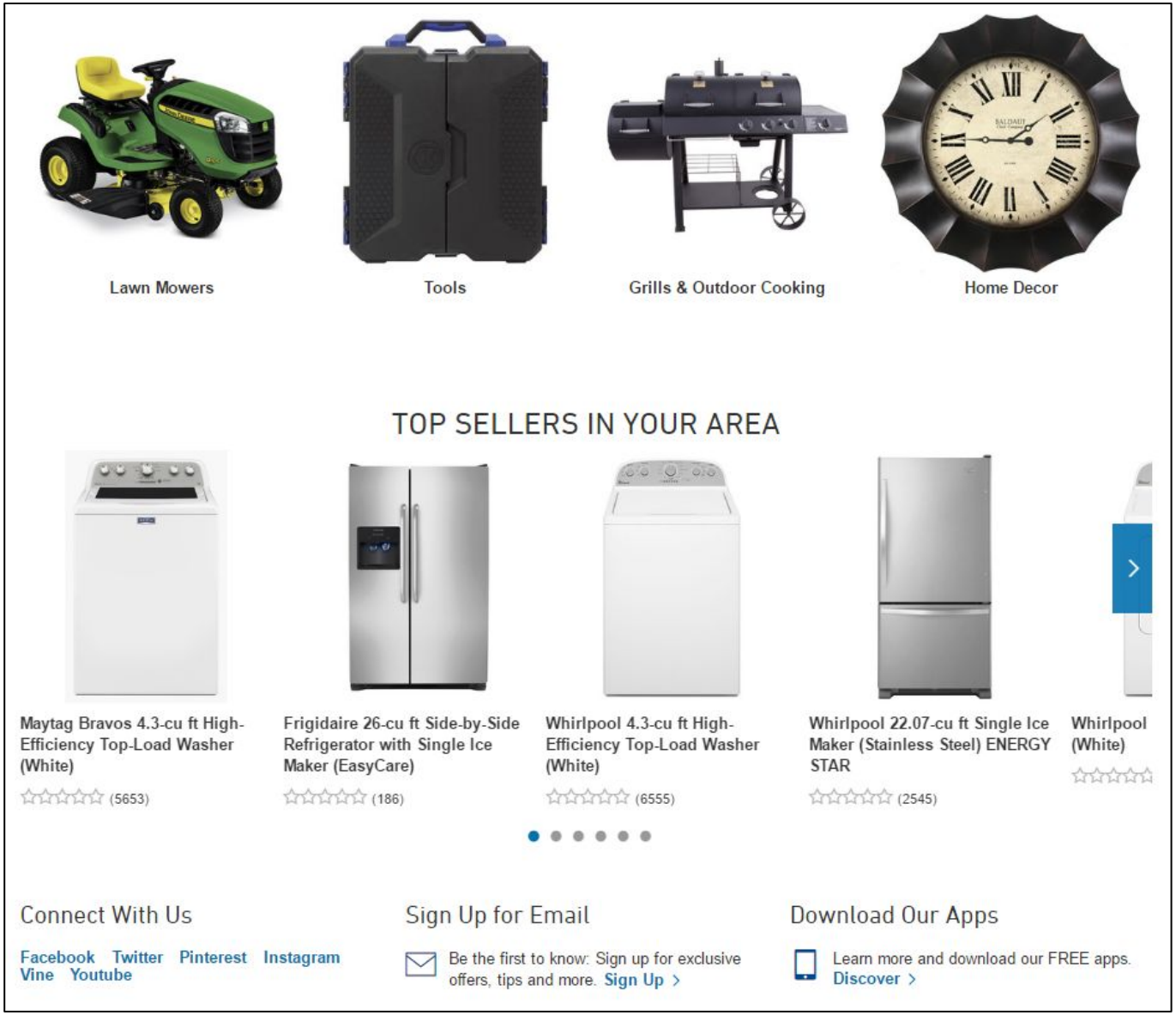
BodyBuilding.com: Ranked in the top 92nd percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. These thumbnails are large enough for users to see the package and read the labels with ease. Additionally, the thumbnails include text describing each product's benefits and specifications.

User quote - When asked what they liked most about the site: *"There were a lot of engaging images and the fonts were bright and easy to see."*

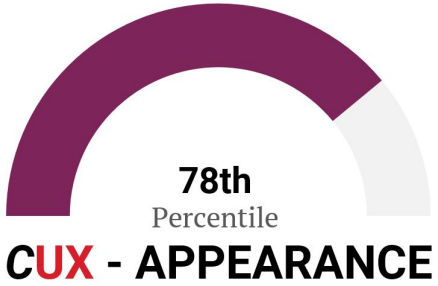


Adherence example

Guideline #18. Don't show more than four products per row; bigger thumbnail images help people understand the product better



Lowe's: Ranked in the top 78th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. These thumbnails are big. They showcase each product's design and include information-packed titles (along with number of reviews, which communicate their popularity). There are no small labels or descriptions that cannot be read. In this situation, four thumbnails per row absolutely works.



Guideline #19. When using thumbnails with product pictures, sometimes a few products better represent a category than just one (i.e. for accessories category on shoe website, a thumbnail for shoe polish and shoe laces)

Because humans are such visual creatures, it can be helpful to pair product category lists with thumbnail images. Instead of mulling over a text list, visitors' eyes will instinctively jump to the image of what it is they're interested in.

Choosing a relevant product image is usually a simple task. If the product category is Dresses, use a picture of a dress. Sometimes, however, the product category is more nuanced. If a footwear website has an Accessories category, for example, finding one representative image becomes more tasking.

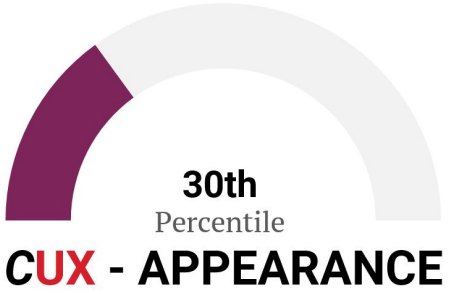
In these situations, it's better to include a few images in the thumbnail that communicate the breadth of the category (e.g shoe polish and orthotics inserts).

Site Component - Product Presentation
Conversion Heuristic - Motivation

Non-adherence example

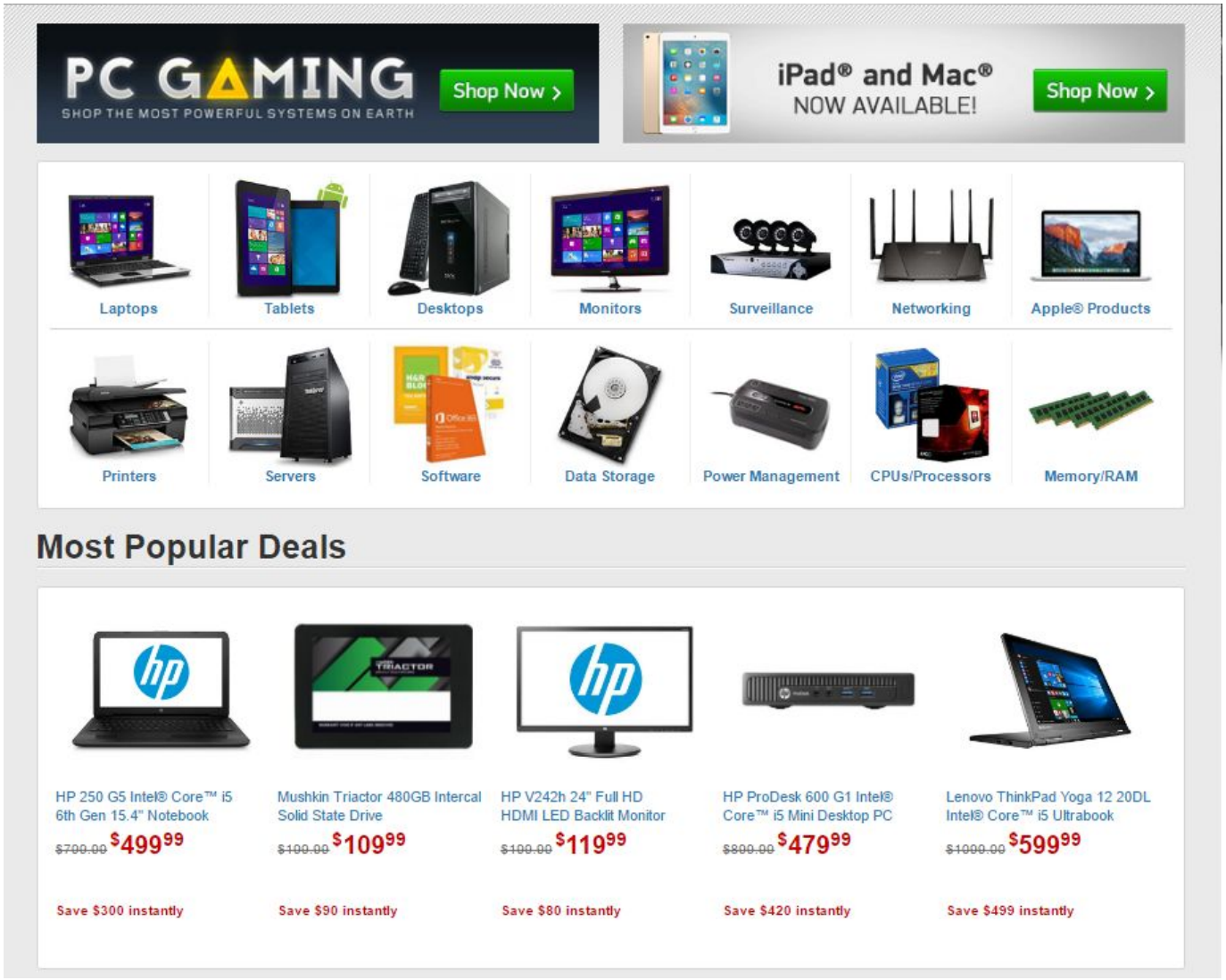
Guideline #19. When using thumbnails to represent product categories, sometimes a few products better represent a category than just one

Monoprice: Ranked in the bottom 30th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. This sale on the homepage advertises musical instruments and shows a violin. However, there's more than just instruments on sale in this category (there are accessories and cleaning supplies too). The thumbnail should display a variety of products to correspond with the contents of the sale collection.

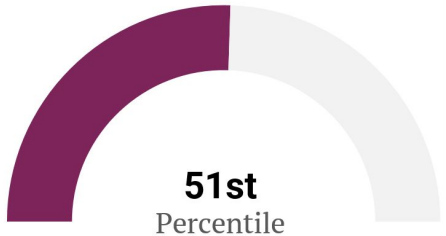


Non-adherence example

Guideline #19. When using thumbnails to represent product categories, sometimes a few products better represent a category than just one

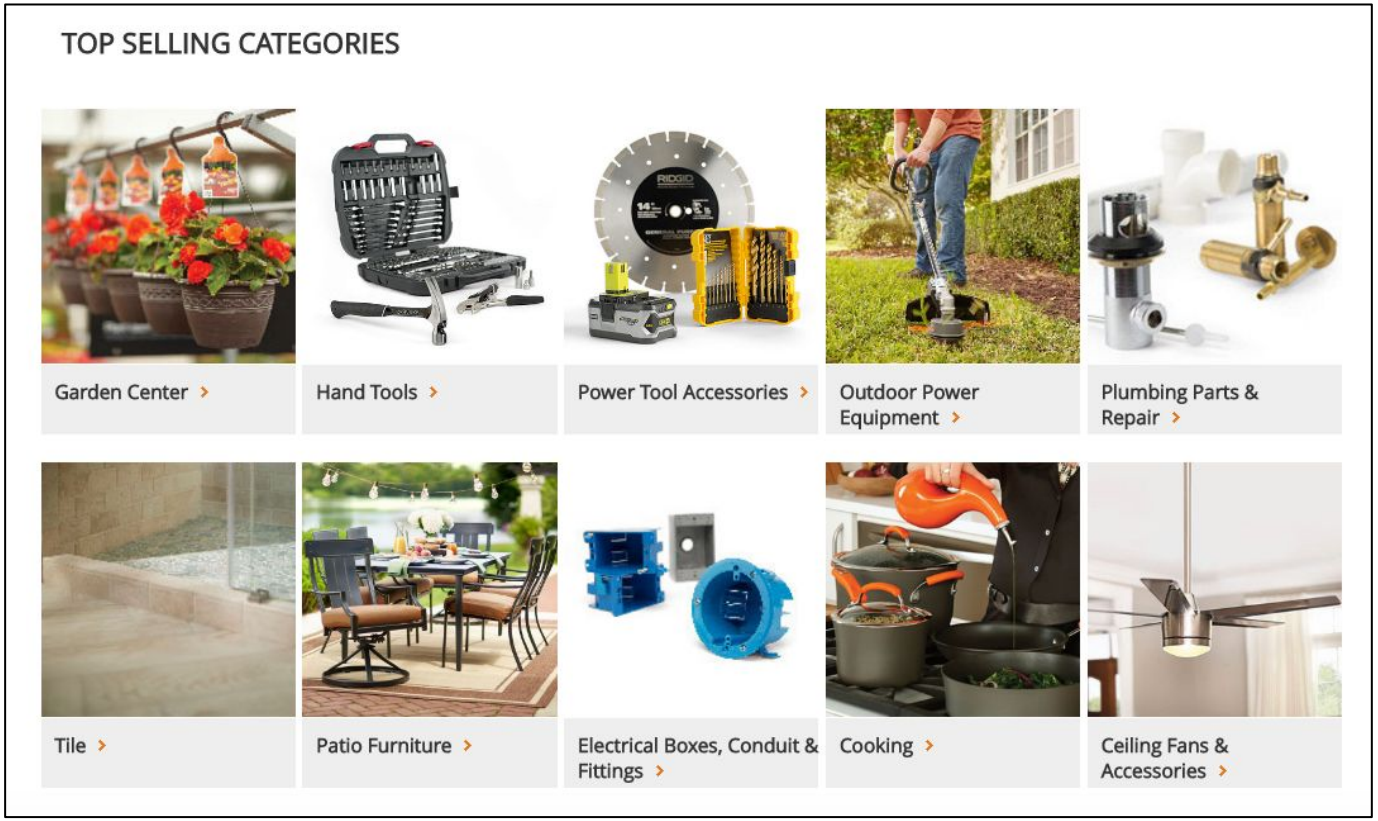


TigerDirect: Ranked in the 51st percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. Most of these product categories sell one clear type of electronics and are matched with a complementary thumbnail. The Data Storage thumbnail could be enhanced, however, to include a USB flash drive and external hard drive since these are two popular ways to store data.



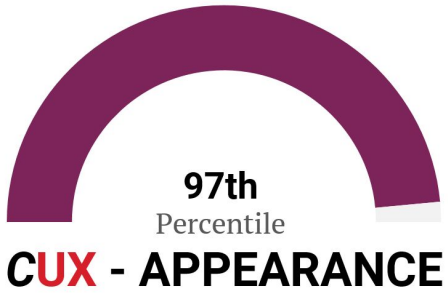
Adherence example

Guideline #19. When using thumbnails to represent product categories, sometimes a few products better represent a category than just one



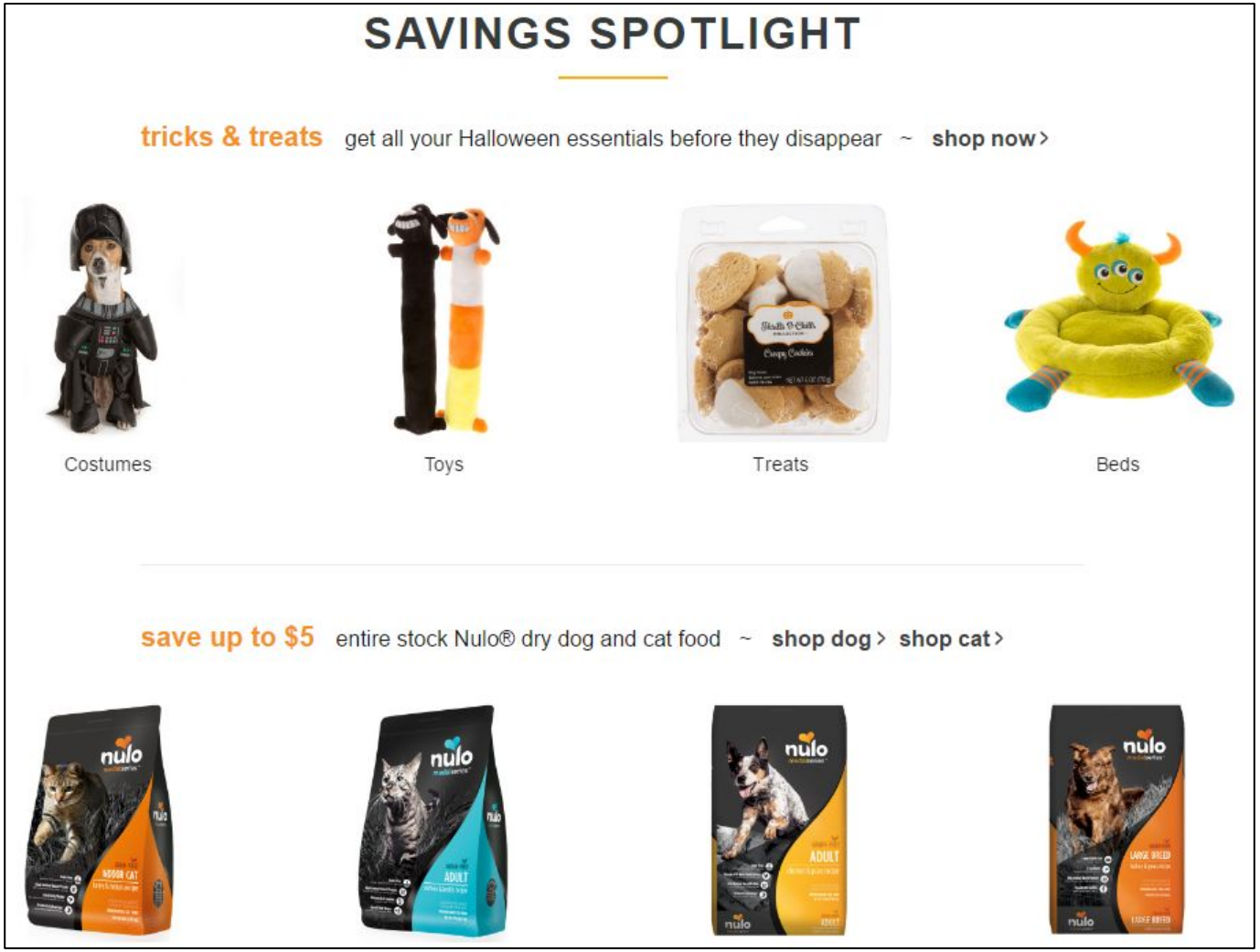
Home Depot: Ranked in the top 97th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. Home Depot does an excellent job visually communicating what can be found in their nuanced product categories.

User quote - *"Nice wide array of products with good pictures, and decent prices."*



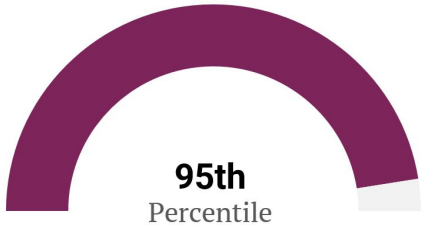
Adherence example

Guideline #19. When using thumbnails to represent product categories, sometimes a few products better represent a category than just one



Petsmart: Ranked in the top 95th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. The seasonal Halloween category is broken down into subcategories to illustrate the breadth of products available. Users immediately understand everything they might be able to find in this collection.

User quote - *"I like how everything was laid out and you didn't have to go around guessing where things were."*



Guideline #20. Design site promotions to resemble the rest of the website. Site promotions should never look like advertisements

Banner blindness is real. In 2013, Nielsen reported in its "Trust in Advertising" study that online banner ads are the least trusted form of advertising among consumers falling even behind traditional ads like in the newspapers or magazines.

If it looks like an ad, people will ignore it like an ad. When designing promotional graphics for the homepage, match the tone characteristics of the website's design. This can include fonts, colors, and other visual features that carry through an entire site.

To avoid designing a promotion that users will mistake for an ad, don't use boxes, borders, or flashy graphics (unless consistent with the rest of the site).

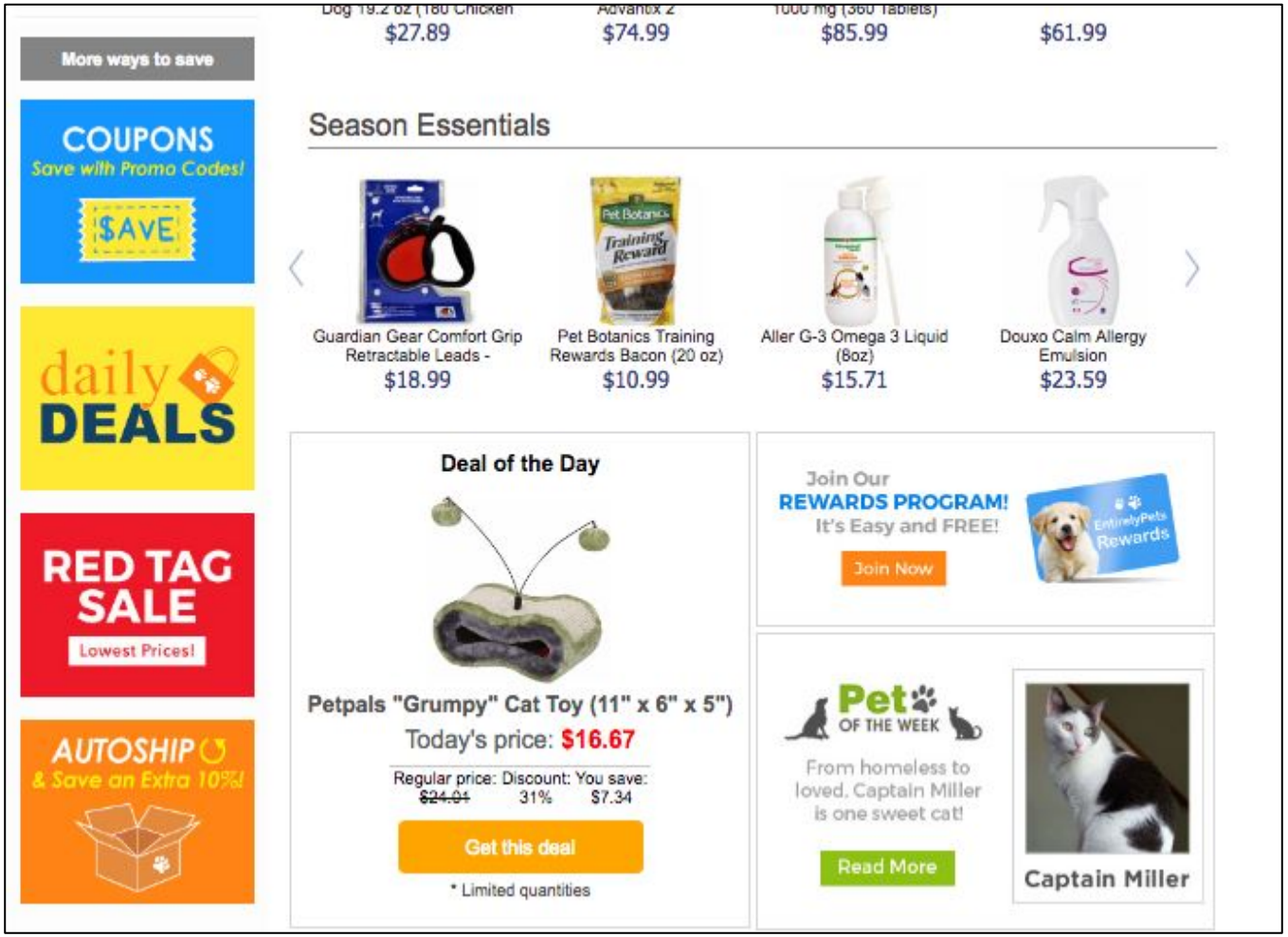
A recent study of ours found that people significantly prefer site promotions over third-party ads.

Site Component - Product Presentation
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

User quote - *"The landing site is not at all welcoming, or giving any sense of the site's "personality." Instead, it's just a swarm of ads for a site the user is already on. The banners and boxes are all jampacked together, and each one is packed to the gills with colors and pictures and text of all different fonts and sizes, some of it blinking or moving, and most of it YELLING AT THE USER IN ALL CAPS."*

Non-adherence example

Guideline #20. Design site promotions to resemble the rest of the website. Site promotions should never look like advertisements



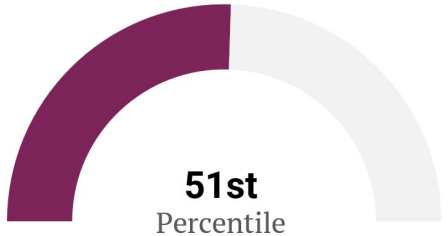
Entirely Pets: Ranked in the bottom 19th percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. The four promotions on the left look like ads. Most users will notice these and unconsciously ignore them, missing out on coupons, sales, and shipping discounts. The bright colors are not used anywhere else on the site. The font and designs also do not match.

User quote - *"The site had a clutterly feel to me. I would clean it up a bit, and definitely change the font."*

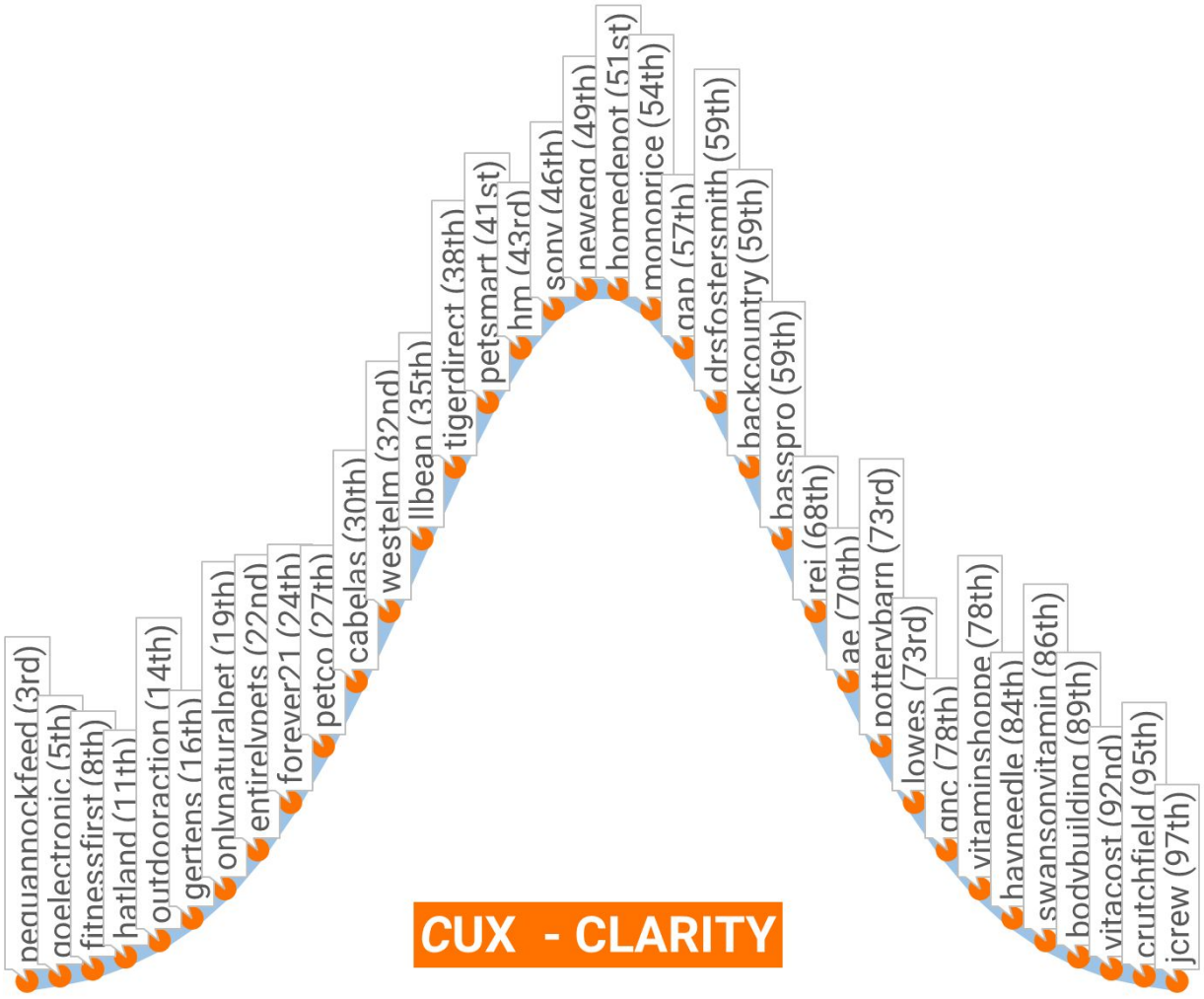
Non-adherence example

Guideline #20. Design site promotions to resemble the rest of the website. Site promotions should never look like advertisements

TigerDirect: Ranked in the 51st percentile for the UX dimension Appearance. This page is littered with site promotions that look like ads. Different colors, boxes, and fonts bombard the user. The Intel promotion especially looks like an advertisement due to the logo and slogan. This site would be better off sticking with a central design theme and creating promotions following the rules of that theme.



CUX Clarity Guideline Chapter



Subvertical	Website	CUX Clarity Rank
Clothing	jcrew.com	97
Electronics	crutchfield.com	95
Nutrition	vitacost.com	92
Nutrition	bodybuilding.com	89
Nutrition	swansonvitamins.com	86
Home & Garden	hayneedle.com	84
Nutrition	gnc.com	78
Nutrition	vitaminshoppe.com	78
Home & Garden	potterybarn.com	73
Home & Garden	lowes.com	73
Clothing	ae.com	70
Recreation	rei.com	68
Pets	drsfostersmith.com	59
Recreation	backcountry.com	59
Recreation	basspro.com	59
Clothing	gap.com	57
Electronics	monoprice.com	54
Home & Garden	homedepot.com	51
Electronics	newegg.com	49
Electronics	sony.com	46
Clothing	hm.com	43
Pets	petsmart.com	41
Electronics	tigerdirect.com	38
Recreation	llbean.com	35
Home & Garden	westelm.com	32
Recreation	cabelas.com	30
Pets	petco.com	27
Clothing	forever21.com	24
Pets	entirelypets.com	22
Pets	onlynaturalpet.com	19
Home & Garden	gertens.com	16
Recreation	outdooraction.co.uk	14
Clothing	hatland.com	11
Nutrition	fitnessfirstusa.com	8
Electronics	goelectronic.com	5
Pets	pequannockfeed.com	3

Clarity Guidelines

Guidelines related to homepage 'Clarity' deal with how clearly and understandably a website's message is communicated. Site visitors should quickly be able to understand three concepts. First, where to buy what they're looking for. Second, what can be bought on your site. Most importantly third, *why* to buy from you rather than the competition.

The following guidelines relate to Clarity of homepage design and messaging:

Clarity > Copy

21. Use as few words as possible
22. Avoid superlatives (e.g. "The best shoes on the planet"). Instead, use specifics ("Rated #1 by Runner's World Magazine")
23. Avoid the use of buzzwords and technical jargon
24. Decide between "your" and "my" (i.e. "your account" or "my account") when copywriting the user interface and stick with it
25. Avoid generic phrasing
26. Mirror your customers' language: Look at social media mentions of your company, products, and brand - survey customers
27. Maintain a consistent tone in copy across homepage

Clarity > Copy > CTA & Value Proposition

28. CTA should be read and understood in five seconds or less
29. The CTA should answer customers' principal need
30. Stick with one primary CTA
31. Don't ask for too much commitment with CTAs (e.g. Don't say "buy now")
32. Focus on what customers get instead of what they lose (e.g. "Get shoes" instead of "Pay $200")
33. Use bullet points to list benefits
34. Communicate what makes your offer unique and how you solve potential customers' problem (or improve their situation)

Clarity > Design

35. The CTA's location should complement the customer's journey
36. Eliminate any design elements that detract from taking the "most wanted" action
37. Avoid placing advertisements (and content that resembles ads) in prime content locations
38. Relevant/specific promotions (seasonal promotions, sales for particular product categories) should not resemble banner ads
39. Don't use prime real estate for social media icons; display them in the footer
40. Personalize homepage content when possible

Clarity » Copy

7 Guidelines

Clarity > Copy

21. Use as few words as possible
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27. Maintain a consistent tone in copy across homepage

What makes copy good? The right answer, of course, is copy that makes money. But we can't know what will make money in advance. Instead, we examine copy word-for-word to try and figure out if it sucks or rocks.

One way to critique copy is the value, clarity, credibility (VCC) test:

The exercise is quite simple in its nature, yet also very effective. Go through an entire piece of copy line by line. Evaluate each statement for value, clarity, and credibility.

- **Value** - What's in it for me? Is there a benefit to the user? In order to get people to pay money, they need to understand the value.
- **Clarity** - Is this sentence simple and clear? Can we make it shorter? Improve clarity? Clarity trumps persuasion. Eliminate all confusion, complicated words and jargon, and make sentences as short as possible.
- **Credibility** (covered in the Credibility UX Chapter) - Is this believable? Convert superlatives and vagueness into specific statements. Back up all claims with proof.

Below are guidelines that cover clarity issues related to copy and the value proposition. Copy guidelines related to credibility are covered in the credibility chapter.

Check out this lesson for copywriting best practices.

User quote - *"It's clear that this company specializes in electronics . . . Also, it seems that there are no "fine lines" to have to look for ... everything is very clear and upfront which is not always the case with competitor sites where it seems there are hidden costs somewhere."*

Guideline #21. Use as few words as possible

Site Component - Copy
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

Attention spans are shorter than ever. In 2000, the average attention span for a human was 12 seconds. Today? A recent study found that our attention span is a mere 8 seconds. To compare, a goldfish has a 9 second attention span.

Get straight to the point. Cut every word that is not necessary.

“Simply fill in your favorite email below and you’ll get instant access to the first lesson.” >> “Enter email to get first lesson”.

There are four pillars of scannable copy. For the best results, optimize for all four.

1. Short sentences seem like less of a commitment, they seem less overwhelming.
2. Simple sentences void of any complicated structures have the same impact.
3. As a rule of thumb, there should be no more than 80 characters per line.
4. Short paragraphs (3-4 lines, maximum) make scanning easier. Big blocks of text are daunting.

Brevity ensures that it gets read.

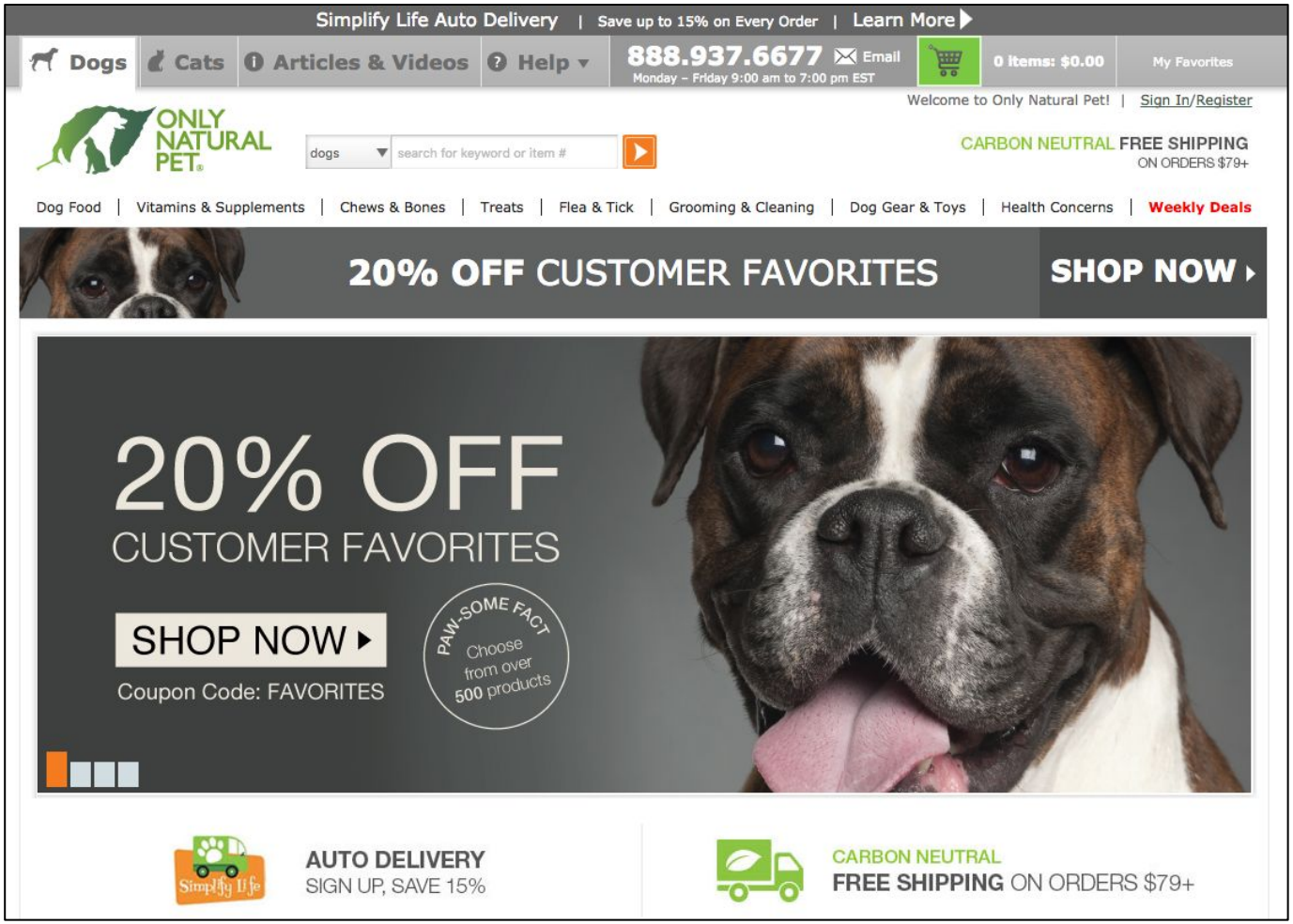
Non-adherence example

Guideline #21. Use as few words as possible

Outdoor Action: Ranked in the bottom 14th percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. There is an overwhelming amount of copy on this page.

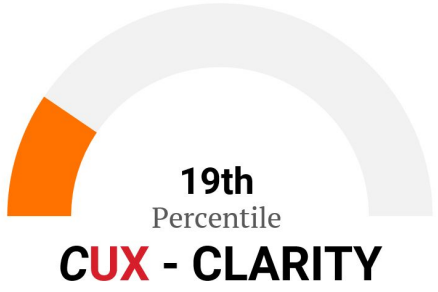
Non-adherence example

Guideline #21. Use as few words as possible



Only Natural Pet: Ranked in the bottom 19th percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. Half the copy on this homepage is redundant and can be eliminated. THE 20% OFF discount, Carbon Neutral - Free shipping on orders over $79, Auto delivery, and navigation menus are all displayed twice above the fold. The page would be much cleaner and more clear if each of these text elements were only displayed once.

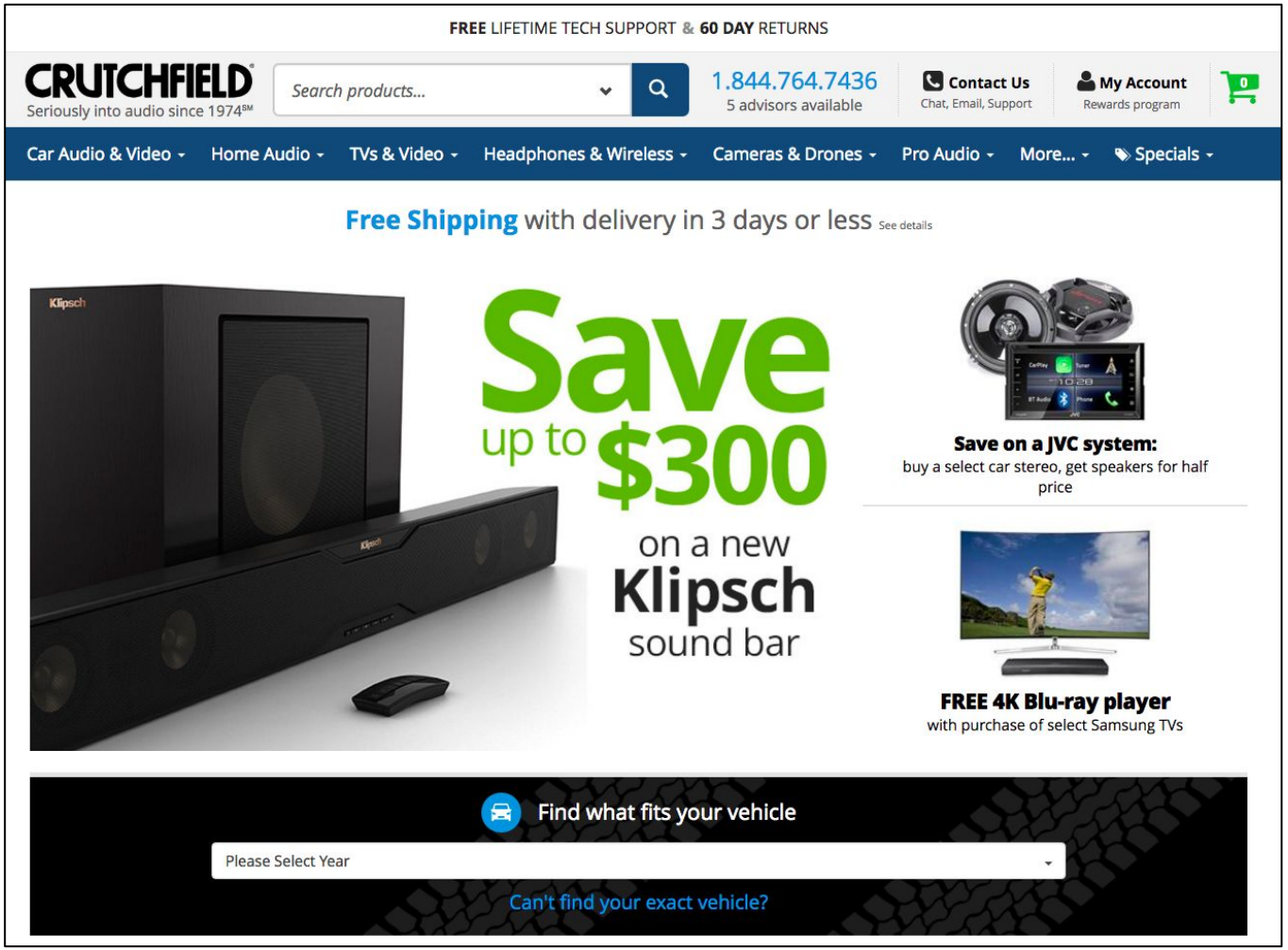
User Quote - *"It was very cluttered on the home page".*



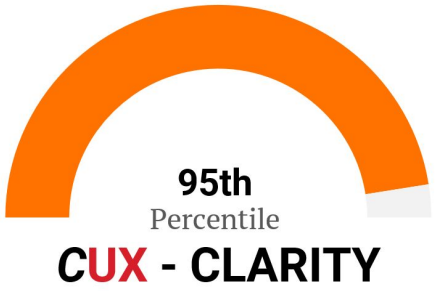
Homepage & Sitewide Section > CUX Dimension Chapter > Clarity > Copy

Adherence example

Guideline #21. Use as few words as possible

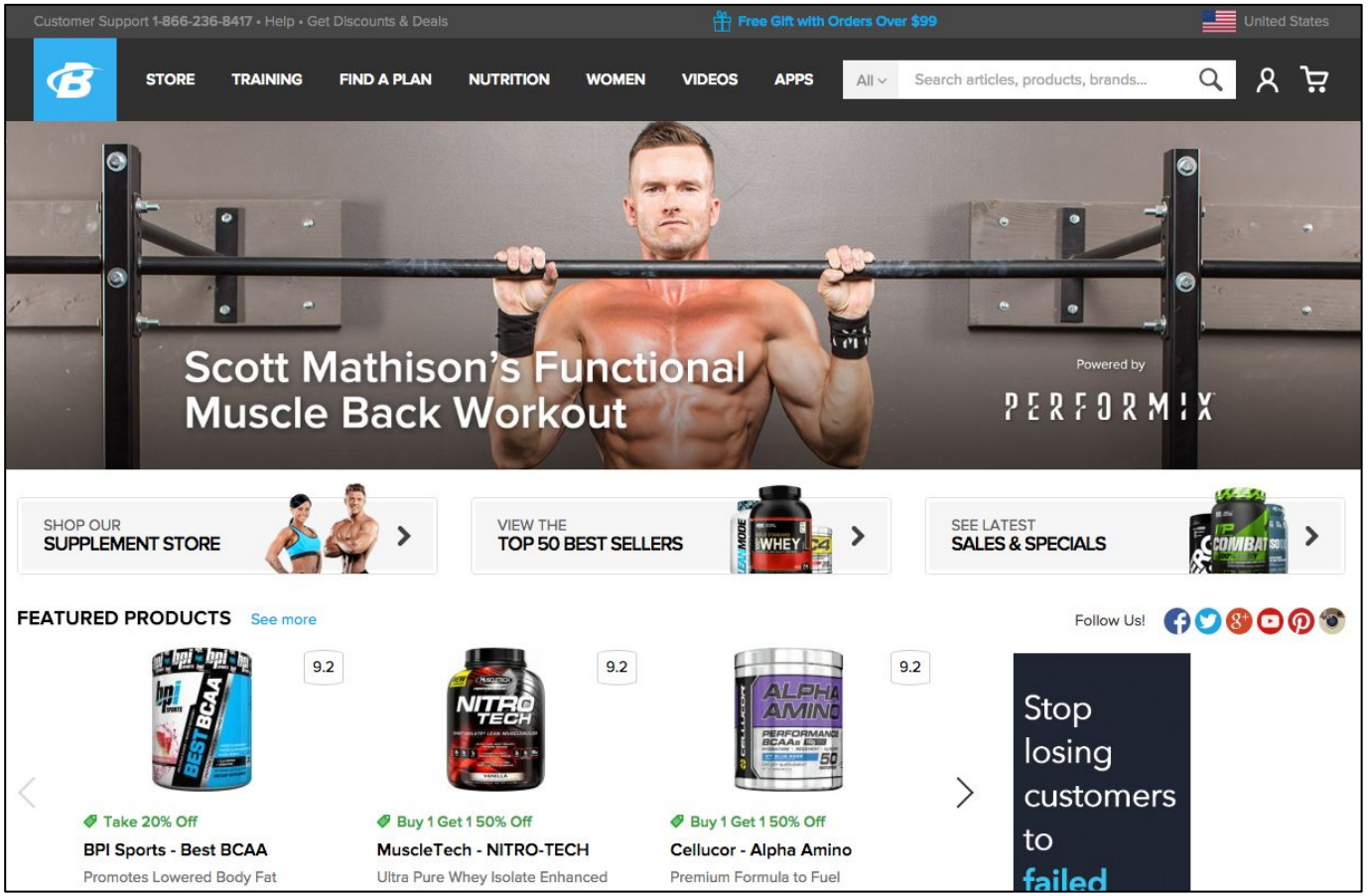


Crutchfield: Ranked in the top 95th percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. The copy on this page is straightforward while providing lots of information.

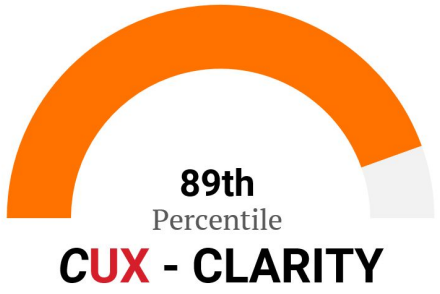


Adherence example

Guideline #21. Use as few words as possible



BodyBuilding.com: Ranked in the top 89th percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. The text elements on this page are concise.



Guideline #22. Avoid superlatives (e.g. "The best shoes on the planet"). Instead, use specifics ("Rated #1 by Runner's World Magazine")

Site Component - Copy
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

Compare these statements, and pick the claim you believe more:

- “Fastest pizza delivery in town” vs. “We deliver your pizza in 10 minutes.”
- “We have the best italian restaurant” vs. “Our restaurant has won 6 Golden Spoon awards in the Italian Food category.”
- “Cheapest web hosting plans” vs. “Our monthly plans start from $1.99.”
- “Best tasting coffee, guaranteed” vs. “Major competitions have voted Esmeralda the consistent winner five years in a row.”

I bet you found the second option more believable in each case.

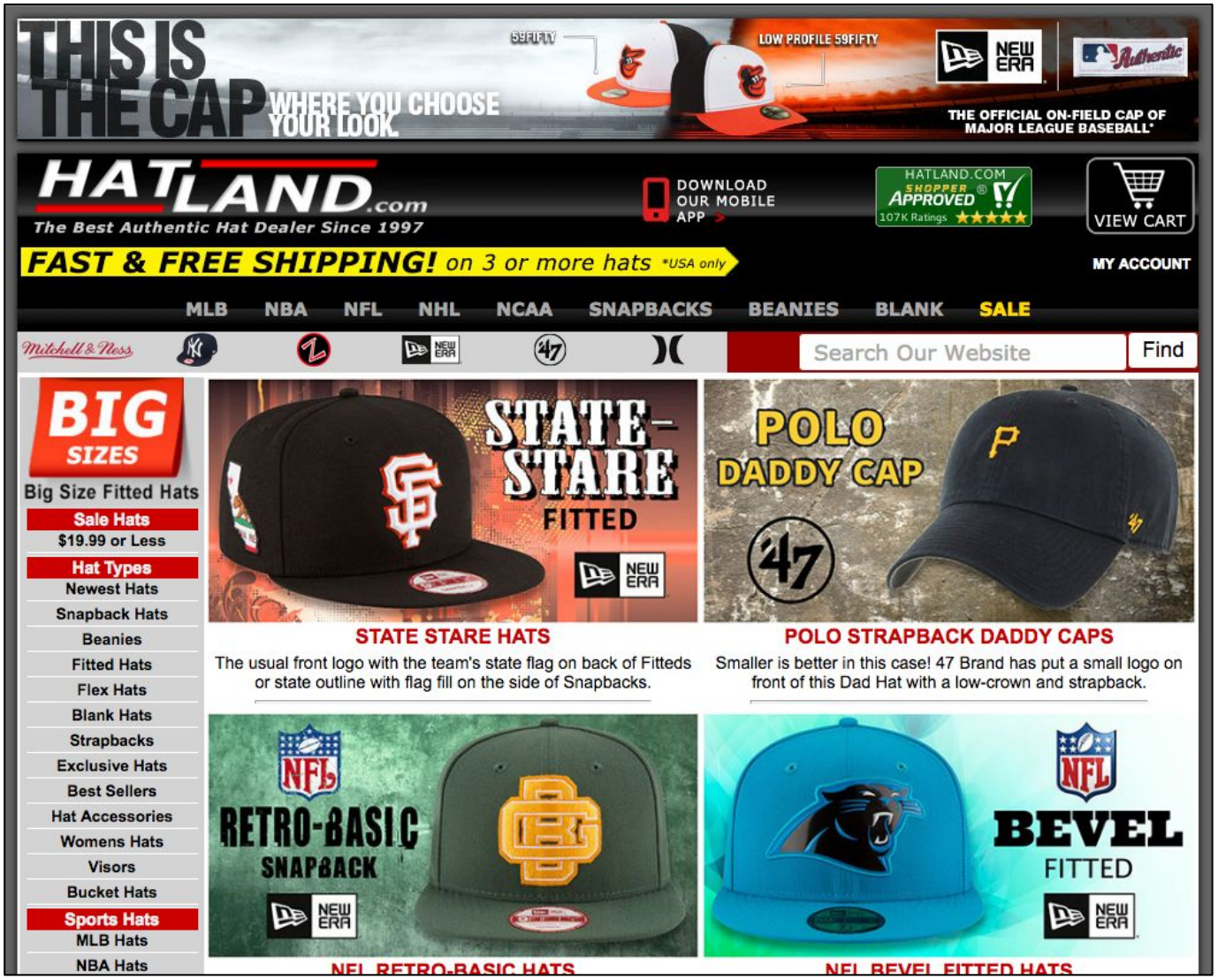
People don’t believe superlatives, they believe specifics. Superlatives are tempting low hanging fruit, but always translate them into specifics.

People are not idiots. They won’t believe you’re the best just because you say so.

Convert superlatives and vagueness into specific statements, back up all claims with proof. Clarity trumps persuasion.

Non-adherence example

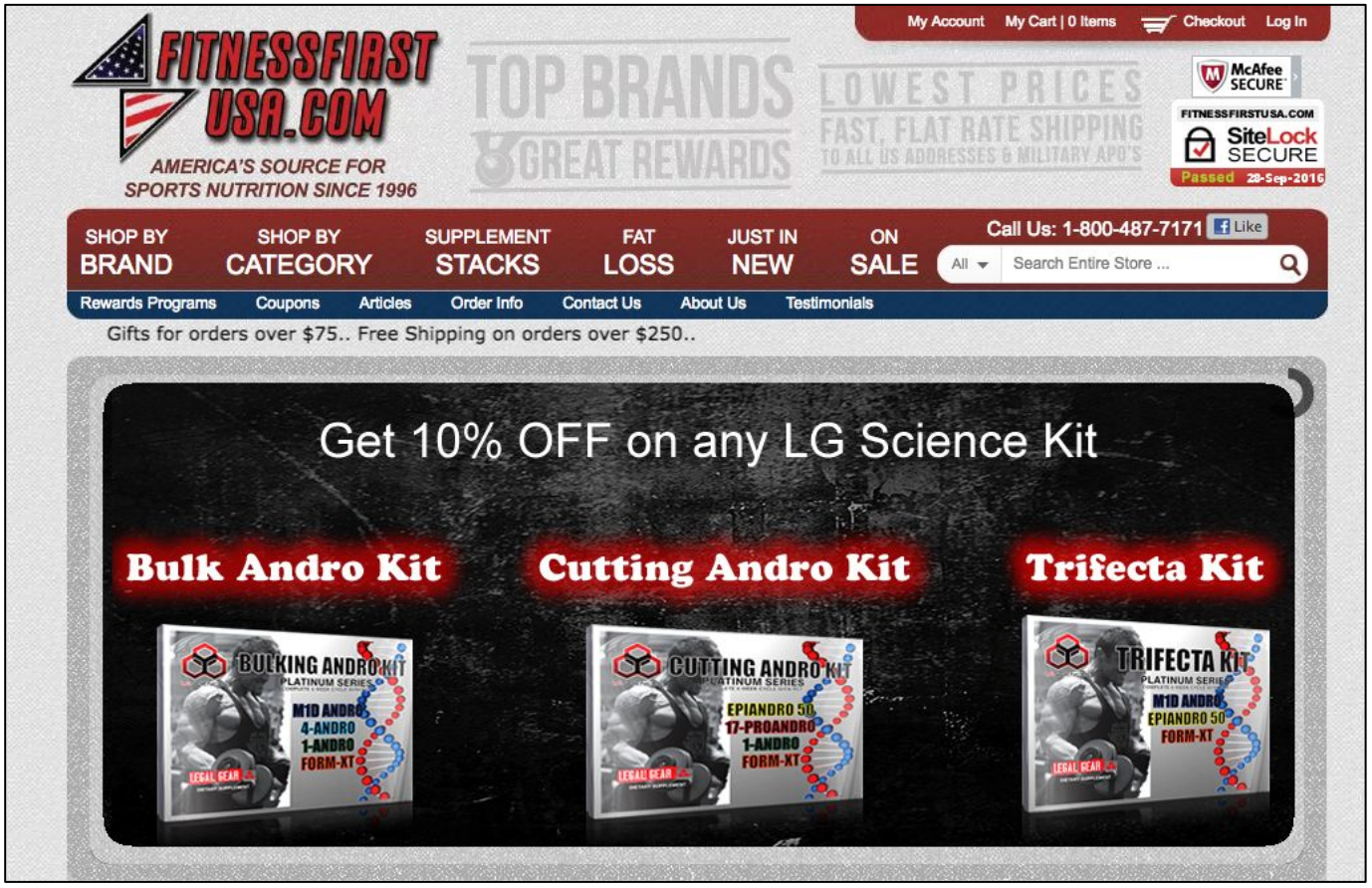
Guideline #22. Avoid superlatives



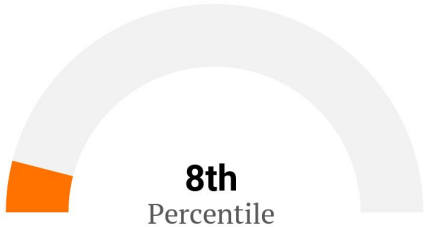
Hatland.com: Ranked in the bottom 11th percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. Hatland claims to be “The Best Authentic Hat Dealer Since 1997”. This statement seems hard to measure and hard to believe.

Non-adherence example

Guideline #22. Avoid superlatives



Fitness First USA: Ranked in the bottom 8th percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. The top banner on this homepage states that the site offers the "Lowest Prices". Another bold, superlative statement that seems hard to guarantee.



Homepage & Sitewide Section > CUX Dimension Chapter > Clarity > Copy

Guideline #23. Avoid the use of buzzwords and technical jargon

Forget buzzwords, the newest office lingo, and fancy-sounding technical terms. People want to feel like the copy they're reading was written for them. Jargon is defined as, "special words or expressions that are used by a particular profession or group and are difficult for others to understand."
Think about these two quick facts:

- The average American reads at a 7th or 8th grade level.
- Only 15% of the population has full literacy (a university undergraduate reading level).

So, if you're writing copy that a 12-year-old would find difficult to read, your writing is too complex for the average American.
How do you make things easy to process? A large part of that has to do with your audience's familiarity with the terms you're using...

NN/g listed 5 'cringeworthy' words/phrases you should stop using immediately:

1. Utilizes
2. Enables (allows you to ...)
3. Very (really, extremely, quite)
4. We understand that... (In today's fast-paced world...)
5. End user

These aren't the only perpetrators of course. Any word that is vague when it could be specific, is complex when it could be straightforward, is bland when it could be colorful, isn't a word you want to use.

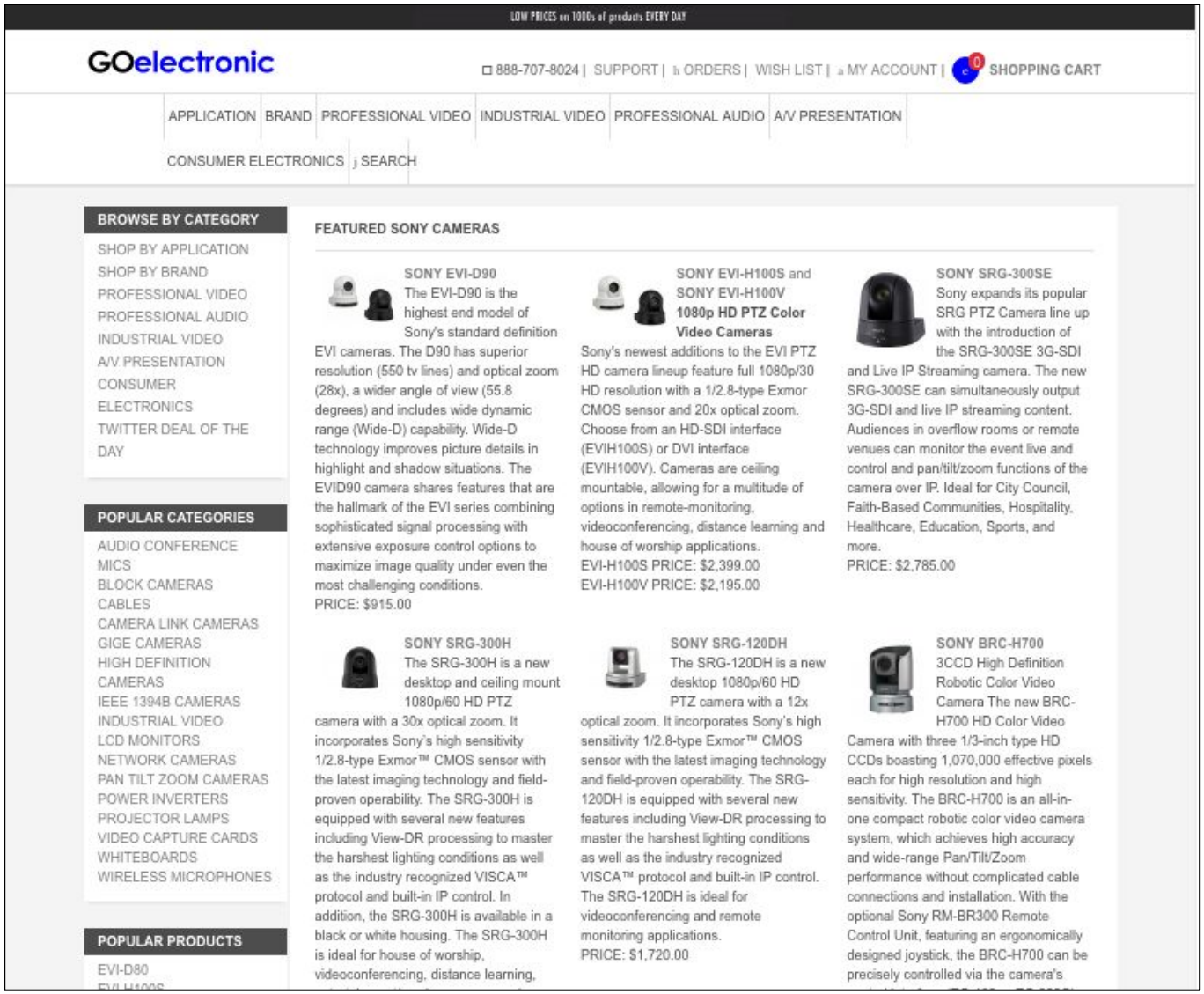
Site Component - Copy
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

Jakob Nielsen from NN/g put it really well:
"Even for specialized audiences it's still best to write as simple as possible. Even highly educated people don't want to struggle to read your site. You do not impress anybody by spouting highfalutin words or complex sentence structures that require careful parsing".

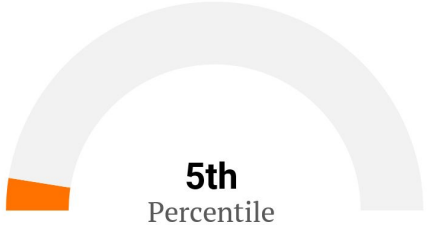
User quote - *"I was confused between Whey protein powder and isolate/concentrate as they were also showing up in the search results when I filtered for powder alone".*

Non-adherence example

Guideline #23. Avoid the use of buzzwords and technical jargon



GO Electronics: Ranked in the bottom 5th percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. There is a terrifying amount of technical jargon on this homepage.

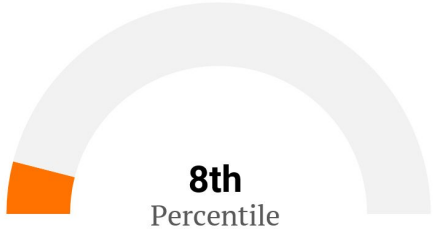


5th
Percentile
CUX - CLARITY

Non-adherence example

Guideline #23. Avoid the use of buzzwords and technical jargon

Fitness First USA: Ranked in the bottom 8th percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. For first-time visitors and people who are new to the weightlifting world, these jargon-filled banners provide no information.

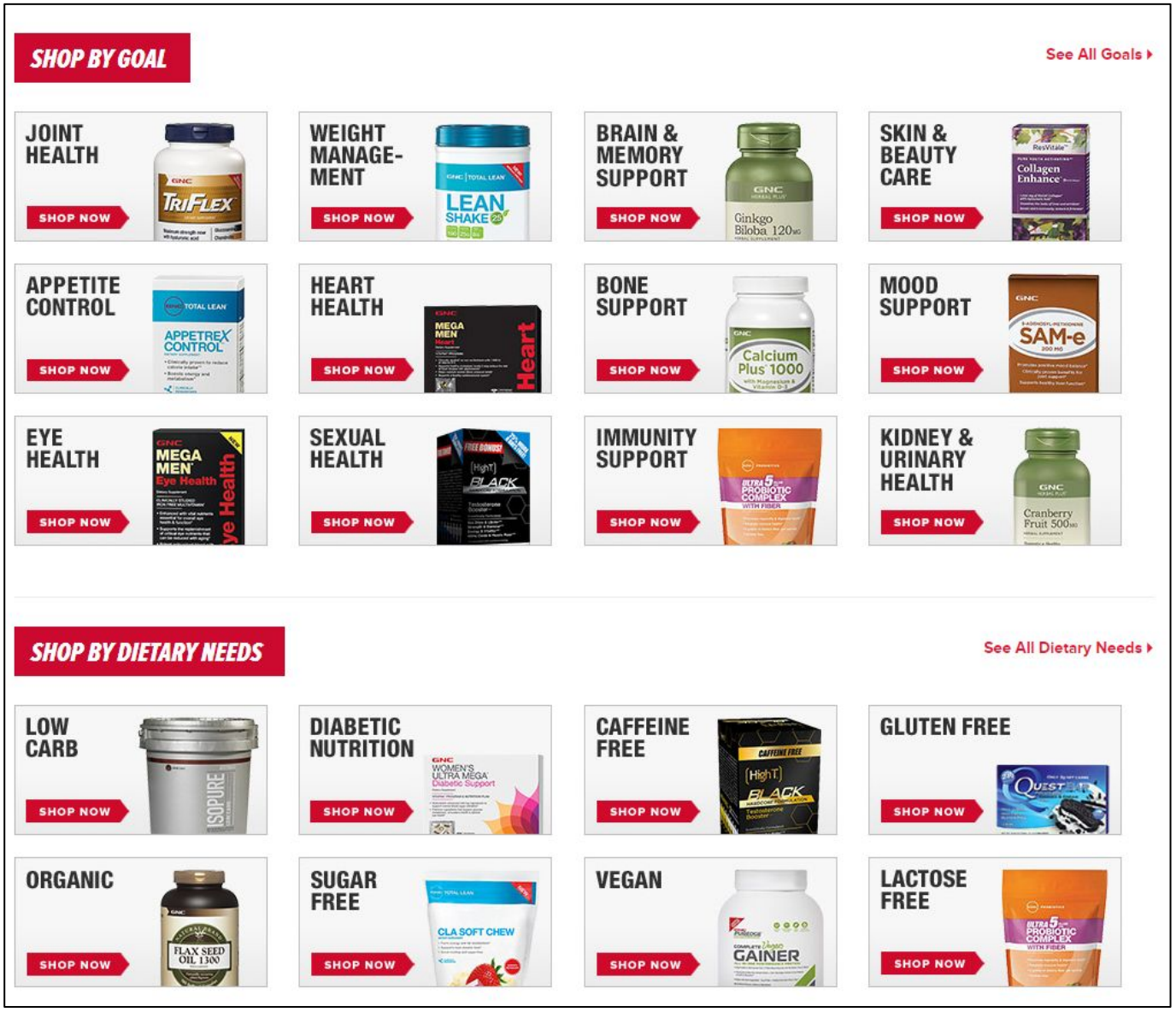


8th
Percentile
CUX - CLARITY

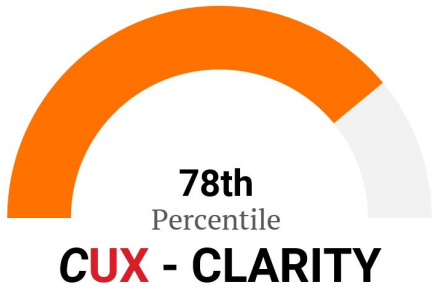
Homepage & Sitewide Section > CUX Dimension Chapter > Clarity > Copy

Adherence example

Guideline #23. Avoid the use of buzzwords and technical jargon



GNC: Ranked in the top 78th percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. Especially compared to Fitness First USA, the GNC homepage makes it easy for supplement novices to dive in.



Guideline #24. Decide between "your" and "my" (i.e. "your account" or "my account") when copywriting the user interface and stick with it

Site Component - Copy
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

Wondering when to use “your” versus “my” in your copy?

There’s not a “one-size-fits-all” answer, but some general rules:

“My”: When you want to emphasize privacy, personalization, or ownership. (“my account” or “my wish board”)
“Your”: When asking questions, giving instructions, or describing something (“are you going to this event?”)

Another option is eliminating any point of view. “My account” simply becomes “account” etc.

The key is to choose a point of view and to stick with it. Seeing “My account” and “Your settings” is confusing.

Check out this Medium article for the full story.

Guideline #25. Avoid generic phrasing

This guideline is the heart of clear copy. The more specific copy is, the more clear it will be:
“Fast shipping” leaves holes compared to “5-day shipping.”
“Buy with confidence” leaves holes compared to “Norton Secured and BBB Accredited Business.”

Be as specific as you possibly can be. Whenever you can use a word with more accuracy, do so. Look at the copy on your homepage: Are there phrases or terms that can be replaced with a more clear, specific term?

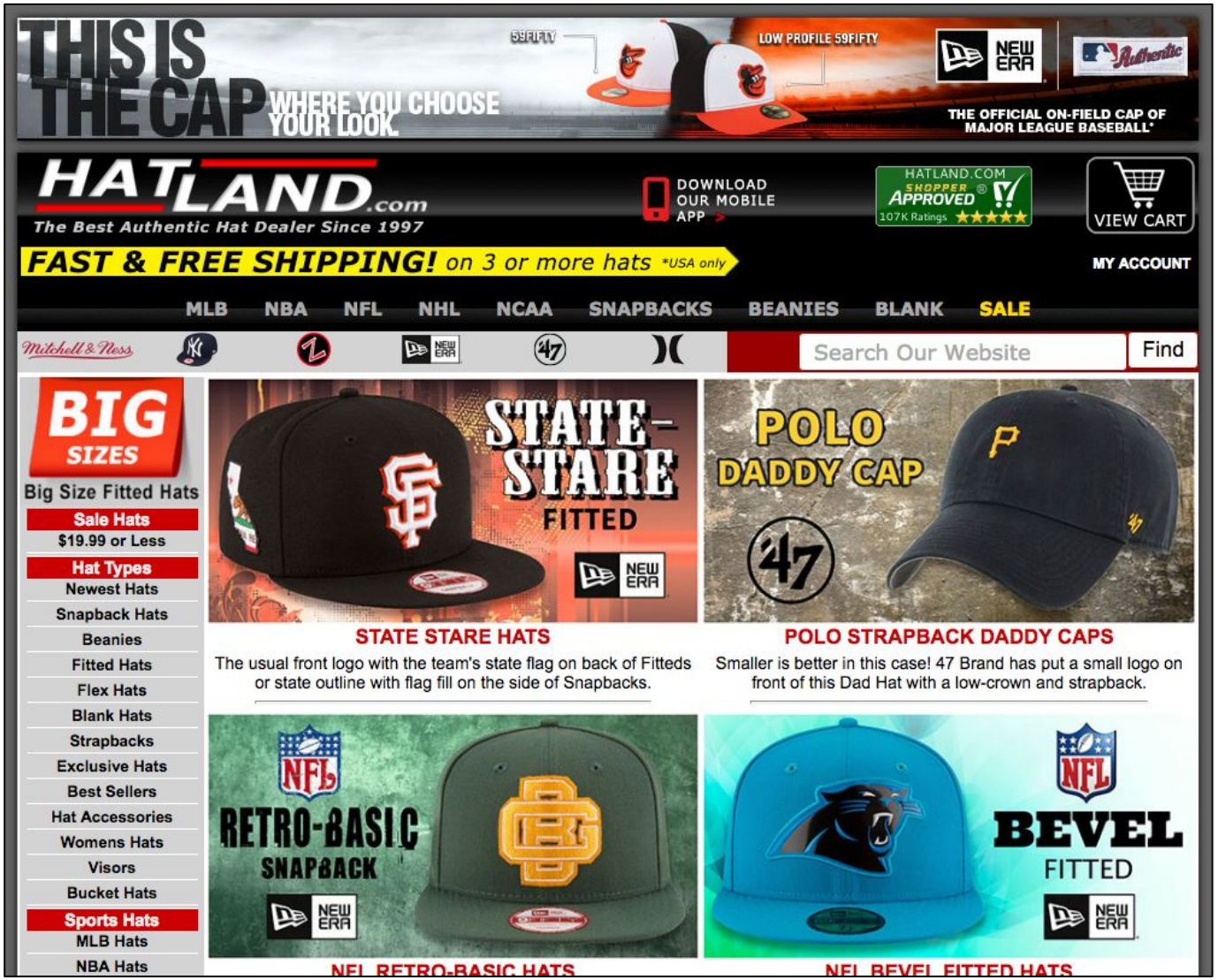
This is pretty similar to our guideline on superlatives. Basically, eliminate meaningless words in favor of rich, precise, and descriptive words.

Keep in mind, however, that although copy should be precise, it should *not* be overly technical.

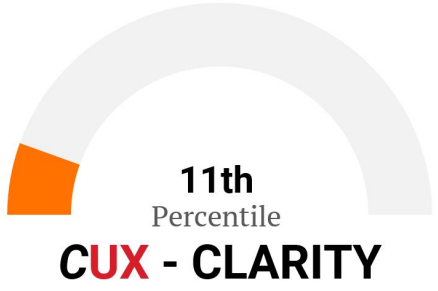
Site Component - Copy
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

Non-adherence example

Guideline #25. Avoid generic phrasing

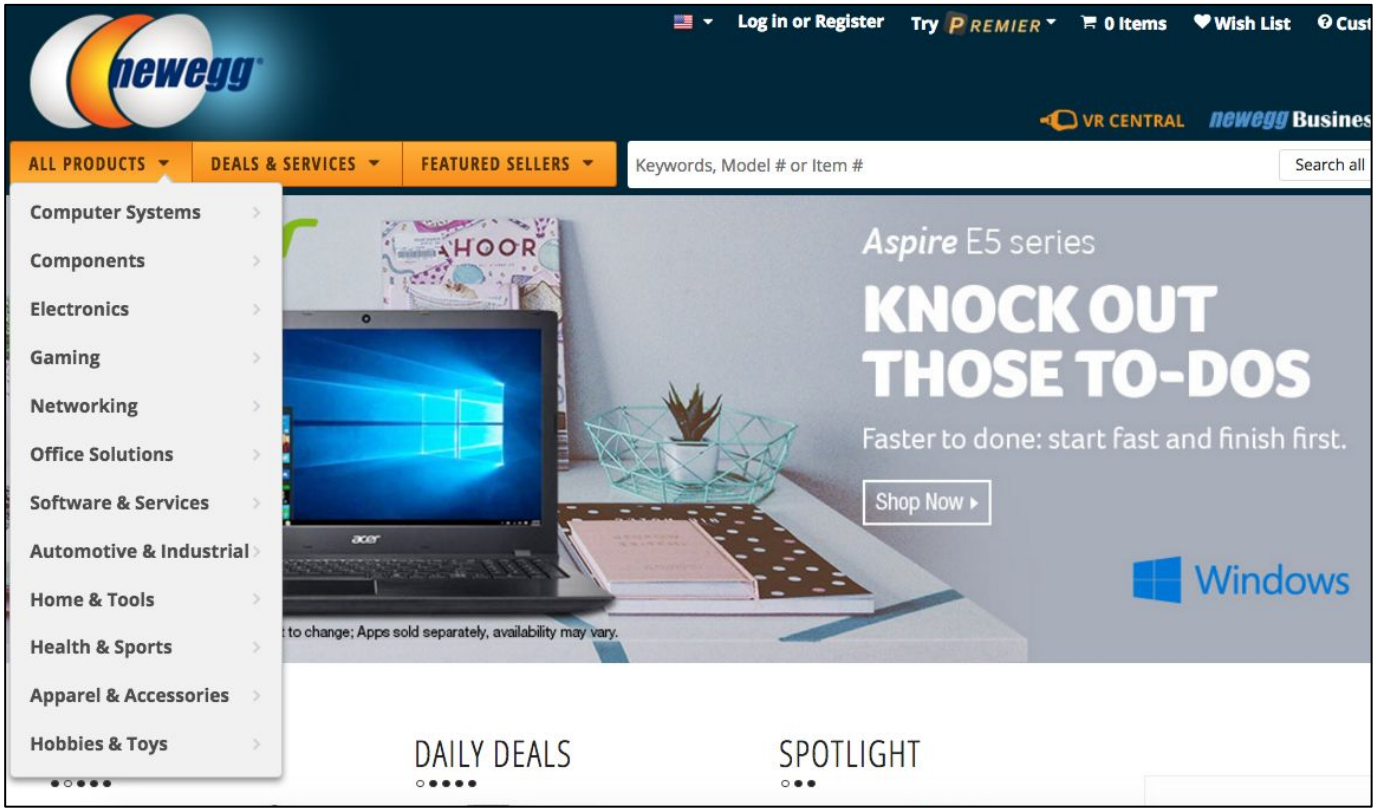


Hatland: Ranked in the bottom 11th percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. Hatland claims to have “Fast Shipping” in the yellow banner. This phrase would be more clear and powerful as “5-day shipping”.



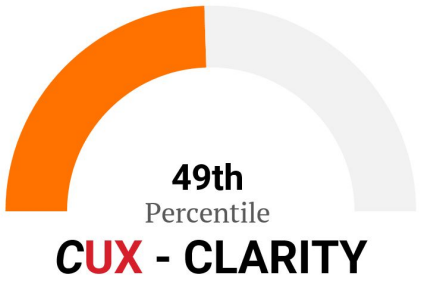
Non-adherence example

Guideline #25. Avoid generic phrasing



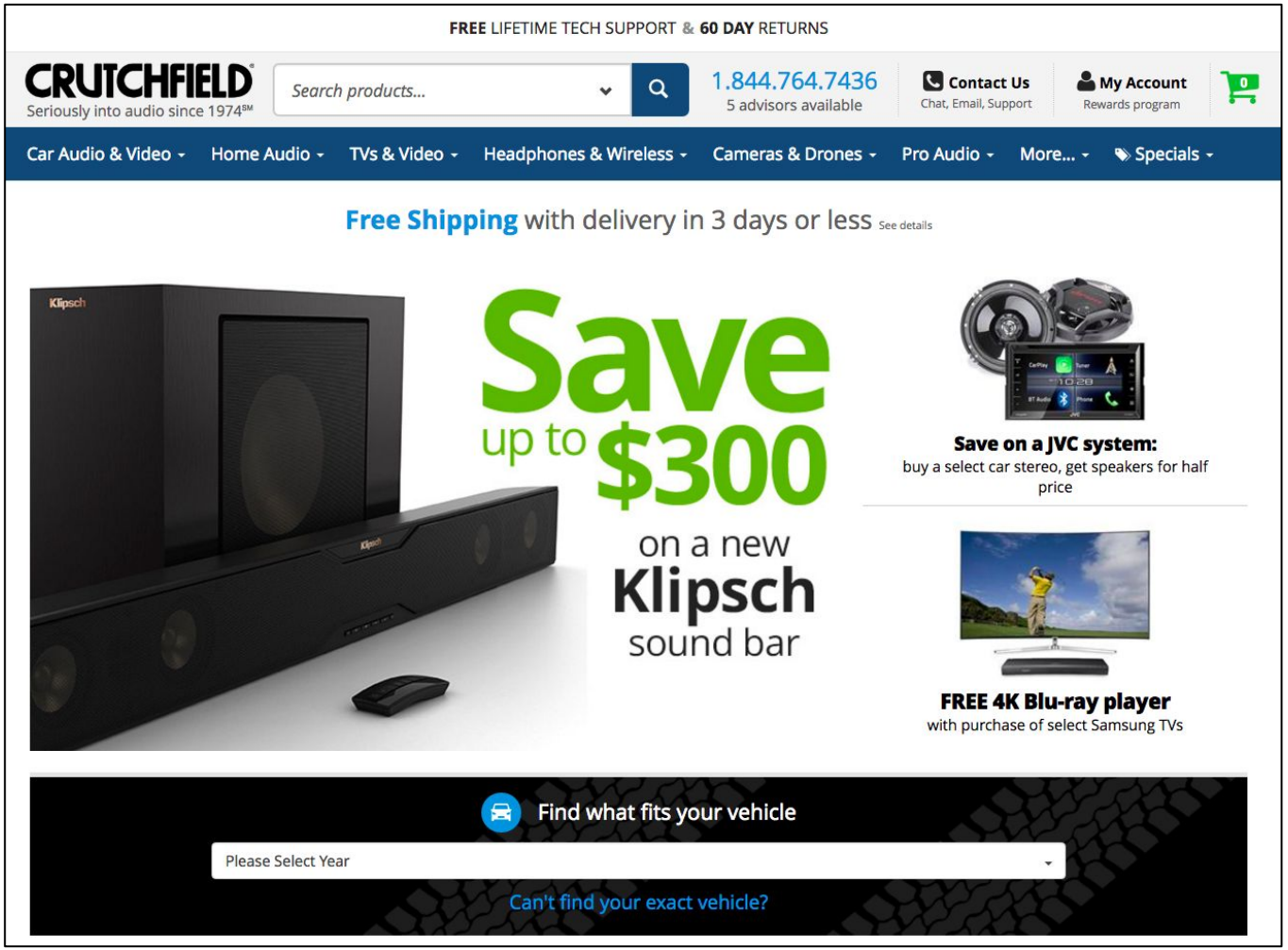
Newegg: Ranked in the bottom 49th percentile for the UX dimension Clarity.

User quote - When asked what they would change about the website, *"a little clearer product category organization".*

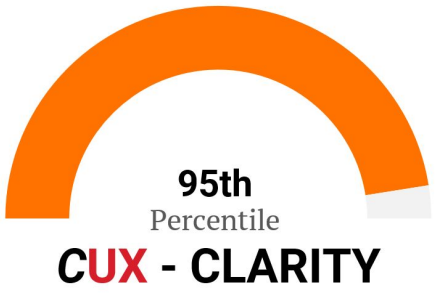


Adherence example

Guideline #25. Avoid generic phrasing

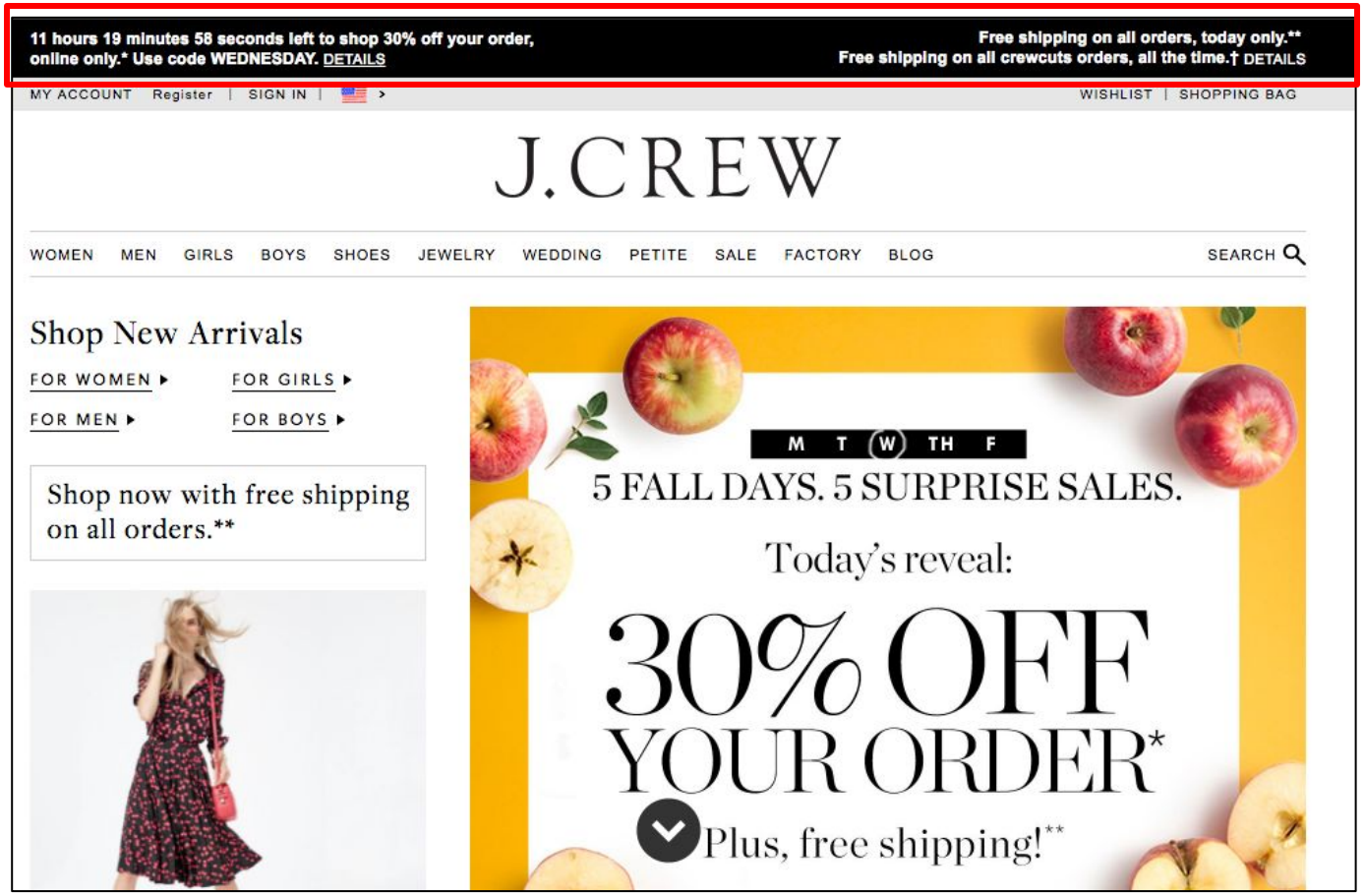


Crutchfield: Ranked in the top 95th percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. This site prominently displays their shipping policy, uses geotargeting to give an accurate shipping time (3 days if you live in Texas), and provides a link to more details.



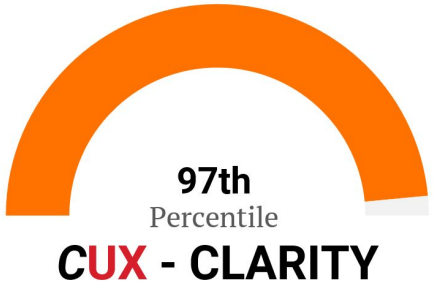
Adherence example

Guideline #25. Avoid generic phrasing



J. Crew: Ranked in the top 97th percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. Instead of using a vague phrase like, "Surprise Sale: free shipping", this homepage is specific about the free shipping promotion, even including a countdown timer until the promotion ends.

User quotes like this for J. Crew were common - "*I loved how clean and simple the site was.*"



Guideline #26. Mirror your customers' language: Look at social media mentions of your company, products, and brand - survey customers

Site Component - Copy
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

Knowing your customer/site visitor demographics allows you to understand how people talk about your products.

You can't go straight into writing. You have to do research to understand your customers and site visitors. Without that qualitative data, you're writing with your eyes closed.

The Fix:

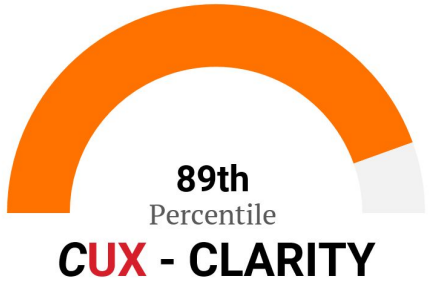
- Interview your sales and customer service representatives. They talk to your customers and visitors day in and day out. What questions are they asked most often? What are the common issues? What prevents people from buying?
- Interview recent, first-time customers and long-time, repeat customers. What benefits do these people receive from your product? How do they describe your product? Would they recommend it to a friend?
- Create a long list of words and phrases they use to describe your product, its benefits, etc. Look for patterns and trends in your list. What words and phrases are mentioned most often? Who is more likely to mention them?
- Use words and phrases used most frequently, not just your personal favorites.
- Aside from typos, leave spelling and grammar alone. Write the way your customers write!
- Don't add additional copy based on assumptions. Work with exactly what you have in front of you.

Incorporate this language into your own site to increase appeal and clarity.

Adherence example

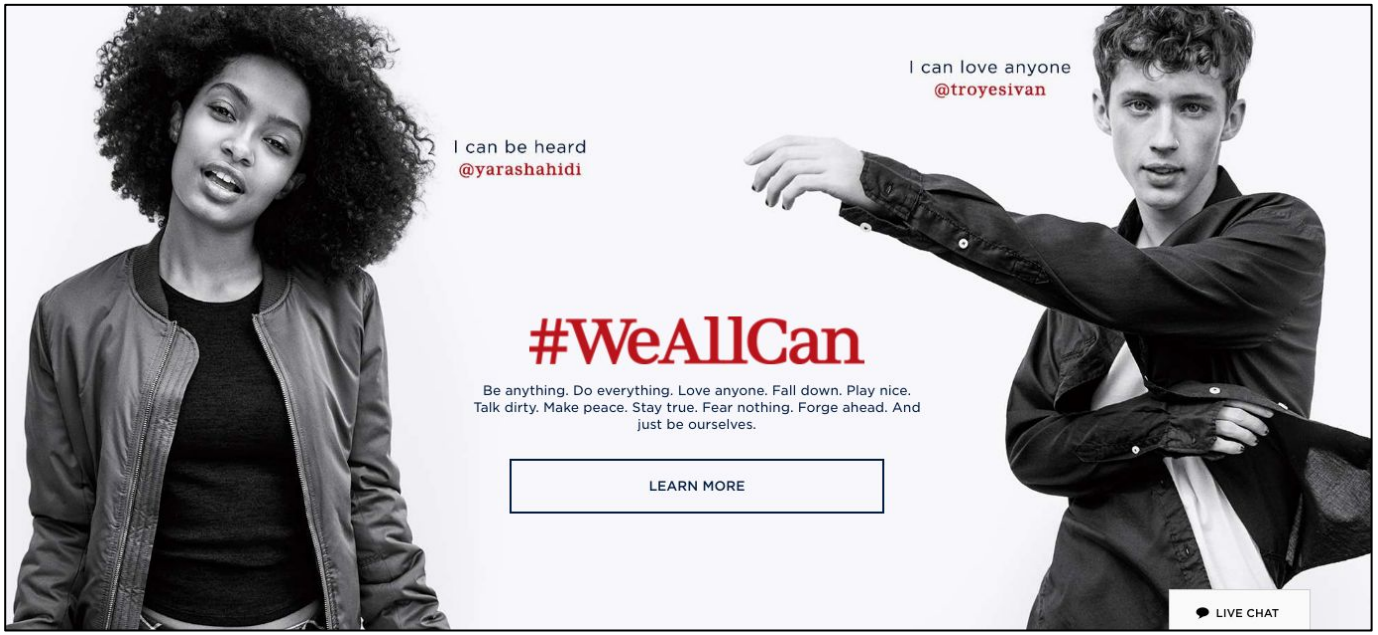
Guideline #26. Mirror your customers' language: Look at social media mentions of your company, products, and brand - survey customers

Bodybuilding.com: Ranked in the top 89th percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. The promotion cleverly titled "okto-*bro*-fest" shows that this bodybuilding website is well-acquainted with its customer base.

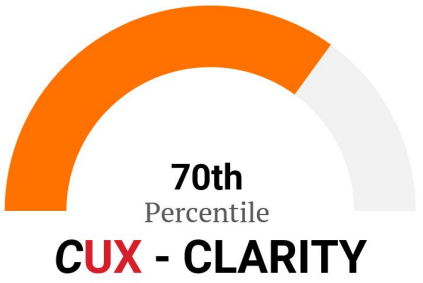


Adherence example

Guideline #26. Mirror your customers' language: Look at social media mentions of your company, products, and brand - survey customers



American Eagle Outfitters: Ranked in the top 70th percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. American Eagle takes this guideline to the next level with their current #WeAllCan campaign. Aware that their customer demographics include many young adults who use twitter, the site incorporates inspirational tweets and videos from young people.



Guideline #27. Maintain a consistent tone in copy across homepage

Site Component - Copy
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

People notice tone of voice, even online. When it comes to tone, casual, conversational, and enthusiastic tones create the highest perceptions of brand friendliness, trustworthiness, and desirability (source). Craft homepage copy around these findings.

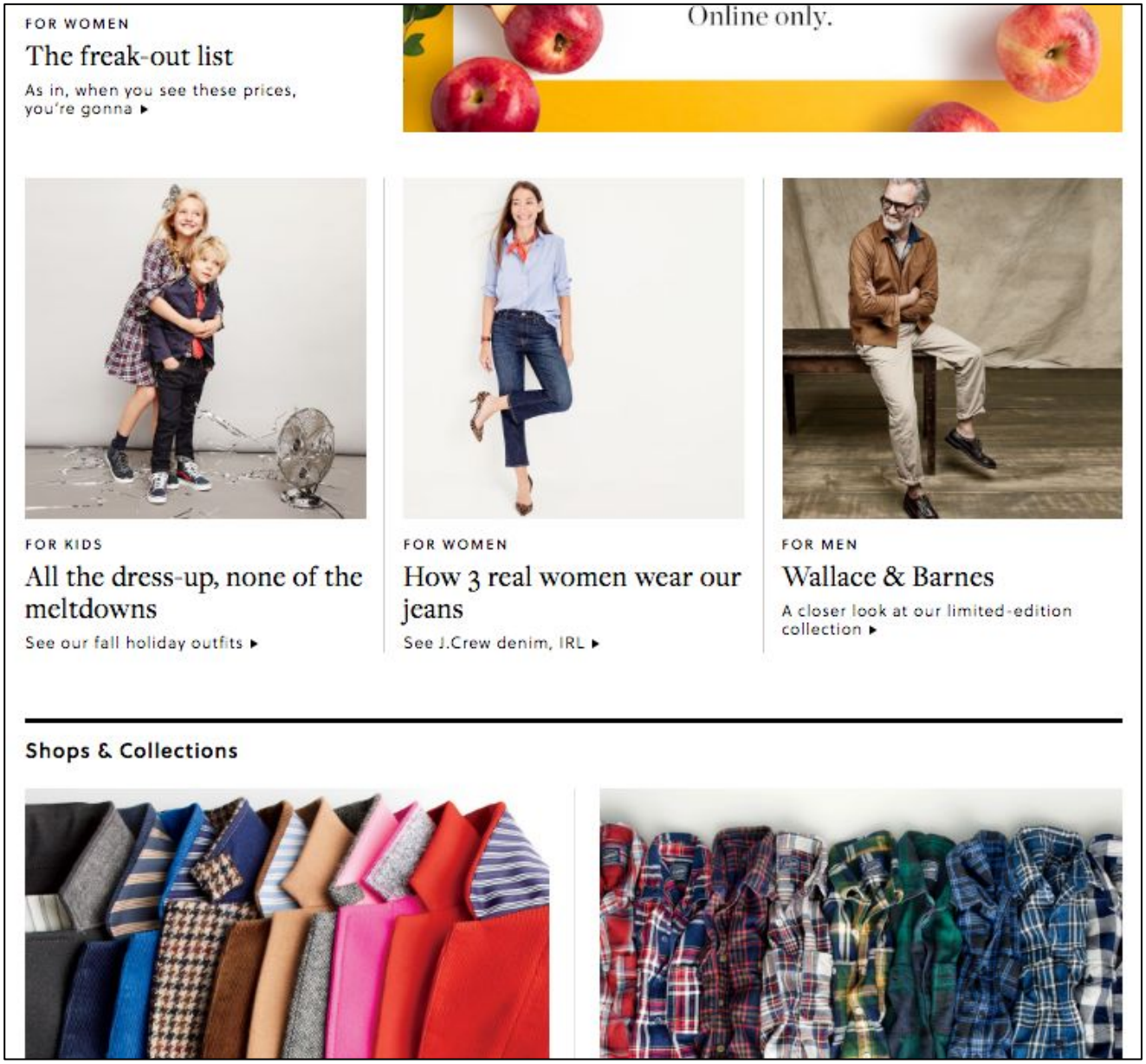
Keep in mind, however, that this tone won't work for *every* site. Serious industries (e.g. insurance) should be wary of this guideline. Some users will be put off by a light hearted tone in a serious context (read this Reddit thread on what is called "chatty copy" for an example of this frustration).

Don't rely solely on formulas, tactics, and round table discussions to determine your tone. Daydreaming about what your audience would respond to is rarely as effective as good customer research, no matter how creative you are. Craft your copy with qualitative and quantitative data from your specific audience.

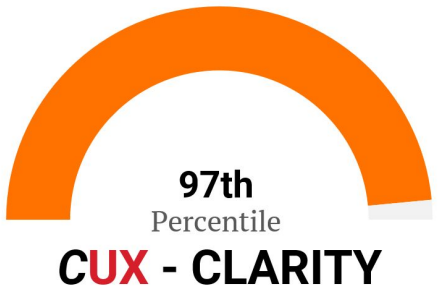
Whatever tone you choose, apply it to all copy to avoid confusion.

Adherence example

Guideline #27. Maintain a consistent tone in copy across homepage

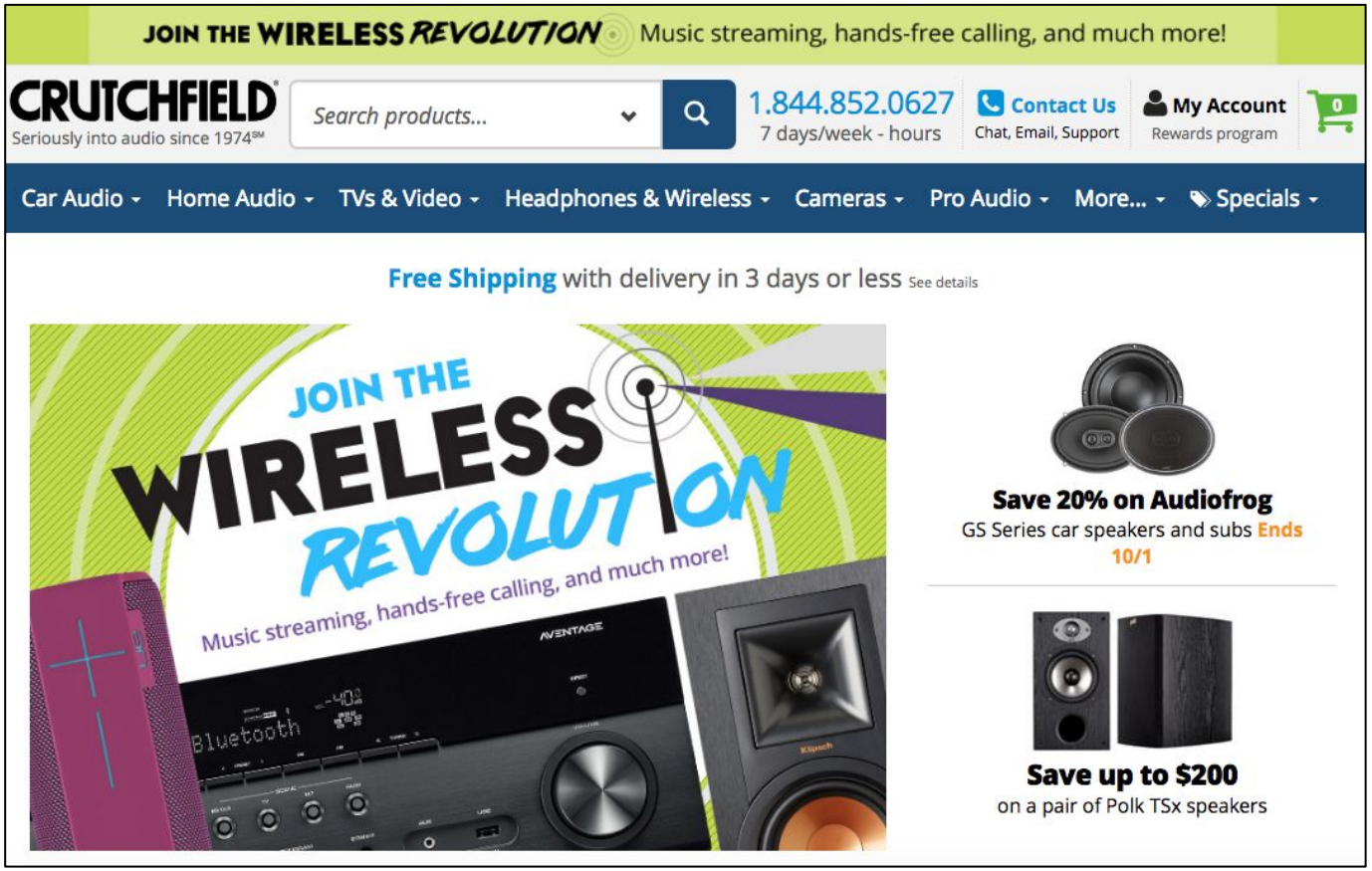


J. Crew: Ranked in the top 97th percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. Check out the casual yet enthusiastic tone consistent across this homepage.

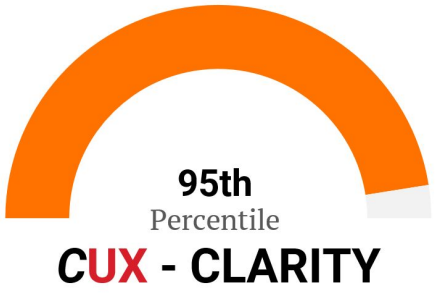


Adherence example

Guideline #27. Maintain a consistent tone in copy across homepage



Crutchfield: Ranked in the top 95th percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. This homepage copy has a casual and eager tone.



Homepage & Sitewide Section > CUX Dimension Chapter > Clarity > Copy

Clarity » Copy » CTA & Value Proposition

7 Guidelines

Clarity > Copy > CTA & Value Proposition

28. CTA should be read and understood in five seconds or less
29. The CTA should answer customers' principal need
30. Stick with just one CTA (unless for segmentation); if you need more than one, add the 2nd one as a secondary CTA
31. Don't ask for too much commitment with CTAs (e.g. Don't say "buy now")
32. Focus on what customers get instead of what they lose (e.g. "Get shoes" instead of "Pay $200")
33. Use bullet points to list benefits
34. Communicate what makes your offer unique and how you solve potential customers' problem (or improve their situation)

From the previous section on copy guidelines related to clarity above we know that the VCC test should help uncover what 'value' is related via a homepage's messaging.

Value - What's in it for me? Is there a benefit to the user? In order to get people to pay money, they need to understand the value.

Everyone knows that their website doesn't exist in a vacuum. However, a majority of websites still act like they do. And that's costing them business. Everyone's got problems, and people are generally busy and superficial. They're not reading everything on your website, instead they're scanning. If it's not explicit why they should buy from you, the competitor who makes it clear wins.

So we also know that HOW we communicate our message and benefits is just as important as the WHAT. Clarity is king. Below are a few guidelines on how to clearly communicate what the value is and how to present a clear call to action.

See the research on crafting an effective Value Proposition in the CXL Institute: Value Proposition Study: Effects of Layout on Perception & Message Recall

Want to learn more about applying good copy techniques to your site? Take our course on Conversion Copywriting.

What to Call Your CTA

seconds or less

This is a pretty straightforward guideline.

Ask someone who knows nothing about your site to read your CTA for five seconds. Or you can run a 5 Second Test or some other form of online test. If the person doesn't understand what the site offers, you need to clarify the CTA.

According to the latest data by Wingify, makers of Visual Website Optimizer, almost 30% of all A/B tests customers run are Call To Action button tests.

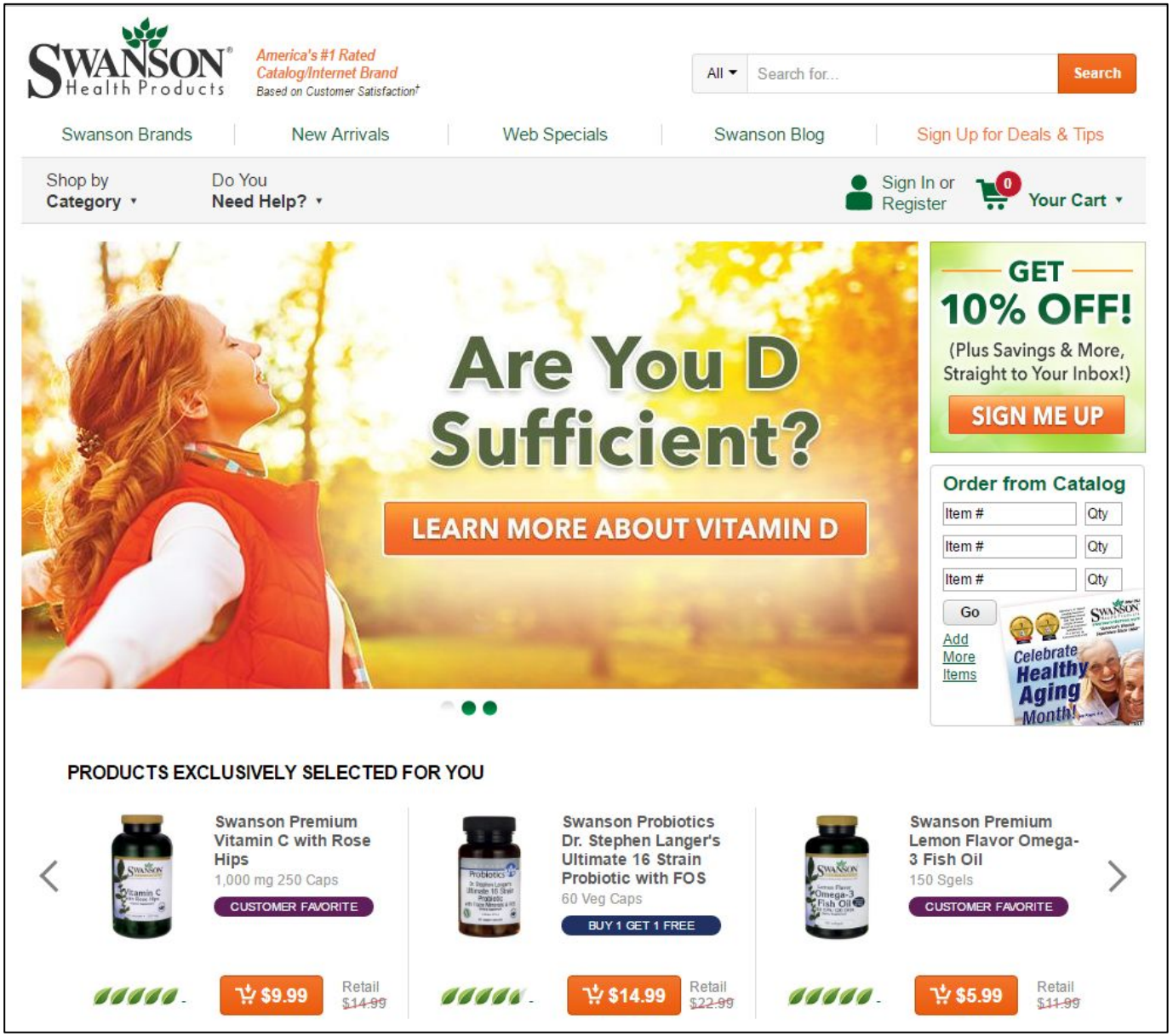
What is even more interesting, is that only one in seven A/B test campaigns produces a statistically significant improvement. But when it does produce a significant improvement; the average increase is 49%.

Also, see Peep Laja's 5-second test website review on the CXL blog.

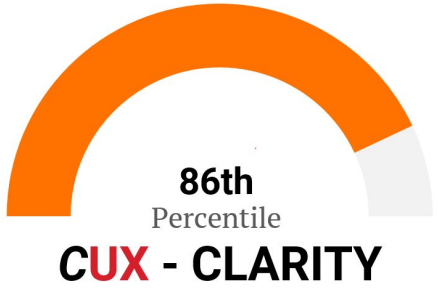
Site Component - Copy
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

Adherence example

Guideline #28. The Call-To-Action (CTA) should be read and understood in five seconds or less

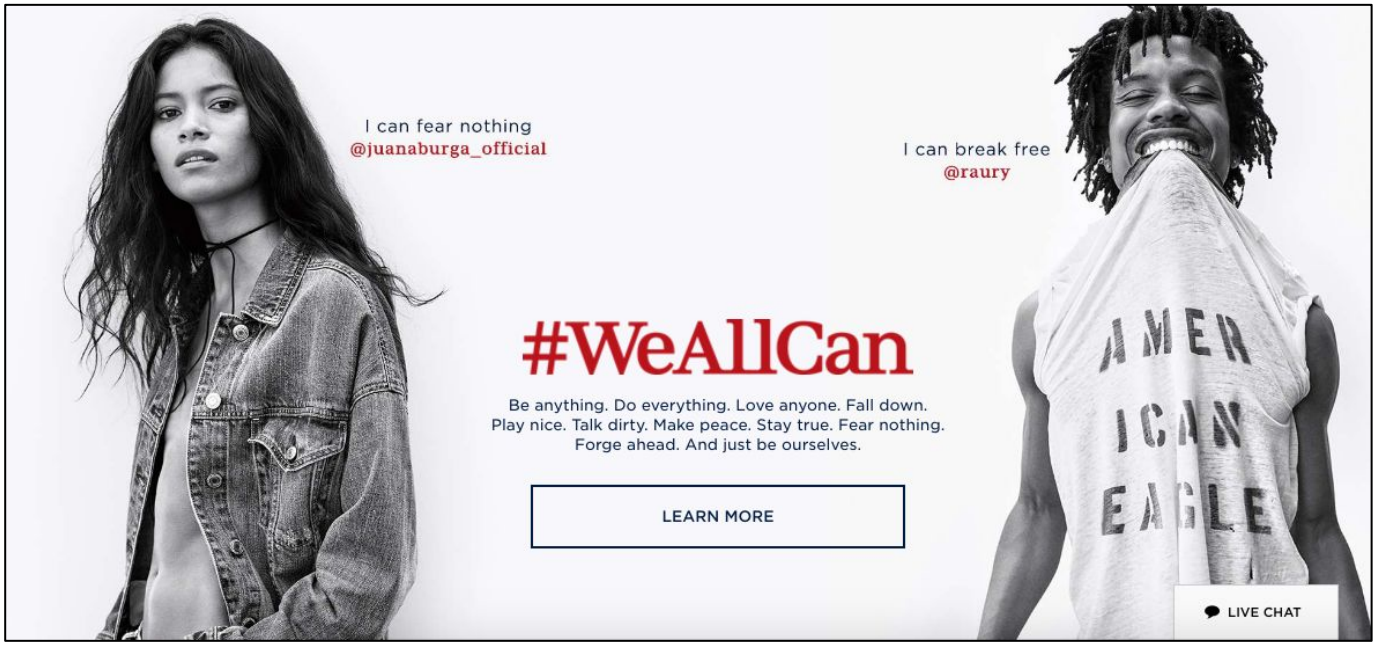


Swanson Vitamins: Ranked in the top 86th percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. This CTA tells users exactly what to expect if they click the button.

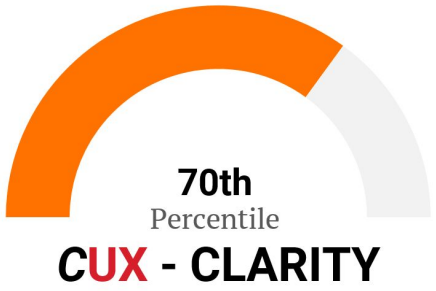


Adherence example

Guideline #28. The Call-To-Action (CTA) should be read and understood in five seconds or less



American Eagle Outfitters: Ranked in the top 70th percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. This CTA is short, simple, and straightforward.



Guideline #29. The CTA should answer customer's principal need

Site Component - Copy > CTA & Value Proposition
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

When it comes to your web pages, no one element lives in vacuum. It's surrounded by other elements of varying sizes, importance and messages – all of them play a role in the success and failure of that one element. It's no different for call to action buttons. What goes on in the rest of the page plays a huge role.

Identify the top motive for people who come to your website. The homepage CTA should address this motive and help move visitors towards their goal.

How? - It's the 'why' behind the quantitative data, knowing what your customers want, when they want it, and how they'd like it served up to them..

It's also the core of developing winning test hypotheses. Behind the 'what' of quantitative data there is a 'why' that informs your copy and gives your visitors an easily navigable path to becoming a customer.

When you understand the motivations driving your prospects and customers, you can reflect their feelings back to them. That way, you're way more likely to convince them that buying from you is the right call.

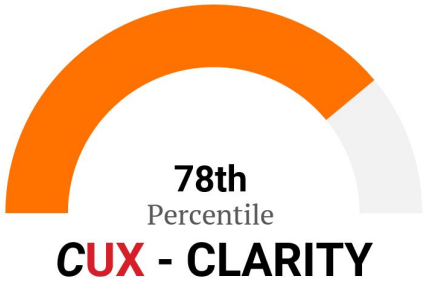
See Jen Havice's article "How to Boost Conversions with Voice of Customer Research [Case Study]" on the CXL blog.

Adherence example

Guideline #29. The CTA should answer customers' principal need

Vitamin Shoppe: Ranked in the top 78th percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. People come to the site to shop, and hopefully save money. This large graphic and CTA help visitors do just that.

User quote - When asked if/why they would buy from this site and not a competitor:
"This website was easy to use. Clearly displayed sales and gave me free shipping."



Guideline #30. Stick with one primary CTA

For every page on your site (in this case your homepage), define the single most wanted action. The primary goal is to lead users into taking this action by displaying a powerful CTA in the best possible location.

To determine what your CTA should be, ask yourself these two questions:

1. What action do you want your visitors to take most?
2. What action do your visitors want to take most?

The second question will ensure you're being realistic. Using the same example, your visitors might not be ready to navigate to the pricing page yet. Perhaps they don't know enough about your product or that's too big of a commitment for their level of intent.

In any case, don't confuse users with multiple calls to action that compete for attention. It's better to focus users on one action and optimize based up on that desired goal.

If you need more than one CTA, the secondary CTA should also be secondary in the homepage's visual hierarchy.

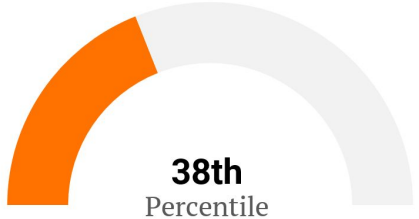
Site Component - Copy > CTA & Value Proposition
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

Non-adherence example

Guideline #30. Stick with one primary CTA

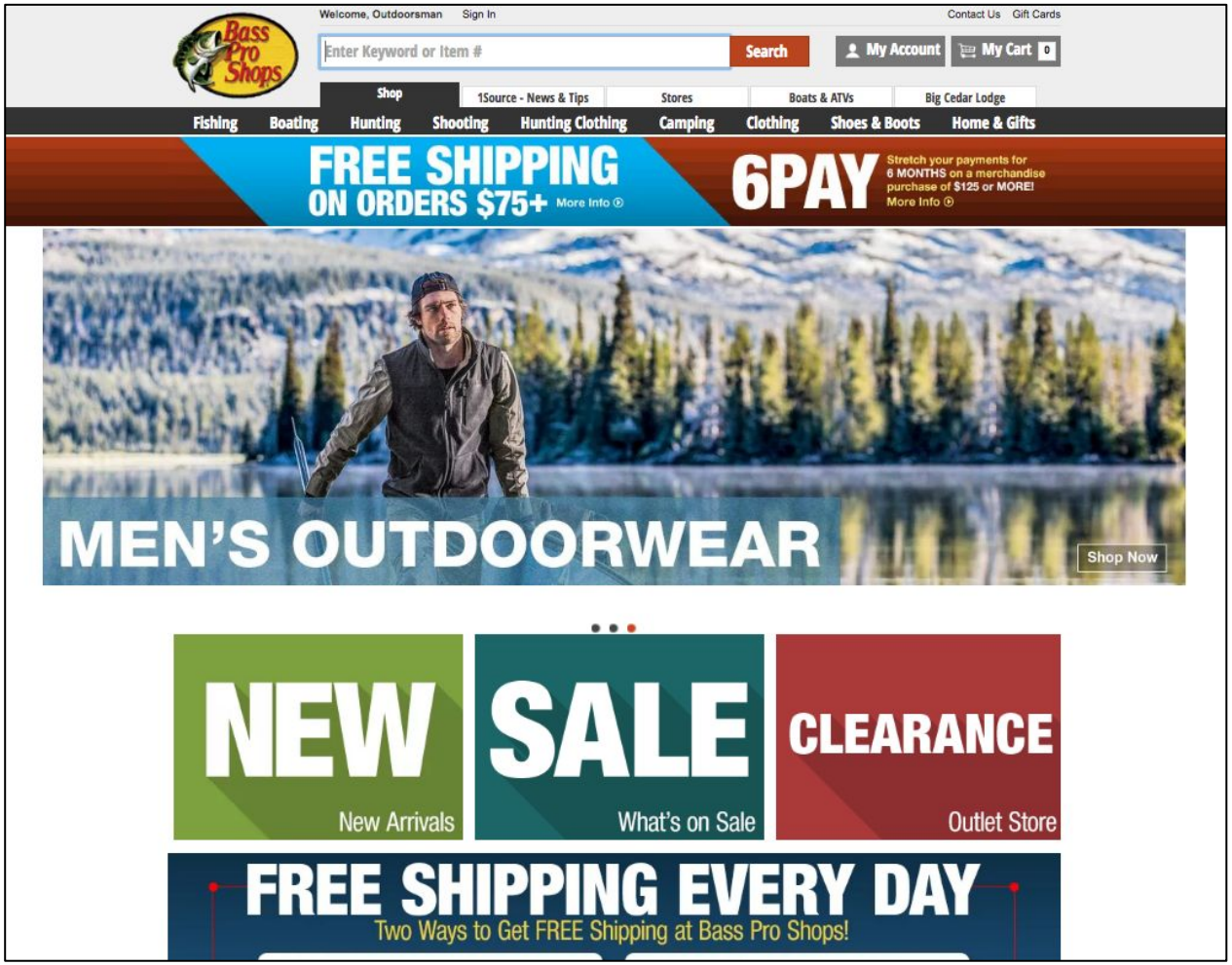
TigerDirect: Ranked in the 38th percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. This homepage flashes users with five near-identical CTAs. Will users end up on some product page? Perhaps a list of Dell, Intel, or Mac products? The outcome for these CTAs is unknown.

User quote - *"The main page was slightly busy. It seemed to put more emphasis on, "Hey! Look at all the stuff we have!" rather than helping the user navigate to what type of items they may want to purchase."*



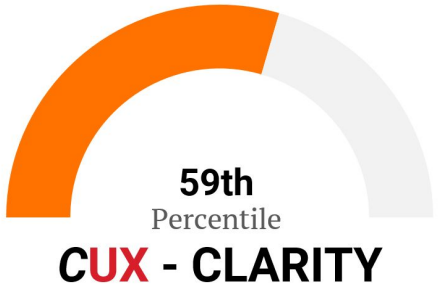
Non-adherence example

Guideline #30. Stick with one primary CTA



Bass Pro Shops: Ranked in the bottom 59th percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. On the other end of the spectrum, it's unclear whether there is a CTA on this homepage, and if so, what it is. Instead, users are required to try and detect the appropriate action on their own.

User quote - *"The landing site is not at all welcoming, or giving any sense of the site's "personality." Instead, it's just a swarm of ads for a site the user is already on. The banners and boxes are all jampacked together, and each one is packed to the gills with colors and pictures and text of all different fonts and sizes, some of it blinking or moving, and most of it YELLING AT THE USER IN ALL CAPS. "*



Guideline #31. Don't ask for too much commitment with CTAs (e.g. Don't say "buy now")

If you have a CTA labeled “buy now,” users may feel pressured *or* that you’re trying to trick them into buying something when they just got to your site. It’s a label that creates more anxiety than necessary upfront, before a user may be motivated enough to buy. Instead of “buy now,” go for something like “learn more,” or “shop now”.

A good formula to use it to have your CTA finish the sentence “I want to …”.

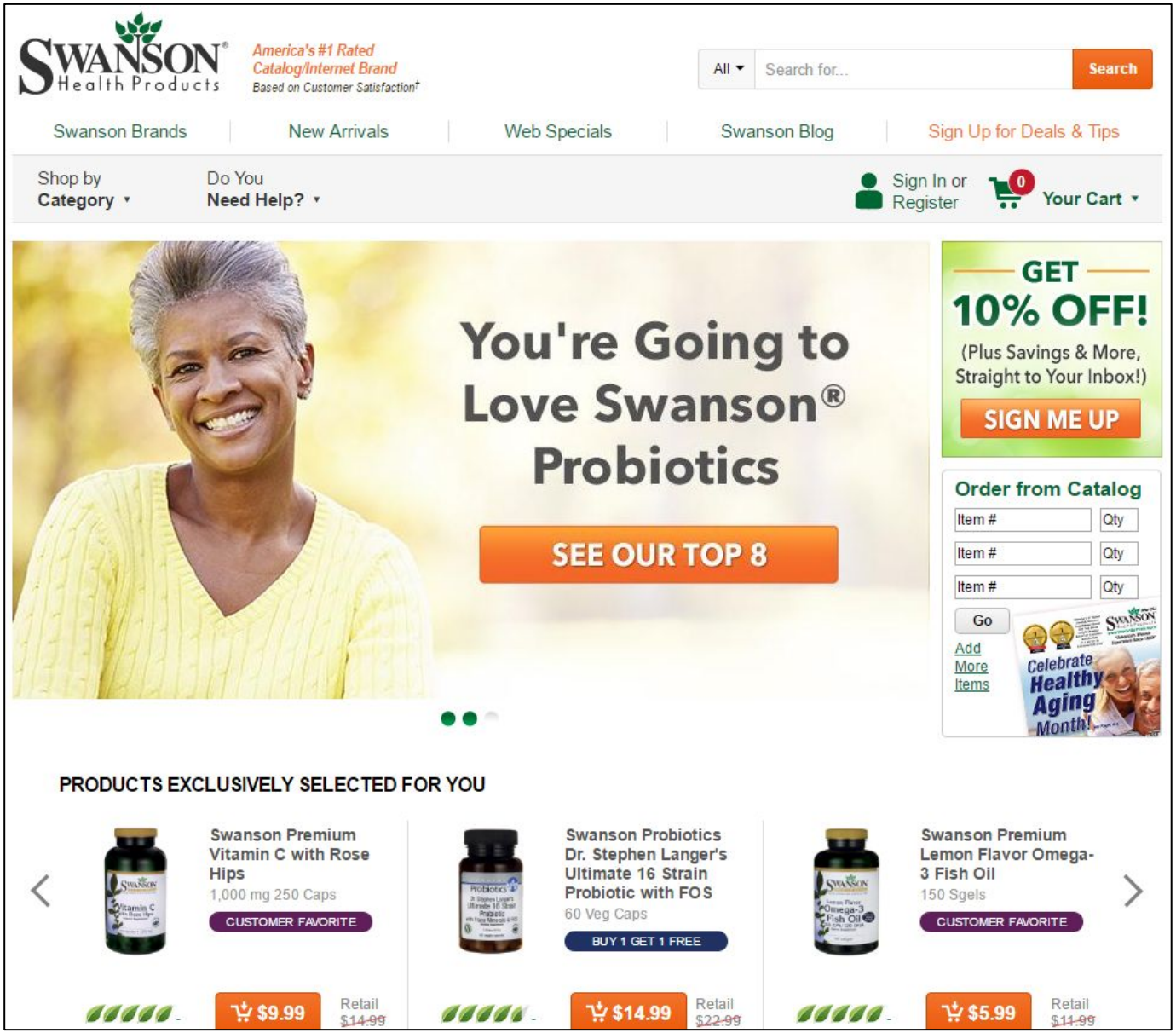
Interestingly CTA “Click here” tends to work pretty well! It defies all the rules, but we’ve seen it outperform other CTAs many times.

What to avoid: Don’t use a CTA like “Submit.” Though it’s a very commonly used button, very few people want to “submit.”

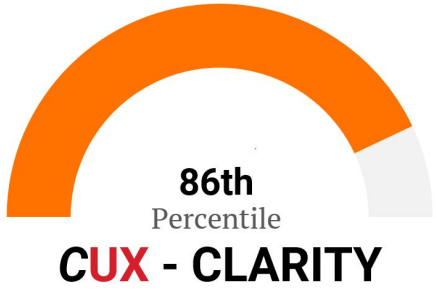
Site Component - Copy > CTA & Value Proposition
Conversion Heuristic - Motivation

Adherence example

Guideline #31. Don't ask for too much commitment with CTAs



Swanson Vitamins: Ranked in the top 86th percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. Instead of feeling pressured into buying, this CTA offers users 8 different popular choices.



Guideline #32. Focus on what customers get instead of what they lose (e.g. "Get shoes" instead of "Pay $200")

People don't want to think about the money they're losing when they buy something from your site. They want to think about what they're *gaining*. Structure your copy to highlight the benefits of their purchase. Our conversion copywriting course provides a value proposition outline.

Sometimes it's the little things that tip the decision in your favor. If all major things are pretty much the same between your and your competitors' offer, you can win by offering small value-adds. We call them boosters. These things work well against competitors who do not offer them.

Boosters can be things like: Free shipping, fast shipping/next day shipping, free bonus with a purchase, free setup/installation, no setup fee, no long-term contract, cancel any time, license for multiple computers (vs. only one), money-back guarantee, a discounted price (for a product), or customizability.

Think of small things you could add that wouldn't cost you much, but could be attractive to some buyers.

Site Component - Copy > CTA & Value Proposition
Conversion Heuristic - Motivation

User quote - *"Loved the promotions- makes me want to buy from them since I feel like I am saving money!"*

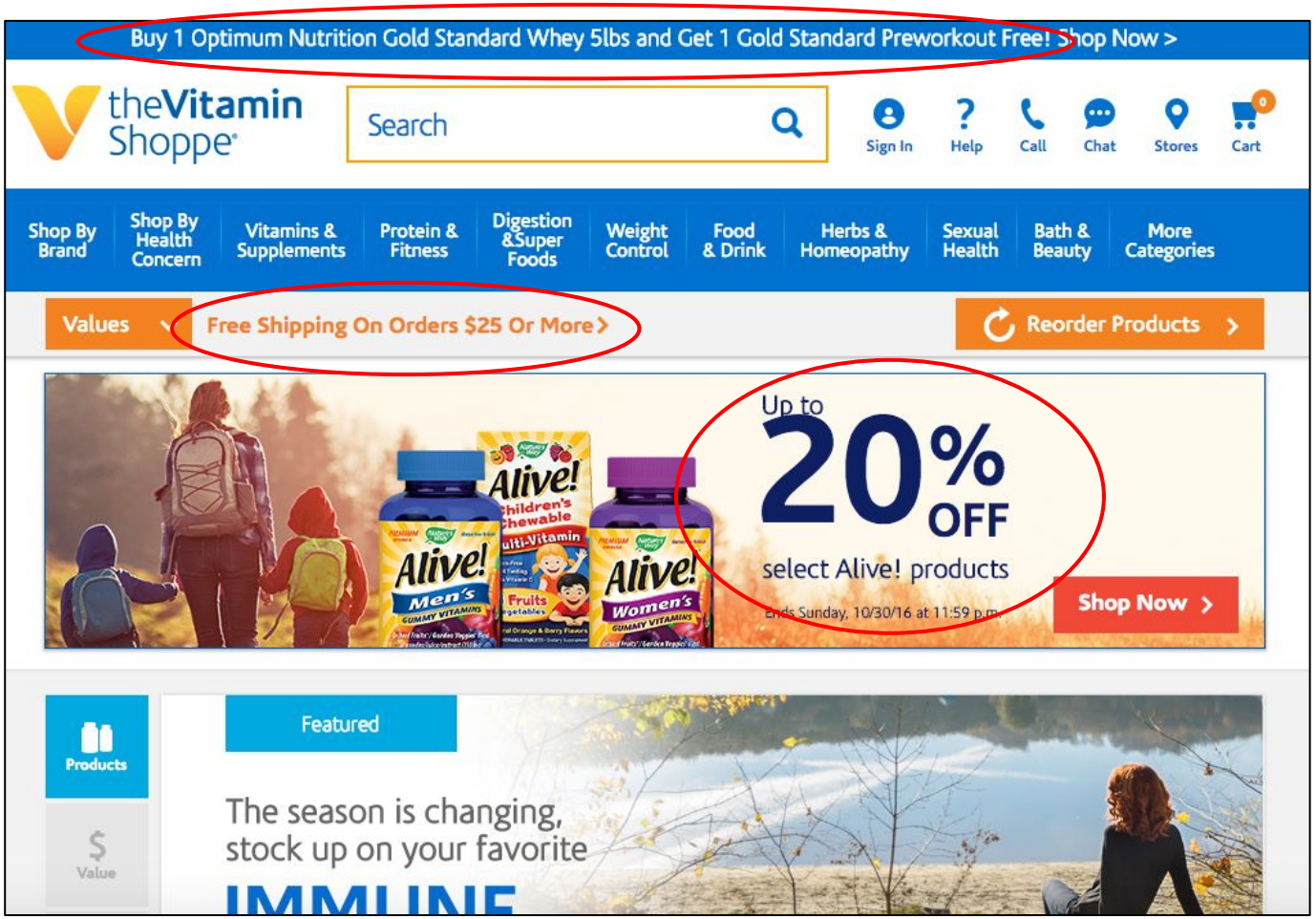
User quote - *"They advertised their free year round shipping on the front page with no price restrictions. This seems like a great perk for shopping with the site."*

User quote - *"Obviously this is a well known brand, but nothing that I saw on this website really made it clear to me why I needed to buy from this website over somebody else"*

User quote - *"The option to add a donation to the Nature Conservancy tells customers what type of business you are dealing with."*

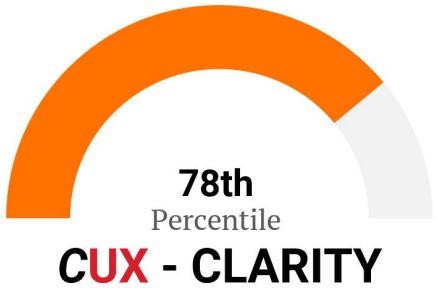
Adherence example

Guideline #32. Focus on what customers get instead of what they lose (e.g. "Get shoes" instead of "Pay $200")



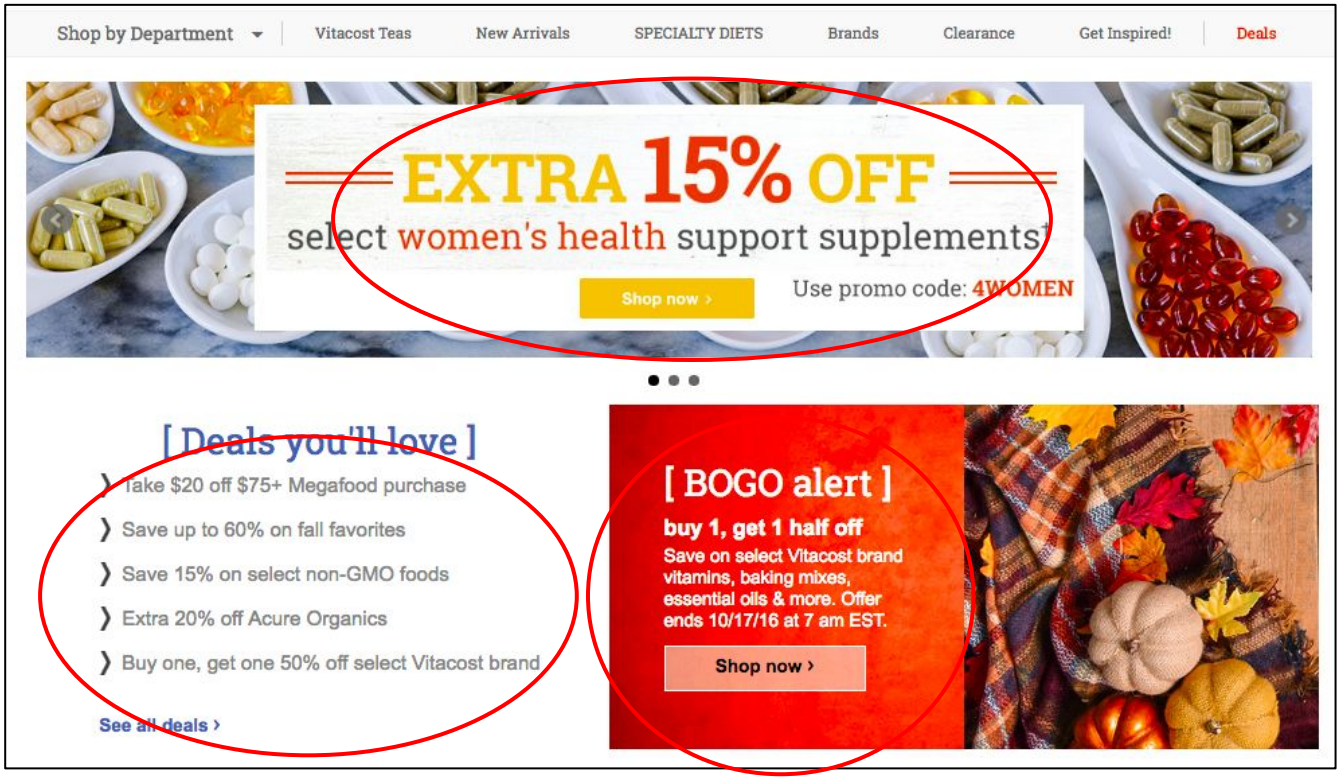
The Vitamin Shoppe: Ranked in the top 78th percentile for the UX dimension Clarity.

User quote - When asked if/why they would buy from this site and not competitors:
"This website was easy to use. Clearly displayed sales and gave me free shipping. It has a variety of products. I would use this site over competitors."

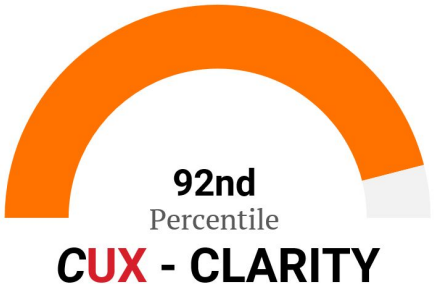


Adherence example

Guideline #32. Focus on what customers get instead of what they lose (e.g. "Get shoes" instead of "Pay $200")



Vitacost: Ranked in the top 92nd percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. This homepage value proposition gives users several good reasons to spend their money on the Vitacost website.



Guideline #33. Use bullet points to list benefits

A value proposition is a promise of value to be delivered. It's the primary reason a prospect should buy from you.

Prospects need to know the benefits of your product/service if they're going to buy.

Evaluate your current value proposition by checking whether it answers the questions below:

- What product or service is your company selling?
- What is the end-benefit of using it?
- Who is your target customer for this product or service?
- What makes your offering unique and different?

Use the headline-paragraph-bullets-visual formula to structure the answers.

We recently conducted a research study on value proposition design and found that benefits listed with bullet points is most memorable *and* most preferable.

If bullet points don't work with your site or design, aim for benefits that are in a list format and are short, distinct, and easy to read.

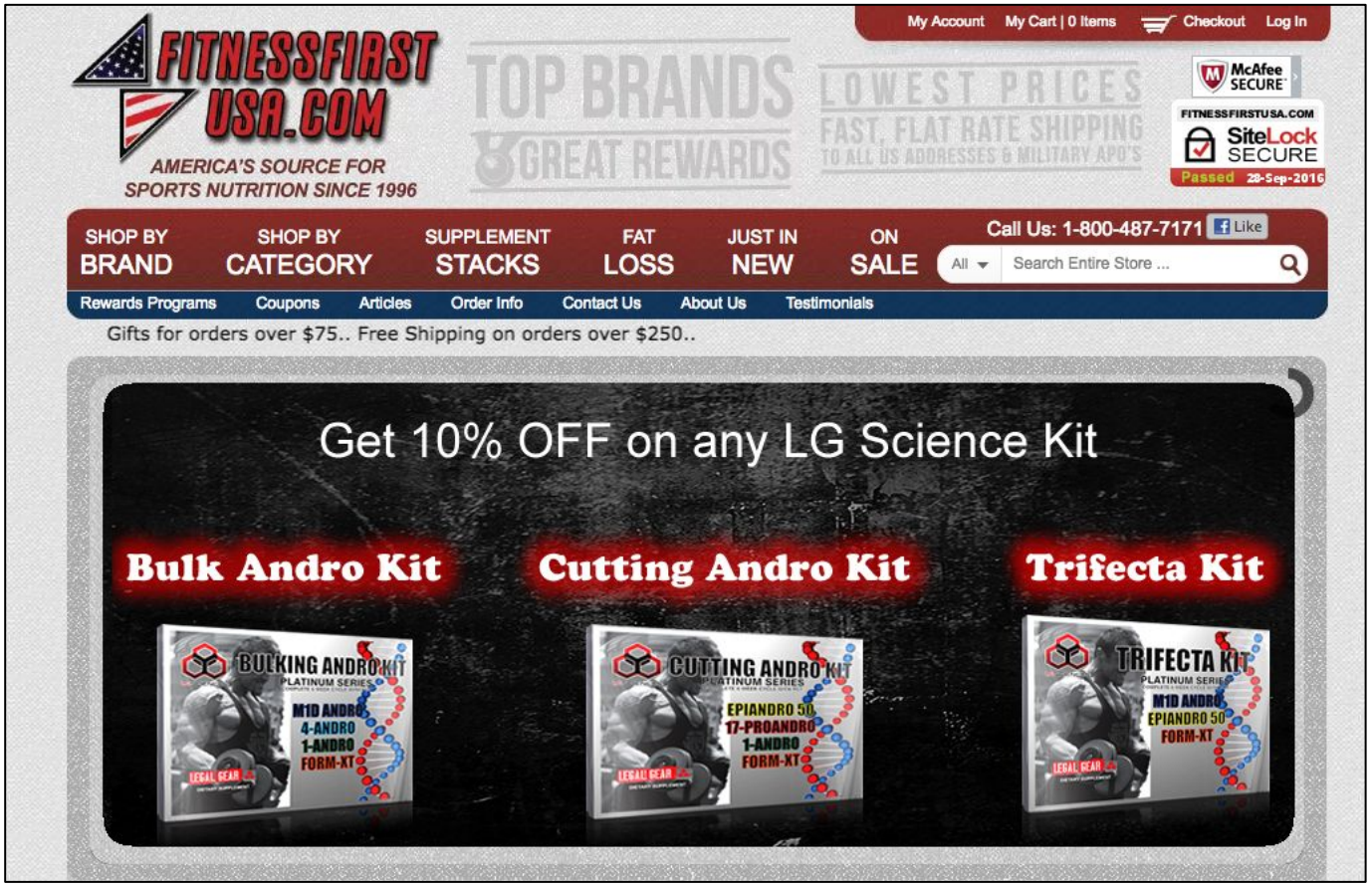
Site Component - Copy > CTA & Value Proposition
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

User quote - *"I'm not familiar why it is better or worse than its competitors".*

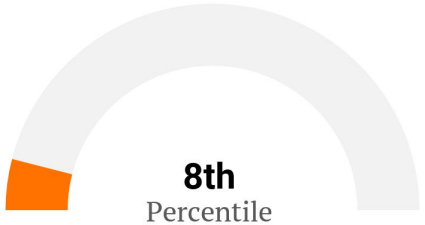
User quote - *"I definitely see why I should buy from this site instead of its competitors because it has a nice look and it's easy to use. They had their "promotions" at the top of the page with coupons and free shipping that make the customers truly feel like they are getting the best possible deal."*

Non-adherence example

Guideline #33. Use bullet points to list benefits



Fitness First USA: Ranked in the bottom 8th percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. The value proposition benefits on this homepage, "top brands, great rewards, lowest prices, fast, flat rate shipping" aren't listed in any cohesive way. What's more, they're barely noticeable. These benefits would be better off re-organized in a visible and easy to read list.



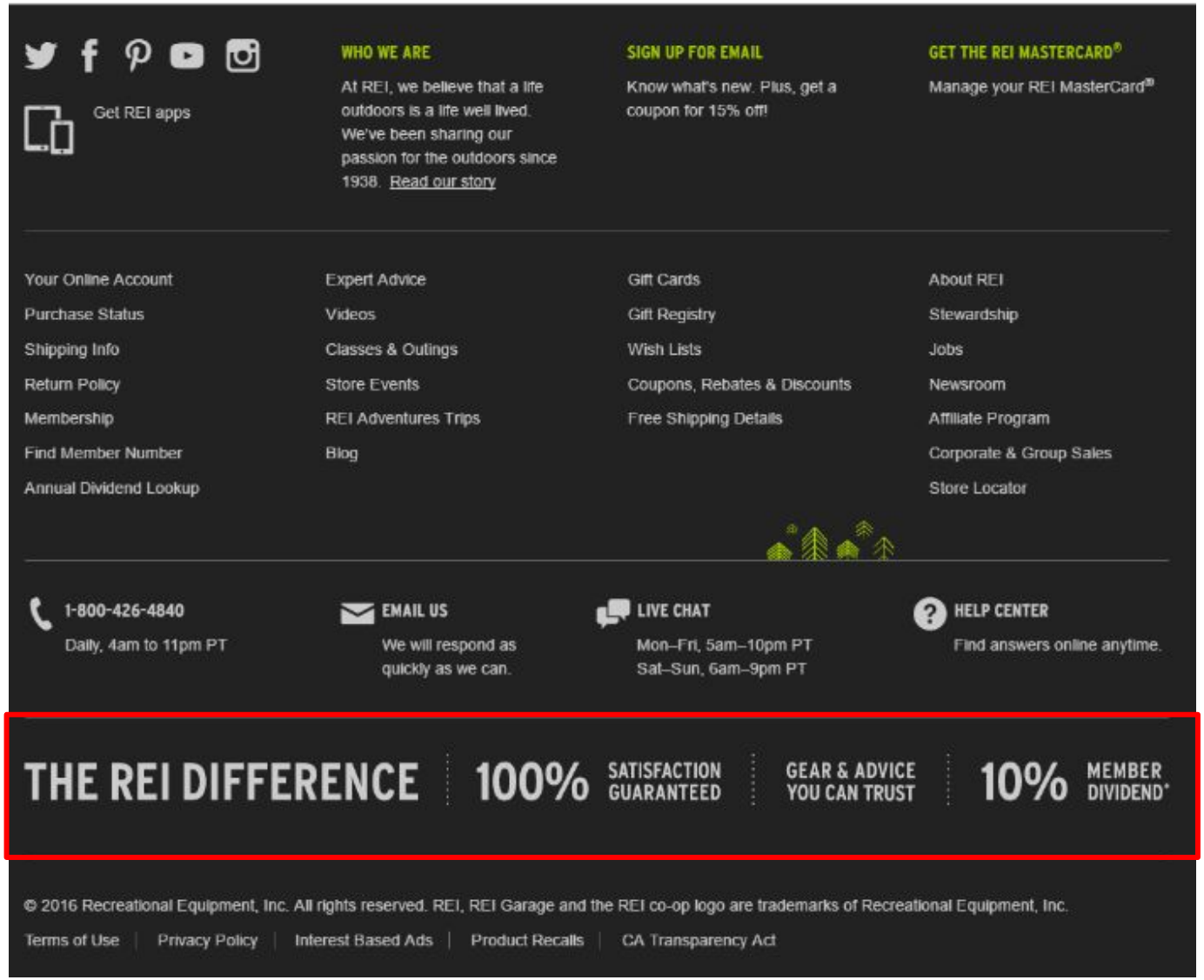
Non-adherence example

Guideline #33. Use bullet points to list benefits

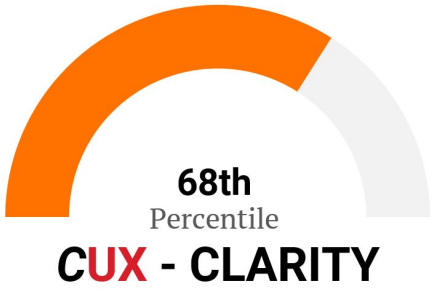
Outdoor Action: Ranked in the bottom 14th percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. This value proposition, boasting benefits like expertise, a wide variety of products, and excellent customer service, is formatted as an extensive paragraph halfway down the homepage. This chunk of copy should be minimized and bulleted so that people actually read it.

Adherence example

Guideline #33. Use bullet points to list benefits



REI: Ranked in the top 68th percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. Although not bulleted, REI lists their benefits in this organized and approachable banner.

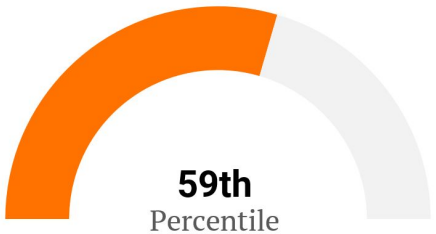


Adherence example

Guideline #33. Use bullet points to list benefits

Drs Foster and Smith: Ranked in the top 59th percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. Three value proposition benefits are prominently listed right below the navigation menu.

User quote - *"reviews under the products and the professional set up really sold me on the site. I would definitely purchase from it."*



CUX - CLARITY

Guideline #34. Communicate what makes your offer unique and how you solve potential customers' problem (or improve their situation)

If your website has the same offer as the competition, then what's the advantage to buying with you?

Ecommerce websites need to offer something unique in order to have leverage against the competition. They also have to solve customer's main problem, too.

Look at your product/service and think about two things:
1. When people come to your website, what problem are they trying to solve? How are you fixing that for them?
2. What makes you different than your competition?

Create a value proposition incorporating clear answers to these questions.

What if your product or service simply is *not* unique? In this situation you'll advance from selling your product/service, to selling your customer experience. For more information, check out our article addressing the issue of a non-unique offer.

Site Component - Copy > CTA & Value Proposition
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

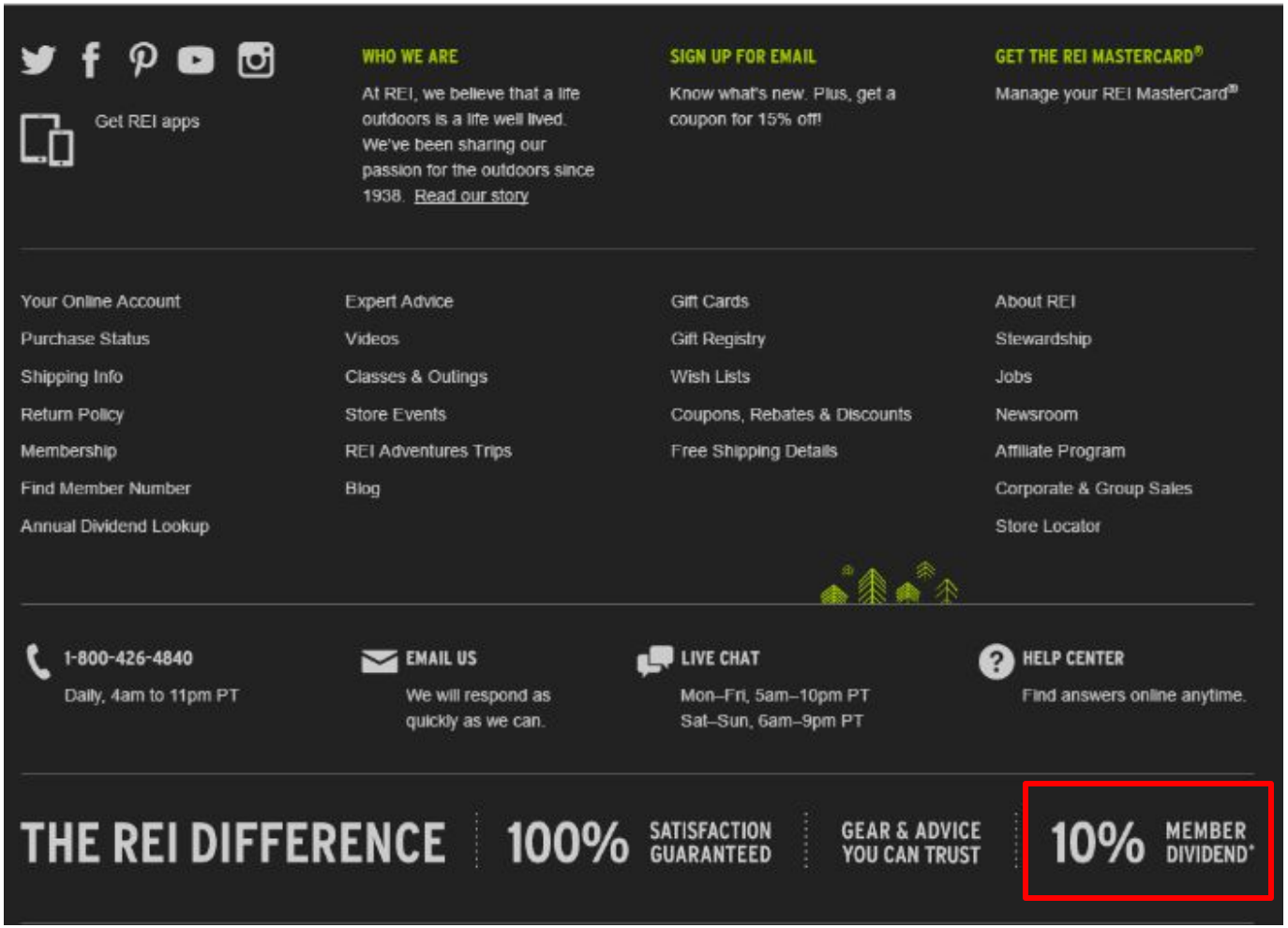
User quote - When asked if they noticed anything that made the website unique, *"I didn't see anything right off the bat that differentiates it from sites like Amazon, especially when you already have a prime membership, although I do greatly appreciate their enhanced and specific search criteria features."*

User quote - When asked if they noticed anything that made the website unique, *"It looked like they carried a very wide range of products and they offered money back guarantees and a 30 day return policy."*

User quote - *"I could not tell ... why this site is different. Perhaps one element is that the pricing seems to be lower than competitors, but it was not immediately clear what advantage this site gives. I did notice at the top of the home page that it has a warranty, but not on all products."*

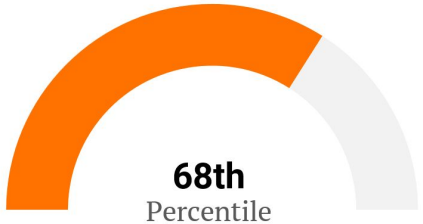
Adherence example

Guideline #34. Communicate what makes your offer unique and how you solve potential customers' problem (or improve their situation)



REI: Ranked in the top 68th percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. No other recreational companies offer a 10% member dividend. For people who are serious about recreation, this is a significant benefit.

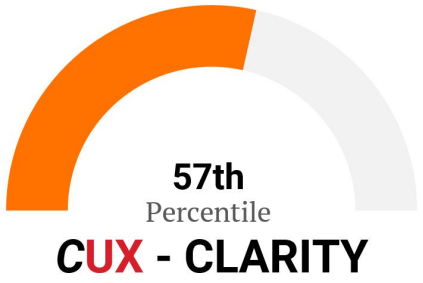
User quote - "*I clearly understand that REI is a store that specializes in outdoor products which sets them apart from big box stores such as Walmart that offers products for decent prices but not always the best quality nor the "expertise" that clearly REI has over those types of competitors.*"



Adherence example

Guideline #34. Communicate what makes your offer unique and how you solve potential customers' problem (or improve their situation)

Gap: Ranked in the top 57th percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. By purchasing from Gap, you're donating to the Breast Cancer Research Foundation. Other clothing stores aren't providing this charitable benefit.



Clarity » Design

7 Guidelines

Clarity > Design

35. The CTA's location should complement the customer's journey
36. Eliminate any design elements that detract from taking the "most wanted" action
37. Avoid placing advertisements (and content that resembles ads) in prime content locations
38. Relevant/specific promotions (seasonal promotions, sales for particular product categories) should not resemble banner ads
39. Don't use prime real estate for social media icons; display them in the footer
40. Personalize homepage content when possible

The primary objective of any design is to get the site's message across. For ecommerce business it's usually 'buy this product' or 'explore our products'. Essentially, the message is a story, and the story should relate why and how to buy from the site. In a good design that facilitates the story, every shape, color, image, and font works together to create a clear message.

Great design contributes to the message, bad design distracts from the message and frustrates users.

When evaluating design clarity, Peep suggests asking yourself the following questions for each and every page of the site...

- "Is there strong visual hierarchy in place? Does it follow most wanted action?
- Are less important things also less important design wise?
- Is there enough white space to draw attention to what matters?
- Are the visuals in place that support the content?
- Does call to action stand out enough?
- How much top priority information is below the fold?
- If there's more information below the fold, is it clear that they should scroll? Any logical breaks that stop the eye flow?
- Is the eye path clear?
- Is the body copy font size large enough easy reading? In most cases the optimal size is 16px, but that depends on the font."

Guideline #35. The CTA's location should complement the customer's journey

Most people read/scan over a webpage in the same sequence (left to right, top to bottom).

Over the years, researchers and web designers have created several formal diagrams for this common viewing pattern. These include the Gutenberg diagram, letter F-pattern layout and the letter Z-pattern layout. Each offers slightly different information on where to place your most important information (including CTAs) on any given web page.

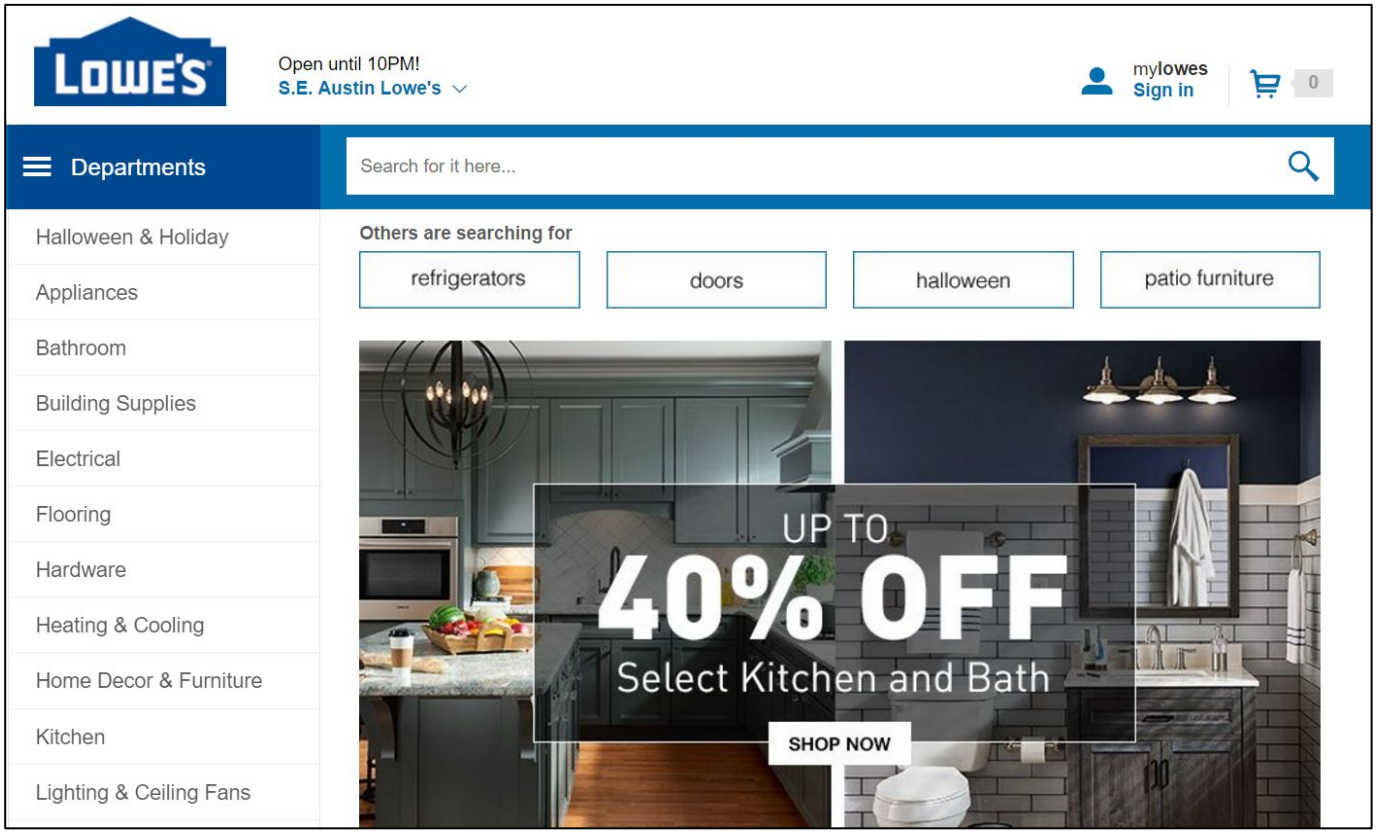
When deciding where to placing the CTA, remember that the homepage is meant to relay the site's key message (what and why to buy) and to get the customer to act. Putting the CTA below the fold or in a unnoticeable place effectively hides a main component of the site's message. Conventional design places CTAs in the center or on the right side of the page above the fold.

Look for a spot that complements taking action. For example, if your website currently has a sale, place an "apply discount" CTA next to the promotion. If there's a graphic explaining how the site sells locally sourced products, put a "shop local" CTA next to this graphic.

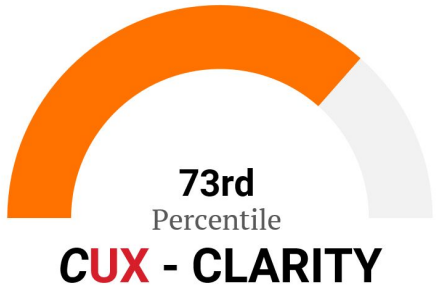
Site Component - Design
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

Adherence example

Guideline #35. The CTA's location should complement the customer's journey

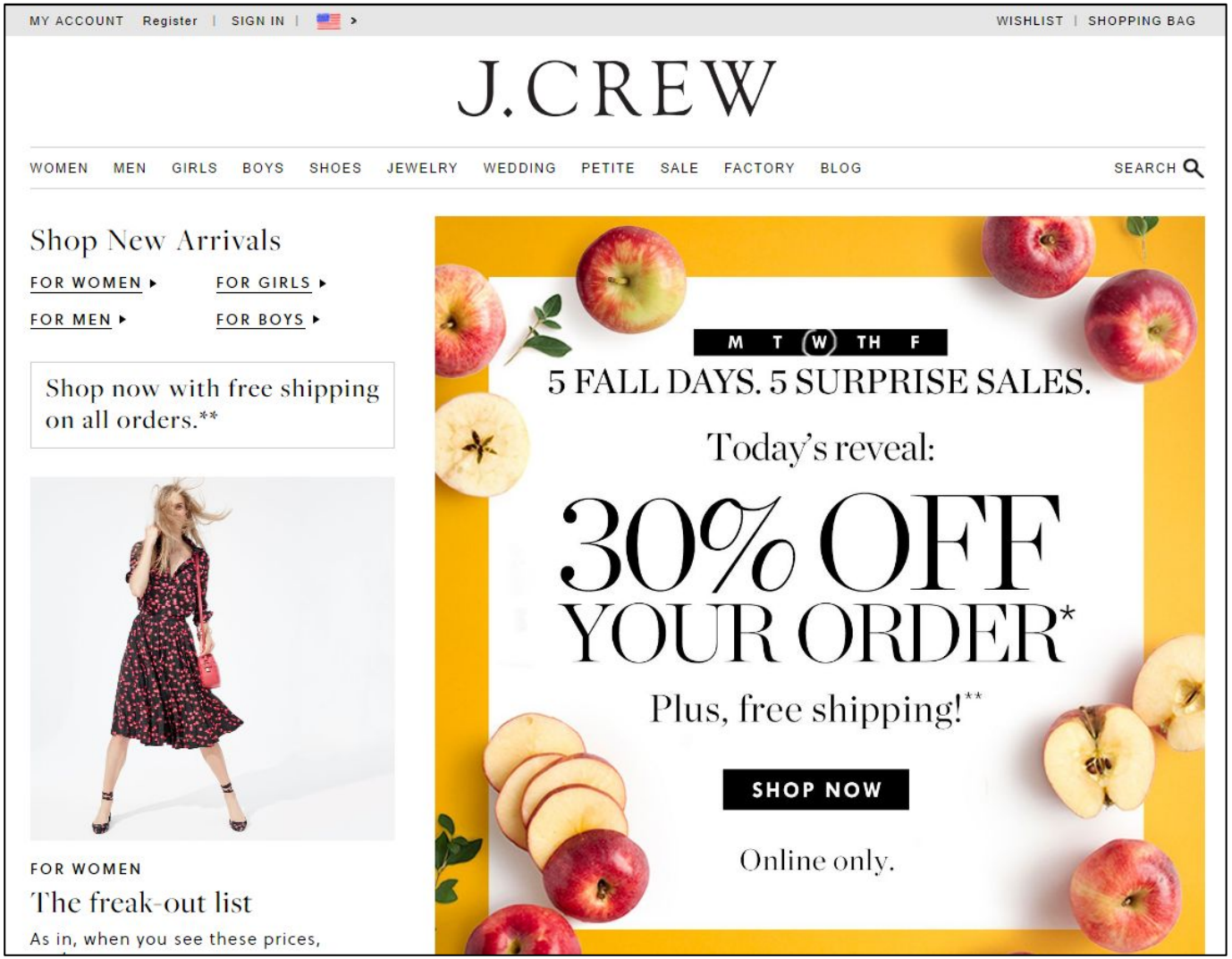


Lowe's: Ranked in the top 73rd percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. This complementary CTA is smartly placed on top of prominent kitchen and bathroom photos.



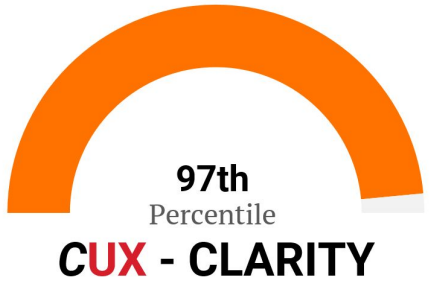
Adherence example

Guideline #35. The CTA's location should complement the customer's journey



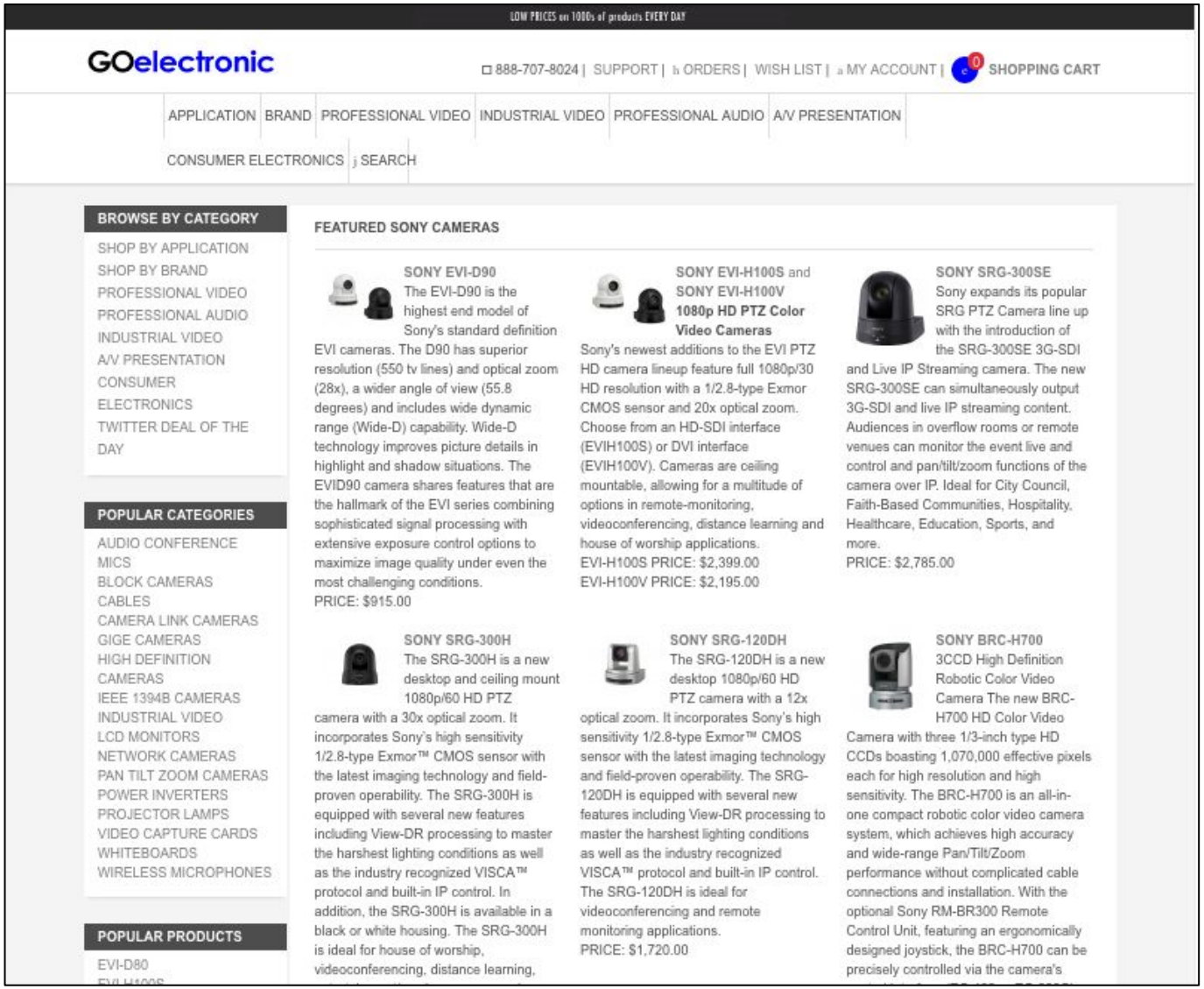
J. Crew: Ranked in the top 97th percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. The CTA is designed as part of the promotion on this homepage so users can start browsing with the applied discount right away.

User quotes for J. Crew on why they'd buy from here versus a competitor - *"very legitimate and professional feel." & "because it has a nice look and it's easy to use"*

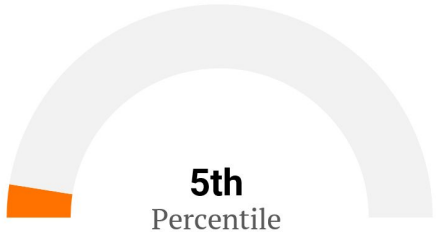


Non-adherence example

Guideline #35. The CTA's location should complement the customer's journey

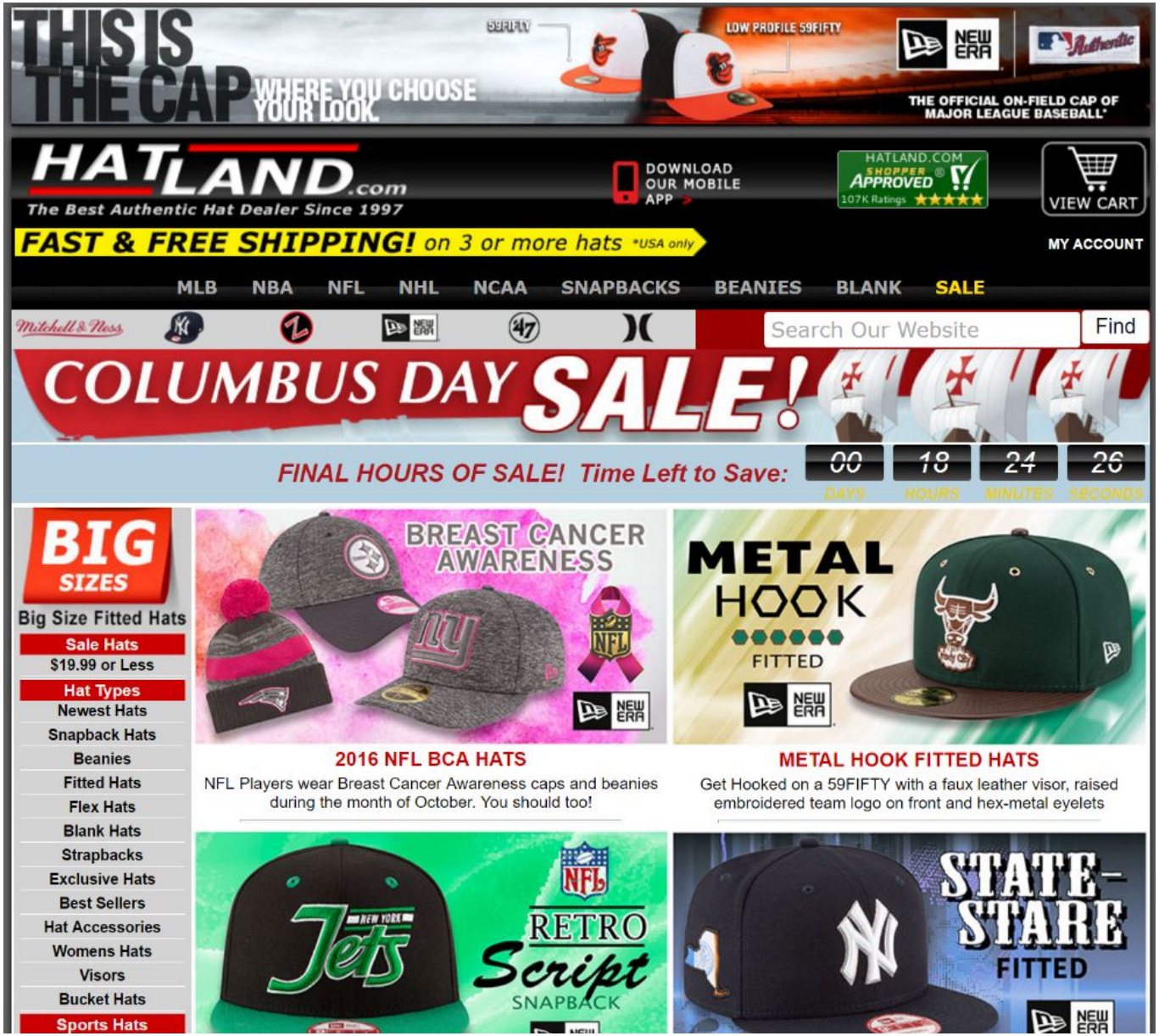


GO Electronic: Instead of a wall of technical product descriptions, this homepage should increase the size of their featured product thumbnails and place a "shop feature products" CTA nearby.



Non-adherence example

Guideline #35. The CTA's location should complement the customer's journey



Hatland: Ranked in the bottom 11th percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. The “fast & free shipping” offer for three or more hats is a good offer. It would be even more enticing if users could click a button to “browse hats” right after reading it.

Guideline #36. Eliminate any design elements that detract from taking the "most wanted" action

Conversion optimizers are in the business of attention management, just like magicians.

Essentially, everything that does not contribute to your most wanted action is a distraction. For example...

- Large navigations that take up a lot of screen space
- Distracting fonts and colors
- Moving images
- Additional calls to action with high contrast colors

Note that it is not only internal factors that distract your visitors. They can also be distracted by external factors (their phones, their environment, their social media, their email).

It's your job, as an optimizer, to direct attention and focus your visitors on the next step. Yet, so few of us do this effectively. Landing pages are full of distractions, CTAs are cluttered, and advertisements and promotions can take away from the primary goals.

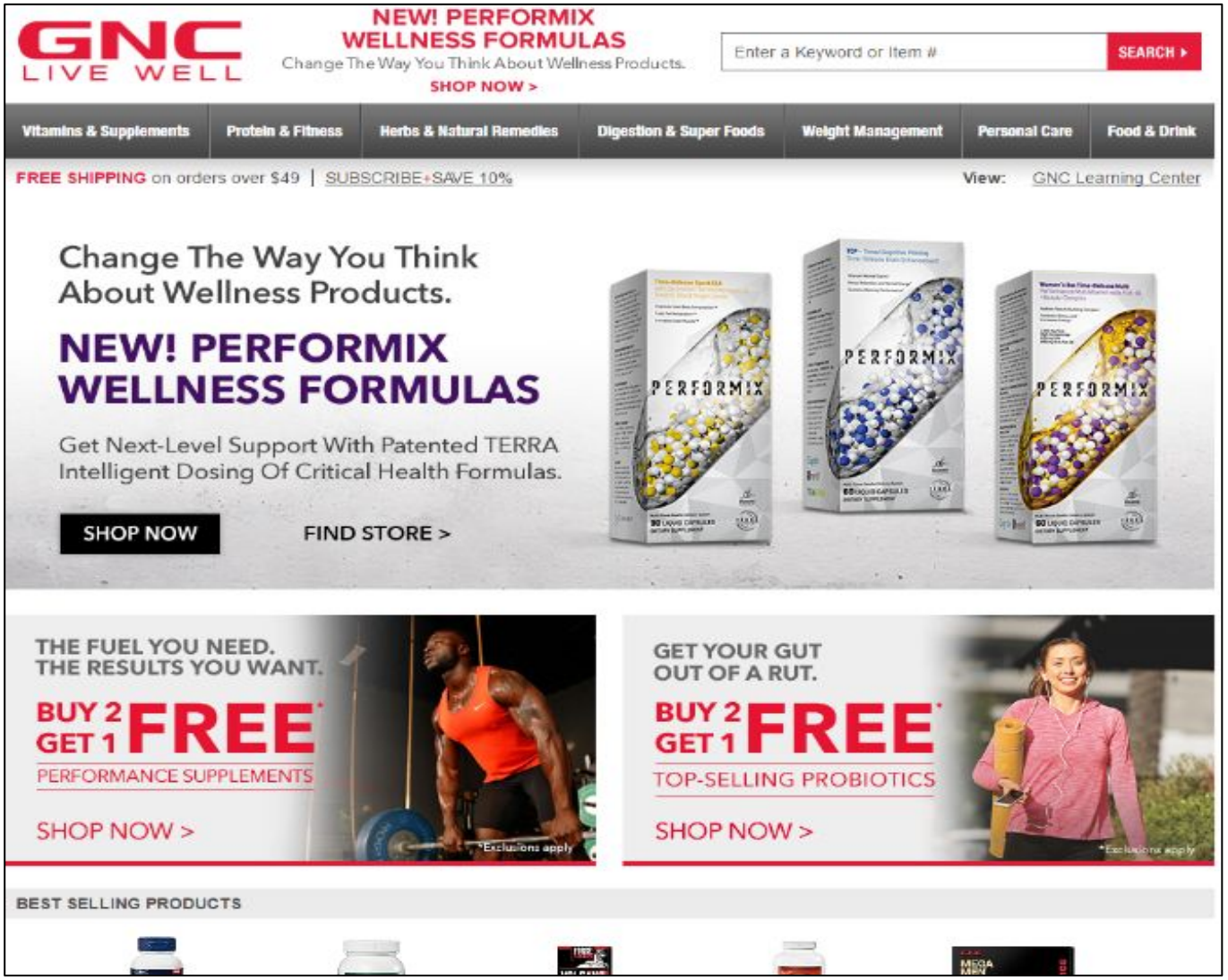
The purpose of the homepage is to direct visitors to the most wanted action.

Site Component - Design
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

Peep Laja, ConversionXL: *"Noise and distraction is not just about how many products you have. It's how busy your layout is, how many competing design elements there are, all asking for attention."* Read more on CXL blog

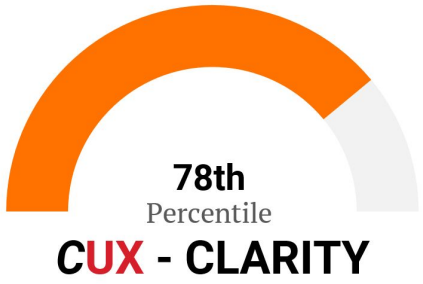
Adherence example

Guideline #36. Eliminate any design elements that detract from taking the "most wanted" action



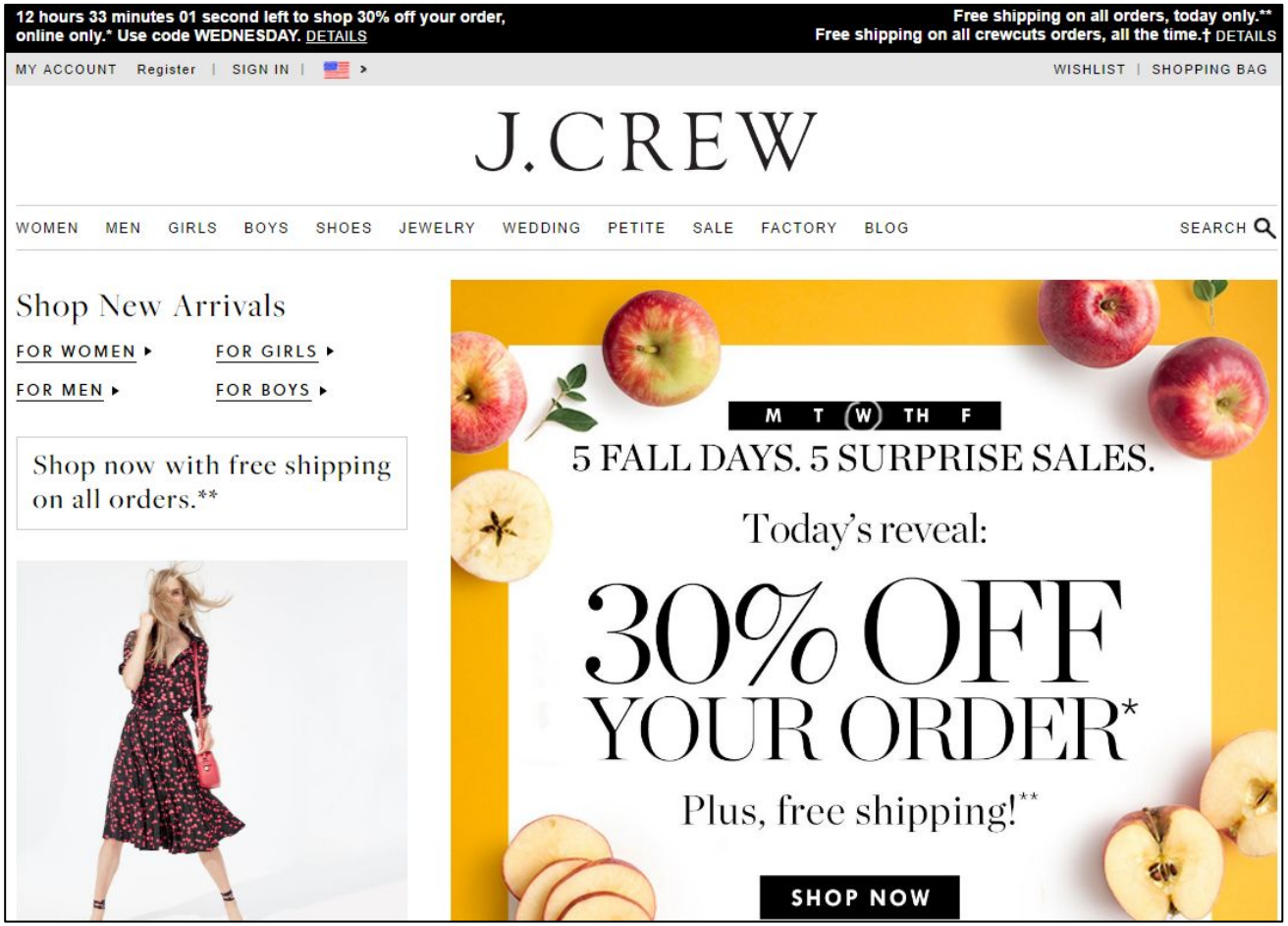
GNC: Ranked in the top 78th percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. There are no pointless elements on this homepage. This, plus the ample amount of whitespace, makes it easy for site visitors to notice the CTA.

User quote - *"I like how everything was laid out and easy to understand."*



Adherence example

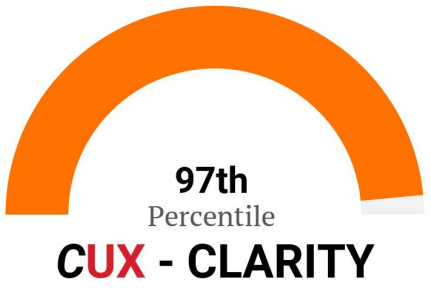
Guideline #36. Eliminate any design elements that detract from taking the "most wanted" action



J. Crew: Ranked in the top 97th percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. Once again, there are no needless elements on this page. The 30% off sales promotion graphic (and CTA inside it) are prominent.

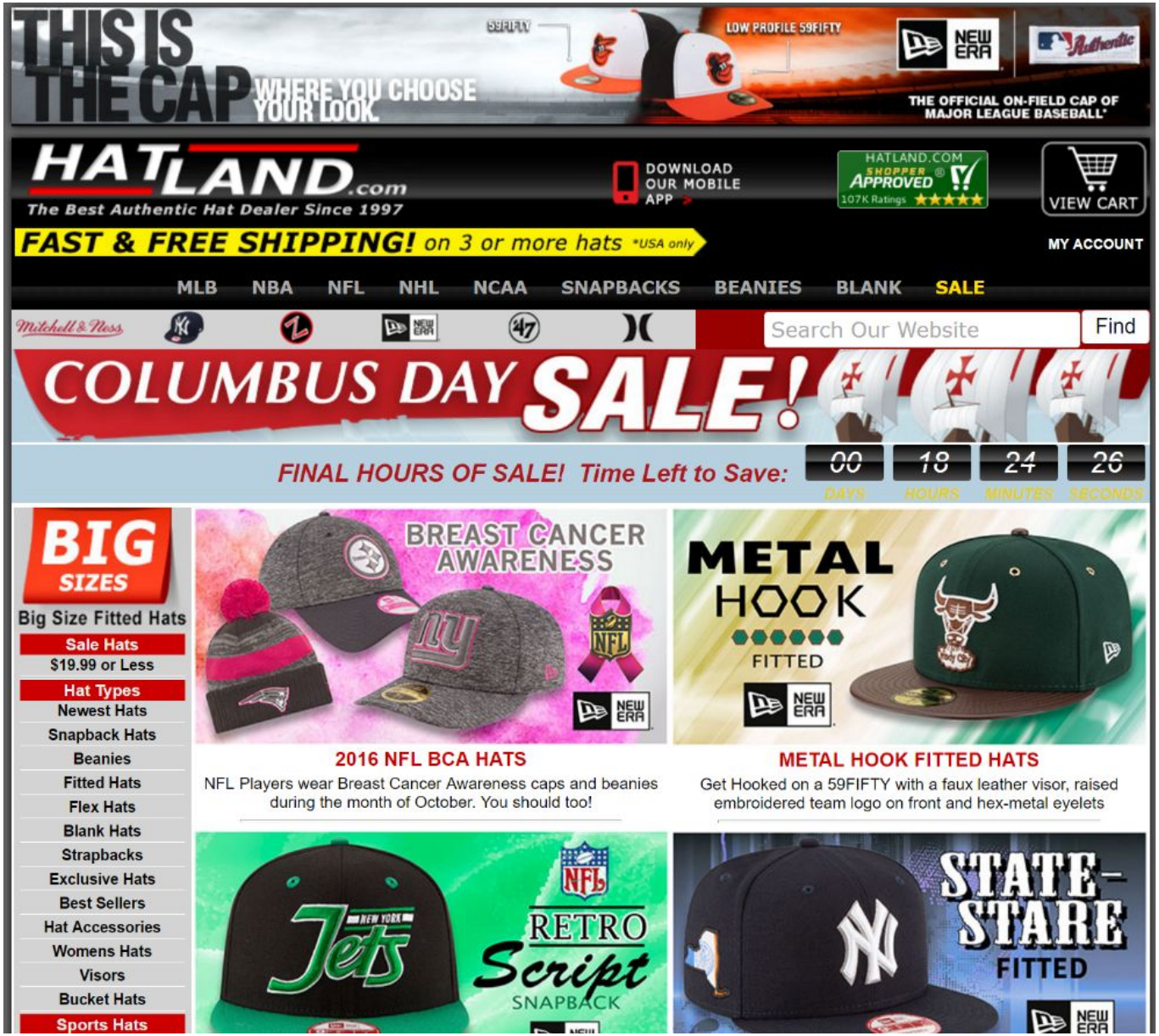
User quote - *"It's incredibly clean and modern. It presents itself as a high quality website with high quality products or items for sale. It's classic and cool and easy to navigate. I found it to be very intuitive and I was able to find what I wanted relatively fast and easy."*

User quote - *"I loved how clean and simple the site was. It was easy to navigate and I really liked that whenever I clicked on something (women, shirts, sweaters) it came up with more options to narrow down my search.*



Non-adherence example

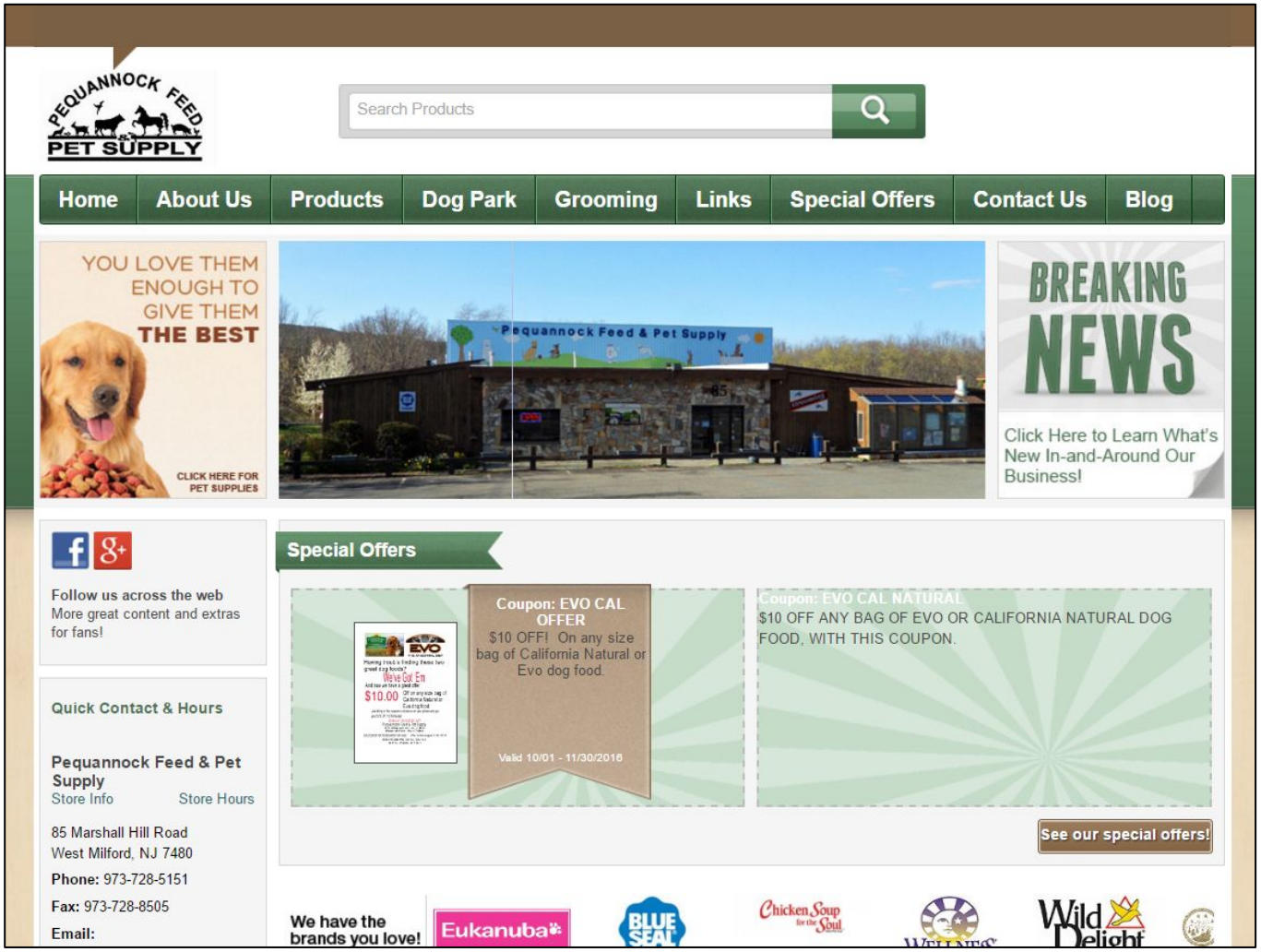
Guideline #36. Eliminate any design elements that detract from taking the "most wanted" action



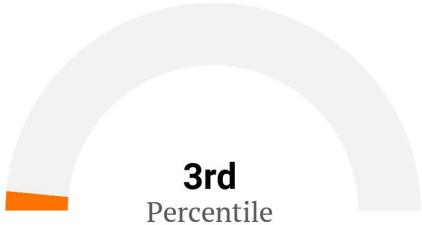
Hatland: Ranked in the bottom 11th percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. There is so much going on with this homepage that it's impossible to know what the most wanted action is. Many elements should be eliminated to create some clarity and visual hierarchy.

Non-adherence example

Guideline #36. Eliminate any design elements that detract from taking the "most wanted" action



Pequannock Feed: Ranked in the bottom 3rd percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. The most wanted action is unclear on this homepage. There is no CTA, sales promotion, or product display. This site would benefit from creating some sort of call-to-action above the fold.



3rd
Percentile
CUX - CLARITY

Guideline #37. Avoid placing advertisements (and content that resembles ads) in prime content locations

If a website homepage is cluttered with irrelevant information, first-time visitors may become distracted or overwhelmed. More time is spent trying to simply figure out the purpose of a site and, if the page is confusing enough, visitors will abandon a website when this task becomes too difficult. This issue can lead to short and long-term decreases in sales.

It's important to be mindful of the effects of internal promotions and third-party ads on user perceptions. As stated in the previous guideline, a homepage should relay one primary goal to the visitor. Anything else is secondary and potentially distracting.

The question to ask is always: Does this contribute to someone taking the most wanted action?

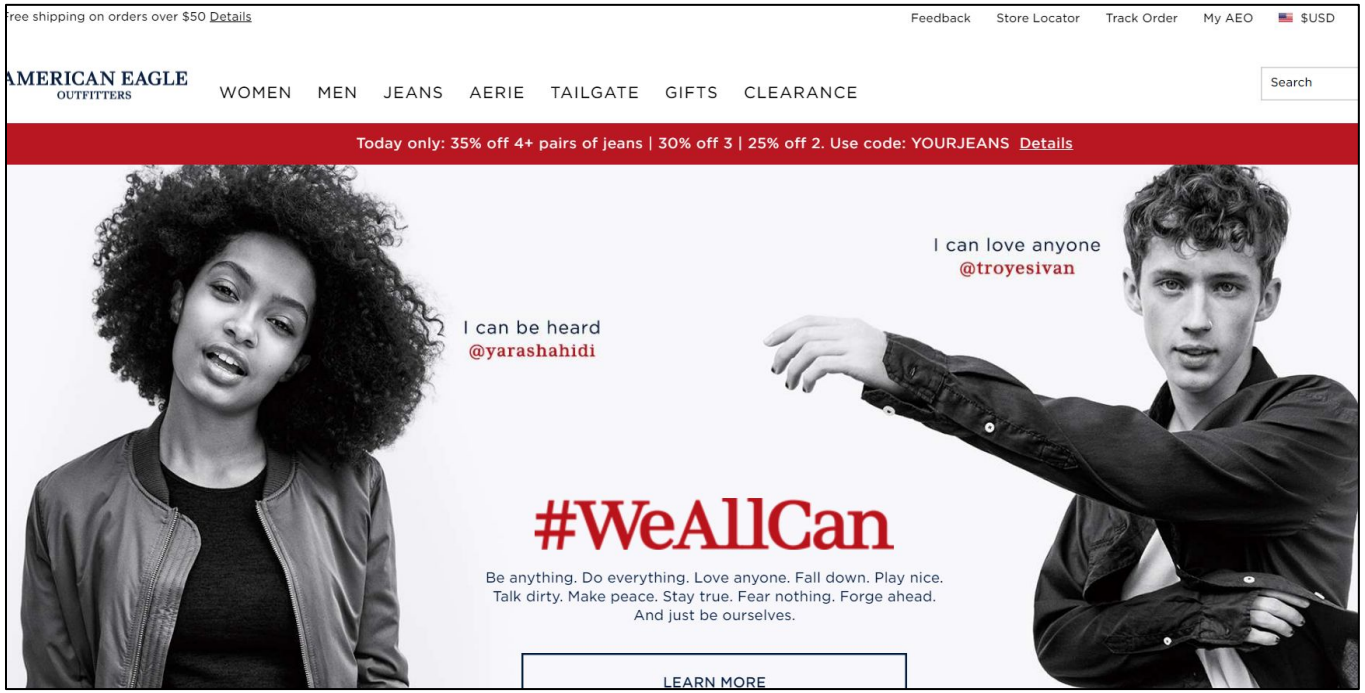
[See the advertisement distraction study performed by the CXL Institute.]

Site Component - Design
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

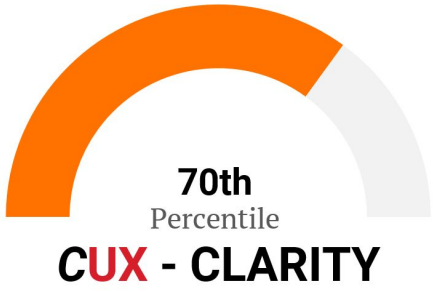
User quote - *"Simplify, unclutter, create some negative space. The pages were too jam packed, either with external ads crunched too close in the products, or else internal ads for other products, in banners both above AND below the item being looked at."*

Adherence example

Guideline #37. Avoid placing advertisements (and content that resembles ads) in prime content locations

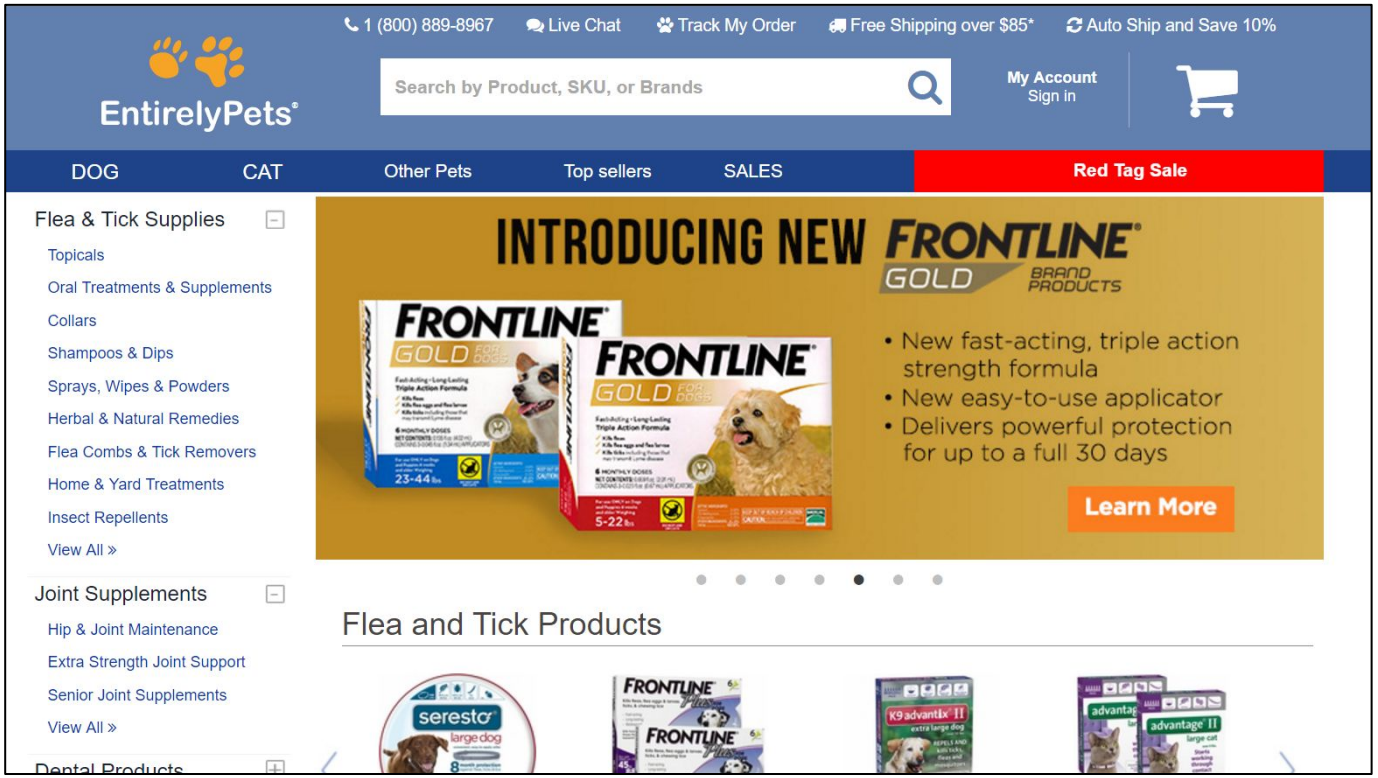


American Eagle Outfitters: Ranked in the top 70th percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. There are no ads (or graphics that resemble ads) on this homepage. The small red banner displays a site promotion, but it takes up minimal real estate *and* it doesn't look like an ad.



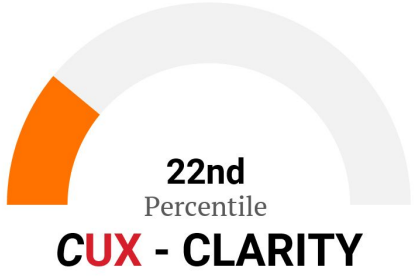
Non-adherence example

Guideline #37. Avoid placing advertisements (and content that resembles ads) in prime content locations



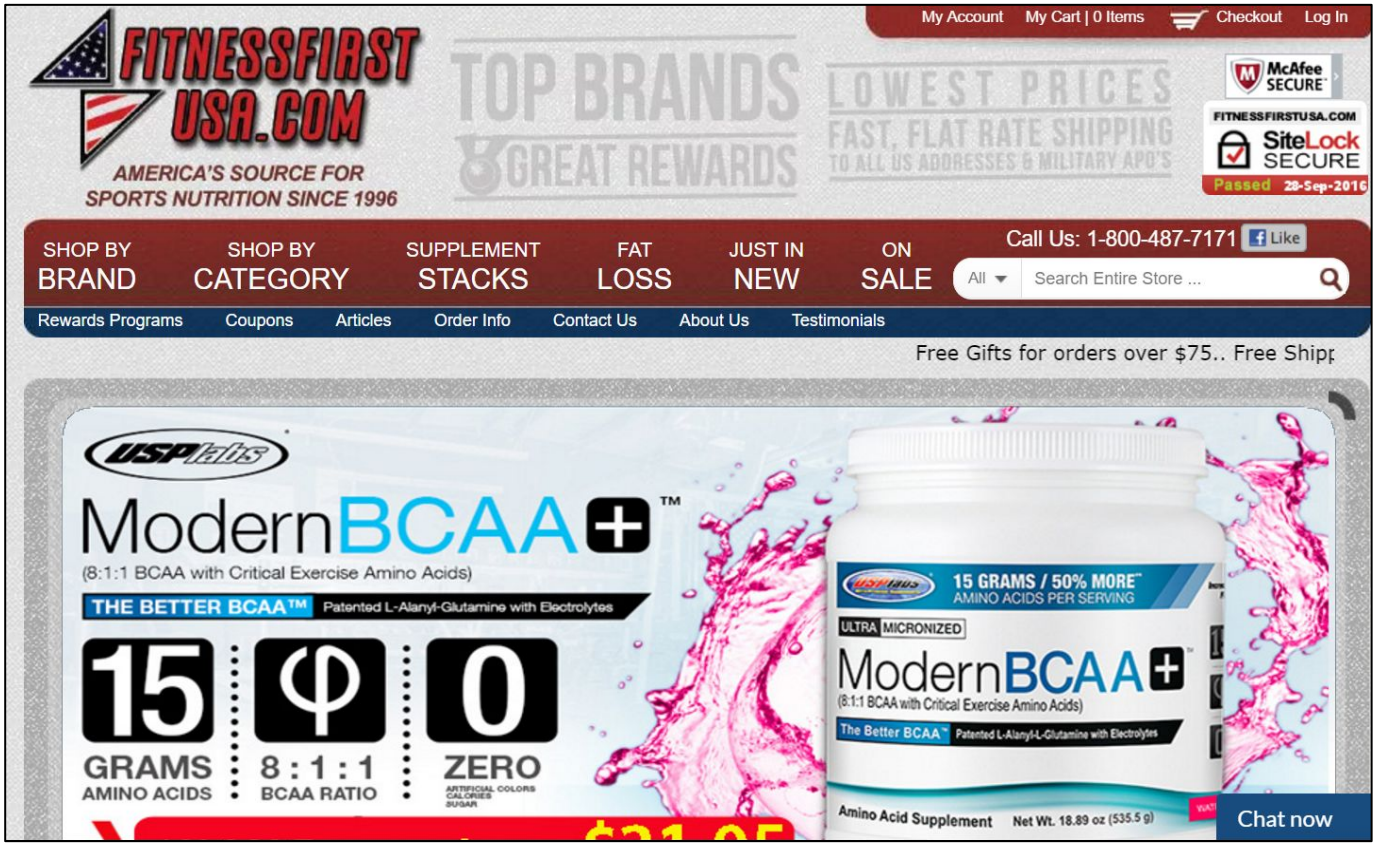
Entirely Pets: Ranked in the bottom 22nd percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. Half of this homepage (above the fold) is taken up by a Frontline ad. Even if it is a good brand or promotion, banner blindness causes to users to ignore it.

User quote - *"The site had a clutterly feel to me. I would clean it up a bit"*

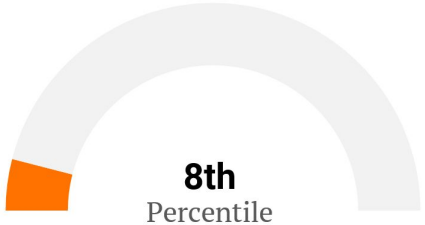


Non-adherence example

Guideline #37. Avoid placing advertisements (and content that resembles ads) in prime content locations



Fitness First USA: Ranked in the bottom 8th percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. The majority of this page is taken up by an ad. There is very little information about the website and what it sells besides this one product.



Guideline #38. Relevant/specific promotions (seasonal promotions, sales for particular product categories) should not resemble banner ads

In 2013, Nielsen reported in its "Trust in Advertising" study that online banner ads are the least trusted form of advertising among consumers falling even behind traditional ads like in the newspapers or magazines.

This is due to many reasons, mainly:

- a lack of credibility
- doesn't meet expectations
- amateur ad design
- plain old 'banner blindness'

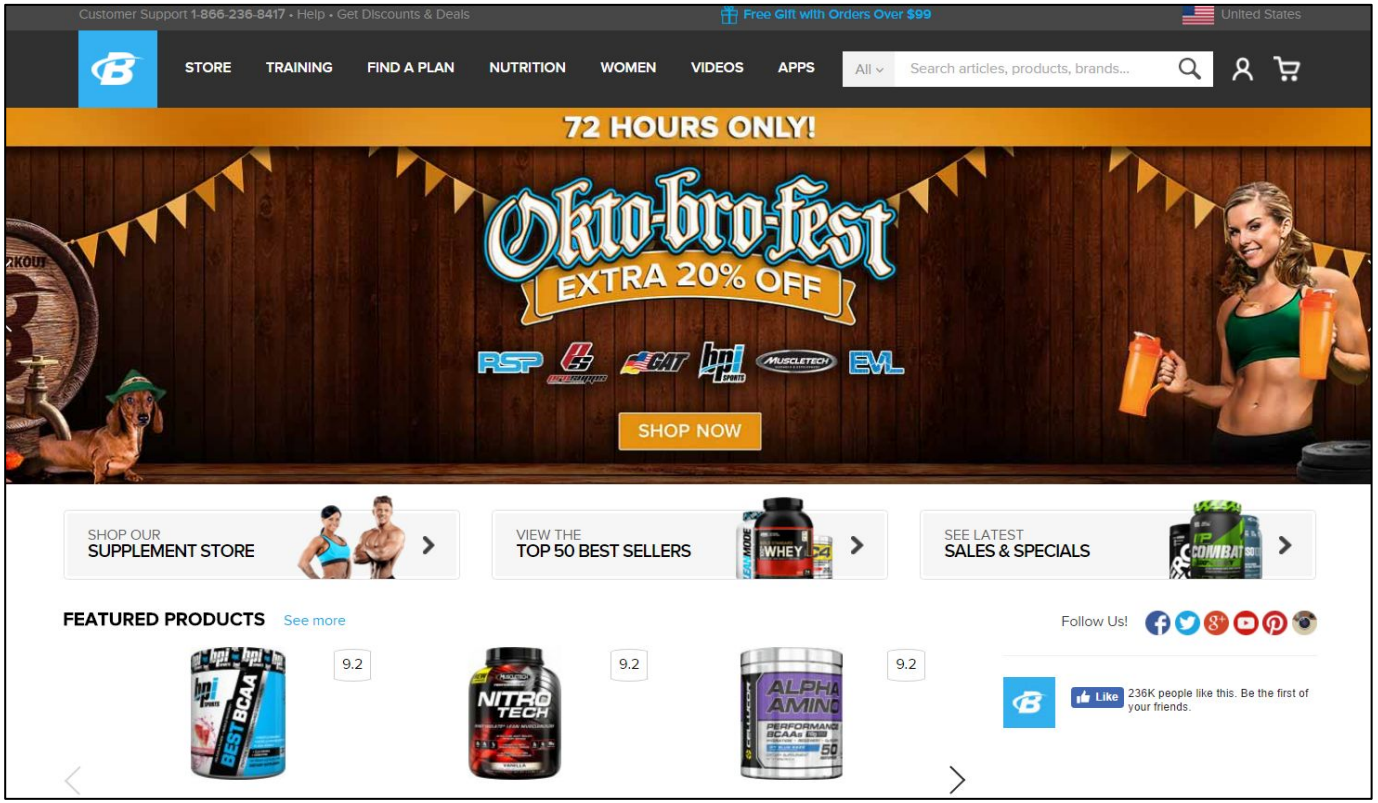
Since users have learned to navigate the internet comfortably, they directly look for information in places on a web page where it is most likely to be. This is a result of our selective attention – an allocation of limited mental resources to the completion of a goal while avoiding any detractors. Banners of any sort are considered detractors. For this reason, website promotions should not resemble ads.

Site Component - Design
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

User quote - *"The landing site is not at all welcoming, or giving any sense of the site's "personality." Instead, it's just a swarm of ads for a site the user is already on. The banners and boxes are all jampacked together, and each one is packed to the gills with colors and pictures and text of all different fonts and sizes, some of it blinking or moving, and most of it YELLING AT THE USER IN ALL CAPS."*

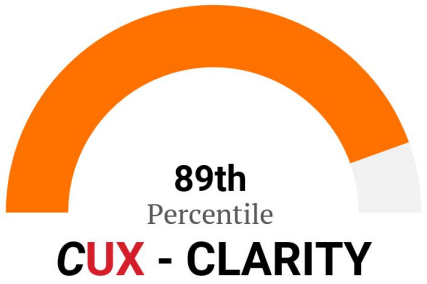
Adherence example

Guideline #38. Relevant/specific promotions (seasonal promotions, sales for particular product categories) should not resemble banner ads



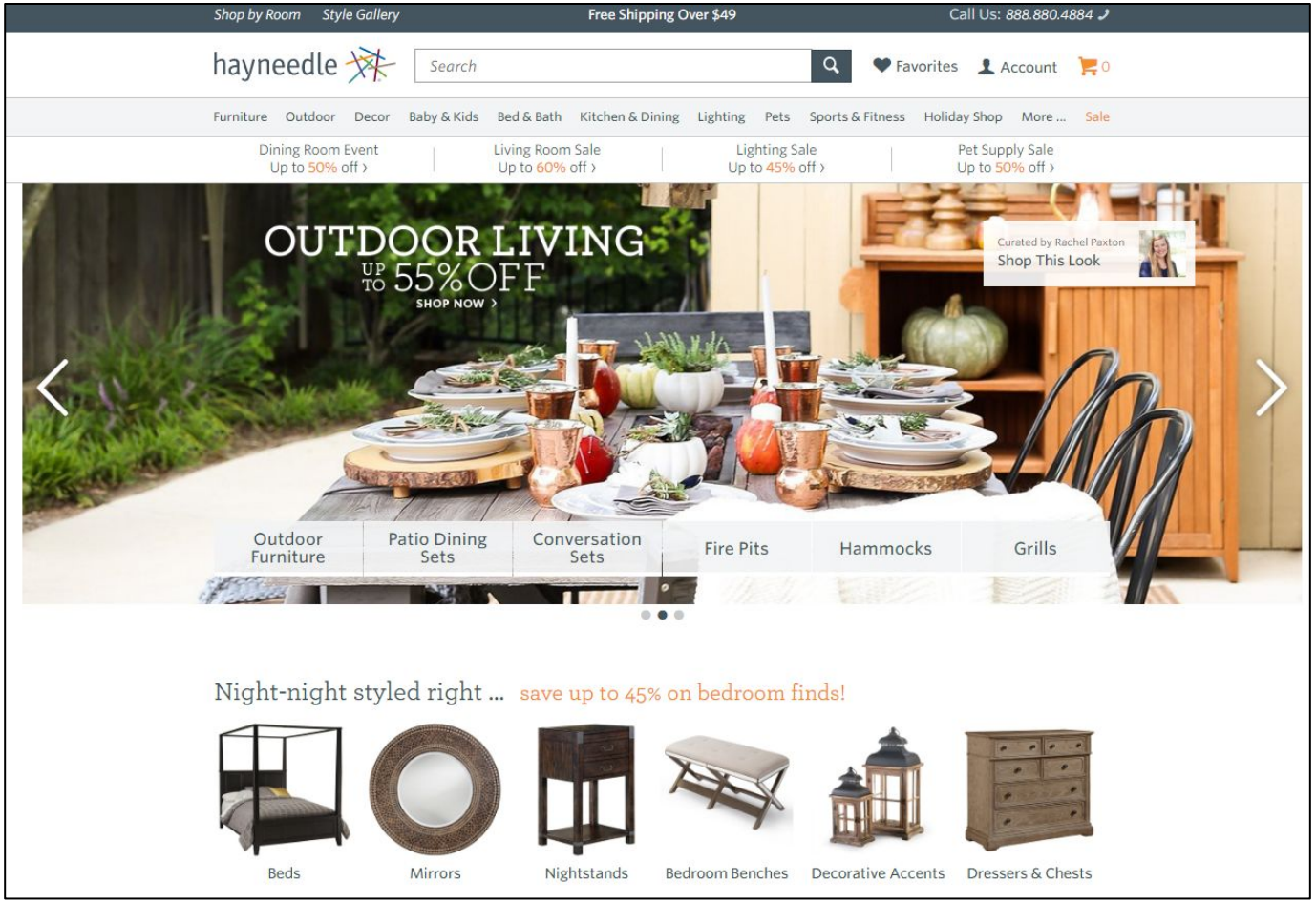
Bodybuilding.com: Ranked in the top 89th percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. The Okto-bro-fest promotion looks nothing like an ad. The promotion incorporates colors from the website's color scheme, creating a visual connection that tells users "this is not an ad".

When asked what they liked about this site, users recalled the *"engaging images"* **and said they** *"loved the promotions!"*

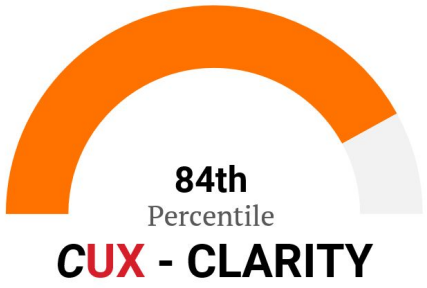


Adherence example

Guideline #38. Relevant/specific promotions (seasonal promotions, sales for particular product categories) should not resemble banner ads



Hayneedle: Ranked in the top 84th percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. The large bespoke imagery invites visitors to check out the Fall Outdoor Sale without looking like an ad.



Guideline #39. Don't use prime real estate for social media icons; display them in the footer

Distraction is anything that prevents (or slows) your visitors from taking the most wanted action. The vast majority of people on an ecommerce site don't care about being socially connected to you, they're just looking to buy something that solves their problem.

Here's the hard and fast rule: one page, one goal. It's highly unlikely that connecting to social media is your first, second, or third homepage goal.

Essentially, everything that does not contribute to your most wanted action is a distraction. This includes social media icons.

Keep social media icons from taking up space that could be more wisely used on elements directing users towards the most wanted action.

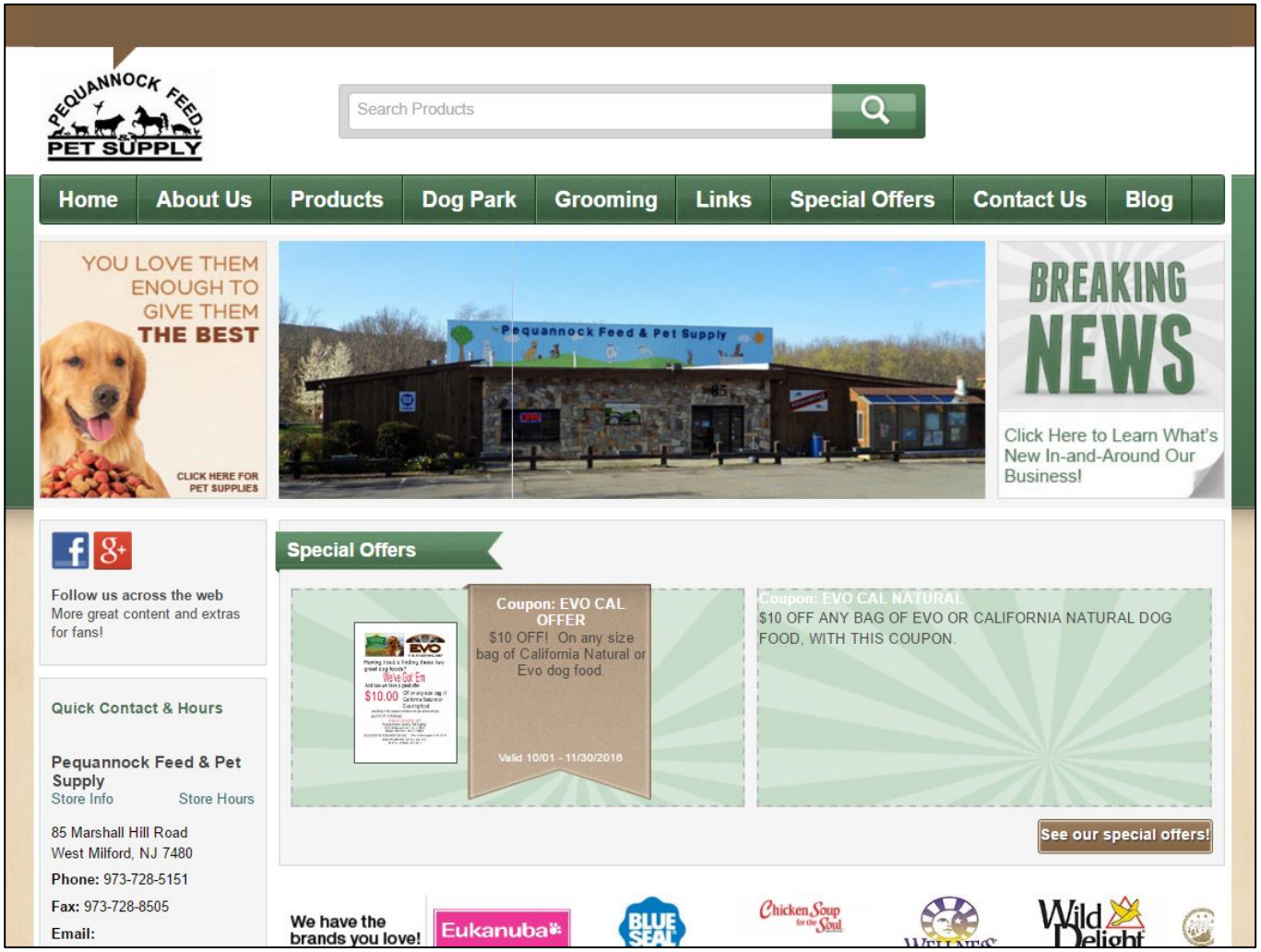
Especially as you move closer to where the money is (i.e. product pages and in the checkout funnel) anything that doesn't contribute to the main goal is a distraction. A Like on Facebook is great, but not at the cost of a sale.

Read more on CXL blog

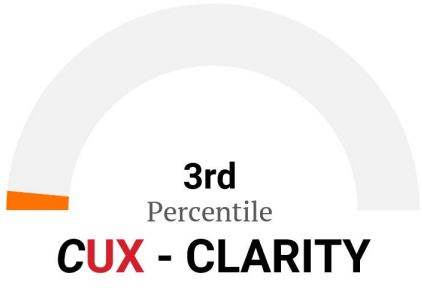
Site Component - Design
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

Non-adherence example

Guideline #39. Don't use prime real estate for social media icons; display them in the footer



Pequannock Feed: Ranked in the bottom 3rd percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. One of the only functional design elements on this page is the social media buttons. This page needs a clear most wanted action besides connecting to Facebook and Google+.



Non-adherence example

Guideline #39. Don't use prime real estate for social media icons; display them in the footer

Gertens: Ranked in the bottom 16th percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. The social media buttons should be moved way down the visual hierarchy on this page. To make the most wanted action more apparent, the “Shop Online” CTAs should be visually highlighted, perhaps with a contrasting color and bigger buttons.

Guideline #40. Personalize homepage content when possible

Site Component - Design
Conversion Heuristic - Motivation

Web personalization is the real-time individualization of a site to suit each visitor's unique needs and guide them through a custom conversion funnel.

Why is it important? People are drowning in information and options. Personalization reduces the amount of information and the number of options to help guide visitors through a funnel that's designed just for them and what they like. It can also prime people in the right way to get them in a certain mindset, or to match their mood.

Increased visitor engagement, improved customer experience, and high conversion rates are the biggest benefits of personalization.

The hypothesis is that the more personalized the site/user experience, the more likely visitors are to convert. So, how exactly are marketers personalizing their sites? Well, it seems they're sticking to the basics for the most part: popups, information bars, call-outs, etc.

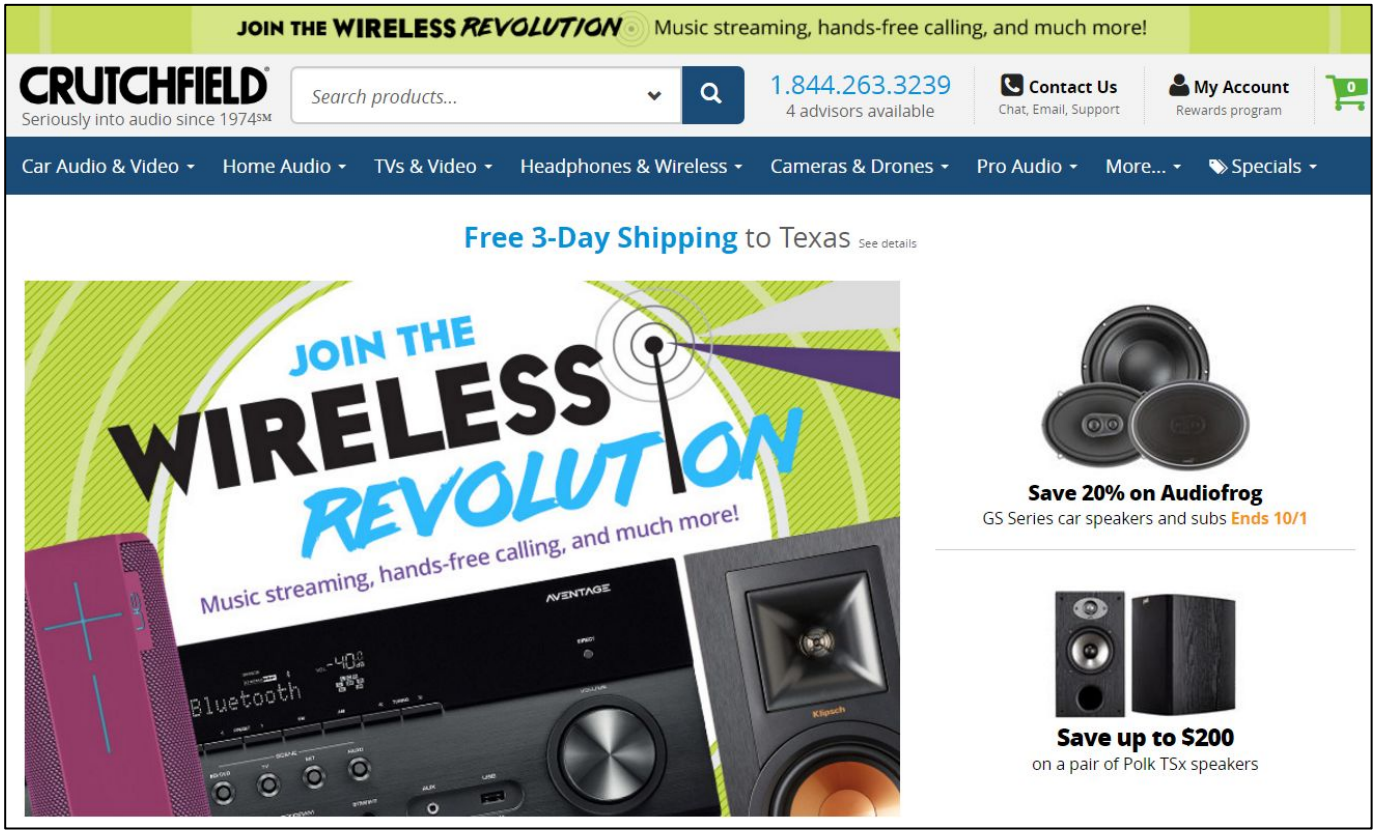
This is a common question: What's the difference between customization and personalization? Often, you'll see the two terms being used interchangeably. That's unfortunate because there is a distinction between the two. Definitions may vary, but to summarize...

- Customization: The visitor deliberately chooses between options designed to make the user experience more personal.
- Personalization: The visitor is automatically shown personalized pages based on anticipated needs / wants.

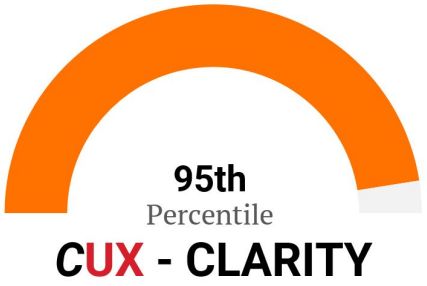
Customization is the visitor's conscious decision to alert the user experience. Personalization is making predictions and automatically altering the user experience based on big data.
Read more on CXL Blog or take the Personalization Course.

Adherence example

Guideline #40. Personalize homepage content when possible

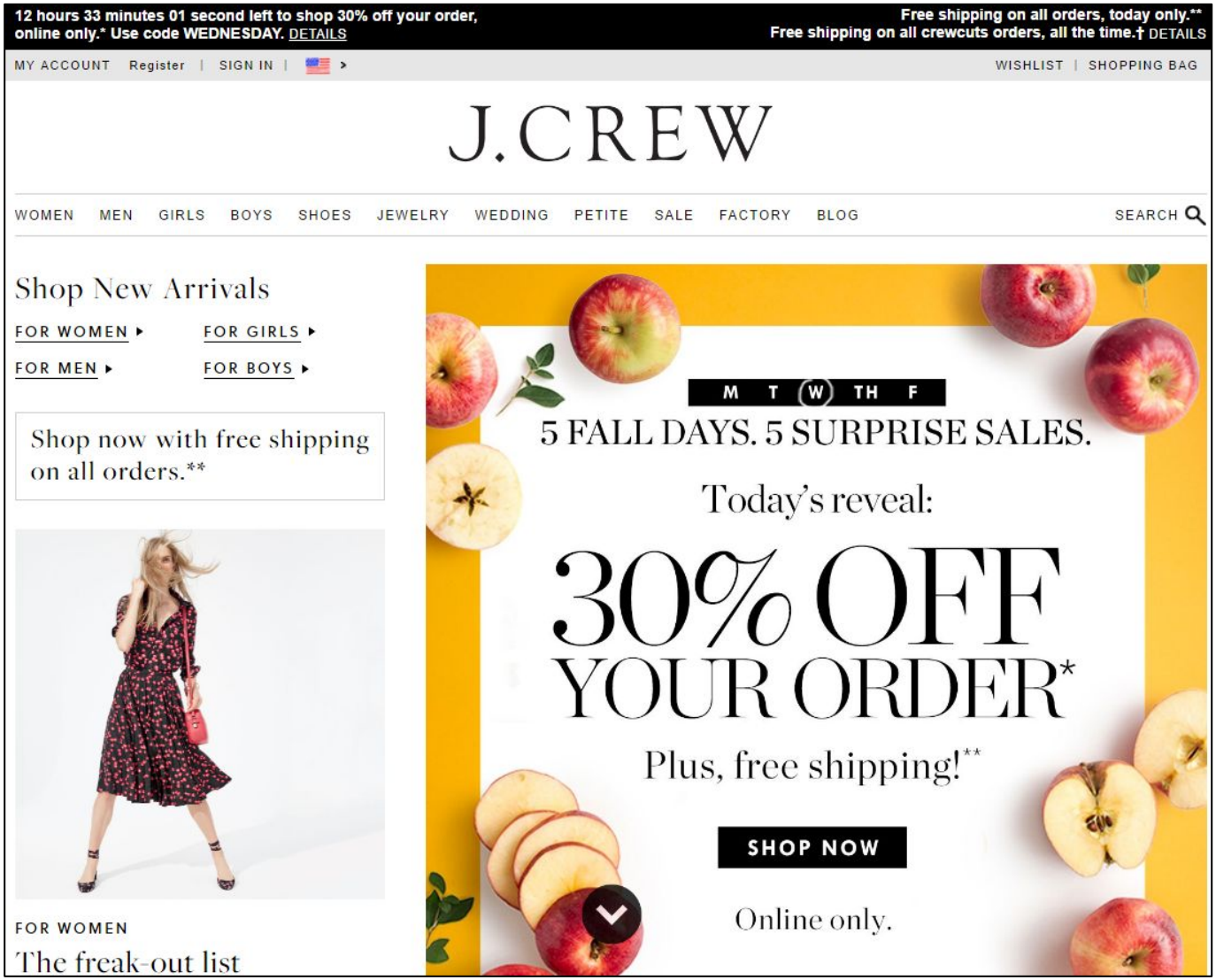


Crutchfield: Ranked in the top 95th percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. The “Free 3-Day Shipping to Texas” banner is personalized for the Texan who visited this website.



Adherence example

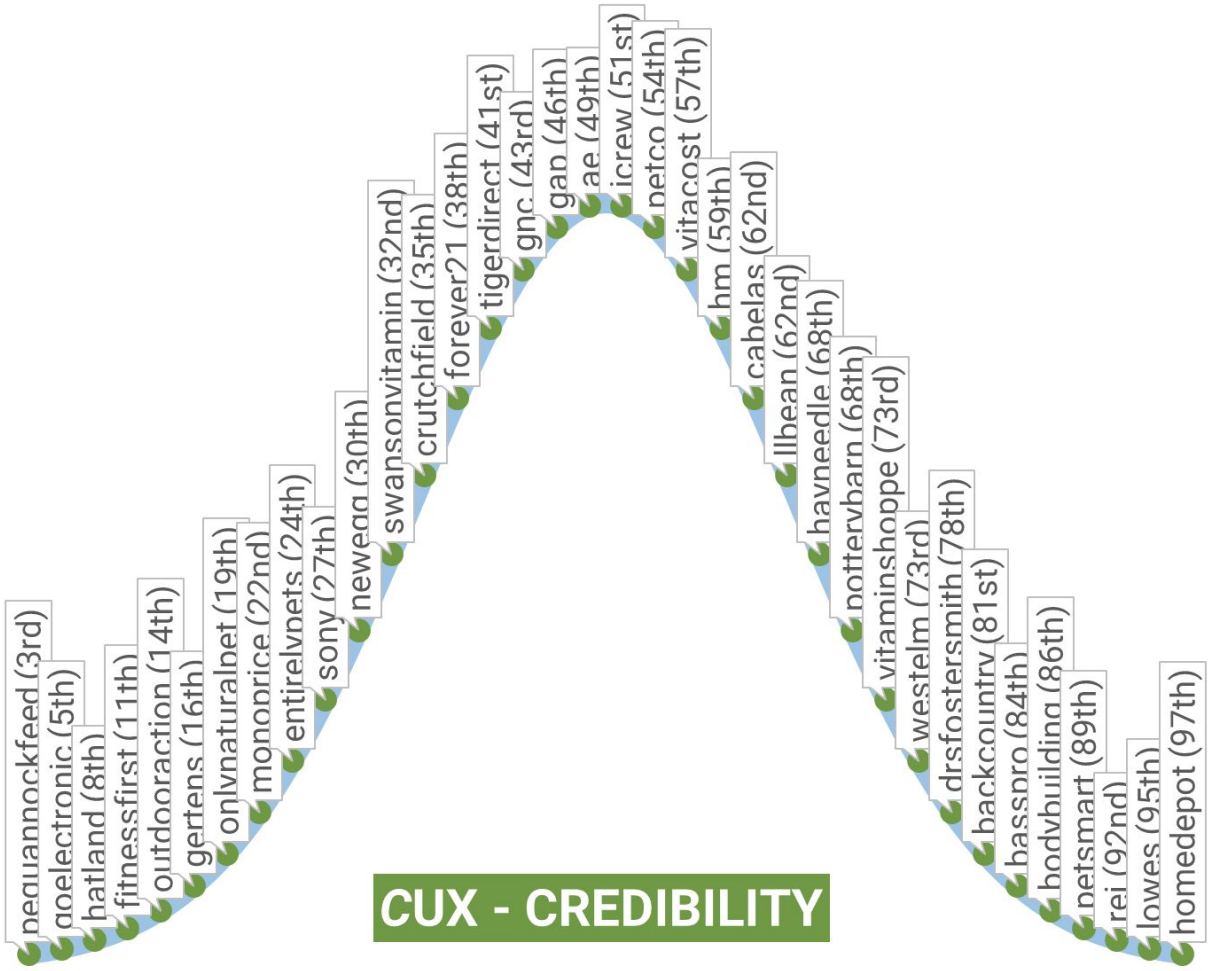
Guideline #40. Personalize homepage content when possible



J. Crew: Ranked in the top 97th percentile for the UX dimension Clarity. This site knows its shoppers are getting ready for fall weather and embraces this with a festive apple border bringing attention to the sales promotion.

User quote on the look of the site - *"I really liked the general layout, color scheme, look and feel of the website. It made everything easy to peruse."*

CUX Credibility Guideline Chapter



Subvertical	Website	CUX Credibility Rank
Home & Garden	homedepot.com	97
Home & Garden	lowes.com	95
Recreation	rei.com	92
Pets	petsmart.com	89
Nutrition	bodybuilding.com	86
Recreation	basspro.com	84
Recreation	backcountry.com	81
Pets	drsfostersmith.com	78
Home & Garden	westelm.com	73
Nutrition	vitaminshoppe.com	73
Home & Garden	potterybarn.com	68
Home & Garden	hayneedle.com	68
Recreation	cabelas.com	62
Recreation	llbean.com	62
Clothing	hm.com	59
Nutrition	vitacost.com	57
Pets	petco.com	54
Clothing	jcrew.com	51
Clothing	ae.com	49
Clothing	gap.com	46
Nutrition	gnc.com	43
Electronics	tigerdirect.com	41
Clothing	forever21.com	38
Electronics	crutchfield.com	35
Nutrition	swansonvitamins.com	32
Electronics	newegg.com	30
Electronics	sony.com	27
Pets	entirelypets.com	24
Electronics	monoprice.com	22
Pets	onlynaturalpet.com	19
Home & Garden	gertens.com	16
Recreation	outdooraction.co.uk	14
Nutrition	fitnessfirstusa.com	11
Clothing	hatland.com	8
Electronics	goelectronic.com	5
Pets	pequannockfeed.com	3

Credibility Guidelines

Top retailers are known and generally trusted online. Everyone else has to work hard for customer trust.
Watch our course on Trust and Credibility in Design.

Credibility > Design

41. Maintain a modern, relevant design
42. Avoid cheesy stock photos

Credibility > Copy

43. Avoid any copywriting errors
44. Verify and claims with citations or reference links
45. Instead of FAQ page answer questions in context (when they appear)
46. Avoid signups or purchases for your CTA

Credibility > Content Menu

47. Shipping, return, and refund policies should be visibly displayed; links should be easy to find
48. Show the "real" organization behind your site; show full office address, phone number, and staff
49. The content menu (think footer or top menu) should provide the familiar basics, and be consistent throughout the site
50. Use live chat, and display it on the bottom right corner

Credibility > Social Proof

51. If your product has been featured or endorsed, or if you have popular clients or associations, show it off
52. Emphasize user-generated content like reviews and ratings
53. Add trust marks/badges to the header and footer. Don't overdo it

Credibility > Pop-ups and Advertising

54. Avoid pop-ups of any kind, advertisment or not....unless you want to make more money

Credibility » Design

2 Guidelines

Credibility > Design

41. Maintain a modern, relevant design
42. Avoid cheesy stock photos

What's website credibility and why is it important?

BJ Fogg – the world's leading researcher on web credibility – has said that web credibility is about making your website in such a way that it comes across as trustworthy and knowledgeable. Your website is often the first point of contact for the customers, responsible for first impressions and of course sources of revenue. Companies that design for credibility have a strategic advantage over competition.

Fogg says there are 4 types of credibility:

1. Presumed credibility – general assumptions (e.g. a brand we've heard of is more credible, unknown brand less)
2. Reputed credibility – third party reference (e.g. your wife said it's good or your friends said service X sucks)
3. Surface credibility – what we find on simple inspection (e.g. the website looks quality or "this seems confusing")
4. Earned credibility – personal experience (e.g. friendly customer service or text full of typos and factual errors)

Credibility is formed through trust. If users trust your site, it becomes credible. Credibility is also very fragile: It's much easier to lose than gain.

Designing a homepage with this fact in mind, think about how the elements of a page communicate trustworthiness. There are certain types of content that must be avoided in order to maintain credibility and others that enhance it. The next few guidelines will provide information on those.

User quote on why they liked a site: "I really liked the general layout, color scheme, look and feel of the website. It made everything easy to peruse."

Guideline #41. Maintain a modern, relevant design

Have you ever been on a website that looked sketchy? Chances are it also looked outdated. If a company doesn't update their website, users won't feel secure shopping there. Credit card information is highly sensitive. If a company isn't maintaining their website, it's safe to assume they probably aren't maintaining their security either. Outdated sites create distrust.

People want the latest and greatest. They're interested in seeing —and being involved with— what's new.

Of course, what's "new" is always changing. A few aspects dominating the scene right now:

- Large hero images
- Loading/scrolling animations
- Animations that direct focus to a page's key feature
- Responsive design
- Minimalism
- Material design
- Long scrolling
- Illustration

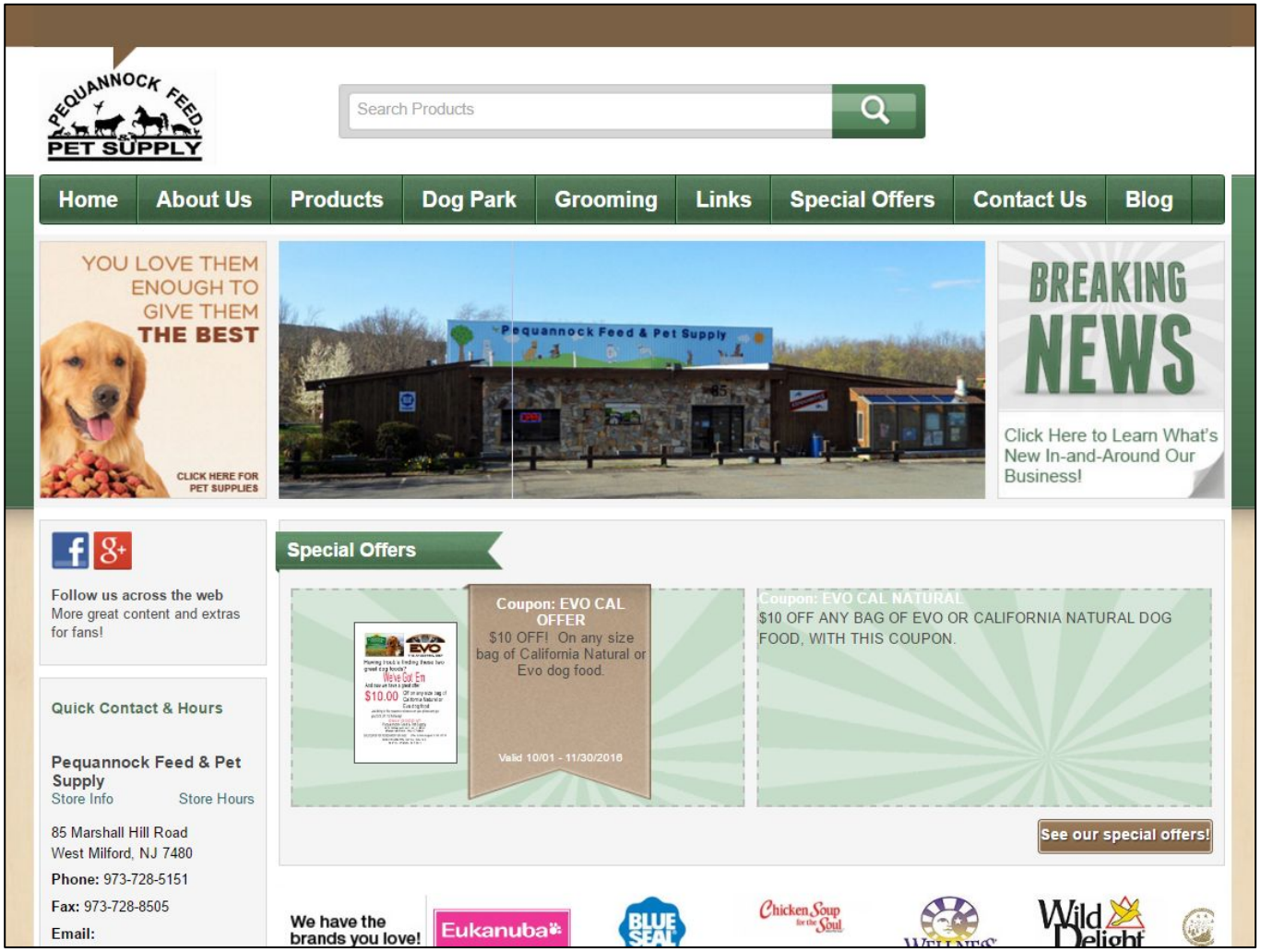
See if any of these trends complement your site.

Site Component - Design
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

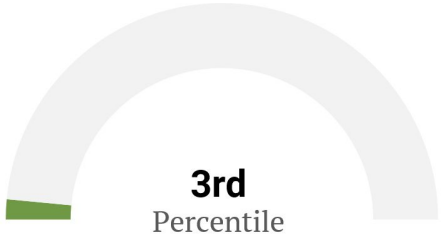
User quote - *"I felt it was overall easy to use and looked professional. I felt like I could trust it."*

Non-adherence example

Guideline #41. Maintain a modern, relevant design



Pequannock Feed: Ranked in the bottom 3rd percentile for the UX dimension Credibility. Parts of this homepage, like the green box, look broken. The photo of the store looks amateur. The graphics are low-quality. The outdated, unkempt look of this site lacks credibility on several levels.



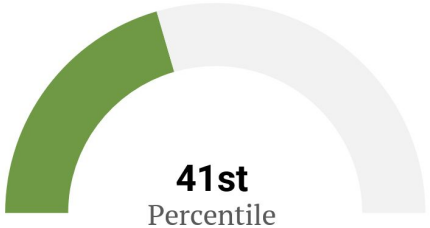
3rd
Percentile
CUX - CREDIBILITY

Non-adherence example

Guideline #41. Maintain a modern, relevant design

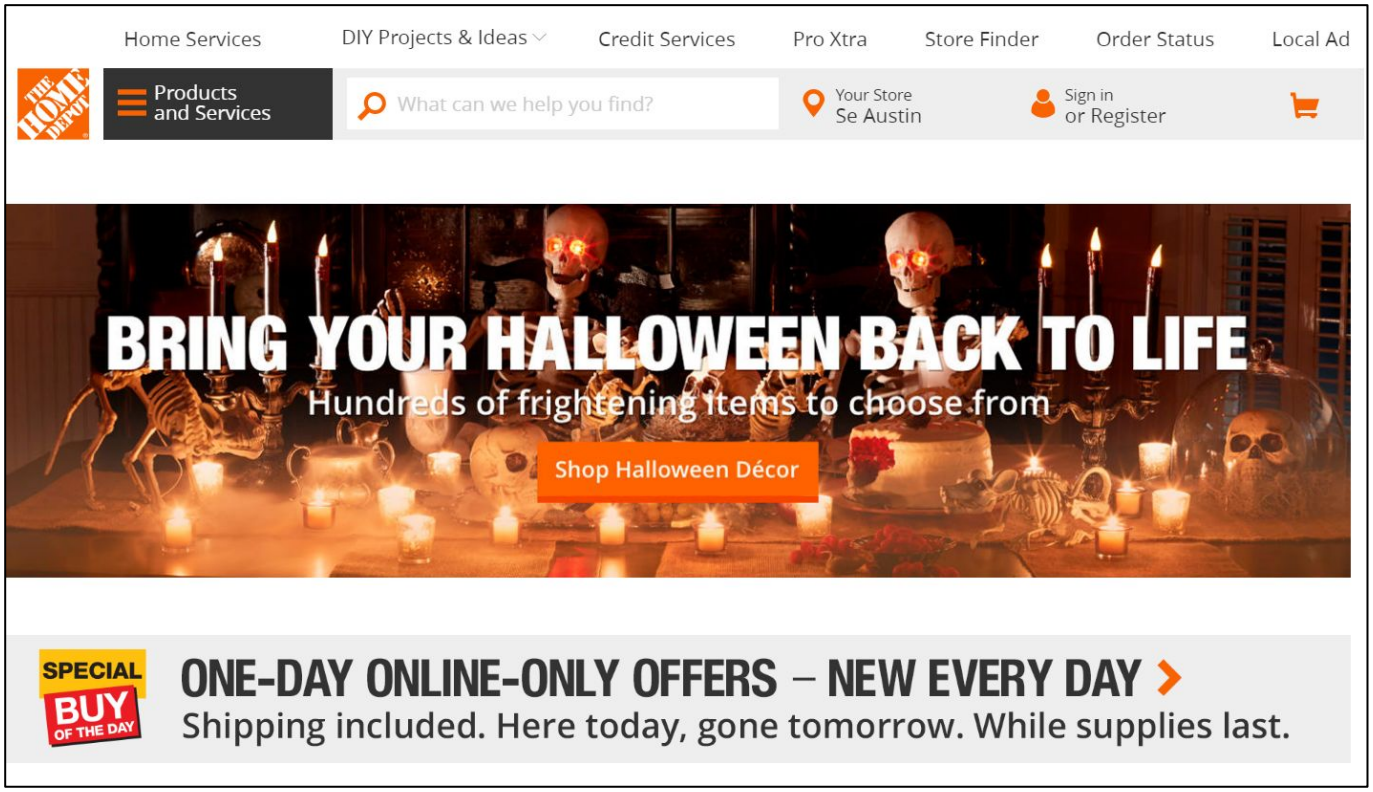
TigerDirect: Ranked in the bottom 41st percentile for the UX dimension Credibility.

User quote - *"I find other direct competitors to have websites that feel more polished and professional. This website feels slightly dated and has no effects or novel UI/UX elements."*



Adherence example

Guideline #41. Maintain a modern, relevant design



Home Depot: Ranked in the top 97th percentile for the UX dimension Credibility. This homepage has all the makings of a current design. It includes modern web design features like an automatic nearest store locator (SE Austin), bespoke imagery, and a holiday promotion.

Guideline #42. Avoid cheesy stock photos

Site Component - Design
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

Usability tests by Jakob Nielsen show that internet users always notice images on a website. When it comes to people in photos, "real people" get lots of attention while stock photo people are glanced over. Don't use cheesy stock photos if you want to communicate authenticity.

According to MDG Advertising, 67% of online shoppers rated high quality images as being "very important" to their purchase decision, which was slightly more than "product specific information", "long descriptions", and "reviews & ratings".

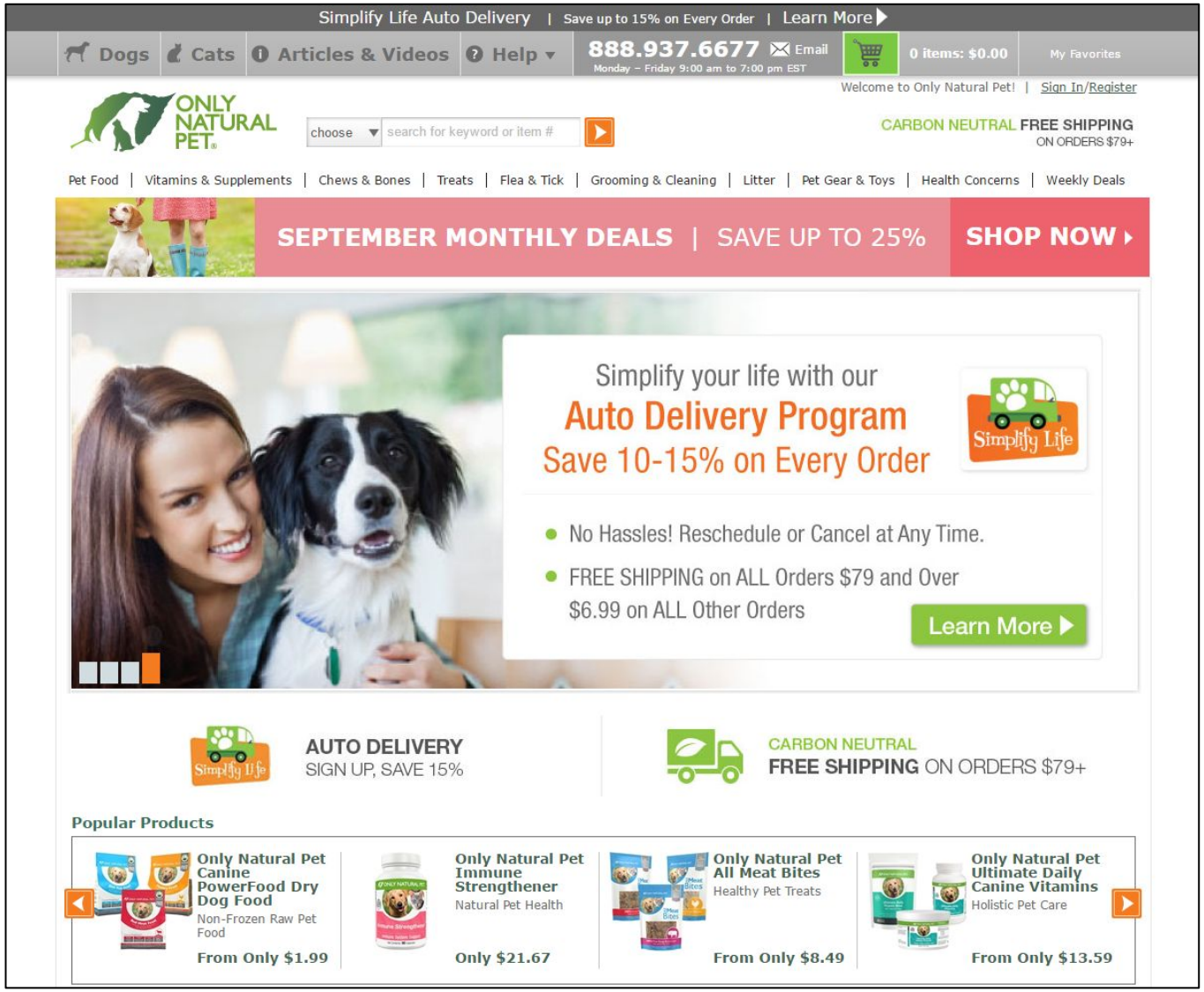
We already know from the "The Science of Storytelling & It's Effect on Memory" article that when a visitor lands on your site for the first time, everything they see is being processed through their working memory – the hyper-short term memory that pulls information from your long term memory to make judgements on what it sees within milliseconds.

If the stock photo you're using is at all similar to another website that created a negative experience for the visitor, subconsciously, they're projecting their negative experiences onto your stock photograph, reducing trust & adding friction to the process.
This is likely the real reason why when Marketing Experiments tested a real photo of their client against their top performing stock photo, they found that nearly 35% of visitors would be more likely to sign up when they saw the real deal.

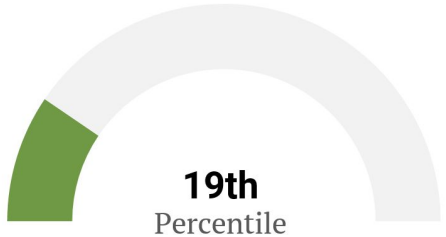
Most phones have decent cameras today, almost any random picture will be better than a stock photo of shiny people and suits shaking hands.

Non-adherence example

Guideline #42. Avoid cheesy stock photos



Only Natural Pet: Ranked in the bottom 19th percentile for the UX dimension Credibility. Multiple participants recalled this homepage as looking outdated. Switching out the stock pictures with bespoke imagery would help alleviate this issue.

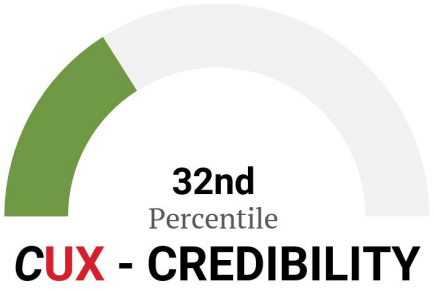


CUX - CREDIBILITY

Non-adherence example

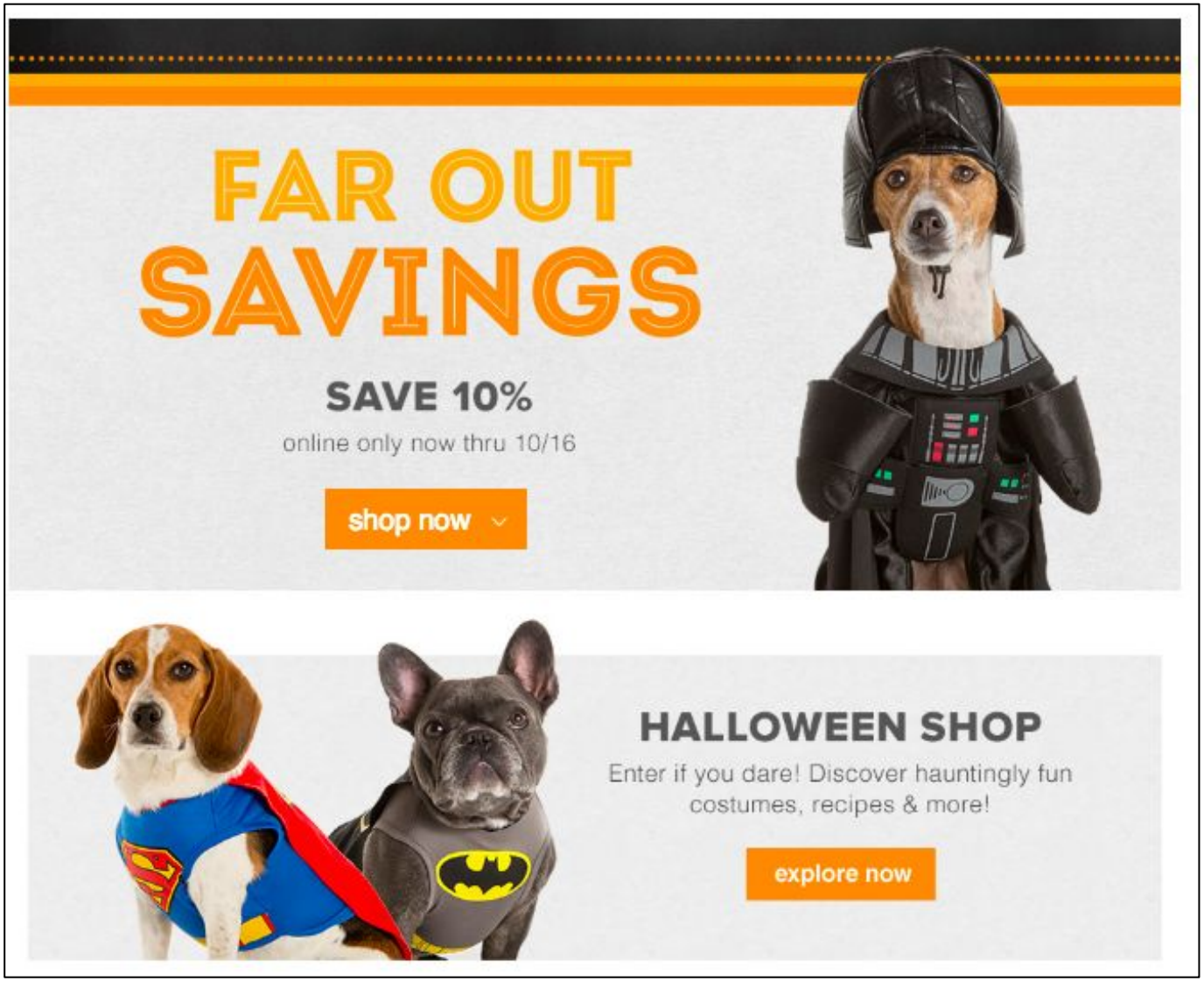
Guideline #42. Avoid cheesy stock photos

Swanson Vitamins: Ranked in the bottom 32nd percentile for the UX dimension Credibility. The designers for this site chose one of the cheesiest stock photos out there. The homepage would greatly benefit from a better quality, bespoke photo.



Adherence example

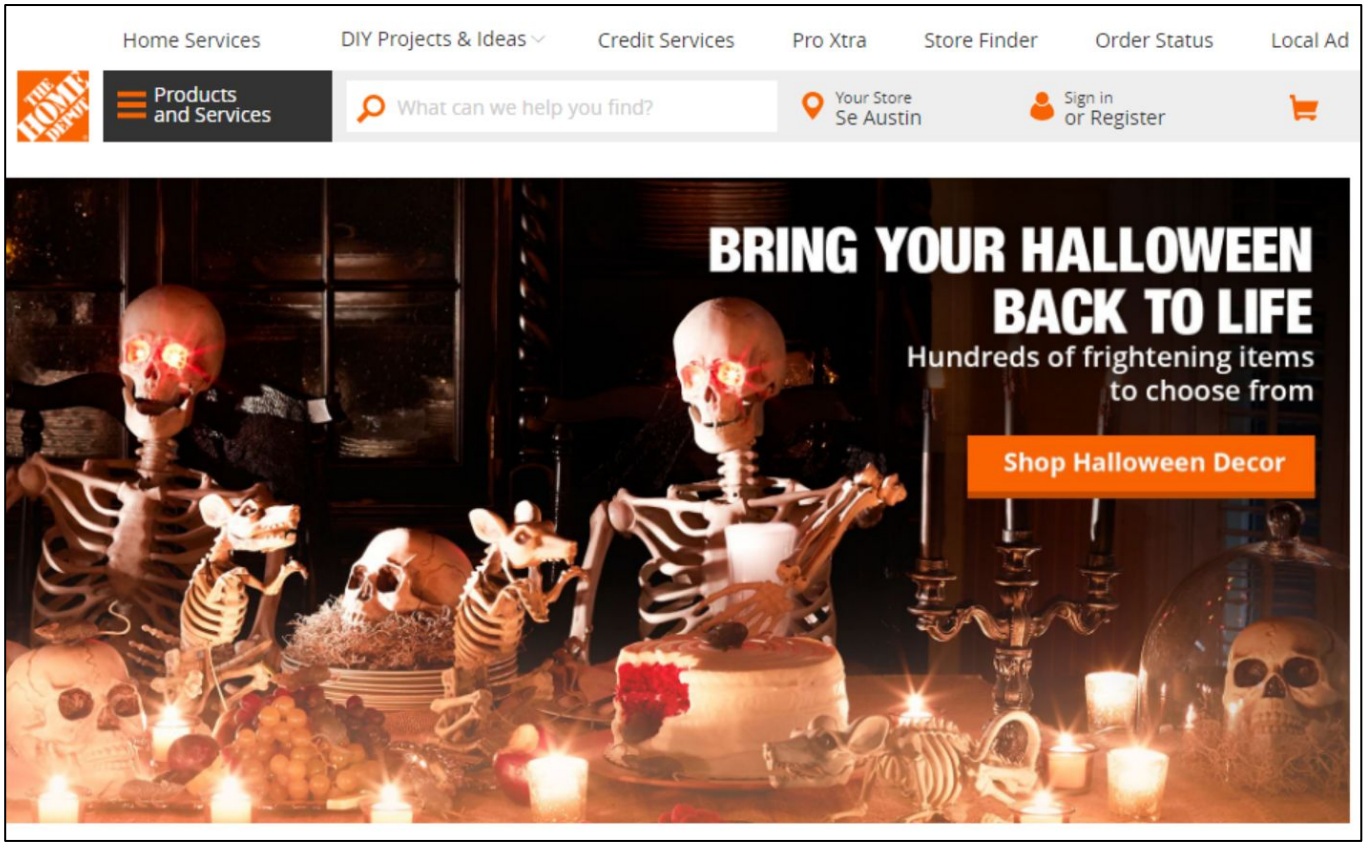
Guideline #42. Avoid cheesy stock photos



Petsmart: Ranked in the top 89th percentile for the UX dimension Credibility. The product photos of the costumed dogs have been taken specifically for Petsmart's Halloween sale. Not only are the photos professional and adorable, but they include actual promotional products for sale. This tells site visitors that petsmart cares about their business and is actively maintaining it.

Adherence example

Guideline #42. Avoid cheesy stock photos



Home Depot: Ranked in the top 97th percentile for the UX dimension Credibility. This bespoke photography captures the Halloween season while including lots of various thematic products Home Depot is selling. While some may call this picture cheesy, it certainly isn't stock photography.

Credibility » Copy

4 Guidelines

Credibility > Copy

43. Avoid any copywriting errors
44. Verify and claims with citations or reference links
45. Instead of FAQ page answer questions in context (when they appear)
46. Avoid signups or purchases for your CTA

Copywriting is more art than exact science. You can find literally hundreds of different copywriting "formulas" or approaches. Keep in mind that there is no single right way to go about it.

I would strongly advise steering clear of the 1980's sales letter and 1990's-2000's info marketing style – full of hype and ridiculous promises. Today's consumer is far more skeptical and savvy. You don't want to sound like a Nigerian scam email. Be very careful with the copywriting advice you'll find online – the overwhelming majority of it advocates scam-like hype and is NOT backed by any science or data.

The terminology and tone of the copy used on your homepage provides an opportunity to enhance credibility. By carefully crafting your copy, users will feel comfortable on your site and will have no unanswered questions. Follow the next several guidelines to make sure your homepage copy is helping your overall credibility, not hurting it.

Guideline #43. Avoid any copywriting errors

Attention to detail matters. On a website, bad grammar has been shown to reduce sales (at least when the error is obvious and prominent). But more often it seems that bad grammar accumulates subconsciously and results in less trust for the site.

BJ Fogg has said that web credibility is about making your website in such a way that it comes across as trustworthy and knowledgeable. Your website is often the first point of contact for the customers, responsible for first impressions and of course sources of revenue.

Typos and other grammatical errors are an example of earned credibility: personal experience (e.g. friendly customer service or text full of typos and factual errors). They are either immediately recognized and turn off readers, or they are subtle and slowly damage credibility throughout copy.

Just fix it.

Site Component - Copy
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

"By presenting readers with sub par content, you are putting your business at risk of losing valuable word-of-mouth marketing. Or even worse, you'll be subject to negative word-of-mouth attention."

ImpactBND put it well: "In other words, there's no denying that first impressions matter. If your content is plagued by poor grammar, it's likely that people will think twice about the quality of your products or services."

Guideline #44. Verify any claims with citations or reference links

Site Component - Copy
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

Don't use guarantees or hyped-up claims as a slimy sales tactic, but rather as a testimony to the quality of your product. Your claim will minimize doubts and help sales — so long as your customers believe it and you can back it up.

Have an impressive stat? Show where it came from (e.g. Ranked #1 Men's Online Shoe Retailer - Forbes Magazine).

Have a testimonial? Include a name, photo, company and position. Don't worry about having professional headshots, people will appreciate seeing that real people enjoy your product/service. Even adding the person's location (e.g. John, Digital Marketing Director, New Jersey) can boost credibility.

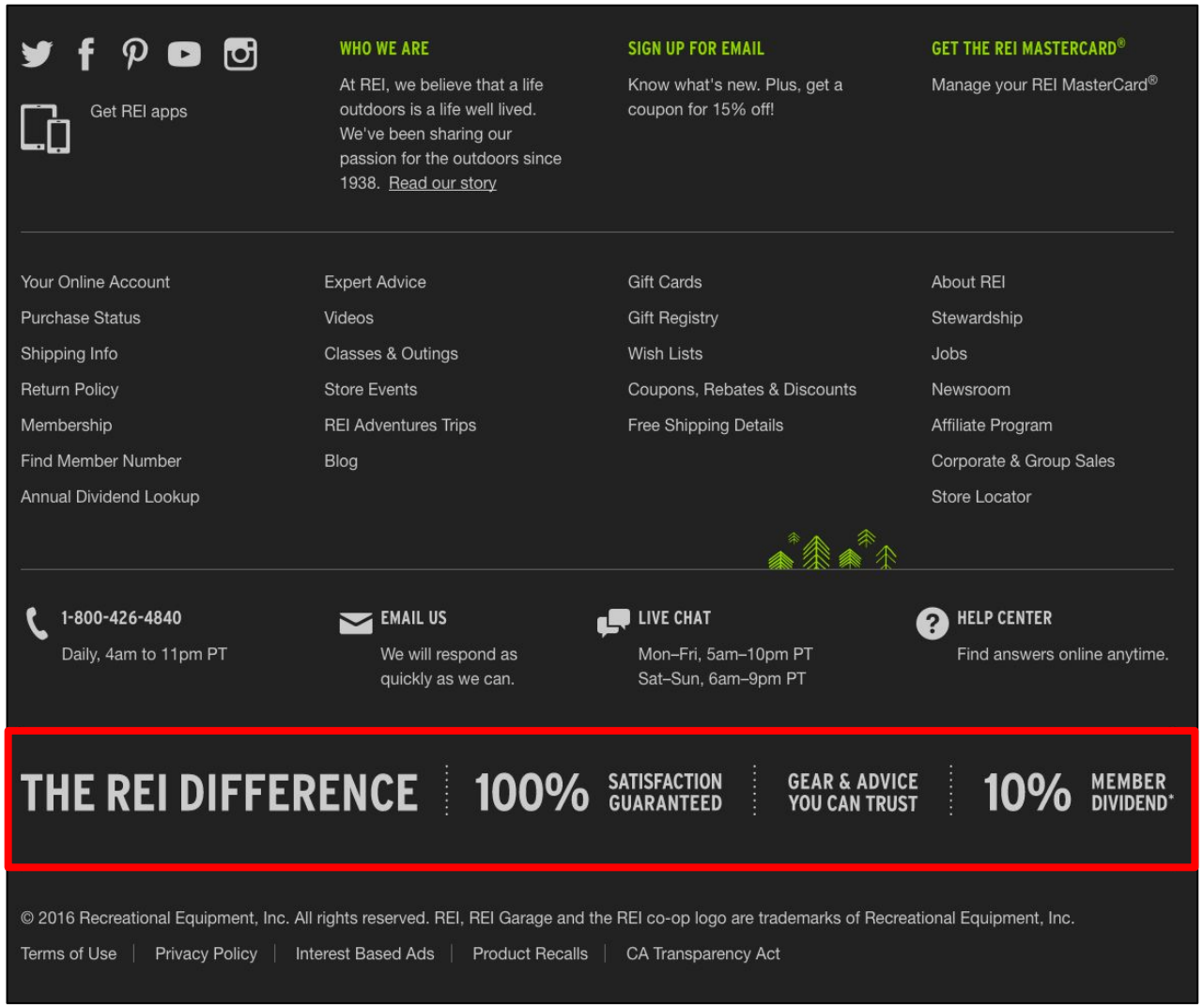
Impressive client? Show their logo.

Some examples:

- Hyundai struggled for years with a reputation that it makes crappy cars that break down fast. So they initiated a 10-year warranty – basically asking 'how can it be a bad car if we're offering such a long warranty?'
- Pizza delivered in 30 minutes or it's free.
- Not only will we give your money back, but also compensate your pain. This is the most powerful kind of guarantee – a pain compensation guarantee.

Adherence example

Guideline #44. Verify any claims with citations or reference links



REI: Ranked in the top 92nd percentile for the UX dimension Credibility. REI offers a 100% satisfaction guarantee to its customers and isn't afraid to advertise it on the homepage.

Non-adherence example

Guideline #44. Verify any claims with citations or reference links

Fitness First USA: Ranked in the bottom 11th percentile for the UX dimension Credibility. The advertised product claims to provide "Revolutionary Muscle Gains". What does this mean? Who says the gains are revolutionary? This claim is in desperate need of support in order for people to take it seriously.

Guideline #45. Have an FAQ page or better yet, instead of FAQ page answer questions in context (when they appear)

FAQ pages can help add value to your website. However, they could also be totally unnecessary if you intend to actually alleviate the sources of customer questions where they appear (in context). Many business owners believe customer questions shouldn't be accumulated and organized, rather they should be addressed and preemptively answered by placing into practice a modified user experience that answers the question before it's asked.

Think reactivity versus proactivity.

That said, when dealing with a complex interface or product, FAQs might be necessary to save time and effort spent responding to emails and/or customer-service calls. A systematic way of answering similar questions can saves money and provides customer confidence in your offerings.

Read this short lesson FAQs on websites for a bit more info.

Site Component - Copy
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

Guideline #46. Avoid signups or purchases for your CTA

Calls to action should be from the customer's point of view. They should finish the customer's sentence, "I want to...".

But remember: Customers don't visit your website because they want to lose money. They want to achieve certain goals or feel something specific (e.g. finding the perfect dress or feeling excited and ready for the event they're attending) that requires making a purchase.

This brings up the concept of click fear: If the outcome of clicking on a button is not 100% clear, people will be significantly less likely to do so.

When it comes to product pictures, however, it's often best to NOT show a button at all. In this day and age, web users know that you can click on a product picture to go to the product page. It's a widely accepted method. By removing "see product" or the generic "shop now" button, you reduce noise.

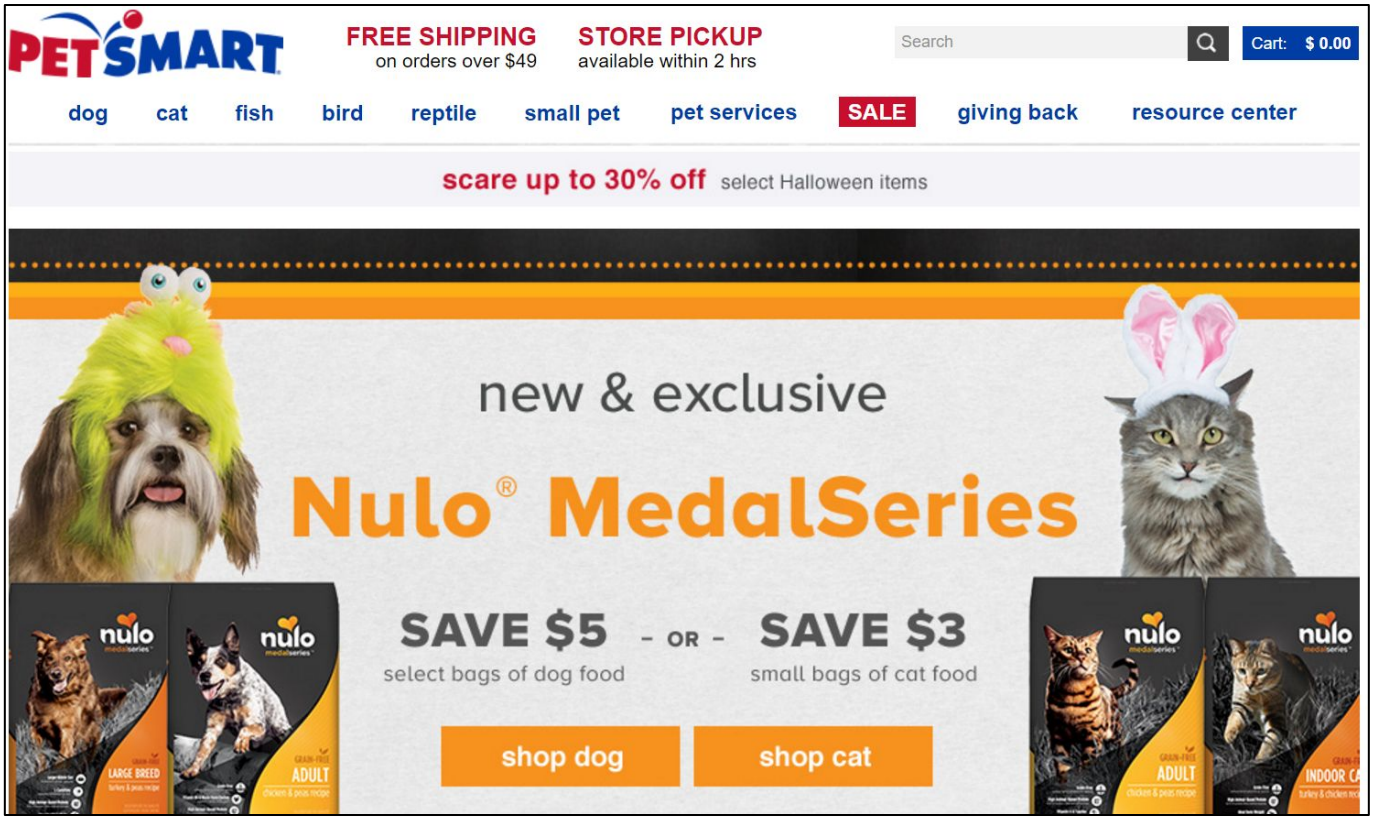
At the very least, aim to be specific and use categories or segments within the CTAs such as 'shop dog' example below.

Site Component - Copy
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

As Tommy Walker said, *"I [don't] want to mislead you into thinking that changing the button from "Buy Now" to "Sign up Here" at the bottom of a sales page makes a lick of difference when everything leading up to that final call to action doesn't build some kind of anticipation in the reader's mind. [...] the best calls to action aren't effective just because of your word-choice on the button. No no, the best calls to action are the ones that promise your story only gets better after you sign up."*

Adherence example

Guideline #46. Avoid signups or purchases for your CTA

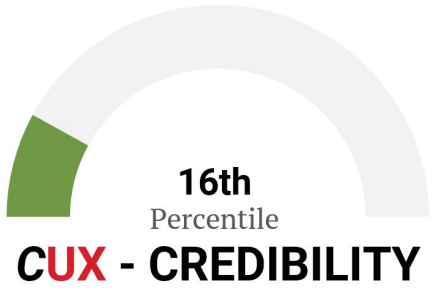


Petsmart: Ranked in the top 89th percentile for the UX dimension Credibility. Petsmart provides two complementary CTAs for their pet food promotion that direct users to the right subcategory of pet food, depending on whether they have a dog or a cat.

Non-adherence example

Guideline #46. Avoid signups or purchases for your CTA

Gertens: Ranked in the bottom 16th percentile for the UX dimension Credibility.



Credibility » Content Menu

4 Guidelines

Credibility > Content Menu

47. Shipping, return, and refund policies should be visibly displayed; links should be easy to find
48. Show the "real" organization behind your site; show full office address, phone number, staff
49. The content menu (think footer or top menu) should provide the familiar basics, and be consistent throughout the site
50. Use live chat, and display it on the bottom right corner

The content menu is an important area for credibility. Users access this menu when they need help. If your site doesn't provide the help or information customers are *already* worried about, you can expect them to leave your site for another one that will answer their questions.

There are certain features in a content menu that are particularly important for credibility. Some of these specific features are simple links that can be provided for customers. Other features, like live chat or FAQs, need to be monitored.

Guideline #47. Shipping, return, and refund policies should be visibly displayed; links should be easy to find

Back in 2008, UPS and Forrester conducted a joint study on return policies, and found the following:

-81% of participants agreed with the statement "If an online retailer makes it easier for me to return a product, I am more likely to buy from that retailer."
-81% agreed with the statement "I am more loyal to retailers that have generous return policies (e.g free return shipping, ability to return any time for any reason)."
-73% agreed with the statement "I am less likely to buy in the future from an online retailer when the returns process is a hassle."

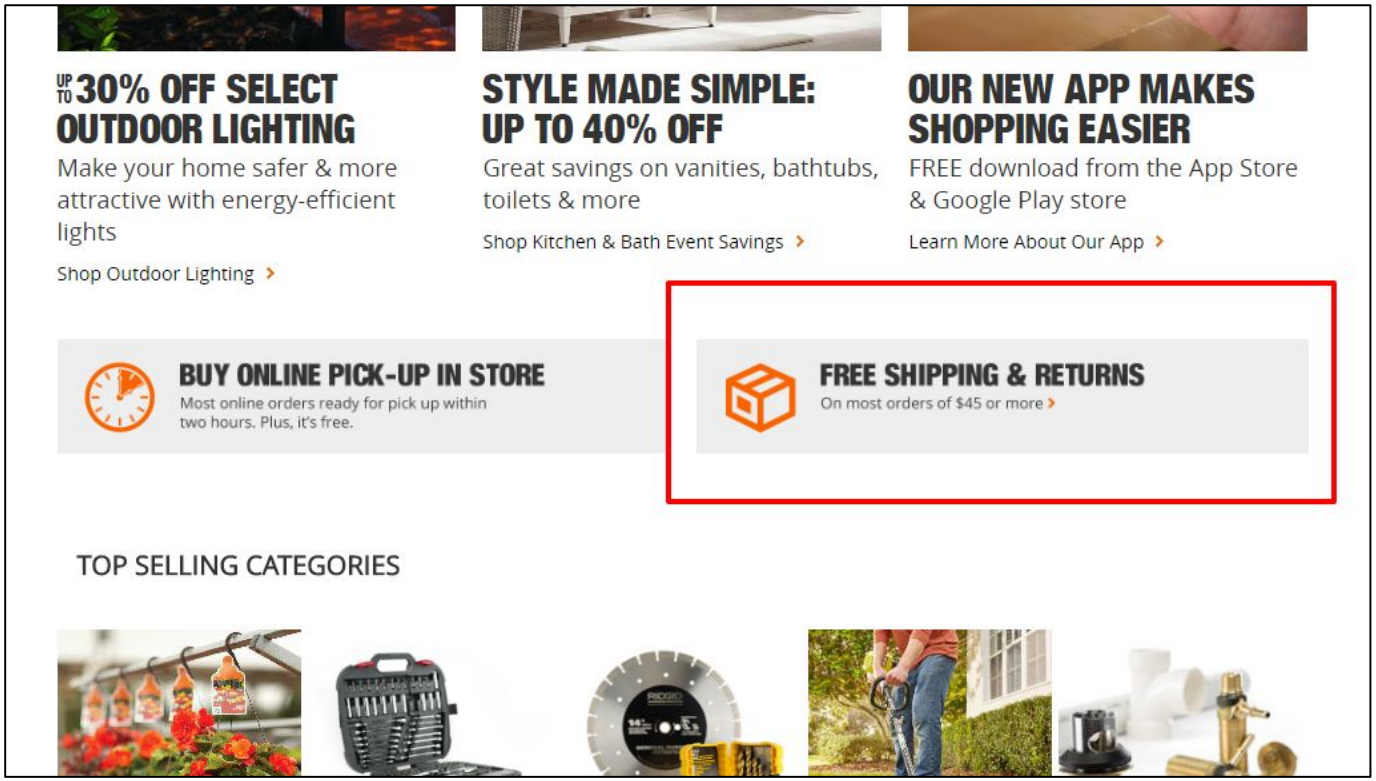
Refund policies are game changers. Offer a generous, easy return policy and display it on the homepage.

This is less important for well-known brands, as people will be familiar with the return policy or assume that there is one. For unknown retailers, though, customer trust is an uphill battle. A website needs to be apparent about its return policy, especially when competing against ecommerce giants like Amazon and Zappos.

Site Component - Content Menu
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

Adherence example

Guideline #47. Shipping, return, and refund policies should be visibly displayed; links should be easy to find



Home Depot: Ranked in the top 97th percentile for the UX dimension Credibility. Already a well-known and trusted company, Home Depot clearly states their shipping and return policy on the homepage.

Guideline #48. Show the "real" organization behind your site; show full office address, phone number, and staff.

Site Component - Content Menu
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

Anonymity is a luxury for well known brands.

This follows Cialdini's 7th Persuasion Principle: Using Unity in Online Marketing.

The Unity Principle is the shared identity the influencer shares with the influence. A visitor has way more in common with an actual human being than an online storefront. Looking at the big picture, it's about humanity and the natural desire to connect with others.

People need to know you're a real company. So if you don't have any photos of real people, or of your office, or of anything that substantiates your existence, how are they to believe you?

The easiest thing you can do is put up an 'about page' or a 'contact us' page with some warmer information. Not just a bland contact form, but a specific service email (hello@company.com), some photos and bios of your staff, and a photo of your office, perhaps even a location depending on the business you're in.

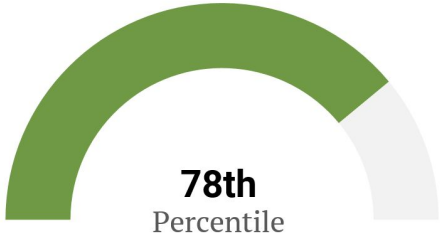
Customers will be more willing to buy *and* revisit your site if they experience that connection. Find creative ways to 'humanize' your business homepage.

Adherence example

Guideline #48. Show the "real" organization behind your site; show full office address, phone number, and staff

Drs Foster and Smith: Ranked in the top 78th percentile for the UX dimension Credibility. This website shows a picture of two veterinarians, leading the customer to think they're seeing a picture of the company's founders (maybe it's really them, who knows).

User Quote - *"I would buy from this site because it seems very credible.. The picture of the two founding doctors, as well as their in-store brand, made everything seem very reliable."*



Guideline #49. The content menu should provide the familiar basics and remain consistent throughout the site

This guideline focuses around prototypicality and customer expectations.

An ecommerce site should provide consistent, reliable global navigation. If a user becomes familiar with the search bar in one corner, they're going to be confused and frustrated when it's no longer there on a different page. The links in your navigation menu and footer should remain the same on every page of the site.

At minimum, consistently provide footer links to: the return policy, customer service, shipping, and privacy pages. It can also be helpful to organize the links into conventional column groups.

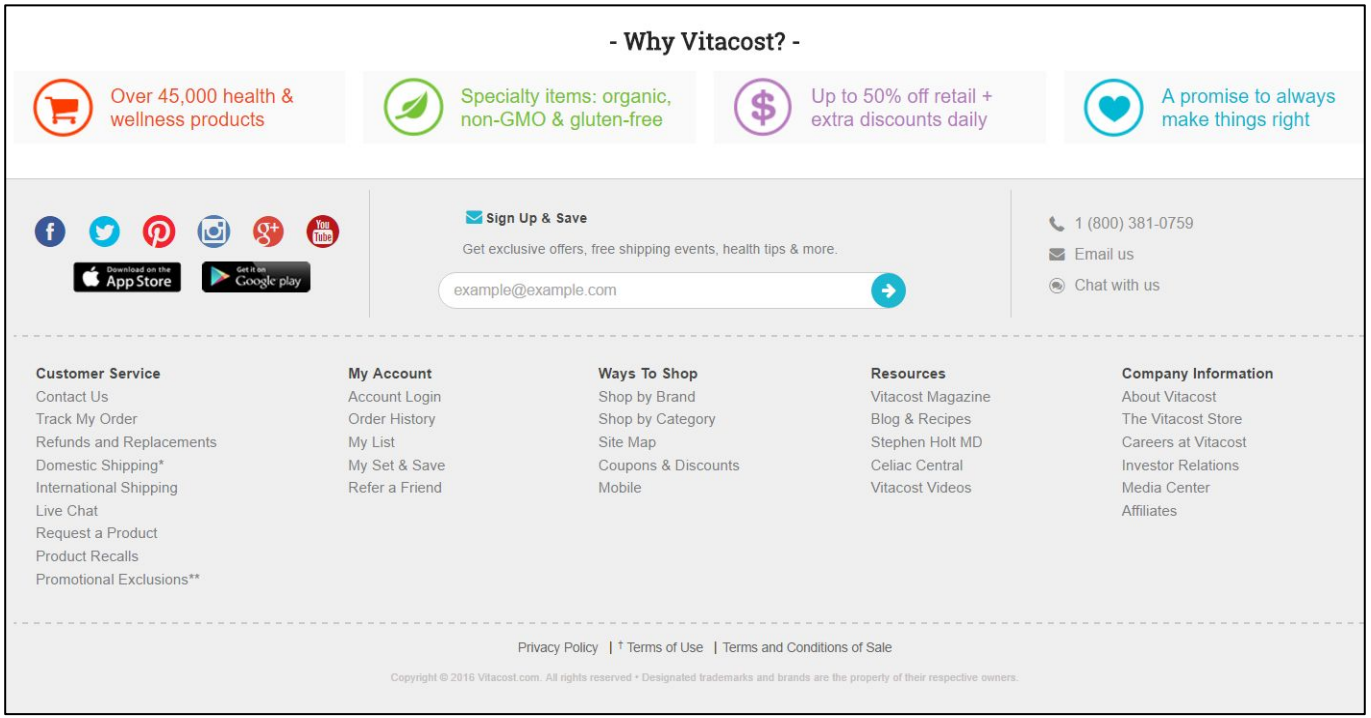
Whatever links you have in your navigation menu and footer, have to be the same on every page of your site.

Site Component - Content Menu
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

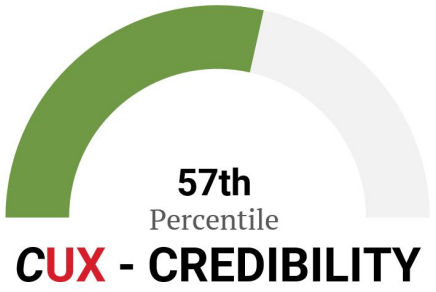
User quote - When asked what they liked most about a site: *"I liked that there were "live chat" and "feedback" buttons on every page."*

Adherence example

Guideline #49. The content menu should provide the familiar basics and remain consistent throughout the site

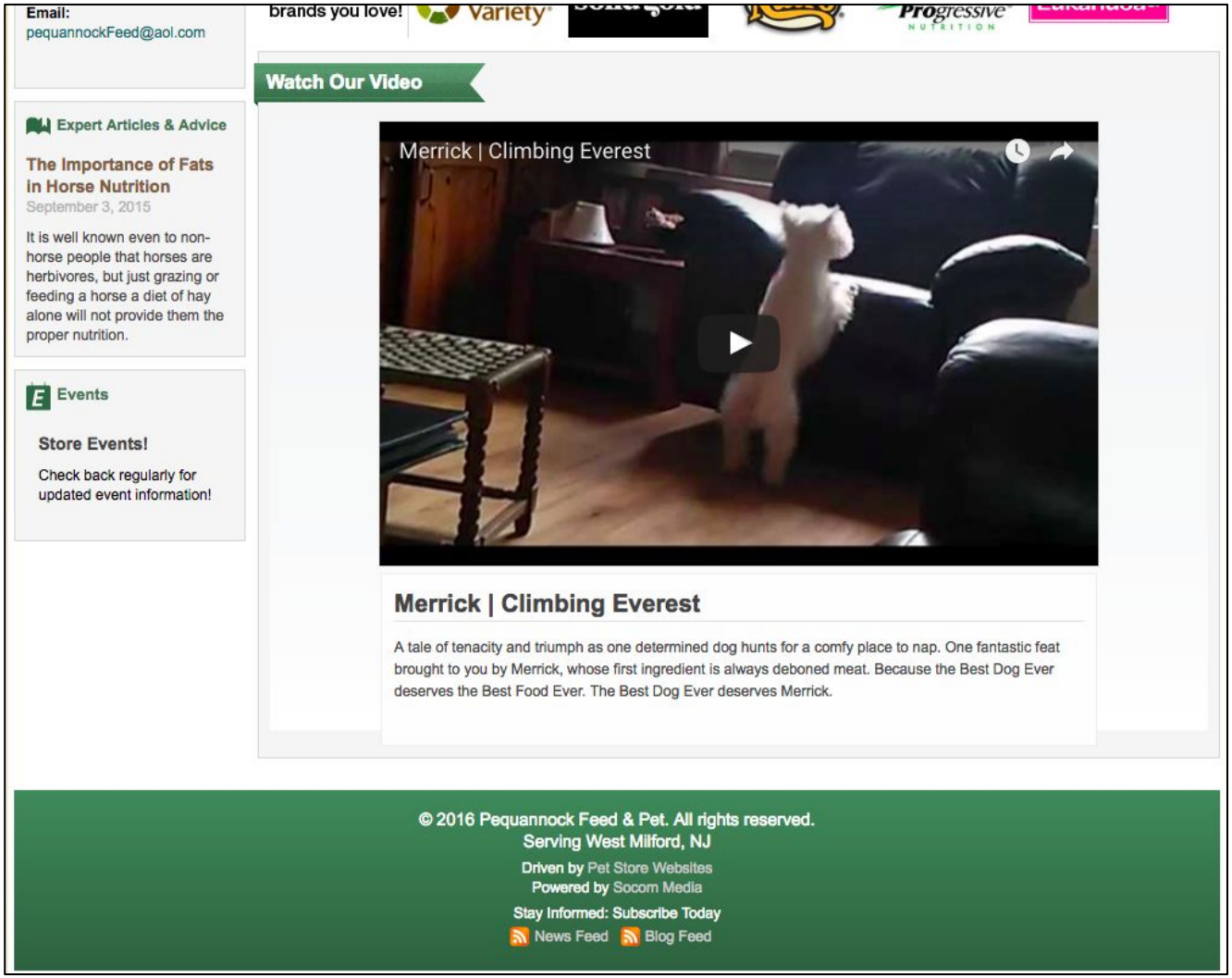


Vitacost: Ranked in the top 57th percentile for the UX dimension Credibility. This homepage uses the prototypical column format for footer links and provides ample information for all types of questions that may come up.



Non-adherence example

Guideline #49. The content menu should provide the familiar basics and remain consistent throughout the site



Pequannock Feed: Ranked in the bottom third percentile for the UX dimension Credibility. This site doesn't offer links in their footer, or the rest of the homepage, to shipping, returns, or customer service.

Guideline #50. Use live chat, and display it on the bottom right corner

Live chat is becoming increasingly common as a customer support channel. In fact, Zendesk's newest report found that "In Q1 2015, live chat led all other channels in customer satisfaction at 92%."

In fact, a Forrester study from 2010 found that "many online consumers want help from a live person while they are shopping online; in fact, 44% of online consumers say that having questions answered by a live person while in the middle of an online purchase is one of the most important features a website can offer."

Companies are using live chat to solve some of the things marketers worry about most, like:

- Cart abandonment
- High traffic, high bounce rate
- Lead generation
- Having an unclear picture of the target audience.

Site Component - Content Menu
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

User quote - "I loved that I saw a chat option. Often I will use a chat feature on a website".

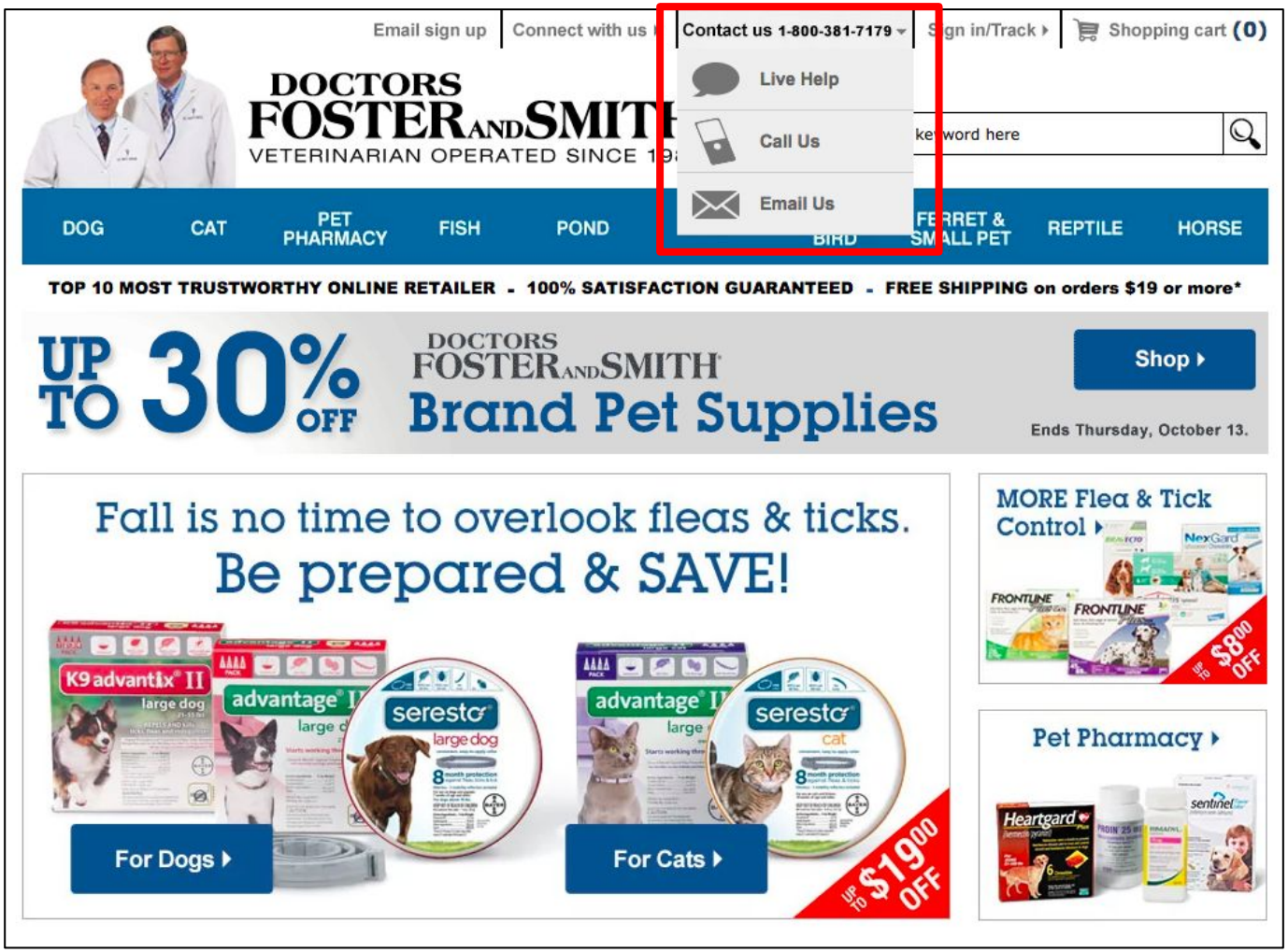
User quote - When asked what they liked about a website: "ability to talk or chat with an expert."

User quote - When asked why they would buy from this website and not a competitor: "I can talk to an expert".

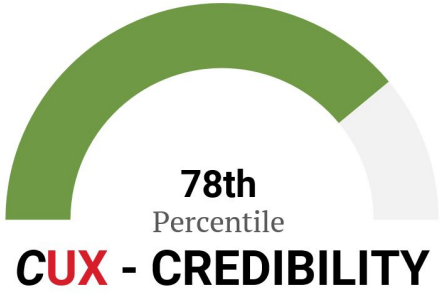
User quote - When asked what they would change about a website: "Maybe have an online chat available for customers."

Adherence example

Guideline #50. Use live chat, and display it on the bottom right corner



Drs Foster and Smith: Ranked in the top 78th percentile for the UX dimension Credibility. This homepage displays multiple methods for getting in touch with customer service including live chat.



Credibility » Social Proof

4 Guidelines

Credibility > Social Proof

51. If your product has been featured or endorsed, or if you have popular clients or associations, show it off
52. Emphasize user-generated content like reviews and ratings
53. Add trust marks/badges to the header and footer. Don't overdo it

Joel Klettke, Business Casual Copywriting:

> *"Social proof is immensely important for landing pages, to the point that it's one of very few elements I've never seen reduce conversion rates in my own tests. Third party proof does so much at the same time – sets expectations, gives leads a comparison party to weigh themselves against, reinforces your messaging and substantiates your claims.*
>
> *Is it always a good idea? There are no absolutes in CRO, but I can say with confidence it's never NOT present in the baseline comparison variants I create. It can be executed poorly – for example, choosing sources that don't reflect your customers, or choosing social proof that seems fake / flimsy.*
>
> *It's not so much about different types of landing pages – more just how you use it. I try to include social proof in areas of friction, like near pricing, or next to claims that seem to be too good to be true at first glance."*

Cialdini defined social proof as people doing what they observe other people doing. It's a principle that's based upon the idea of safety in numbers.

Bottom line: Show impressive numbers. Share what other people are doing. Show off testimonials and social media followers.

We conducted a study to find out which forms of social proof are the most powerful: Social Proof Study

User quote - When asked what one thing they would change about a website: *"Have reviews from professionals. Not just spokespeople but everyday people talking about how they like the product."*

Guideline #51. If your product has been featured or endorsed, or if you have popular clients or associations, show it off

Site Component - Social Proof
Conversion Heuristic - Motivation

There's nothing more reassuring than being validated by others.

Cialdini defined social proof as people doing what they observe other people doing. It's a principle that's based upon the idea of safety in numbers. Social proof examples would include testimonials, client logos, press mentions, your 'partners', and 'expert' endorsements.

From our original research "Which Social Proof Works Best", we found that high-profile client logos, testimonials with photos, and press mentions left the strongest impression on participants. High profile client logos were the "winner" of this study, in that they require low cognitive load while yielding high recall rates.

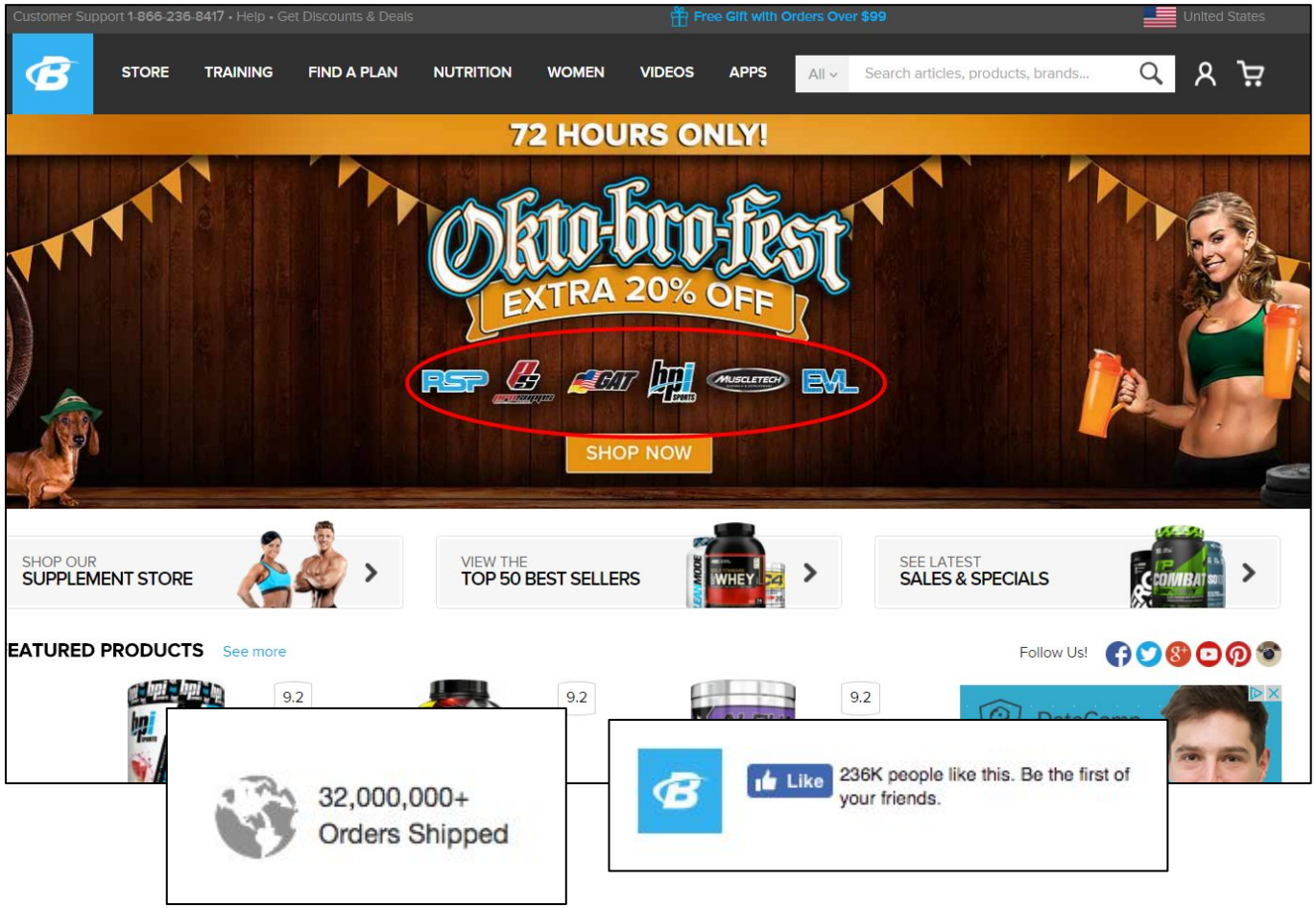
There are several ways to harness the power of social proof, but one of the most powerful is through so-called "wisdom-of-the-crowds" social proof: Following the same lines of the FOMO phenomenon, we want what others have.

For more, see:

- The CXL Institute course "Social Proof" by Social Proof experienced copywriter and content strategist Joel Klettke.
- "Social Proof Power Plays" Talk by Angie Schottmuller at CXL Live 2016

Adherence example

Guideline #51. If your product has been featured or endorsed, or if you have popular clients or associations, show it off



Bodybuilding.com: Ranked in the top 86th percentile for the UX dimension Credibility. They use various types of social proof to add credibility.

User Quote - *"With the rating on the site everyone seems to be pretty happy with the products they are receiving which makes it less stressful for me."*

Guideline #52. Emphasize the community with user-generated content like images, reviews and ratings

A sense of community helps people feel welcome. “If everyone else is doing it…”. It especially helps with ‘design’-type products like art, crafts, and apparel.

A study by Toby Hopp & Valerie Barker in April of 2016 titled “Investigating the influence of age, social capital affinity, and flow on positive outcomes reported by e-commerce site users” found that young shoppers (think Millennials) are the age group most likely to feel a strong sense of community on ecommerce sites and are more likely to engage with these sorts of sites.

Display some sort of community on your homepage, especially if your target group is a younger crowd.

Site Component - Social Proof
Conversion Heuristic - Motivation

User quote - **When asked what one thing they would do to improve a website:** *“I would eventually add some more user comments and reviews as they really add value to the site.”*

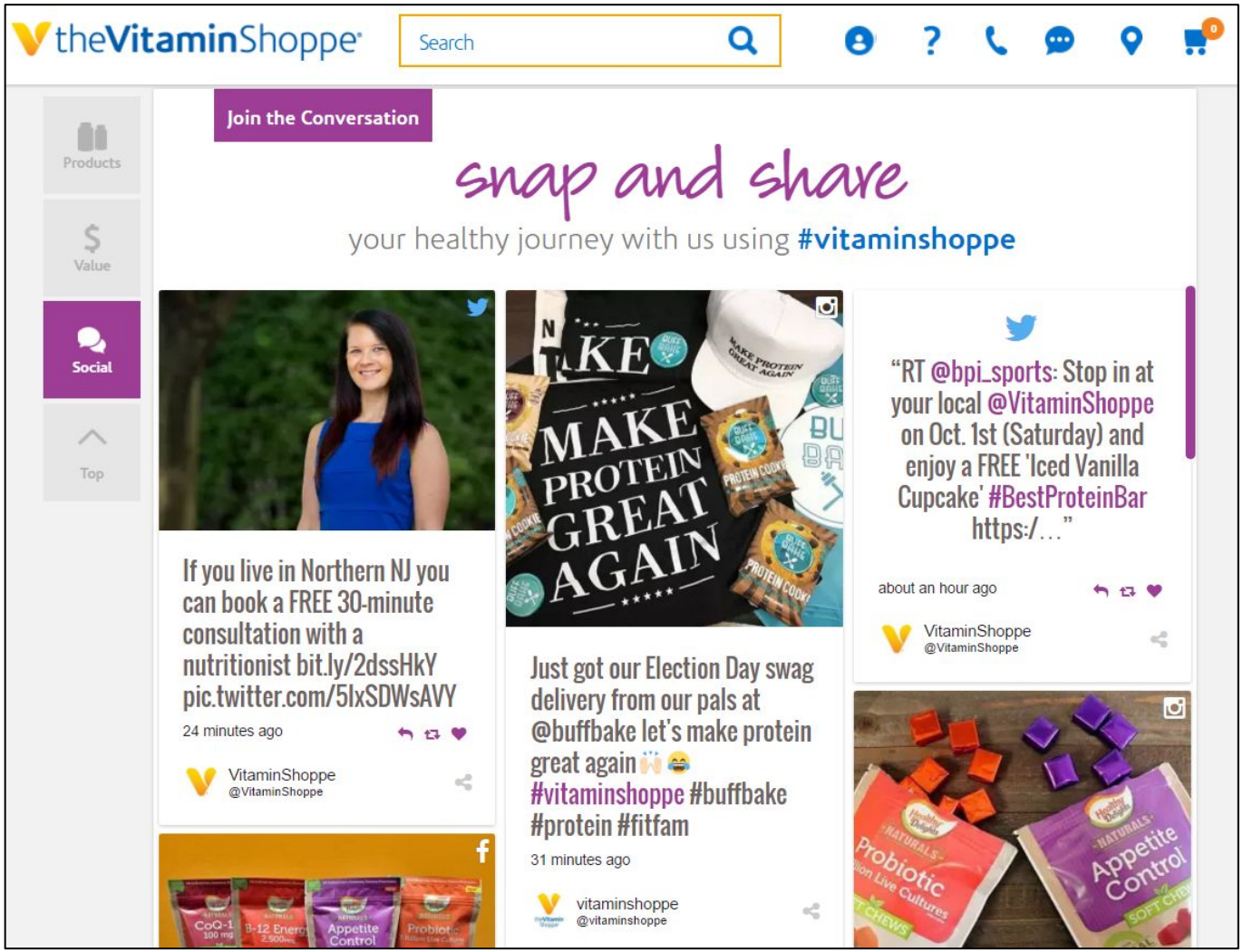
User quote - *“Add user ratings to the items or some sort of review. It's really important. I still buy shoes in person at the store cause I need to know how they feel on my foot.”*

User quote - *“it would add some value to see user comments and ratings, it's always good to read feedback from users.”*

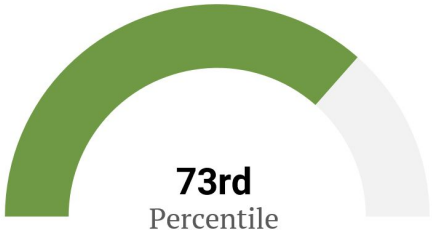
User quote - *“I would compare Bass Pro to another outdoor store, like Cabelas. Cabelas is similar, but their items have more reviews on them and even a section for questions about the products that get answered fairly quickly. Knowing others' experiences with the products I'm thinking about buying is key. If it is a bad product, I won't buy it.”*

Adherence example

Guideline #52. Emphasize the community with user-generated content like images, reviews and ratings



The Vitamin Shoppe: Ranked in the top 73rd percentile for the UX dimension Credibility. This page's huge section of social interactions create a community right on the homepage. Users are sharing recipe ideas and showing each other how they use The Vitamin Shoppe's products.



Guideline #53. Add trust marks/badges to the header and footer

Internet users want to feel safe sharing their private information. One of the most popular and predominant ways to convey a secure website is through the implementation of trust badges (also referred to as "trust logos" and "site seals").

The top-trafficked sites we benchmarked are highly known and trusted, yet many still indicate that they're a 'Google trusted store' or 'Norton Secure'. What we typically see is that known brands don't bother with trust seals, and unknown brands use them in some form or another.

If your audience tips towards the 'neurotic' side of the online shopping sliding scale, trust symbols are of extra importance.

In general, whatever you can do to increase the feeling of trust and safety on your site, you should do. Nobody wants to feel like they're going to be ripped off, or that their personal and financial information will be unsafe.

We conducted a 2 part study on trust seals:

Part One: Security vs. Familiarity

Part Two: Online Security Perceptions

The "PayPal Verified" seal was the most trusted logo/badge tested, followed by the "Norton Secured" badge.

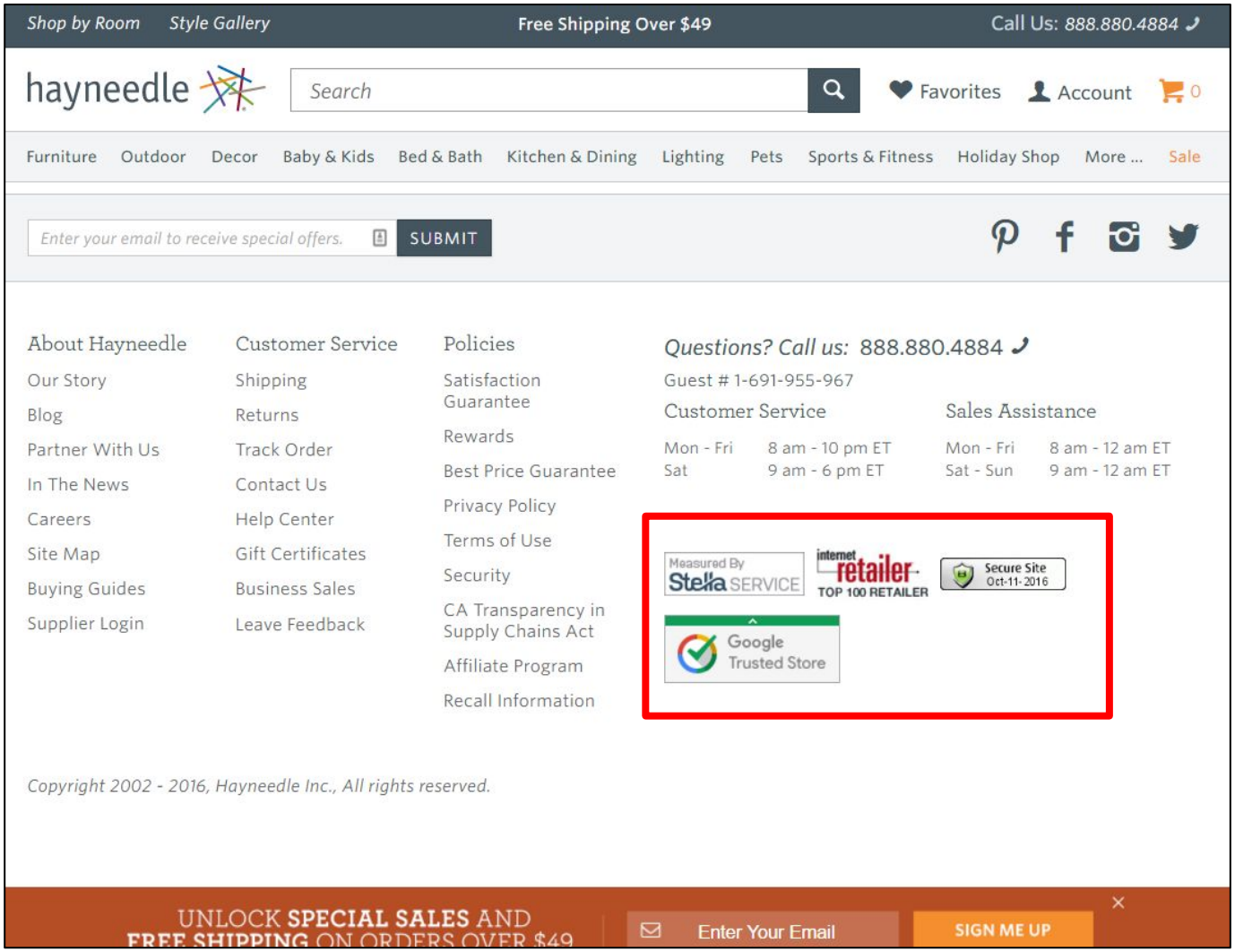
Below are examples of trust seal use from the unknown and less credible sites surveyed.

Site Component - Social Proof
Conversion Heuristic - Motivation

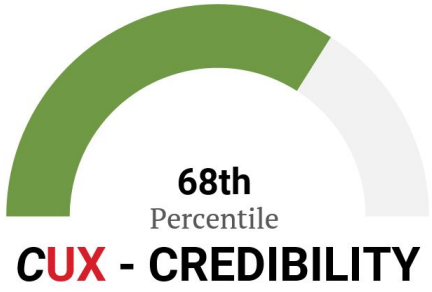
User quote - When asked how they would improve the website: *"I can not think of anything that would improve it. It had many things that made the user experience better like paypal. Very well done site."*

Adherence example

Guideline #53. Add trust marks/badges to the header and footer



Hayneedle scored in the 68th percentile in credibility. Note the footer includes four trust seals.



Credibility » Pop-ups and Advertising

1 Guideline

Credibility > **Pop-ups and Advertising**

Guideline #54. Avoid pop-ups of any kind, advertisment or not... Unless you want to make more money

Site Component - Pop-ups
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

According to SeeWhy's extensive research, 99% of visitors don't buy on their first site visit. So, if 99% of people won't buy on the first visit... how then can we at least get them to return for a second visit?

The good news is the study *also* found that 75% of people who left have future intentions of returning to continue the buying process.

Whether you personally love it or hate it, the truth is that sticking a big ole pop-up in their faces can be one of the most effective ways to command attention & secure an email address, increasing the chances of a return visit. Why?

The answer is related to a persuasion technique known as "pattern interrupt", a state of awareness occurring when something unexpected happens after the brain has become lulled into a rhythm. In the context of email & content marketing though, it's particularly effective when this "interruption" proposes to solve the user's problem.

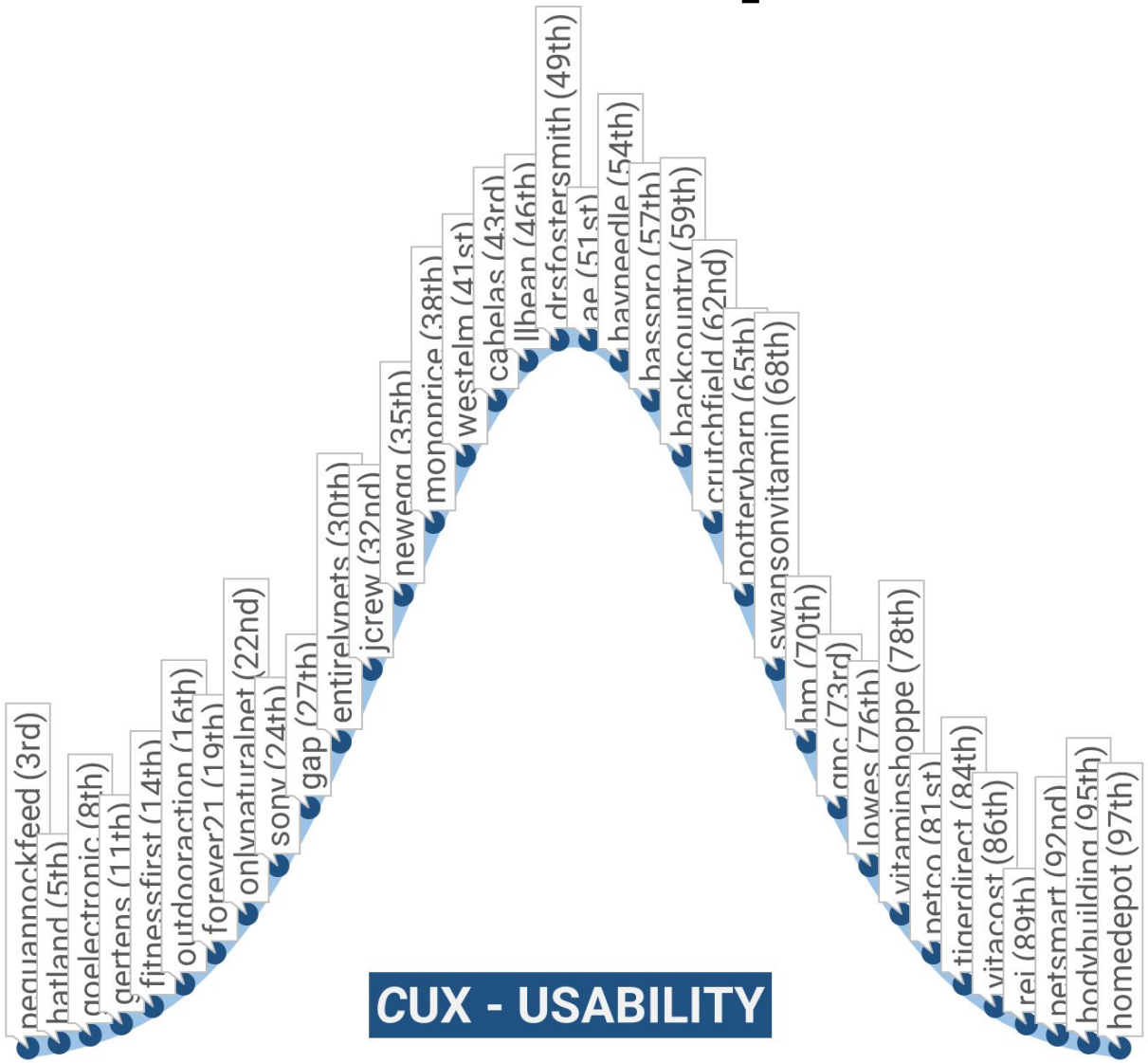
Do they work on every site? Of course not. Do your own testing. But they can work very well.

User quote - *"I'm just not a big fan of pop ups right at the beginning when I am trying to find something"*

User quote - When asked what was most frustrating about the website: *"What frustrated me was the amount of pop ups that interfered with my shopping. For instance, one was the chat now pop up. I would click on that if I needed help, so I did not like how that got in the way. The other pop up was asking me to take a survey, and the last was the one asking me to join the email list. I prefer to browse without the pop ups."*

User quote - When asked what one thing they would change about the website: *"I would eliminate the pop-ups I think there were like 4 of them while I was shopping".*

CUX Usability Guideline Chapter



Subvertical	Website	CUX Usability Rank
Home & Garden	homedepot.com	97
Nutrition	bodybuilding.com	95
Pets	petsmart.com	92
Recreation	rei.com	89
Nutrition	vitacost.com	86
Electronics	tigerdirect.com	84
Pets	petco.com	81
Nutrition	vitaminshoppe.com	78
Home & Garden	lowes.com	76
Nutrition	gnc.com	73
Clothing	hm.com	70
Nutrition	swansonvitamins.com	68
Home & Garden	potterybarn.com	65
Electronics	crutchfield.com	62
Recreation	backcountry.com	59
Recreation	basspro.com	57
Home & Garden	hayneedle.com	54
Clothing	ae.com	51
Pets	drsfostersmith.com	49
Recreation	llbean.com	46
Recreation	cabelas.com	43
Home & Garden	westelm.com	41
Electronics	monoprice.com	38
Electronics	newegg.com	35
Clothing	jcrew.com	32
Pets	entirelypets.com	30
Clothing	gap.com	27
Electronics	sony.com	24
Pets	onlynaturalpet.com	22
Clothing	forever21.com	19
Recreation	outdooraction.co.uk	16
Nutrition	fitnessfirstusa.com	14
Home & Garden	gertens.com	11
Electronics	goelectronic.com	8
Clothing	hatland.com	5
Pets	pequannockfeed.com	3

Usability Guidelines

Usability > Navigation

55. When you have to use icons, use widely accepted symbols (i.e. a shopping cart icon, a magnifying glass for search box)
56. Links should change in appearance when hovered and/or clicked on
57. The logo should be clickable and lead to the homepage
58. Place logo in top left corner of page
59. Place main navigation horizontally across top of page or vertically down left side of page
60. The main navigation bar should be sticky
61. Limit numbers of menu items to increase clarity and focus
62. Limit navigation options to one or two words each
63. Make dropdown menus easy to manipulate and to scan
64. Content menus and transactional menus should be visually distinct

Usability > Navigation > Content Menu

65. Content menu items can be designed as a secondary navigation bar in the top right corner or in the footer
66. If you sell to multiple countries, denote language and currency in the top right corner
67. The shopping cart icon should indicate number of items in the cart and total price

Usability > Navigation > Transactional Menu

68. If products are listed on a homepage use advanced sorting and filtering (Faceted Search, if product categories are listed, allow for users to easily see groupings of categories and subcategories with mega menus
69. Dropdown navigation should display at most the first three levels of products
70. Always have parent categories
71. Parent categories in transactional menu should be clickable
72. If a subcategory could apply to two different categories then include it under both (e..g "coffee tables" under "tables" and "living room")
73. Consider displaying main categories as homepage content (depends on industry and product scope)
74. Visually indicate any default site scopes (i.e. if a site is defaulted to "Women's" scope, highlight "Women's" product category in main menu)
75. Avoid vague product categories ("more", "miscellaneous", and "other") unless it dynamically displays more options without page load (in effort to reduce item number visually)
76. Consider adding additional information and resources alongside products or categories (e.g., inline descriptions, tooltips, and explainer articles), especially in specialty or ‘jargon-heavy’ product classes
77. Promoting subcategories on the homepage accelerates the search journey
78. Showcase special categories like ‘new arrivals’ and ‘sales & promotion’ groupings

Usability Guidelines (continued)

Usability > Image Slider

79. Avoid automatic image sliders
80. Image Slider Content - What's in the slider images needs to be relevant and not look like an ad
81. Image Slider Interaction - it should rotate manually, and if it has to be automatically, then slowly, typically 5-7 seconds at minimum and more with heavy copy
82. Image Slider Interaction -it should have obvious controls and should freeze with ANY interaction including hovering

Usability > Search

83. The search bar should be prominently located either in the center of the site, or top right of the page, and large enough for a moderately long search string
84. Label the search bar with the word "Search" or similar
85. The search bar should be sticky so users can search no matter where they are down the page
86. The search bar should have autocomplete capabilities; fix spelling mistakes
87. Search should optimize itself to share most relevant information and similar/popular searches as users type in the search bar
88. Allow users the ability to press the enter key to search (instead of being required to click the "search" button only)
89. Allow for filtering/categories when using search bar to narrow down/simplify search
90. Include product images in site search window
91. Search should be localized, providing results in the local terminology

Usability > Site Speed

92. Start using a CDN (Content Delivery Network)
93. Host your static files in the cloud that uses a CDN
94. Install Google PageSpeed on your server
95. Tell your hosting provider or system admin that you want Memcached installed
96. Optimize your images
97. Use a fast web host if not your own servers
98. Minimize round-trip times (RTTs)
99. Use caching
100. Compress your website with gzip
101. Add an Expires header
102. Switch off all the plugins or extras that you don't need or use

Usability » Navigation

10 Guidelines

Usability > Navigation

55. When you have to use icons, use widely accepted symbols (i.e. a shopping cart icon, a magnifying glass for search box)
56. Links should change in appearance when hovered and/or clicked on
57. The logo should be clickable and lead to the homepage
58. Place logo in top left corner of page
59. Place main navigation horizontally across top of page or vertically down left side of page
60. The main navigation bar should be sticky
61. Limit numbers of menu items to increase clarity and focus
62. Limit navigation options to one or two words each
63. Make dropdown menus easy to manipulate and to scan
64. Content menus and transactional menus should be visually distinct

In case you're wondering, the entire homepage is a navigation page. Sure, it should also relate the benefit of the site and explain why to buy from it instead of a competitor, but one of the basic functions is to get a visitor deeper into the site to buy something.

When it comes to design, homepage navigation is one element that benefits from familiarity and conventional rules. Users don't want to spend time trying to find fancy quasi-hidden menus and deciphering weird icons. Conventional navigation organization increases usability. Putting the most important elements in familiar places increases navigation efficiency.

Common user quotes from the question: "what did you like about the site":

"Extremely easy to navigate, super-responsive."

"Easy to find the stuff and well organized"

"the site is easy to navigate. It has clear categorization and so easy to chose for what I am looking for."

Guideline #55. When you have to use icons, use widely accepted symbols (e.g. a shopping cart icon, a magnifying glass for search box)

Site Component - Navigation
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

Look everywhere around the internet and you'll find icons. From Facebook to the dark web, icons will be there. They replace text, which takes tons more time for our brains to process...that's good, right? For the most part. If icons are unfamiliar, however, they become a hassle.

There are familiar ones like the magnifying glass for search. But there are others that don't speak to everyone, and those will lose people.

If you work in Industry A and I work in Industry B, a single icon could mean two different things. You could see the icon and think "contact page" and I could see the icon and think "pricing page".

Before using an icon, you have to be aware of how it's used on other sites / in other apps. How likely are your visitors to use those other sites / apps? So, to summarize, here are your icon recognition options...

1. Universal – Everyone recognizes and comprehends this icon.
2. Multi-Use – Most people recognize it, but it has multiple possible meanings.
3. Unknown – Few people recognize or comprehend this icon.

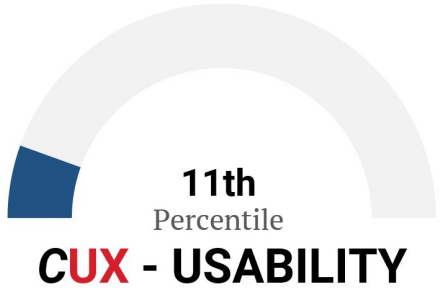
Universal is safe, multi-use is risky without extensive research and unknown is just plain silly.

If your icon doesn't clearly symbolize what will happen when it's clicked, most people won't bother finding out. Even if they do, they'll get frustrated and leave the site.

Non-adherence example

Guideline #55. When you have to use icons, use widely accepted symbols (e.g. a shopping cart icon, a magnifying glass for search box)

Gertens: Ranked in the bottom 11th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. The outdated "Hot Deals" flame graphic at first seems like the heading for the products below it. However, it's actually a link to a page with popular products. This graphic is highly unconventional. Most users will never know they're supposed to click it.



Guideline #56. Links should change in appearance when hovered and/or clicked on

It almost seems impossible to violate this fundamental guideline, but we found many sites that did.

Common changes for when hovering over a link: A changed background color, a removed underline, turning the mouse arrow into a hand, or a changed text color.

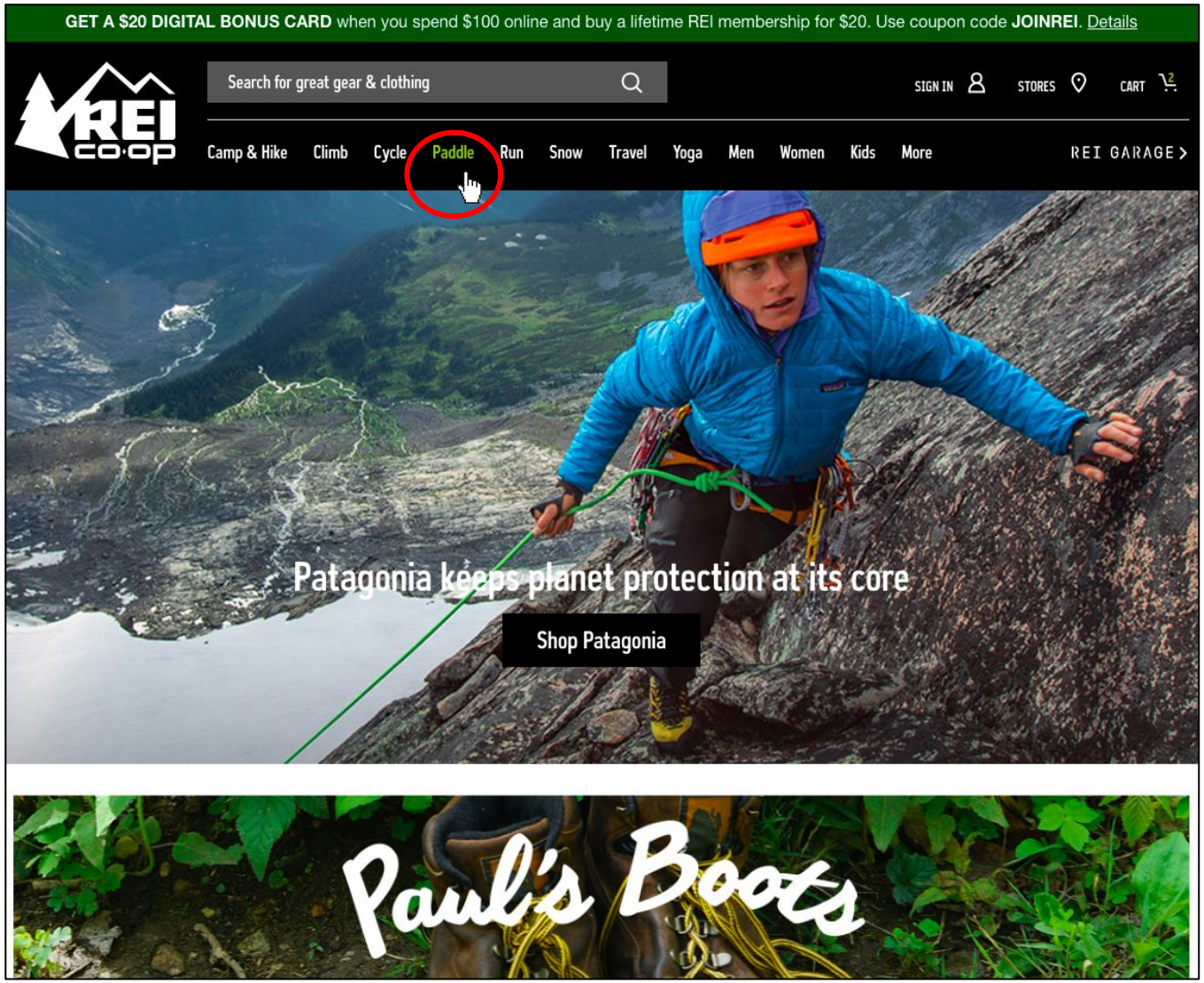
According to Smashing Magazine's article: "Visited links are often overlooked, but they are very helpful, especially on larger websites. Knowing where they've been before is helpful for users, whether because they want to avoid pages they've visited or to make a point of visiting them again. Give visited links a darker shade of color, so that they stand out but aren't as obvious as unvisited links."

This is a really easy fix, and it helps usability because it is the prototypical way of doing things.

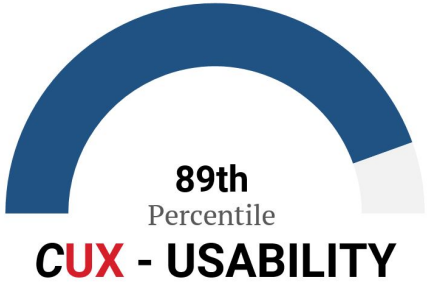
Site Component - Design
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

Adherence example

Guideline #56. Links should change in appearance when hovered and/or clicked on

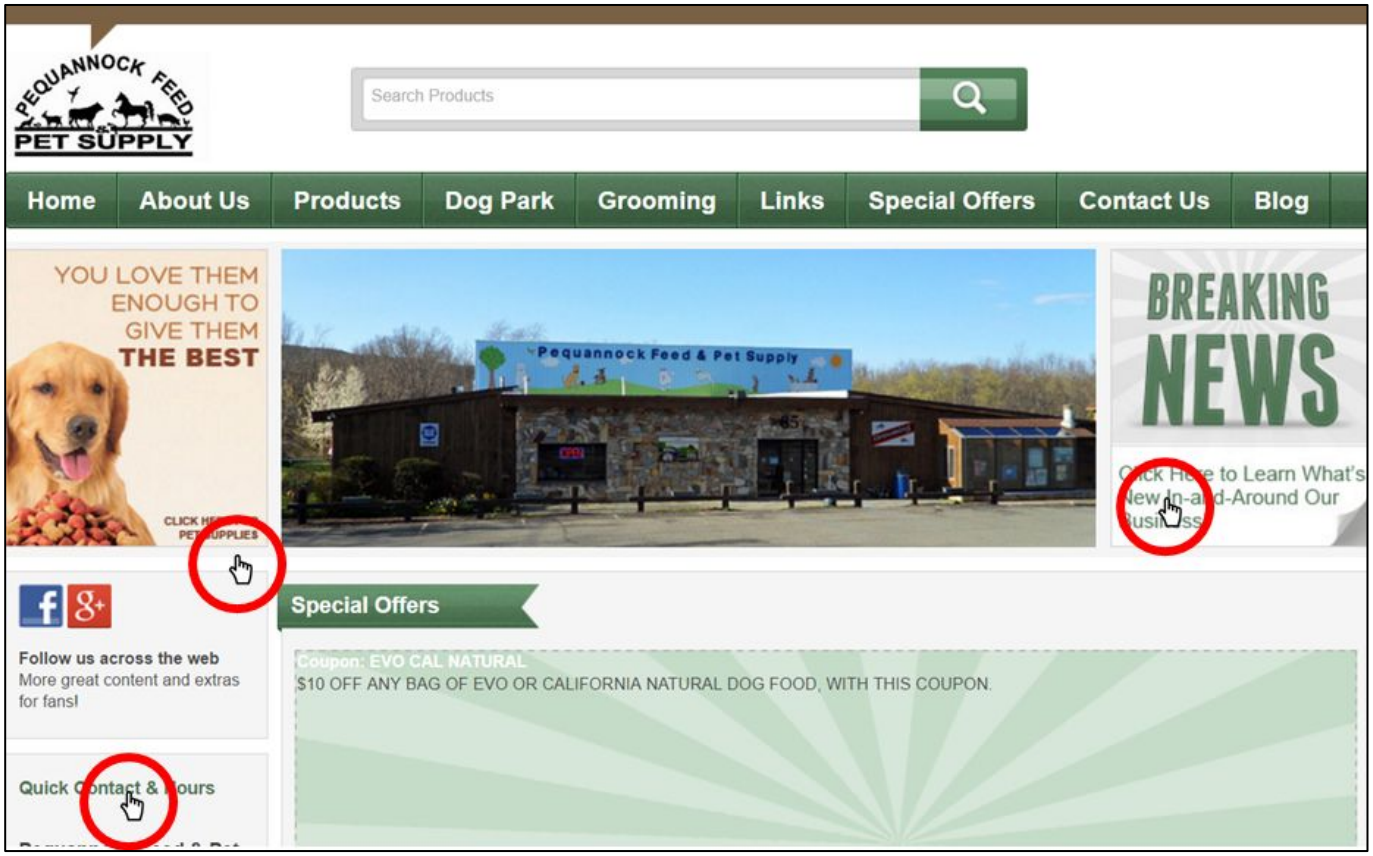


REI: Ranked in the top 89th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. Notice the category 'Paddle' turning green when moused over.

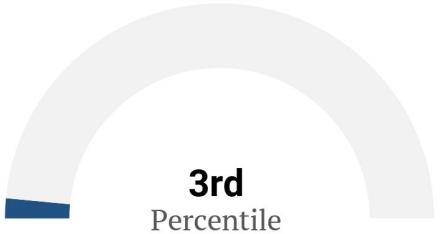


Non-adherence example

Guideline #56. Links should change in appearance when hovered and/or clicked on



Pequannock Feed: Ranked in the bottom 3rd percentile for the UX dimension Credibility. Noticed that the links for this site don't change appearance when moused over.



CUX - USABILITY

Guideline #57. The logo should be clickable and lead to the homepage

Site Component - Navigation
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

Check out this Internet Wayback Machine archive of Yahoo's site back in 1996. Notice the logo is clickable.

Conventions are self-perpetuating.

It has become an industry standard for logos to redirect a user to a website's homepage. People expect it and will be thrown off if this common functionality is not there.

While it's true that some people look for a 'home' link or button, most internet users rely on the logo to take them back to the homepage.

This is another easy fix with absolutely no downside. Just do it. You can also see if it's a particular problem on your site by checking out a click map, and if people are clicking your (unclickable) logo, then you should definitely make it clickable.

Guideline #58. Place logo in top left corner of page

There's a July 2016 NNgroup research study titled "Centered Logos Hurt Website Navigation" stating that getting back to the homepage is about 6 times harder when the logo is placed in the center of a page compared to when it's in the top left corner.

Additionally, participants of the study remembered the brand name more often when it was displayed on the left side. In fact, the brand recall lift was 89% when the logo was on the left vs. the right.

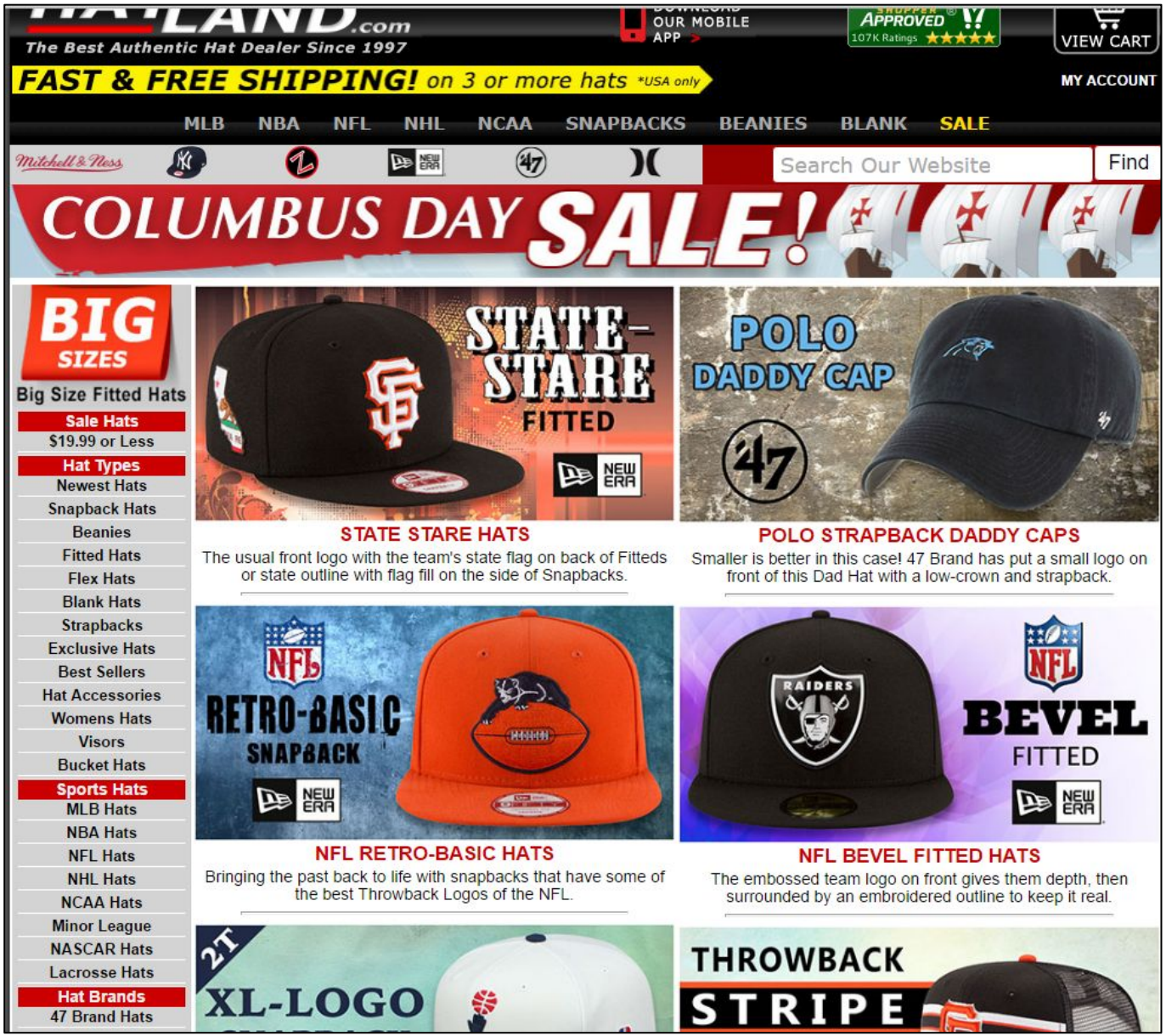
But why? This likely has something to do with the way most brains process information. If you speak a left-to-right language, like English, research suggests you will instinctively look to (and focus on) the left side of the screen first. Thus, you are more likely to remember what's on the left-side of a site.

Also, it's about convention and what people are used to. Sometimes the best optimization is just to match customers' expectations. Make it easy to shop and use the site. Change things up and people WILL get lost.

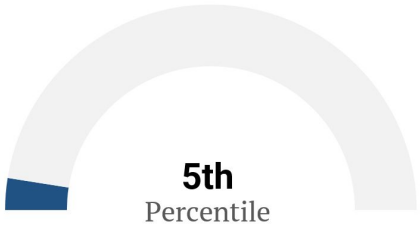
Site Component - Navigation
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

Non-adherence example

Guideline #58. Place logo in top left corner of page



Hatland: Ranked in the bottom 5th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. The "HATLAND.com" website title is also the logo. Because it looks nothing like a typical logo, it's likely that many users aren't going to know they can click this button to return to the homepage. Perhaps if it were in the very top left corner this would be more clearly communicated.



Guideline #59. Place main navigation horizontally across top of page or vertically down left side of page

Familiarly placed navigation is crucial. In the infamous words of Steve Krug, "Don't make me think."

Users need to quickly see where to go from the homepage, and the top-level navigation is where this starts. The top, horizontal area of the screen is where most people typically look first. See CXL Institute research study "User Reading Patterns."

Ideally, a visitor should arrive on your site and not have to consciously think about where they should look or click. They should immediately see what they're looking for (or at least how to get there).

Should the main menu be horizontal or vertical? While there's a strong case against the left vertical menus, two studies (2003 and 2004) actually claim it's better. Opt for horizontal menu whenever possible, but go for the left vertical menu if you've got a ton of menu items (Amazon!). This eyetracking study says top menu is easier to use, but there's only so much space there.
If you do use vertical menus, make sure they're aligned left. Right-aligned menus impede scannability.

People can only buy what they can find. There are a number of studies (e.g. this) that show websites are losing money because the navigation system has failed and user can't find the product they are interested in. Check out this Jakob Nielsen article on costly content organization and navigation mistakes.

Site Component - Navigation
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

User quote - *"I also would like to see the menu items to be more open. I felt it was a little difficult for me to find the printer section. If the menu navigation was on the top and open I think that would help me."*

User quote - *"I liked how the website showed the categories on the top".*

User quote - *"Instead of putting all the categories, like Men's, Women's, Children's at the very bottom of the page it would be easier to see them as tabs at the very top of the page. I don't like to have to scroll all the way to the bottom of the webpage for that info, it should be right at the top---the first thing you see".*

Non-adherence example

Guideline #59. Place main navigation horizontally across top of page or vertically down left side of page

Gertens: Ranked in the bottom 11th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. There *is* a navigation menu across the top of this page, but it contains links that few people ever look for. These links should be exchanged for the main product categories.

Guideline #60. The main navigation bar should be sticky

Site Component - Navigation
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

Sticky (or fixed) navigation is when the menu, typically the top menu, is locked into place. It doesn't disappear on scrolling, so it's accessible no matter where a user is on the page.

Sticky navigation bars are quicker to navigate. They simply make browsing faster and easier, especially when a website has a lot of information contained within.

Smashing Magazine conducted a study to find out whether sticky navigation bars were really better. They found that Sticky menus were 22% quicker to navigate. If a user spent five minutes on a website, sticky navigation saved them an average of 36 seconds. Keep in mind these 36 seconds wouldn't have been spent enjoying site content, but having to navigate the website.

What's more, the study found that *all* of the participants preferred sticky navigation. Most times, they didn't even know what the difference between the two sites was, they just knew they preferred the site that had a sticky nav bar.

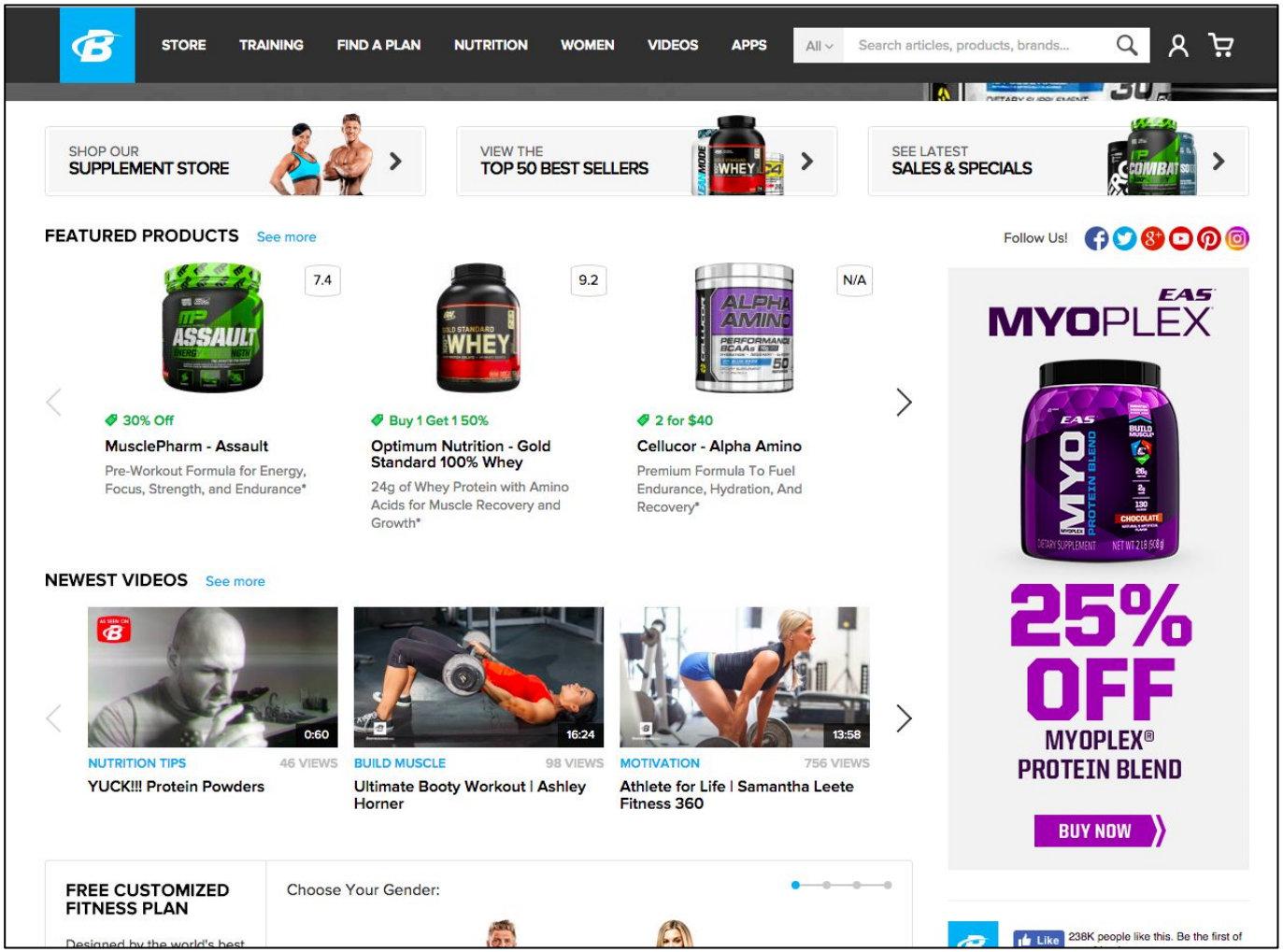
That said, there are some downsides to a sticky navigation bar. Mainly, it can be tricky to implement. Since there are design limitations, it can be perceived as intrusive and bulky at times.

Again, this is most important for pages with lots of information, so it might not apply to a typical ecommerce homepage. It also might be more useful (usable) in product category pages where transactional navigation menus get larger.

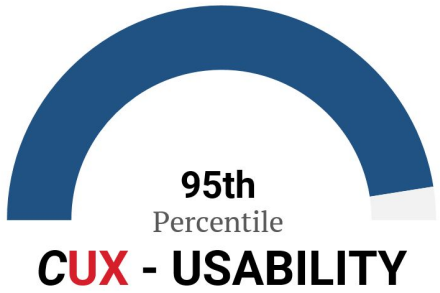
Wondering how to set up sticky navigation on your site? Read Smashing Magazine's full article here.

Adherence example

Guideline #60. The main navigation bar should be sticky



Bodybuilding.com: Ranked in the top 95th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. As you can see, the black top navigation bar remains apparent as you scroll down the page.



Guideline #61. Limit numbers of menu items to increase clarity and focus

More choices equals more freedom, right? For the most part yes, but there is a good body of evidence that the more choices we are presented, the less happy we are with the one we make.

The most famous, and possibly first, study that pointed to the adverse effects of choice was conducted in 2000 and the subject was jam. Researchers found that more people purchased jam when there were less options available.

Since then, other studies have supported this phenomenon, with subjects ranging from chocolates to 401(k) plans. Most of them have supported the notion that more options debilitates consumers from making decisions.

What this comes down to is a balance of distraction from the primary, and most profitable, avenues for a customer to get into your site and find what they're looking for. As always, knowing your customer and what they want should be the basis for what the homepage presents.

Site Component - Navigation
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

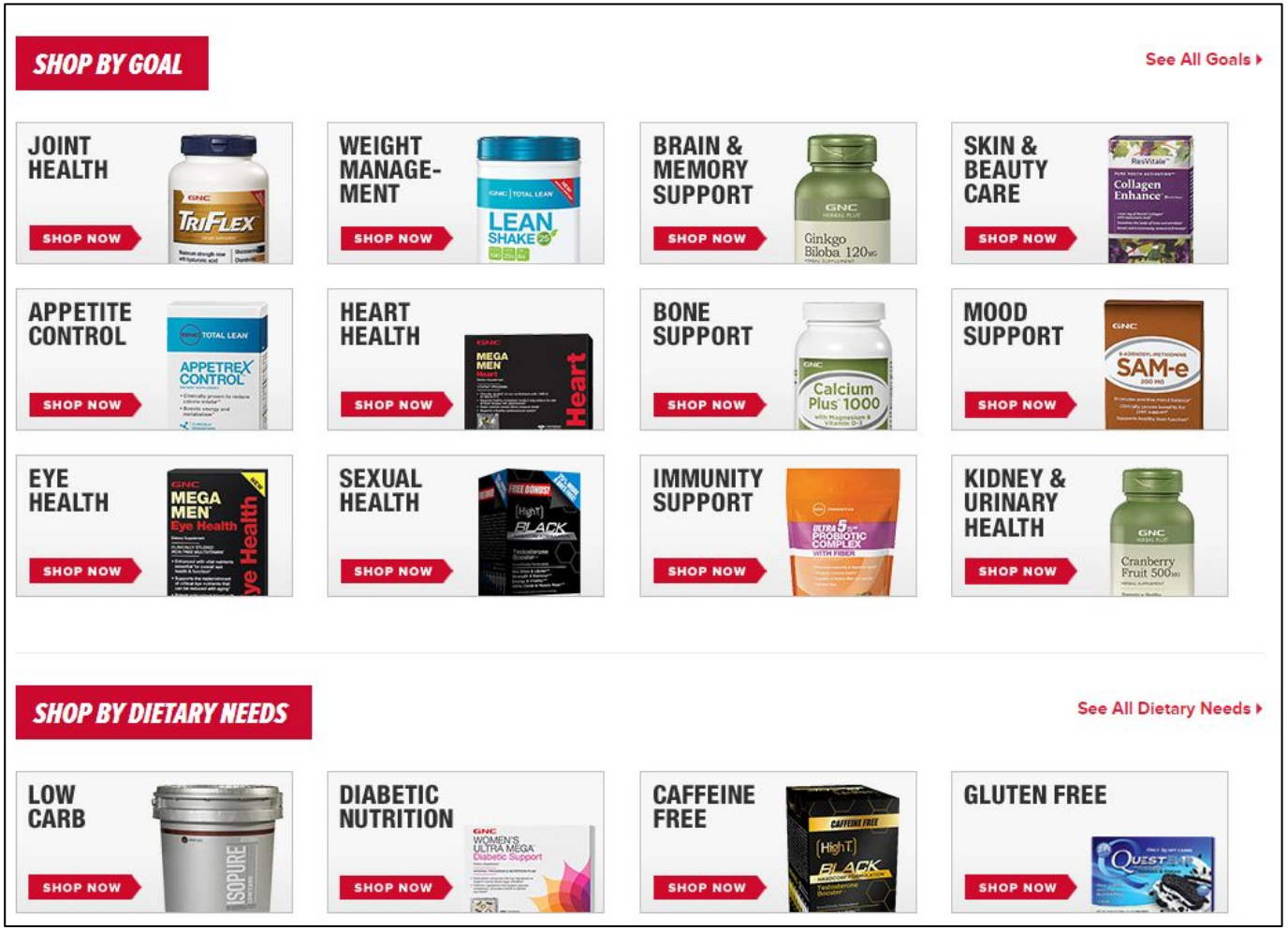
User quote - *"I liked the menu across the top, with a reasonable number of main categories."*

User quote - *"The site is easy to navigate. It has clear categorization and so easy to chose for what I am looking for"*

User quote - *"I felt like some of the menus were pointlessly long and repetitive, and it makes things harder to find, not easier."*

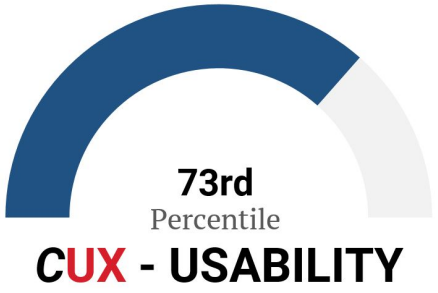
Adherence example

Guideline #61. Limit numbers of menu items to increase clarity and focus



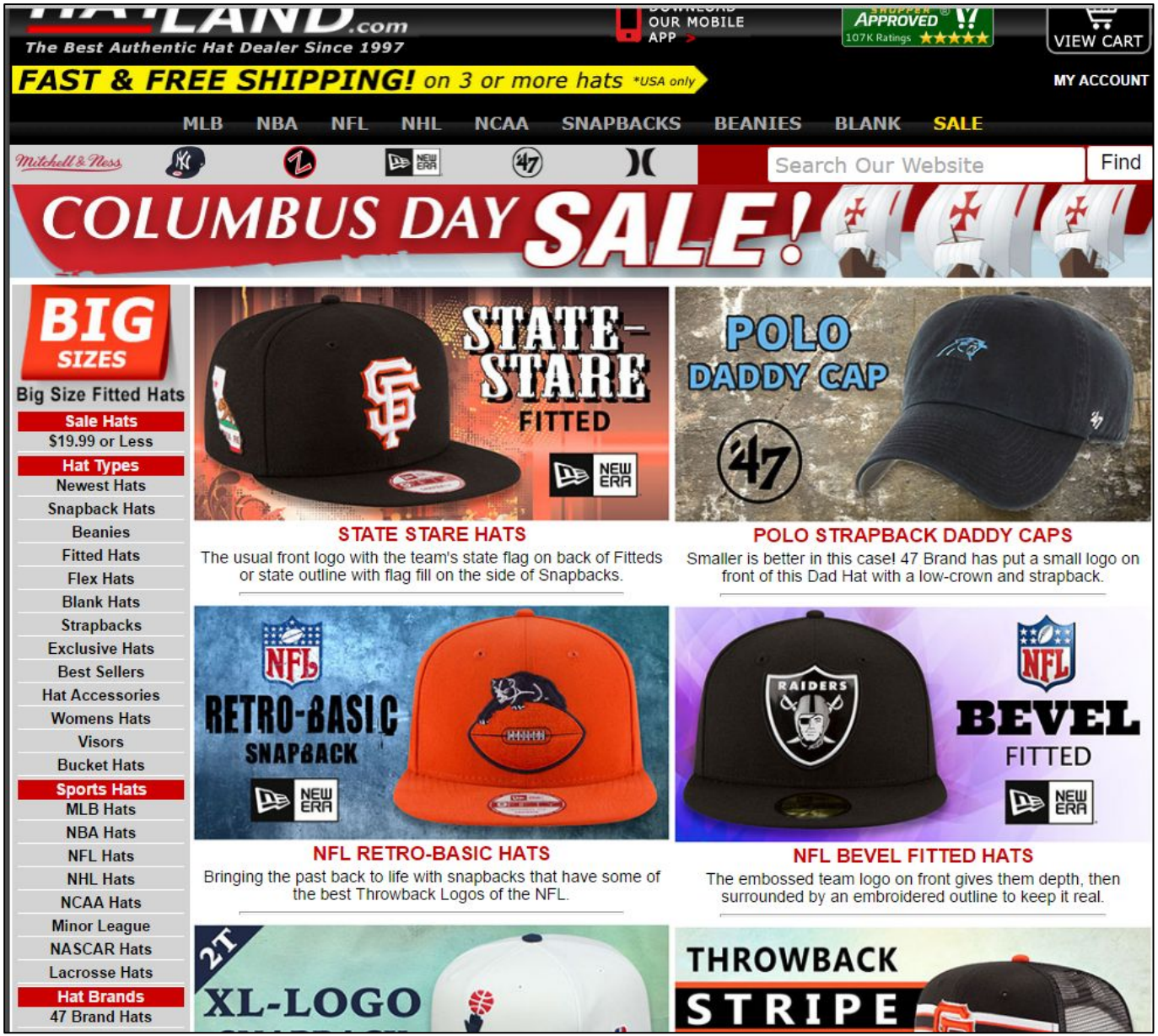
GNC: Ranked in the top 73rd percentile for the UX dimension Usability. Instead of overwhelming visitors with a list of all goals, GNC shows 12 of the top health goals on their homepage.

User quote - *"I like how everything was laid out and easy to understand ... It was clearly labeled."*

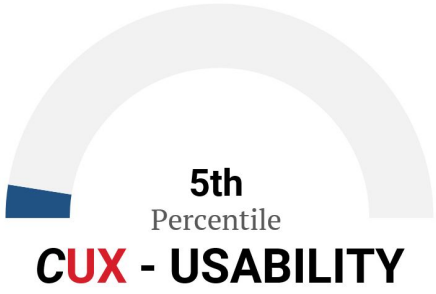


Non-adherence example

Guideline #61. Limit numbers of menu items to increase clarity and focus



Hatland.com: Ranked in the bottom 54th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. The number of navigation options to start browsing hats on this homepage is seriously overwhelming.



Guideline #62. Limit navigation options to one or two words each

Cognitive fluency applies here. It's human nature to prefer familiarity and easily understandable options. Our brain prefers easy. For marketers, this means the easier to understand your offer is, the more likely people are to buy it.

Psychologists have determined, for example, that shares in companies with easy-to-pronounce names do indeed significantly outperform those with hard-to-pronounce names. Coincidence? Nope.

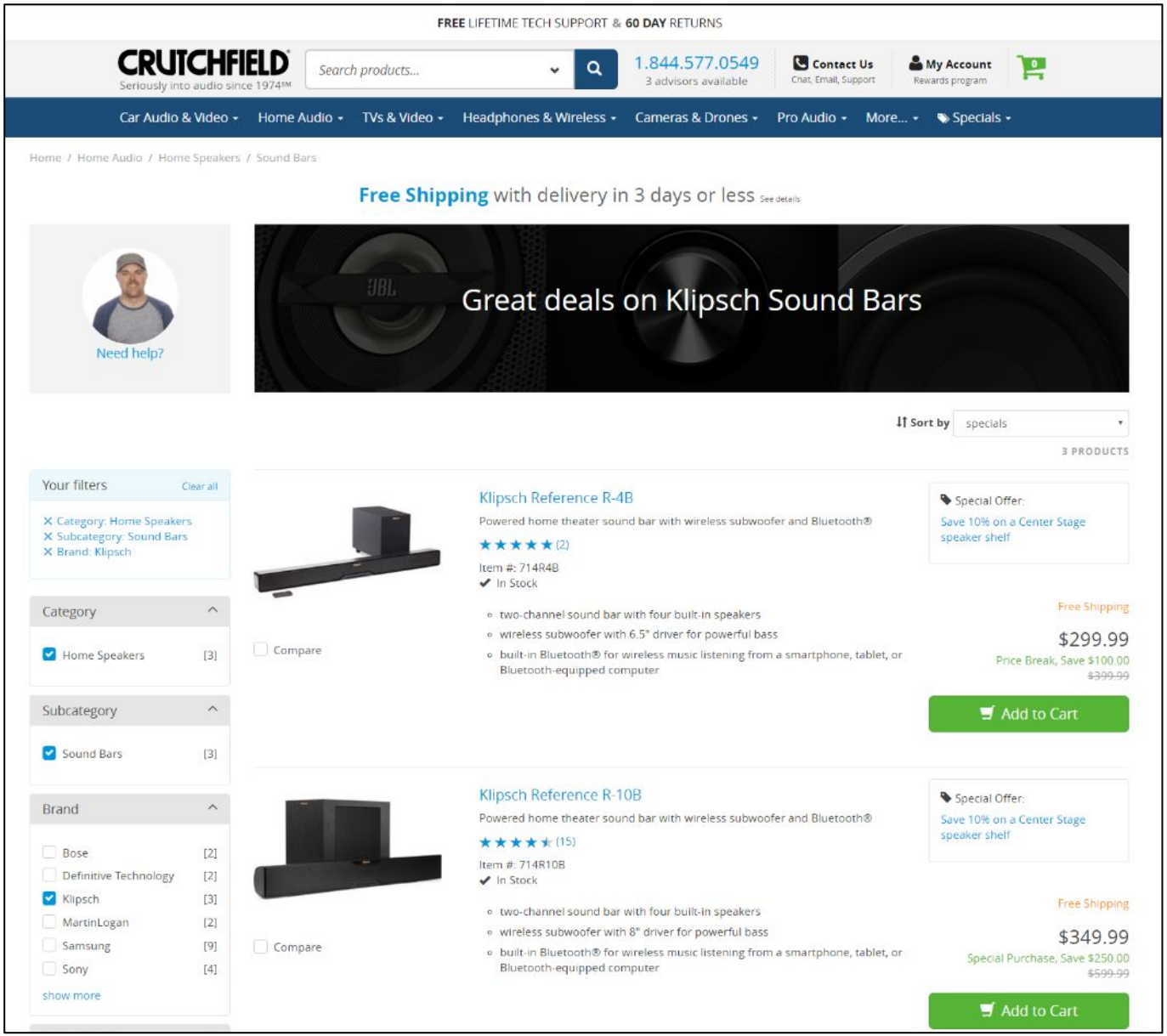
Help yourself, and your users, out by keeping navigation options as simple as possible. Don't distract users with long, difficult words or multiple words. Be as simple as possible.

Read more on the Conversion Effects of Cognitive Fluency in the CXL Institute.

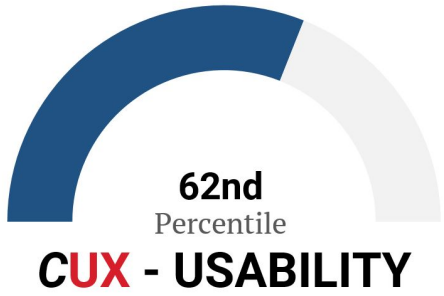
Site Component - Navigation
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

Adherence example

Guideline #62. Limit navigation options to one or two words each

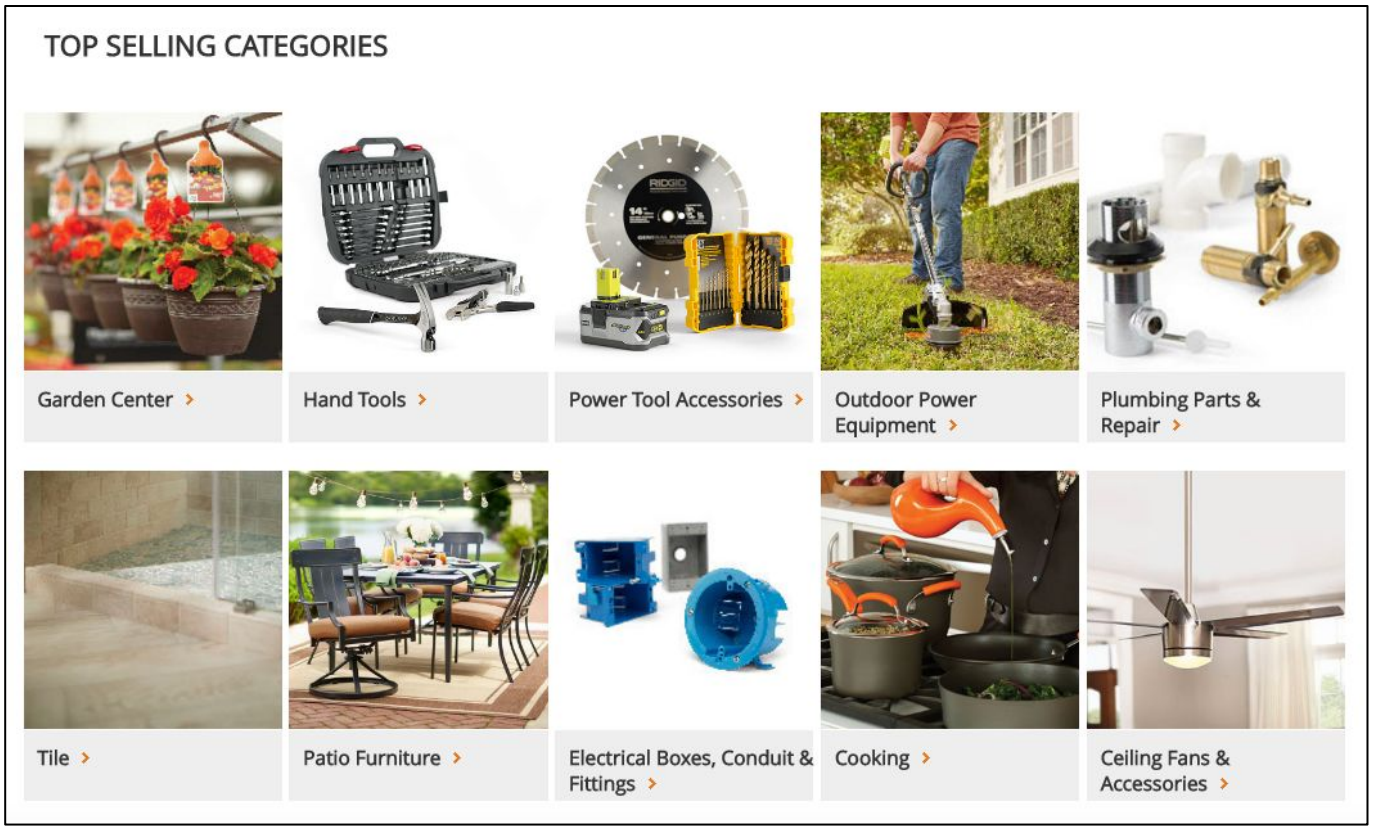


Crutchfield: Ranked in the top 62nd percentile for the UX dimension Usability. This site nicely breaks down their thousands into simple-to-understand categories.

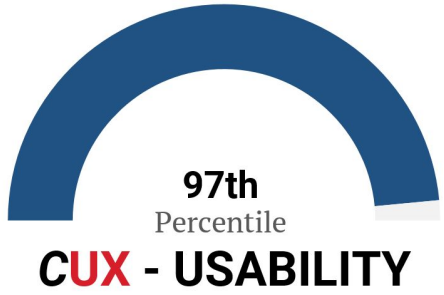


Adherence example

Guideline #62. Limit navigation options to one or two words each

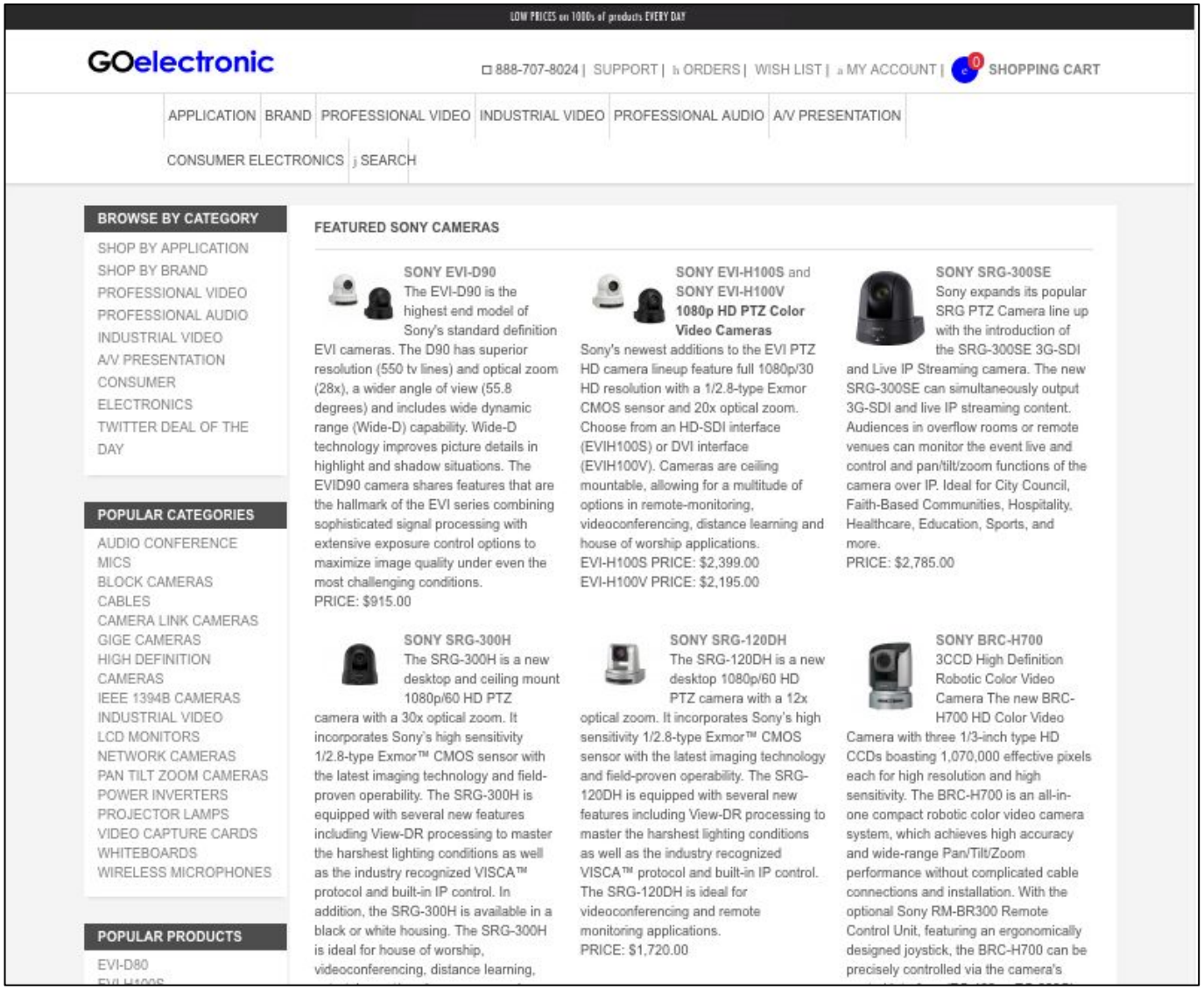


Home Depot: Ranked in the top 97th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. Home Depot's "Top Selling Categories" are also well organized. The thumbnails help with the more nuanced categories, too.

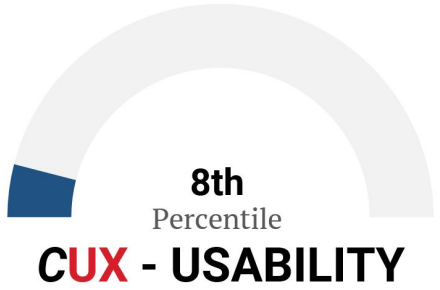


Non-adherence example

Guideline #62. Limit navigation options to one or two words each



GO Electronic: Ranked in the bottom 8th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. The vertical navigation menu on the left side of this homepage is anything but simple.



Guideline #63. Make dropdown menus easy to use and scan

If you have a lot of categories, subcategories, and sub-subcategories, then menu management is difficult —yet crucial— to get right.

Avoid a long vertical dropdown that goes below the fold so users don't see all the options. Users also prefer long lists in smaller chunks, organized logically. Who wants to read a long list of items with no apparent order?

Jacob Nielsen did a drop-down menus study and found that when there's lots of options, large two-dimensional drop-down panels that group options can help users avoid scrolling. The use of typography, icons, and tooltips can then help with the users exploration and discovery of what the site has to offer.

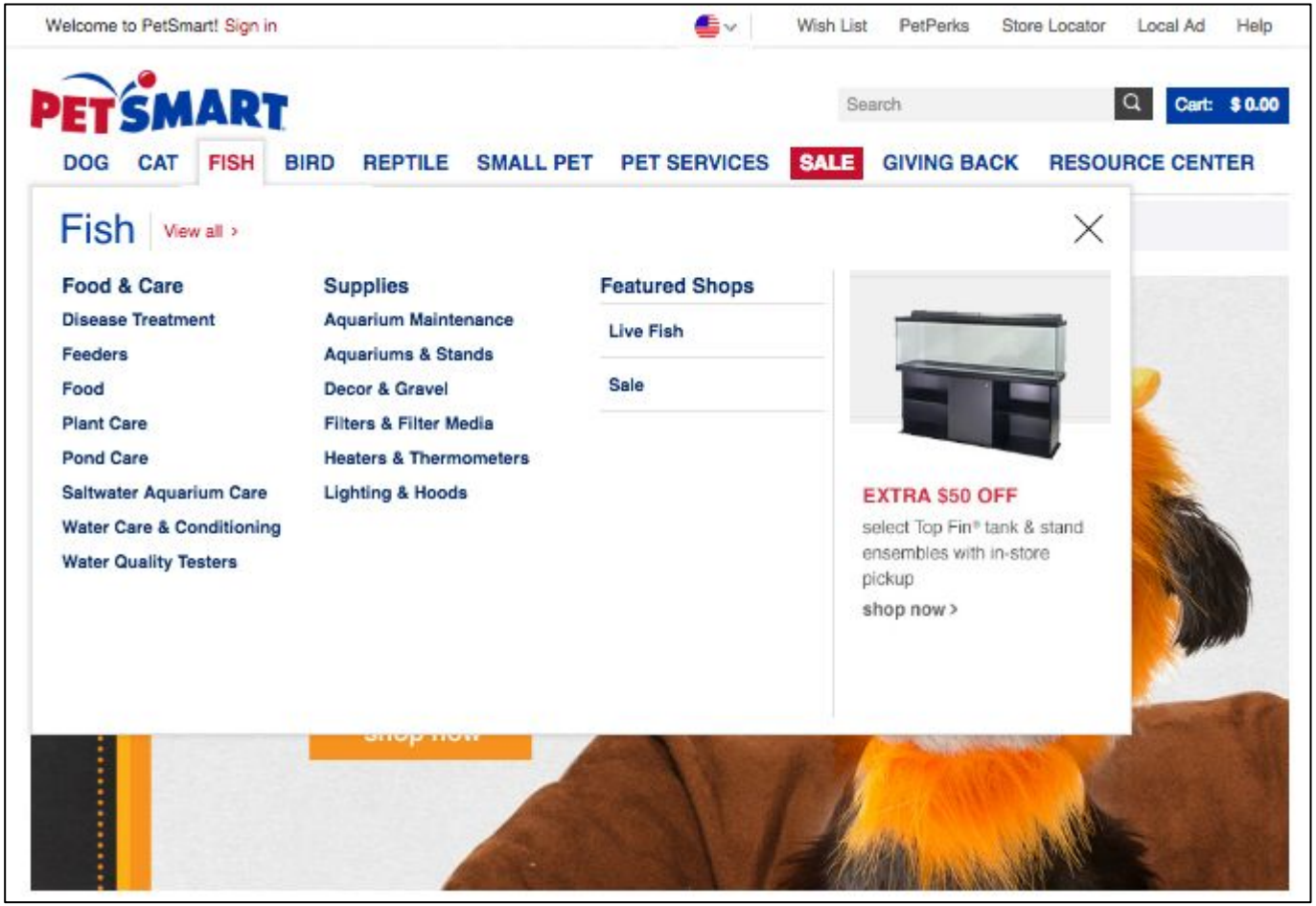
Site Component - Navigation
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

Frustrated user quotes -
"The sub-menus seemed to overlap the main menu. So, for example, if I'd hover over "Accessories," that sub menu would overlap the main list of menus. "

"The only part that I found to be frustrating was that I couldn't use the menu navigation very well. I felt it was sort of hard as there were too many items to use that navigation"

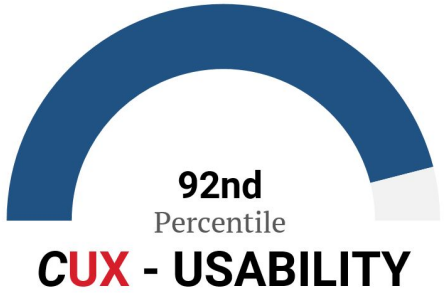
Adherence example

Guideline #63. Make dropdown menus easy to use and scan



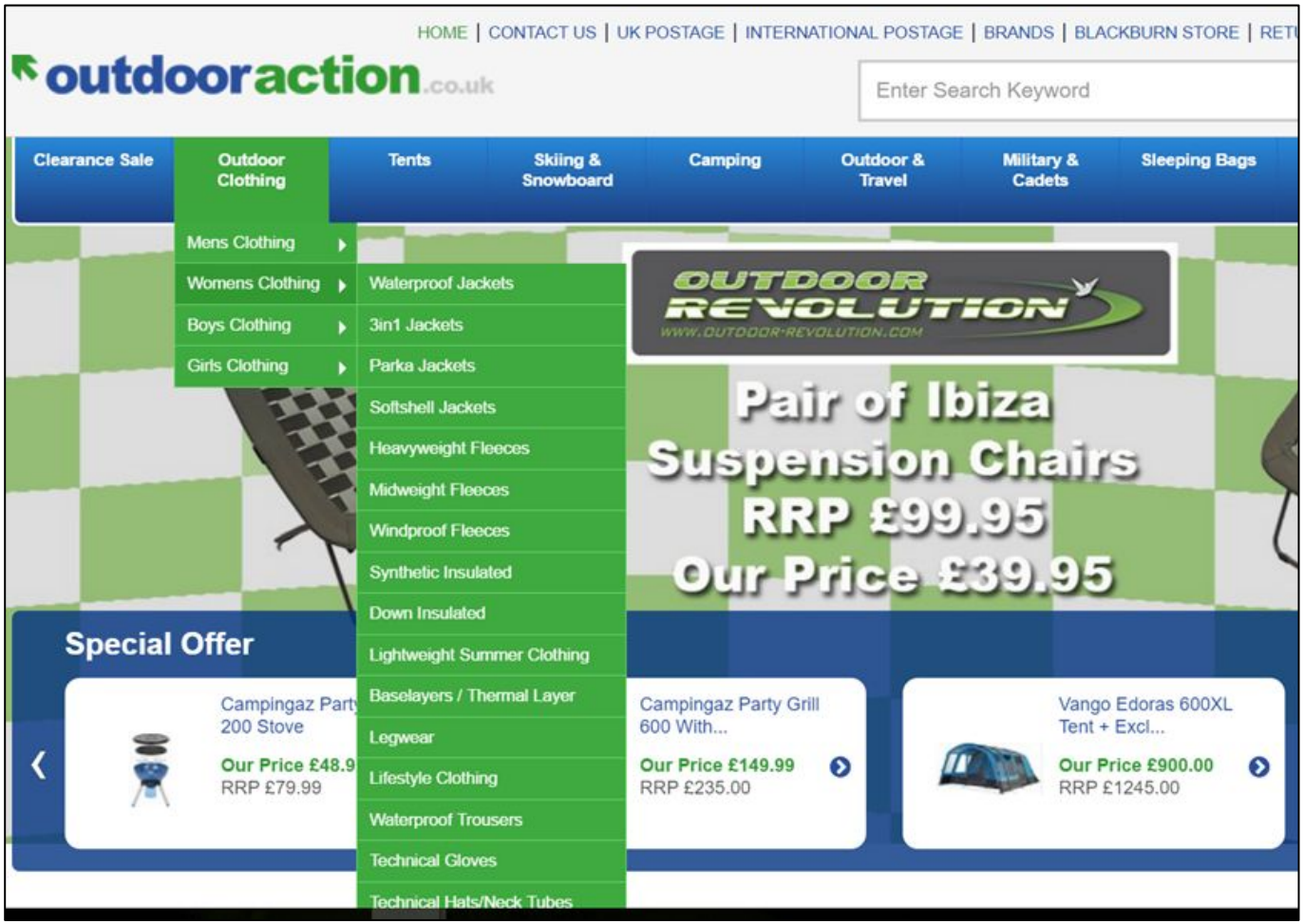
Petsmart: Ranked in the top 92nd percentile for the UX dimension Usability. This dropdown menu is cleanly broken up into three columns: Food & Care, Supplies, and Featured Shops. What's more, each parent category (e.g. Dog, Cat, Fish, etc.) is organized into these same three groups.

User quote - *"I like how everything was laid out and you didn't have to go around guessing where things were."*



Non-adherence example

Guideline #63. Make dropdown menus easy to use and scan



Outdoor Action: Ranked in the bottom 16th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. There are two mistakes being made here. First, the Women's clothing subcategory should be broken up into sub-subcategories. There are too many options as is. Second, the dropdown menu disappears below the fold.

CUX - USABILITY

Guideline #64. Content menus and transactional menus should be visually distinct

This usability guideline is an extension of the visual hierarchy principle. What's more important for a first time visitor, seeing where the company headquarters are located or browsing products?

Don't confuse users by combining the two menus. They have different purposes and should be visually represented to communicate that.

You'll want to emphasize your transactional menu, of course. How you do that is up to you, and it's subject to your own context. But make sure that your transactional menu looks different than the rest of the page, and especially that it looks different than your content menu.

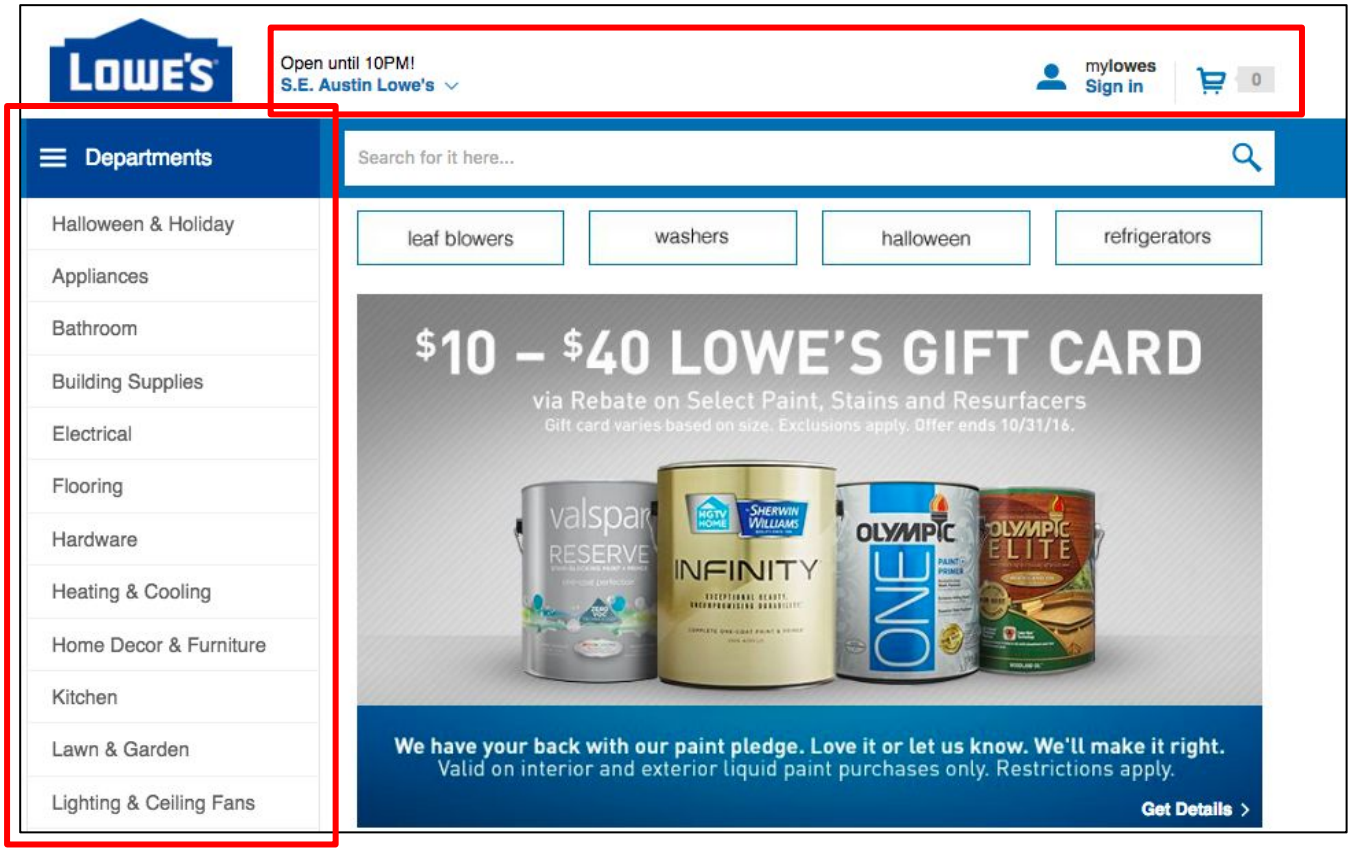
Site Component - Navigation
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

User quote - *"The menu on the left was distracting. While there was a small gutter between the menu and the item, I felt like there needed to be a better separation between the two."*

User quote - *"The sub-headers within the menu really blended in and did not stand out. The sub-headers would have been helpful if I would have realized they were there from the beginning, but since they blended in I didn't notice them at first."*

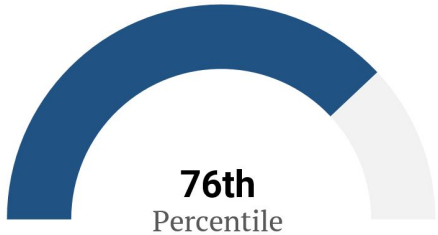
Adherence example

Guideline #64. Content menus and transactional menus should be visually distinct



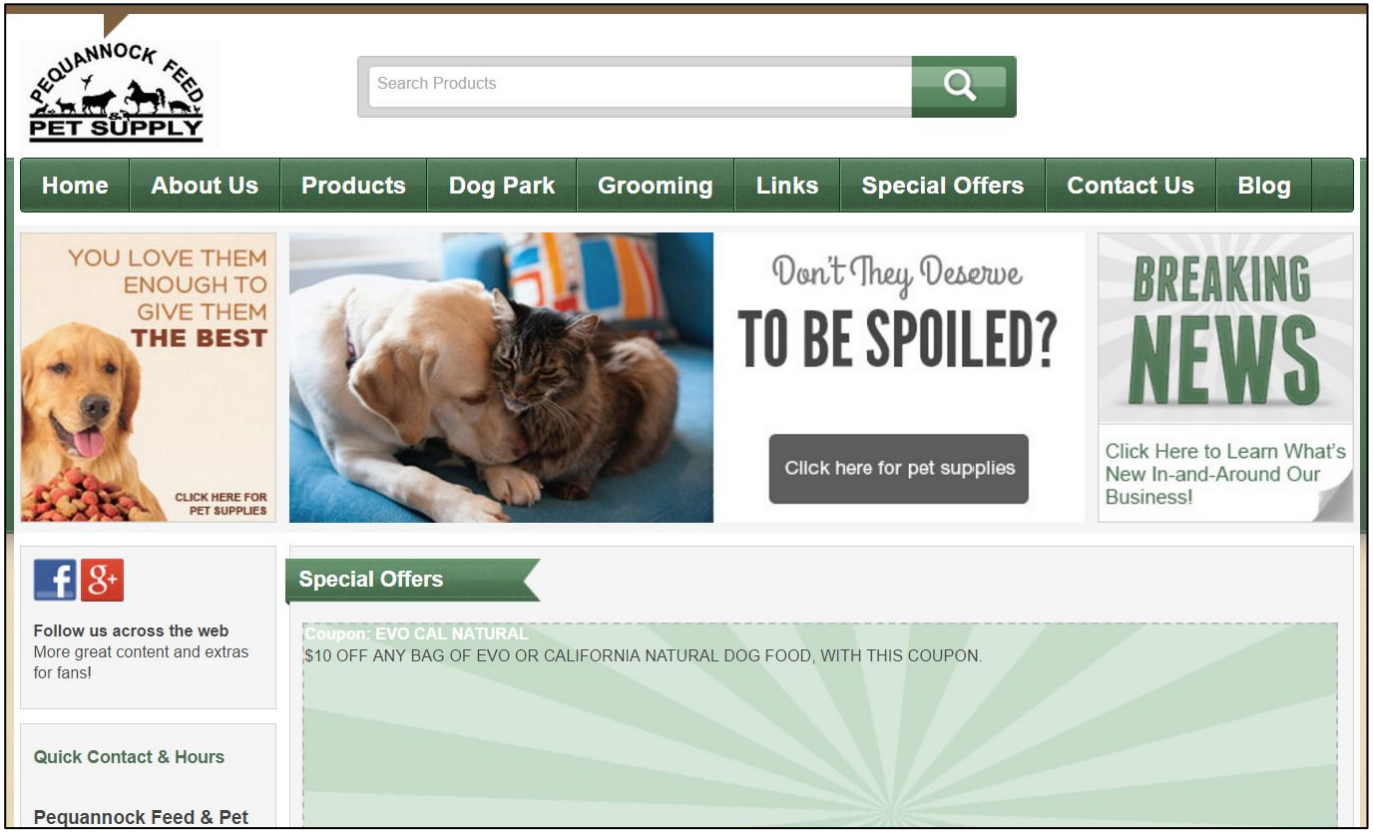
Lowe's: Ranked in the top 76th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. The top horizontal content menu is visually distinct from the vertical transactional menu on the left.

User quote - *"the navigation was easy and made sense where to find items."*

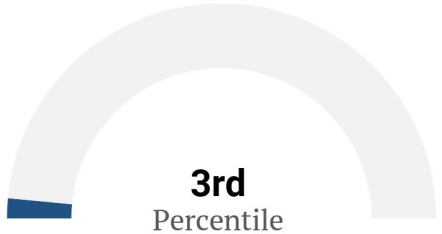


Non-adherence example

Guideline #64. Content menus and transactional menus should be visually distinct



Pequannock Feed: Ranked in the bottom 3rd percentile for the UX dimension Usability. The products for sale on this site are hidden under one tab on the horizontal navigation menu. The rest of the menu includes other random links, like a link to a blog, that absolutely does not deserve equal attention to all the products for sale.



Usability » Navigation » Content Menu

3 Guidelines

Usability > Navigation > Content Menu

65. Content menu items can be designed as a secondary navigation bar in the top right corner or in the footer
66. If you sell to multiple countries, denote language and currency in the top right corner
67. The shopping cart icon should indicate number of items in the cart and total price

The content menu consists of items users access when they need help or more information. Typical elements of a content menu include the shopping cart, default language, customer service information, return and privacy policies, shipping information, and FAQs.

The content menu is a major usability factor in that users access it when they need information. If they can't find what they're looking for in the content menu, or can't find the content menu at all, this can be a huge deterrence that could ultimately lead to site abandonment.

Guideline #65. Content menu items can be designed as a secondary navigation bar in the top right corner or preferably in the footer

While the content menu should be visually distinct, it should also be in a familiar place.

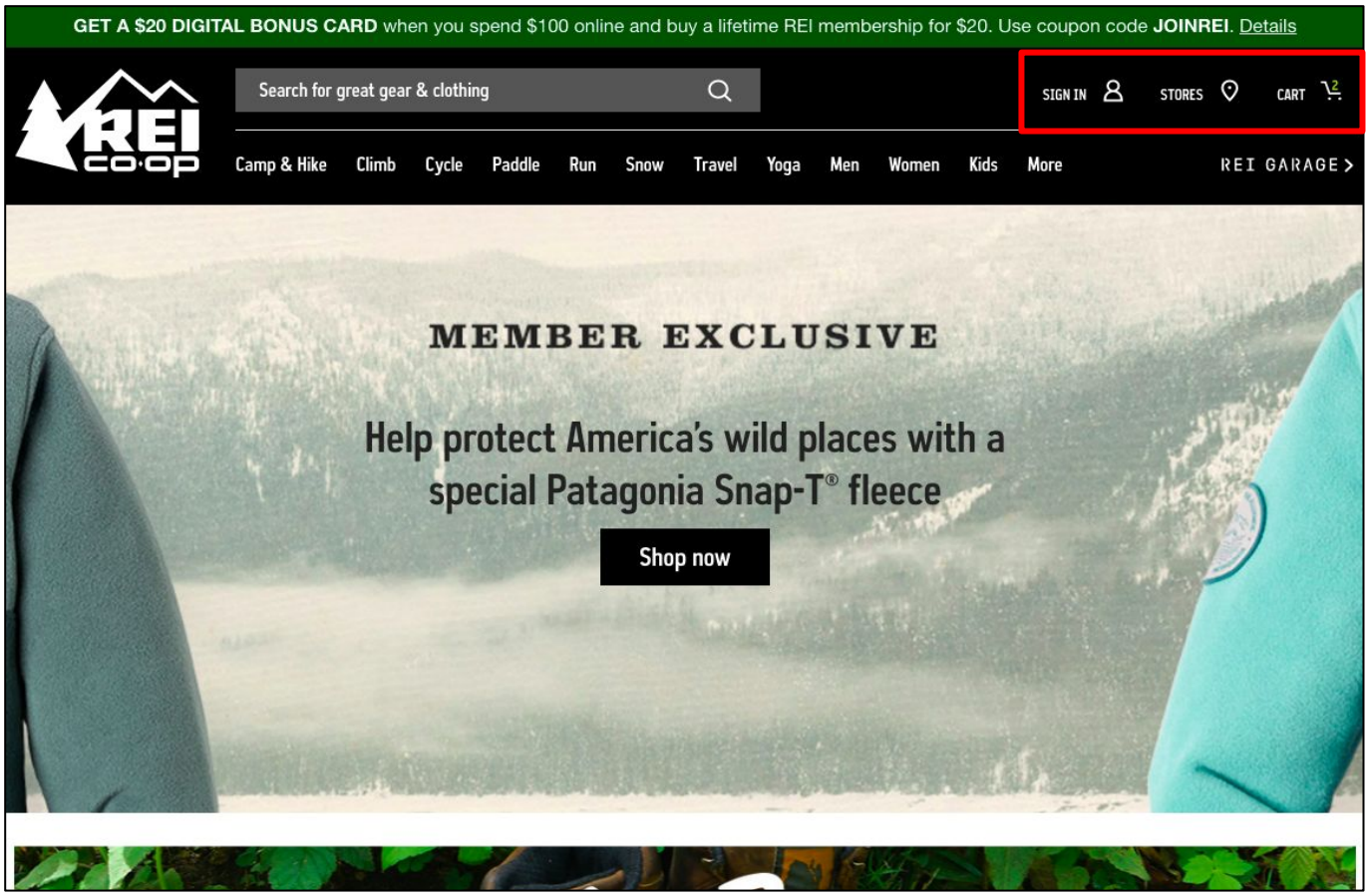
Most large ecommerce websites operate complex organizations with many departments and customer service policies. Thus, it makes sense to have a site-wide footer for all these links. People are used to it being there and it isn't a prime real estate location.

If you don't have tons of policies and links to worry about, it's perfectly acceptable to place the content menu in the top right corner of the homepage. This is another conventional spot that users will have no trouble locating.

Site Component - Content Menu
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

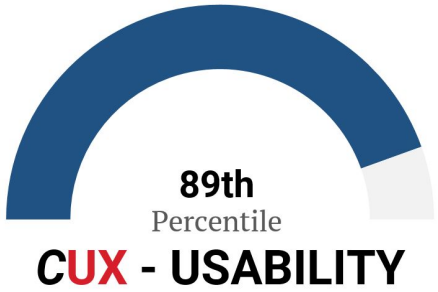
Adherence example

Guideline #65. Content menu items can be designed as a secondary navigation bar in the top right corner or preferably in the footer



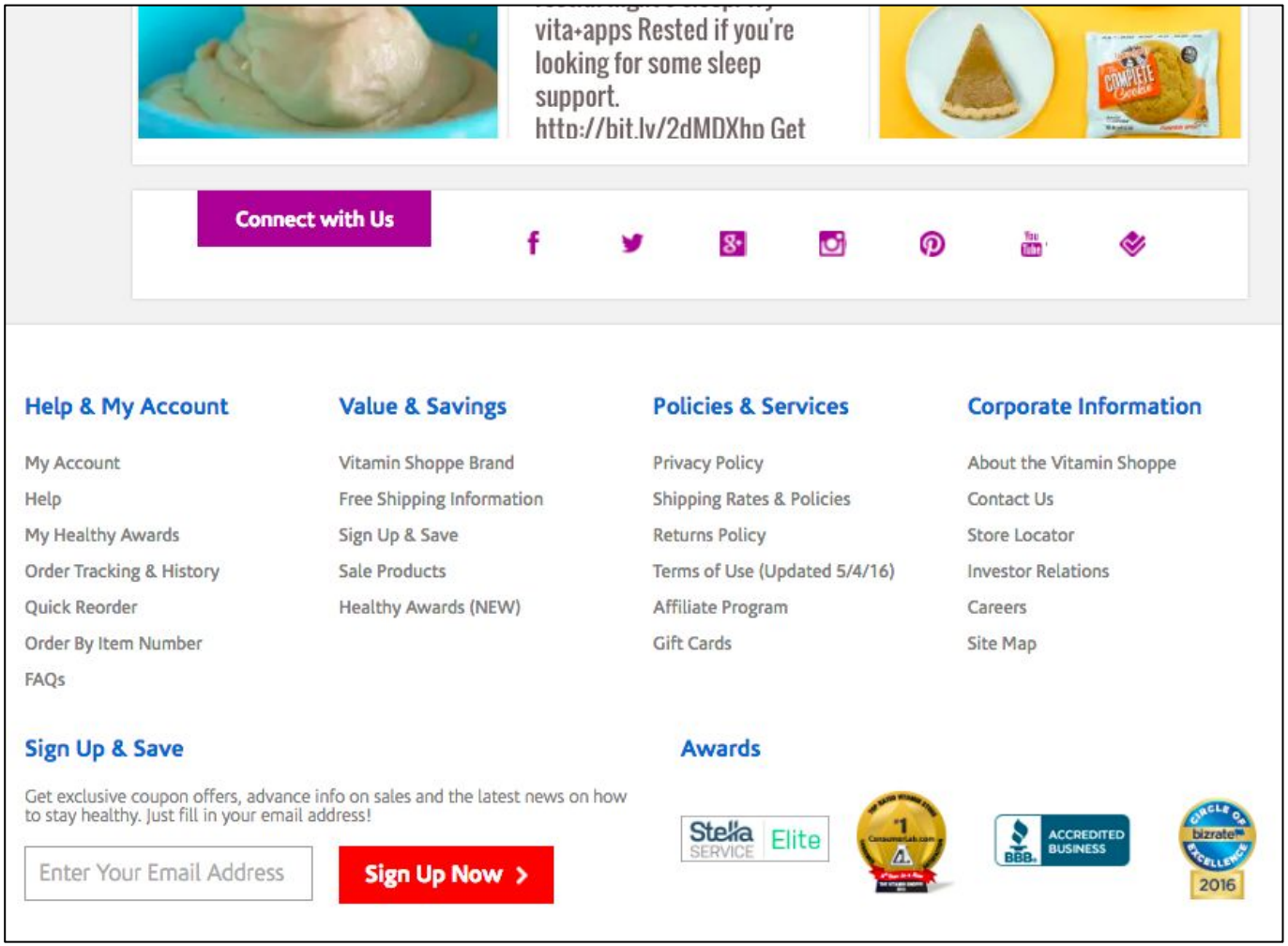
REI: Ranked in the top 89th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. The conventional placement and high visibility of the content menu in the top right corner have been perfectly executed for high usability.

User quote - *"The layout of the menus and filters were easy to figure out".*

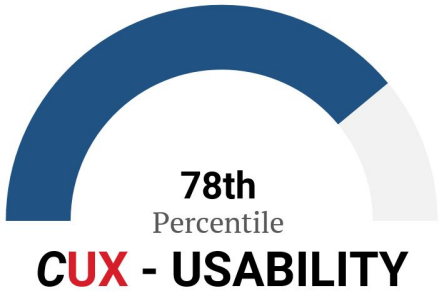


Adherence example

Guideline #65. Content menu items can be designed as a secondary navigation bar in the top right corner or preferably in the footer



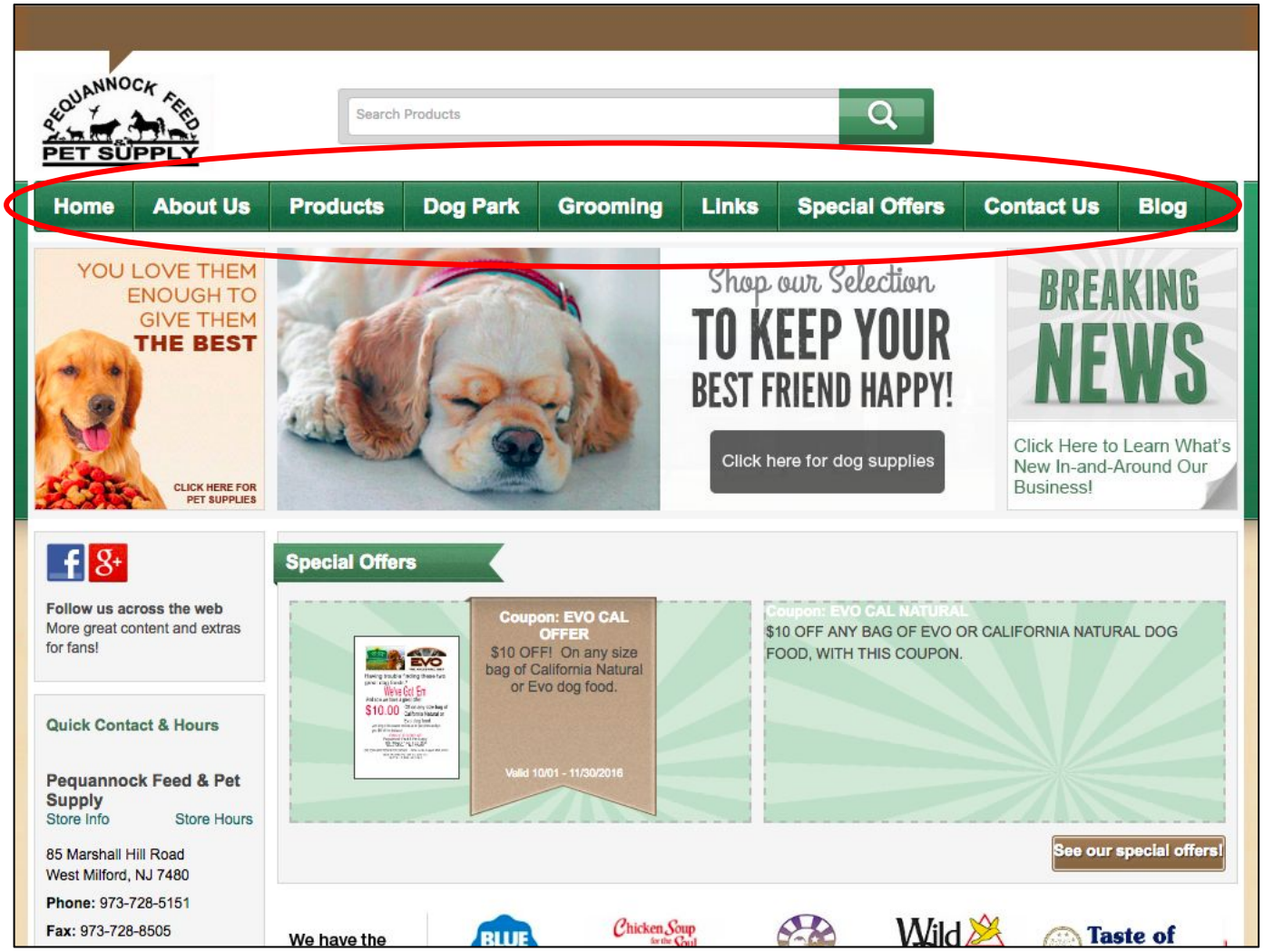
The Vitamin Shoppe: Ranked in the top 78th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. This conventional content menu is found in the footer.



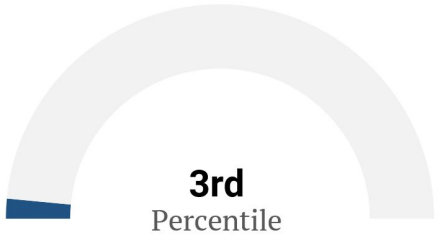
CUX - USABILITY

Non-adherence example

Guideline #65. Content menu items can be designed as a secondary navigation bar in the top right corner or preferably in the footer



Pequannock Feed: Ranked in the bottom 3rd percentile for the UX dimension Usability. The content menu is in an unconventional location (it's mixed in with the transactional menu) and takes up more space than it deserves according to the rules of visual hierarchy.



Guideline #66. If you sell to multiple countries, denote language and currency in the top right corner

Providing the option to display your site for multiple languages and countries naturally leads to more sales.

Generally, indication of language and currency options are found in the top right menu area of a website. It's here that a foreign visitor would look first to find out that there's going to be a simple buying process with no hassle of manual currency calculations or customer service discussions about shipping options.

If you conduct business across many countries, then a splash page might be appropriate. A splash page precedes the homepage and it's where a visitor selects their country from many options before entering into a customized experience for that country. It's important that the splash page doesn't look like a popup or advertisement however, as we know people are blind to these types of interactions and will simply close it before making the right decision.

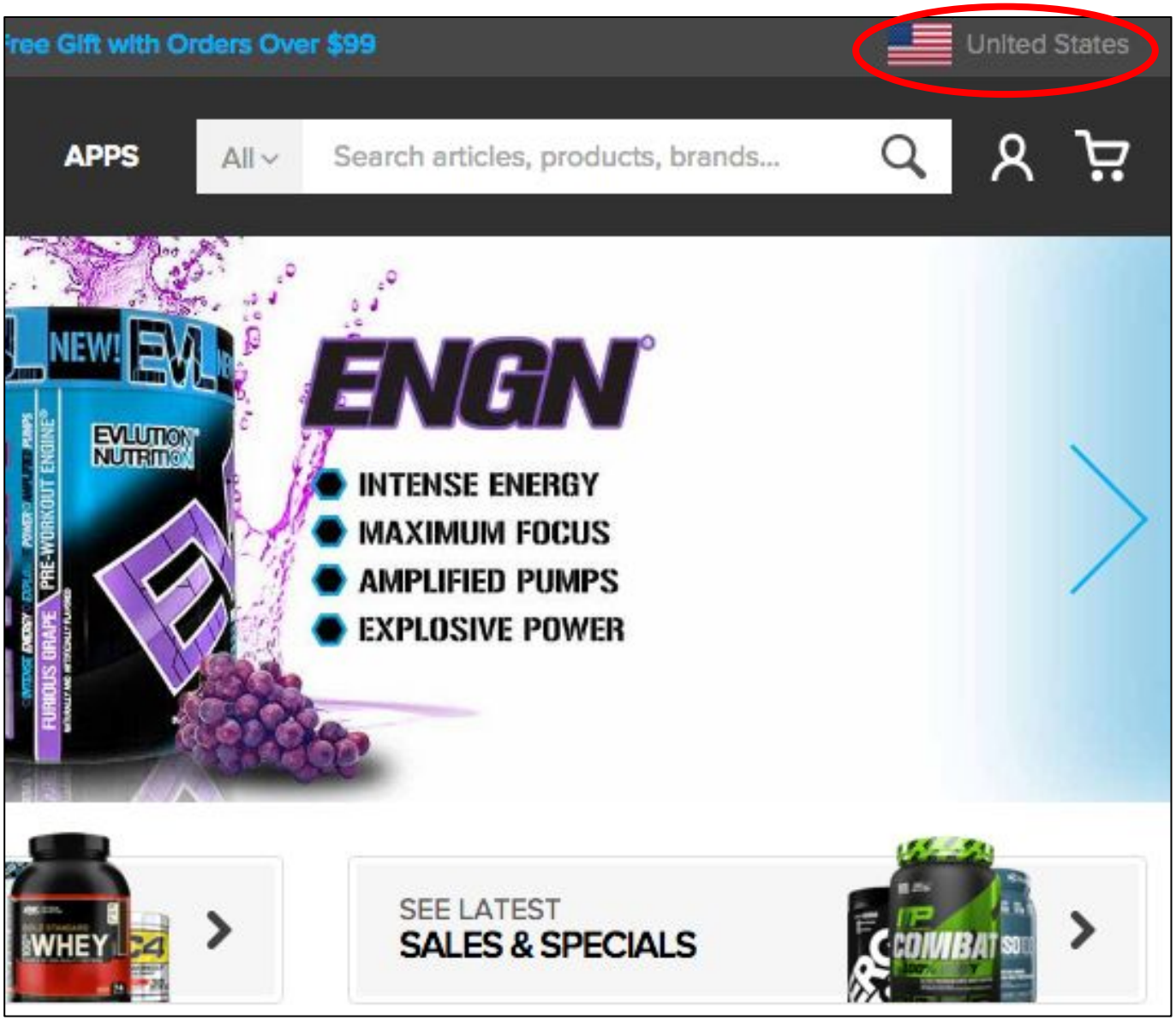
That said, some users don't like splash pages.

Site Component - Content Menu
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

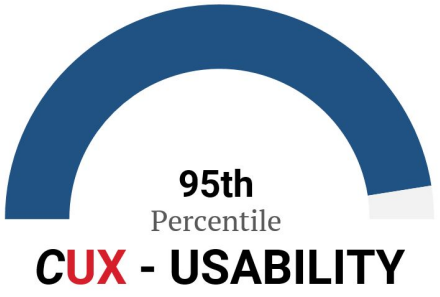
User quote - *"I would let the site use my IP address to determine the appropriate site to direct me to, and then provide the option to access other HM sites if for some reason it places me in the wrong country."*

Adherence example

Guideline #66. If you sell to multiple countries, denote language and currency in the top right corner

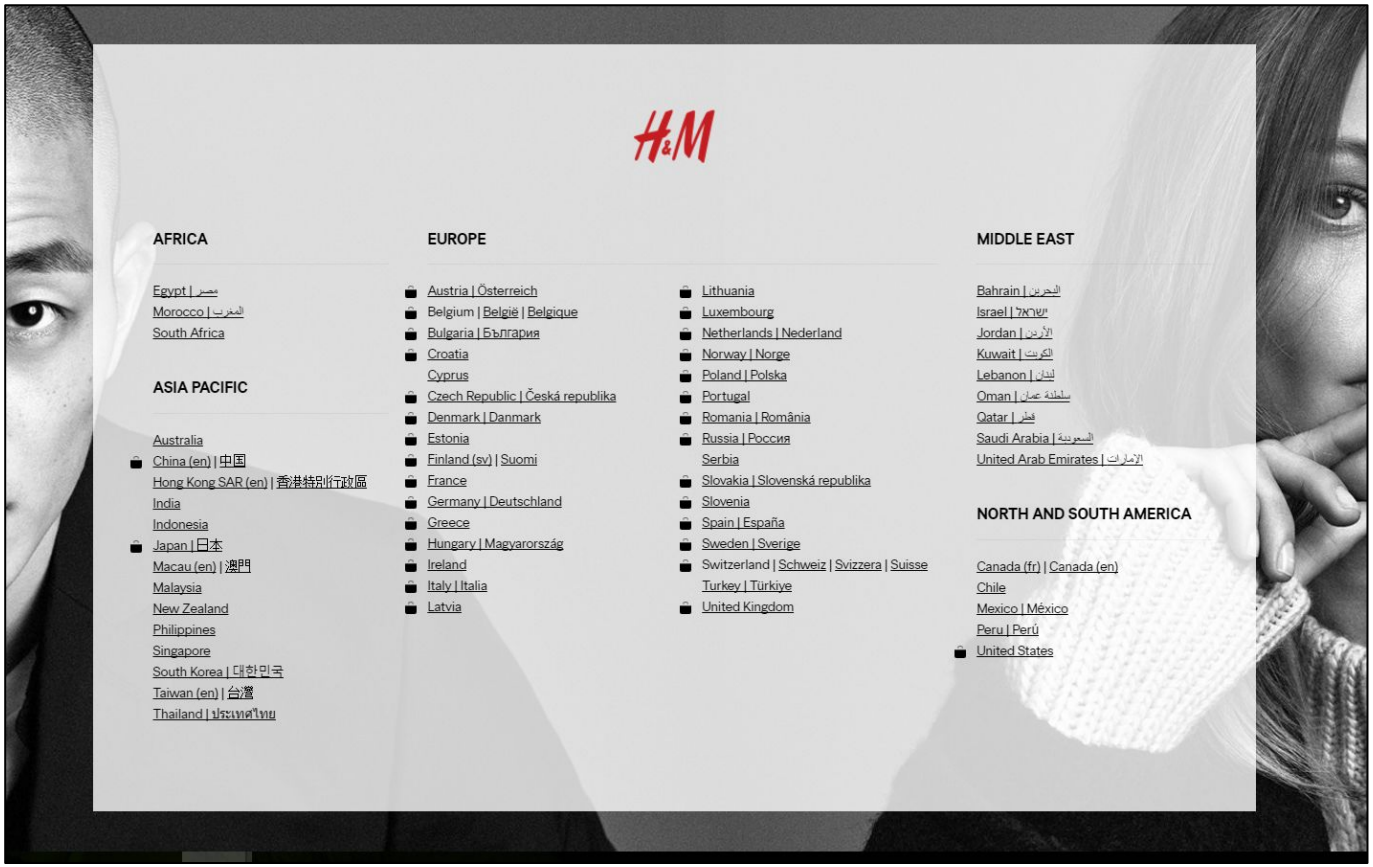


Bodybuilding.com: Ranked in the top 95th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. Notice the 'United States' indicator in the upper right.



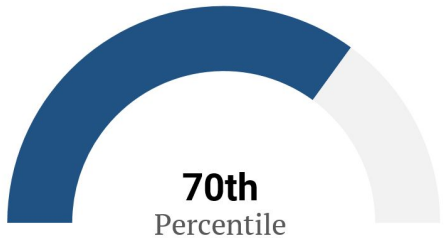
Adherence example

Guideline #66. If you sell to multiple countries, denote language and currency in the top right corner



H&M: Ranked in the top 70th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. This is the splash page first time visitors see. After the first visit, the location will remain the same as the original selection (unless the user manually changes it).

A user did say they would improve this - *"I would let the site use my IP address to determine the appropriate site to direct me to, and then provide the option to access other HM sites if for some reason it places me in the wrong country."*



Guideline #67. The shopping cart icon should indicate number of items in the cart and total price

Site Component - Content Menu
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

The cart is the first step of the checkout process. It's the first serious signal that the user is getting ready to make a purchase.

It's easy to track a person's cart items if they leave the site. Retaining cart items, and signaling that the items are waiting in the cart, is important. It just makes things easy for the user, which is what reducing friction is all about.

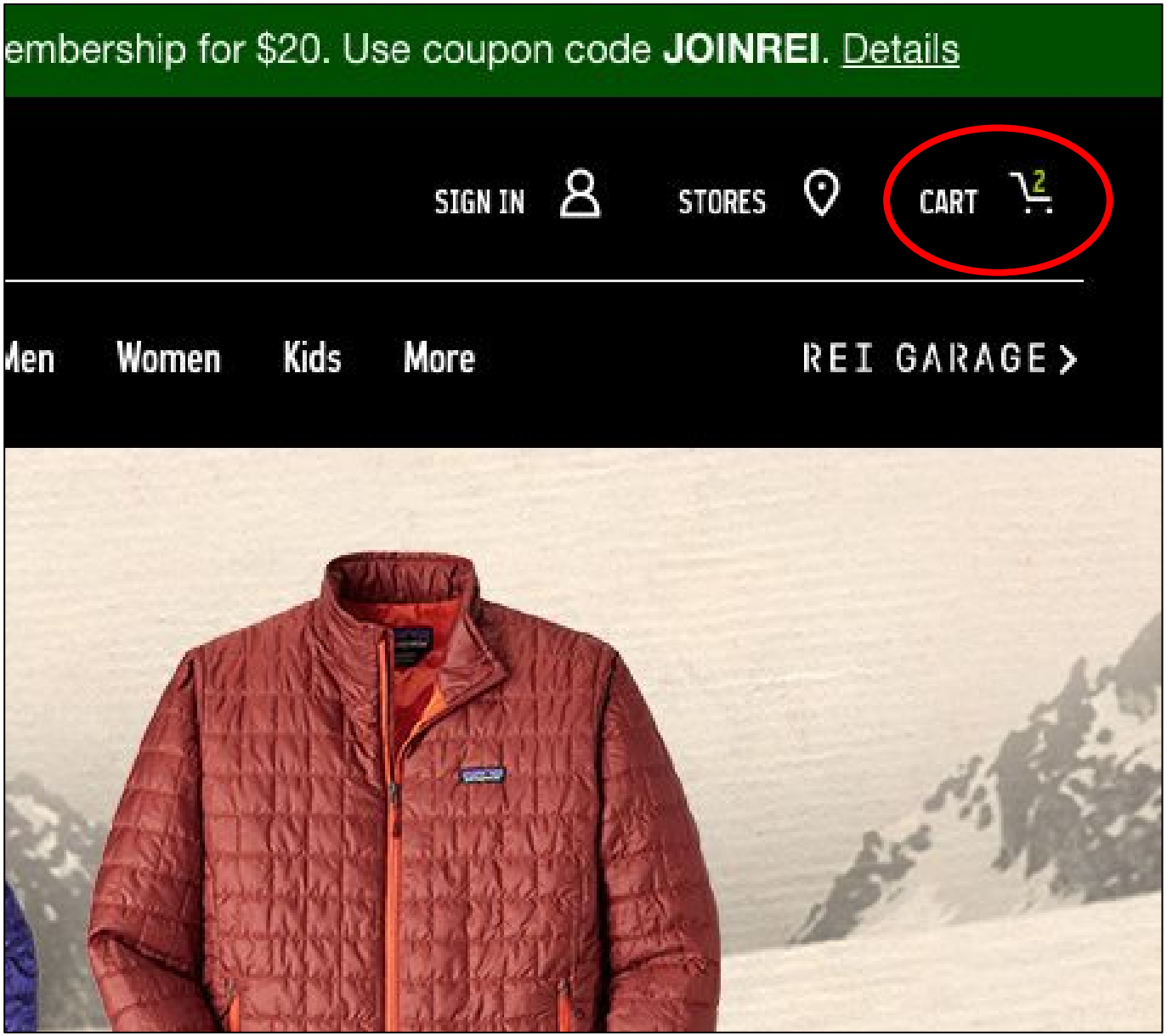
Also, when you're shopping on a website, it's easy to get distracted and forget about items in your cart. With average industry cart abandonment rates so high, you don't want to give users any more reasons to abandon. So make sure that the number of items is prominent and obvious, so users know they're leaving stuff behind if they bounce.

From a UX perspective, it's just good practice for these reasons:

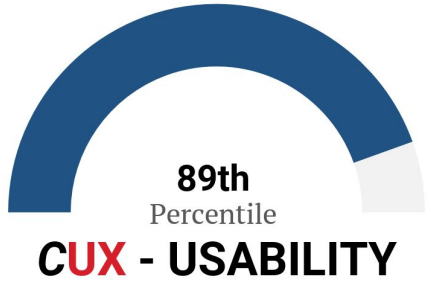
- Provides feedback to confirm that when a user tries to add something to the cart that it was successful.
- Feedback for what is in the cart....they know that they put an item in there so know what that 'number' represents.
- A nudge. They've committed to a certain degree by placing something in the cart, and that number is a reminder of that commitment.

Adherence example

Guideline #67. The shopping cart icon should indicate number of items in the cart and total price

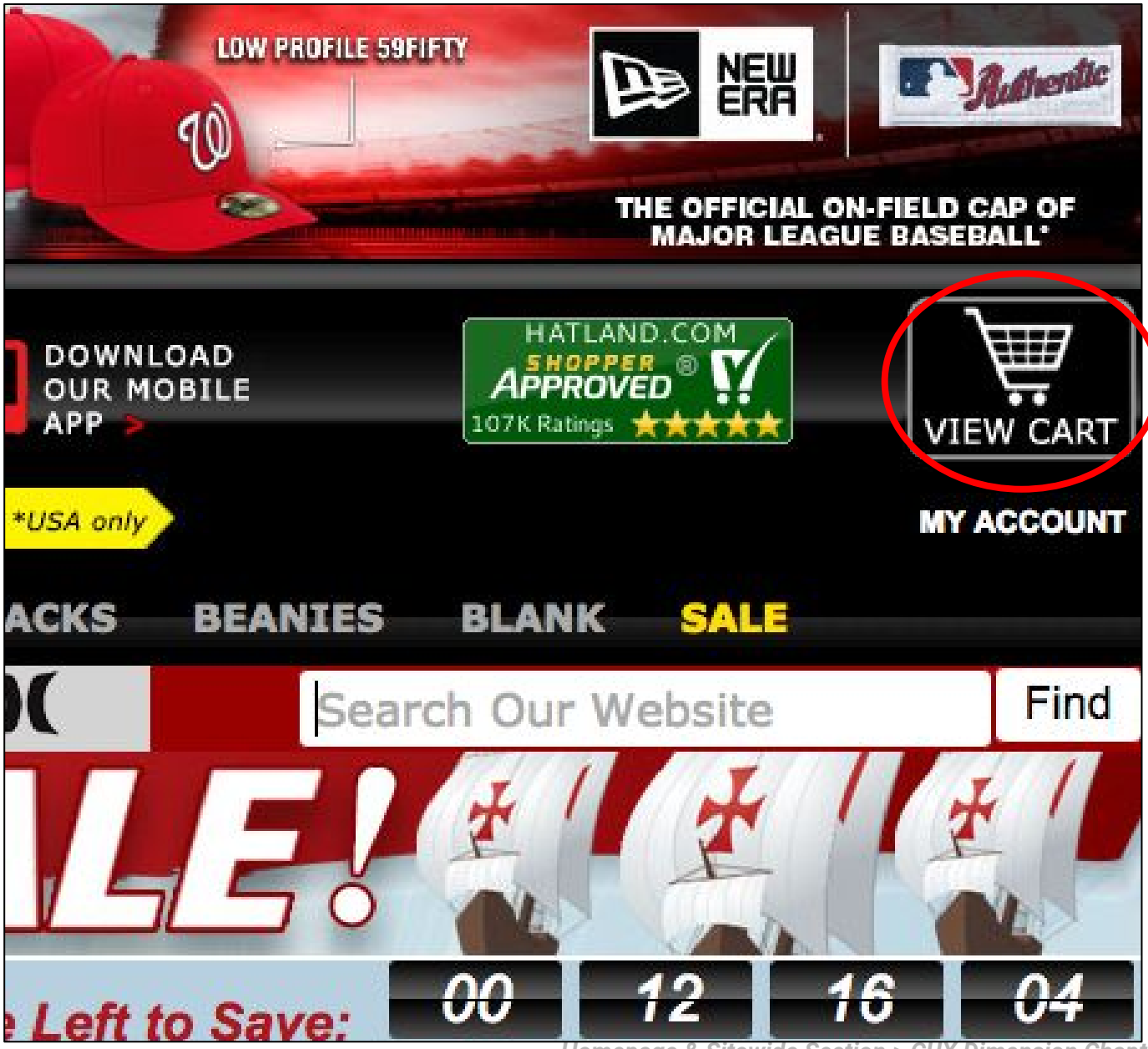


REI: Ranked in the top 89th percentile for the UX dimension usability. Notice the cart symbol with indication of the number of items within.

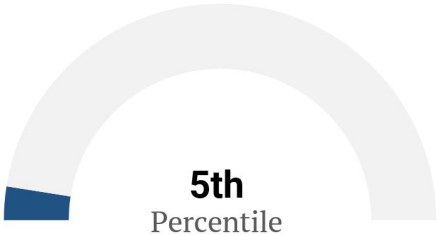


Non-adherence example

Guideline #67. The shopping cart icon should indicate number of items in the cart and total price



Hatland: Ranked in the bottom 5th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. The shopping cart never shows the number of items in the cart, or whether there are any items in the cart at all.



CUX - USABILITY

Usability » Navigation » Transactional Menu

11 Guidelines

Usability > Navigation > **Transactional Menu**

68. If products are listed on a homepage use advanced sorting and filtering (Faceted Search, if product categories are listed, allow for users to easily see groupings of categories and subcategories with mega menus
69. Dropdown navigation should display at most the first three levels of products
70. Always have parent categories
71. Parent categories in transactional menu should be clickable
72. If a subcategory could apply to two different categories then include it under both (e..g "coffee tables" under "tables" and "living room")
73. Consider displaying main categories as homepage content (depends on industry and product scope)
74. Visually indicate any default site scopes (i.e. if a site is defaulted to "Women's" scope, highlight "Women's" product category in main menu)
75. Avoid vague product categories ("more", "miscellaneous", and "other") unless it dynamically displays more options without page load (in effort to reduce item number visually)
76. Consider adding additional information and resources alongside products or categories (e.g., inline descriptions, tooltips, and explainer articles), especially in specialty or 'jargon-heavy' product classes
77. Promoting subcategories on the homepage accelerates the search journey
78. Showcase special categories like 'new arrivals' and 'sales & promotion' groupings

The transactional menus includes navigation and menus related to the products/services users can buy (performing a transaction).

Elements of the transactional menu typically include parent product categories (cars vs. trucks or men's vs. women's), subcategories (white vs. blue cars or men's pants vs. men's shirts), and subcategory groupings (seasonal, sales, promos, accessories, etc.).

Helping users understand where they should click to explore different products is one of the homepage's main purposes. The best product in the world won't sell if no one can find it.

While the search bar will satisfy some users, plenty of people browse the transactional menu. Take advantage of this behavior by offering the most effective and functional navigation capabilities.

Frustrated user quotes -

> *"The only part that I found to be frustrating was that I couldn't use the menu navigation very well. I felt it was sort of hard as there were too many items to use that navigation"*

> *"I would somehow make it easier to use the menu navigation. For some reason it was difficulty."*

Guideline #68. If products are listed on a homepage use advanced sorting and filtering (faceted search), if product categories are listed, allow for users to easily see groupings of categories and subcategories with mega menus

If you have a small selection of products then listing them directly on the homepage is an option. It's the simplest way to do things. In this case it serves as a category page and allows the visitors to immediately search and filter for what's needed.

However, many ecommerce sites have tons of products. And if you have a broad range of products in many categories, then displaying subcategories via mega menus is common and familiar for visitors to interact with.

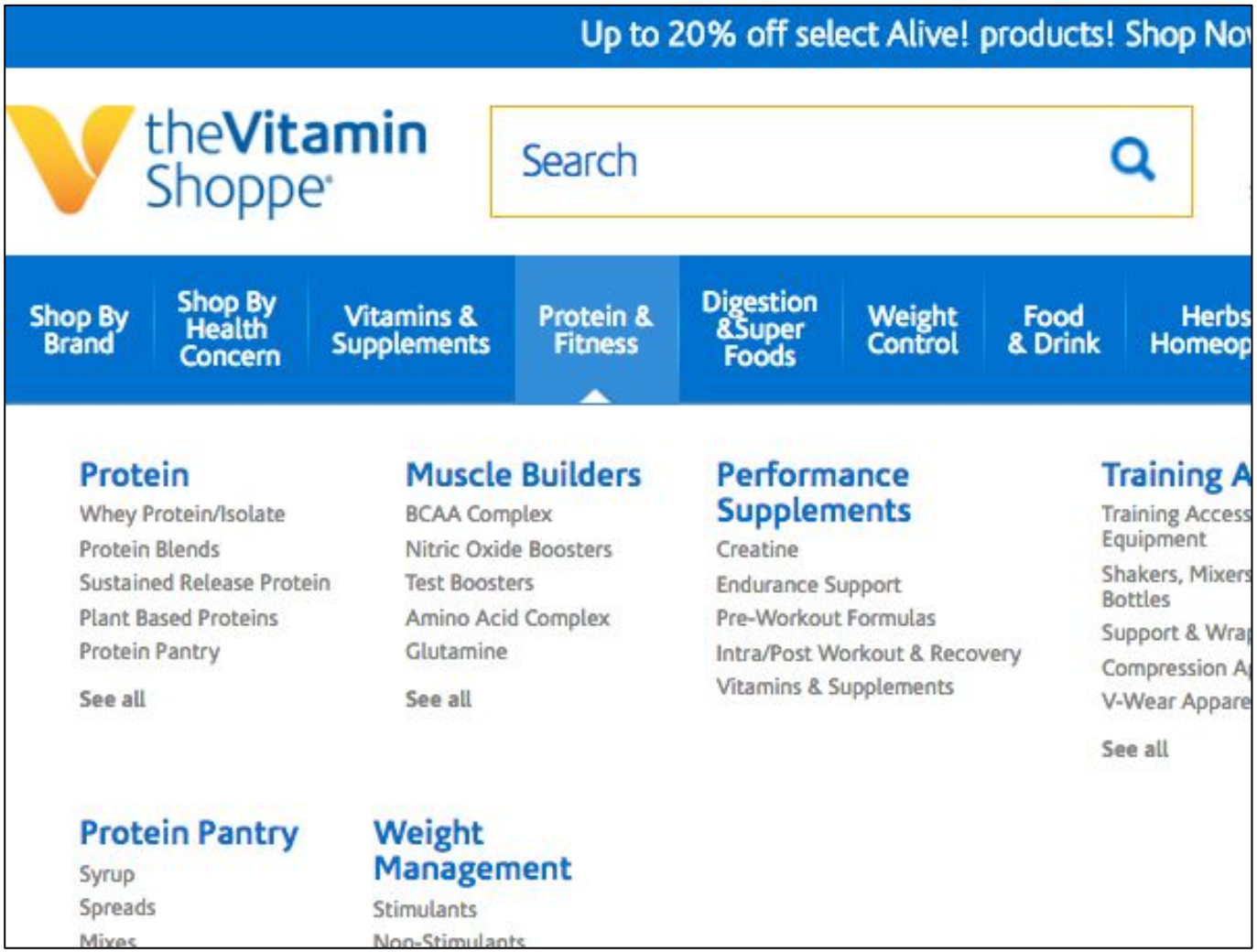
It's all about making your site easy to interact with. Navigation is one of the biggest challenges with an ecommerce site, especially if you have a large product offering. Always think about optimizing for intuitive navigation. If you make it fun to shop on your site, and easy to do so, your conversion rate can't help but rise.

Site Component - Transactional Menu
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

User quote - *"I like that the subcategories that took me exactly where I needed to go without an issue."*

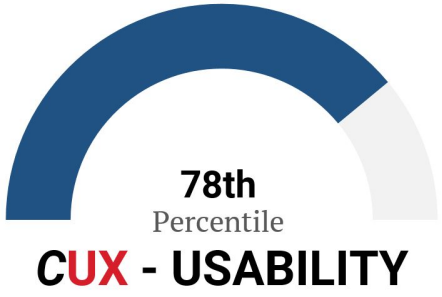
Adherence example

Guideline #68. If products are listed on a homepage use advanced sorting and filtering (faceted search), if product categories are listed, allow for users to easily see groupings of categories and subcategories with mega menus



The Vitamin Shoppe: Ranked in the top 78th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. "Protein & Fitness" is a vague category title, so showing subtitles and even sub-subtitles in this situation is helpful for users looking for a specific product.

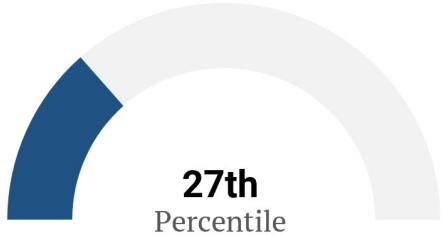
User quote - *"This site was very easy to use. The layout is great. It was pretty simple to find the category I needed."*



Non-adherence example

Guideline #68. If products are listed on a homepage use advanced sorting and filtering (faceted search), if product categories are listed, allow for users to easily see groupings of categories and subcategories with mega menus

Gap: Ranked in the bottom 27th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. When hovered, the Girls product category doesn't show any product categories. Users shopping for 15-year olds, or shoes, will have to take a chance and click on this category to find out if they can find what they're looking for in it.



27th
Percentile
CUX - USABILITY

Guideline #69. Dropdown navigation should display at most the first three levels of products

Some people enter a website knowing exactly what they're looking for, others come just to browse.
Because there's no way to know why each user is on your site, you need to design it for all possibilities. This means the transactional menu should show an adequate portion of your product selection without overwhelming anyone.

Depending on the breadth and amount of products your site sells, this guideline varies in importance. For sites with lots of products and/or lots of different *types* of products, this is especially important.

You want people to understand how your products are organized, so show parent categories with the corresponding subcategories that fall under them. This way, users who came to the site looking for something in particular have an idea as to where they can expect to find that product. The users who came to the site just to browse now understand the breadth of products your company has to offer.

Showing category levels beyond the first three, simply put, becomes too much. Remember, we humans like simple, organized lists. Don't make us think.

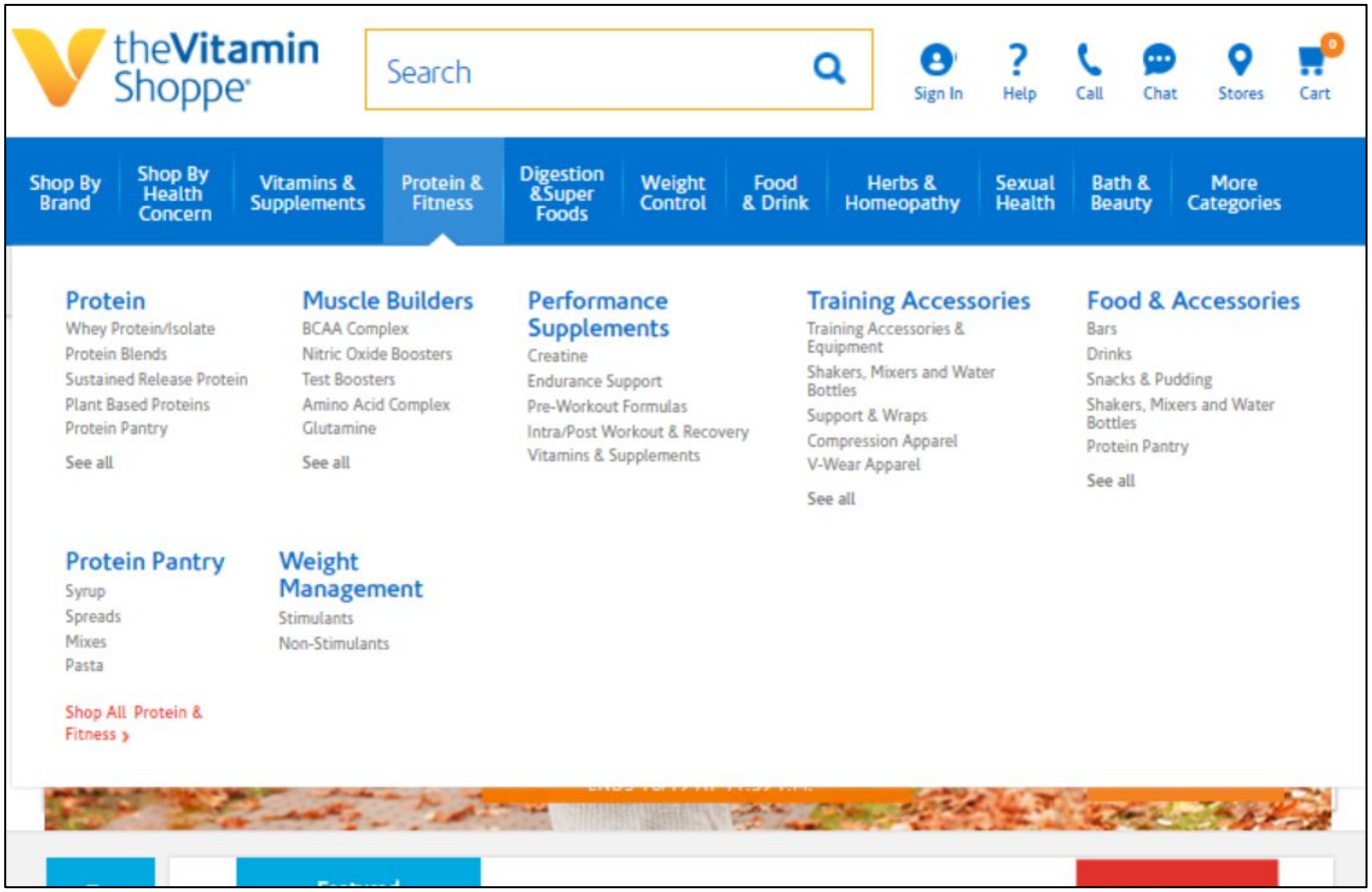
Site Component - Transactional Menu
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

User quote when a site didn't use drop down menu - *"I would make the menu bar simple with the categories Women, Men, Kids, Girls, Beauty, etc. Then when the cursor is over those headings then sub headings would pop up such as tops, bottoms, dresses, swimwear, etc."*

User quote - *"Easy to navigate. For as many product categories as the inventory represents, I think they do a good job summarizing the top-level navigation categories."*

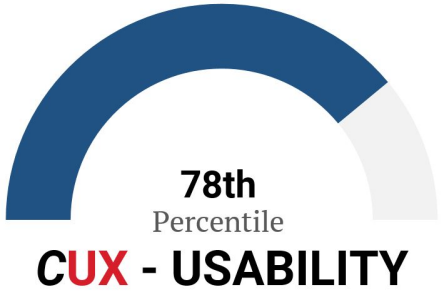
Adherence example

Guideline #69. Dropdown navigation should display at most the first three levels of products



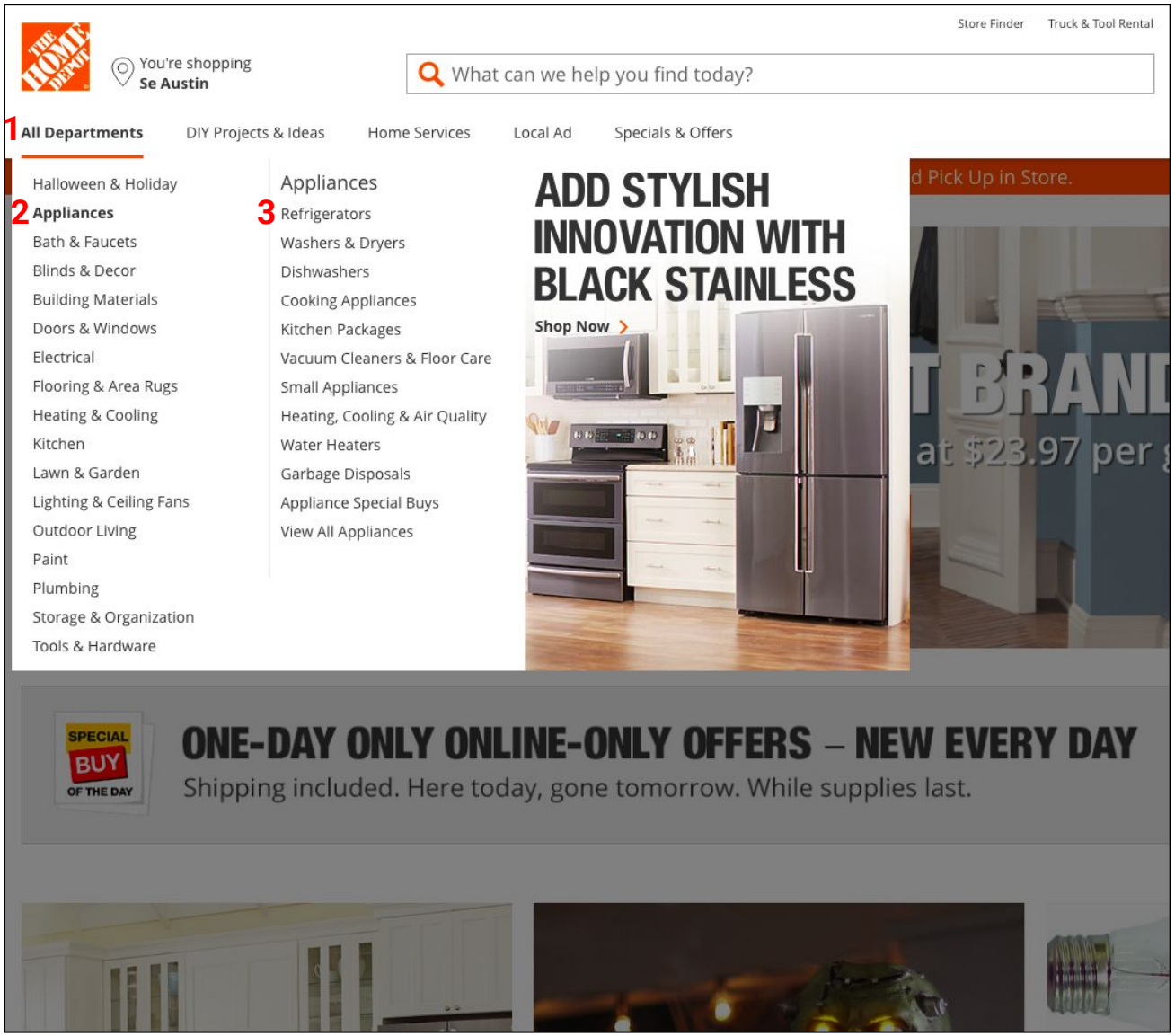
The Vitamin Shoppe: Ranked in the top 78th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. Three category layers in this dropdown transactional menu provide the perfect amount of organization and show just enough content.

User quote - *"Despite not having the specific filtering options I needed for my item, there was a good amount of filtering options in general. The categories and subcategories are done well and it only took me one or 2 clicks to get to the results of items that I am searching for."*

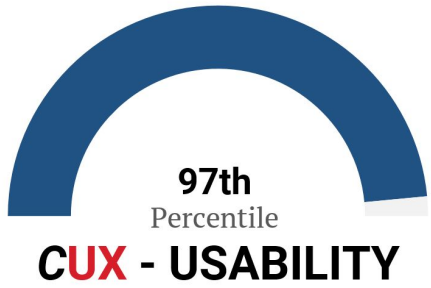


Adherence example

Guideline #69. Dropdown navigation should display at most the first three levels of products



Home Depot: Ranked in the top 97th percentile for the UX dimension. On this site, some of the product categories with less content only show two layers and others with more content show three.



Guideline #70. Always have parent categories, and make them part of the product hierarchy

This is a relatively simple guideline, but if looked over there will be major confusion. If you're a clothing website, don't go straight to dresses and skirts. Some users will want to browse *all* women's clothing.

Instead of getting into the most granular categories, always give the option to shop from the broader parent category. This is another fix that is without downside. You still have the option to sort more specifically, of course, but you accommodate the interests of those who want to sift through at a higher level.

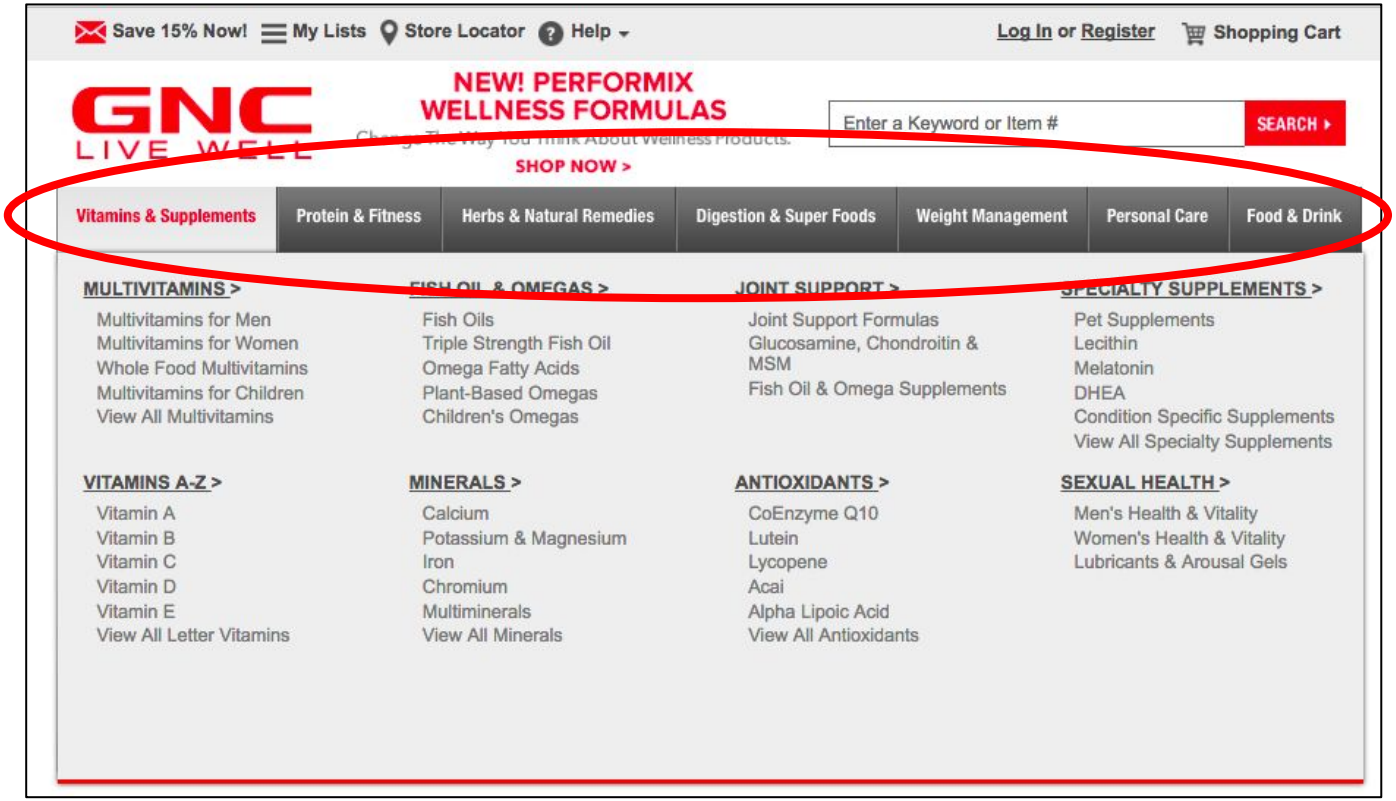
Further, with a dropdown menu of the category, don't make it simply an overview of what's in that parent category. Allow subcategories to be their own pages onced clicked on. In other words, allow the parent and subcategories to be part of an exploratory hierarchy of products that allow users to go into and back out of product category classes.

Site Component - Transactional Menu
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

User quote - "I think some of the subcategories aren't necessarily helpful. For example, looking at hiking boots I may not know if I want low or mid/high hiking boots but I wasn't able to look at all of them. I had to make a choice. Or choosing a gift for a friend I couldn't just look at all hiking and navigation I had to choose a specific type of item like a compass."

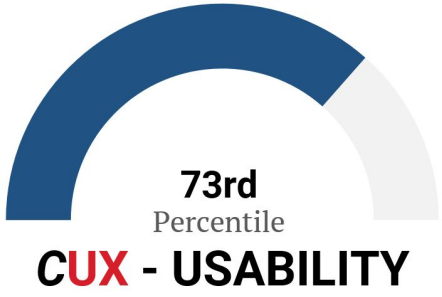
Adherence example

Guideline #70. Always have parent categories



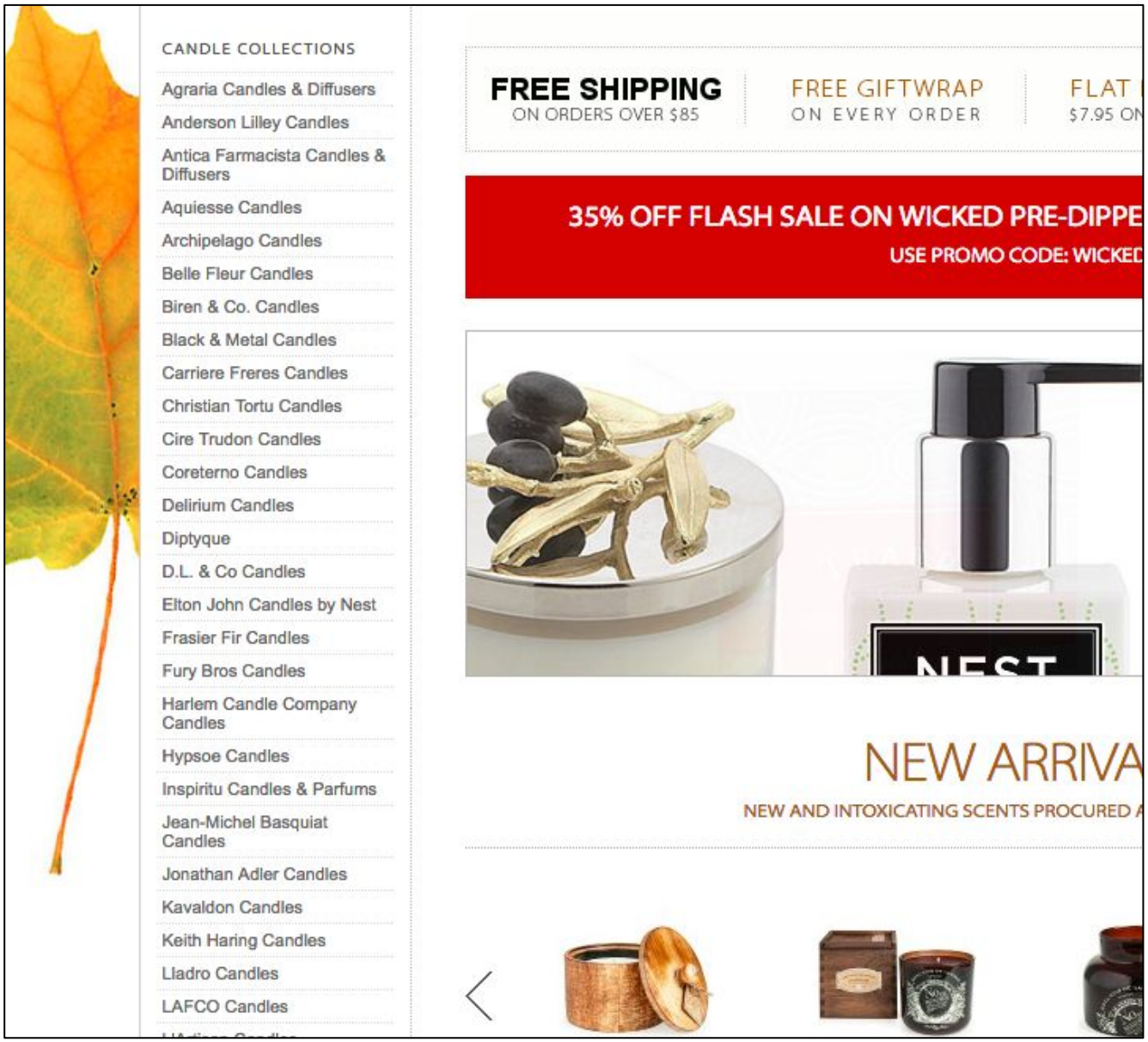
GNC: Ranked in the top 73rd percentile for the UX dimension Usability. Imagine if this site got straight into the subcategories without organizing them into parent categories first. It would be a real mess.

User quote - *"I felt that the items were easy to find from the menu. It was categorized well that makes me think about what I want."*



Non-adherence example

Guideline #70. Always have parent categories



Candle Delirium: All candles are listed in alphabetical order in a vertical text-only menu. For first time visitors who aren't sure what type of candles this site offers, this menu is not helpful in any way.

NOTE: We did not conduct user testing on this site. All of the sites tested adhered to this guideline.

Guideline #71. Parent categories in transactional menu should be clickable

Being wrong isn't fun. This is one of the many reasons why usability is a crucial aspect of web design: Users need to feel confident navigating a website if they're going to stay on it.

When you click on a link only to find out that it isn't a link, frustration sets in. People expect to click on parent categories and be taken to a product category page. Make sure your homepage offers this capability for smooth sailing.

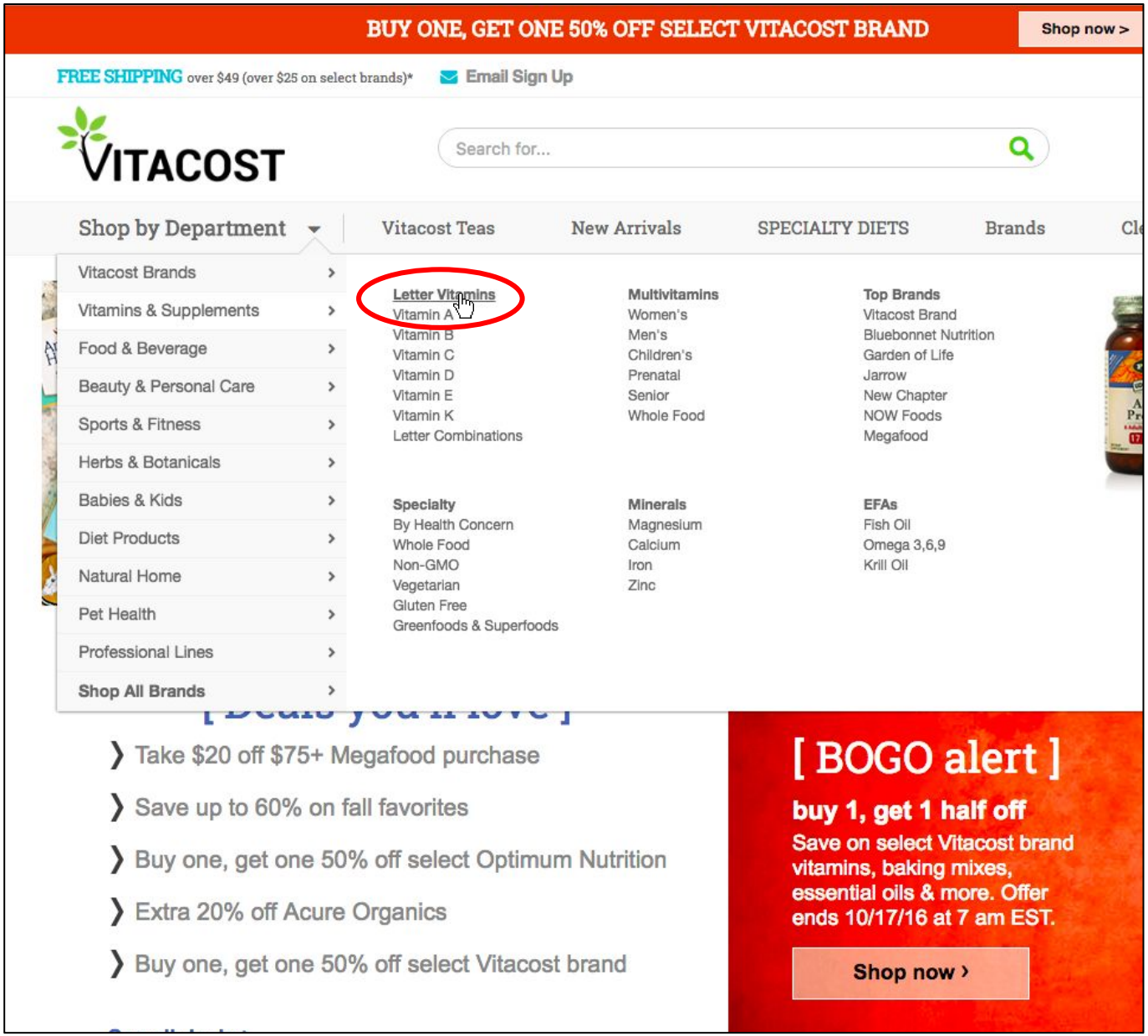
This is actually a common problem, believe it or not. It's also an easy fix and an easy lift in user experience, and probably conversions. You can see if this is a problem on your site using session replays (especially the tools that flag for User Frustration) or just by viewing your click maps and seeing if people are clicking unclickable icons.

This also ties into guideline #70, allowing for parent and subcategories to be a true exploratory hierarchy for users to go back and forth with.

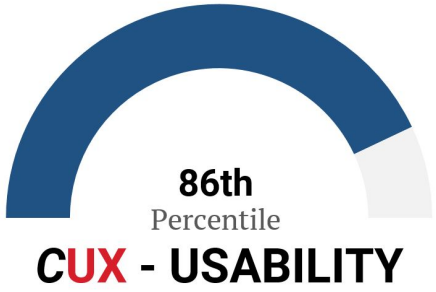
Site Component - Transactional Menu
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

Adherence example

Guideline #71. Parent categories in transactional menu should be clickable



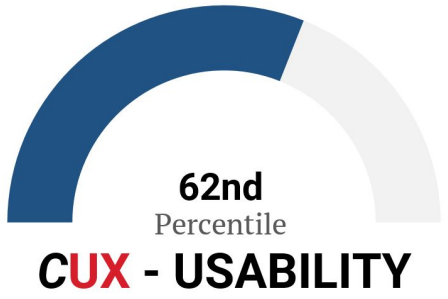
Vitacost: Ranked in the top 86th percentile for the UX dimension Usability.



Adherence example

Guideline #71. Parent categories in transactional menu should be clickable

Crutchfield: Ranked in the top 62nd percentile for the UX dimension usability.



Guideline #72. If a subcategory could apply to two different categories, include it under both (e..g "coffee tables" under "tables" and "living room")

The purpose of the transactional menu is direct customers to the product they're interested in as painlessly as possible.

One common cause confusion when it comes to product lists deals with products that could belong in a number of categories. In order to create a seamless search process for users, place these nuanced products in each category they might fall under.

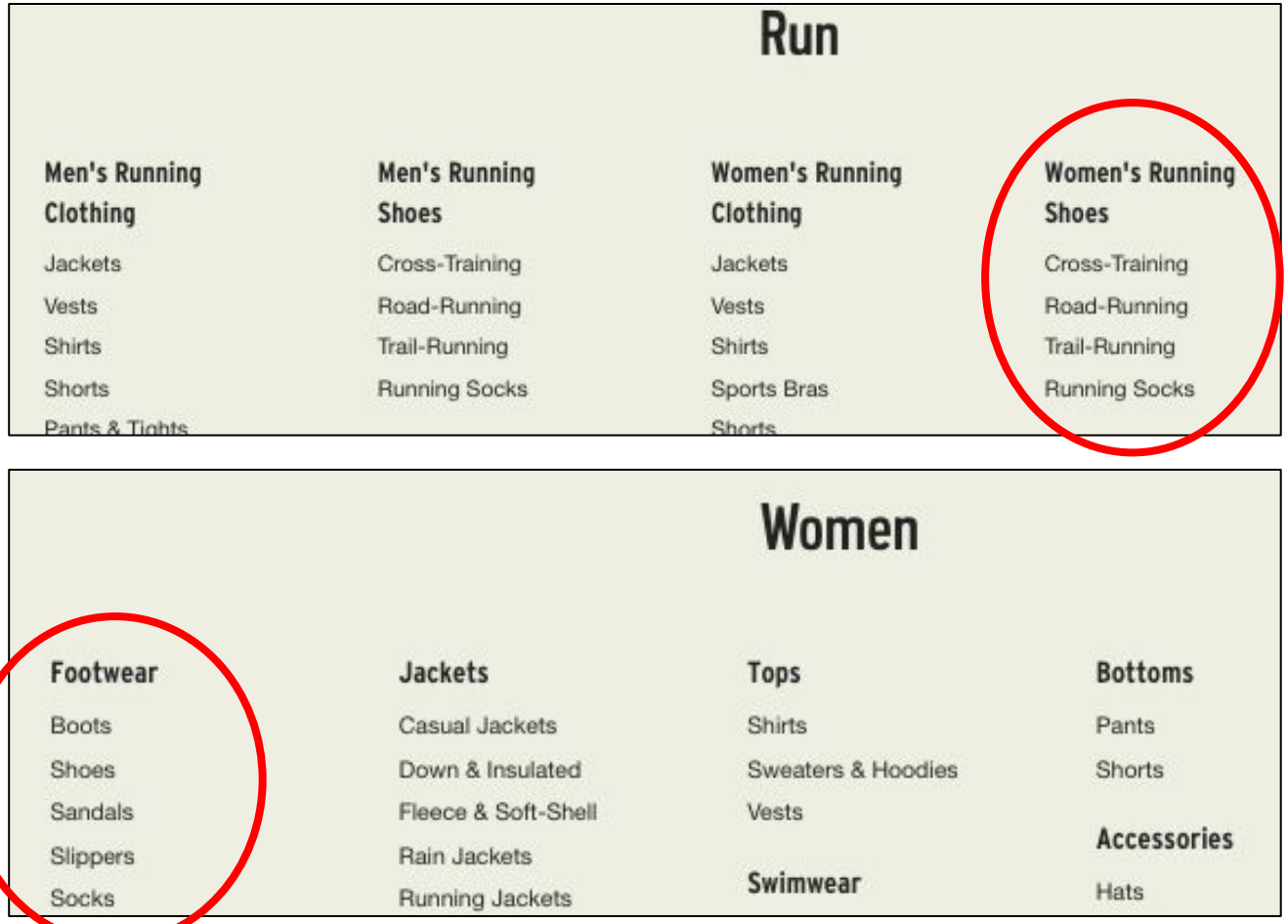
It's not about where *you* think a subcategory belongs, but all the places where site users might think a subcategory belongs.

How can you discover this information? User testing. Notably, you can ask your user to find a specific item, and watch the path they take. If they attempt to click on a menu that is different from where the subcategory is, you might have a labeling/navigation problem.

Site Component - Transactional Menu
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

Adherence example

Guideline #72. If a subcategory could apply to two different categories, include it under both (e..g "coffee tables" under "tables" and "living room")



Run

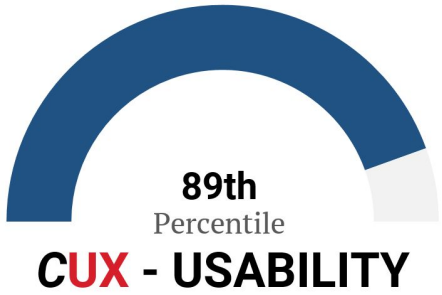
Men's Running Clothing	Men's Running Shoes	Women's Running Clothing	Women's Running Shoes
Jackets	Cross-Training	Jackets	Cross-Training
Vests	Road-Running	Vests	Road-Running
Shirts	Trail-Running	Shirts	Trail-Running
Shorts	Running Socks	Sports Bras	Running Socks
Pants & Tights		Shorts	

Women

Footwear	Jackets	Tops	Bottoms
Boots	Casual Jackets	Shirts	Pants
Shoes	Down & Insulated	Sweaters & Hoodies	Shorts
Sandals	Fleece & Soft-Shell	Vests	
Slippers	Rain Jackets		Accessories
Socks	Running Jackets	Swimwear	Hats

REI: Ranked in the top 89th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. Women's running shoes can be found under both the Run and the Women parent categories.

User quote - *"I absolutely loved the variety of filters and the fact that it was so easy to navigate to a product using a variety of ways (e.g., search engine, camping & hiking tab, men's tab)."*



Guideline #73. Consider displaying main categories as homepage content (depends on industry and product scope)

This guideline is particularly relevant for sites with a wide range of products. Displaying main product categories on the homepage allows users to jump right into browsing products and communicates the breadth of your product selection.

If you only have a few products this guideline does not apply.

And, even if you *do* have a wide range of products, it may not be the perfect solution. But if you feature a couple of your top main categories on the homepage, first time visitors will have an easier time finding things.

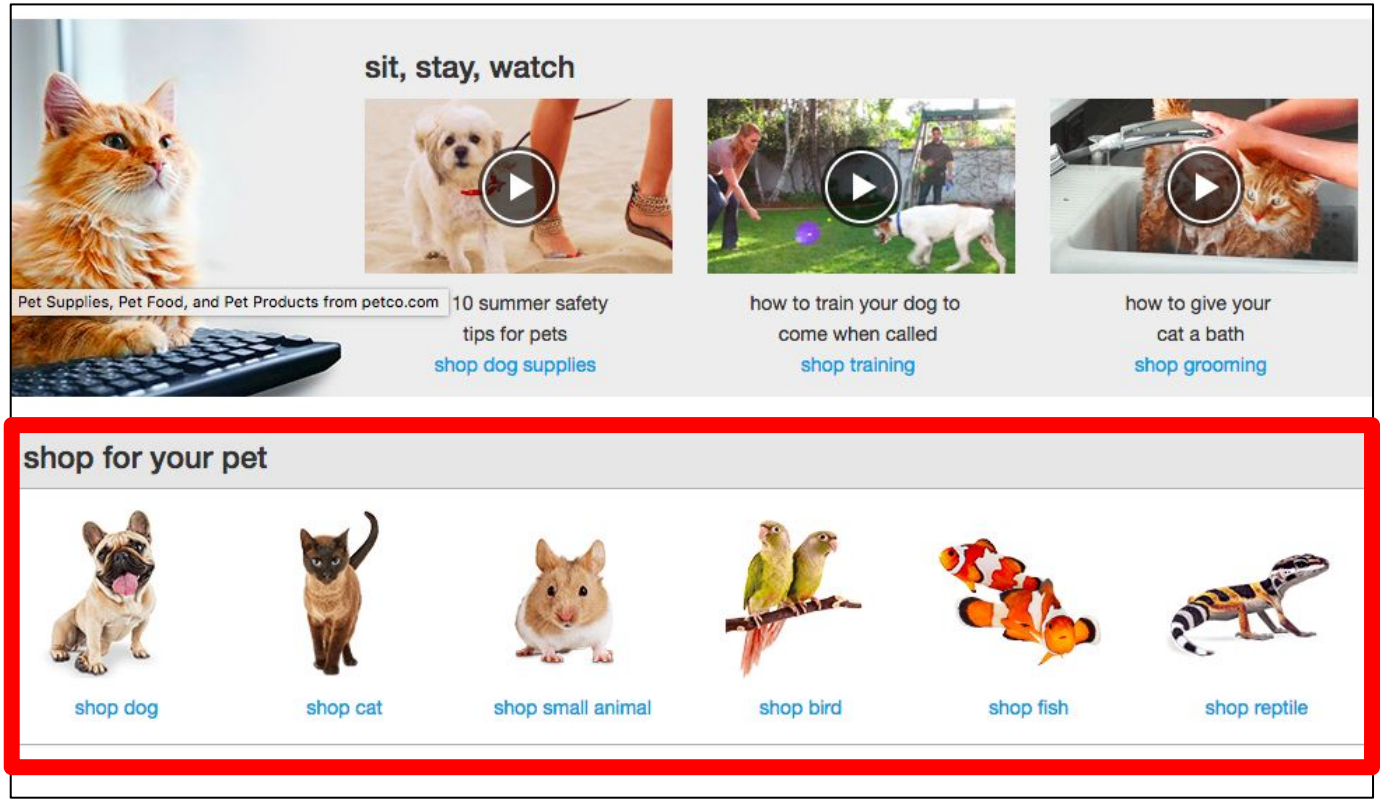
Site Component - Transactional Menu
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

User quote - *"Everything was very easy to locate! I could easily find things for cats and dogs no matter where I looked on the site."*

User quote - *"I liked that all my options were clear to view, I could easily navigate through the website and find what I was looking for"*

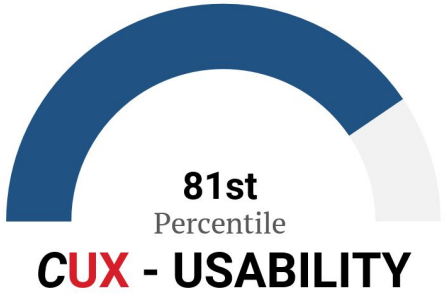
Adherence example

Guideline #73. Consider displaying main categories as homepage content (depends on industry and product scope)



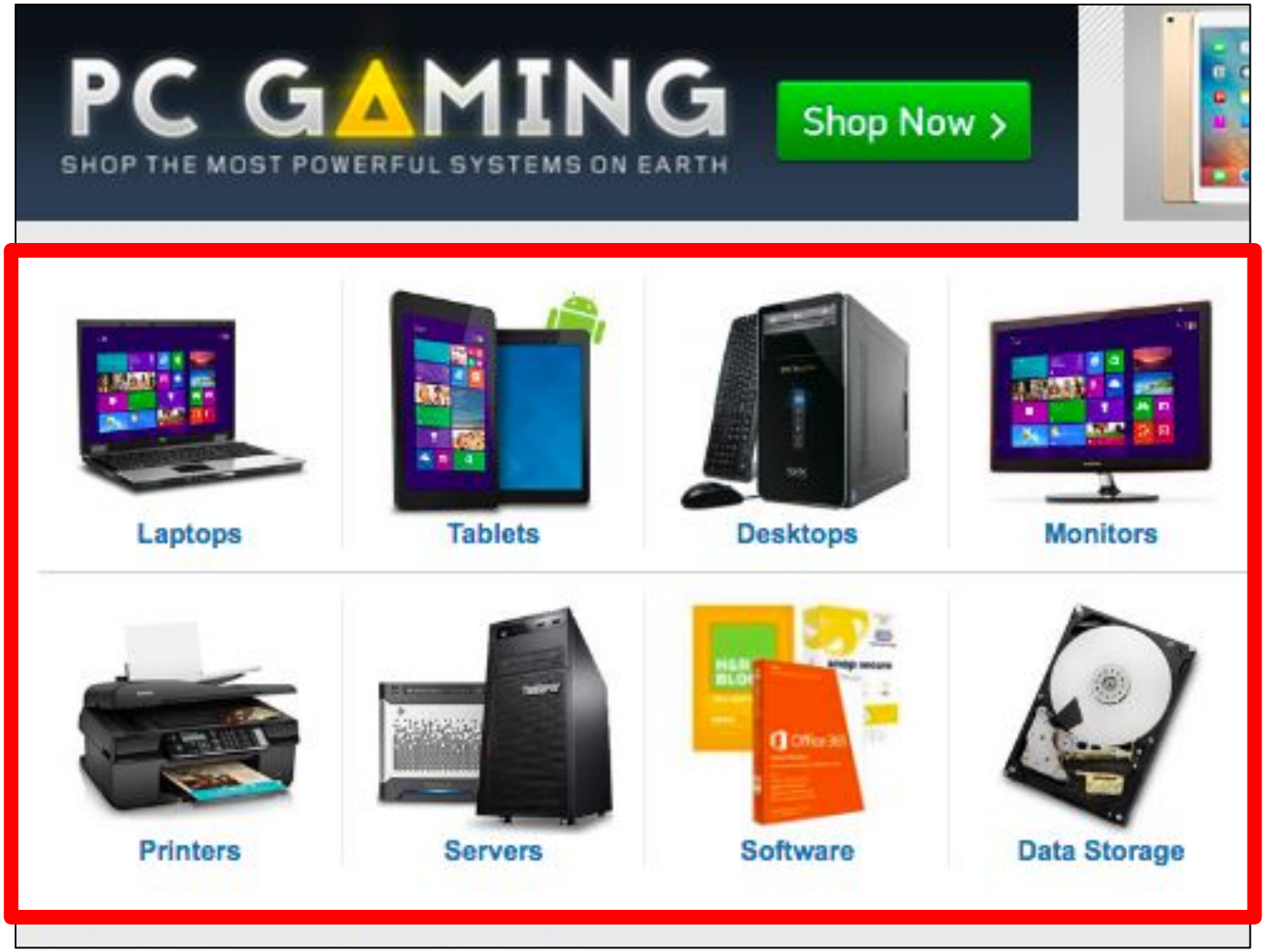
Petco: Ranked in the top 81st percentile for the UX dimension Usability. Wondering if Petco sells supplies for you bearded dragon? You won't have to look beyond the homepage to answer that question.

User quote - *"Everything was very easy to locate! I could easily find things for cats and dogs no matter where I looked on the site."*

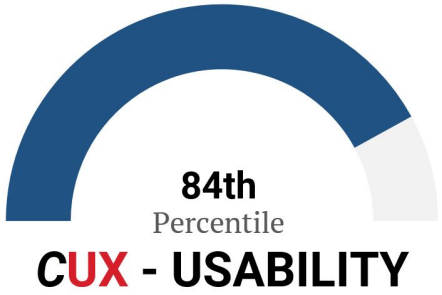


Adherence example

Guideline #73. Consider displaying main categories as homepage content (depends on industry and product scope)



TigerDirect: Ranked in the top 84th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. Wondering if you can also buy Photoshop or Illustrator software on this website? This homepage category display lets you know it's very likely you can.



Guideline #74. Visually indicate any default site scopes (i.e. if a site is defaulted to "Women's" scope, highlight "Women's" product category in main menu)

Personalizing a homepage is usually advantageous. One major flaw, however, occurs when people are unaware that the homepage is personalized.

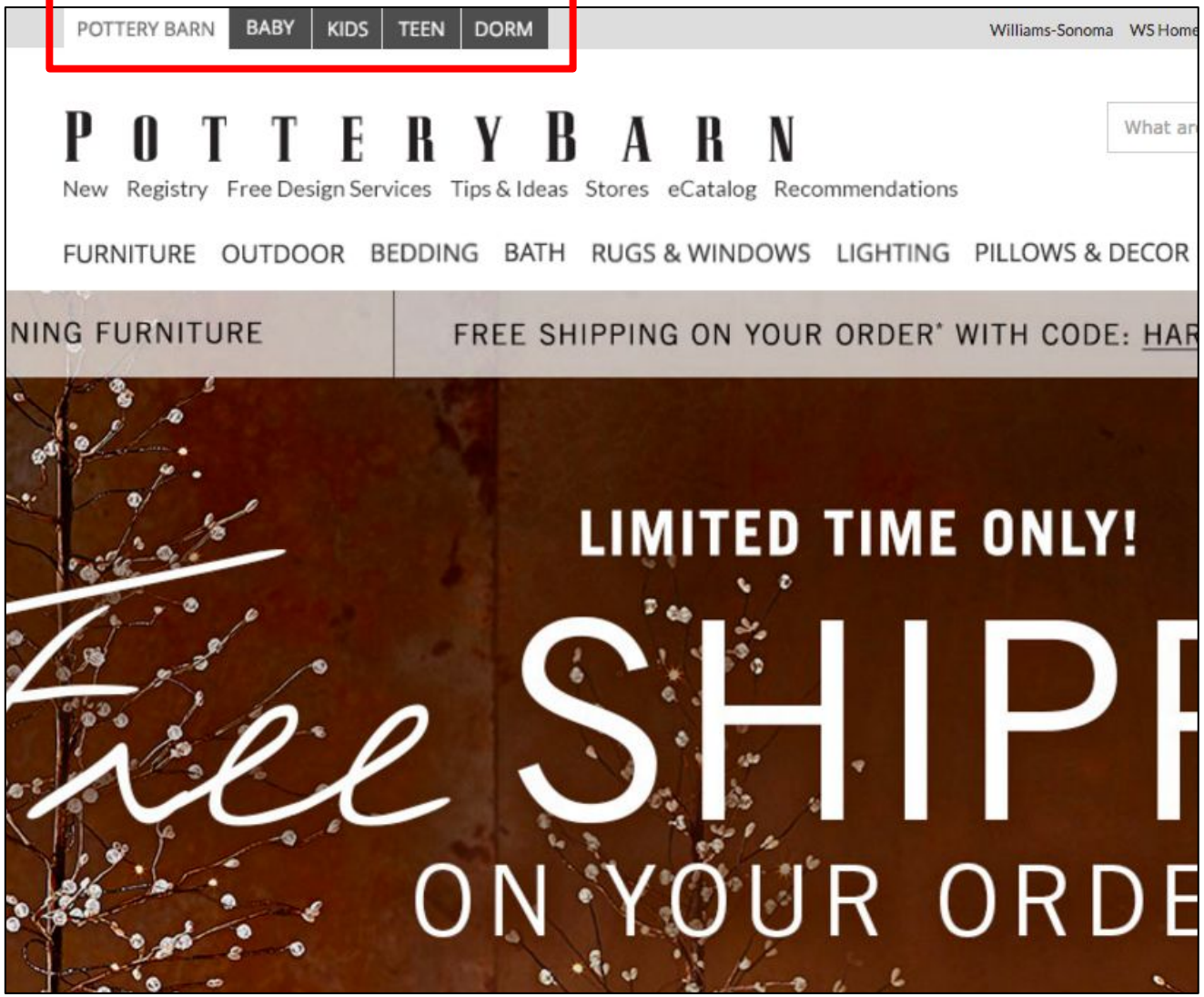
If a homepage is personalized by default (e.g. automatically shows women's clothing, although the site also sells men and children's clothing), make this visually apparent. Most sites highlight the tab or category that the homepage displays on defaults.

Users want to know where they are located on a given site. It helps them situate themselves as well as navigate to another desirable location. This is an easy fix that gives the user context and shows them where they are at.

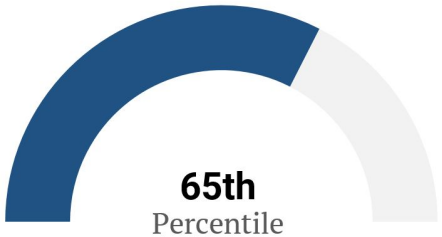
Site Component - Transactional Menu
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

Adherence example

Guideline #74. Visually indicate any default site scopes (i.e. if a site is defaulted to "Women's" scope, highlight "Women's" product category in main menu)



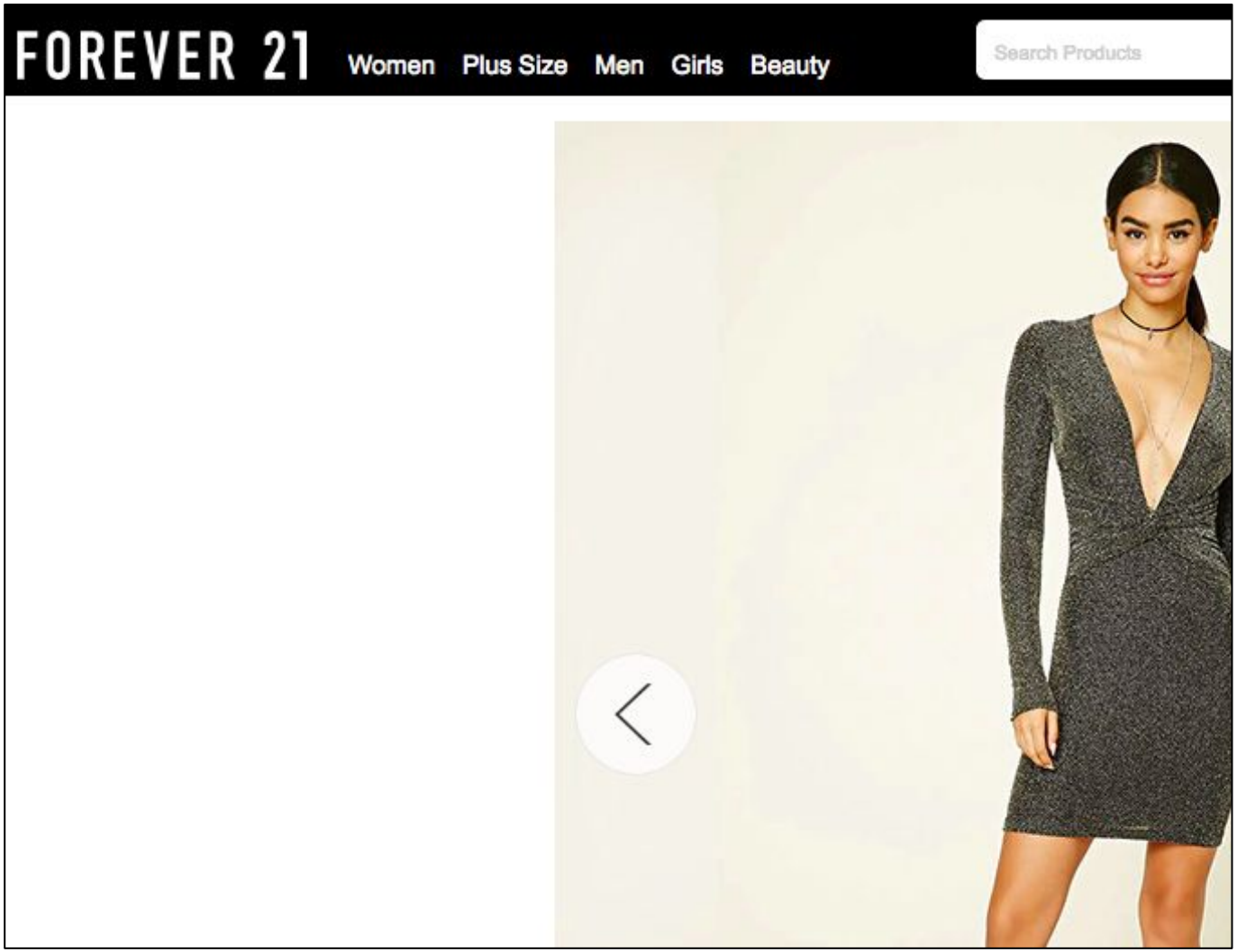
Pottery Barn: Rated in the top 65th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. Although pottery barn also offers Baby, Kids, Teen, and Dorm parent categories, users can see that they've landed in the generic Pottery Barn category, and that they need to select the appropriate tab to browse the other parent categories.



CUX - USABILITY

Non-adherence example

Guideline #74. Visually indicate any default site scopes (i.e. if a site is defaulted to "Women's" scope, highlight "Women's" product category in main menu)



Forever 21: Ranked in the bottom 19th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. Although Forever21 also sells Plus Size, Men, and Girls clothing (and beauty supplies), the homepage displays the Women category with no visible indication. First time shoppers might be unaware of the other types of clothing this site sells.

19th
Percentile
CUX - USABILITY

Guideline #75. Avoid vague or specialized product categories ("more", "miscellaneous", and "other") unless it dynamically displays more options without page load (in effort to reduce item numbers visually)

There's only so much a visitor is expected to know.

Don't make them think.

Category menu items need to be precise and understandable. Increased task times and dead end journeys result from vaguely titled categories. If there are more categories than there's space to show, or you want to introduce a new specialty category, allow for a hover-over tool tip explainer that will provide the user a quick grasp of it without having to dive in. Save them the extra clicks. Auto drop down menus are good for this, they indicate what's actually inside the parent category without much effort.

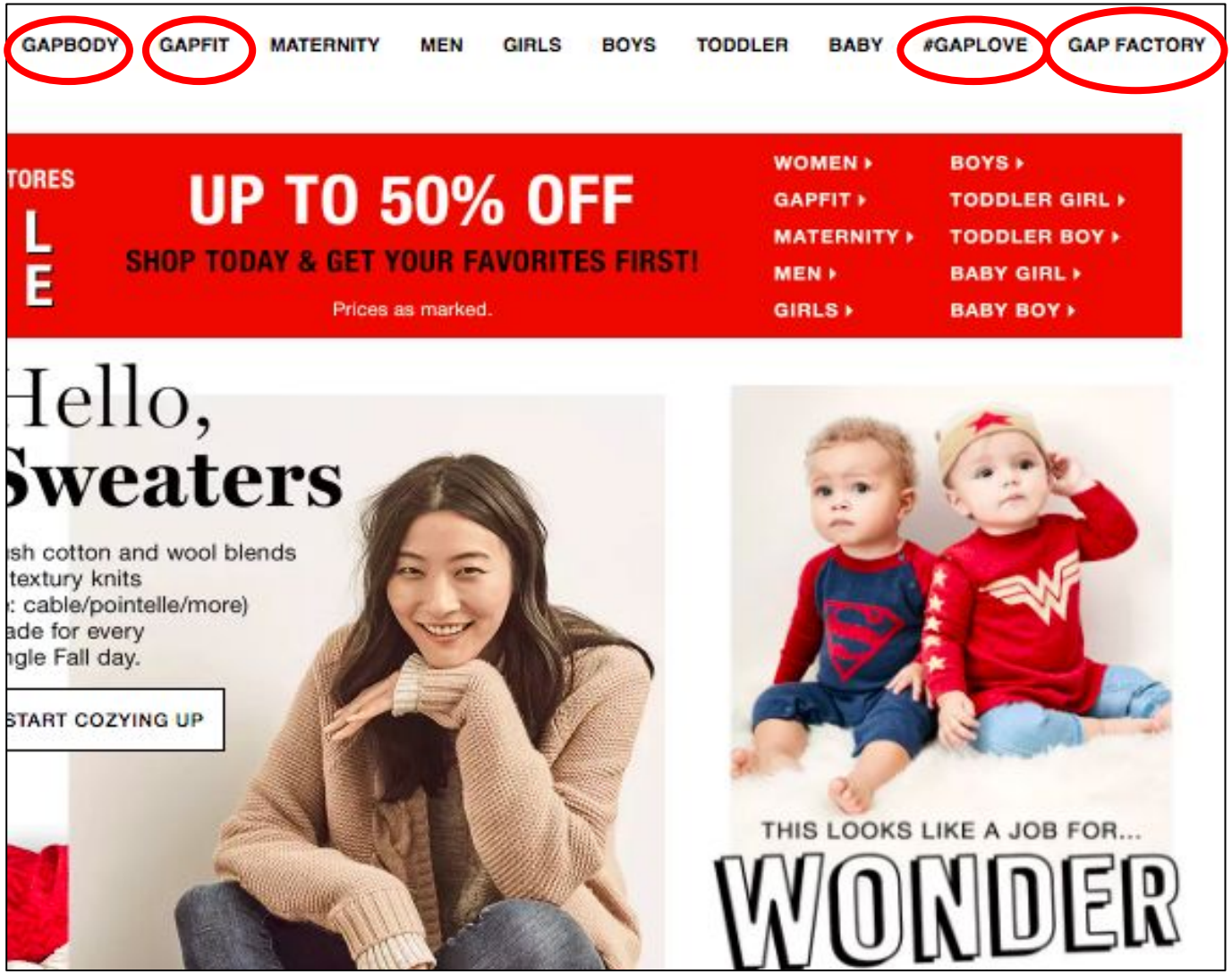
Site Component - Transactional Menu
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

User quote - *"Some things were abbreviated in ways that I would not understand. Some stuff was a bit too categorized."*

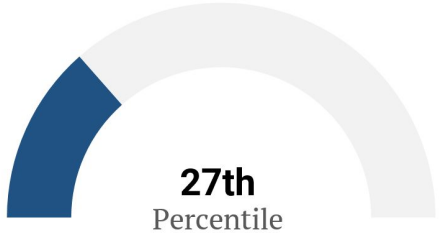
User quote - *"I am still unsure what AERIE was and whether this was something I wanted to know. "*

Non-adherence example

Guideline #75. Avoid vague or specialized product categories ("more", "miscellaneous", and "other") unless it dynamically displays more options without page load (in effort to reduce item numbers visually)



Gap: Ranked in the bottom 27th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. The circled categories are all too specialized for first time visitors to understand what they are.



27th
Percentile

CUX - USABILITY

Guideline #76. Consider adding additional information and resources alongside products or categories (e.g., inline descriptions, tooltips, and explainer articles), especially in specialty or 'jargon-heavy' product classes

The idea here is to increase the understanding of what you're selling in the quickest and most efficient way possible. Industry pros will know, but this is about increasing conversions by selling to those who don't know. If people aren't sure what they're looking at (if the benefit or purpose isn't apparent) then they'll assume it's not what they're looking for or interested in.

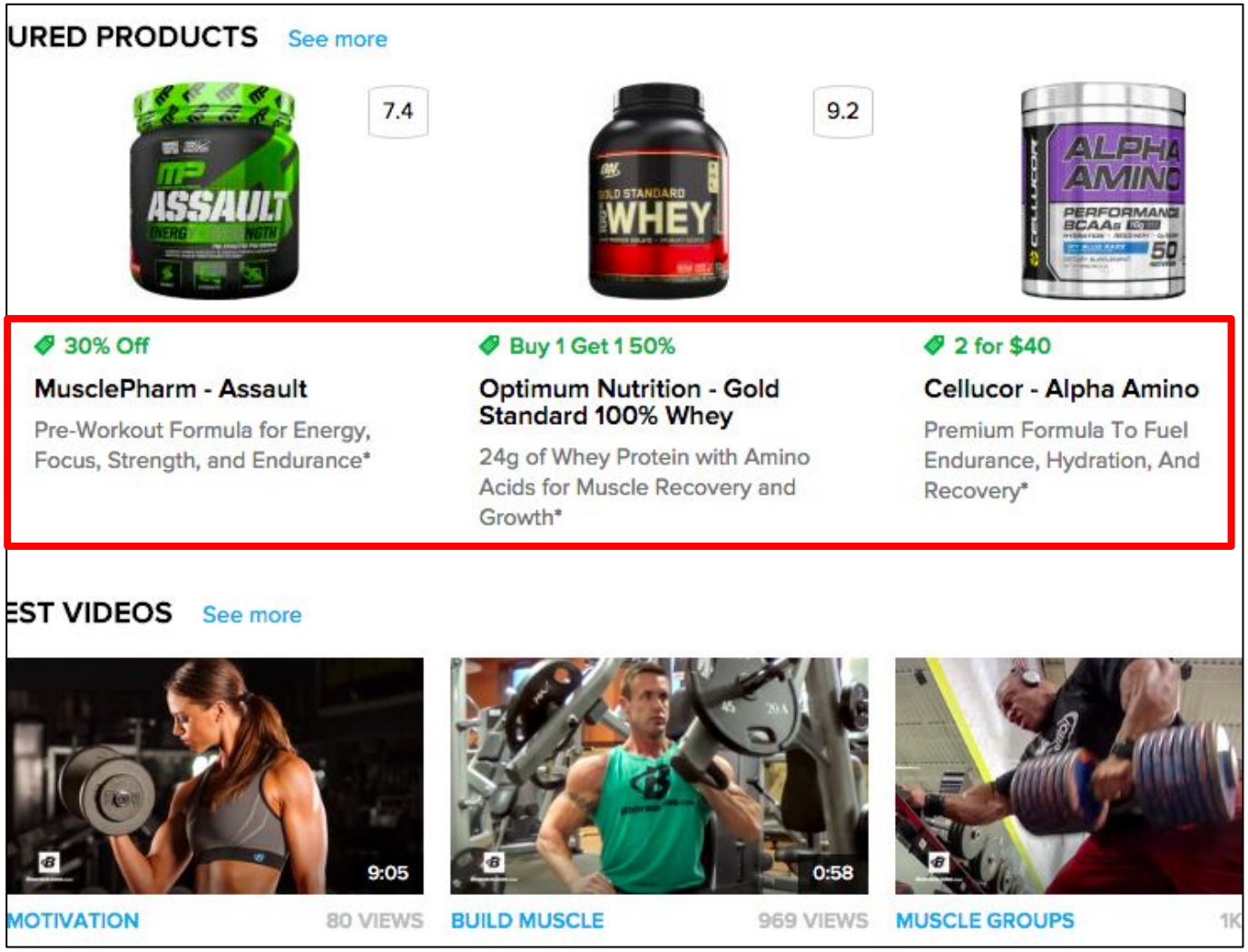
This is another fix with no downside. By increasing the clarity for those without as much industry specific knowledge, or technical terminology, you don't decrease the clarity or motivation for those with superior product knowledge. All you do is make your site inclusive for different levels of sophistication.

Site Component - Transactional Menu

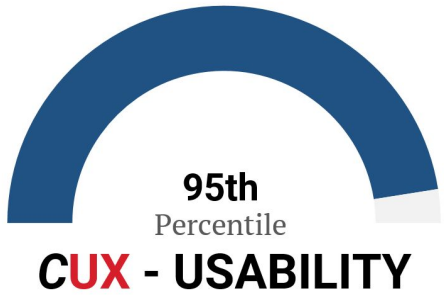
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

Adherence example

Guideline #76. Consider adding additional information and resources alongside products or categories (e.g., inline descriptions, tooltips, and explainer articles), especially in specialty or 'jargon-heavy' product classes

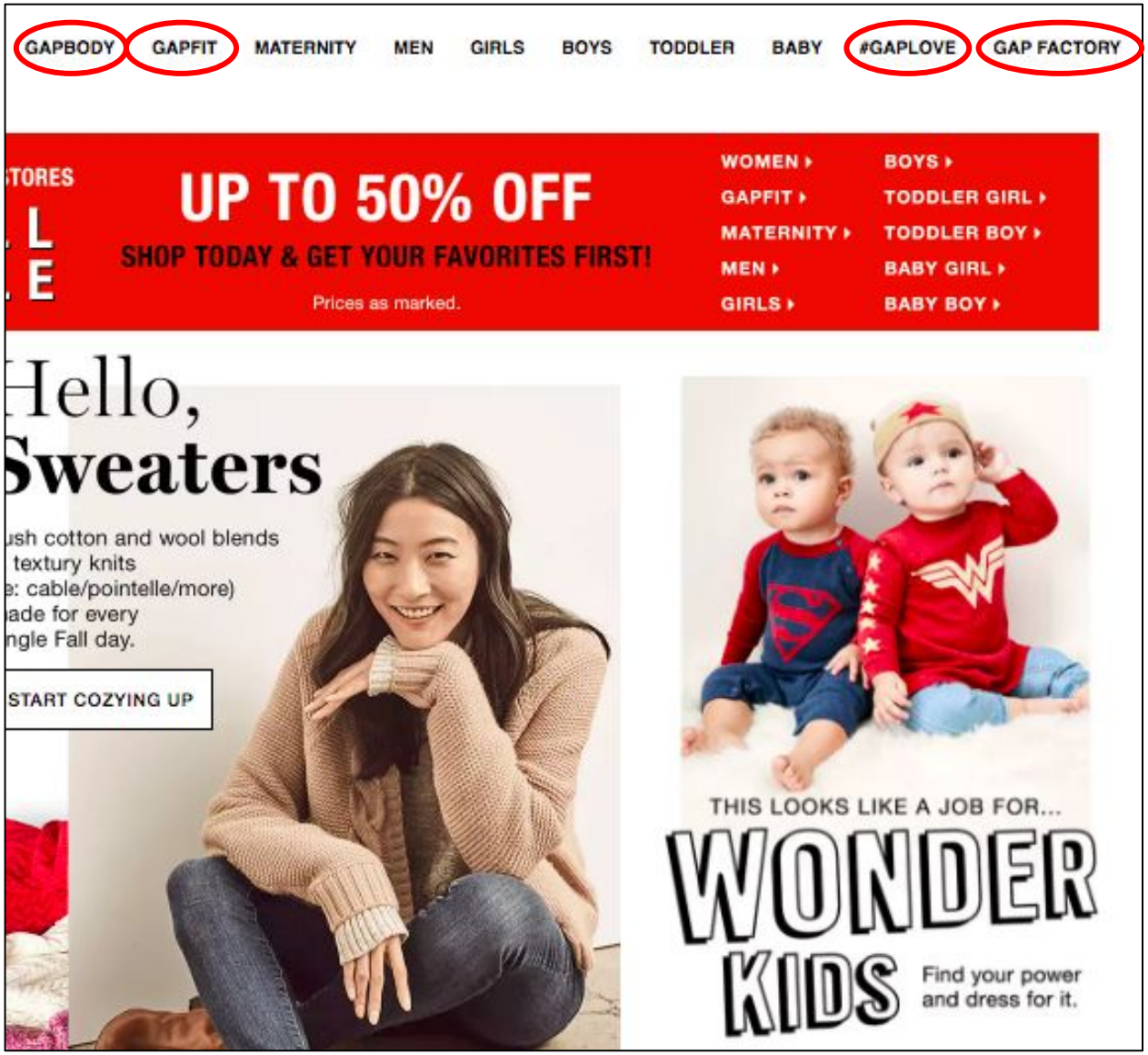


Bodybuilding.com: Ranked in the top 95th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. Without the descriptions providing a good amount of introductory information, these powder supplements would be confusing for people not super involved in the workout world.

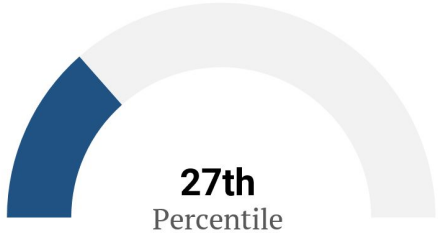


Non-adherence example

Guideline #76. Consider adding additional information and resources alongside products or categories (e.g., inline descriptions, tooltips, and explainer articles), especially in specialty or 'jargon-heavy' product classes



Gap: Ranked in the bottom 27th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. Very few people are going to know what these categories are.



Guideline #77. Promoting subcategories on the homepage accelerates the search journey

Promoting one or more subcategories on the homepage offers another way to explore a site's product selection. During testing, most people either used the search (most common) or category dropdown menus (second most common) to find a product.

But there were also many that were more exploratory, and interacted with the 'inspirational' or 'featured' section of the homepage that highlighted a particular product subcategory.

This is especially relevant during seasonal holidays, where thematic subcategories can draw more people in and browsing for unknown products as gifts becomes more common.

Site Component - Subcategory
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

User quote - *"I would redesign the categories in such a way that all products are easily accessible. I was not a fan of the "Consumer Electronics" category, and would prefer its sub-categories to be placed somewhere more apparent."*

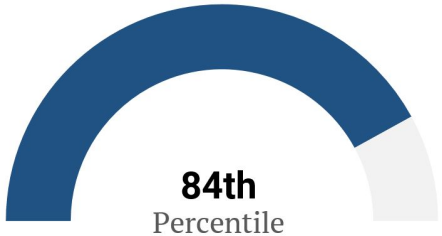
User quote - *"I like the suggested products on the main page. It made it really easy to find a gift."*

Adherence example

Guideline #77. Promoting subcategories on the homepage accelerates the search journey

TigerDirect: Ranked in the top 84th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. Users can immediately start browsing product categories on the homepage. The page also offers Inspirational categories, the Best of the Week and the Back to Business Sale.

User quote - *"I really think the ease of navigation from the homepage to product of choice was quite seamless."*



Guideline #78. Showcase special categories like ‘new arrivals’ and ‘sales & promotion’ groupings

Similar to the guideline above, many visitors want to browse, but they want to start either with sales or new arrivals. These category groupings should always be available and easy to distinguish on a homepage.

Different customers have different intentions. Some need to see “what’s hot” right now. Some don’t care, and they just want to see what’s on sale.

No matter the case, you can convert any of these visitors by allowing navigation based on differing intentions. “Sales” tabs and “New Items” tabs are very prototypical, rarely decreasing the user experience, and only helping add dimensions to your site.

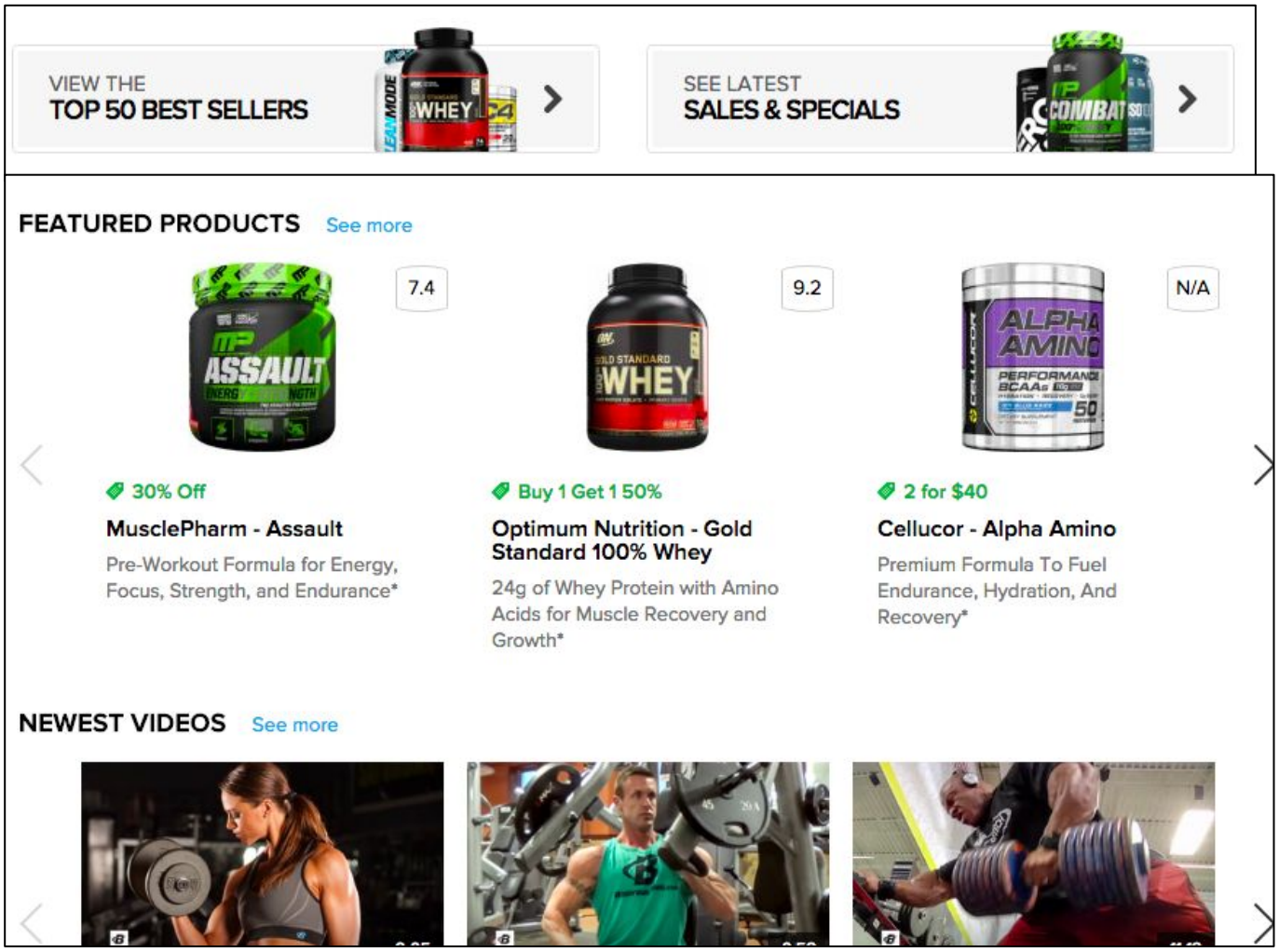
Site Component - Subcategory
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

User quote - When asked what they liked most about the Forever 21 site: *“ I do love that Forever 21 points out "what's hot" and what's "on trend" - so you sort of have a guide to how to be fashionable just by glancing at their GIF/video on the main web site. “*

User quote - *“I would make it where you could see what was on sale or show us what coupons they had out right now.”*

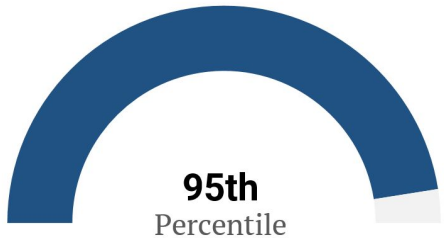
Adherence example

Guideline #78. Showcase special categories like 'new arrivals' and 'sales & promotion' groupings



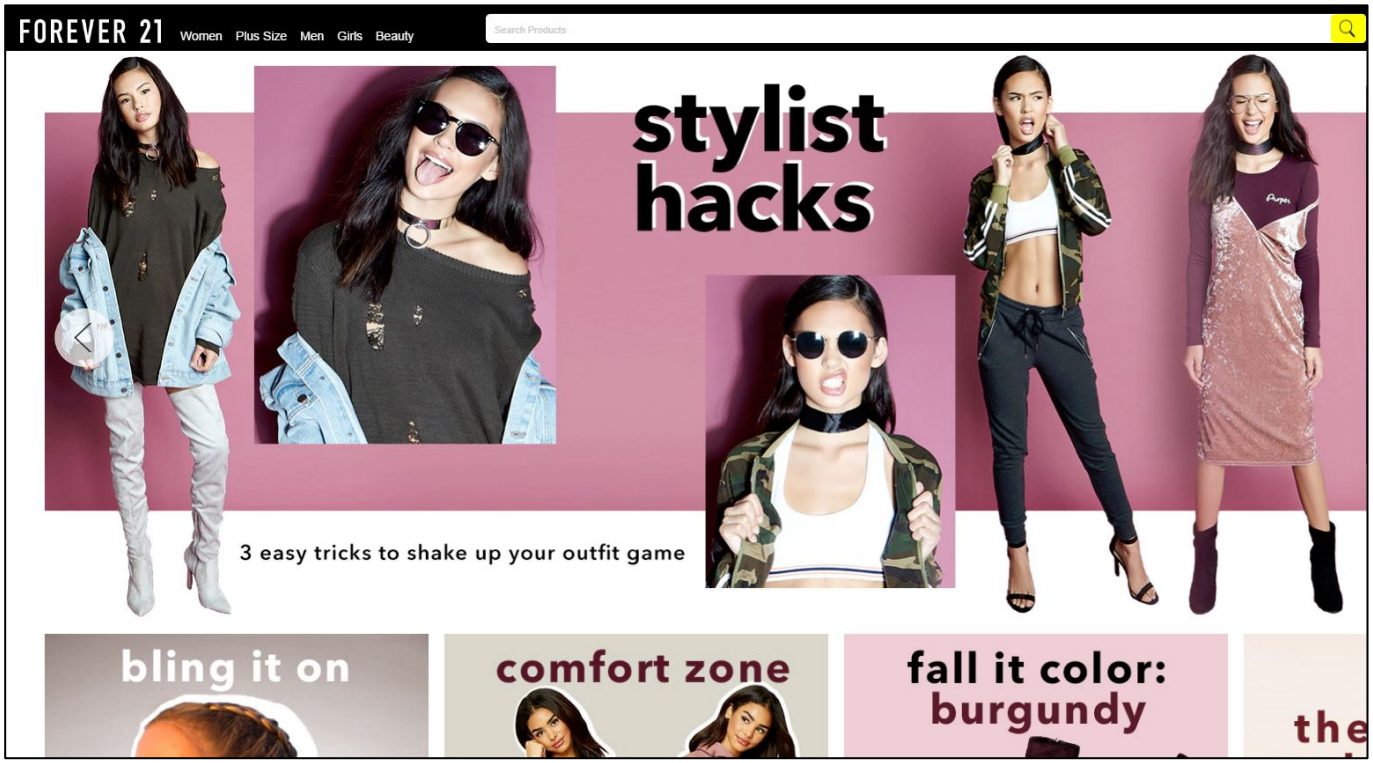
Bodybuilding.com: Ranked in the top 95th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. This homepage shares many special deals and promotions.

User quote - *"Loved the promotions- makes me want to buy from them since I feel like I am saving money!"*



Non-adherence example

Guideline #78. Showcase special categories like 'new arrivals' and 'sales & promotion' groupings



Forever 21: Ranked in the bottom 19th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. There is no visible Sale category in the transactional menu. Users have to click on a parent category before seeing the Sale subcategory. This could deter visitors looking for a discount.

User quote - When asked if/why they would buy from this site and not a competitor: *"nothing that I saw on this website really made it clear to me why I needed to buy from this website over somebody else. I think maybe I may have missed some things on the home page. Maybe there was a sale or something, but I'm not sure, and I really didn't see that."*

CUX - USABILITY

Usability » Image Slider

4 Guidelines

Usability > Image Slider

79. Avoid automatic image sliders
80. Image Slider Content - What's in the slider images needs to be relevant and not look like an ad
81. Image Slider Interaction - it should rotate manually, and if it has to be automatically, then slowly, typically 5-7 seconds at minimum and more with heavy copy
82. Image Slider Interaction -it should have obvious controls and should freeze with ANY interaction including hovering

These days so many ecommerce sites use rotating offers – and I think it's not because they tested it, but due to herd mentality – "others have it, so should we".

I'm sure you've come across dozens, if not hundreds of image sliders or carousels (also called 'rotating offers'). You might even like them. But the truth is that they're conversion killers.

So if they're not effective, why do people use them? 2 reasons:

1. Some people think they're cool. But cool does not make you money – at least not this way.
2. Different departments and managers want to get their message on the homepage. Design by committee never fails to fail.

Jakob Nielsen (yes, the usability guru) confirms this in tests. They ran a usability study where they gave users the following task: "Does Siemens have any special deals on washing machines?". The information was on the most prominent slide. The users could not see it – totally hit by banner blindness. Nielsen concludes the sliders are ignored.

Notre Dame university tested it too. Only the first slide got some action (1%!), other slides hardly got clicked on at all. 1% of clicks for something that takes up (more than) half the page?

Still think using a slider might be a good idea? Check out this site.

The first guideline in this section is 'Avoid automatic image sliders". But we understand that sometimes they are unavoidable, especially in cases where they placate corporate bosses. The other guidelines make sure that if you are going to do it, then you have good navigation to help make it more effective.

Guideline #79. Avoid automatic image sliders

A quote by Lee Duddell -

"Carousels are effective at being able to tell people in Marketing/Senior Management that their latest idea is now on the Home Page.

They are next to useless for users and often "skipped" because they look like advertisements. Hence they are a good technique for getting useless information on a Home Page (see first sentence of this post).

In summary, use them to put content that users will ignore on your Home Page. Or, if you prefer, don't use them. Ever.

btw these views are not my own, but are based upon observing thousands of tests with users."

Our blog post: Don't Use Automatic Image Sliders or Carousels, Ignore the Fad

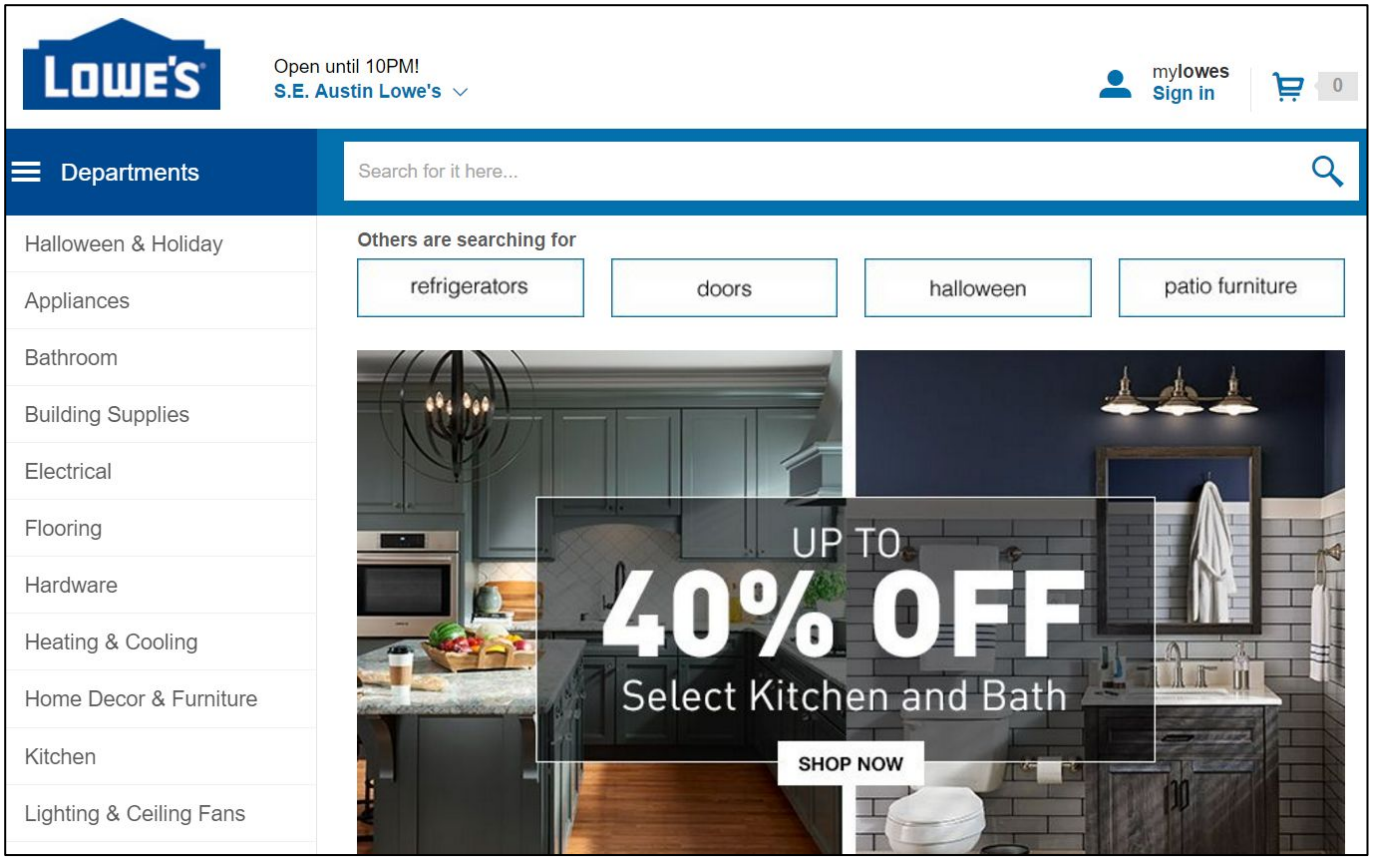
Some main reasons to avoid auto-rotating sliders: First, most people register the rotating slider and immediately scroll past it on the lookout for content that's *actually* relevant to them. Second, most sliders either move too slowly (people get tired of waiting for the slide to rotate) or too quickly (people are in the middle of digesting the slide when it rotates). Third, the movement of rotating sliders is distracts from important features on a homepage like the value proposition and CTA.

Site Component - Image Slider
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

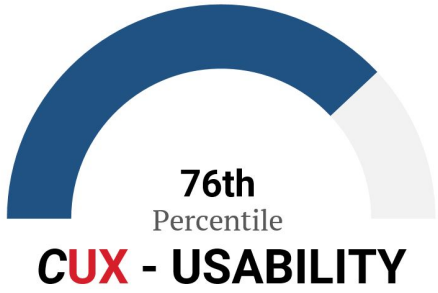
User quote - *"The constantly sliding imagines were very distracting, too fast, and made me feel like my computer was sliding off the desk -- I'd much rather see scroll arrows at each side of an image, so I can look through if I want to, and at my own pace. Also, they continued to slide around in the background, when i was obviously not looking at them, because I had a menu pulled down."*

Adherence example

Guideline #79. Avoid automatic image sliders

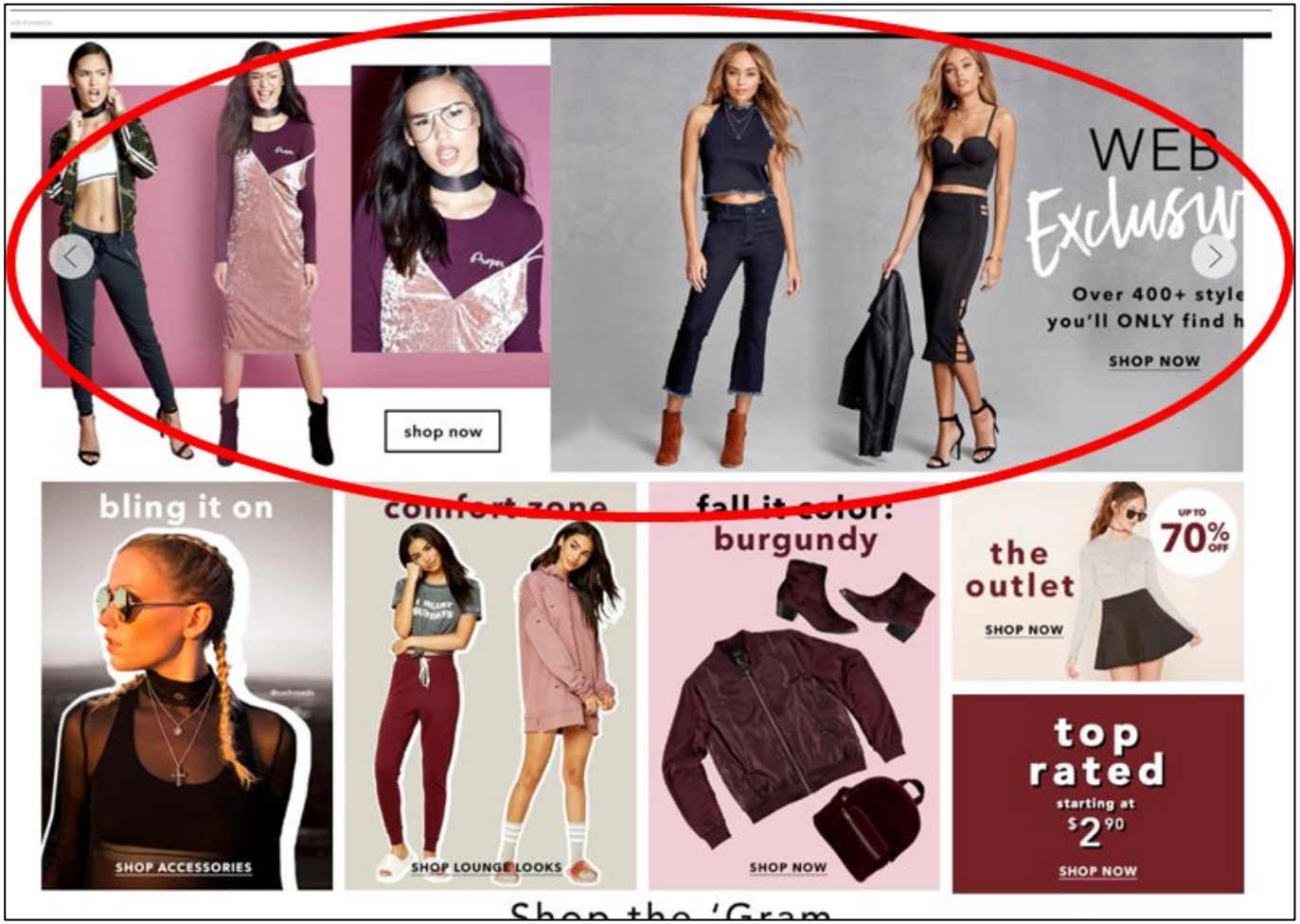


Lowe's: Ranked in the top 76th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. The 40% off promotion graphic could've been a rotating slider, showing a picture of a kitchen and then a picture of a bathroom. Instead, they're one combined, static picture. This simply designed page facilitates exploration by eliminating any distractions.



Non-adherence example

Guideline #79. Avoid automatic image sliders



Forever 21: Ranked in the bottom 19th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. We caught this slider mid-rotation. This homepage is way too busy. Users are gripped by the graphics and rotating slider, forgetting why they came to the site in the first place.

User quote - *"I did feel that the main site was a little busy. Maybe if the GIF/Video was static, it wouldn't feel this way. Instead, if I remember correctly, it was a slideshow that changed every few seconds."*

Guideline #80. What's in the slider images needs to be relevant, not exclusive, and should not look like an ad

During testing, site users often commented on the amount of ads. Rotating sliders act like flashing advertisements which people have grown accustomed to ignoring, and even resenting. Further, if the information isn't relevant then there will be no interaction, interest, or message-takeaway.

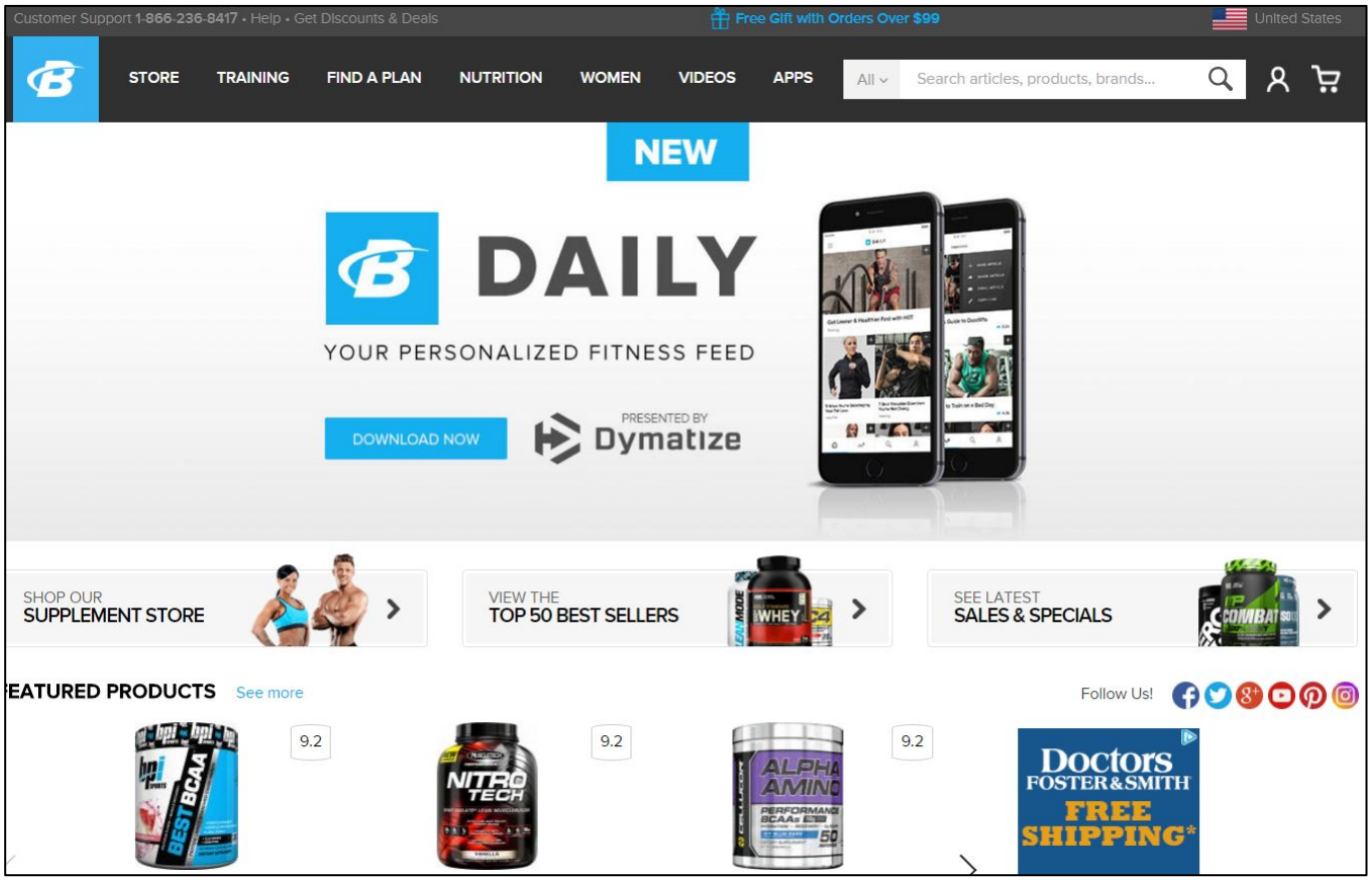
With that in mind, value propositions, links, navigation, and anything vital should not be in a slider as it might disappear as a user is trying to access it. These elements need to be elsewhere on the page.

If the very first offer people see is not what they like (=relevancy), then what? What if they don't like any of the offers? That's certainly not going to help your customer lifetime value get better.

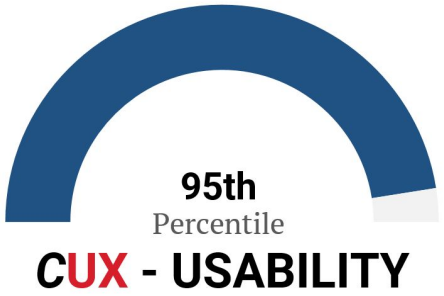
Site Component - Image Slider
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

Adherence example

Guideline #80. What's in the slider images needs to be relevant, not exclusive, and should not look like an ad

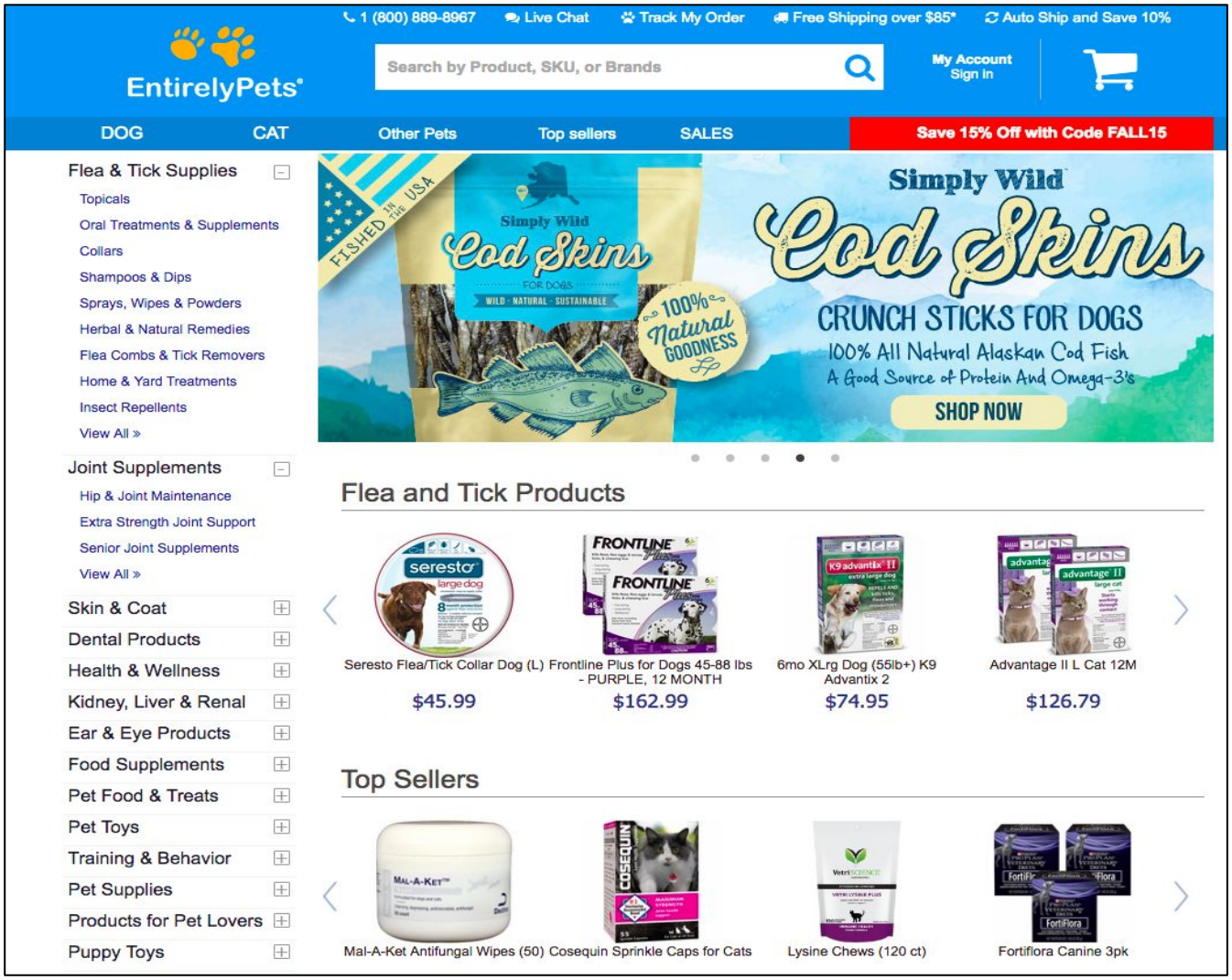


Bodybuilding.com: Ranked in the top 95th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. This B Daily graphic is a site wide promotion that looks nothing like an external advertisement.

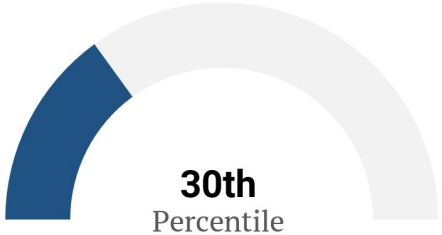


Non-adherence example

Guideline #80. What's in the slider images needs to be relevant, not exclusive, and should not look like an ad



Entirely Pets: Ranked in the bottom 30th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. This Cod Skins promo looks a lot like an ad.



Guideline #81. Image slider should rotate manually, and if it has to be automatic, then slowly, typically 5-7 seconds and more with heavy copy

Site Component - Image Slider
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

Our brains have 3 layers, the oldest part is the one we share even with reptiles. It's mostly concerned with survival. A sudden change on the horizon could be a matter of life and death. Hence human eye reacts to movement – including constantly moving image sliders and carousels. But is this bad?

Unless the image slider is the only thing on your website (bad idea!), it's not a good thing. It means it takes away attention from everything else – the stuff that actually matters. Like your value proposition, the content of your site, and your products.

Image sliders get hit by banner blindness and most people won't even pay attention to them, but even those who do can't really get the messages.

Imagine a visitor lands on your site. They see a message on the slider and starts reading it. "This fall you get to ..." Bam! Gone. Often the sliders are so fast that people are not even able to finish reading them (even if they want to).

Focusing on a single primary message and action is way always far more effective.

Guideline #82. Image slider should have obvious controls and should freeze with ANY interaction including hovering

The image slider should stop permanently with any interaction like a click or manual advance. Main reason: user control.

Carousels often have terrible usability – they move too quickly, have too small navigation icons (if any!) and often move automatically even if the user wants to browse the content manually. One of the key rules of user interface design is that users need to be in control.

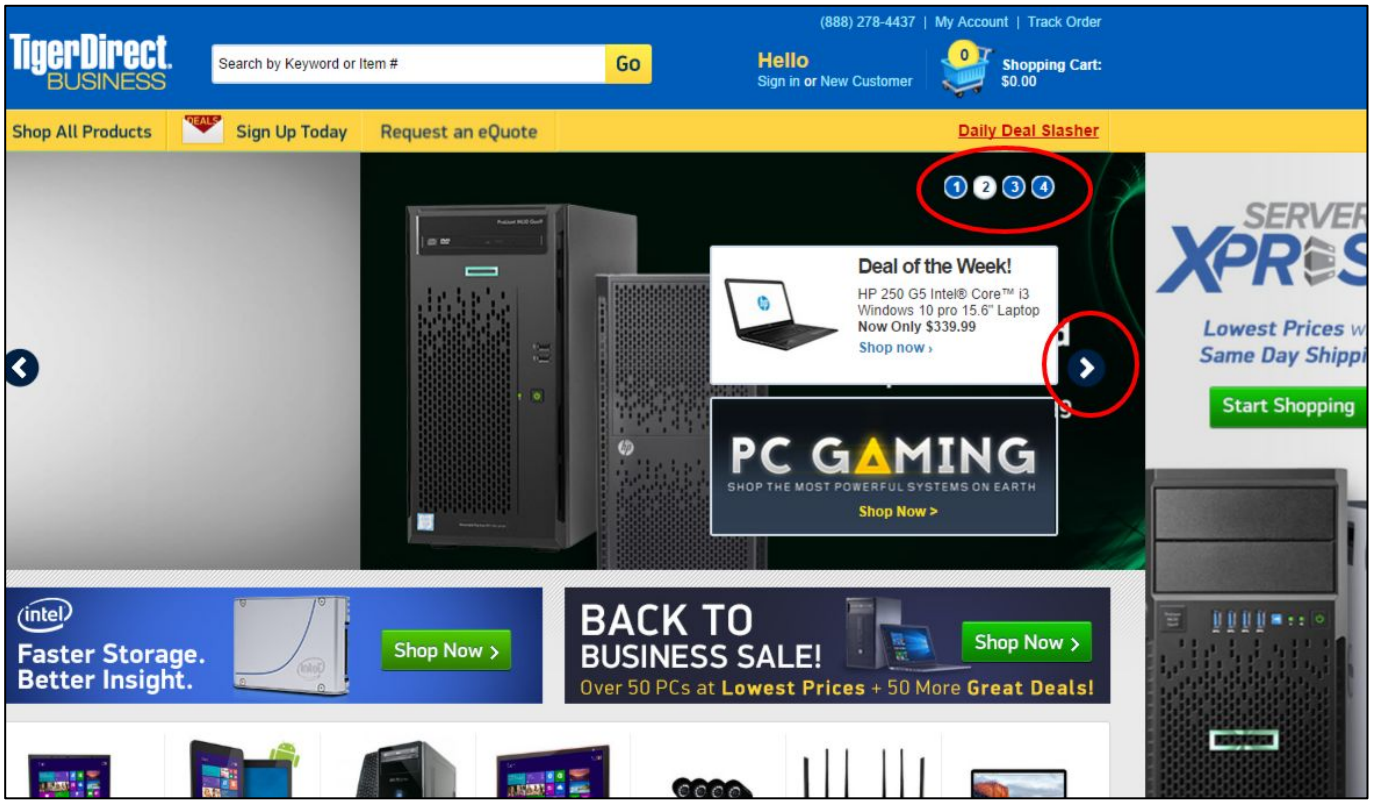
Slider controls should be obvious. Little tiny dots on the bottom of the image with no forward or backward indicators don't give users control, or communicate to users that they can manually click through each slide.

Instead, create large, hard to miss controls. Use icons that are universal, like forward and backward arrows.

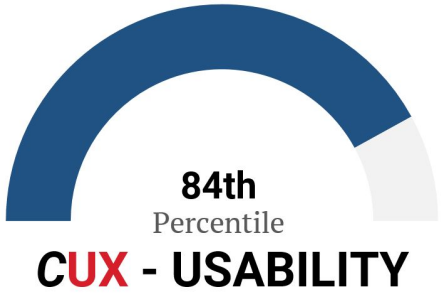
Site Component - Image Slider
Conversion Heuristic - DIstraction & Focus

Adherence example

Guideline #82. Image slider should have obvious controls and should freeze with ANY interaction including hovering

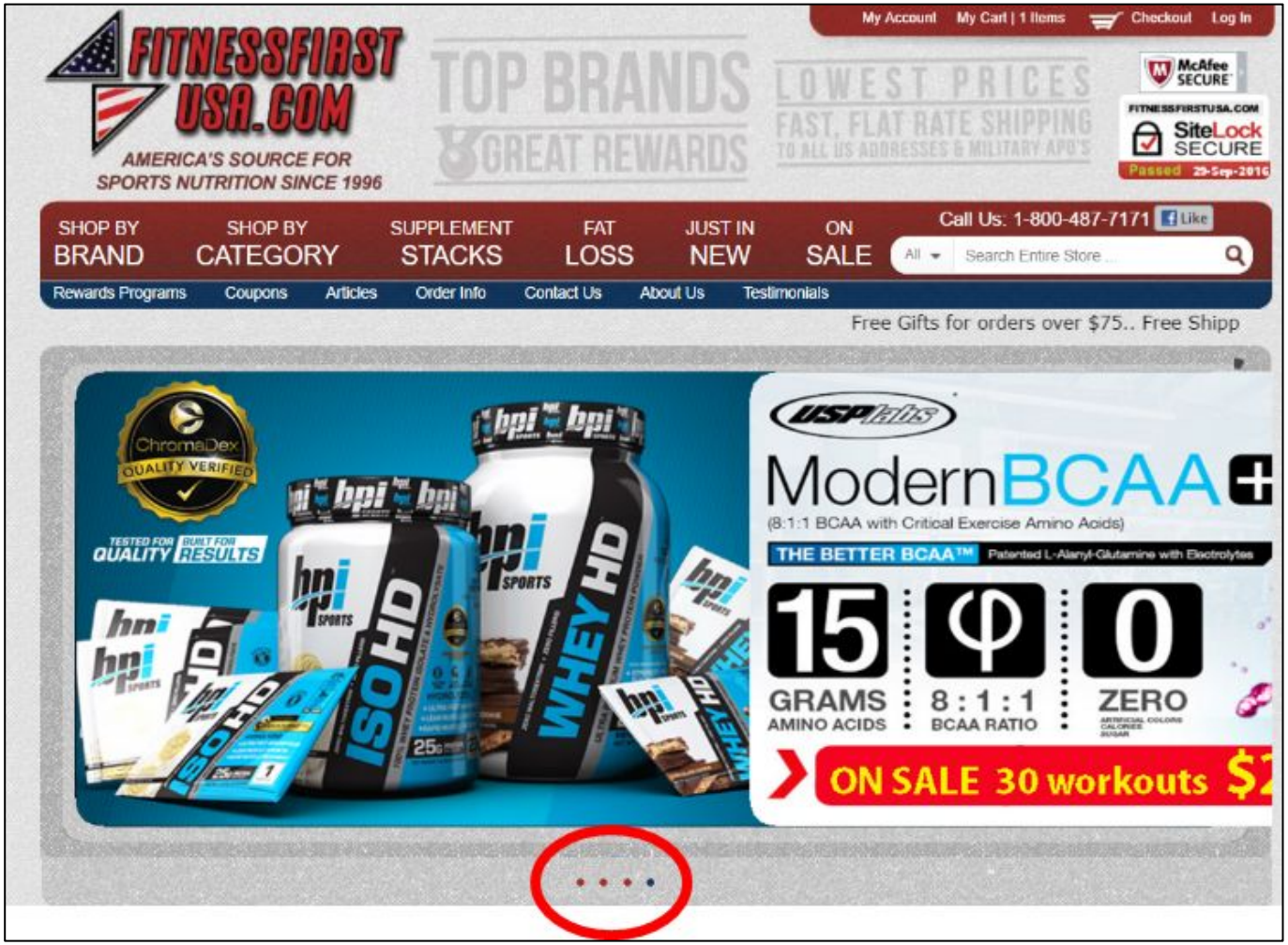


TigerDirect: Ranked in the top 84th percentile for the UX dimension Usability.



Non-adherence example

Guideline #82. Image slider should have obvious controls and should freeze with ANY interaction including hovering



Fitness First USA: Ranked in the bottom 14th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. These buttons are a bit too small and inconspicuous to be sure that users will realize the above graphic is a slider.

Usability » Search

9 Guidelines

Usability > Search

83. The search bar should be prominently located either in the center of the site, or top right of the page, and large enough for a moderately long search string
84. Label the search bar with the word "Search" or similar
85. The search bar should be sticky so users can search no matter where they are down the page.
86. The search bar should have autocomplete capabilities; fix spelling mistakes
87. Search should optimize itself to share most relevant information and similar/popular searches as users type in the search bar
88. Allow users the ability to press the enter key to search (instead of being required to click the "search" button only)
89. Allow for filtering/categories when using search bar to narrow down/simplify search
90. Include product images in site search window
91. Search should be localized, providing results in the local terminology

Interesting fact: On most websites —especially on transactional (ecommerce) ones— people who perform a search convert better. Sometimes a lot.
Why?
First, there are people who know what they want and don't want to browse, just search instead. Second, some people are search-inclined.

A simple and effective search function allows two basic advantages to the user:

1. Users can control their own destiny, getting straight to where they want to go, and
2. It allows an 'escape' from getting lost or hitting dead ends in the navigation.

Search is a big deal: if people can't find what they're looking for they will leave your site.

Note that good search is not enough. In our usability tests, we found that the best search designs are highly functional, and offer both efficient search, navigation, discoverability, and inspiration.

Take our course on Internal Search.

Guideline #83. The search bar should be prominently located either in the center of the site, or top right of the page, and large enough for a moderately long search string

Place the search bar where people will find it. There's no reason to reinvent the wheel here.

In a study by ThanxMedia, it was found that site search is a part of the shopping experience in over 40% of online purchases.

Yet, in a site search benchmark study evaluating 50 top eCommerce sites by Baymard Institute – including NewEgg, Gap, Target & more – it was found that half of the sites evaluated did not have a search functionality that was easy to find.

A closer look reveals the search functionality just blends into the rest of the design, and isn't intuitive to find when needed. For example, Gap.com rated low when users were asked "find the search bar".

I understand this may be for aesthetic reasons, however, de-emphasizing the visibility of your search bar means you're adding friction to the buying process for those visitors who already know what they want.

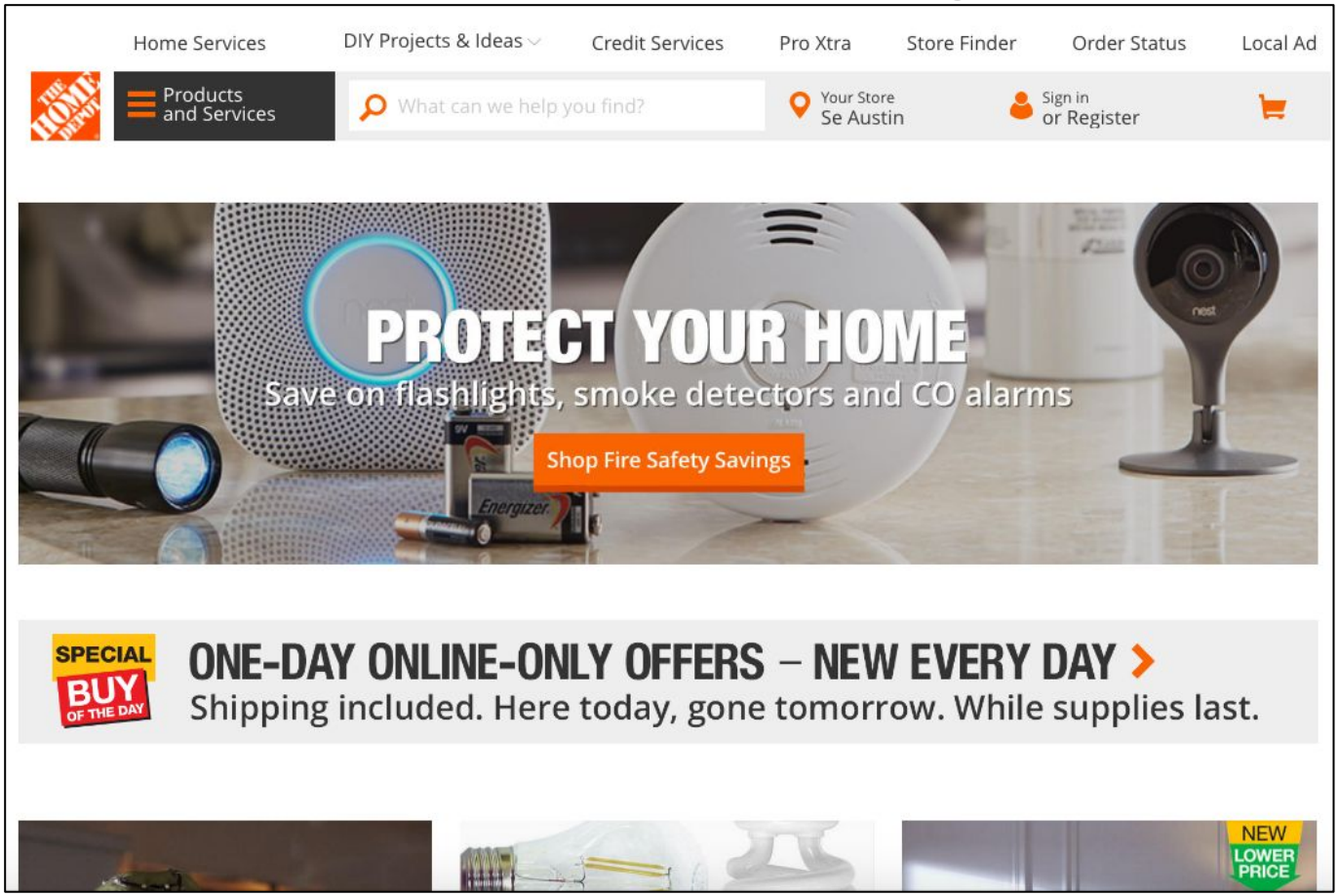
Making some changes to enhance the visibility of your search bar can bring major gains. When Black Forest Décor changed their search bar in 2008, they saw a 34% increase in the overall conversion rate of the site. They made the search bar bigger, moved it to the center of the page, changed the CTA from "Go" to "Find", and added color to the search box. Read the entire case study here.

Site Component - Search
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

User quote - When asked what they liked most about a website: *"Search box on the top (it makes it easy to find the items)".*

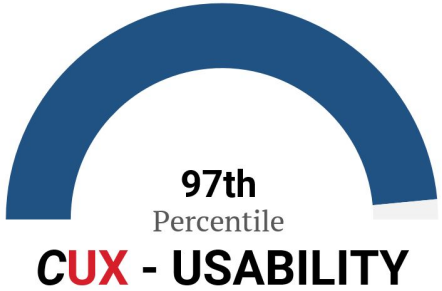
Adherence example

Guideline #83. The search bar should be prominently located either in the center of the site, or top right of the page, and large enough for a moderately long search string



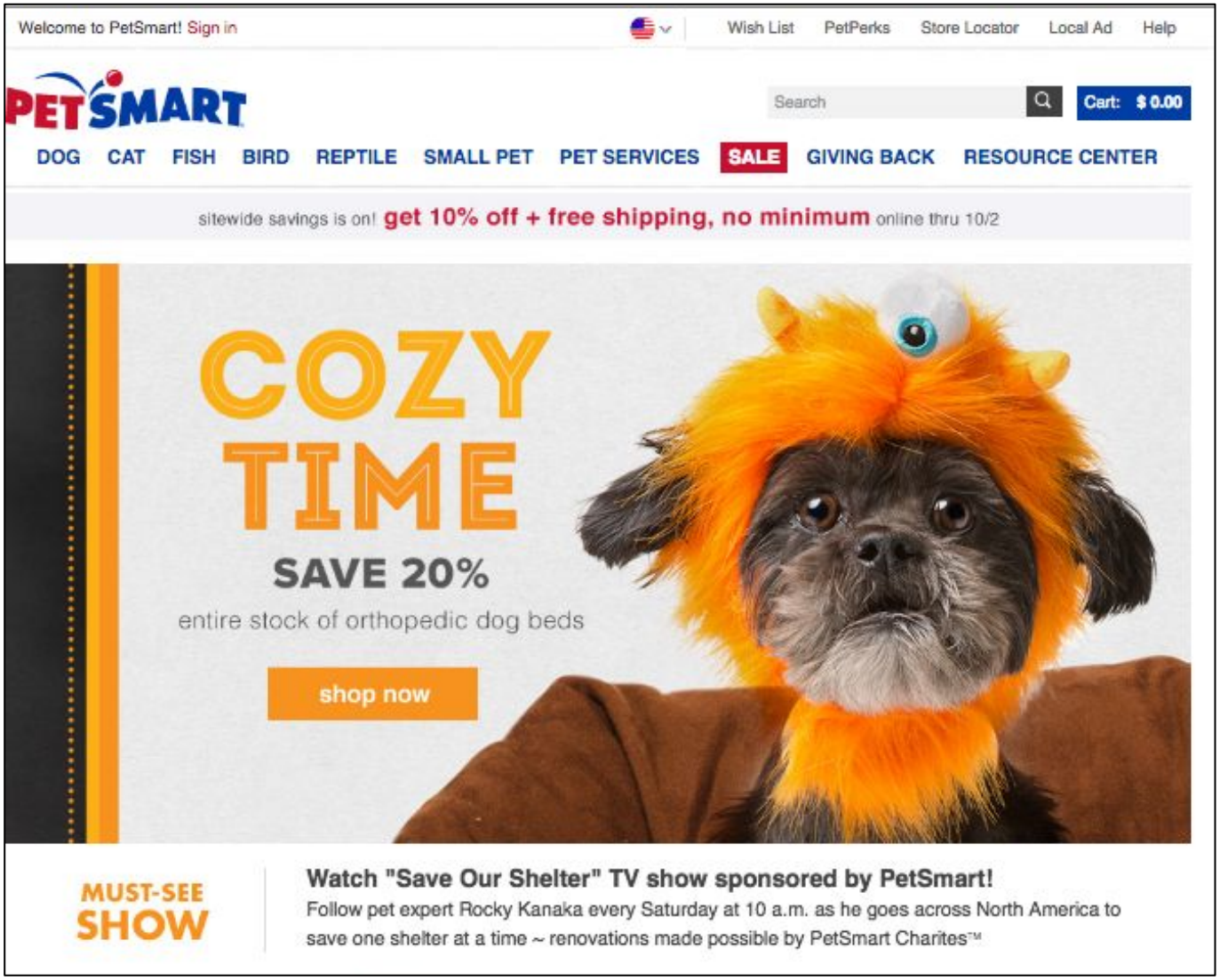
Home Depot: Ranked in the top 97th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. The search bar is front and center, where people expect to find it

User quote - *"The functionality of the site was strong. The info I was seeking was easily located."*



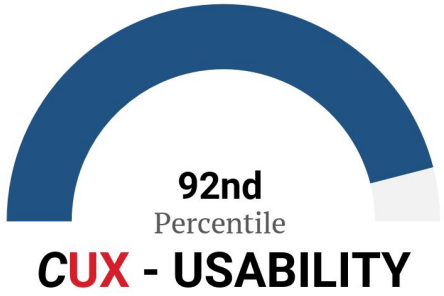
Adherence example

Guideline #83. The search bar should be prominently located either in the center of the site, or top right of the page, and large enough for a moderately long search string



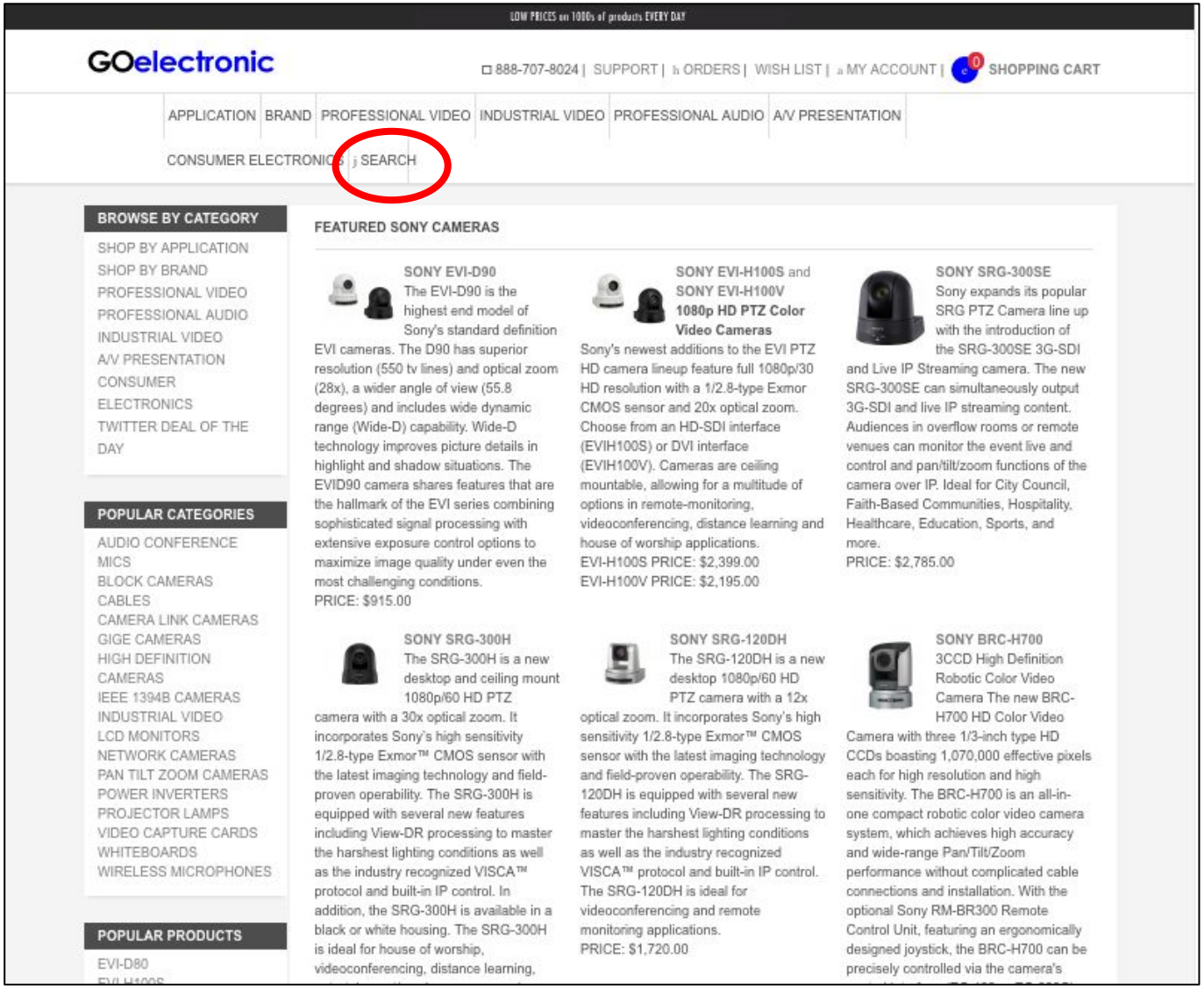
Petsmart: Ranked in the top 92nd percentile for the UX dimension Usability. This search bar is off to the right, also where people expect to find it.

User quote - *"I liked how easy it was to find a product. The search feature was very helpful".*

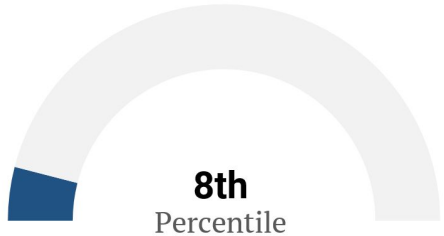


Non-adherence example

Guideline #83. The search bar should be prominently located either in the center of the site, or top right of the page, and large enough for a moderately long search string



GO Electronic: Ranked in the bottom 8th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. This site hides the search bar in the top navigation menu where no one expects it to be.



CUX - USABILITY

Guideline #84. Label the search bar with the word "Search" or similar

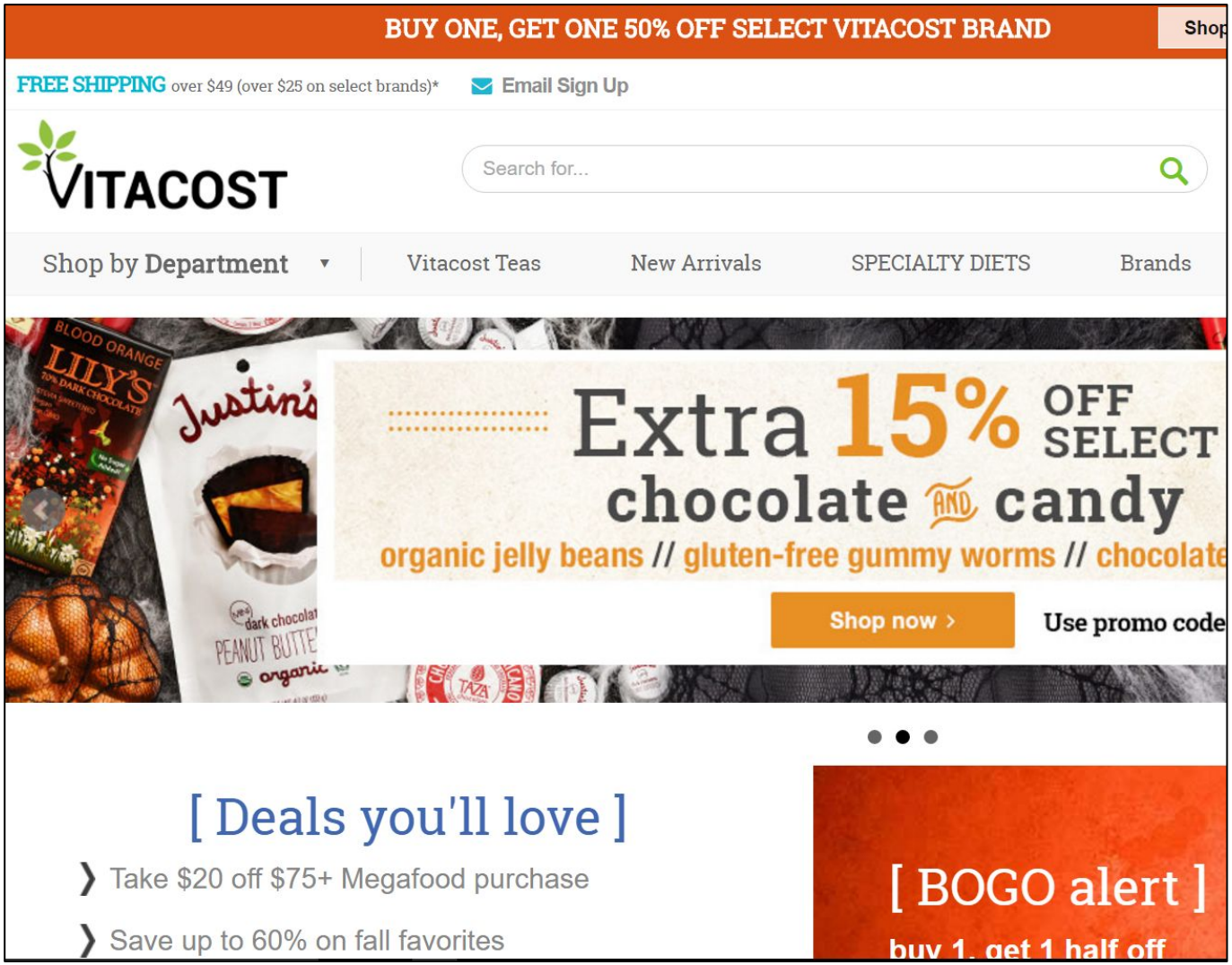
This guideline especially helps the less avid internet users out there. Use a straightforward phrase indicating the search bar's purpose. It can also make the search bar double as a CTA, but generally, it can be used to explain the function of the site to users. You can tell customers they can search by certain categories, within the entire store or specific departments, and so on.

An important note, or sub-guideline is to not make users have to delete any in-line text within the search box. Use JavaScript to make the default text disappears as users click to enter their own term.

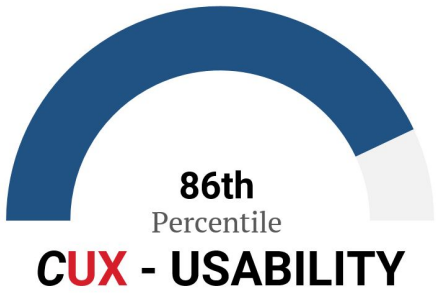
Site Component - Search
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

Adherence example

Guideline #84. Label the search bar with the word "Search" or similar



Vitacost: Ranked in the top 86th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. “Search for…” makes it clear that users are supposed to finish the sentence.



Guideline #85. The search bar should be sticky so users can search no matter where they are down the page

Site Component - Search
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

This guideline deals with accessibility. Allowing for an omnipresent search bar will save users time, especially if they've scrolled far down a page and the search bar is all the way at the top. Instead of losing their train of thought going back up to the top of the page, users can instantly type in the search phrase they just thought of.

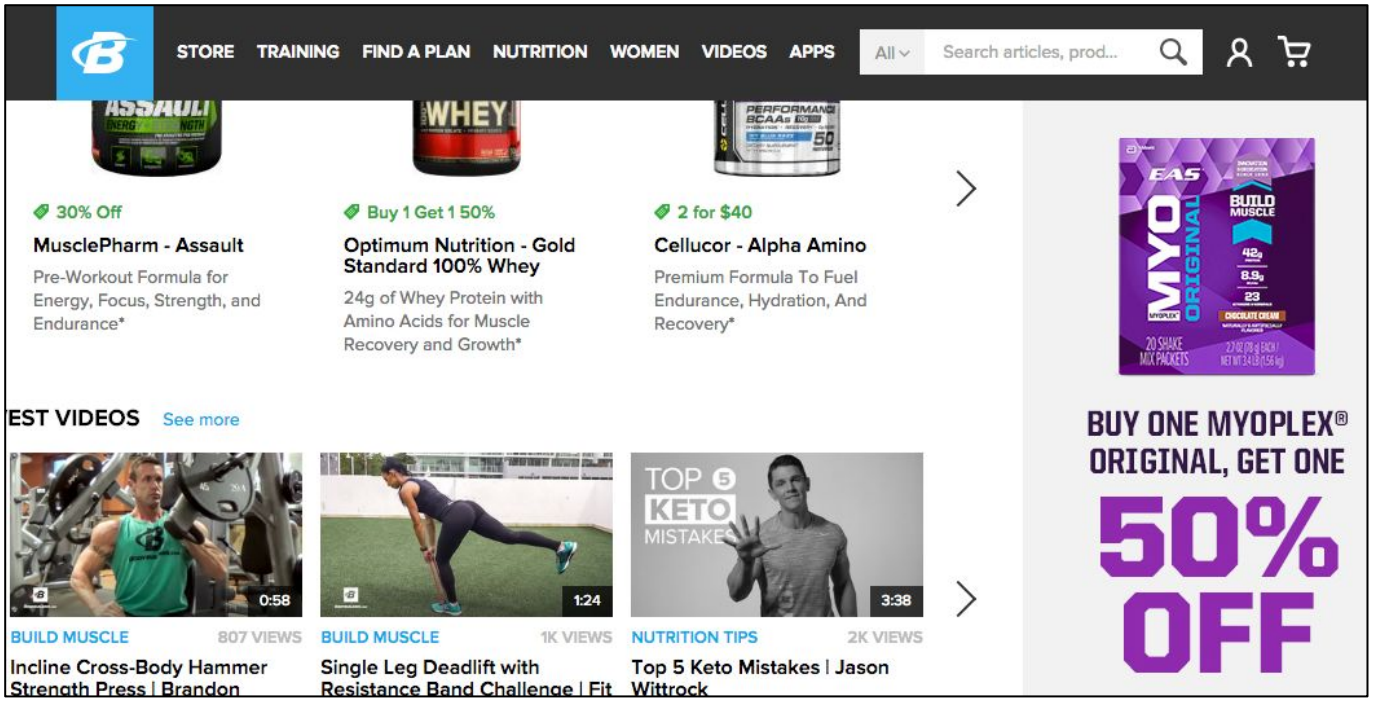
Smashing Magazine conducted a study to find out whether sticky navigation bars were really better. They found that Sticky menus were 22% quicker to navigate. If a user spent five minutes on a website, sticky navigation saved them an average of 36 seconds. Keep in mind these 36 seconds wouldn't have been spent enjoying site content, but having to navigate the website.

What's more, the study found that *all* of the participants preferred sticky navigation. Most times, they didn't even know what the difference between the two sites was, they just knew they preferred the site that had a sticky nav bar.

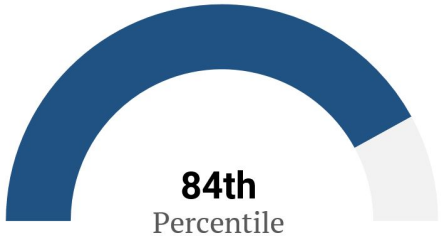
Wondering how to set up sticky navigation on your site? Read Smashing Magazine's full article here.

Adherence example

Guideline #85. The search bar should be sticky so users can search no matter where they are down the page

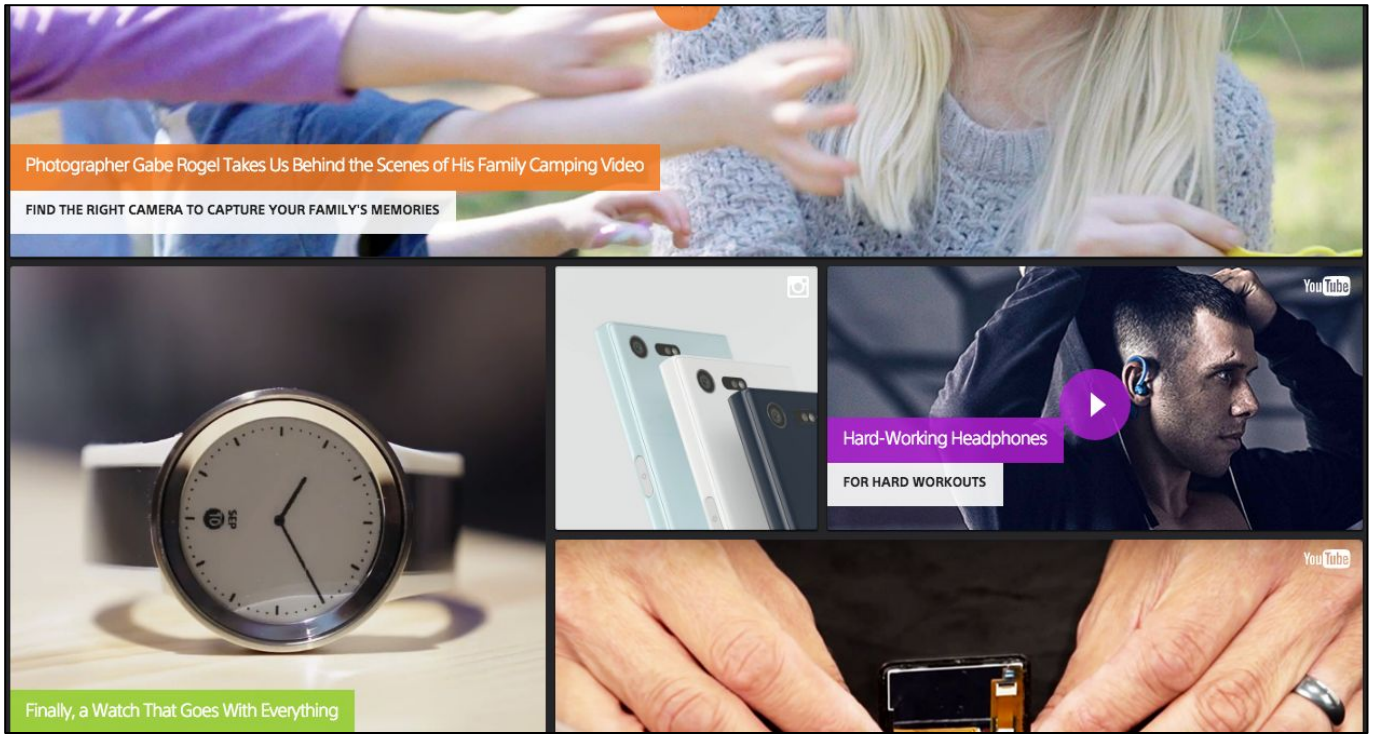


Bodybuilding.com: Ranked in the top 95th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. Imagine seeing this Myoplex promotion and wondering which Myoplex products Bodybuilding.com carries.

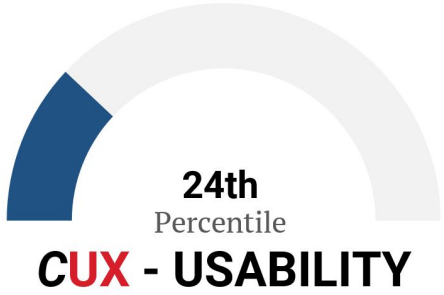


Non-adherence example

Guideline #85. The search bar should be sticky so users can search no matter where they are down the page



Sony: Ranked in the bottom 24th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. Imagine scrolling down this seemingly endless homepage and wondering about all the watches Sony makes. Scrolling back up to search “watches” has become a time commitment.



Guideline #86. The search bar should have autocomplete capabilities; fix spelling mistakes

Site Component - Search
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

One study found that 73% of visitors will abandon a site within 2 minutes if they can't find what they're looking for.

Additionally, 25% of shoppers who conduct a search will refine their query. This is for a number of reasons including mis-spellings, inaccurate search results, and regional differences in product names.

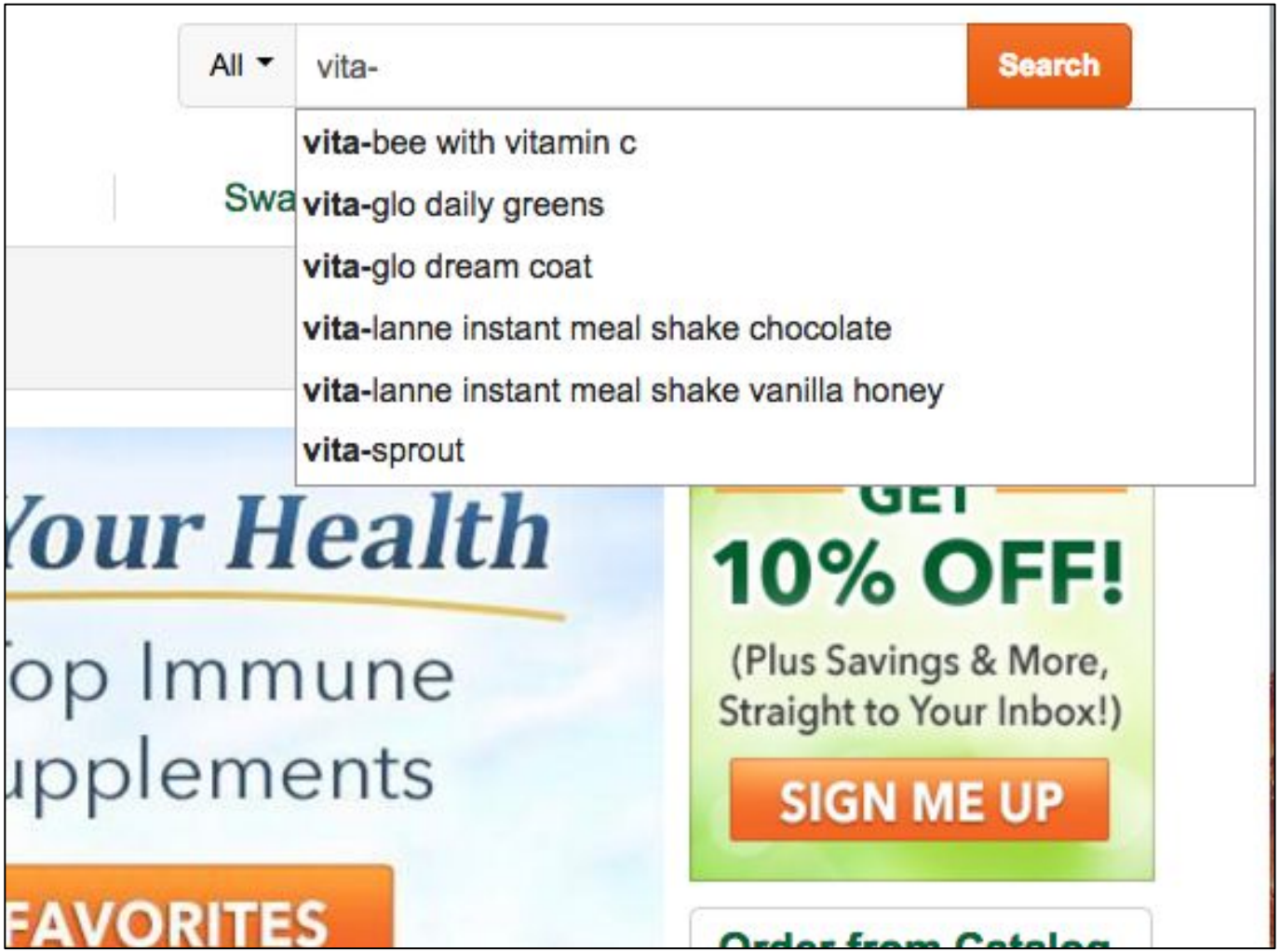
In Avinash Kaushik's must read "Kick Butt With Internal Site Search Analytics" he talks about how refinements can be an indicator of search result quality, especially when you start comparing refinements against the % of exits & time on site after a search was performed. In one line, he couldn't be clearer as to why you must pay attention to these metrics: *"They came, they search on your site, they puke at your search results, they leave [your site] from the search results page"*.

It seems that auto-complete itself is pretty standard, actually. Another survey by SLI which interviewed 160 eCommerce found that 62.5% of sites are using standard text auto-complete.

By using auto-complete, you can guide users towards the searches that provide the best results, and reduce the amount of refinements (and clicks) needed to get them to the product they want.

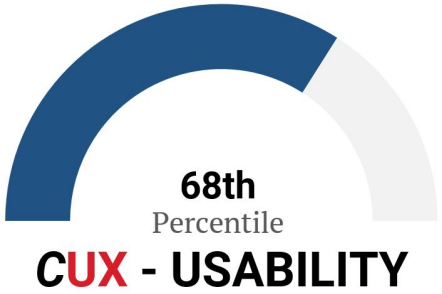
Adherence example

Guideline #86. The search bar should have autocomplete capabilities; fix spelling mistakes



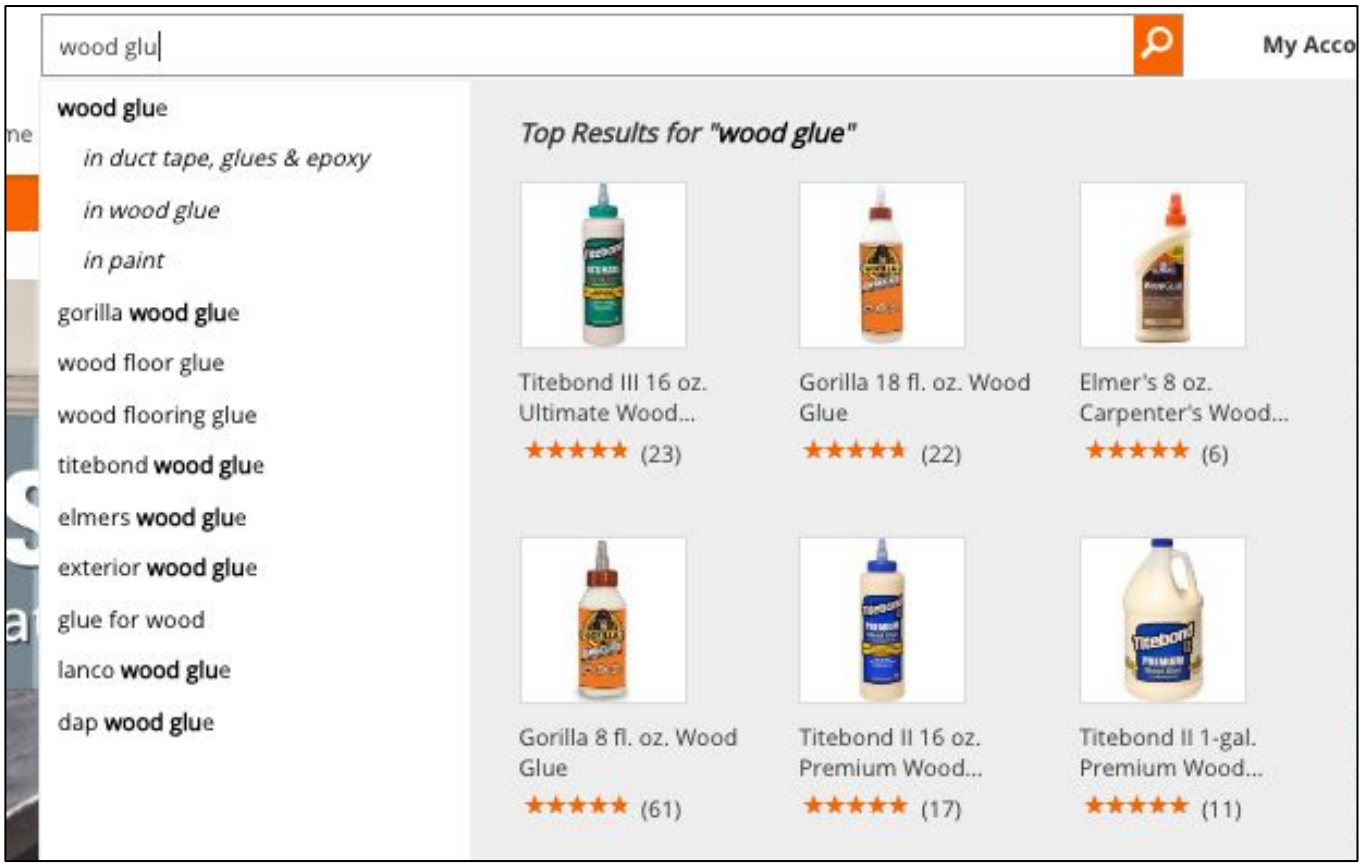
Swanson Vitamins: Ranked in the top 68th percentile for the UX dimension Usability.

User quote - When asked what they liked most about this website: *"I liked how the search bar had an autofill option with commonly searched items."*



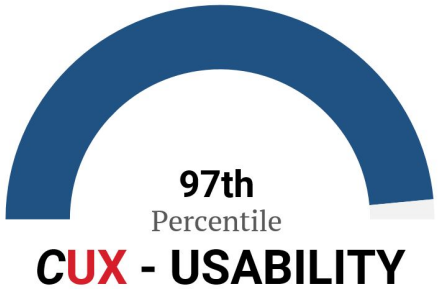
Adherence example

Guideline #86. The search bar should have autocomplete capabilities; fix spelling mistakes



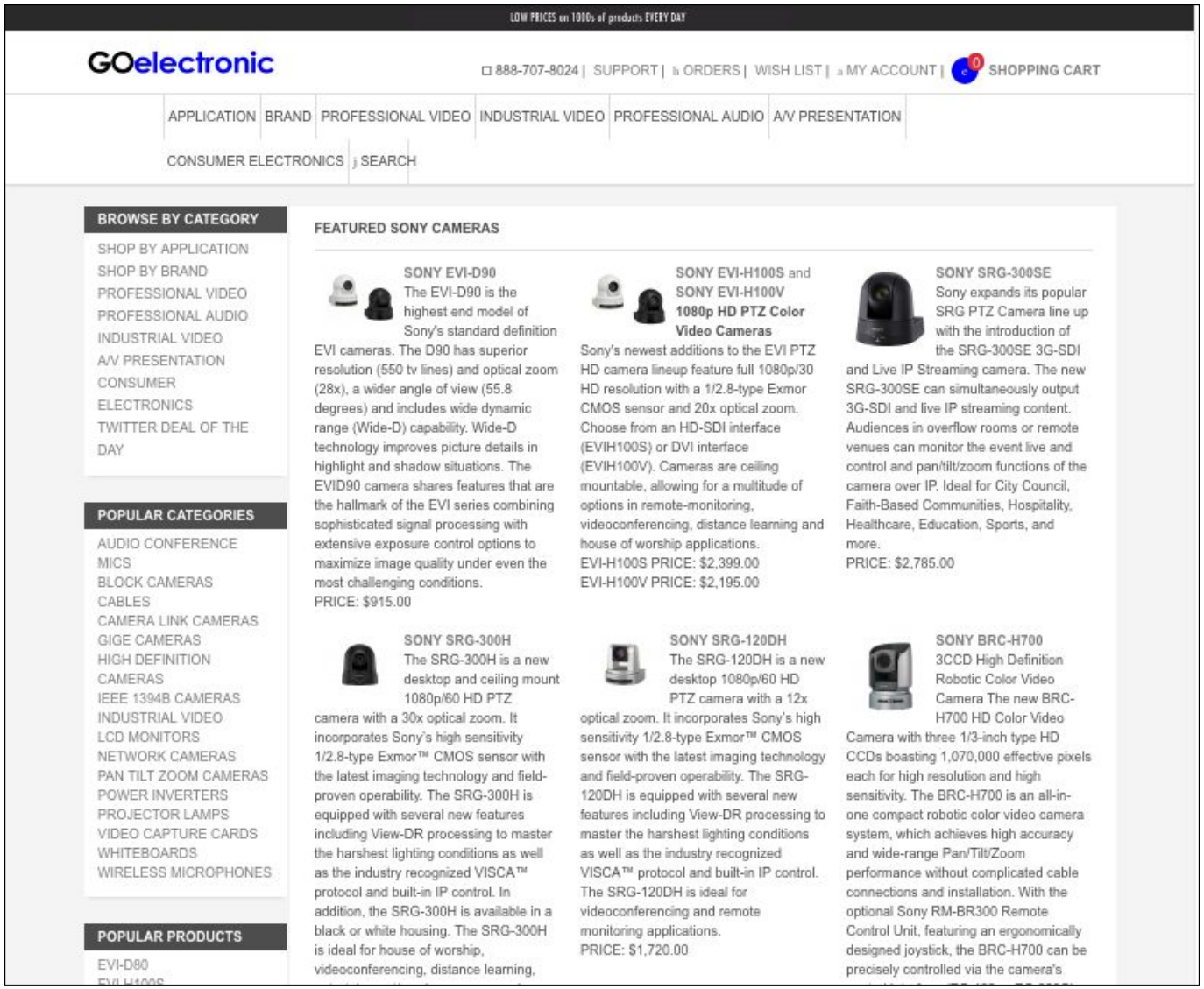
Home Depot: Ranked in the top 97th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. Home Depot wants to finish your search for you. This super functional search bar shows users products that might be better than what they were originally searching for.

User quote - *"I really liked the search feature it was really helpful to see the suggestions. That helped me immensely to complete the search for the specific items."*

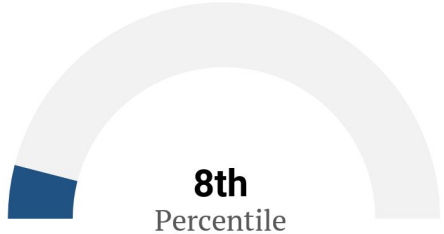


Non-adherence example

Guideline #86. The search bar should have autocomplete capabilities; fix spelling mistakes



GO Electronic: Ranked in the bottom 8th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. This site, which offers a wide variety of electronics, would especially benefit from adding autocomplete capabilities into its search bar.



CUX - USABILITY

Guideline #87. Search should optimize itself to share the most relevant information and similar/popular searches as users type in the search bar

Going beyond showing images in the search bar, what if the site search engine was able to continually learn & improve search relevancy by tracking visitor's search queries & click-throughs?

In this study, speciality toy manufacturer Kid Robot noticed visitors were 3-4x more likely to click on a search recommendation when the search result pages started learning from queries, refinements & clicks.

This improvement in the overall search experience has resulted in a jump from 1% – 4% usage in visitors using site search, with 87% of searchers finding what they wanted within the first 5 results. Within a few months of deployment, they experienced a 4x lift in conversions & online orders increased by 13%.

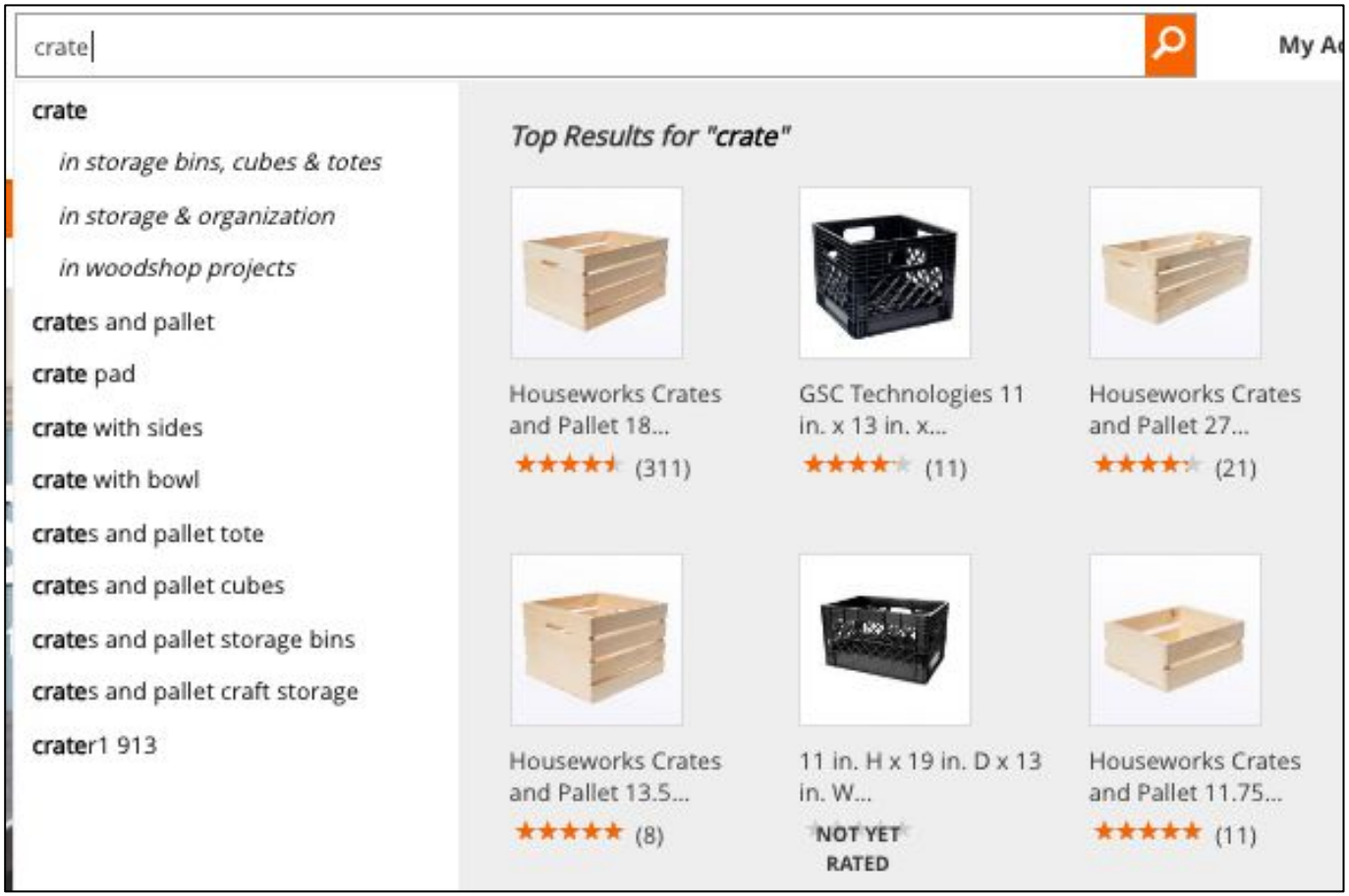
Site Component - Search
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

User quote - *"I really liked the search feature it was really helpful to see the suggestions. That helped me immensely to complete the search for the specific items."*

User quote - When asked what one thing they would change about the website, *"I would eliminate false positives from the search results."*

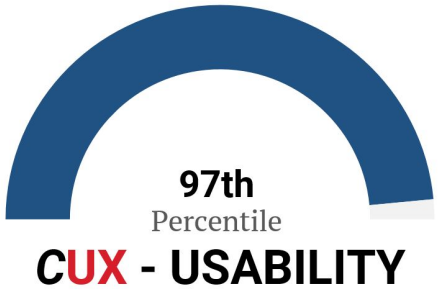
Adherence example

Guideline #87. Search should optimize itself to share the most relevant information and similar/popular searches as users type in the search bar



Home Depot: Ranked in the top 97th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. There are so many things being done right in this search bar.
Auto-complete, sharing all the categories this product is under, showing popular, relevant product thumbnails, including review ratings and numbers.

User quote - *"I really liked the search feature it was really helpful to see the suggestions. That helped me immensely to complete the search for the specific items."*



Guideline #88. Allow users the ability to press the enter key to search (instead of being required to click the "search" button only)

This is pretty straight forward. Why make a user perform a mouse function when they can simply press enter?

The muscle memory for a quick press of the enter button is there anyway, might as well take advantage of it. Enter.

Site Component - Search
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

Guideline #89. Allow for filtering/categories when using search bar to narrow down/simplify search

According to this report by SLI systems, about 25% of shoppers who conduct a search will refine their query. This is for a number of reasons including misspellings, inaccurate search results, and regional differences in product names.

In the must-read "Kick Butt With Internal Site Search Analytics", Avinash Kaushik's talks about how refinements can be an indicator of search result quality, especially when you start comparing refinements against the % of exits & time on site after a search was performed.

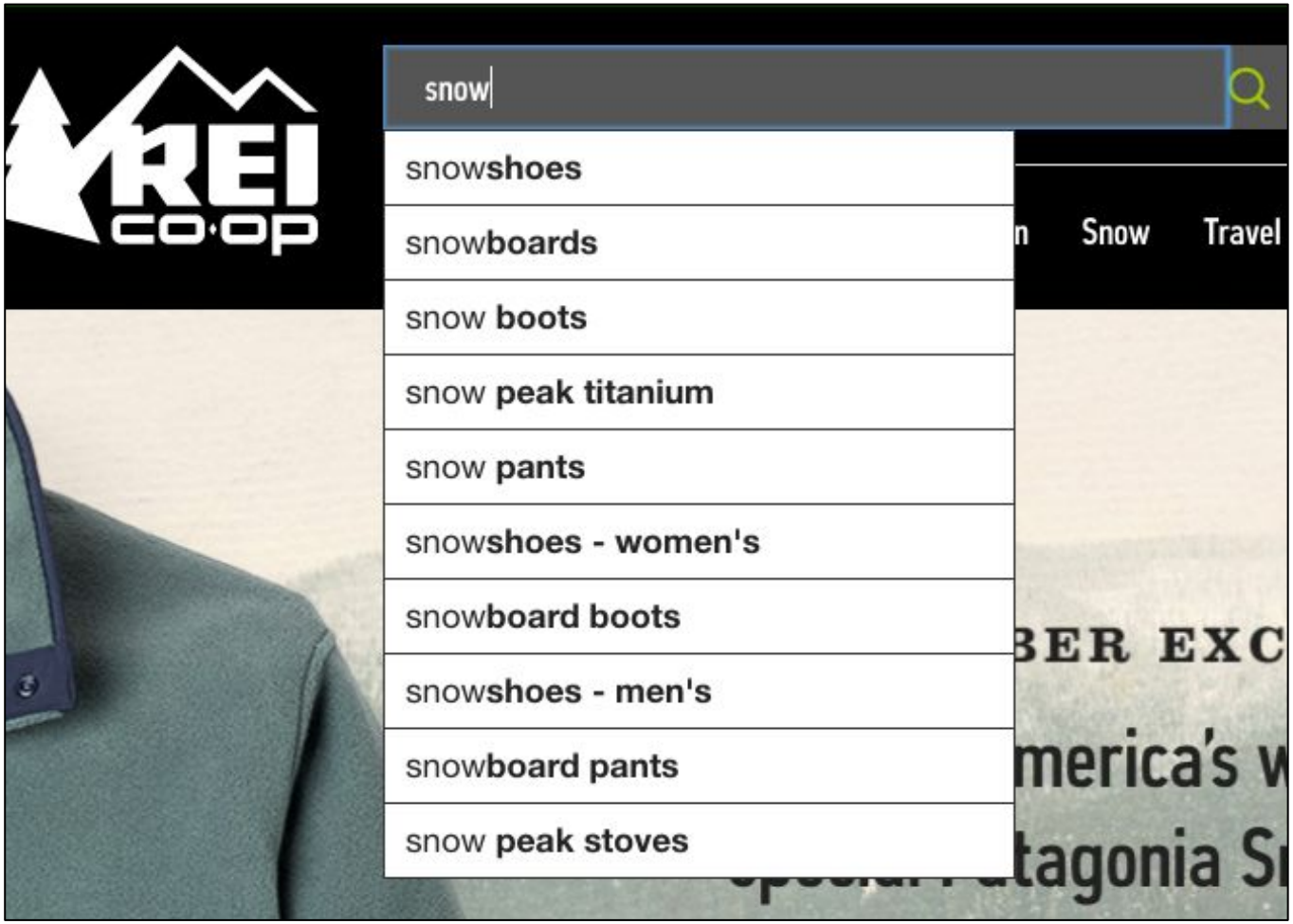
There's two ways to do this. Either by a separate filter next to the search field, or even better by inline auto-populated results that displays {search term} in {department or segment}. The latter option allows for a cleaner interface, but either option avoids an irrelevant search result and makes sure they're more likely to find what they're looking for.

Site Component - Search
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

User quote - *"I would enable product search narrowing by multiple categories at once, a la ebay, so that the process would be a bit faster."*
User quote - *"I would make the menu bar simple with the categories Women, Men, Kids, Girls, Beauty, etc. Then when the cursor is over those headings then sub headings would pop up such as tops, bottoms, dresses, swimwear, etc."*
User quote - *"I wish there had been a helpful search filter!"*
User quote - *"I would add my suggestion for the filter search, making it so that you can choose your search options first, then apply them".*
User quote - *"Make it able to use multiple filters for searching for items we are interested in."*

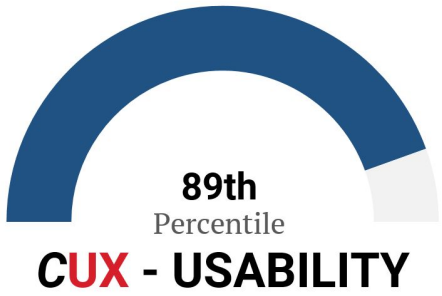
Adherence example

Guideline #89. Allow for filtering/categories when using search bar to narrow down/simplify search



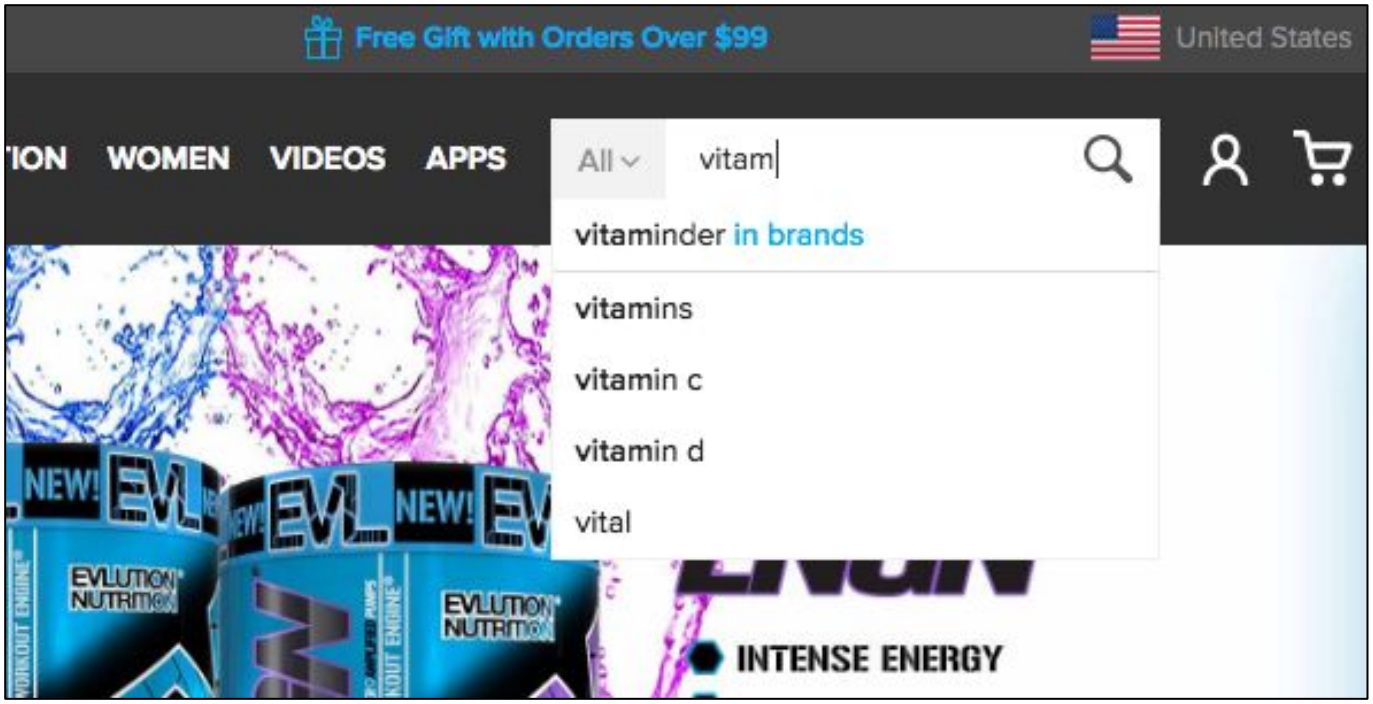
REI: Ranked in the top 89th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. Users can see that REI sells sandals in the women, men, and kids categories, as well as some of the popular brands they have.

User quote - *"I absolutely loved the variety of filters and the fact that it was so easy to navigate to a product using a variety of ways (e.g., search engine, camping & hiking tab, men's tab). In addition, I was impressed with the clarity of the "compare products" page. It was very easy for me to scroll through the specifications to determine where the differences were at."*



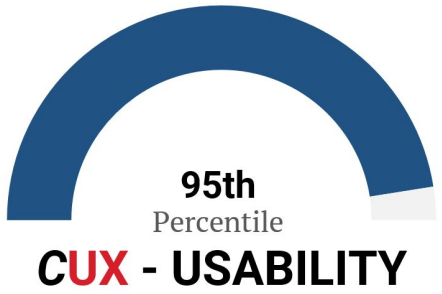
Adherence example

Guideline #89. Allow for filtering/categories when using search bar to narrow down/simplify search



Bodybuilding.com: Ranked in the top 95th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. The drop down menu next to the search box allows users to refine their search under one category.

User quote - *"It was easy to navigate, good filters and categories, well defined menu items".*



Guideline #90. Include product images in site search window

Site Component - Search
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

Graphics + Autocomplete = Merchandizing where there is high purchase intent.

It's because of graphics in search that Mod Cloth was able to increase orders by 5% and average order value by 3% and per value visit by 8% through tablet traffic.

Even cooler, combined with autocomplete the search suggestions start populating after typing three letters; so you can find what you want even faster.

In another case study, LED HUT was able to increase site search conversions by 200%. Even better, site searchers spent double the amount of the average visitor.

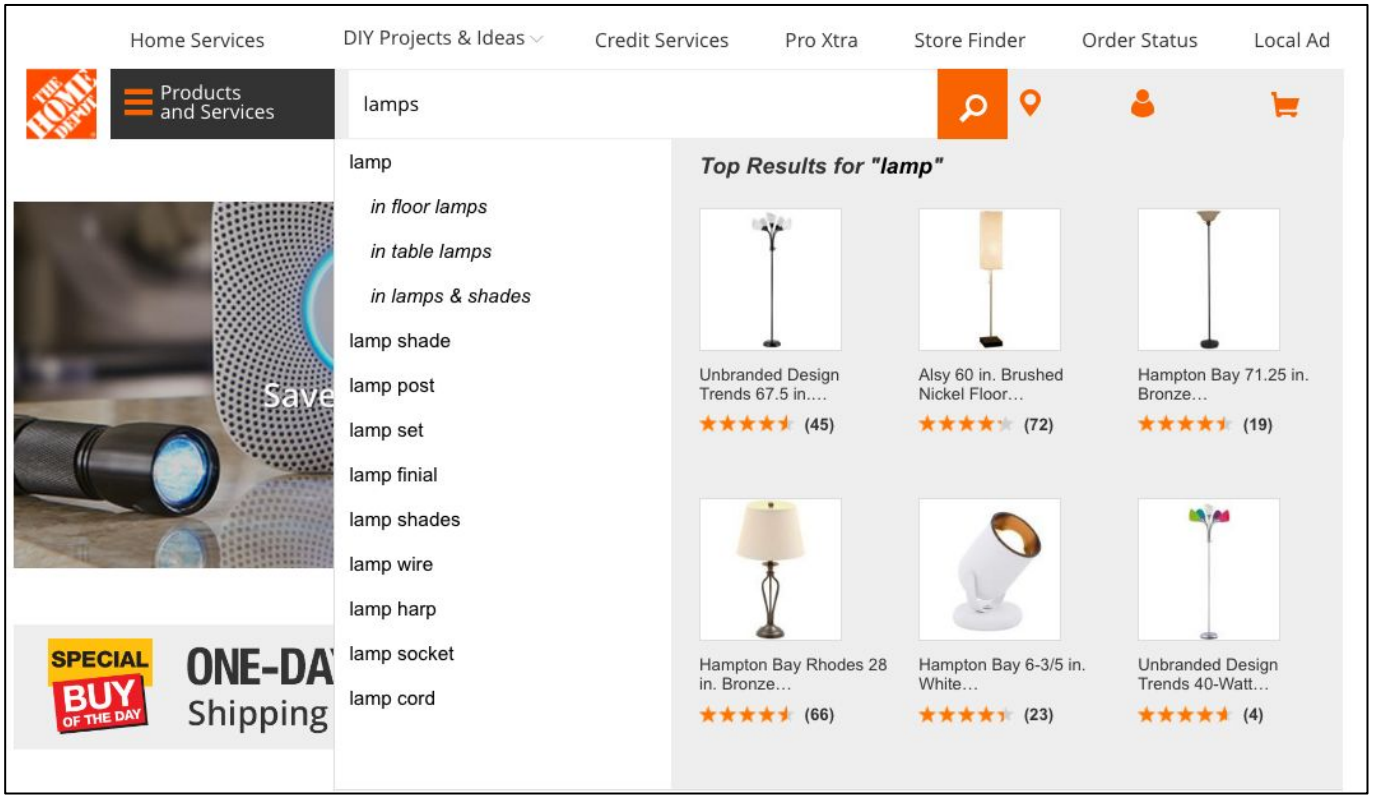
Actually *seeing* products before choosing which to click on can immensely speed up the browsing process. Instead of selecting one product to view, seeing it's nowhere near what you wanted, returning to the product list and repeating the process all over again, you start the process already knowing the product is (visually) what you want.

The good news is, simply including images in the search bar's autocomplete seems to be a pretty straight forward process if you're familiar with jQuery. Here's a tutorial if you'd like.

Now here's the disclaimer, adding images to your auto suggest is only as good as the results you recommend. Good images on crappy suggestions will not get you very far.

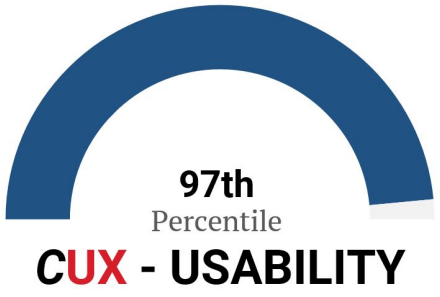
Adherence example

Guideline #90. Include product images in site search window



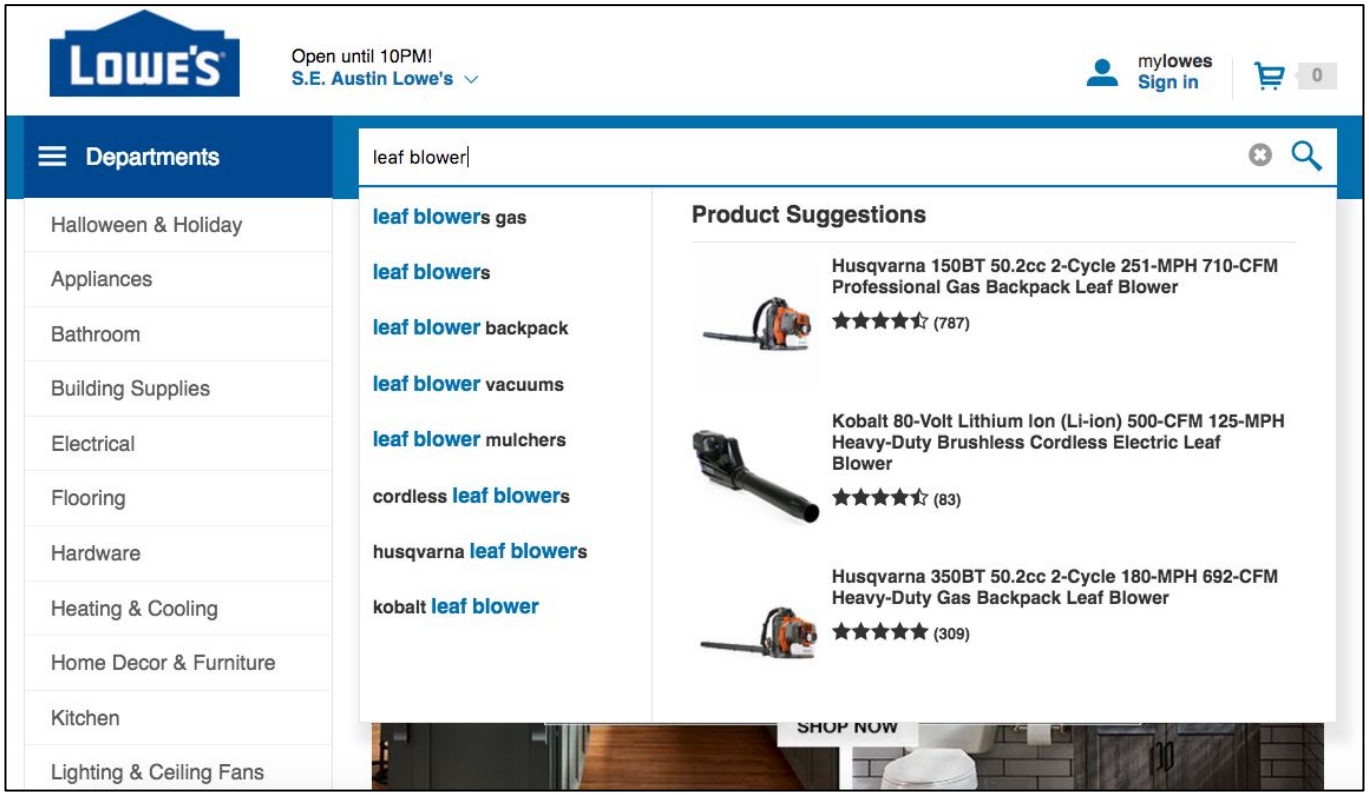
Home Depot: Ranked in the top 97th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. Users wondering whether Home Depot sells lamps immediately have an idea of what they store has to offer.

User quote - *"I really liked the search feature it was really helpful to see the suggestions. That helped me immensely to complete the search for the specific items."*



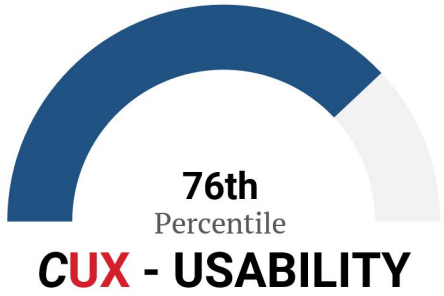
Adherence example

Guideline #90. Include product images in site search window



Lowe's: Ranked in the top 76th percentile for the UX dimension Usability.

User quote - *"I thought this site was very user friendly and easy to navigate. I was able to find what I was looking for pretty easily. I also liked how easy it was to compare items."*



Guideline #91. Search should be localized, providing results in the local terminology

In this article on DefinateEcommerce: India Edition, Flipkart's VP of products says "Localization will be a large theme in eCommerce in the next one two years." They came to this realization when they noticed that over 50% of their sales were coming from "tier-II and tier-III cities" and over half of their customers were opting to speak in Hindi, one of several spoken languages in India, and a language that has many dialects within itself.

Now, make no mistake, serving up regionalized results based on a user's location can be really hard. Because most of the heavy lifting is done on the server side, it's going to require you to work with your database programmers. If you're using a popular open source engine known as SOLR, this page on spatial search should hopefully help get you started.

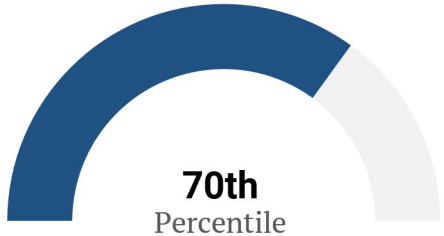
Regardless of how you handle it, the end result is about making sure the results make sense for your visitor based on where they are in the world.

Site Component - Search
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

Adherence example

Guideline #91. Search should be localized, providing results in the local terminology

H&M: Ranked in the top 70th percentile for the UX dimension Usability. The left screenshot is the search results for “Pants” for the U.S. shoppers. The right screenshot is the search results for “Pants” for U.K. shoppers. The results are tailored to the “pants” people most often buy in each region.



Usability » Site Speed

9 Guidelines

Usability > Site Speed

92. Start using a CDN (Content Delivery Network)
93. Host your static files in the cloud that uses a CDN
94. Install Google PageSpeed on your server
95. Tell your hosting provider or system admin that you want Memcached installed
96. Optimize your images
97. Use a fast web host if not your own servers
98. Minimize round-trip times (RTTs)
99. Use caching
100. Compress your website with gzip
101. Add an Expires header
102. Switch off all the plugins or extras that you don't need or use

So how fast should your site be? While Jakob Nielsen says people can handle up to 10 second load time, consider this:

- 47% of people expect a web page to load in two seconds or less.
- 57% of visitors will abandon a page that takes 3 seconds or more to load.
- At peak traffic times, more than 75% of online consumers left for a competitor's site rather than suffer delays.
- According to this scientific study tolerable waiting time for information retrieval is approximately 2 seconds. Adding feedback, like a progress bar, can push tolerable waiting time to 38 seconds (so if your site is slow, add progress bars or equivalent).
- A site that loads in 3 seconds experiences 22% fewer page views, a 50% higher bounce rate, and a 22% fewer conversions than a site that loads in 1 second. While a site that loads in 5 seconds experiences 35% fewer page views, a 105% higher bounce rate, and 38% fewer conversions.
- 8% of people cite slow loading pages as a key reason for abandoning their purchase.

Main point: Faster sites get higher conversions. Improving site speed is part of conversion optimization. It's often a low-hanging fruit that you can get done right away – improving user experience and revenue at the same time.

User quote - *"I liked that the site was really fast in response times."*

User quote - *"I liked how the site flows and was very responsive. I experienced no lag."*

User quote - *"I found the most frustrating thing to be that the page was taking a lot of time to load. Apart from that the payment was too many pages long and quite slow to load."*

Guideline #92. Start using a CDN (Content Delivery Network)

Site Component - Site Speed
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

It's worth it, especially if you have a decent amount of traffic. Your audience will thank you with extra dollars.

Check out these options:

- MaxCDN – Lots of people say good things.
- CacheFly – Another trustworthy provider.
- Cloudflare. Part CDN, part security tool. We use it on ConversionXL.
- Inscapsula – similar to Cloudflare, but has shown to offer a much better level of security / protection according to research.

Here's a great article on how to pick a CDN.

Guideline #93. Host your static files in the cloud that uses a CDN

Serve static content from a cookieless domain, backed by a CDN. Why cookieless domains? Every time a browser sends an HTTP request, it has to send all associated cookies that have been set for that domain and path along with it. Static content, such as images, javascript and CSS files, don't need to be accompanied by cookies. You can decrease latency by serving static resources from a domain that doesn't serve cookies.

Site Component - Site Speed
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

Check out these 2 options:

- Rackspace files
- Amazon Cloudfront

Guideline #94. Install Google PageSpeed on your server

Tell your web host guys to set it up, you'll love the results.

PageSpeed improves web page latency and bandwidth usage by changing the resources on that web page to implement web performance best practices. It will automatically apply web performance best practices to web pages and associated assets (CSS, JavaScript, images) without requiring that you modify your existing content or workflow. Plug'n'play.

Site Component - Site Speed
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

Guideline #95. Tell your hosting provider or system admin that you want Memcached installed

Memcached is an open source high-performance distributed memory object caching system intended for use in speeding up dynamic web applications by alleviating database load.

Consult with your system admin first about your particular setup, but in most cases Memcached will be a great help (or alternatively look at Redis).

Unlike PageSpeed, this doesn't do anything upon installing, so you need to configure your sites to use it. If you use WordPress, it plays nicely with W3 Total Cache plugin and you can set Memcached to do the caching.

Site Component - Site Speed
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

Guideline #96. Optimize your images

Images can be large, and make your website slow to load. That's why you need to reduce the file size of your photos that you use on your blog posts and other content, logo files, graphics etc. The good thing is that you can significantly reduce image size without compromising quality.

If you use WordPress, use a plugin like EWWW Image Optimizer which optimizes your images as you upload them (can also optimize them in bulk in Media Library).

Everybody else check out Kraken as a great image optimization service.

Site Component - Site Speed
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

Guideline #97. Use a fast web host if not your own servers

Not all web hosts are made equal. In fact, your web host makes a huge difference.

If you have a decent amount of traffic, you should not be on hosts like Bluehost, Hostgator, GoDaddy and other low budget web hosts like that.

- WP Engine – Web hosting made for WordPress. Blazing fast, fanatic support - stuff that dreams are made of. If you run WordPress and want a fast site, this is it.
- LiquidWeb – Shared hosting, dedicated hosting, cloud hosting, CDN. They have it all.
- SingleHop – Best dedicated server host I've come across.
- Hetzner – Best deals on dedicated servers.
- Storm on Demand – The best priced cloud hosting service out there. Runs ConversionXL too. Great support.

Site Component - Site Speed
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

User quote - When asked what one thing they would change about Newegg's website, *"Make the speed of loading the pages much faster".*

Guideline #98. Minimize round-trip times (RTTs)

Site Component - Site Speed
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

RTT refers to all the requests required when a user accesses your website. This is not a size of file issue, but a number of requests issue. Each asset that needs loading – css files, javascript files, images files etc – is requested individually. So your browser sends a request to the web server, which sends information back. The same for each file. That's why an important strategy for speeding up web page performance is to minimize the number of round trips that need to be made.

Google has a handy manual for doing it all. Here's a quick summary (have your web guys take care of it):

- Combine all your javascript files into one to minimize requests. If you're technically inclined, check out Google Closure Compiler.
- Combine images with CSS sprites. The higher the number of images used on a page, the more roundtrips there are between visitor's browser and the web server. Ideally you merge all tiny background images into one, and use CSS to show them. Your front-end developer (CSS guy) should take care of it. Some tools to create CSS sprites: Compass, SpritePad, Spriteme.
- Avoid CSS @import. Instead of @import, use a <link> tag for each stylesheet. This allows the browser to download stylesheets in parallel, which results in faster page load times.
- Minimize DNS lookups. Avoid using multiple domain names when loading a site.
- Minimize redirects. If needed, always use http redirects instead of javascript.

Guideline #99. Use caching

Many caching tools will already take care of the issues mentioned in the guideline for minimizing round-trip times (RTTs). If you use WordPress, you should really take a look at W3 Total Cache plugin.

Site Component - Site Speed
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

Guideline #100. Compress your website with gzip

Compression reduces response times by reducing the size of the HTTP response. Gzipping generally reduces the response size by about 70%. Some caching extensions / plugins do it automatically, sometimes you need to set it up manually at the web server level. Here's one of many millions of manuals on how to do it.

Site Component - Site Speed
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

Guideline #101. Add an Expires header

Browsers use cache to reduce the number and size of HTTP requests and hence making web pages load faster. A web server uses the Expires header in the HTTP response to tell the browser how long a component can be cached. For static components: implement “Never expire” policy by setting far future Expires header, and for dynamic components use an appropriate Cache-Control header to help the browser with conditional requests.

While most caching systems take care of it, you need to look into it.

Site Component - Site Speed
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

Guideline #102. Switch off all the plugins or extras that you don't need or use

We see a lot of WordPress sites and other sites that have a ton of plugins, extensions, and tools installed that are actually not used. Many of them require loading different css and javascript files – all that slows down your site. Perform a plugin audit and switch off all the plugins you don't use. You can also take a quick run through your tag manager to make sure you don't have anything firing on your site that shouldn't be.

No sense in having that extra load time for something you don't use. Don't be a plugin horder, and clean it up.

Site Component - Site Speed
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

Category Landing Page CUX Guideline Chapter

Category Landing Page Guidelines

Design

103. Consider whether your site requires a category landing page
104. Graphics and product thumbnails on your category landing page should represent the breadth of the category
105. Product images on the category landing page should lead to their corresponding product page
106. Popular filters and brands can be displayed on category landing page

Design > Category Hierarchy

107. Consider whether your categories should be a deep or shallow hierarchy
108. Users shouldn't have to search more than 4 levels into the hierarchy
109. Shallow parent categories will confuse users, avoid them

Design > Subcategories

110. Display both a left-hand vertical list of subcategories and a grid view with thumbnails
111. Offer thematic categories/subcategories (seasonal, sale, etc)
112. Aim to have 10 or less subcategories per category
113. Put subcategories under multiple categories when appropriate/necessary
114. Create an accessories subcategory for every category that has accessories

Category Naming & Copy

115. Category names should never suggest overlapping products (e.g. "lawn care" and "lawnmowers")
116. Category names should be descriptive and common ("about us" beats "company experience")

Category Landing Page » Design

4 Guidelines

Category Landing Page > Design

103. Consider whether your site requires a category landing page
104. Graphics and product thumbnails on your category landing page should represent the breadth of the category
105. Product images on the category landing page should lead to their corresponding product page
106. Popular filters and brands can be displayed on category landing page

Category landing pages provide context. They tell site visitors where they are, and what they can expect to find within a category.

Imagine browsing an ecommerce website in search of a lamp shade. Does the Housewares category include lamp shades? Are lamp shades found in the Furniture subcategory, or Accessories? The category landing page answers these types of questions.

Keep in mind, however, that not all ecommerce sites require category landing pages. Sites that sell only a few different products will fare just fine without a dedicated category page. Users will know where to find the product they're looking for when there are only a few categories.

It's the difference between a bustling city and a small town. Sometimes you need a map to orient yourself, other times you simply have to look around.

User quote - *"This process of finding the exact item based on the navigation makes me feel like I would prefer this process over other [websites]"*

User quote - *"The other item that was confusing to a new user, was the placement of the category information. I had to scroll down to find the category. I would expect it to be the first thing I see when I click on "Women"."*

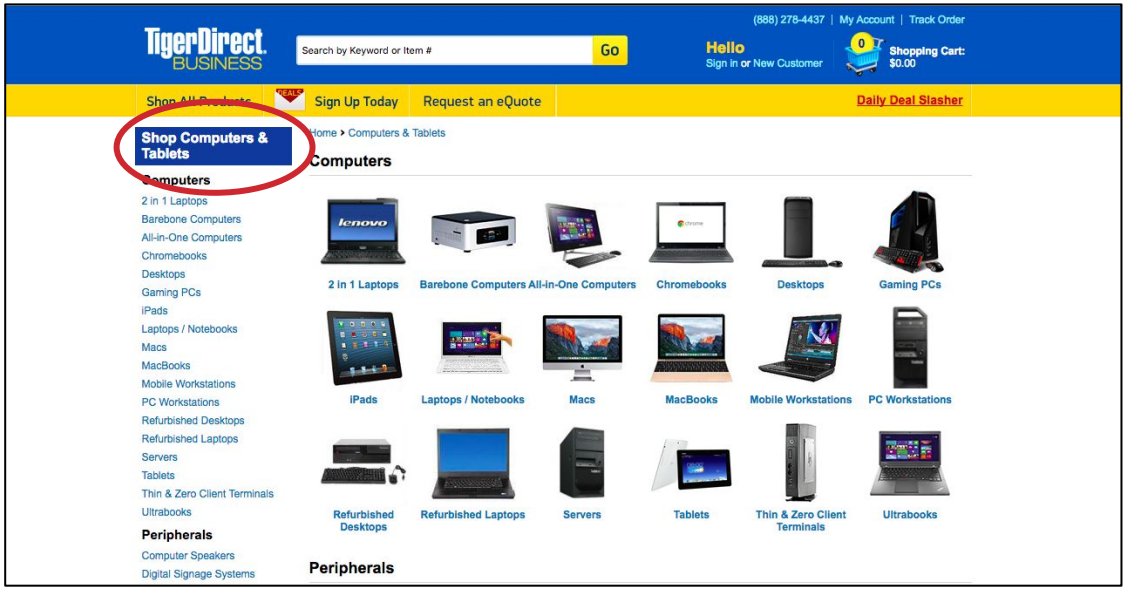
Guideline #103. Consider whether your site requires a category landing page

Before committing your time to the development and optimization of a category landing page, think about whether your site would benefit from one.

If you sell 4 different products, then the navigation bar will do the job. A devoted category page would be an unnecessary click and a waste of time for your site users. If you sell 4,000 different products, however, visitors will need direction and orientation when looking for a specific product.

There is much grey area between 4 and 4,000, however. For this reason, it's important to consider your site's specific situation.

TigerDirect sells a wide variety of electronics —thousands of different products— and so category landing pages are useful for visitors (category shown is Computers & Tablets):



Site Component - Design
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

User quote - "*I think that when I click on any category, most would expect to see a list of different products, their prices, and images pop up. I think the option to have extra information there for those who want to learn about the best choice for them is good, but most do not need that and would not want to scroll through it to find what they really need. Ultimately, organization is key for me in the website*"

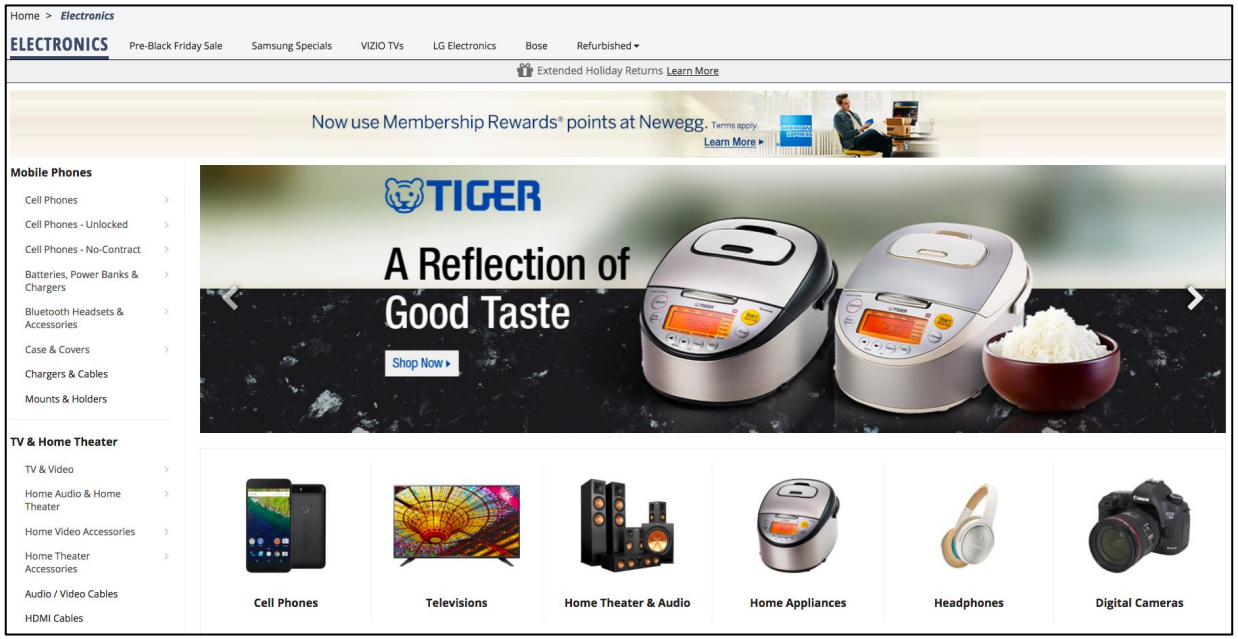
Guideline #104. Graphics and product thumbnails on your category landing page should represent the breadth of the category

Site Component - Design
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

Showing a few, similar product pictures may mislead users into thinking that the category *only* consists of these products.

It's the difference between a Sporting Goods category page displaying tennis balls and tennis racquets, versus the same category page displaying a tennis racquet, a football, and a hockey stick.

Below, Newegg successfully communicates the variety of products offered in the Electronics category with a thumbnail for each subcategory:



Guideline #105. Product images on the category landing page should lead to their corresponding product page

Site Component - Design
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

Few online shopping experiences are more frustrating than seeing a picture of the product you want to buy and *not* being able to find its product page. Save your visitors time, effort, and annoyance by guiding them to the thumbnail's product page.

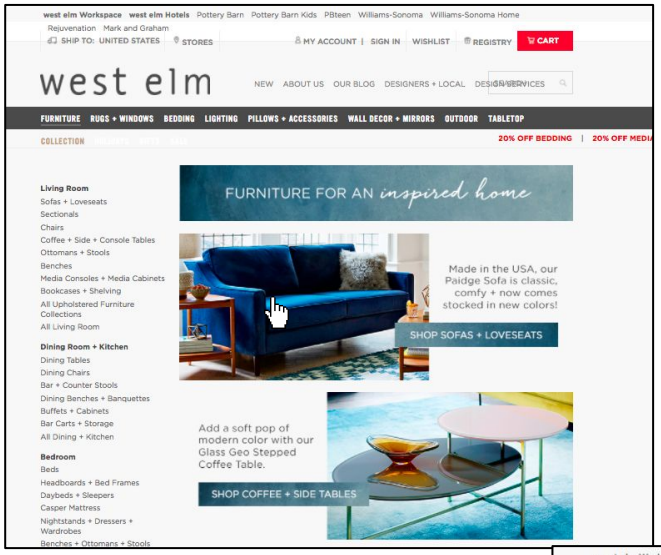
A few different approaches will successfully lead users from a product picture to its product page. You can take a direct route and link the photo to the product page URL.

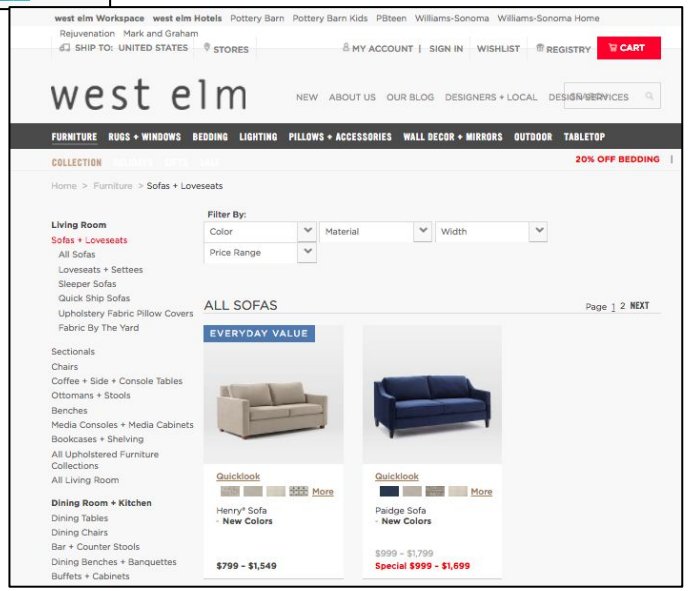
However, it is often more pragmatic (and conventional) to link a product picture to a whole list of similar products. If this is the case, place the pictured product high at the top of the list for users who clicked the photo see it.

Another way to direct users to the product page is by including the name of the product in a caption by the photo (e.g. "Paidge sofa, royal blue"). They can easily search the product name to find it.

Adherence example

Guideline #105. Product images on the category landing page should lead to their corresponding product page





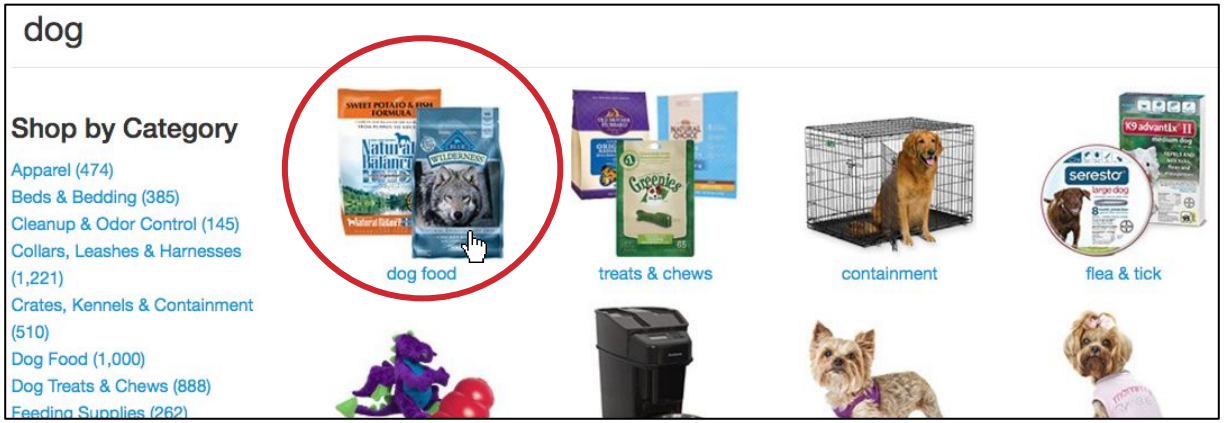
On the Furniture category landing page, this blue sofa is pictured. The caption shares that this is the “Paidge Sofa”. Clicking on the photo leads to a product list of all sofas, in which the Paidge is listed right at the top for users who fell in love at first sight.

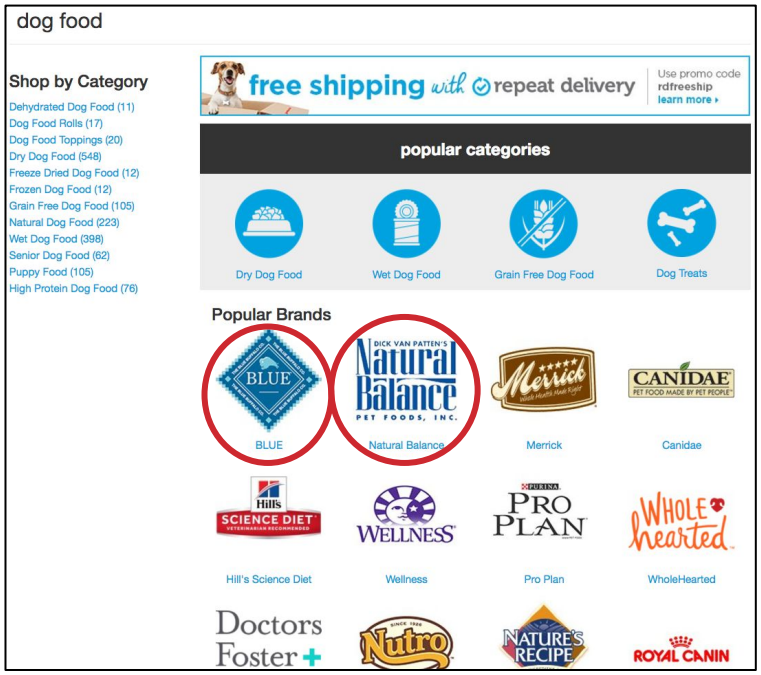
Adherence example

Guideline #105. Product images on the category landing page should lead to their corresponding product page

The Petco dog category landing page displays two product thumbnails to represent the dog food subcategory.

When clicked on, these two product thumbnails are first in the list of “Popular Brands” at the top of the page.



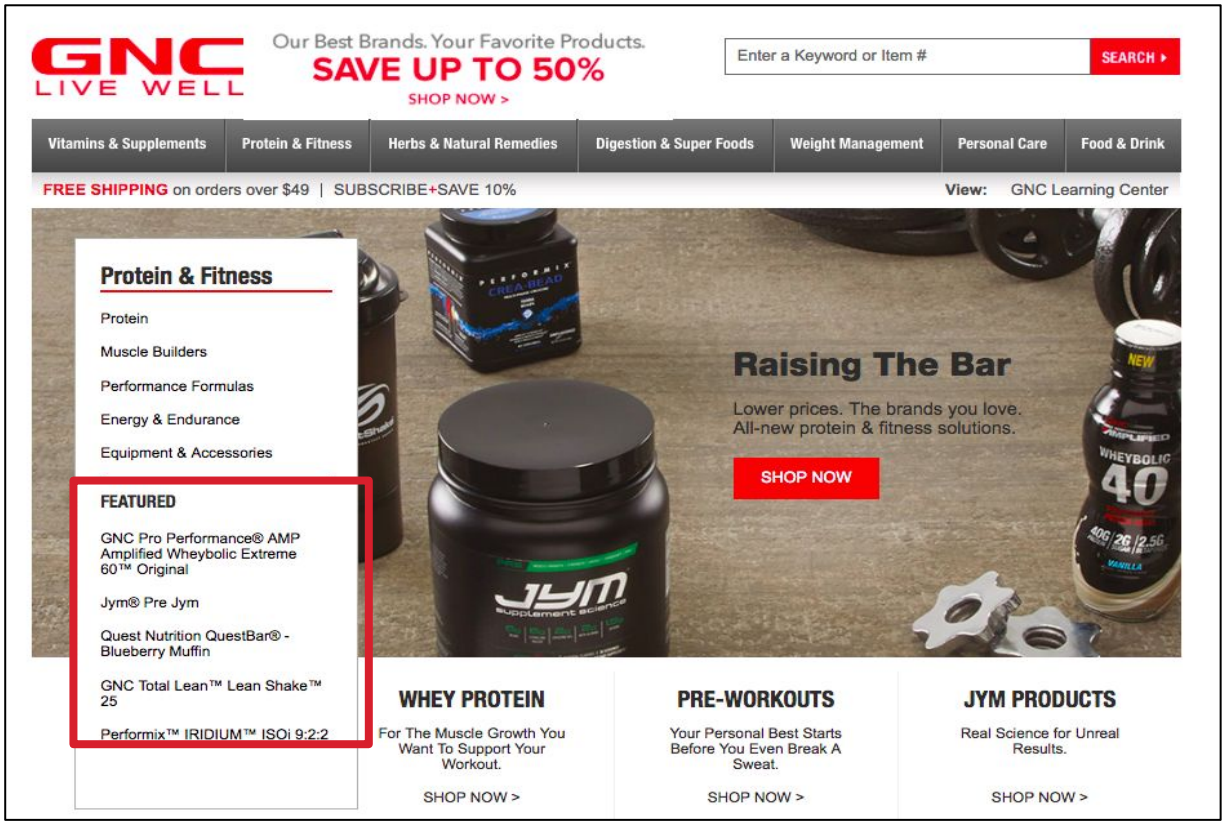


Guideline #106. Popular filters and brands can be displayed on category landing page

If a significant portion of people come to your site to shop one or two brands, make it easy for them to do so. Display the brands where they will be quickly noticed.

Site Component - Design
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

GNC's Protein & Fitness category landing page features popular brands and products:



Category Landing Page » Design » Category Hierarchy

3 Guidelines

Category Landing Page > Design > Category Hierarchy

107. Consider whether your categories should be a deep or shallow hierarchy
108. Users shouldn't have to search more than 4 levels into the hierarchy
109. Shallow parent categories will confuse users, avoid them

What kind of content should you have on your site? How should you structure the menu? What should be the first-level menu items? One or two menus? What should the menu links be called?

Category hierarchy is the organization of categories, and is a part of your website's information architecture.

Information architecture is no joke, yet the overwhelming majority of businesses have structured their site using the IMO method – "in my opinion".

While common sense is a useful tool and a lot of sites are very simple (e.g. 5 pages total), there's a better way to go about it.

It's about organizing the content and flow of a website based on research and planning. The end goal of information architects is to come up with a structure/design that balances users' desires with the business' needs.

The next few guidelines provide information on the successful creation and organization of product categories.

User quote - "*I like the format and the ease of finding general categories. Things like furniture or home decor were easy enough to find before I started working through the subcategories.*"

Guideline #107. Consider whether your categories should be a deep or shallow hierarchy

Both approaches display the same amount of information, just in different ways.

A shallow category hierarchy has only a few levels of categories, sometimes just main categories and subcategories (e.g. Candles > Soy Candles).

A deep hierarchy has more category levels, for example main categories > categories > subcategories > sub-subcategories > further subcategories (e.g. Departments > Home > Decor > Candles> Soy Candles).

If you sell a wide variety of products (think Amazon), your site requires a deep hierarchy so people can accurately navigate to every product. Can you imagine if Amazon only had main categories and subcategories? No one would use the navigation tool anymore.

It takes a bit longer to find a product in deep hierarchies, as they involve more clicks and page loads.

Shallow (flat) categories enhance browsing behaviors, as users naturally see more subcategories/products while navigating.

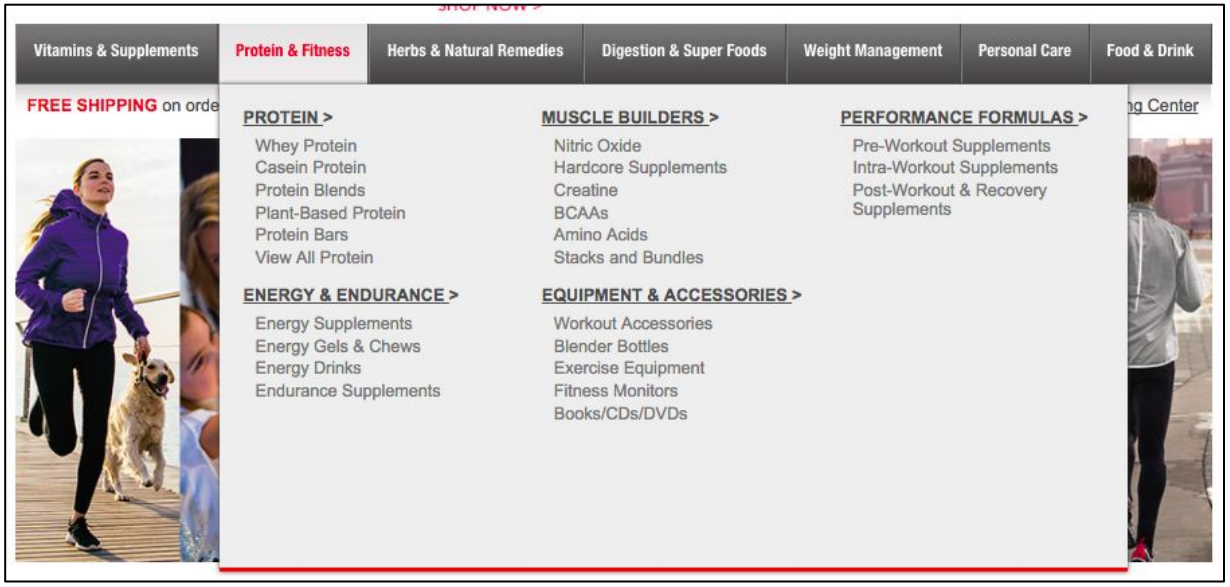
Site Component - Design > Category Hierarchy
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

User quote - When asked what could be improved: *"I found it a little difficult to navigate to the section for table lamps under $100. I had to go through a lot of different categories and subcategories and a couple different specifications in order to get there. It seemed to take a lot of steps."*

User quote - When asked what could be improved: "*More streamlined with less categories per page"*

Adherence example

Guideline #107. Consider whether your categories should be a deep or shallow hierarchy

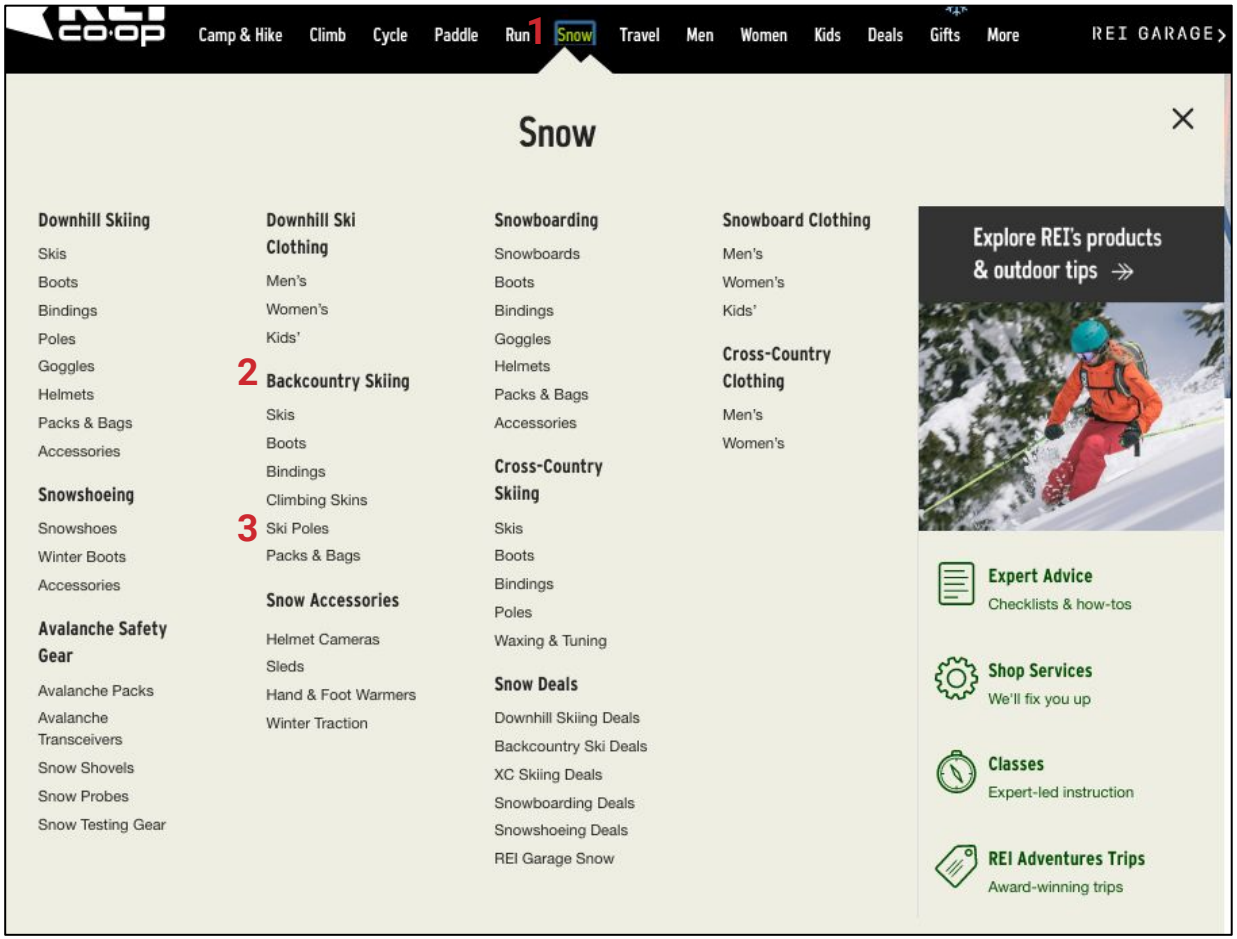


GNC has 3 category levels: Main categories (protein & fitness), categories (Protein), and subcategories (Whey Protein)

Adherence example

Guideline #107. Consider whether your categories should be a deep or shallow hierarchy

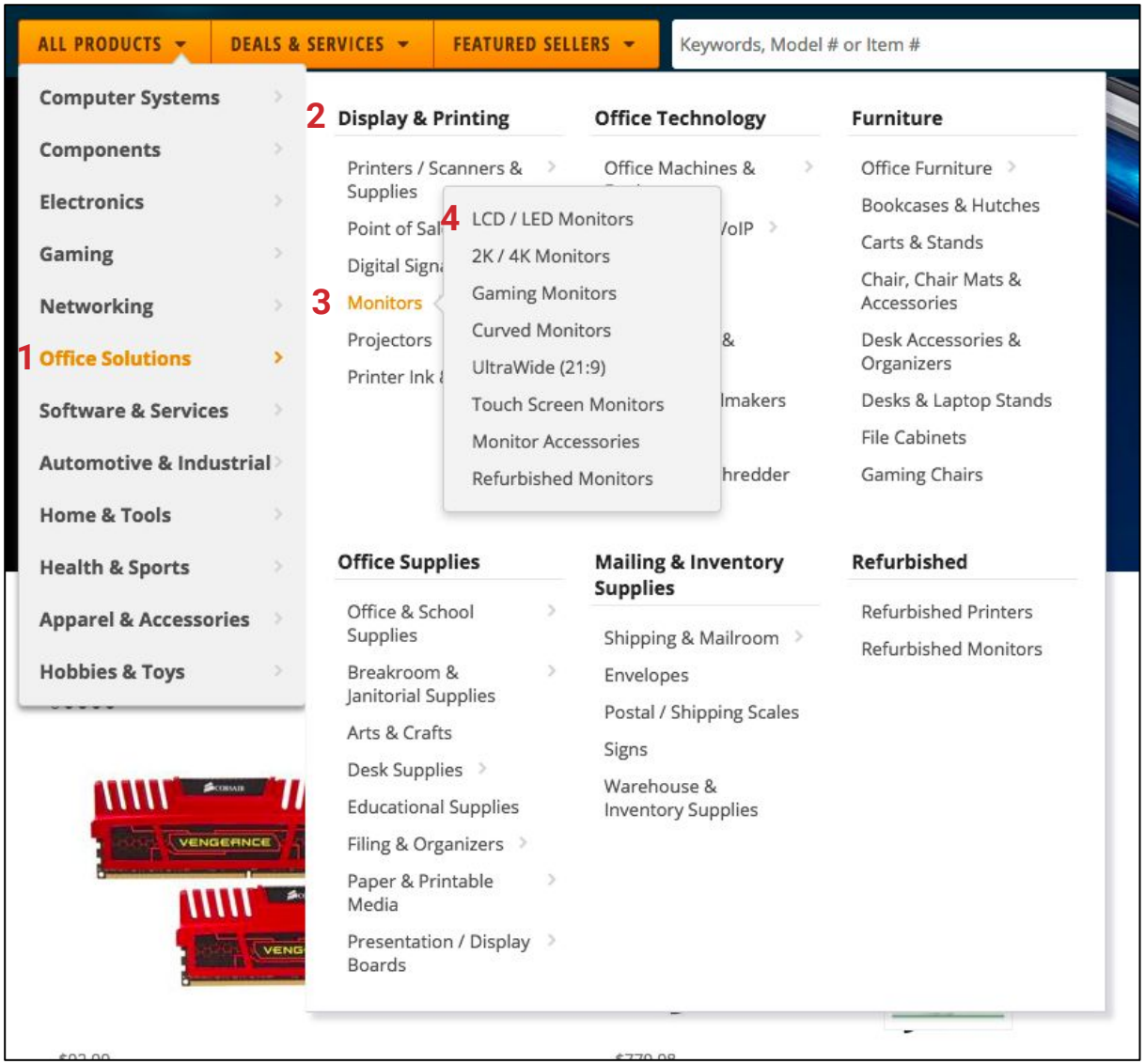
REI also has 3 category levels



Adherence example

Guideline #107. Consider whether your categories should be a deep or shallow hierarchy

Newegg has 4 category levels



Guideline #108. Users shouldn't have to search more than 4 levels into the hierarchy

Apply this general rule of thumb to the information architecture of your product categories.

If users have to go deeper than four levels when navigating to a product, you probably don't have the best product organization.

Card sorting and reverse card sorting are efficient ways to build and validate a highly usable category hierarchy.

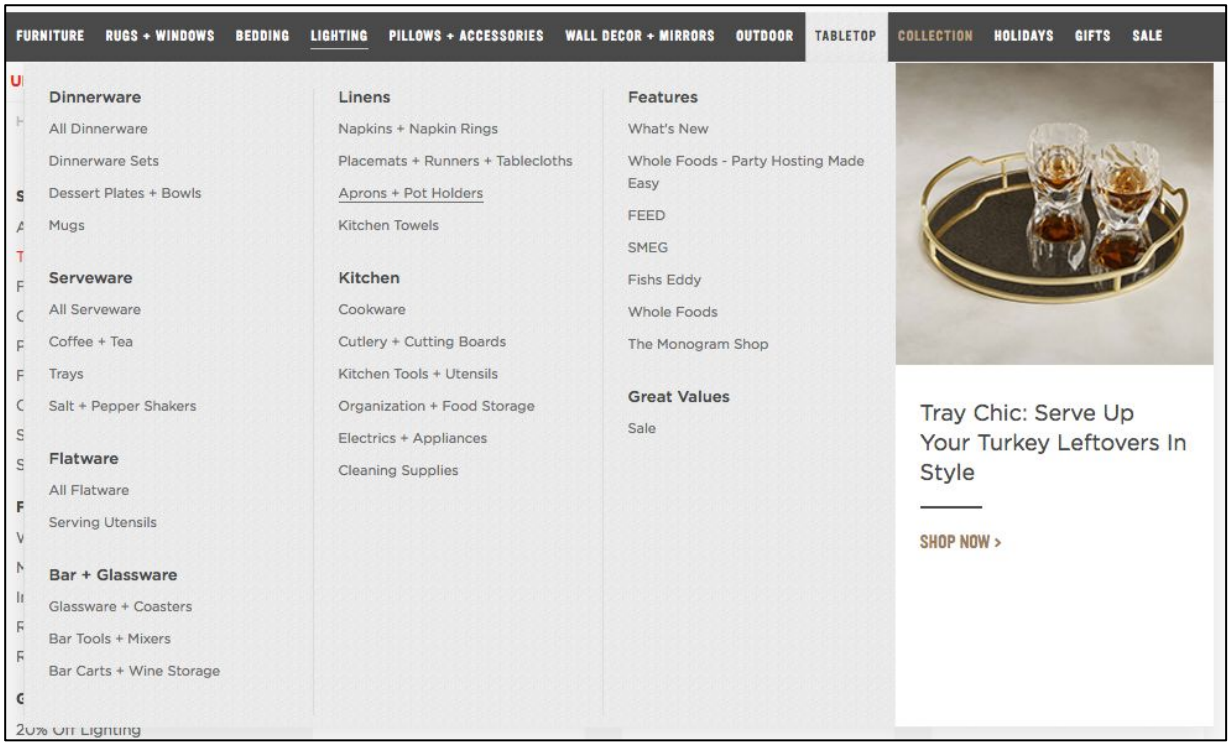
You don't have to conduct card sorting in person. Doing it online is cheaper, doesn't require logistics planning and can be done without geographical limitations. You can't be "there" and moderate it (although you could be having a Skype chat at the same time), so proper pre-education of test participants is a must. Some pros and cons of online card sorting are pointed out in this article.

Site Component - Design > Category Hierarchy
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

User quote - *"The categories and subcategories are done well and it only took me one or 2 clicks to get to the results of items that I am searching for."*

Adherence example

Guideline #108. Users shouldn't have to search more than 4 levels into the hierarchy



Although West Elm sells a wide variety of products, the deepest category is only 3 levels away.

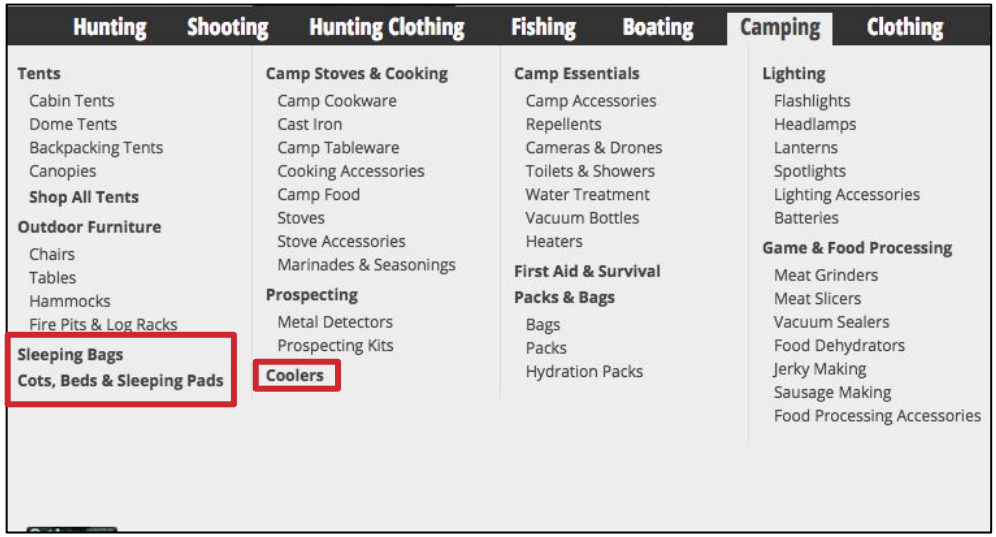
What's more, the deepest category is only one click away because of the way west elm displays categories in this dropdown menu.

Guideline #109. Shallow parent categories will confuse users, avoid them

Intsead of creating a category for throw pillows with only 3 items in it, include those 3 throw pillow in the accessories category.

Users will see a shallow category and think something is missing, or perhaps that the page isn't fully loaded. Instead, add the few products in a category to a different one.

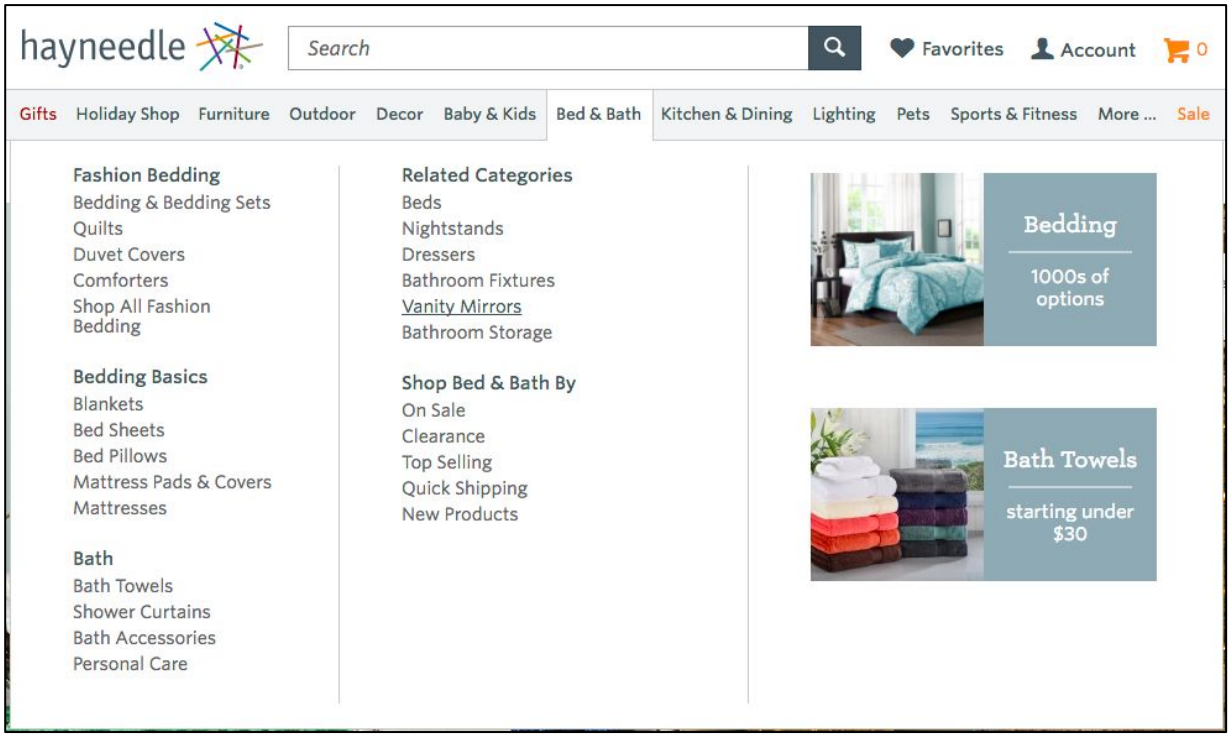
The "Coolers" category on the Bass Pro menu confusingly has no subcategories and may be better as a subcategory in the Camp Stoves & Cooking or Camp Essentials categories. Also, the Sleeping Bags and Cots, Bed & Sleeping Pads categories should be grouped together under a sleeping type of parent category:



Site Component - Design > Category Hierarchy
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

Adherence example

Guideline #109. Shallow parent categories will confuse users, avoid them



Each of Hayneedle's parent categories has a solid structure and number of subsequent categories

Category Landing Page » Design » Subcategories

5 Guidelines

Category Landing Page > Design > Subcategories

110. Display both a left-hand vertical list of subcategories and a grid view with thumbnails
111. Offer thematic categories/subcategories (seasonal, sale, etc)
112. Aim to have 10 or less subcategories per category
113. Put subcategories under multiple categories when appropriate/necessary
114. Create an accessories subcategory for every category that has accessories

The purpose of a category landing page is to visually show how a site's categories and subcategories are organized.

By providing a list and/or grid of categories and subsequent subcategories, users get an idea of where to find products.

The following guidelines provide insights on subcategory creation, design, and organization.

Guideline #110. Display both a left-hand vertical list of subcategories and a grid view with thumbnails

By displaying categories both as a list and as a grid, you're facilitating intuitive search flow for many different intentions.

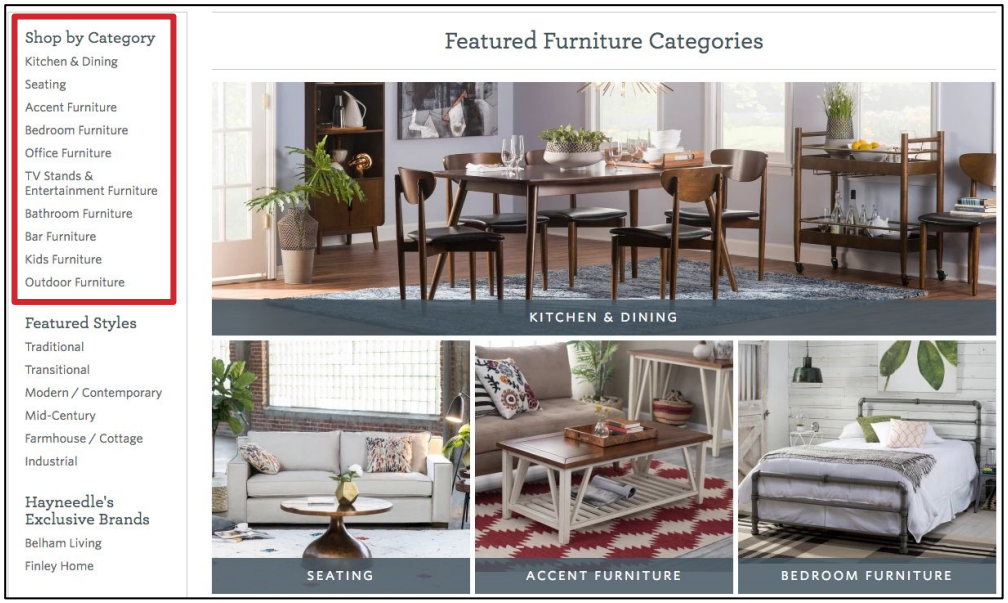
For users who simply want to look around, a grid showing categories and subcategories —complete with attractive photos— will nicely complement browsing behaviors.

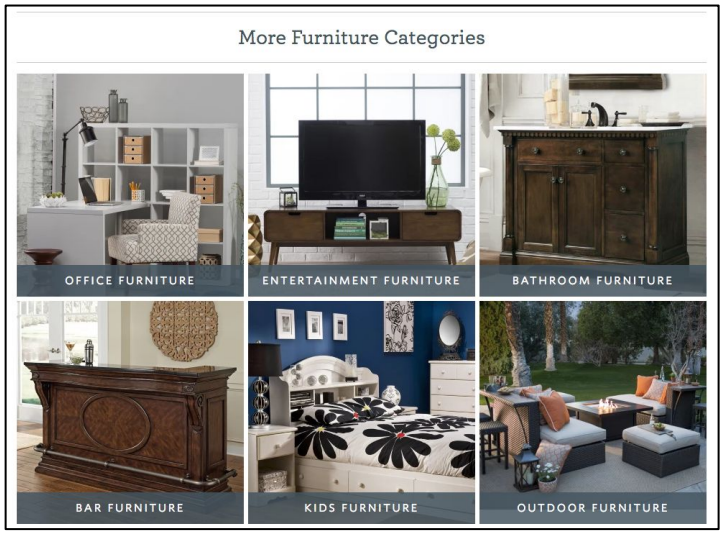
For users who came to your site for a specific reason, a vertical list is most helpful. The utility of a quick, organized list helps to quickly move this group of users along to their search goal.

Site Component - Design > Subcategories
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

Adherence example

Guideline #110. Display both a left-hand vertical list of subcategories and a grid view with thumbnails





Hayneedle displays a list of all subcategories in the Furniture category on the left-hand side of the page and displays an appealing grid of popular subcategories

The rest of the subcategories are displayed in a secondary grid further down the page, clearly titled More Furniture Categories

The product thumbnails provide an intuitive representation of what users can expect to find within each subcategory.

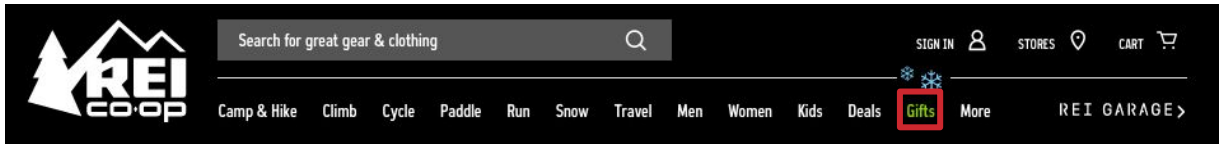
Guideline #111. Offer thematic categories/subcategories (seasonal, sale, etc)

Create a space for special categories next to the permanent categories.

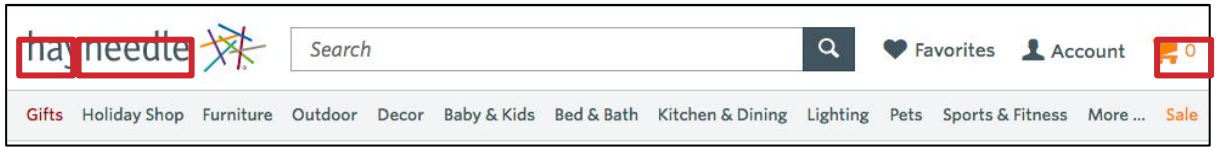
These can include sale items, holiday/seasonal categories, a mix of the two ("summer clearance"), or other groups that a significant number of users shop for on your site.

If lots of people come to your site to buy Christmas gifts, save them time and offer inspiration by curating a "Holiday Gifts" category, and displaying it front and center.

REI adds a Gifts category during the holiday season:



Hayneedle shows a Gifts, Holiday Shop, and Sale category:



Site Component - Design > Subcategories
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

User quote - *"love that a "gift" tab is available. I think this is a beautiful idea for those who are in need of a gift but aren't really sure what to get the person (e.g., co-worker). Excellent option to have!"*

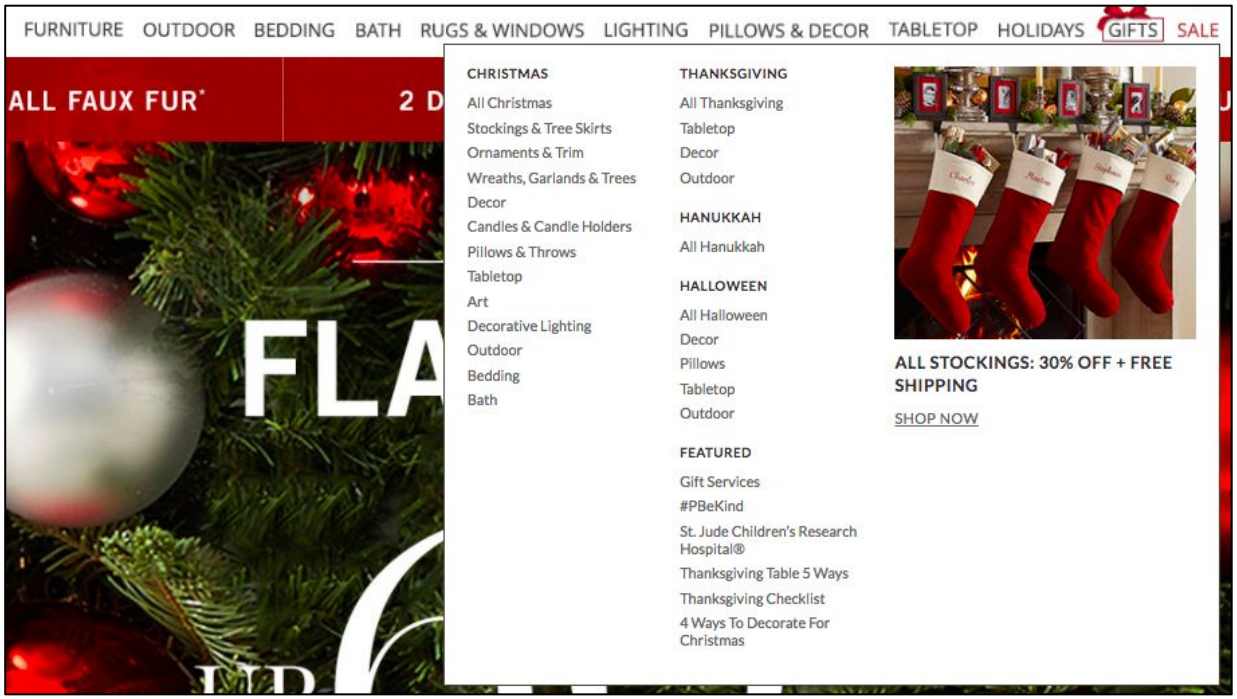
User quote - When asked what could be improved: *"Offer a gift center with ideas that fall within various price ranges."*

User quote - *"it would have been nice to see a 'Gift by occasion' section"*

User quote - *"I enjoyed that the website included multiple user guides and style guides in the product sections. Buying clothing online is difficult and gaining understanding on how the product would look on me is a major advantage over the competitors."*

Adherence example

Guideline #111. Consider listing thematic categories/subcategories (seasonal, sale, etc)



Pottery Barn has Holidays, Gifts, and Sale categories.

The Holidays category shows products for popular holidays in fall and winter seasons: Christmas, Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, and Halloween.

Guideline #112. Aim to have 10 or less subcategories per category

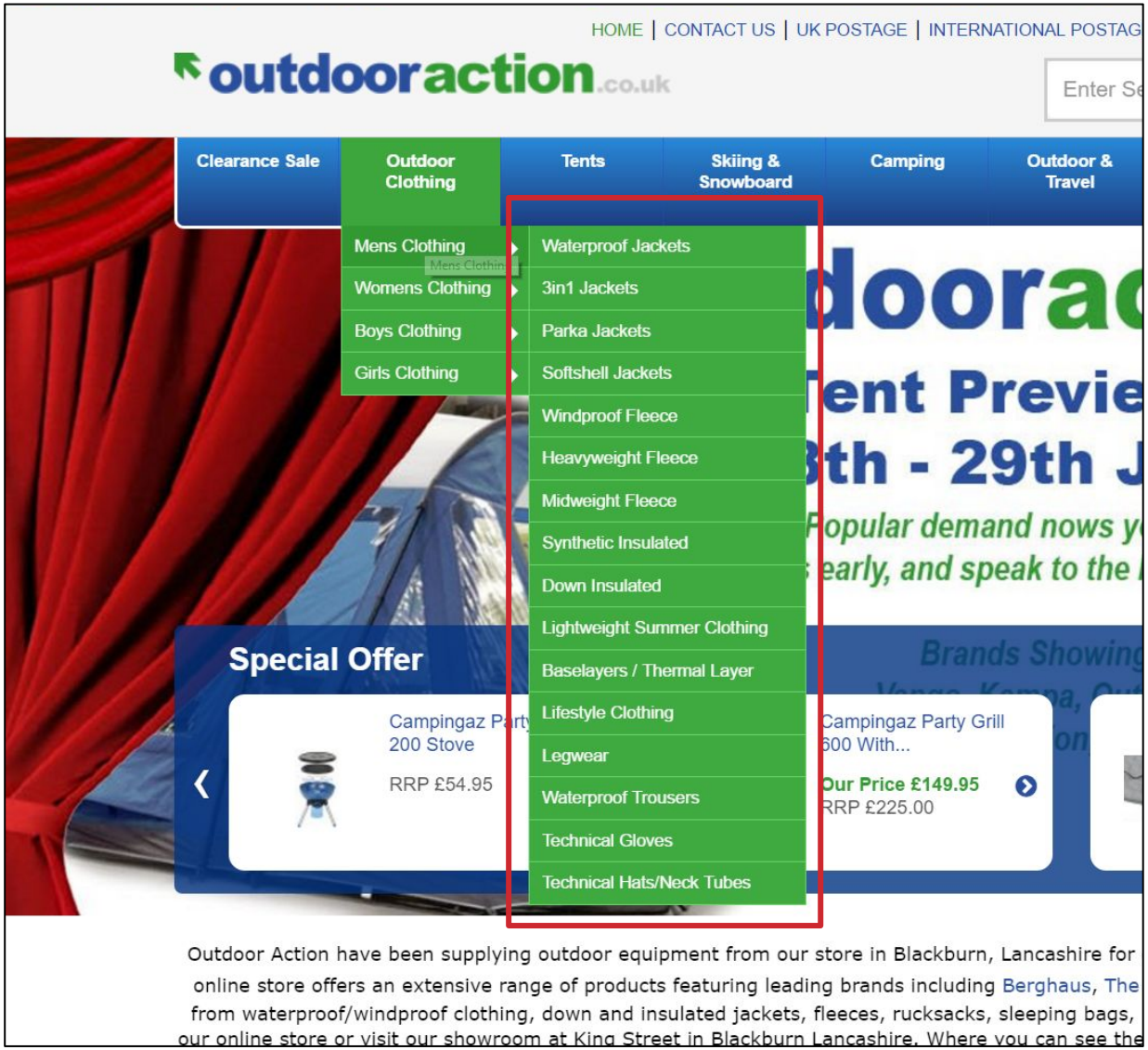
Another general rule of thumb, this guideline aims to keep your site's category organization on par. If you have 25 subcategories in one category, there's probably an issue with the grouping and/or organization of categories.

Keep in mind that this is a rule of thumb. There are exceptions. For example, Petsmart goes over the limit of 10, but maintains high usability with a clean menu and clear category titles:

Site Component - Design > Subcategories
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

Non-adherence example

Guideline #112. Aim to have 10 or less subcategories per category



The majority of subcategories here are types of jackets, and would be better grouped as sub-subcategories under a Jackets subcategory.

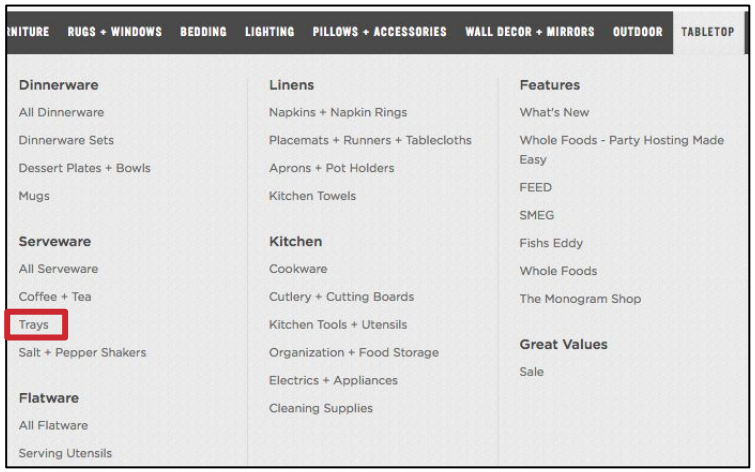
Some of the subcategories don't even state what the product is (Heavyweight Fleece, Synthetic Insulated, etc), you have to assume they're more jackets.

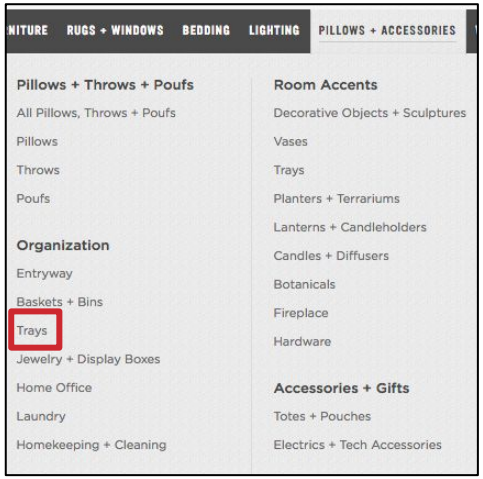
Guideline #113. Put subcategories under multiple categories when appropriate/necessary

Category organization is not black and white. There are going to be subcategories that easily belong under multiple categories. Don't fight this fact, instead work with it.

Site Component - Design > Subcategories
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

West Elm shows Trays under both the Accessories category and the Tabletop category:





User quote - "*The thing that frustrated me was the fact that I couldn't find table lamp under furniture column.*"

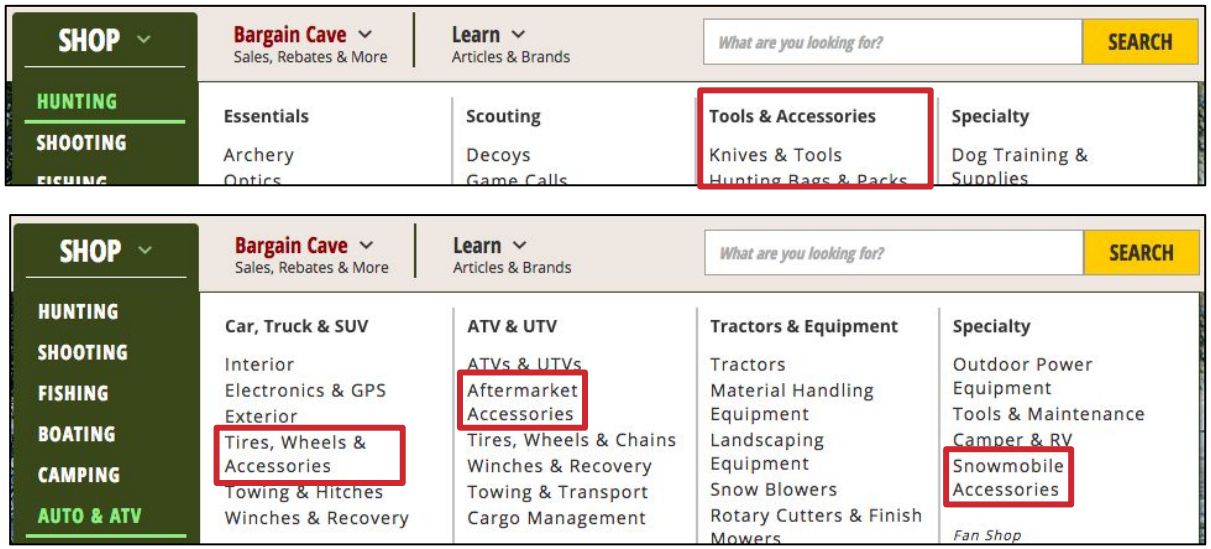
User quote - "*I was a bit confused while searching for shirts because t-shirts and other shirts were not included in the shirts/blouses category.*"

Guideline #114. Create an accessories subcategory for every category that has accessories

Instead of cluttering a product category with accesories (“why are there keyboard covers in the laptops category?”), create an accessories subcategory.

This simple move creates less confusion and more organization.

Cabela’s has either an Accessories subcategory or sub-subcategory for every main category:



Site Component - Design > Subcategories
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

User quote - “*When I was searching for a picture frame gift, there were several items appearing in the picture frame category that were not actual picture frames, such as wiring and hanging kits. While these are relevant, they don't represent what I was looking for and it was a bit frustrating to have to sort through them.*”

Category Landing Page » Category Naming & Copy

2 Guidelines

Category Landing Page > Design > Subcategories

115. Category names should never suggest overlapping products (e.g. "lawn care" and "lawnmowers")
116. Category names should be descriptive and common ("about us" beats "company experience")

In order to point potential customers in the right direction, you'll need to name categories and subcategories accurately and precisely.

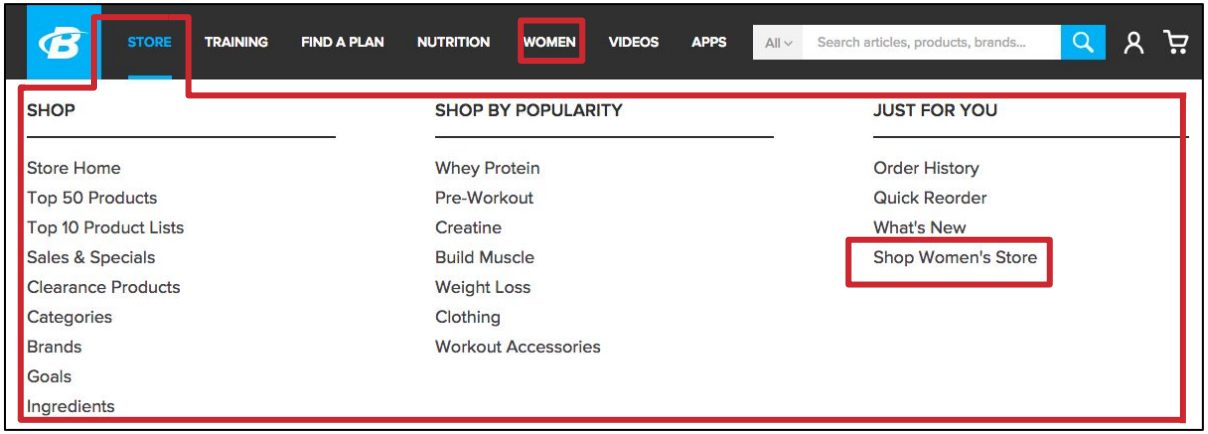
It's easy to throw a title on a group of products without much thought. Overlooking this seemingly small aspect can have big consequences, however. Category names need to accurately represent all their products.

The next few guidelines provide insights to avoid overlooking small details when it comes to naming categories and subcategories.

Guideline #115. Category names should never suggest overlapping products (e.g. "lawn care" and "lawnmowers")

For the sake of clear site structure, avoid ambiguous —and worse, overlapping— names.

BodyBuilding.com has a category completely devoted to women. However, this creates some confusion when browsing the Shop category. Are these products for men only?



Site Component - Category Naming & Copy
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

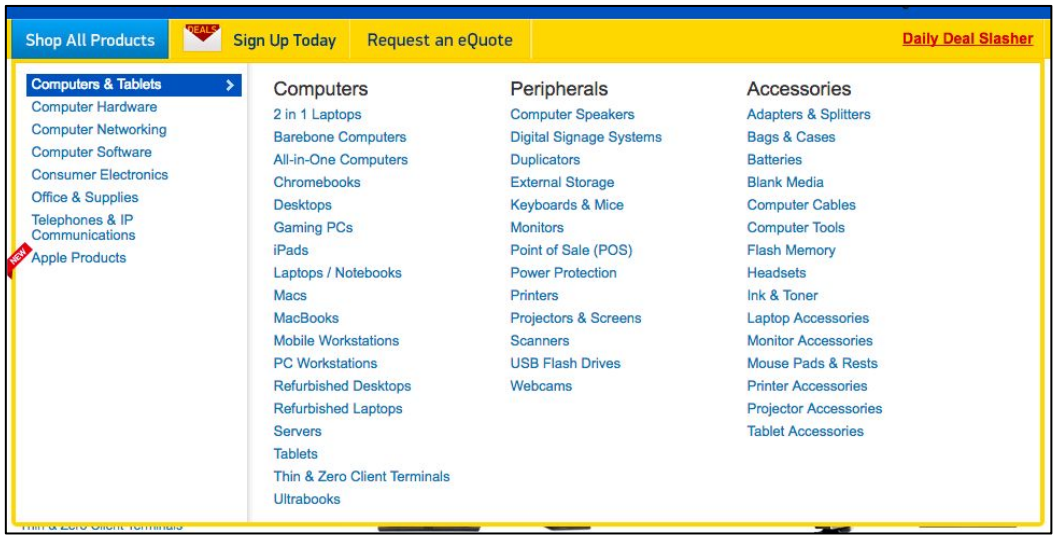
Guideline #116. Category names should be descriptive and common ("about us" beats "company experience")

When creating category/subcategory titles, keep your ultimate goal in mind: To effortlessly guide users to *their* goal.

Do your titles quickly communicate the right message? While it might seem fun, avoid "fluffy" names and go for simple and straightforward.

If you use card sorting, ask participants to create titles for product groupings (categories). Analyze all your participant data for the most common titles, use these.

For selling highly technical products, TigerDirect manages to find clear, simple names for categories and subcategories:



Site Component - Category Naming & Copy
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

User quote - *"Some things were abbreviated in ways that I would not understand. Some stuff was a bit too categorized."*

User quote - *"I also appreciated that the wording of categories was more tailored to the customer and how a customer sees it than how the business views their items."*

Product List & Search Results Page CUX Guideline Chapter

Product List & Search Results Page Guidelines

Design

117. Carefully consider how many products per row to display
118. Product list page design (grid vs list) should match/correspond with product type
119. Consider the best page design for your specific product list
120. Show total number of products in list when product list is paginated

Design > Product Image

121. Product thumbnail should reveal product in context, secondary thumbnail should reveal product on its own
122. Reveal additional product picture(s) that appear upon mouse hover, or as a gallery slider; photos can show all variations of a product, different angles/facets of a product, or hidden attributes of a product
123. Consider which product thumbnail would be more effective for the specific product at hand: a photo of the product itself, or of the product packaging
124. Product packages should be taken straight on to capture all small product details that are on the package
125. Take your product picture at an angle if you want to capture the product's physical depth

Product Information

126. Design product lists so users don't have to pogo-stick
127. Top of product list should communicate variety of products available
128. Show only the most essential product attributes in product list
129. For combined categories (e.g. "sofas and loveseats"), display both product types at top of product list
130. For products in a package, show a price per unit in product list
131. Communicate all variations of a product on the product list (e.g. "available in 6 more colors")
132. Show compatibility (e.g. camera case fits camera model X) in product list
133. Offer a product comparison tool

Trust Elements

134. Show ratings (and # of ratings/reviews) in product list
135. Products with ratings and reviews should be promoted upward
136. Avoid "zero results" page

Product List & Search Results Page Guidelines

Filters

137. Offer filtering options
138. Don't confuse sorting and filters
139. Choose highly relevant filters; depends on product at hand
140. Learn how people use your filters, adjust them accordingly
141. Promote popular filters to the top of the list
142. Filters on the product list should be high in visual hierarchy
143. Filter values should have checkboxes
144. Allow users to select more than one filter
145. Show how many products apply to each filter choice in parentheses next to the filter choice
146. Only display filter values that apply to what's available
147. Offer themed filters ("fall sweaters" filter in sweaters and jackets product list)
148. Offer a “clear all” option for filter selections
149. Filter tools should be sticky, especially for endless scrolling and "load more" product lists
150. Horizontal filter menu and vertical filter menu should have the same top alignment
151. Horizontal filtering bar at top of product list (can be additional to vertical left filtering options) works best when there are only a few filtering options
152. Collapse long filtering lists after around 10 filtering values, and clearly indicate that it's collapsed with 'see more' text
153. Each filter selection should be a separate action in browser history (many users rely on the back button)
154. Auto-refresh search results after a filter has been selected (or deselected)

Sorting

155. Follow convention: Design sorting options as dropdown box near top of page, labeled "Sort by"
156. When sorting a product list via customer ratings, take number of ratings into account
157. When sorting by price: offer sorting for item price and/or price per unit
158. Offer original date (of production, publication,etc) sorting option for products whose original date is relevant
159. Suggested scope and sorting can be helpful for large product lists

Product List & Search Results Page » Design

4 Guidelines

Product List & Search Results Page » Design

117. Carefully consider how many products per row to display
118. Product list page design (grid vs list) should match/correspond with product type
119. Consider the best page design for your specific product list
120. Show total number of products in list when product list is paginated

If we can assume that a searcher's goal is to find the product that's right for them, there are some essential principles required. The search experience should be designed to get them to the exact product they're looking for with as little hassle as possible.

One study found that 73% of visitors will abandon a site within 2 minutes if they can't find what they're looking for.

The following guidelines are dedicated to the *design* of product lists and search results pages. They illustrate when to implement one design over another and how different visual formats can influence browsing behaviors.

The difference lies in the details when it comes to product list and search results page design. Small differences can produce big changes, however.

Guideline #117. Carefully consider how many products per row to display

This decision should depend on a few factors.

First, consider how large the product picture should be in order for users to see it clearly. If there are many fine details involved, the picture will need to be larger and less products will fit on a single row.

Next, how many product details are displayed? Once again, if there are tons of specs, there will be less room for multiple products per row.

Visually-driven products (e.g. apparel or jewelry) normally show 3-4 products per row. Spec-driven products can get away with displaying only one product per row due to the large description typically included with each item.

Consider offering users the capability to adjust how many products per row are shown. They can select a product image size button (small, medium, or large). Large images will show less products per row while the small image option allows room for more products per row.

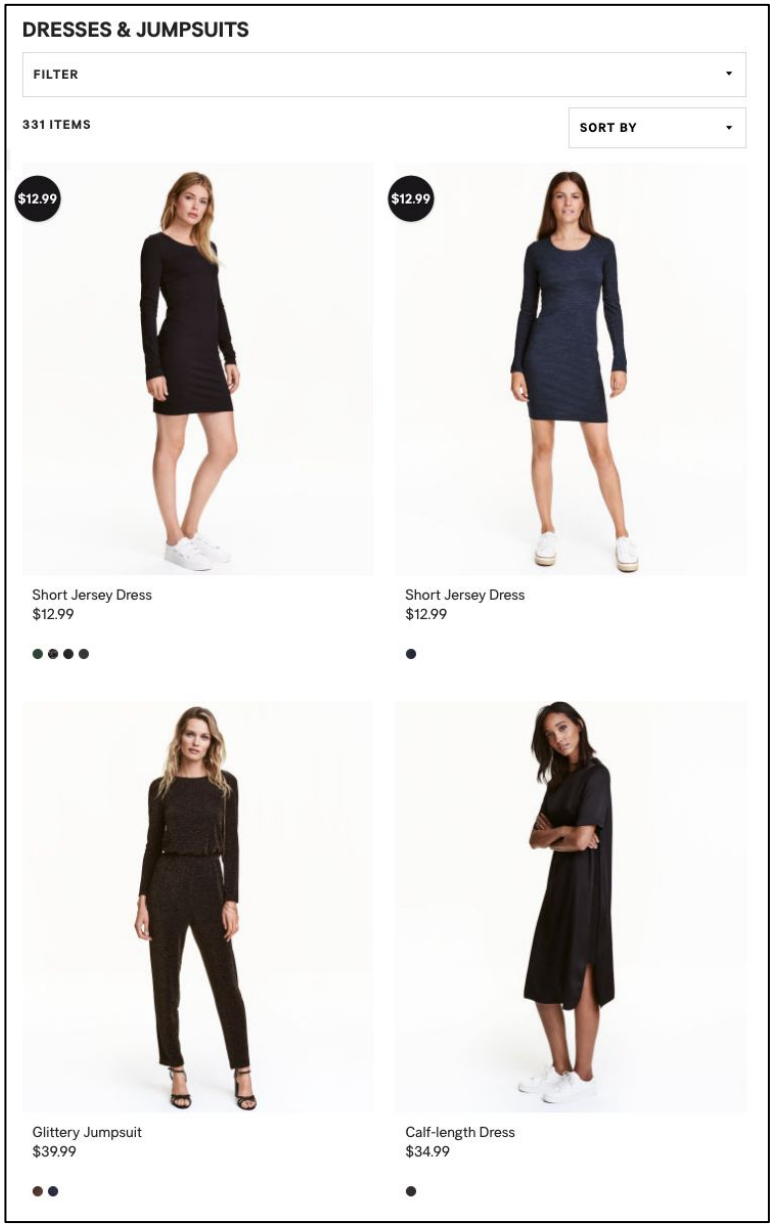
Site Component - Design
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

User quote - *"I found the product results display page to be most frustrating. I found that the images on that page were pretty small and difficult to see detail in the product at times, and the text was small."*

User quote - *"The pictures of all the items when browsing in a category are just too small to be as helpful as they should be."*

Adherence examples

Guideline #117. Carefully consider how many products per row to display



At two products per row, H&M capitalizes on large product pictures with minimal product attributes

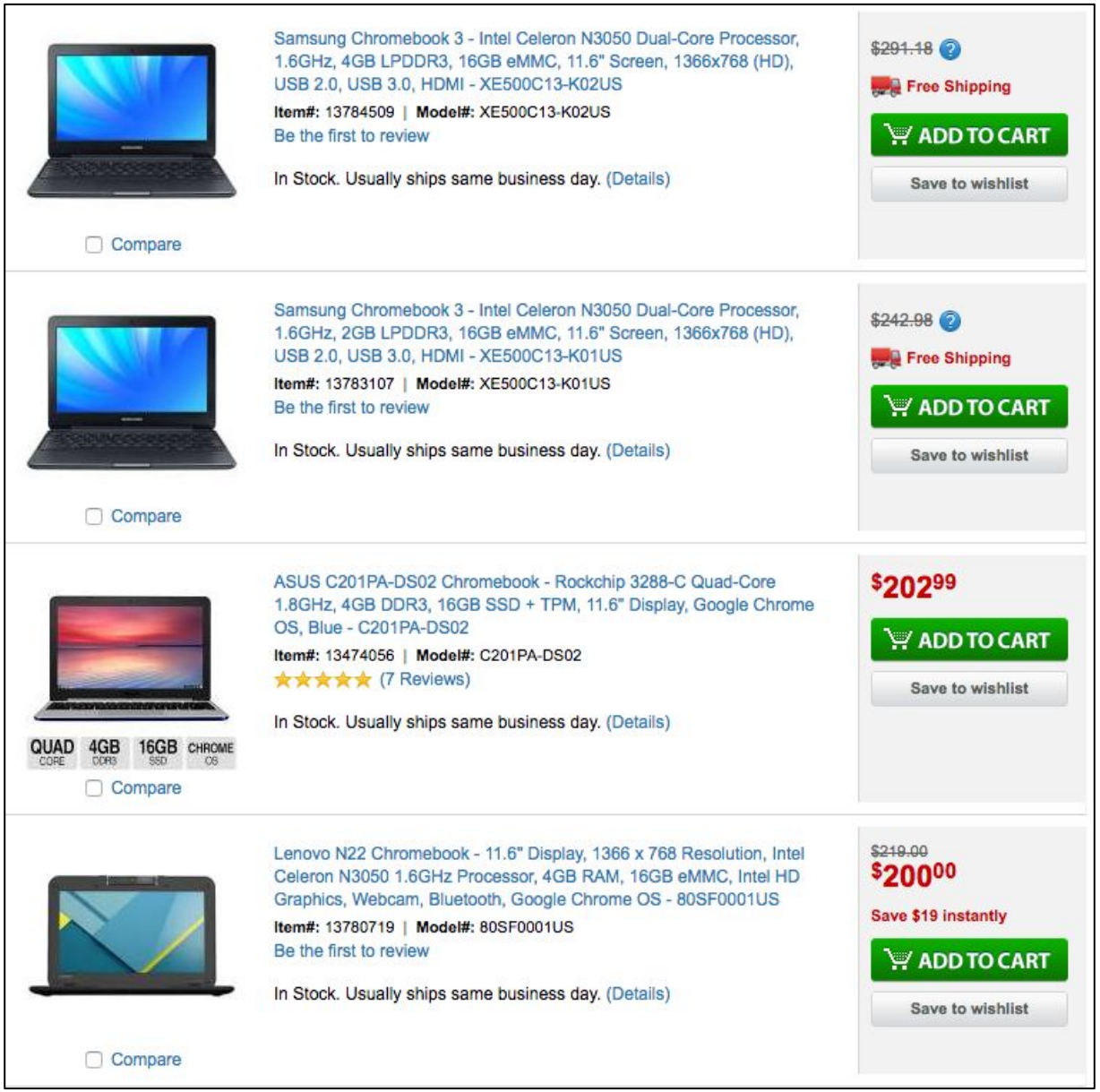
Adherence examples

Guideline #117. Carefully consider how many products per row to display

American Eagle displays 4 products per row

Adherence examples

Guideline #117. Carefully consider how many products per row to display



TigerDirect shows one product per row, displaying ample product information. This is an appropriate approach for the spec-heavy product at hand.

Guideline #118. Product list page design (grid vs list) should match/correspond with product type

The two primary approaches to product list display: Grid view and list view.

Use grid view when products are visually-driven. Products are visually driven when their appearance is a major factor that influences the purchase decision (e.g. people care about how a dress looks more than how much it weighs). Grid view allows product images to be the center of attention and facilitates efficient browsing behaviors.

Use list view for spec-driven products. These are items that are defined by their attributes (e.g. storage capacity, power, dimensions, etc). It's likely that the specs outweigh the appearance for these types of products.

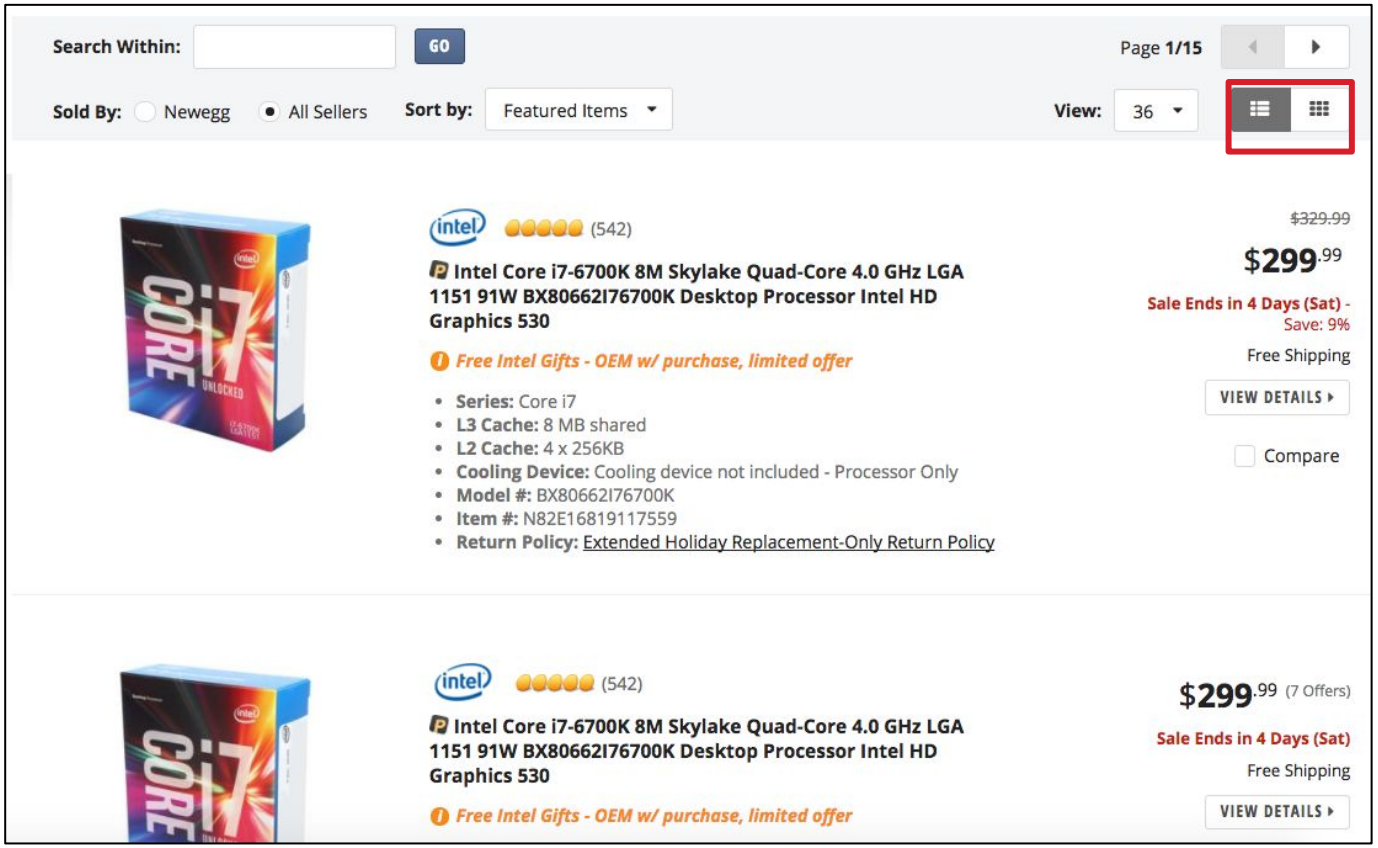
Not sure which style is best for your products? Offer users the option to switch between grid and list view.

Site Component - Design
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

User quote - *"It may also be useful to have an option to change the the view of the results, in terms of maybe a tile and list of you just to be able to more quickly scroll through the items."*

Adherence examples

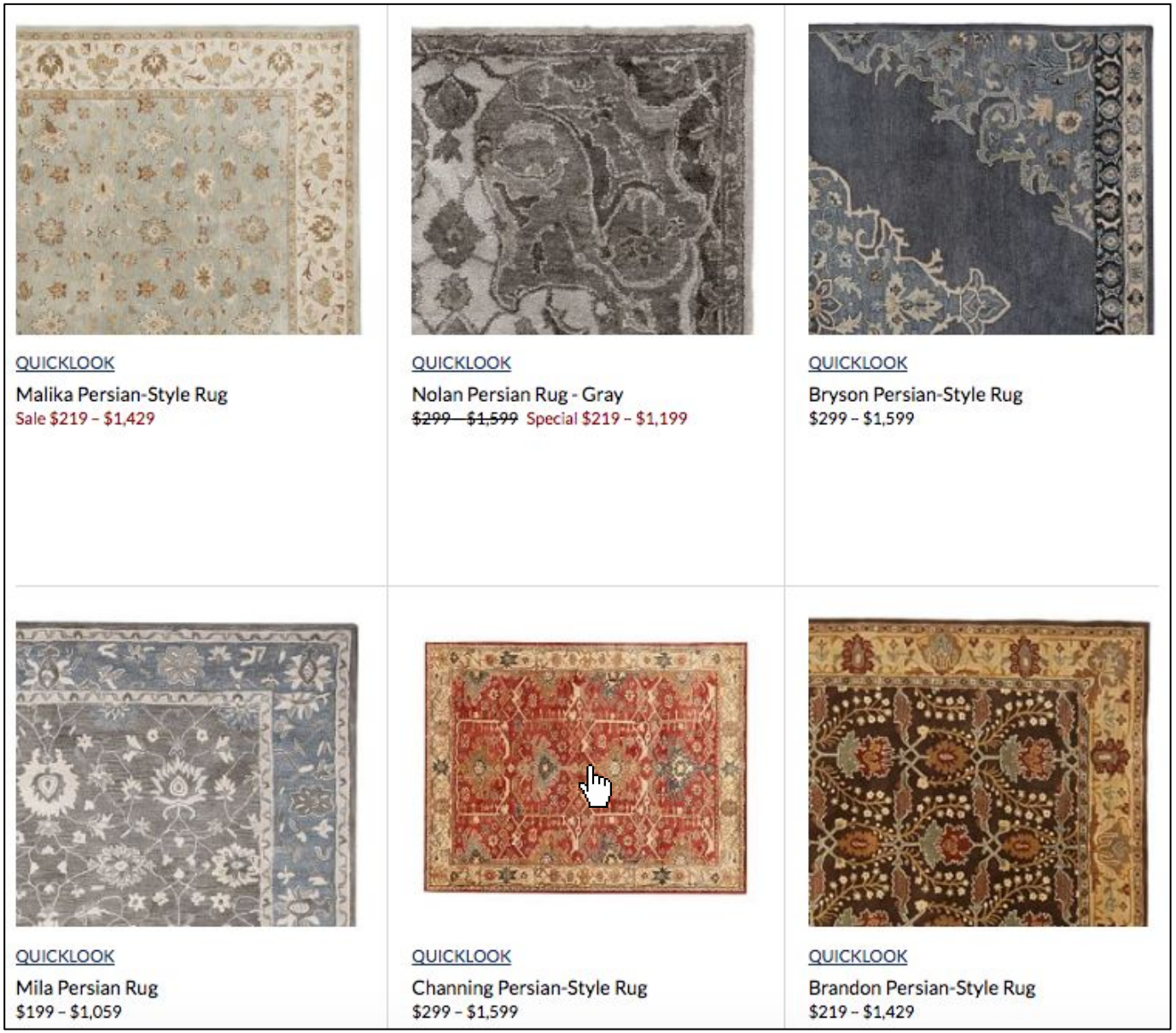
Guideline #118. Product list page design (grid vs list) should match/correspond with product type



Newegg offers list and grid views, with the option to toggle between the different options.

Adherence examples

Guideline #118. Product list page design (grid vs list) should match/correspond with product type



Pottery Barn displays its rugs in grid view. Additionally, users can mousehover over each product picture for a zoomed out version of the entire rug.

Guideline #119. Consider the best page design for your specific product list

Site Component - Design
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

How many products should be displayed on one product list page? While endless scrolling + load more tested best in a comprehensive UX study, there is no universal "best practice" for these options:

Endless pages keep users engaged because they don't have to decide whether to click to see another page. However, endless scrolling can induce the paradox of choice: The inability to make a decision when too many choices are available (analysis paralysis). In some scenarios, offering fewer products has actually increased sales. Infinite scrolling is best for browse-oriented sites and products. If your site's shopping flow is goal-oriented (e.g. building a ring step-by-step), endless scrolling is not a fitting choice.

User quote - "[need to] *show all products in one page (currently, you can only see 48 per page)"*

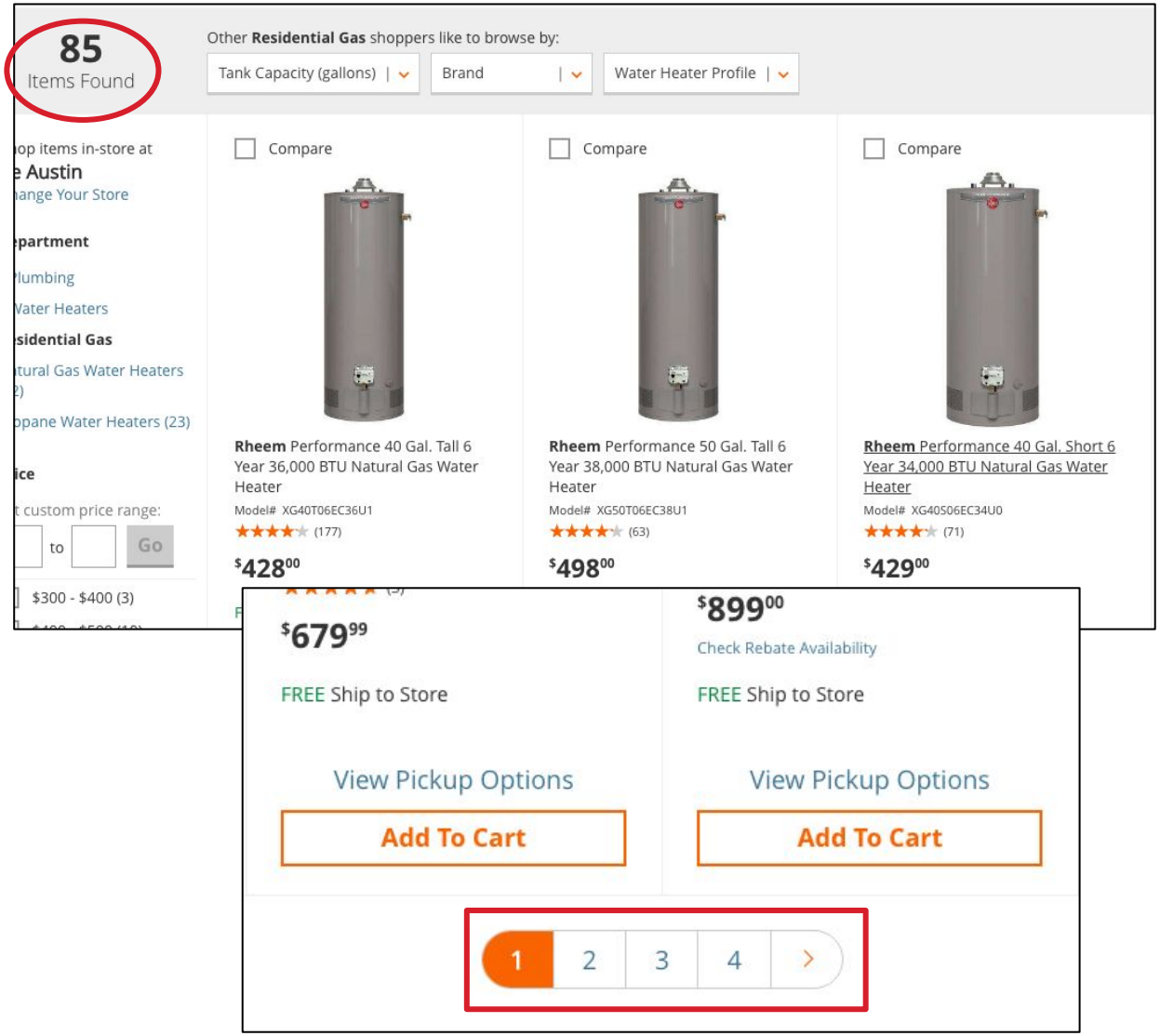
Pagination keeps the user in the loop, they know when and where the page ends. It also gives users a "sense of completion" once they've finished reviewing a product list page. However, some users become frustrated with the time it takes to load each page. If you take this approach, offer the capability to choose the number of products per page displayed, including a "see all" option.

User quote - "*When I was trying to look at the products that I did a search on, the items did not stay on the page and they had to keep on re-loading as I tried to scroll up and down."*

Endless scrolling + "load more" allows users to remain in control of the number of products in the list. This style also facilitates product comparison because all products remain on the same page. Instead of deciding which page to browse next, users simply decide whether or not they want to see more items.

Adherence examples

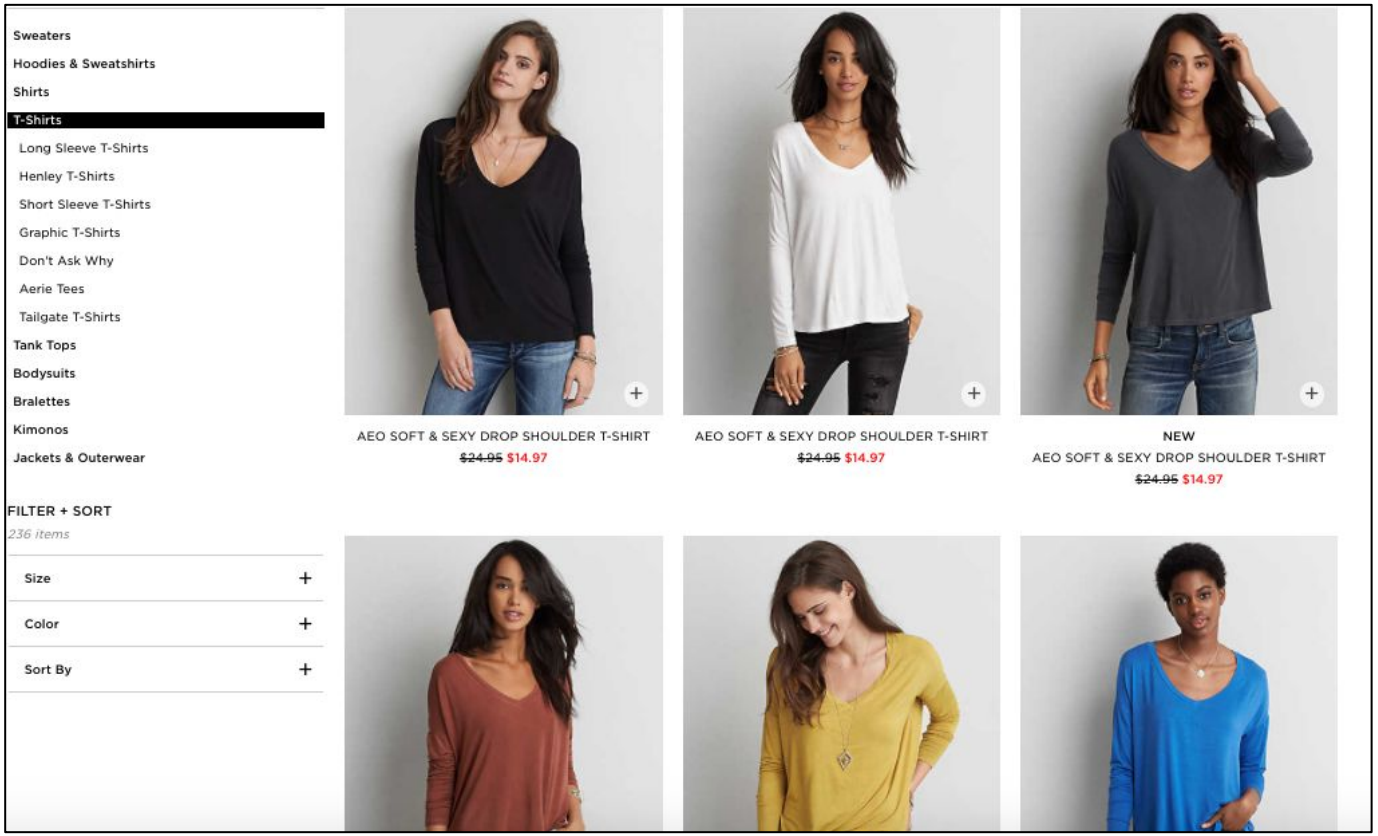
Guideline #119. Consider the best page design for your specific product list



Home Depot displays a paginated product list and shows the number of products in the list at the top of the first page.

Adherence examples

Guideline #119. Consider the best page design for your specific product list



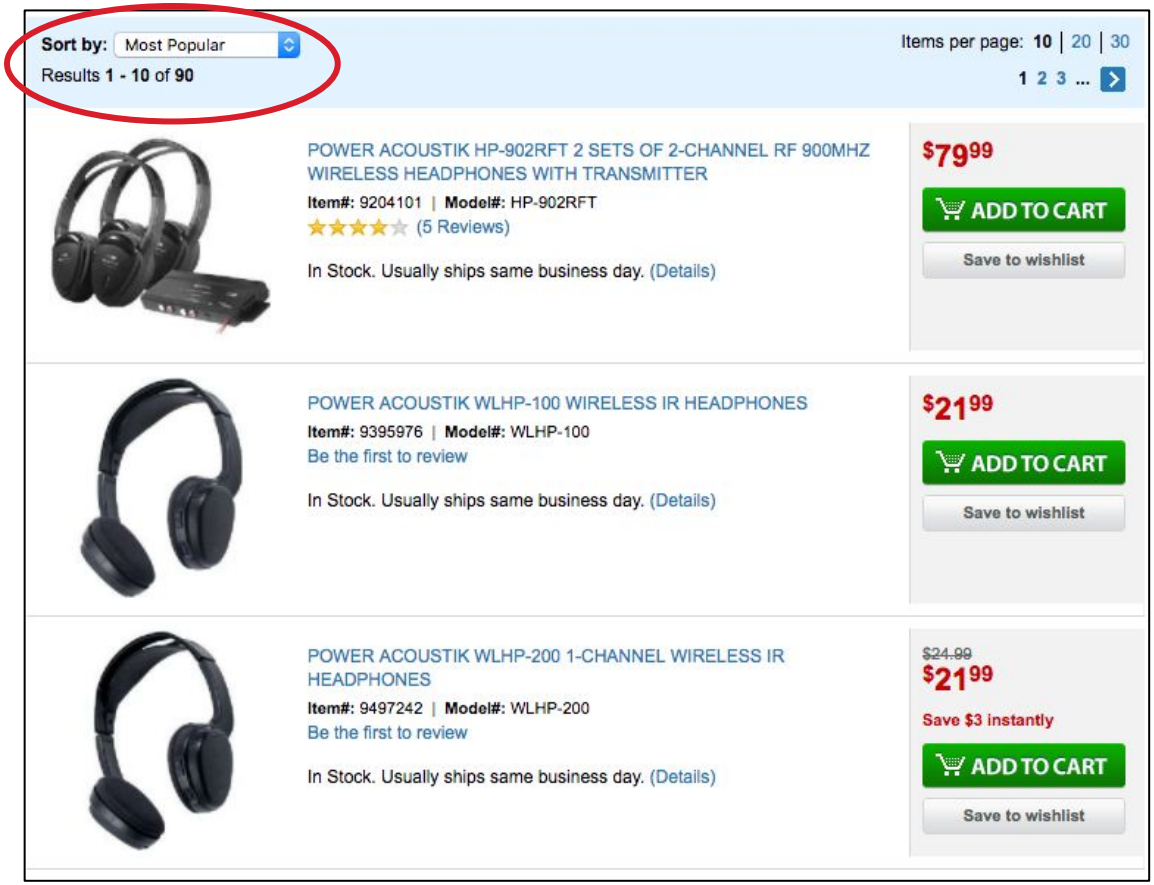
American Eagle displays the women's t-shirts product list as endless scrolling. This style complements the browse nature of the products, especially when paired with a subcategory menu that can help users quickly narrow down their search.

Guideline #120. Show total number of products in list when product list is paginated

Inform users of the total number of products in a list so they know what to expect as they begin browsing.

Site Component - Design
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

TigerDirect:



Product List & Search Results Page » Design » Product Image

5 Guidelines

Product List & Search Results Page » Design > Product Image

121. Product thumbnail should reveal product in context, secondary thumbnail should reveal product on its own
122. Reveal additional product picture(s) that appear upon mouse hover, or as a gallery slider; photos can show all variations of a product, different angles/facets of a product, or hidden attributes of a product
123. Consider which product thumbnail would be more effective for the specific product at hand: a photo of the product itself, or of the product packaging
124. Product packages should be taken straight on to capture all small product details that are on the package
125. Take your product picture at an angle if you want to capture the product's physical depth

People hardly buy anything without seeing it. Usually they also want to touch it, hold it and take it for a spin. You really can't do those things online (unless it's web based software). So to compensate for all of that, you need to work twice as hard to make your products come alive via excellent photography and graphics.

The following guidelines apply to product images in a product list, and on search results pages.

User quote - *"I was easily able to find and add the specific items that I wanted based on the pictures."*

User quote - *"I think the pictures when in the shopping category could be a little bigger for a better view of the items."*

User quote - *"Not having to go into the details to see the different angles ... is a big time saver."*

Guideline #121. Product thumbnail should reveal product in context, secondary thumbnail should reveal product on its own (or vice versa, just make sure both ways are shown)

To provide as much information as possible, show how a product looks both alone and in context. When the product is picture alone, users can focus on its details. When in context, people can get an idea as to how it fits into its surroundings, and how it may fit into their lives.

West Elm shows a variety of product pictures including close-ups of the pattern, individual pictures of each pillow in the set, and various photos of the bedding in context:

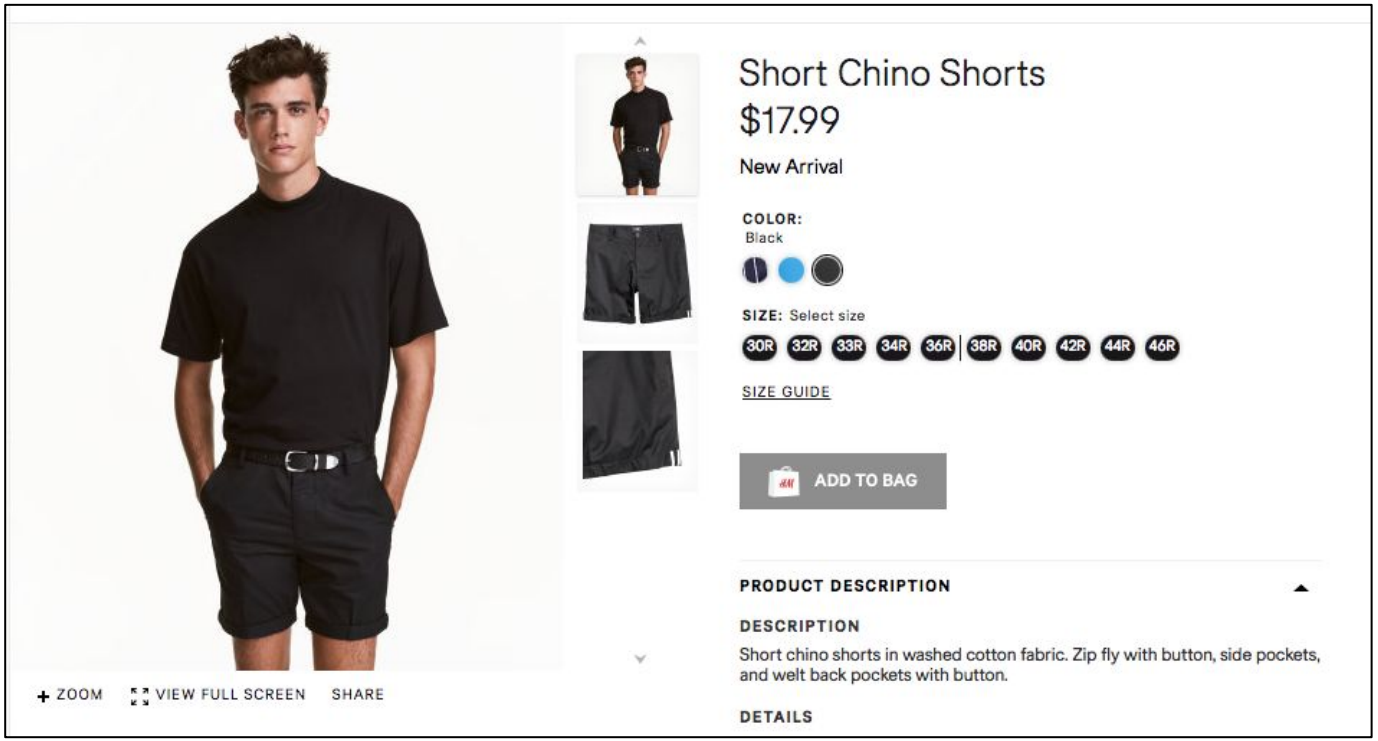
Site Component - Design > Product Image
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

User quote - *"I was easily able to find and add the specific items that I wanted based on the pictures."*

User quote - *"the items are displayed beautifully, which makes it easier to imagine the items in my own home"*

Adherence examples

Guideline #121. Product thumbnail should reveal product in context, secondary thumbnail should reveal product on its own



H&M shows shorts on the model in the primary product image. There is a thumbnail with the product alone.

Guideline #122. Reveal additional product picture(s) that appear upon mouse hover, or as a gallery slider; photos can show all variations of a product, different angles/facets of a product, or hidden attributes of a product

Once again, this guideline aims to reveal as much visual information about a product as possible.

American eagle shows a second way to wear this sweater upon mousehover:

Site Component - Design > Product Image
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

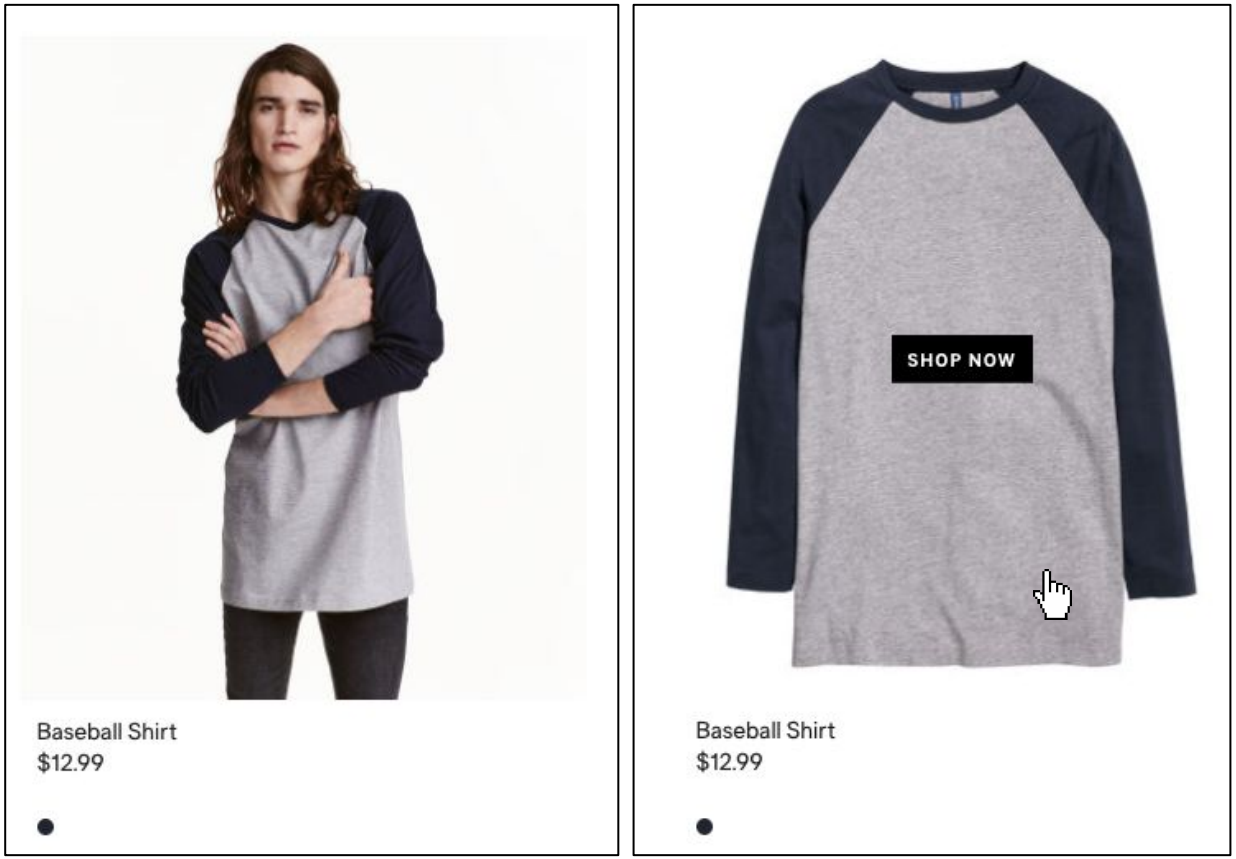
User quote - "*The product images were excellent! Large, and previewing a color change was done with a simple hover over the color swatch*"

User quote - "*I'm unable to see bigger pictures in the search results, instead, I have to go back and forth between search results and product details screens*"

User quote - "*when I put in the filter for color I seemed to have gotten some items that were different colors that I guess you could change to black, but would have liked to have seen black in the beginning. Also, would have liked to have seen the zoom in tool go in further to get a better look at the material of the clothes*"

Adherence examples

Guideline #122. Reveal additional product picture(s) that appear upon mouse hover, or as a gallery slider



On the product list the left picture is displayed and reveals the right picture during mousehover.

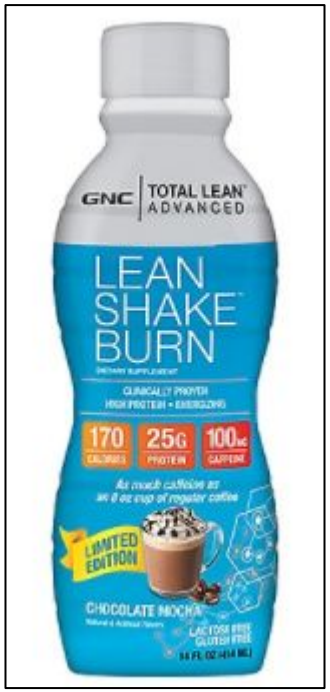
Guideline #123. Consider which product thumbnail would be more effective for the specific product at hand: a photo of the product itself, or of the product packaging

Imagine seeing a pile of powder when shopping for workout supplements. Alternatively, imagine seeing a cardboard box when browsing lamps. It simply feels like the wrong way to advertise the product.

Site Component - Design > Product Image
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

Considering conventional practices ("how is it usually done?") combined with the nature of the product at hand to determine the best way to photograph and display a product.

GNC's approach to photographing a chocolate protein shake:



User quote - *"I found it difficult to narrow down to the specific earbuds that I wanted as I couldn't see pictures for a lot of the items."*

Adherence examples

Guideline #123. Consider which product thumbnail would be more effective for the specific product at hand: a photo of the product itself, or of the product packaging

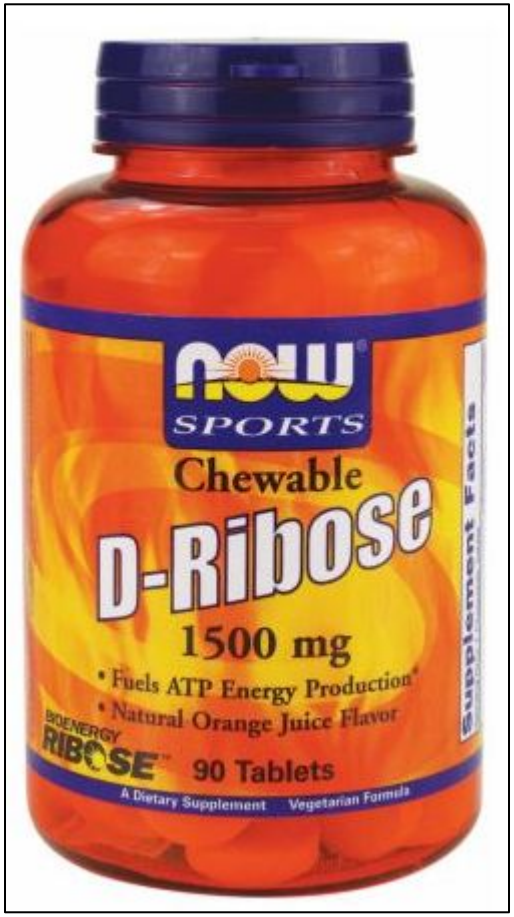
BodyBuilding.com displays the packaging for these acai chews in their product picture. Not only does the packaging shares lots of details about the product, but it shows what the chews look like.

Guideline #124. Product packages should be taken straight on to capture all small product details that are on the package

If you're photographing a product's packaging, it only makes sense for the details on the package to be visible and legible.

Site Component - Design > Product Image
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

BodyBuilding.com:
From looking at the product picture alone, shoppers know the tablets are chewable, there are 1500 mg of d-ribose per tablet, they are orange flavored, there are 90 tablets in the bottle, and that the tablets help with energy production.



User quote - *"It was good to see all the information for the nutrition labels."*

Guideline #125. Take your product picture at an angle if you want to capture the product's physical depth

This is particularly important when a product’s size/dimensions matter (furniture, appliances, etc.)

West Elm includes an angled photo of their larger pieces so shoppers can see multiple dimensions and better understand each product’s shape:

Site Component - Design > Product Image
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

Product List & Search Results Page » Product Information

8 Guidelines

Product List & Search Results Page » Product Information

126. Design product lists so users don't have to pogo-stick
127. Top of product list should communicate variety of products available
128. Show only the most essential product attributes in product list
129. For combined categories (e.g. "sofas and loveseats"), display both product types at top of product list
130. For products in a package, show a price per unit in product list
131. Communicate all variations of a product on the product list (e.g. "available in 6 more colors")
132. Show compatibility (e.g. camera case fits camera model X) in product list
133. Offer a product comparison tool

When it comes to providing information, the product page pulls the weight. Product lists also share much of this responsibility too, however.

People need to understand the differences between products in order to decide which is most suitable for themselves. Maybe they're on a budget and need an inexpensive item. Perhaps they're looking for a very particular shade of red. Regardless of the scenario, product lists provide the first bits of information about each item your site offers.

The product list, while preliminary, uses product information to direct potential customers to the most suitable product.

The question is, what makes for a good, informative product list? What makes users want to click on a product?

The following guidelines illustrate how to create a highly informative product list. They support product comparison tools, ease of use while browsing, and the provision of ample, essential information while avoiding cognitive overload.

Guideline #126. Design product lists so users don't have to pogo-stick

“Pogo-sticking” is the act of clicking on a search result, clicking back to the search results page, clicking on a different search result, and so on. It occurs when users are dissatisfied with the search result they selected, so they return to the results page to browse something else.

This back and forth process also applies to product lists: Users click on a product from a product list, decide it’s not what they want, and click back to the product list to choose another product. This process can go on and on until the user becomes frustrated, ultimately abandoning their search journey.

How to fix the problem of pogo-sticking? To put it as simply as possible, analytics and research. Analyze and identify links with the highest rate of pogo-sticking, determine where people are commonly misled, re-organize your product list to match user intentions. Nielsen Norman Group details how to minimize pogo-sticking.

Site Component - Product Information
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

User quote - *“I'm unable to see bigger pictures in the search results, instead, I have to go back and forth between search results and product details screens”*

User quote - *“...one of the headphones I was looking at didn't have a easy-to-read "specs" list. I could only reply on a paragraph to decide whether I wanted to buy the item or not.”*

User quote - *“I would have liked some kind of an option to compare on different items against each other ... without having to go back and forth between the results page and then details page for a specific item.”*

Guideline #127. Top of product list should communicate variety of products available

Imagine a user is browsing the Boating category on an outdoor website hoping to find paddle boats. They check out the boats on the product list and the 3 top rows, the entire space above the fold, show only canoes and kayaks. The user concludes that this site doesn't sell paddle boats and leaves.

However, the site *does* sell paddle boats, but because they're not as popular as canoes and kayaks, they aren't displayed at the top of the product list.

Luckily, this costly mistake has an easy fix. Take a look at your product lists and ensure that the top few rows of products illustrate the breadth of your selection. If not, adjust your product list ranking/display.

Alternatively, try five-second testing your product list to determine whether a wide variety of products is being displayed from an objective standpoint. Participants will tell you what they think is for sale after a quick browse. Use these results to adjust the top of the product list.

Site Component - Product Information
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

User quote - *"Somewhat vague categories made it slightly more difficult to find earbuds than I would have thought."*

Guideline #128. Show only the most essential product attributes in product list

Attributes in a product list should give users the information they need to understand the differences between products.

Think about what users might consider when browsing a product list. While price is always a factor, most other attributes depend heavily on the product at hand.

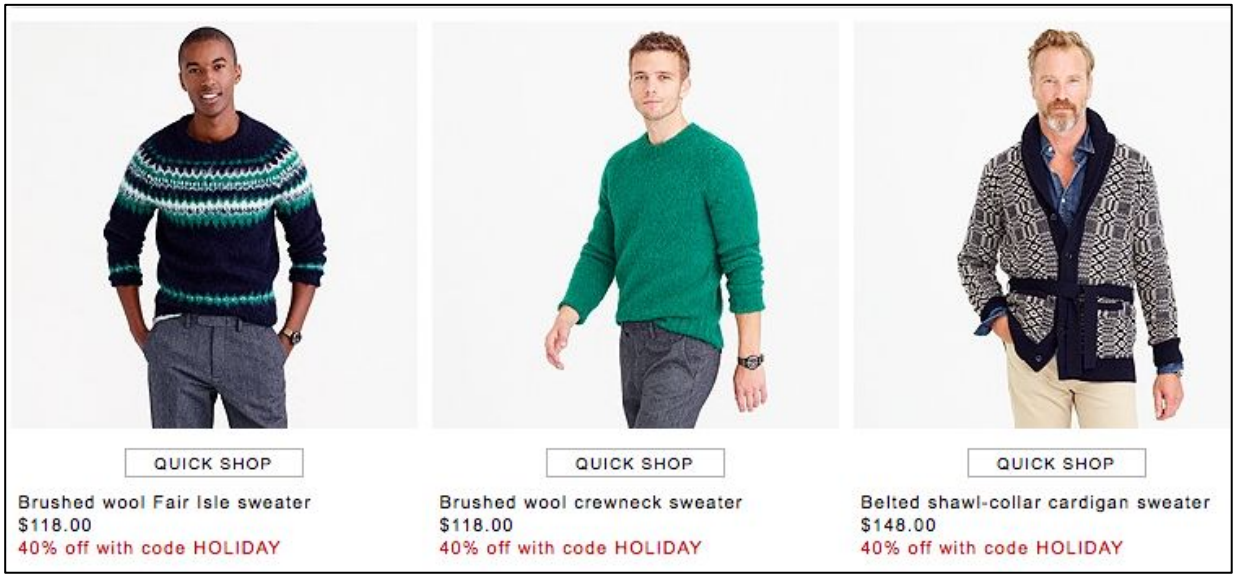
While it might be tempting to share as much information as possible, don't go overboard with specs and attributes. Too much information clutters a page, making it hard for users to locate the few pieces of information they care about.

If the nature of your product requires displaying many product attributes (e.g. electronics parts that match certain models, have specific dimensions, etc.), display them in a pop-up box that appears upon mousehover.

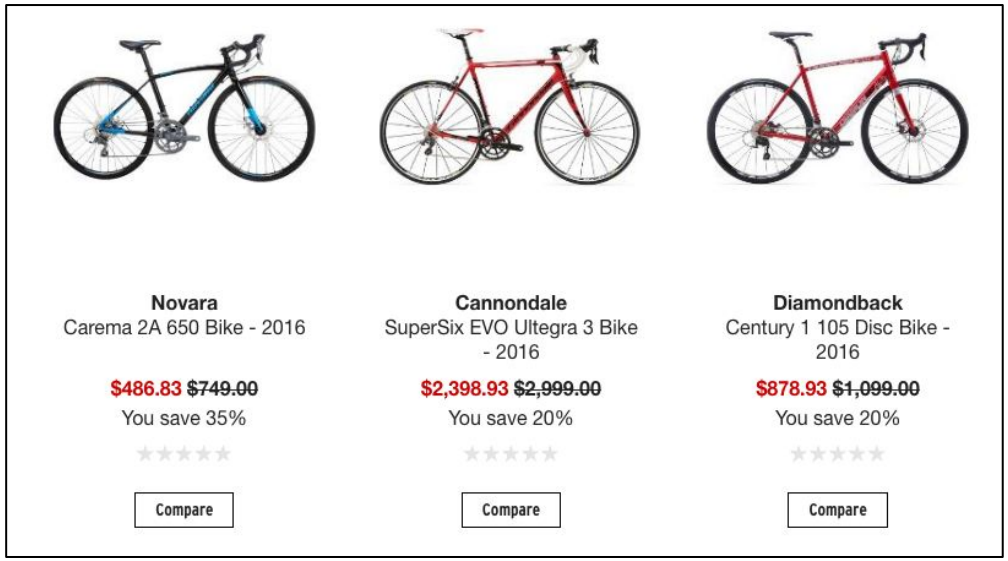
Site Component - Product Information
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

Adherence examples

Guideline #128. Show only the most essential product attributes in product list



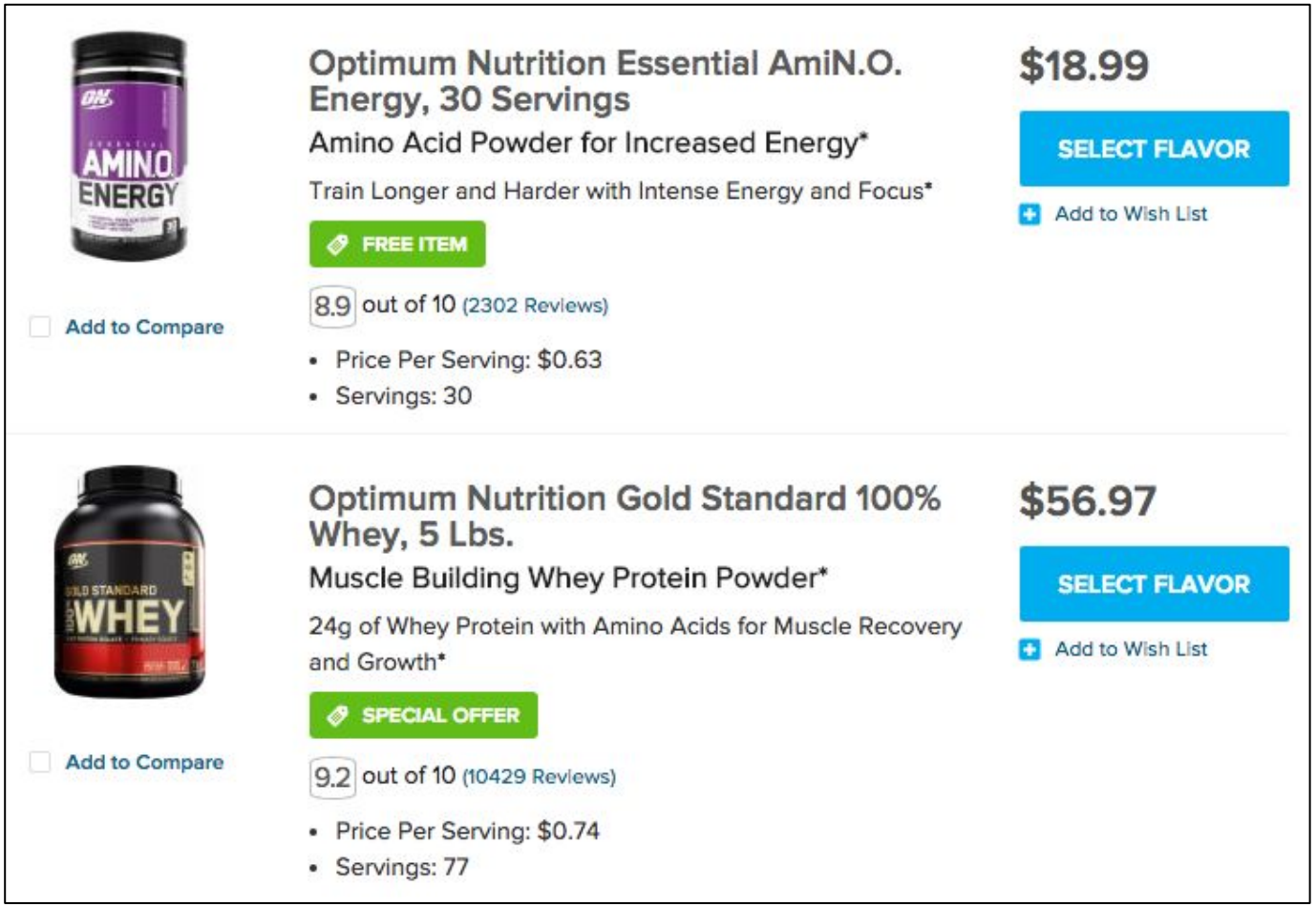
J.Crew includes a descriptive product name, price, and discount code



REI includes the bicycle brand, make and model, price, current discount, and any possible star ratings

Adherence examples

Guideline #128. Show only the most essential product attributes in product list



BodyBuilding.com includes: product name, short product description, short sub-description, rating score (out of 10), number of reviews, number of servings, price, price per serving, and options to compare, select a flavor, or add to wishlist

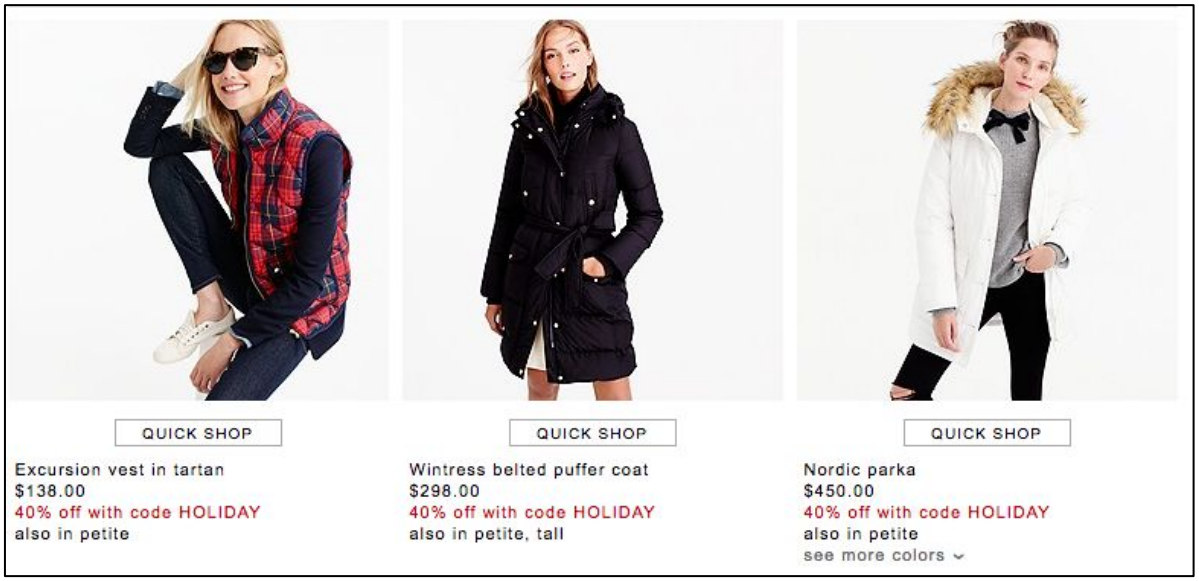
Normally this number of attributes would be considered too many, but the products at hand vary widely and it's likely that shoppers consider all of these attributes before clicking on a product

Guideline #129. For combined categories (e.g. "sofas and loveseats"), be sure to display both product types at top of product list

Site Component - Product Information
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

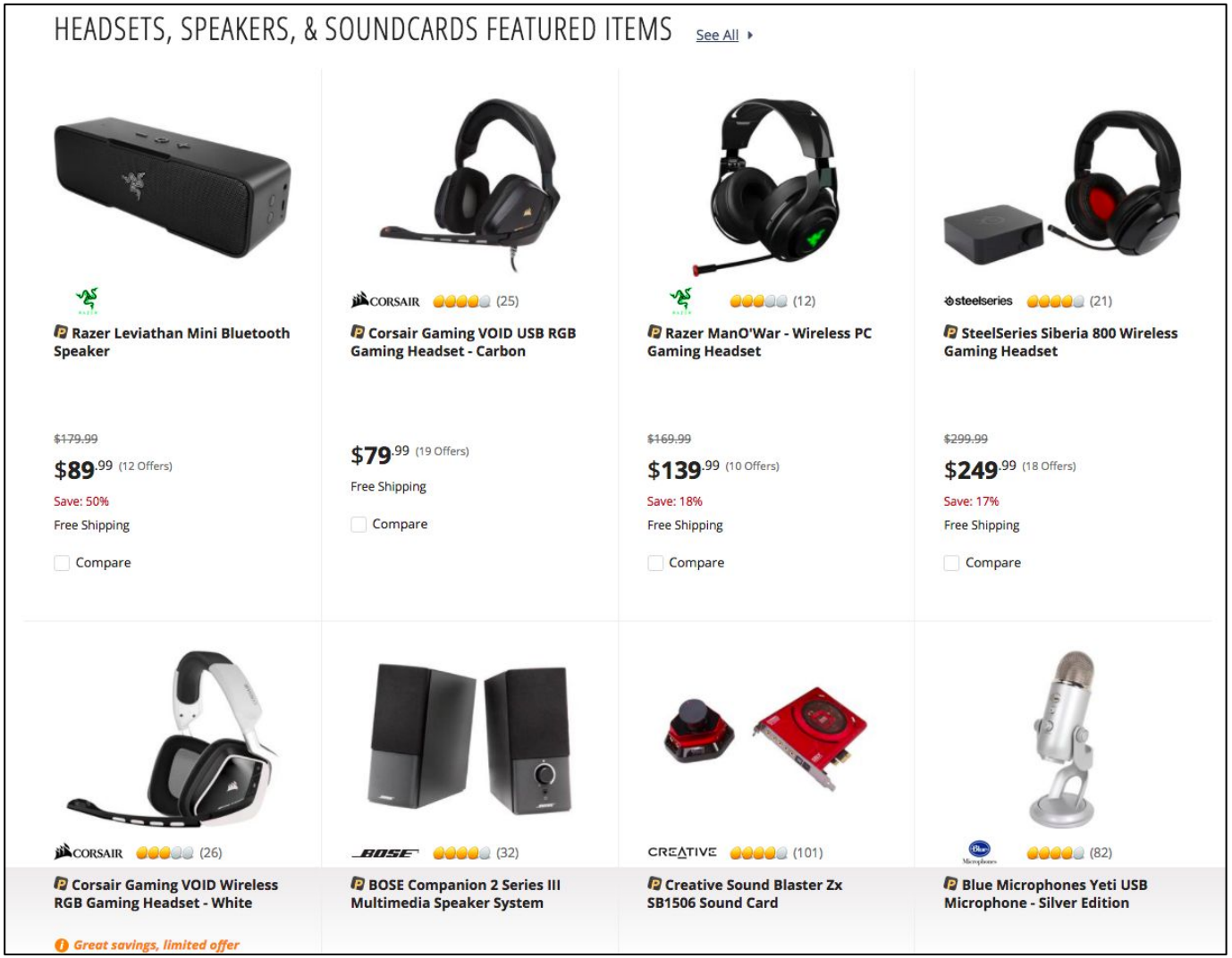
This guideline again refers to the practice of prominently displaying the full breadth of products available at the top of the product list.

The top few rows of J.Crew's Puffers & Vests category displays just that, puffers *and* vests:



Adherence examples

Guideline #129. For combined categories (e.g. "sofas and loveseats"), be sure to display both product types at top of product list



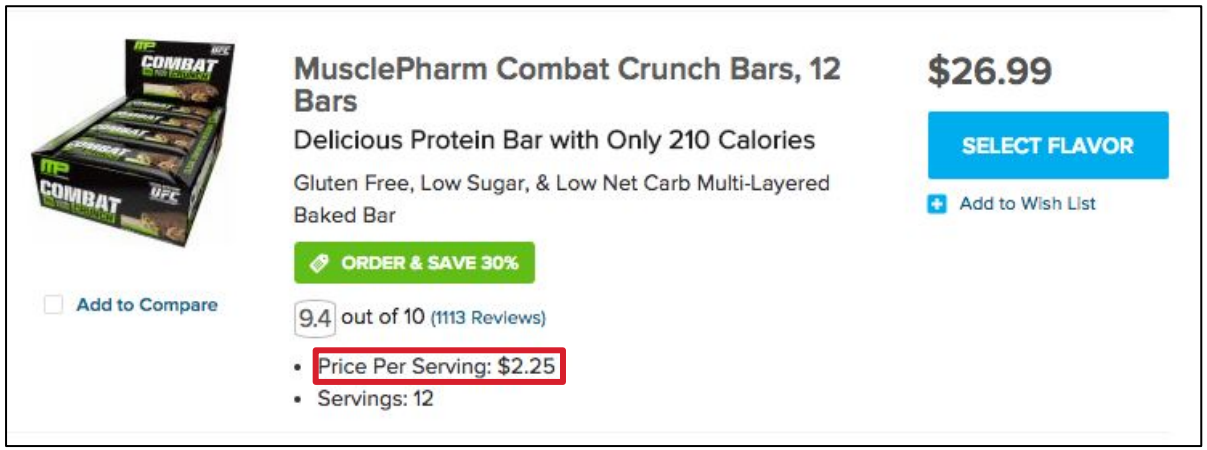
All three of the products in the category title (headsets, speakers, and soundcards) are shown in the first two rows of this product list

Guideline #130. For products in a package, show a price per unit in product list

This attribute is important for people who buy in bulk often and want to ensure that they're getting the best deal.

Site Component - Product Information
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

BodyBuilding.com shows shoppers cost per protein bar:



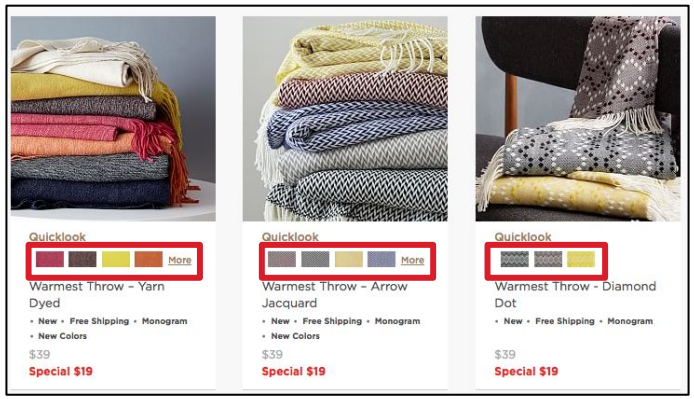
Guideline #131. Communicate all variations of a product on the product list (e.g. "available in 6 more colors")

Lacking this simple guideline could lose you lots of money. Online shoppers are accustomed to seeing all variations of a product on the product list and will abandon your site if they don't immediately see the color or style they were hoping to find.

Site Component - Product Information
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

H&M uses circular indicators under the product picture:

West Elm takes a similar approach:



User quote - "*I would've preferred if a particular style was listed and then within the same tile for the search results there could be small swatches that show the color options for that style.*"

Guideline #132. Show compatibility (e.g. camera case fits camera model X) in product list

Site Component - Product Information
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

Whether you include the compatible model(s) in the product name or include it as a separate attribute, clearly state which products are compatible.

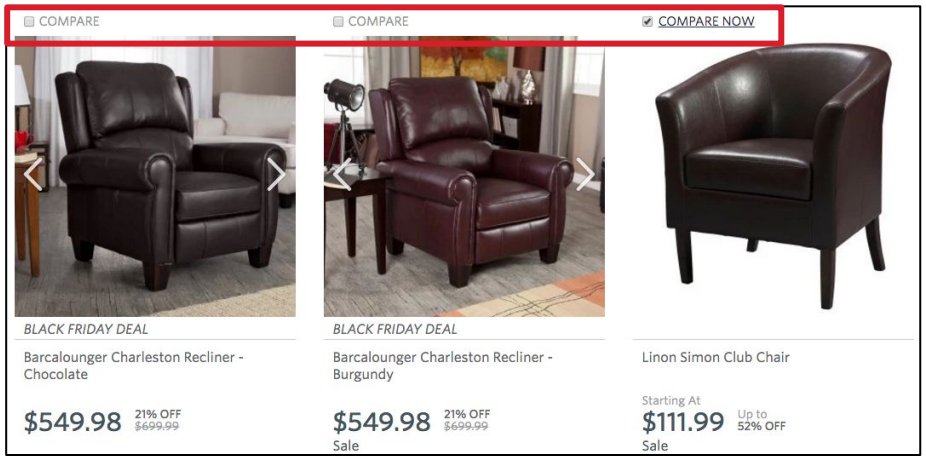
TigerDirect shows that all laptops up to 16 inches will fit in this case:

Newegg clarifies that this keyboard is compatible with the Microsoft Surface Pro 3:

Guideline #133. Offer a product comparison tool

Product comparison tools should be displayed on the product list, as they best complement the search journey and browsing behaviors here.

Home Depot displays a "Compare" checkbox above each product:



When users select a product to compare, the Compare text changes to Compare Now for that product. The product comparison tool page loads when the Compare Now buttons is clicked.

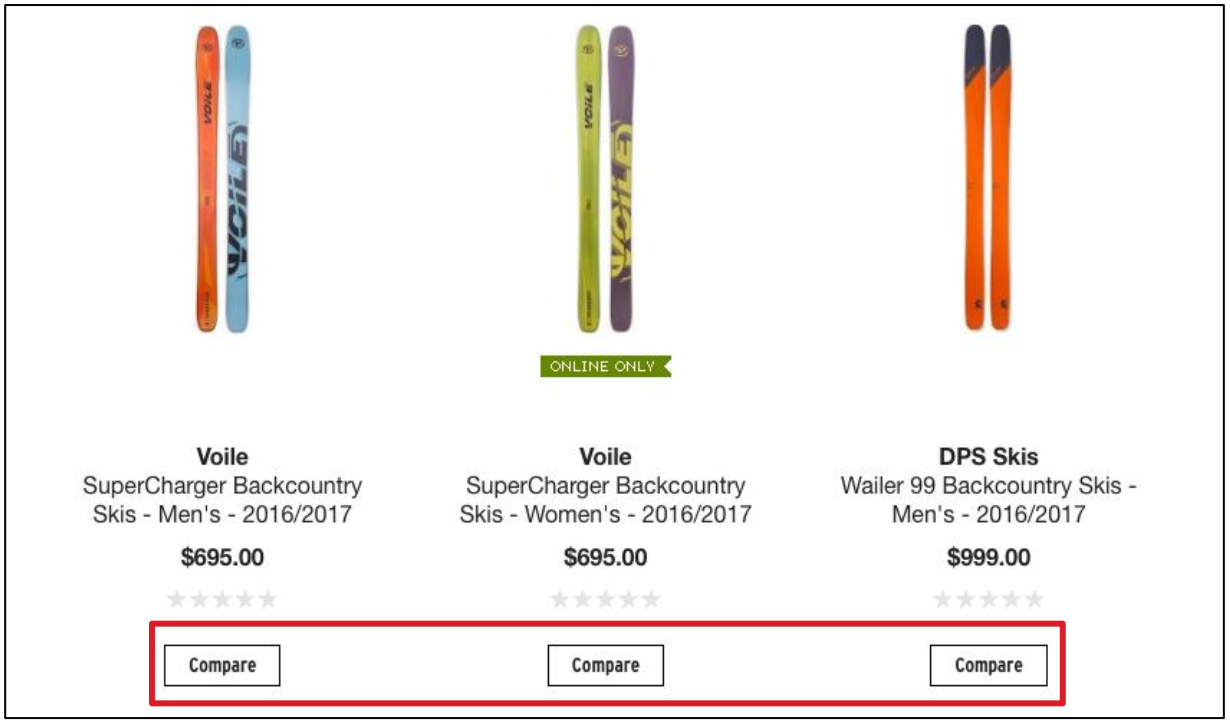
Site Component - Product Information
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

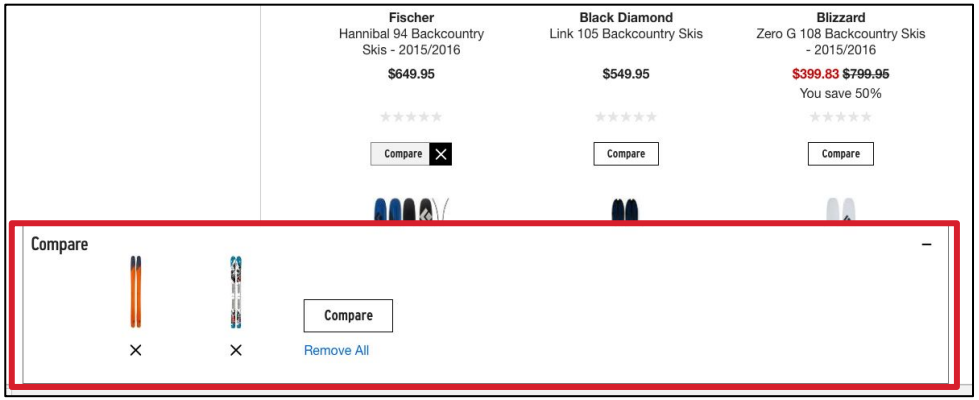
User quote - *"I would like to see a side by side comparison of two items, if I want to compare them."*

User quote - *"I would have liked some kind of an option to compare on different items against each other. Just something where I could say add a couple of items and then click compare and have all the items on one page and I can just go through the different angles and views of each item without having to go back and forth between the results page and then details page for a specific item."*

Adherence examples

Guideline #133. Offer a product comparison tool





REI includes a Compare button under each product. When an item is selected for comparison a small bar pops up from the bottom of the page.

Product List & Search Results Page » Trust Elements

3 Guidelines

Product List & Search Results Page » Trust Elements

134. Show ratings (and # of ratings/reviews) in product list
135. Products with ratings and reviews should be promoted upward
136. Avoid "zero results" page

When it comes to cart/site abandonment, trust (or lack thereof) is a major influencer.

While it may seem like an odd location, the product list can contribute to building trust. If you're apparent with the quality of products, pros *and* cons, users will appreciate and trust that honesty. If you communicate *why* something is broken or unavailable, users will also appreciate that. Instead of feeling hoodwinked, users will feel informed.

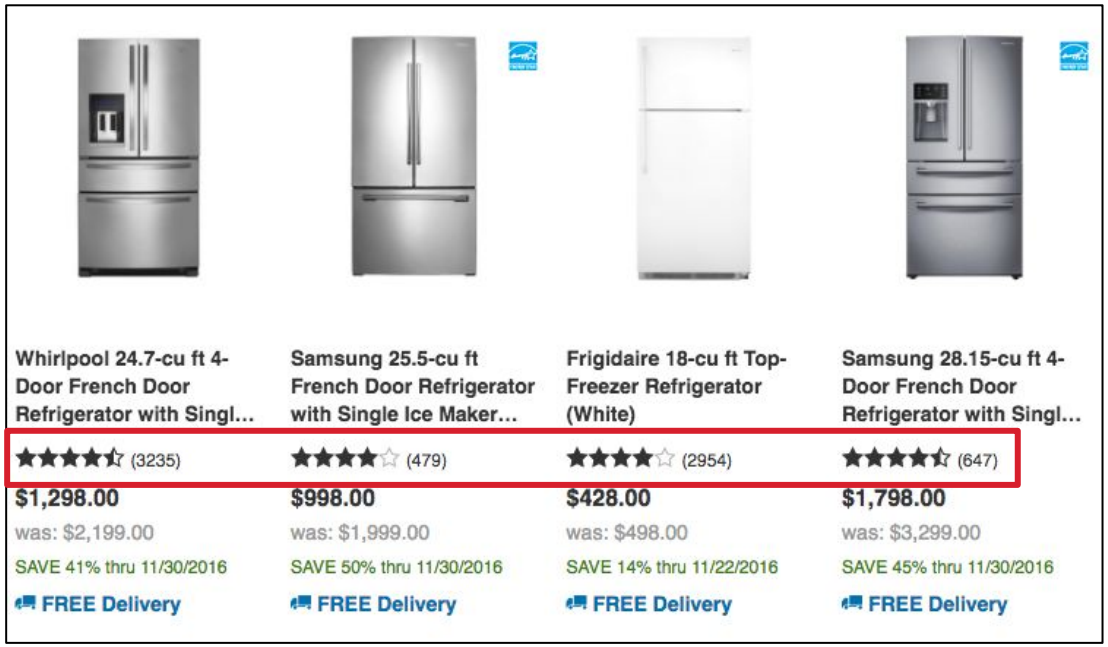
The following guidelines contribute to a reliable, legitimate product list that ultimately creates a trustworthy ecommerce site.

Guideline #134. Show ratings (and # of ratings/reviews) in product list

Ratings, and number of ratings or reviews, play the part of social proof on the product list.

Users are usually inclined to click on a highly rated item, but they're even more inclined when the item has been reviewed by hundreds of people and still maintains this high rating. Offer these details to better inform your users' decisions.

Lowe's displays ratings and reviews clearly:



Site Component - Trust Elements
Conversion Heuristic - Motivation

User quote - "*the reviews and ratings were excellent, and could easily be sorted by rating and other sort options. This made it VERY easy to see low ratings and quickly navigate the reviews section.*"

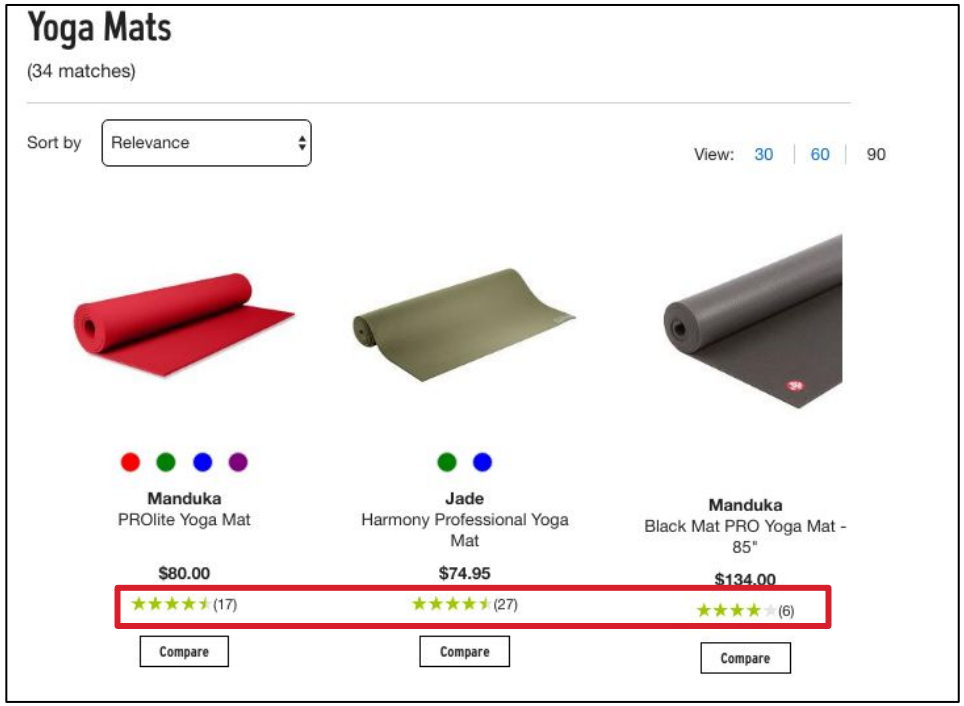
Guideline #135. Products with ratings and reviews should be promoted upward

Site Component - Trust Elements
Conversion Heuristic - Motivation

People are more likely to buy a product with high ratings and reviews than a product with zero customer feedback. Promote products with ratings and reviews so users don't have to waste time looking for them.

Worried that those products without reviews and ratings will be perpetually stuck at the bottom? Incentivize people to write reviews and to rate them.

REI shows yoga mats with many ratings at the top of the list:

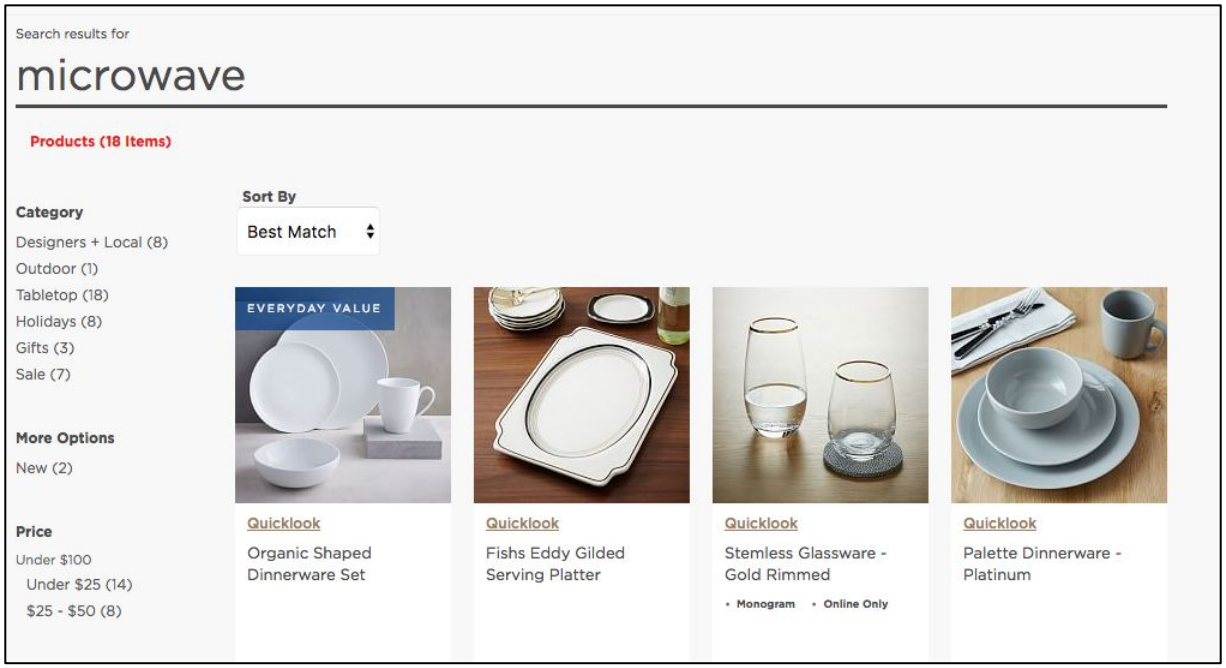


Guideline #136. Avoid "zero results" page

Display analogous products to the search term. Check for misspellings. Redirect to a category page or the homepage. Whatever your approach, avoid a zero results page when users search for non-existent products.

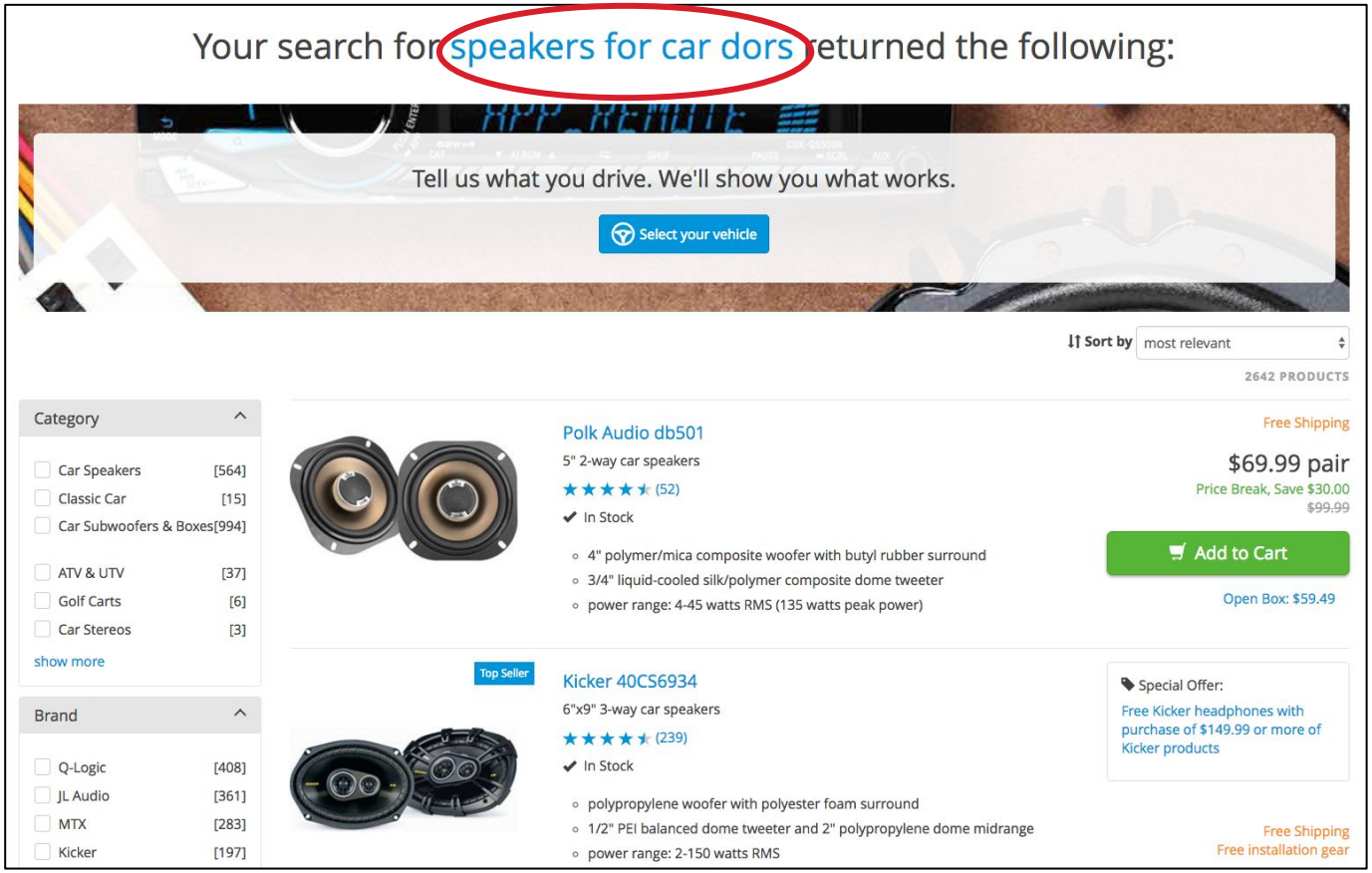
Site Component - Trust Elements
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

While West Elm doesn't sell microwaves, they offer a variety of relatively similar search results (microwave safe plates) when a user searches for one:



Adherence examples

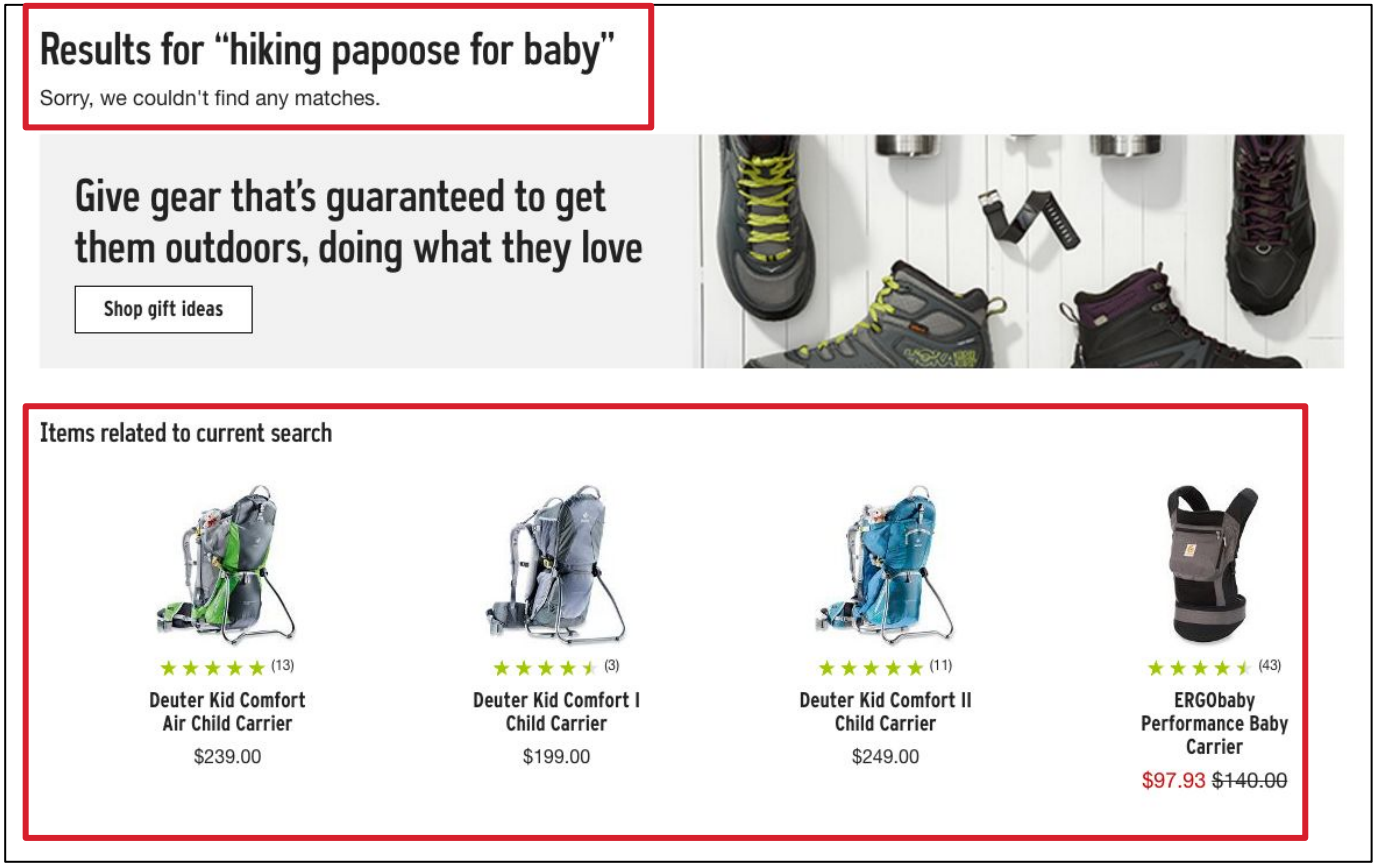
Guideline #136. Avoid "zero results" page



Crutchfield intelligently interprets the misspelling “dors” for “doors”, reiterates the user’s faulty search phrase to them (“Your search for speakers for car dors…”), and provides similar results: speakers for car doors.

Adherence examples

Guideline #136. Avoid "zero results" page



REI doesn’t call it a papoose, but they know what you’re getting at.

Product List & Search Results Page » Filters

18 Guidelines

Product List & Search Results Page » Filters

137. Offer filtering options
138. Don't confuse sorting and filters
139. Choose highly relevant filters; depends on product at hand
140. Learn how people use your filters, adjust them accordingly
141. Promote popular filters to the top of the list
142. Filters on the product list should be high in visual hierarchy
143. Filter values should have checkboxes
144. Allow users to select more than one filter
145. Show how many products apply to each filter choice in parentheses next to the filter choice
146. Only display filter values that apply to what's available
147. Offer themed filters ("fall sweaters" filter in sweaters and jackets product list)
148. Offer a "clear all" option for filter selections
149. Filter tools should be sticky, especially for endless scrolling and "load more" product lists
150. Horizontal filter menu and vertical filter menu should have the same top alignment
151. Horizontal filtering bar at top of product list (can be additional to vertical left filtering options) works best when there are only a few filtering options
152. Collapse long filtering lists after around 10 filtering values, and clearly indicate that it's collapsed with 'see more' text
153. Each filter selection should be a separate action in browser history (many users rely on the back button)
154. Auto-refresh search results after a filter has been selected (or deselected)

The more choice you give people, the harder it is to choose something. The way to combat paradox of choice is by filters. The more choice you offer, the better filters you need to provide.

Ever been to a wine store? It's one of those places where the selection knocks you unconscious and you feel like grabbing beer instead. Retail stores don't have good filters (usually it's the salesperson).

Online, you can have great filters. The role of the filter is to make finding most suitable products easy.

These guidelines explain what makes a good filter, how to find out what the most useful filters for your products are, and how to design the filtering tool for maximum usability.

User quote - When asked how they'd improve a site: *"Deeper filtering options on the search results."*

User quote - When asked how they'd improve a site: *"I think there should be more options available to filter by style (e.g., long sleeve, short sleeve). I am a BIG fan of filters; I think it makes the shopping experience much more user-friendly, easy to navigate to products and stress-free experience. Having to manually go through several products can get a bit tedious so I would definitely improve the filtering portion of the site."*

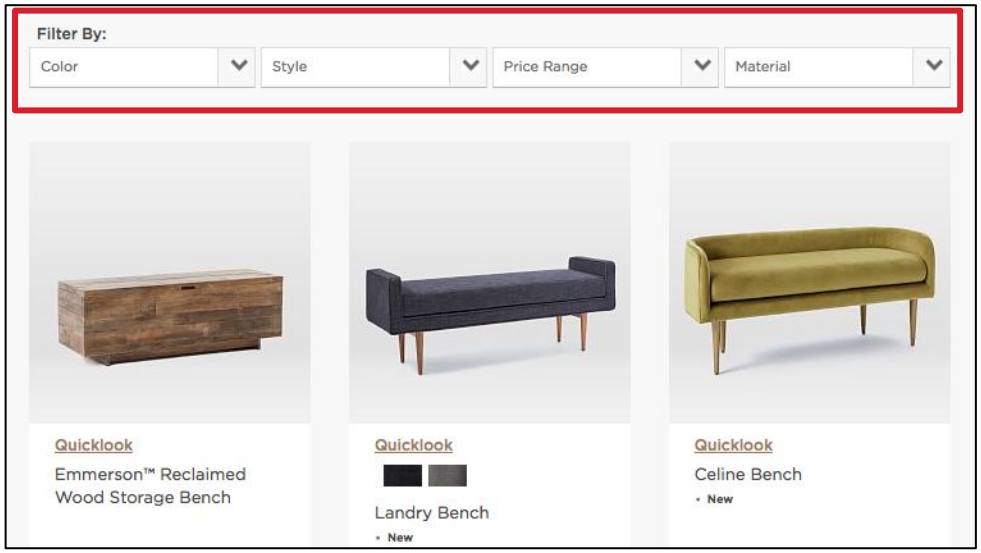
Guideline #137. Offer filtering options

This should be a bit of a no-brainer, as filtering is now a feature of all successful ecommerce sites.

If you sell just a few different products, filters are unnecessary. For all other sites, however, filtering is essential to the search process. Many people heavily rely on filtering tools to find what they're looking for.

Follow convention and either design filters as dropdown boxes at the top of the product page, or as a vertical menu on the left side of the page.

West Elm:



Site Component - Filters
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

User quote - *"The lack of filtering options available was quite frustrating. I was surprised that a price filter was not utilized especially with a clothing website."*

User quote - *"[frustrated by] the lack of sorting and filtering options on the search results page."*

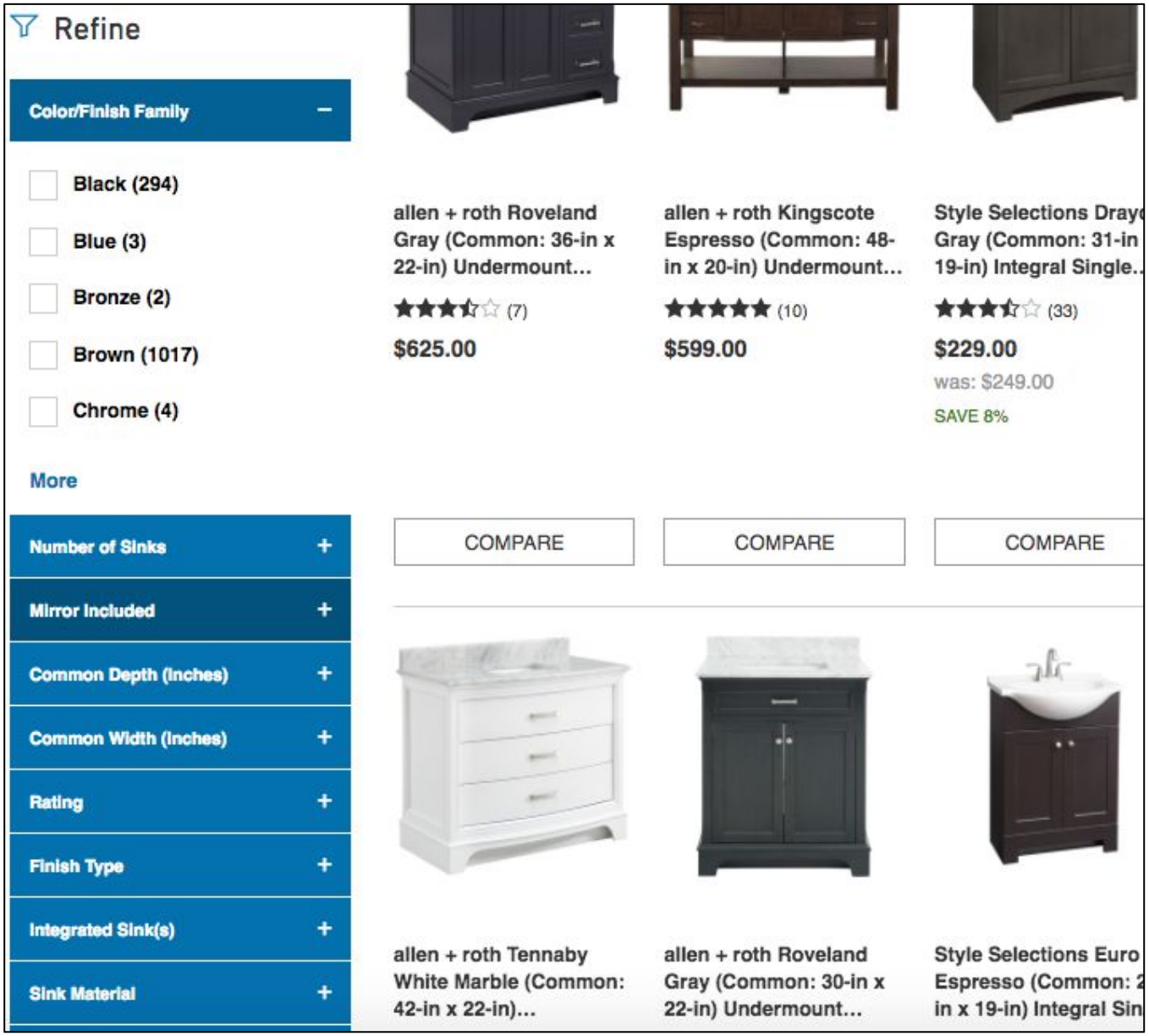
User quote - *"I would have liked to have more filtering options when looking at the items. Being able to filter by price is nice, but I would also like to filter by color, rating, etc."*

User quote - *"..add more filter options, like brand, size."*

User quote - *"On the first task, I did not see a filter option for price. So I had to go through each item. I would have liked some filtering options (price, best seller, etc.) "*

Adherence examples

Guideline #137. Offer filtering options



Lowe's displays filters as collapsible tabs on the left side of the product page

Guideline #138. Don't confuse sorting and filters

Sorting applies to values that organize *any* list of products. Sorting values commonly include price (low to high), best sellers, and highest rated items.

Filters are values that only apply to the current scope of products. These include things like materials, brand, finish type, dimensions, etc.

Imagine a user is browsing for a refrigerator. Filter values would include cubic space, ice maker type, Energy Star qualification, etc. These values do not apply to the majority of products for sale online.

Hayneedle follows convention, displaying sorting as a dropdown tool on the top right and filters on the left:

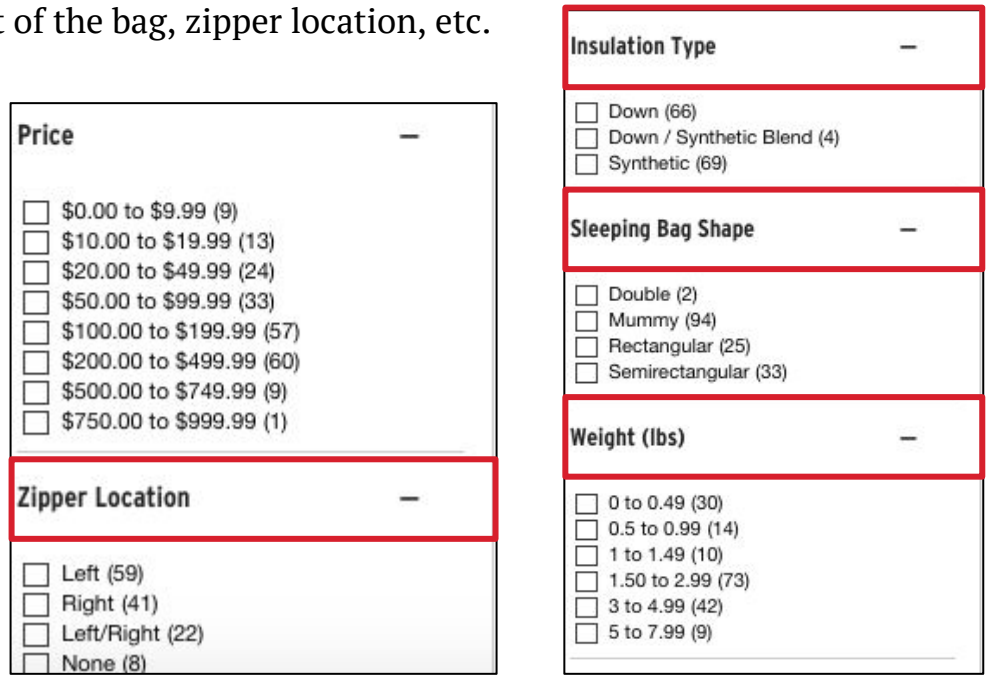
Site Component - Filters
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

Guideline #139. Choose highly relevant filters; depends on product at hand

Consider what matters the most about a product when people make purchase decisions.

Find the most relevant filters for your product by surveying and asking customers and by analyzing customer reviews for frequently mentioned features and specifics.

REI has highly relevant filters for their sleeping bags, including: Maximum height that will fit in the sleeping bag, type of insulation, shape of the bag, weight of the bag, zipper location, etc.



Site Component - Filters
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

User quote - *"There were a lot of categories and good filters to search through them.*

User quote - *"Felt like the site could have had a few more filters after I got into the right department and I found the types of lamps I was looking for (color, material, bulb wattage) to help pair down the search results so I didn't have as many lamps to look through."*

User quote - *"I liked that the site was user friendly and ... it had great filters"*

User quote - *" I did not see an option to filter the list by the price I wanted to pay. I also did not see a way to sort the list by price. I feel that those two options are very important when I am looking for an item as it helps narrow down the list of items I want to buy."*

User quote - *"The lack of a price filter was annoying when trying to meet a budget"*

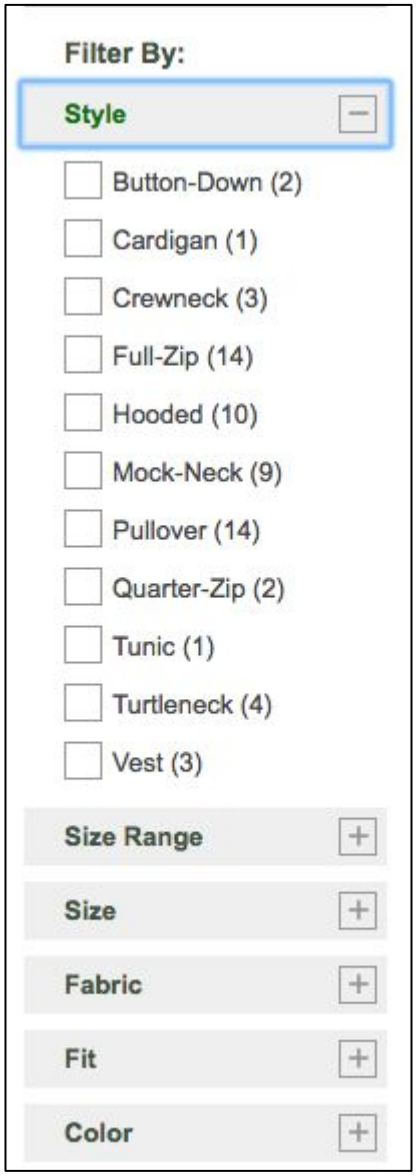
Adherence examples

Guideline #139. Choose highly relevant filters; depends on product at hand

When browsing the pre-workout product list, BodyBuilding.com provides relevant filters that influence purchase decisions.

Adherence examples

Guideline #139. Choose highly relevant filters; depends on product at hand



L.L. Bean's filtering makes it easy for users to narrow down precisely what they're looking for.

Guideline #140. Learn how people use your filters, adjust them accordingly

Collect qualitative data to learn about the power of your filters. Use email and on-site surveys to analyze whether visitors utilize filtering tools, and if so, which are used most.

Collect quantitative data using Google Analytics. Measure which filters are used most often and adjust from there. You can also conduct heat map tests to collect quantitative data, as well.

Site Component - Filters
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

User quote - "*I would buy because of ... the appropriate filtering options.*"

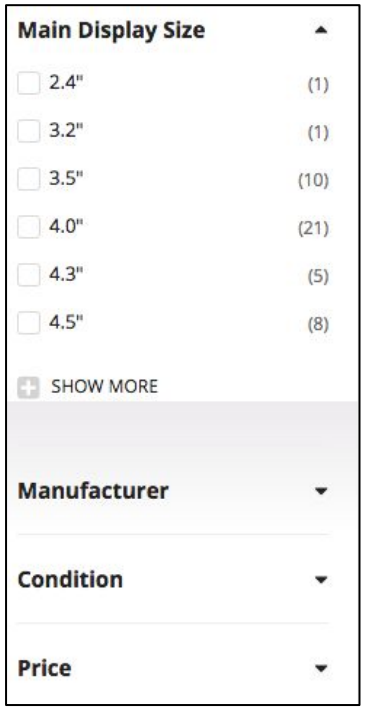
User quote - "*I was frustrated that the filter search wasn't present on each page. I had to go three subcategories in for it to come up, and I think it would be helpful to have it on any page with products displayed.*"

Guideline #141. Promote popular filters to the top of the list

Increase usability and search flow by placing popular filters at the top of the page.

Additionally, if you use collapsible filter tabs, popular filters can be expanded to draw more attention.

Newegg expands the most popular filter, screen size, when browsing for smartphones:



Site Component - Filters
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

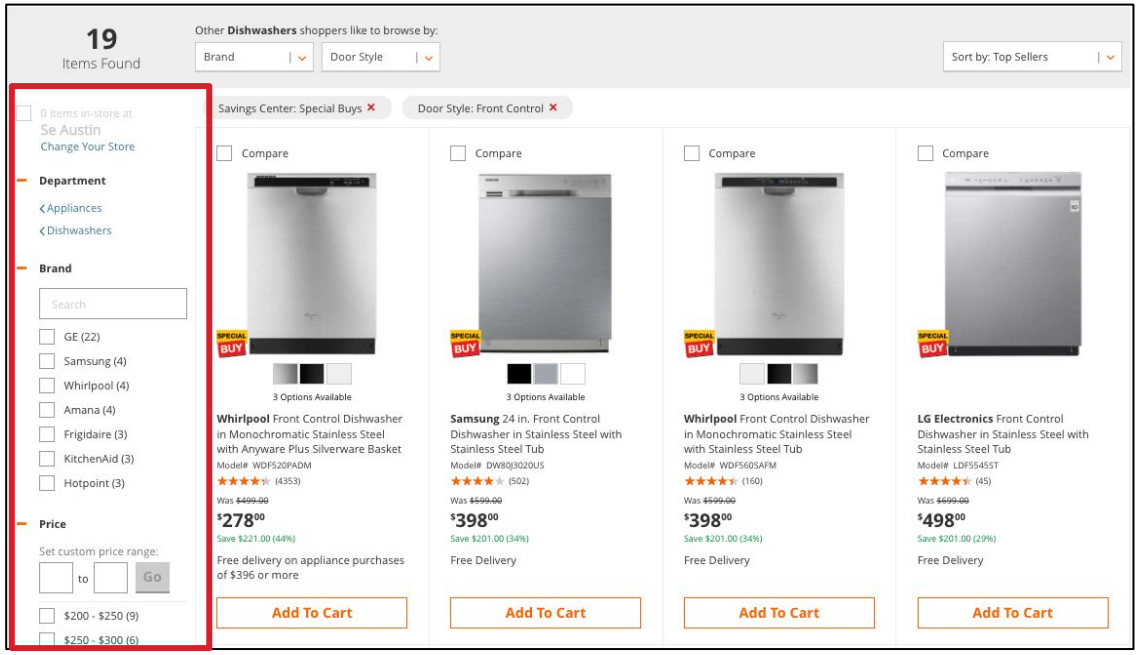
User quote - *"The only thing that frustrated me was that I couldn't limit my search by color or price"* **These filters went unnoticed, as they were placed near the bottom of the filtering options list**

Guideline #142. Filters on the product list should be high in visual hierarchy

Because filters are often used to find products, they should be prominent in the product list.

Follow convention and place filters above the fold on the left side of the page.

Home Depot's filters are prominently and conventionally placed:



Site Component - Filters
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

User quote - "*To improve the site i would consider making the filter more prominent or possibly bring the different aspects within the filter out and just have them as sort functions for sizing and colors.*"

User quote - "*There was no way to sort or filter the items once you selected the category. It would have been great to be able to narrow down my choices once I selected a category*"

User quote - "*I think my frustration would be that the filter was a little hidden, it didn't let you know clearly that there was an option for color filter.*"

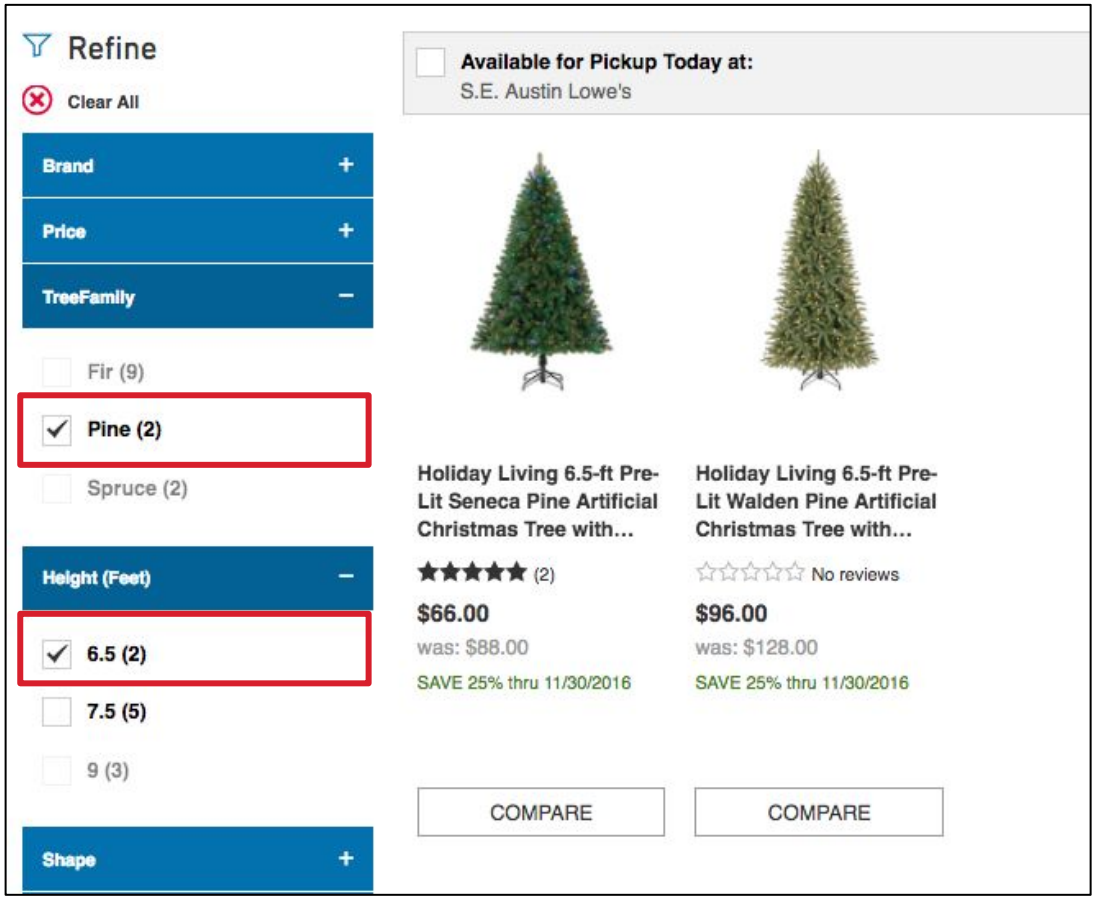
User quote - "*The drop downs for the filters were a little hard to notice at first.*"

Guideline #143. Filter values should have checkboxes

Users need to know which filters are selected. Create checkboxes as visual indicators.

Site Component - Filters
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

Lowe's:



User quote - "*I really enjoyed how ... the filters incorporated selection boxes ... which made for a great intuitive experience.*"

Guideline #144. Allow users to select more than one filter

This common functionality allows site visitors to take full advantage of filtering options.

User quote - "*The only thing that was a bit frustrating is that I was only able to select one sub-filter (e.g., 0-25) under the price filter. If my budget was under $50, I would have liked to have been able to select multiple choices (e.g., 0-25 as well as 25-50)*"

User quote - "[I was frustrated] *that [the] site reset my color preference when I selected to sort by price.*"

User quote - "*It was frustrating that I was unable to select more than one pricing category as a filter at the same time.*"

Site Component - Filters
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

User quote - When asked what frustrated them about the site: "*when searching for items I could only use 1 filter option at a time.*"

User quote - When asked what frustrated them about the site: "*Make it able to use multiple filters for searching for items we are interested in.*"

Guideline #145. Show how many products apply to each filter choice in parentheses next to the filter choice

If users can see that only two products apply to the current filter choice, they'll know not to get any more specific.

If users see that 1,274 products apply to the current filter selection, they'll know that they can continue to trim down the results.

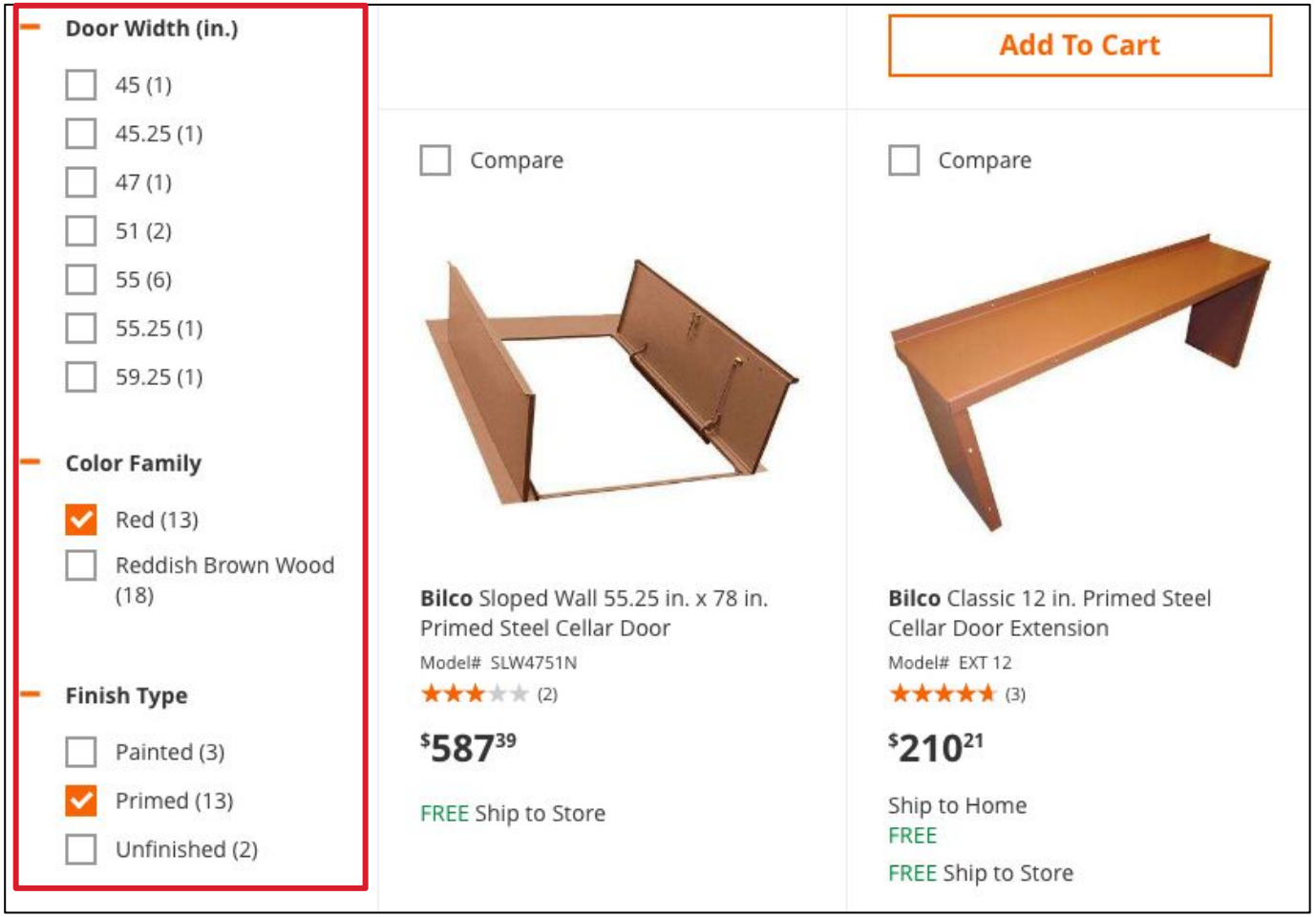
Showing the number of products available for a filter selection quickly provides valuable information for users' search journey

Site Component - Filters
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

User quote - "*The most frustrating thing would have to be the way the search results were listed for an item I was looking for. They were really only 2 of the types of shirt that I was looking for [but] it listed 7. I was misled by the amount of options because all the different colors for a particular style was listed in the search results.*"

Adherence examples

Guideline #144. Allow users to select more than one filter

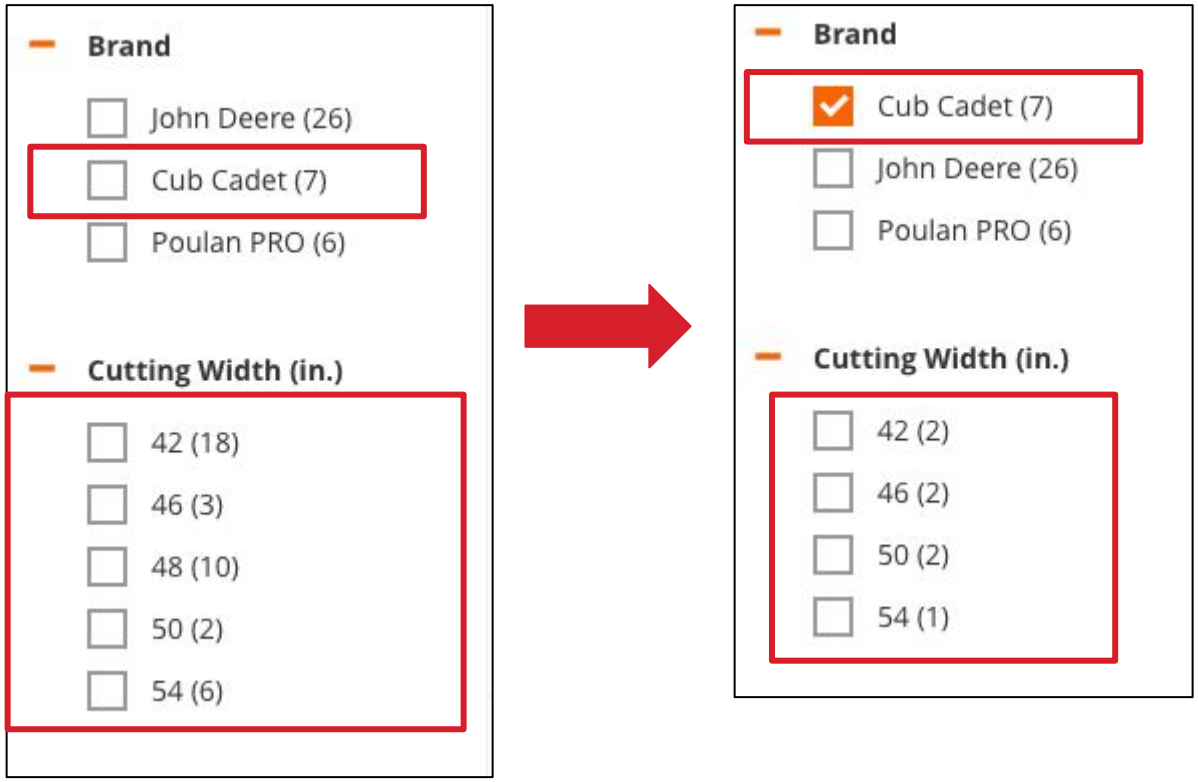


Home Depot allows users to select multiple filters and shows the number of available items for each filter selection in parentheses

Guideline #146. Only display filter values that apply to what's available

If you sell purple bikes, but none for men, don't allow users to choose both the "men" and "purple" filter selections when browsing for bicycles.

Home Depot adjusts the filter display for accurate availability when one filter is selected. The following filter displays adjusts when a brand is selected:



Site Component - Filters
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

Guideline #147. Offer themed filters ("fall sweaters" filter in sweaters and jackets product list)

Especially during holidays (e.g. Christmas) and special times of the year (e.g. back to school), themed filters are both a useful and fun addition to typical filters.

Some people will be shopping for gifts, some will simply be browsing and looking for inspiration. Themed filters facilitate these browsing behaviors.

Site Component - Filters
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

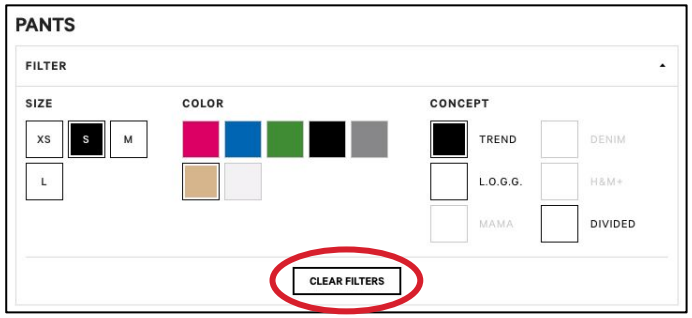
Guideline #148. Offer a “clear all” option for filter selections

Site Component - Filters
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

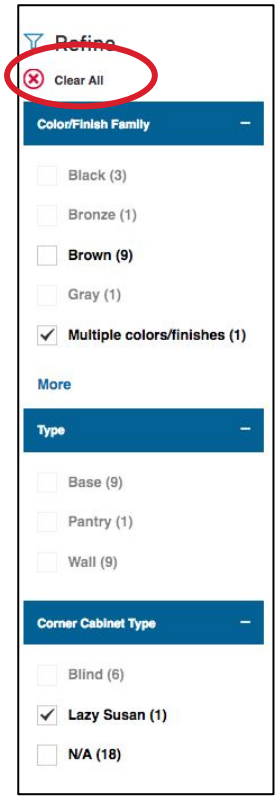
The “clear all” filter selection allows users to remove any applied filter selections with one click.

When users get too specific with their filter selections, want to get a feeling for the full scope of items available, or just want to start their search over again, they can click the “clear all” button to do so.

H&M allows users to clear all filters:



Lowe’s also offers a “clear all” option:



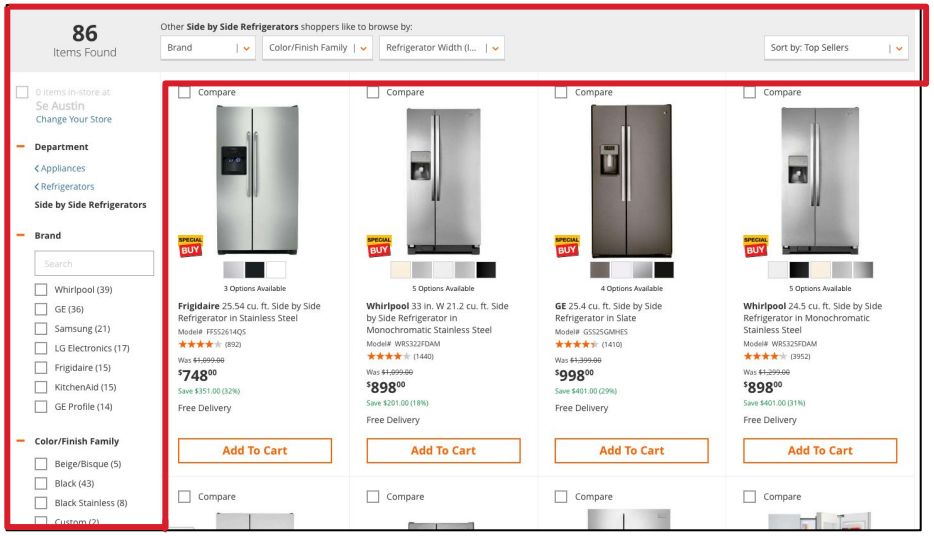
Guideline #149. Filter tools should be sticky, especially for endless scrolling and "load more" product lists

A sticky filter tool will increase usability. Instead of having to scroll all the way to the top of the product list, users can access filters wherever they are on the product list.

Site Component - Filters
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

Guideline #150. Horizontal filter menu and vertical filter menu should have the same top alignment

If you display filter tools both on the left hand side and the top of the product list, align the top of the two menus.
Home Depot aligns top and side filtering menus:



Site Component - Filters
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

User quote - "*Navigation and filter options were available on the left menu, as well as on the header Navigation bar. This made navigating from page to page a breeze!*"

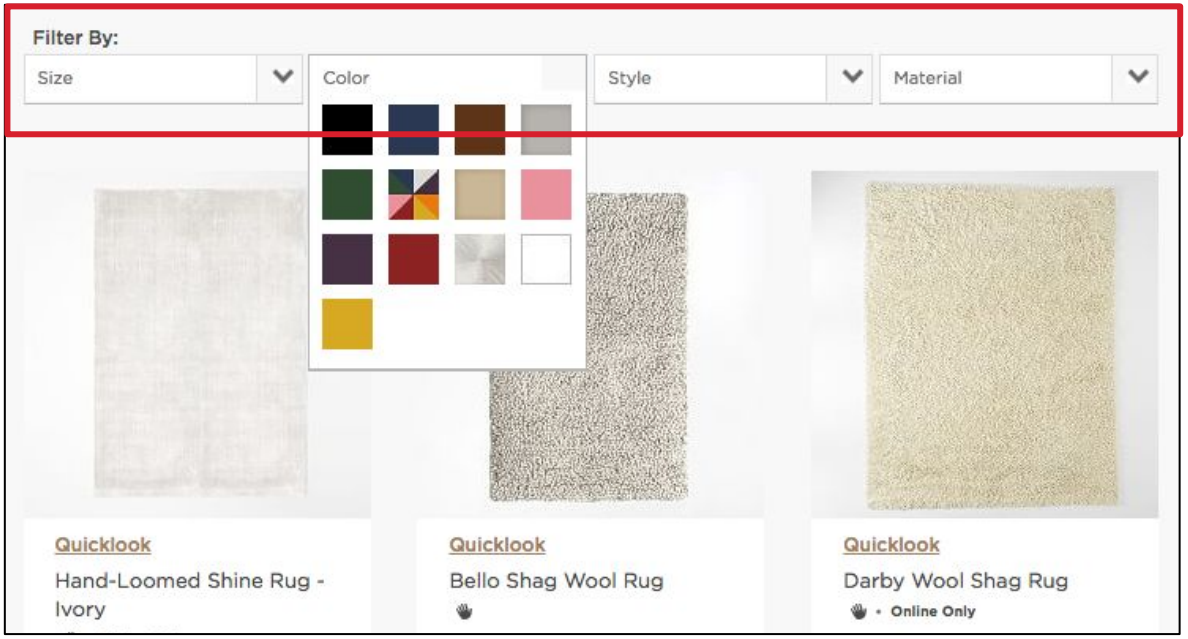
Guideline #151. Horizontal filtering bar at top of product list (can be additional to vertical left filtering options) works best when there are only a few filtering options

Horizontal filtering tools are becoming more common, and for good reason. In a recent usability study, horizontal filtering proved more visible than sidebar filters.

Some sites combine filter and sorting tools in the same horizontal bar.

However, horizontal placement only works when there are a few filtering options, simply because there's less space across the top of a product list.

West Elm places its filters horizontally:



Site Component - Filters
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

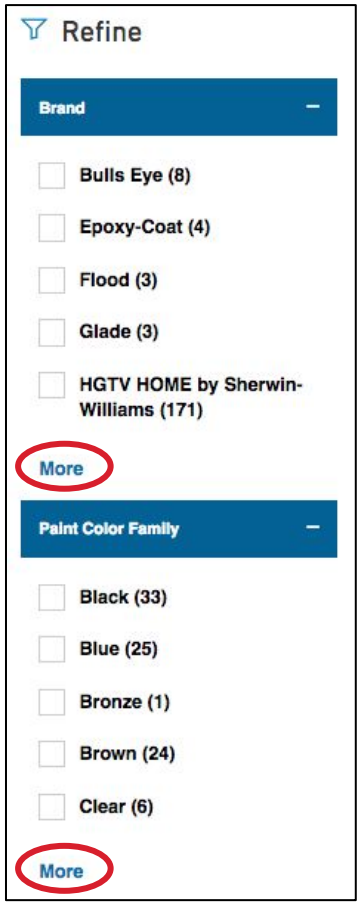
User quote - *"I really liked the filter that [was] placed at the top and it made it very easy for me to get the exact item that I wanted."*

Guideline #152. Collapse long filtering lists after around 10 filtering values, and clearly indicate that it's collapsed with 'see more' text

Displaying an extensive list of filter choices will slow down users who want to get onto the next filter. Create collapsible tabs for filters with many selections so users can quickly move on to either the next filter, or expand the selection.

Site Component - Filters
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

Lowe's online paint section:



User quote - *"I might suggest auto collapsing the filter drop down menus after making a selection."*

Guideline #153. Each filter selection should be a separate action in browser history (many users rely on the back button)

This guideline aims to increase usability for those who use the back button as a navigation tool. If each filter selection is an action in the browser history, users can simply click the back arrow to undo any filter selections.

Site Component - Filters
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

User quote - "*If I am looking for a product, I want to easily be able to go back and forth between the product search and viewing functions. Depending on the browser back button is an oversight of the development team.*"

Guideline #154. Auto-refresh search results after a filter has been selected (or deselected)

Don't make users find and click an "apply" button each time a filter selection is chosen. Instead, enable auto-refresh settings every one or two seconds to continually update filter selections.

Site Component - Filters
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

User quote - "*The [filters] that I chose were not remembered from one page to the next all the time as I navigated the product search and I had to enter the color/cost multiple times.*"

Product List & Search Results Page » Sorting

5 Guidelines

Product List & Search Results Page » Sorting

155. Follow convention: Design sorting options as dropdown box near top of page, labeled "Sort by"
156. When sorting a product list via customer ratings, take number of ratings into account
157. When sorting by price: offer sorting for item price and/or price per unit
158. Offer original date (of production, publication,etc) sorting option for products whose original date is relevant
159. Suggested scope and sorting can be helpful for large product lists

Sorting creates a significantly more efficient search process with one click. Users can re-organize a product list to match their needs. On a budget and want to see the least expensive items first? Looking for the newest version of a product? The sorting tool quickly allows people to find what they're looking for.

Because sorting is such a popular and common tool, it needs to be optimized.

It also needs to work:

User Quote - *"When I typed in the term "earbuds" and sorted by best selling, the number one match wasn't even earbuds."*

The following sorting guidelines offer design ideas and explain which sorting options are essential.

User quote - *"I would rather be able to sort by sleeve length, price and color, rather than shirt type"*

Guideline #155. Follow convention: Design sorting options as dropdown box near top of page, labeled "Sort by"

Increase usability by placing tools (and other design elements) where they belong. In this case, place the sorting tool on the top right of the product list.

If this location doesn't work for your site, the second most common spot for sorting options is above the filters on the left hand side of the page.

The "Sort by" label again lends itself to conventionality.

Site Component - Sorting
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

Guideline #156. When sorting a product list via customer ratings, take number of ratings into account

Judgements as to whether a 5-star rating with 2 reviews or a 4-star rating with 50 reviews is better are subjective, so be sure to display this information regardless of how you sort and display it.

User Quote - *"I would also have liked to be able to sort by the rating if possible. It would be great to be able to have the highest rated items at the top and sort that way."*

Site Component - Sorting
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

User quote - *"the reviews and ratings were excellent, and could easily be sorted by rating and other sort options. This made it VERY easy to see low ratings and quickly navigate the reviews section."*

Guideline #157. When sorting by price: offer sorting for item price and/or price per unit

This guideline applies to packages of items that are purchased in bulk.

BodyBuilding allows users to sort by price, serving, or gram:

Site Component - Sorting
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

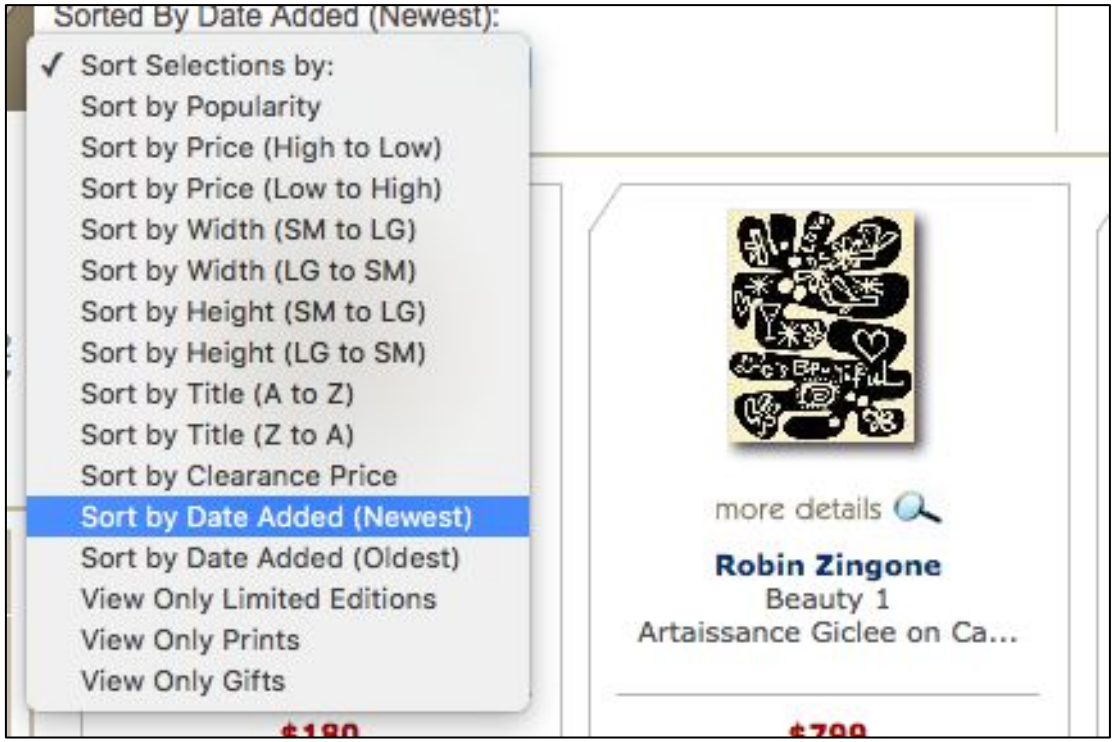
User quote - *"extremely simple to compare two (or more) separate products side-by-side, even including price per serving"*

Guideline #158. Offer original date (of production, publication,etc) sorting option for products whose original date is relevant

Site Component - Sorting
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

Dates can be important for movies, music, and other forms of art. The date can be publication, production, etc.

Prints.com offers the option to sort prints by their date of addition to the website:



Guideline #159. Suggested scope and sorting can be helpful for large product lists

This guideline is applicable when a product could belong in multiple categories. For instance, a computer may be found under electronics, office products, or hobbies. By suggesting a scope and/or sorting option, users can quickly narrow down their search.

Upon searching "TV" on the TigerDirect site, users are prompted with the choice to select a category:

Site Component - Sorting
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

User quote - *"I really liked that whenever I clicked on something (women, shirts, sweaters) it came up with more options to narrow down my search if I wanted short sleeve or long sleeve or what type of neckline I wanted."*

Product Page CUX Guideline Chapter

Product Page Guidelines

Product Page > Design & Copy

160. Product pictures should have a simple background (ideally white or grey)
161. Product page requires a CTA (usually "add to cart" type button)
162. If you offer in-store pickup, add a "Find in store" CTA to product page (and explain how it works)
163. Offer a "wish list" or “favorites” button in addition to “add to cart” button

Product Page > Product Information

164. Product page should show all possible variations (sizes, colors, models)
165. Product picture should offer as much information into the look & feel of the product as possible (3d view, zoom magnifier, etc)
166. Show products in accurate context and scale
167. If a product variation (e.g. size) is unavailable, this should be immediately apparent
168. Offer an email notification system for when out of stock items come back in stock
169. Offer link to size guide on product page (if applicable to product)
170. Color swatches should be accurate
171. Push urgency and/or scarcity
172. Consider adding product videos to the product page
173. Comparison info (e.g. dimensions, materials) for similar products should be presented in a visually similar format so people know where to look when trying to compare products
174. For expensive products: Display payment options
175. Social sharing is more effective on the "thank you page" than on the product page

Product Page > Product information > Product Description

176. Create unique product descriptions (don't use the manufacturer's)
177. Every sentence in the product description should tell buyers something they didn't know before (don't tell them it's chocolate if they're buying a box of chocolates)
178. Gather and analyze product reviews to see what people enjoy most. Include it in your product description
179. Product description should address fears, uncertainties, and doubts - figure out what these are
180. Write your product descriptions in the style of your target audience
181. Share features AND benefits
182. Use specific language in product description ("best value" vs "won X award 4 years in a row")
183. Be altruistic, sell for a "cause"

Product Page Guidelines

Product Page > Product Information > Shipping & Returns

184. Display shipping and return policy on product page
185. Show estimated shipping time

Product Page > Trust Elements

186. Show reviews and ratings on product page
187. Don't be afraid to include a few negative reviews
188. Offer sorting options for reviews
189. Ask "was this review helpful?"

Product Page > Navigation

190. Breadcrumbs should be near top of page, following convention
191. On product page, offer hierarchy-based breadcrumb links

Product Page > Accessories & Related Products

192. Offer similar/recommended products to the product page
193. Offer accessories and add-ons to the product page
194. Link any other products to their rightful product pages
195. Similar products, recommended products, and accessories/add-ons should be in distinct and separate areas of the product page
196. Show "recently viewed items"
197. Allow users to clear or disable "recently viewed items"

Product Page » Design

4 Guidelines

Product Page > Design & Copy

160. Product pictures should have a simple background (ideally white or grey)
161. Product page requires a CTA (usually "add to cart" type button)
162. If you offer in-store pickup, add a "Find in store" CTA to product page (and explain how it works)
163. Offer a "wish list" or “favorites” button in addition to “add to cart” button

With product pages, it’s often way too easy to lose sight that the goal is to actually persuade people. Instead, on most eCommerce sites, product pages are treated with a very clinical approach.

If the goal is to get the person on the other side of the screen saying, “I need this, and you can’t get it into my cart fast enough” then the product page needs to take into consideration all of the tiny things that go into a purchase decision.

While there are many aspects that go into being more persuasive, this section focuses on the design aspects of compelling product pages.

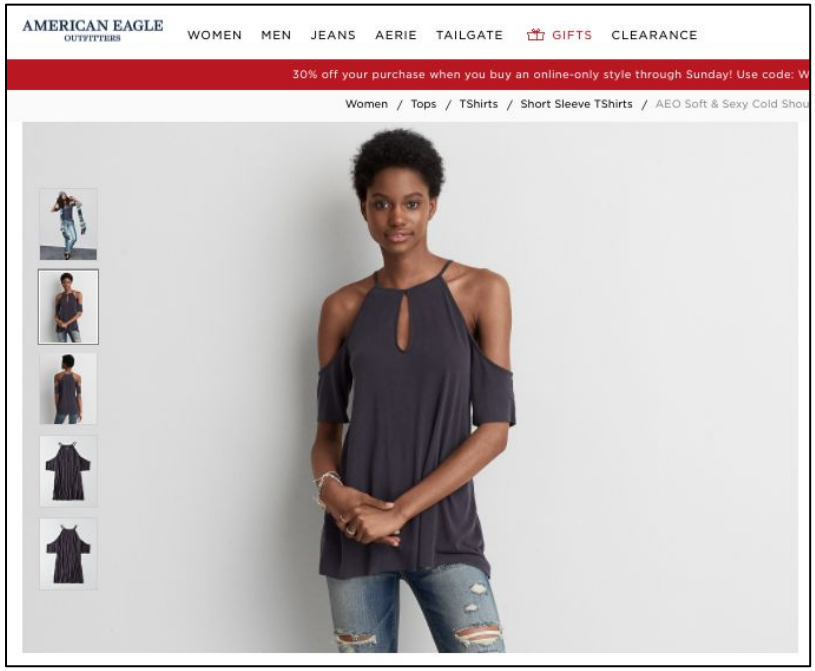
The following guidelines explain how to design a prototypical yet compelling product page.

Guideline #160. Product pictures should have a simple background (ideally white or grey)

This relatively simple guideline stems from the fact that users are on the product page to look at the product. They don't want to be distracted by irrelevant visuals like a busy background.

A neutral and unobtrusive background keeps cognitive load low, allowing your shoppers to focus on the essential aspects of the product picture.

American Eagle showcases their products and delivers ample information via product photos while keeping background distraction at a minimum:



Site Component - Design
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

User quote - " *I also liked the clean look of items displayed on white background.*"

User quote - "*I really like how all items were simply laid out*"

User quote - "*With so many words and useless images, I found myself distracted while using the site. It was extremely difficult to concentrate.*"

Guideline #161. Product page requires a CTA (usually "add to cart" type button)

A prominent CTA is one of the most essential parts of a product page. Without a CTA, the user experience dead ends when shoppers find the product they want to buy. In other words, a CTA is vital.

Regardless of your site's color scheme, the CTA should color-contrast the background. It should be high in the page's visual hierarchy.

Common product page CTA phrases include Buy Now, Add to Cart, and Order Now. Is one of these CTAs more successful than the others, and what do these different phrases mean to shoppers?

In one test, Add to Cart performed best. The action "add to cart" implies a reversible decision: The shopper can remove the item from their "cart" if they change their mind. Buy Now, Order Now, and doing anything "now" implies that this is the shopper's final decision, and there's no turning back.

At the end of the day, however, copy is relative. Test different CTAs for yourself to learn what best complements your product.

Site Component - Design > CTA
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

User quote - *"It was clear with the red buttons where you needed to press to add to the cart and checkout"*

User quote - When asked what they would improve on a site: *"I would put 'add to cart' on the button"*

User quote - *"not being able to find the shopping cart entry point, I was not familiar with this particular setup and overlooked the order buttons to the right."*

Guideline #162. If you offer in-store pickup, add a "Find in store" CTA to product page (and explain how it works)

Major benefits of in-store pickup: No shipping charges. Users' ability to touch, feel, and fully understand a product before committing to it. The possibility of cross-selling once shoppers are in your brick and mortar store.

While your in-store pickup CTA should be visible, it should be secondary to the Add to Cart CTA.

After clicking the in-store pickup CTA, prompt users to enter their location and to select a radius (are they willing to drive 50 miles to the nearest location?). Display whether the item is in stock at the nearest location to the shopper.

Once shoppers are in your brick and mortar location, make it easy for them to find the pickup area in your store using clear, prominent signage.

Worried about the security risks associated with in-store pickup? Read this article for store pickup best practices.

Site Component - Design > CTA
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

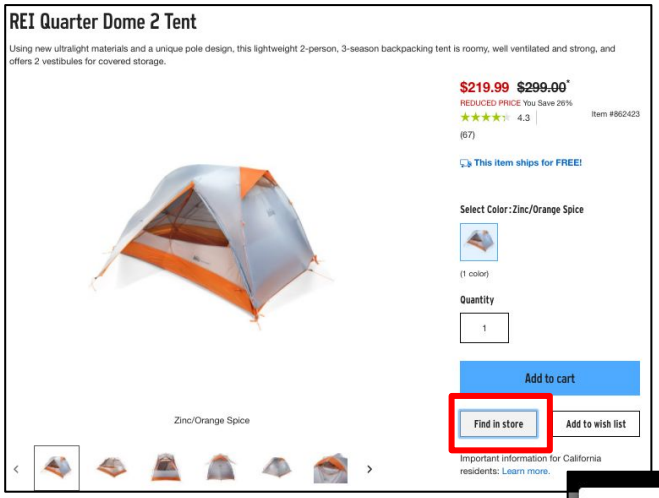
User quote - When asked what they liked about a site: "*Order online and pick it up at a nearby store*"

User quote - "*I was surprised there was no "pick up in store" option for the chaise, and the shipping cost of $55 (or $180 for expedited -- seriously?) was sort of absurd. Maybe that was uncommon, and just that particular item?*"

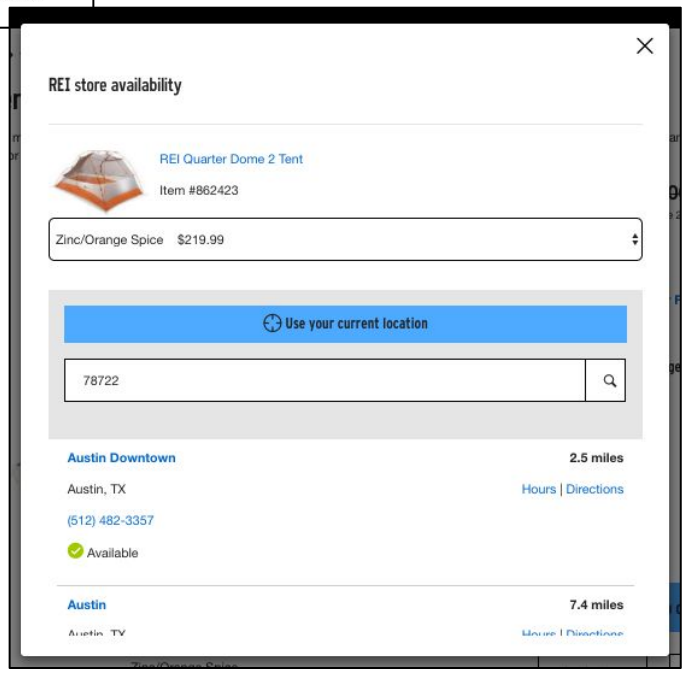
User quote - "*I ... liked how it displayed whether or not it was in a store nearby so I can pick it up today.*"

Adherence example

Guideline #162. If you offer in-store pickup, add a "Find in store" CTA to product page (and explain how it works)



1



2

REI: The popup (bottom right) appears when users click the “Find in-store” CTA. Once entering their zip code or clicking the “Use your current location” button, the page displays the nearest locations, each location’s distance from the user’s location, and whether the product is available (in stock) at each store. REI goes so far as to provide a map, directions, and a phone number for each location as well.

Adherence example

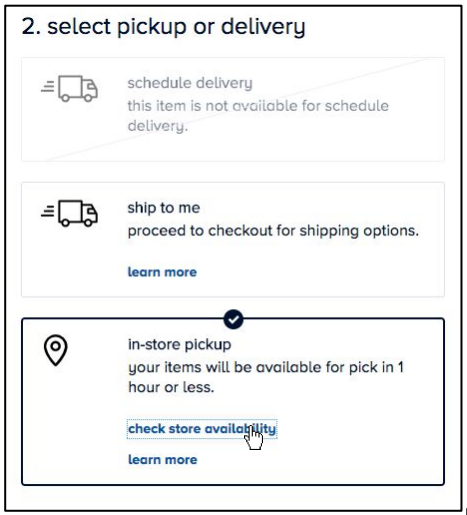
Guideline #162. If you offer in-store pickup, add a "Find in store" CTA to product page (and explain how it works)

Petsmart provides in-store pickup on the product page.

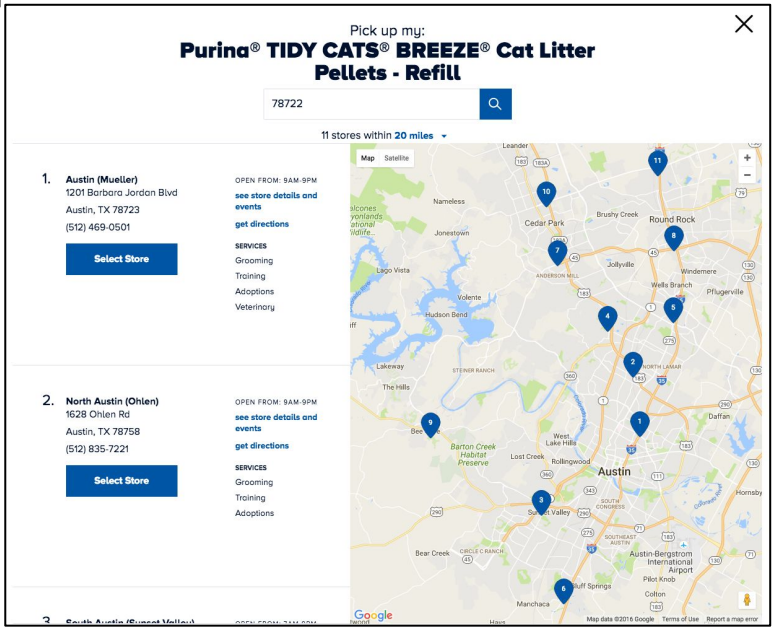
When the “check store availability” is clicked on, users are prompted to enter their zip code along with a distance radius for store locations.

Users will then be shown nearby stores and can “Select Store” by clicking on the corresponding blue CTA.

1



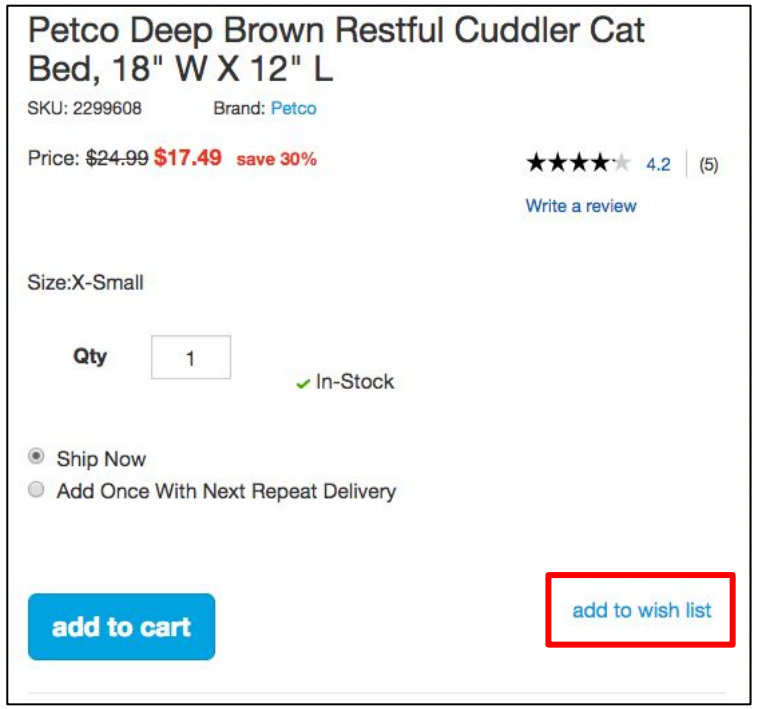
2



Guideline #163. Offer a "wish list" or “favorites” button in addition to “add to cart” button

Some shoppers don’t always intend to make a purchase when viewing a product page. They might want to save the product instead for various reasons: to bookmark something they’re considering buying, a gift for a friend, a gift for themselves, or even to compare products.

Allow users to create a wish list, a place to save products. Create a simple, secondary “add to wish list” or “add to favorites” button near (but secondary to) the Add to Cart CTA.



Site Component - Design > CTA
Conversion Heuristic - Motivation

User quote - *“I would have not just a recently viewed tab, but a favorites tab because I liked the fact I could go back to items I've seen but some items i didn't like on there and just cluttered the tab”*

Product Page » Product Information

12 Guidelines

Product Page > Product Information

164. Product page should show all possible variations (sizes, colors, models)
165. Product picture should offer as much information into the look & feel of the product as possible (3d view, zoom magnifier, etc)
166. Show products in accurate context and scale
167. If a product variation (e.g. size) is unavailable, this should be immediately apparent
168. Offer an email notification system for when out of stock items come back in stock
169. Offer link to size guide on product page (if applicable to product)
170. Color swatches should be accurate
171. Push urgency and/or scarcity
172. Consider adding product videos to the product page
173. Comparison info (e.g. dimensions, materials) for similar products should be presented in a visually similar format so people know where to look when trying to compare products
174. For expensive products: Display payment options
175. Social sharing is more effective on the "thank you page" than on the product page

People won't buy something if they don't know what it is.

People won't buy something if they don't know how it will benefit them.

The following guidelines explain how to craft product information: product descriptions, specs, and all other types of product information that's displayed on the product page.

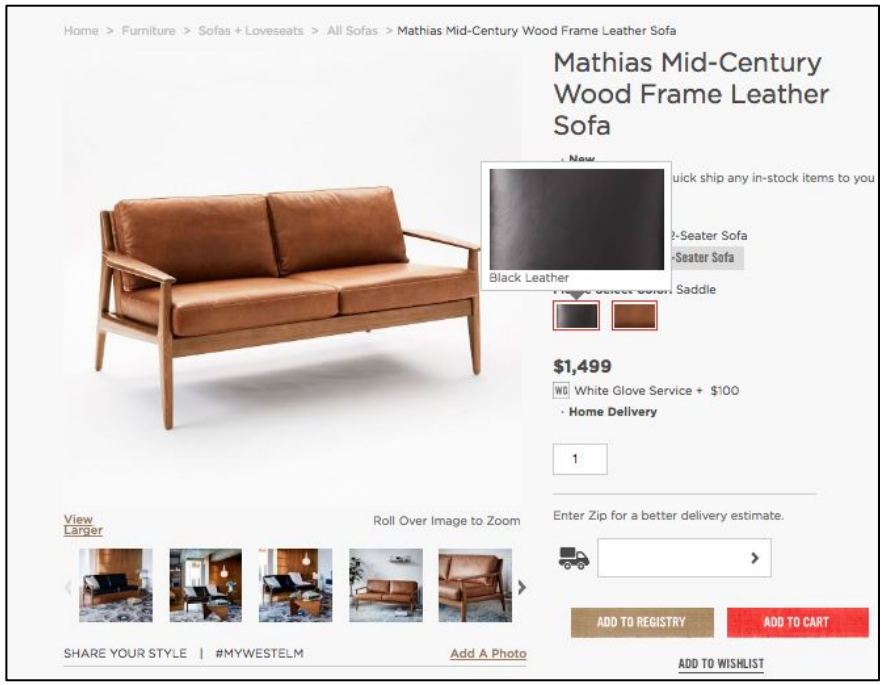
Guideline #164. Product page should show all possible variations (sizes, colors, models, etc.)

Site Component - Product Information
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

The purpose of the product page is to effectively communicate all possible information about an item you're selling.

Display the variations of your product in a user-friendly way. The best approach will depend on the item and its variations.

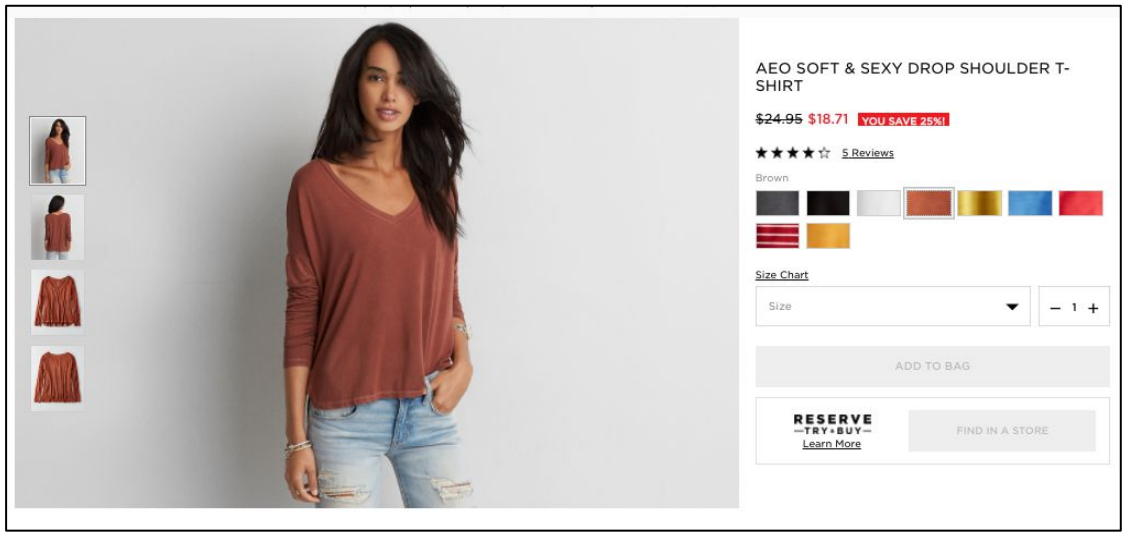
West Elm allows users to read information about each variation (color and material) when mouse hovering over the swatch:

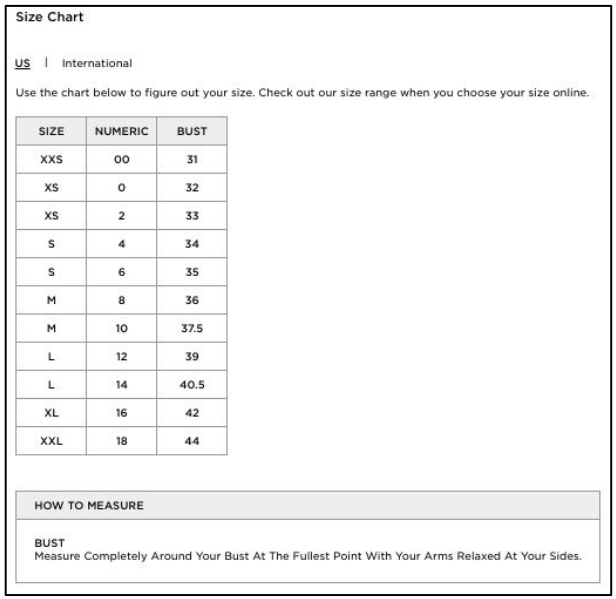


Adherence example

Guideline #164. Product page should show all possible variations (sizes, colors, models, etc.)

American Eagle sells this basic tee in lots of colors and sizes, and they want you to know it.





Size Chart

US | International

Use the chart below to figure out your size. Check out our size range when you choose your size online.

SIZE	NUMERIC	BUST
XXS	00	31
XS	0	32
XS	2	33
S	4	34
S	6	35
M	8	36
M	10	37.5
L	12	39
L	14	40.5
XL	16	42
XXL	18	44

HOW TO MEASURE

BUST
Measure Completely Around Your Bust At The Fullest Point With Your Arms Relaxed At Your Sides.

Non-adherence example

Guideline #164. Product page should show all possible variations (sizes, colors, models, etc.)

While J. Crew does show all color variations of this shirt upon mousehover, they could provide better product pictures.

Users can't see each shirt on an actual person and don't know the color of the elbow patch on different colored shirts.

Guideline #165. Product picture should offer as much information into the look & feel of the product as possible (3d view, zoom magnifier, etc)

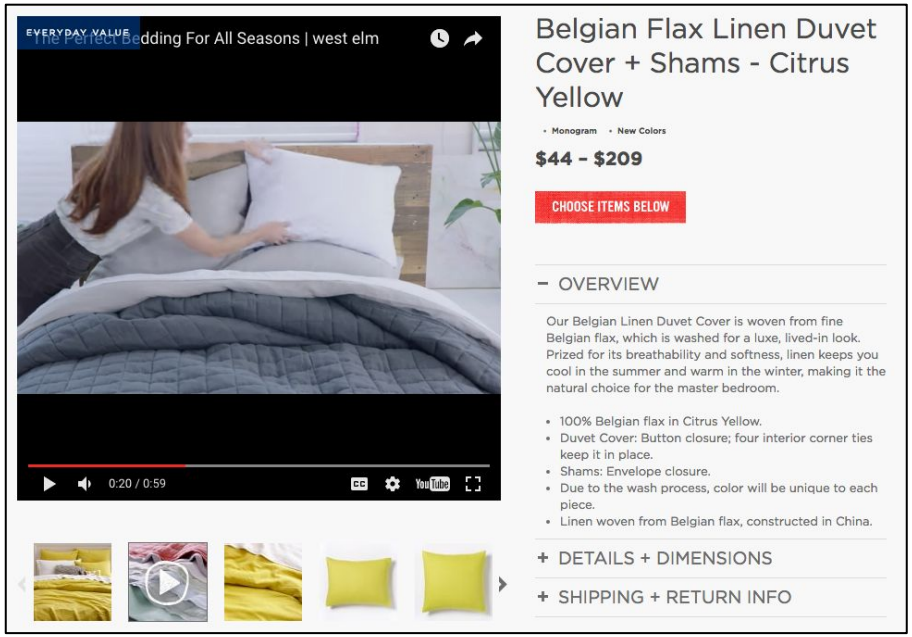
Especially for visually-driven products, the amount of visual information offered on a product page is a make or break feature. If users don't have a confident grasp on your product, they'll go to a site where they can better understand what they're buying.

Site Component - Product Information
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

Consider what shoppers want to know about your product: Do they want to know what it looks like from every angle? Do they want to know what it looks like up close? Offer features that answer these questions.

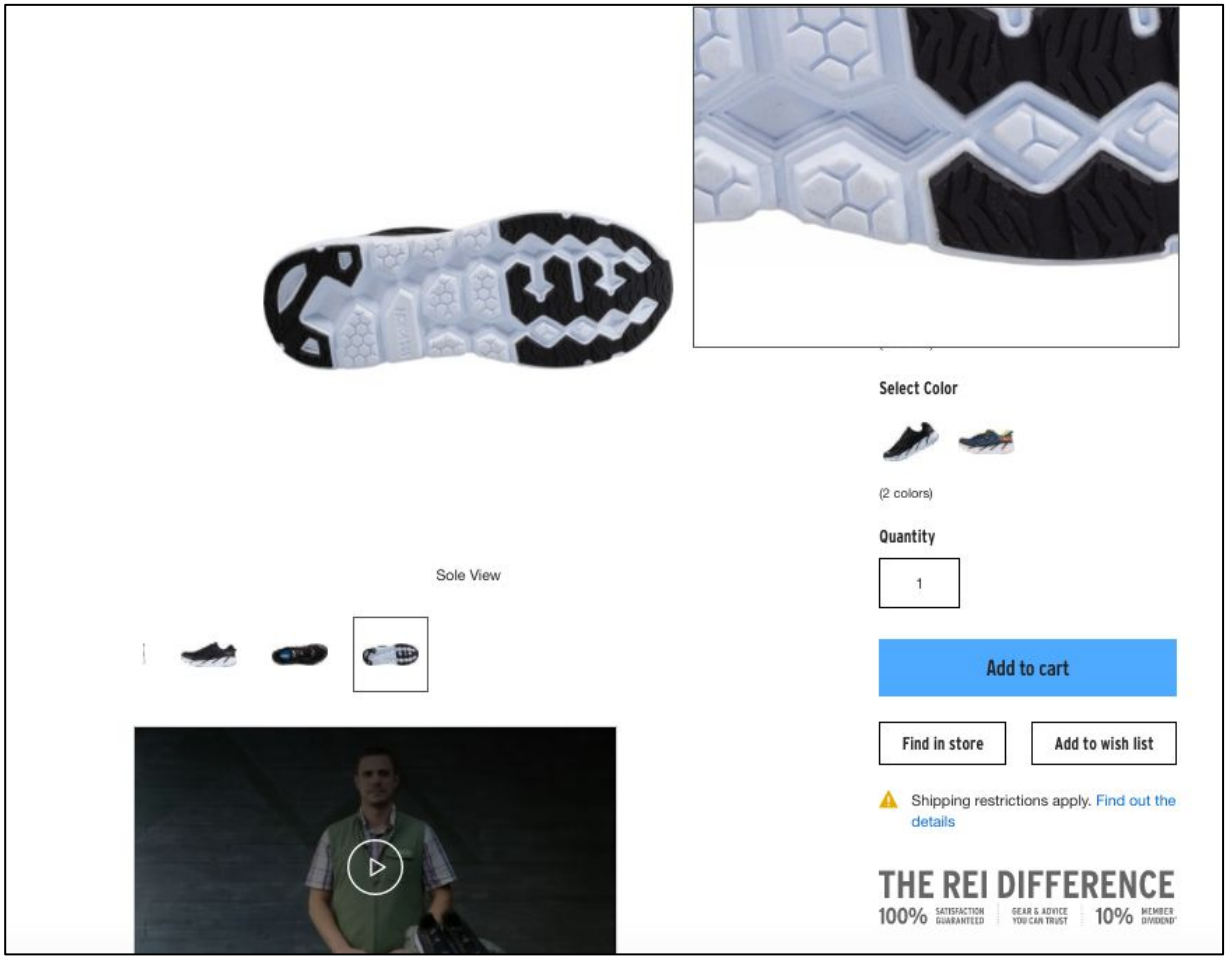
User quote - *"I liked seeing multiple photos of each item"*

West Elm provides a variety of product pictures and a video:



Adherence example

Guideline #165. Product picture should offer as much information into the look & feel of the product as possible (3d view, zoom magnifier, etc)



REI offers multiple views of their products. Knowing that runners care about the tread of shoes, the site includes a photo of the underside of the shoe. All photos can be magnified on mouse hover and are high-quality so that the details are clear.

REI also includes a product video of the shoes so users can see how they move and look in real-time.

Guideline #166. Show products in accurate context and scale

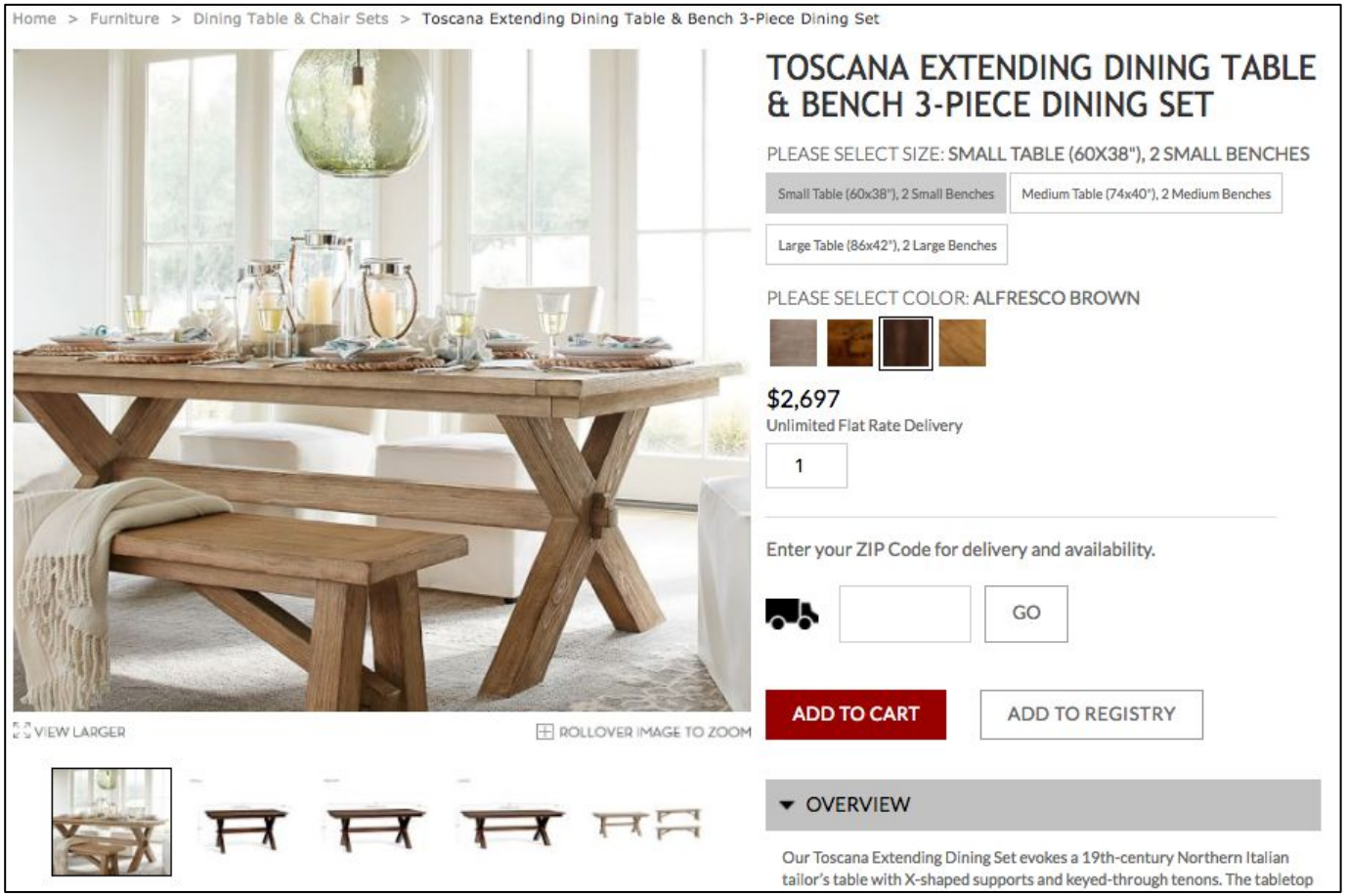
It can be hard to conceive whether a product will fit your needs when the product picture shows it completely out of context. Help users imagine how a product will fit into their lives by placing it in a realistic context.

TigerDirect should consider bringing this system unit and laptop back down to Earth and photographing it in a home or office setting instead:

Site Component - Product Information
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

Adherence example

Guideline #166. Show products in accurate context and scale

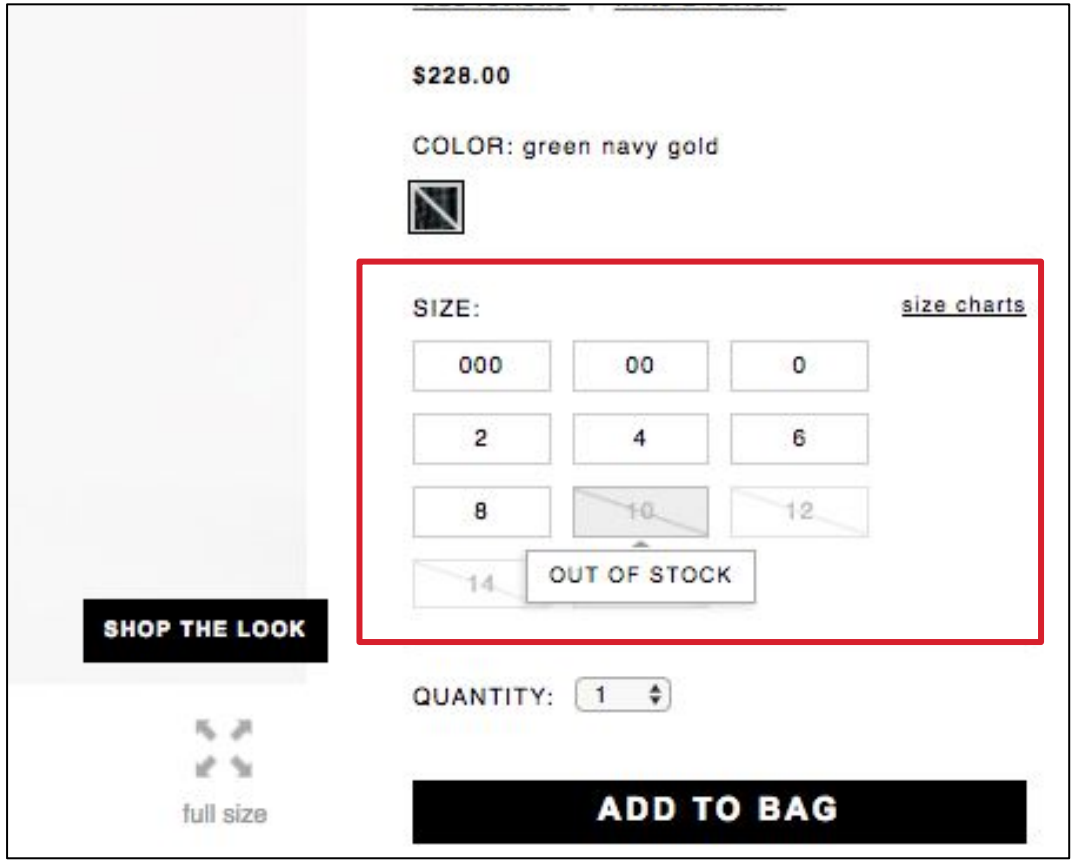


Pottery Barn displays beautiful, high-quality product images that don't just show the product in context, but provide design inspiration

Guideline #167. If a product variation (e.g. size) is unavailable, this should be immediately apparent

Don't frustrate your site visitors, don't waste their time.

There are a few ways to display out of stock variations. J. Crew greys out, puts a slash through, and displays "OUT OF STOCK" on mouse hover sizes that aren't available:



Site Component - Product Information
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

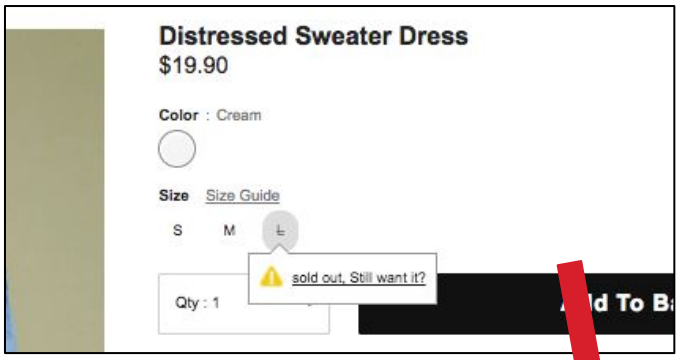
User quote - "*One of the items I wanted to add to my cart did not have the option to, whether it was out of stock or not was not expressed. If I wanted to buy it I would have to possibly go elsewhere in order to.*"

User quote - "*The websites strikes off [sizes] which are not available. Does this mean it is unavailable online? It would help if it suggests if the sizes are available in the nearest store.*"

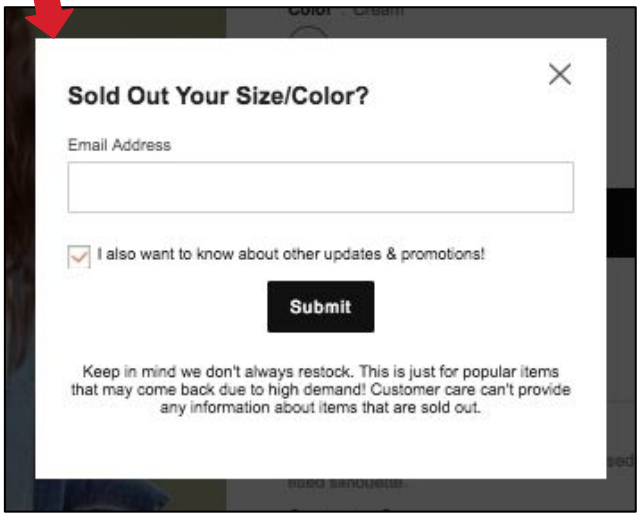
Guideline #168. Offer an email notification system for when out of stock items come back in stock

This is a viable solution for the problem of out of stock items. Users don't have to keep checking back on your site to find out if your product is available. Instead, they simply enter their email address and receive an email when you've replenished your stock.

Site Component - Product Information
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity



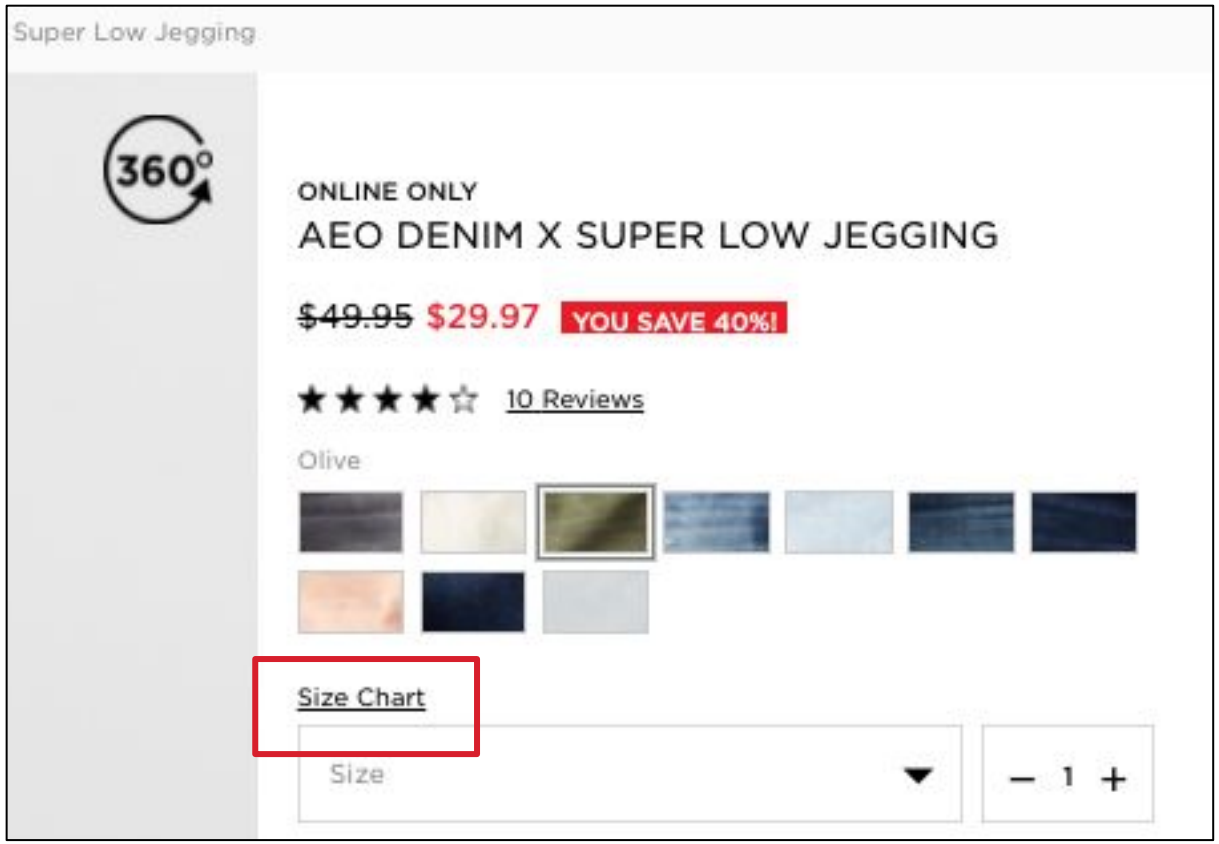
Forever21 displays a yellow "sold out" notification. When clicked on, the "Sold Out Your Size/Color?" box pops up, where users can enter their email to be notified when their size/color is back in stock.



Guideline #169. Offer link to size guide on product page (if applicable to product)

This simple guideline has high utility for clothing sites. It's common knowledge that sizes vary across brands. Display a link to your size guide in a visible location.

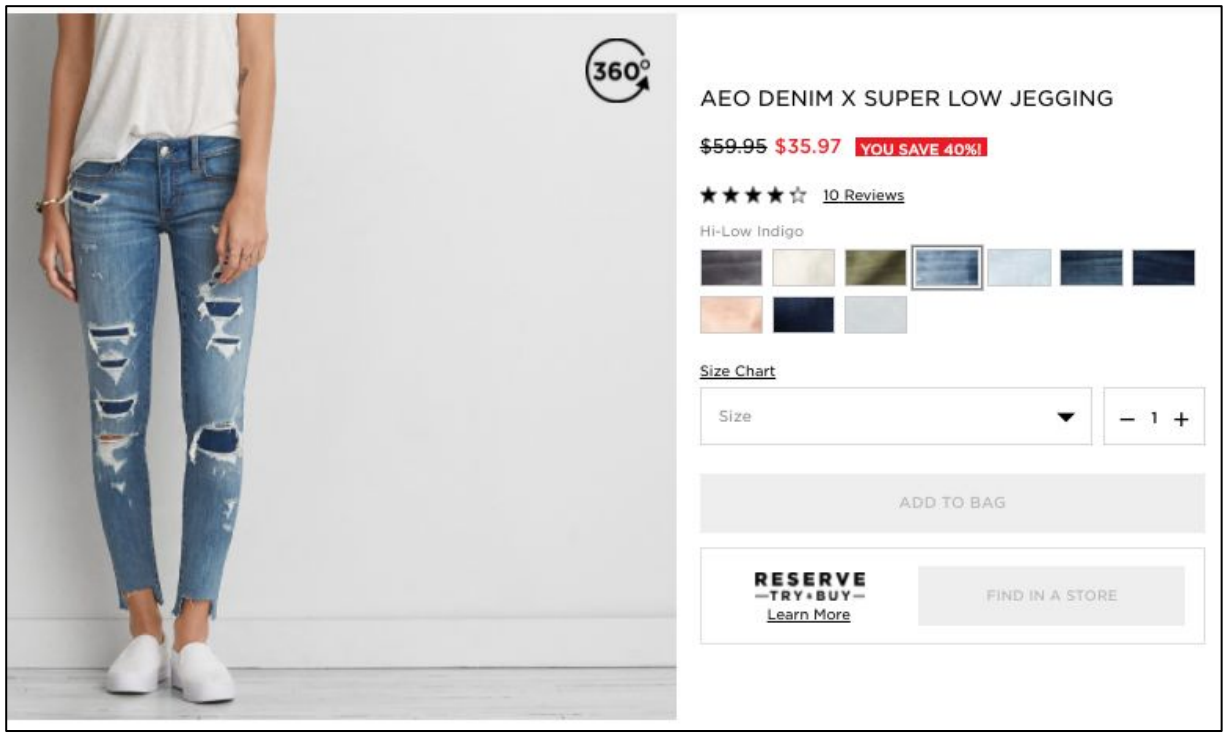
Site Component - Product Information
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity



Guideline #170. Color swatches should be accurate

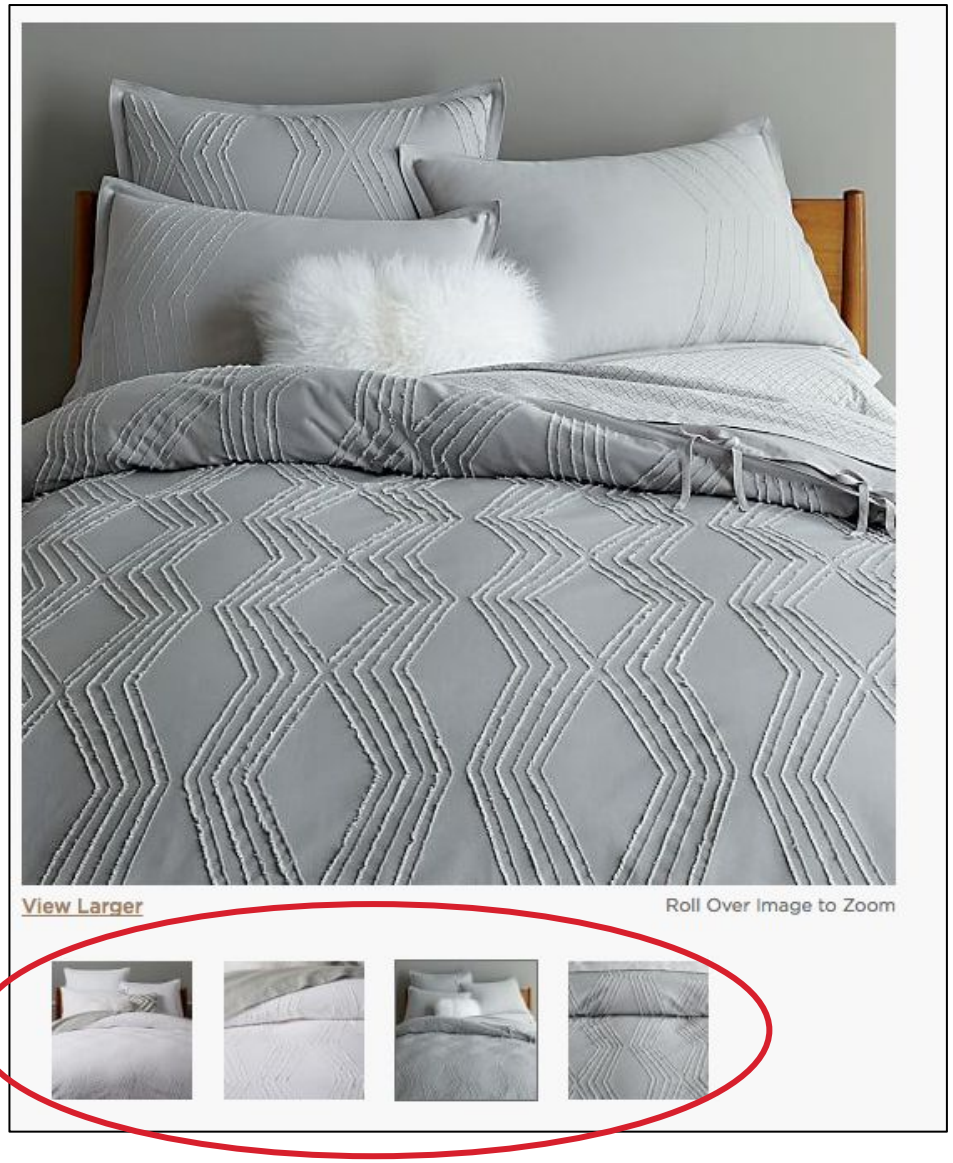
This seems like a no-brainer, but one of the most common negative reviews on ecommerce sites deal with colors being "off". Make sure your colors are accurate. American Eagle shows multiple product pictures of each color variation, and the color swatches are actual photographs of the product:

Site Component - Product Information
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity



Adherence example

Guideline #170. Color swatches should be accurate



West Elm shows product pictures for each color variation (white and grey for this item)

Guideline #171. Push urgency and/or scarcity

Scarcity, a pillar of modern persuasion, communicates the idea that a product is so popular that there are hardly any left, so buy now!

This last part, the push to "buy now", is linked to urgency. Urgency comes into play when shoppers feel the need to act immediately. Whether there are only a few items left in stock or a sale is ending, urgency pushes users to buy.

TigerDirect advises shoppers to "HURRY!" in order to get the best deal:

Site Component - Product Information
Conversion Heuristic - Motivation

Guideline #172. Consider adding product videos to the product page

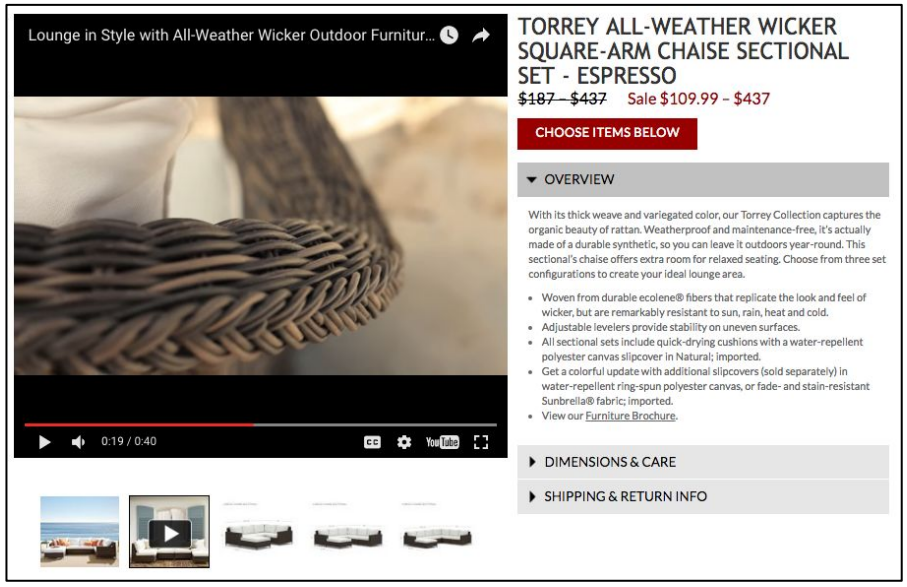
Product videos can significantly increase conversions by providing information that would not be understood otherwise. Users can understand how a product looks, moves, and fits into its surroundings with product videos.

Site Component - Product Information
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

Some tips for product videos

Some great examples of product videos

Pottery Barn includes videos on many product pages:



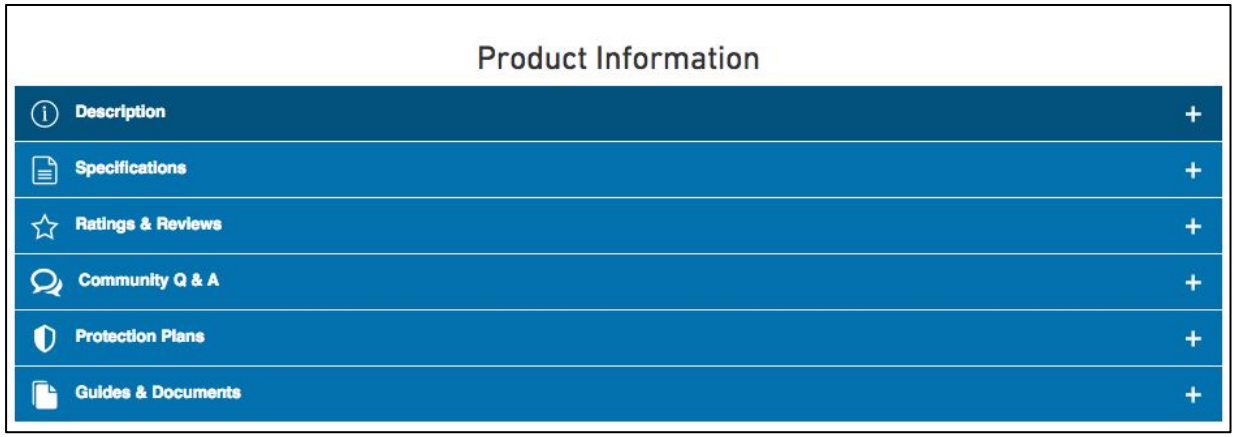
Guideline #173. Comparison info (e.g. dimensions, materials) for similar products should be presented in a visually similar format so people know where to look when trying to compare products

Site Component - Product Information
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

This guideline aims to increase usability and decrease friction. Product pages should consistently show specs in the same place so users don't become frustrated trying to find a small piece of information that could easily be hidden anywhere.

If you have lots of product info/specs, organize them with tabs or a collapsable menu

Lowe's devotes area to a collapsable "Product Information" menu where users can find the same information across product pages:

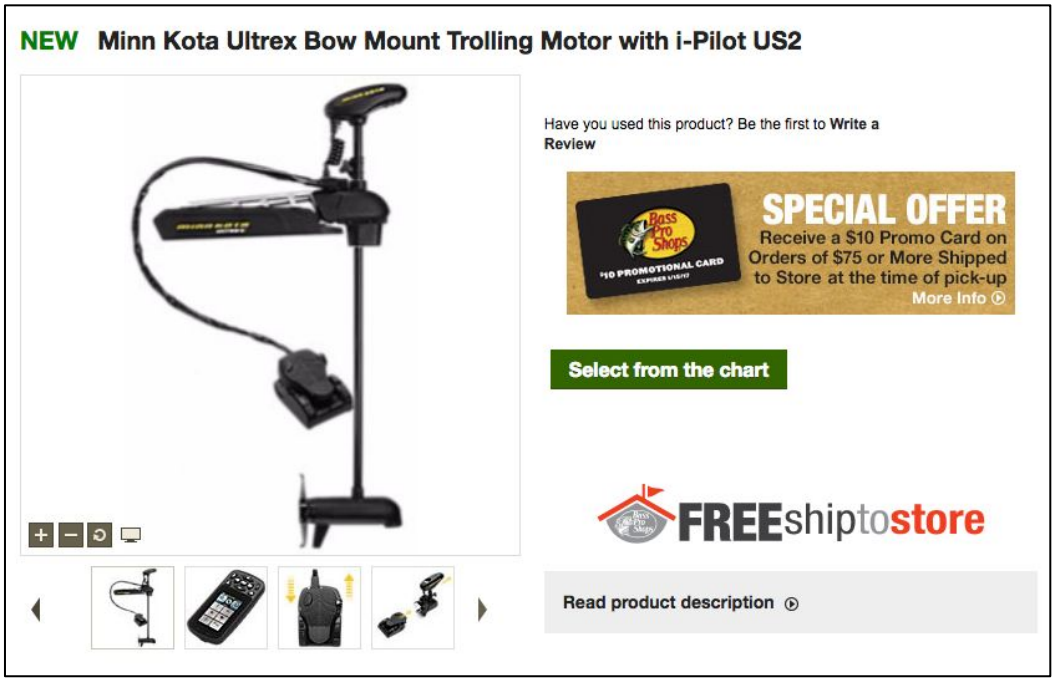


Guideline #174. For expensive products: Display payment options

Site Component - Product Information
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

It would be a shame to miss out on revenue just because your site visitors don’t know that you offer a payment plan. Display them on the product page to immediately alleviate any possible concerns.

Bass Pro Shops offers a payment plan allowing customers to stretch their payment out over a six-month period. However, information on this plan is hidden deep within the website. It would be smarter to display this payment option on the product page, especially for expensive products like a $2,000 boat motor:



Guideline #175. Social sharing is more effective on the "thank you page" than on the product page

Although the common practice is to display social sharing on the product page, this isn't complementary to the customer journey. Just because someone is looking at a product page does not mean that they're already ranting and raving about it.

Instead, allow customers to share a product with their friends *after* they've purchased it. It's much more likely that they're going to be excited to share an item if they actually committed to buying it. Place social sharing buttons on the Thank You page.

Site Component - Design > Interaction
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

Product Page » Product Information » Product Description

8 Guidelines

Product Page > Product Information > Product Description

176. Create unique product descriptions (don't use the manufacturer's)
177. Every sentence in the product description should tell buyers something they didn't know before (don't tell them it's chocolate if they're buying a box of chocolates)
178. Gather and analyze product reviews to see what people enjoy most. Include it in your product description
179. Product description should address fears, uncertainties, and doubts- figure out what these are
180. Write your product descriptions in the style of your target audience
181. Share features AND benefits
182. Use specific language in product description ("best value" vs "won X award 4 years in a row")
183. Be altruistic, sell for a "cause"

Do people really read product page copy? Maybe. While there's evidence that most people skim, instead of read, online, there's also good evidence that product descriptions matter. Substantially.

Although it's not as blatant as a hero image or a value proposition, product page copy is an important component of a successful eCommerce site. Especially if you've got a large amount of traffic, beefing up your product page copy could produce noticeable lifts.

Empirical support from an ecommerce study conducted by NN group found that 20% of overall task failures – when the user failed to successfully complete a purchase when asked to do so – could be attributed to incomplete or unclear product information.

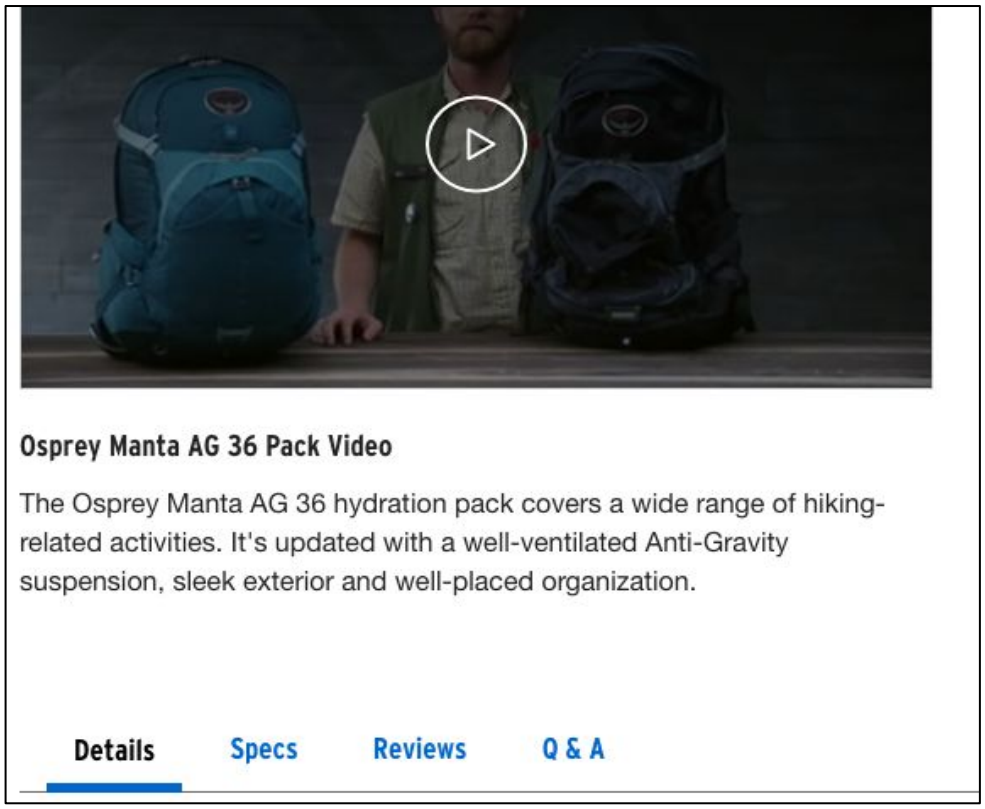
These guidelines aim to help you avoid that 20% of failures.

Guideline #176. Create unique product descriptions (don't use the manufacturer's)

Site Component - Product Information > Product Description
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

Product descriptions provide an opportunity to increase sales using various copywriting techniques. Manufacturer's descriptions don’t focus on sales, so don’t rely on them to deliver a powerful message to site visitors.

REI writes a compelling description, includes a video, and a table of details, specs, etc.:



Guideline #177. Every sentence in the product description should tell buyers something they didn't know before (don't tell them it's chocolate if they're buying a box of chocolates)

This straightforward guideline deals with the power of your product description. Your description should be information-packed, starting with the most important details. Read our blog post on product page copy for more insight.

Site Component - Product Information > Product Description
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

Guideline #178. Gather and analyze product reviews to see what people enjoy most. Include it in your product description

Analyze product reviews for recurring features or aspects that customers enjoy. Also, look for phrases that are used repeatedly. For instance, if multiple reviews mention how “soft” your sweater is, be sure to advertise the softness in your description.

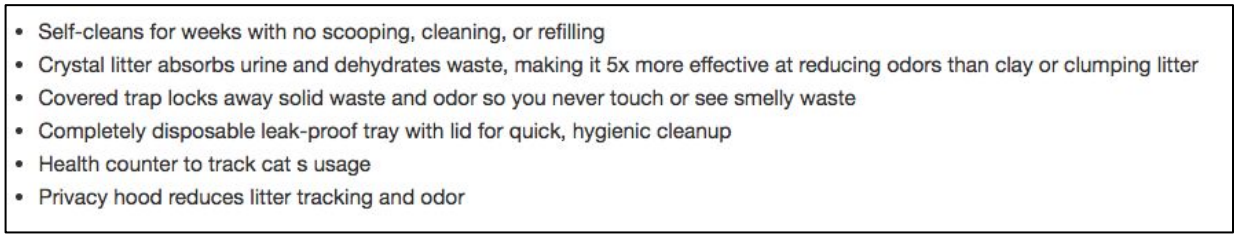
Site Component - Product Information > Product Description
Conversion Heuristic - Motivation

Guideline #179. Product description should address fears, uncertainties, and doubts- figure out what these are

To learn what drives potential customers' buying decisions, comb through product reviews and send surveys to past customers. Take this information and add it to your product description.

Addressing uncertainties, fears, and doubts removes one more obstacle between turning a site visitor into a customer. Read this article to learn more about addressing FUDs.

Petco does an excellent job acknowledging and addressing FUDs. For a $160 self-scooping litter box, a product that seems precarious by nature, the site advertises a 30-day money back guarantee and shares a variety of information all crafted to inform and reassure potential customers:



- Self-cleans for weeks with no scooping, cleaning, or refilling
- Crystal litter absorbs urine and dehydrates waste, making it 5x more effective at reducing odors than clay or clumping litter
- Covered trap locks away solid waste and odor so you never touch or see smelly waste
- Completely disposable leak-proof tray with lid for quick, hygienic cleanup
- Health counter to track cat s usage
- Privacy hood reduces litter tracking and odor

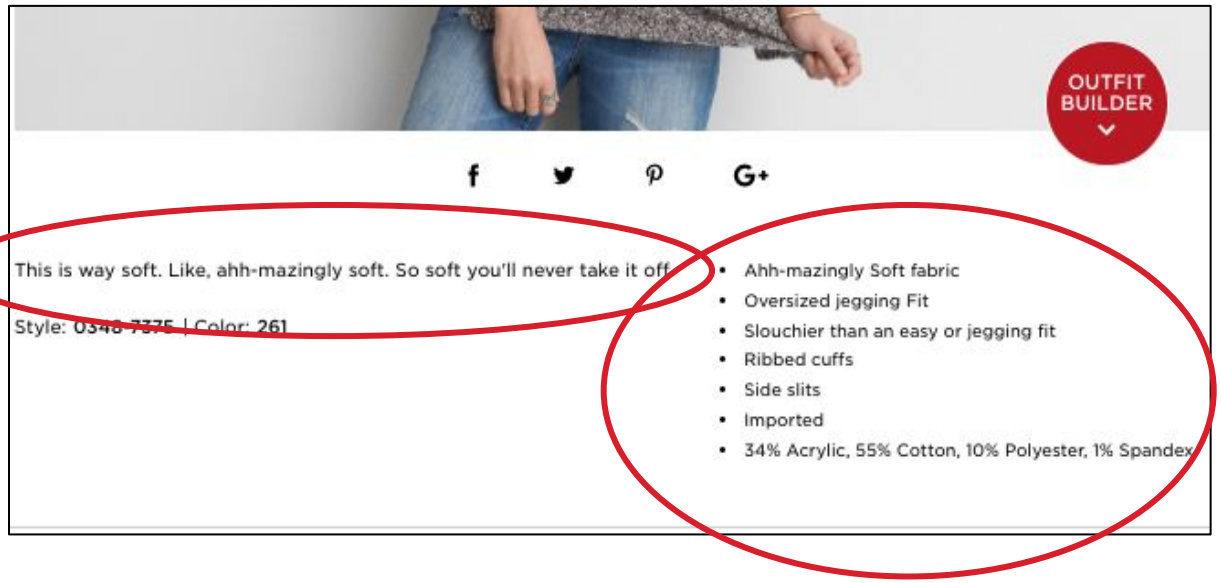
Site Component - Product Information > Product Description
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

User quote - "*The description of each product and ingredients list was there as most sites do not show everything. Also It was helpful in that the products show the allergy in case someone needed to know if it was dairy free or gluten free.*"

Guideline #180. Write your product descriptions in the style of your target audience

Use qualitative analysis to develop buyer personas. Craft your product descriptions around these personas.

American Eagle's product description writing accurately reflects the style of their main customer demographic:



Site Component - Product Information > Product Description
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

User quote - *"I also love how it's very geared towards my generation - the "like button" seems very fluid with the "feel" of the site. And as I like photos on Instagram all day, it makes sense that I am able to "like" clothes that I'd like to buy on the website, too."*

User quote - *"Some things were abbreviated in ways that I would not understand."*

Guideline #181. Share features AND benefits

This guideline doesn't require too much background. Explain what your product is and why people will be better with it.

BodyBuilding.com effectively explains what's in their top-selling protein powder and why it's worth the purchase:

Site Component - Product Information > Product Description
Conversion Heuristic - Motivation

Guideline #182. Use specific language in product description ("best value" vs "won X award 4 years in a row")

Back up powerful statements for credibility and validity.

Bodybuilding.com on their whey protein powder product page:

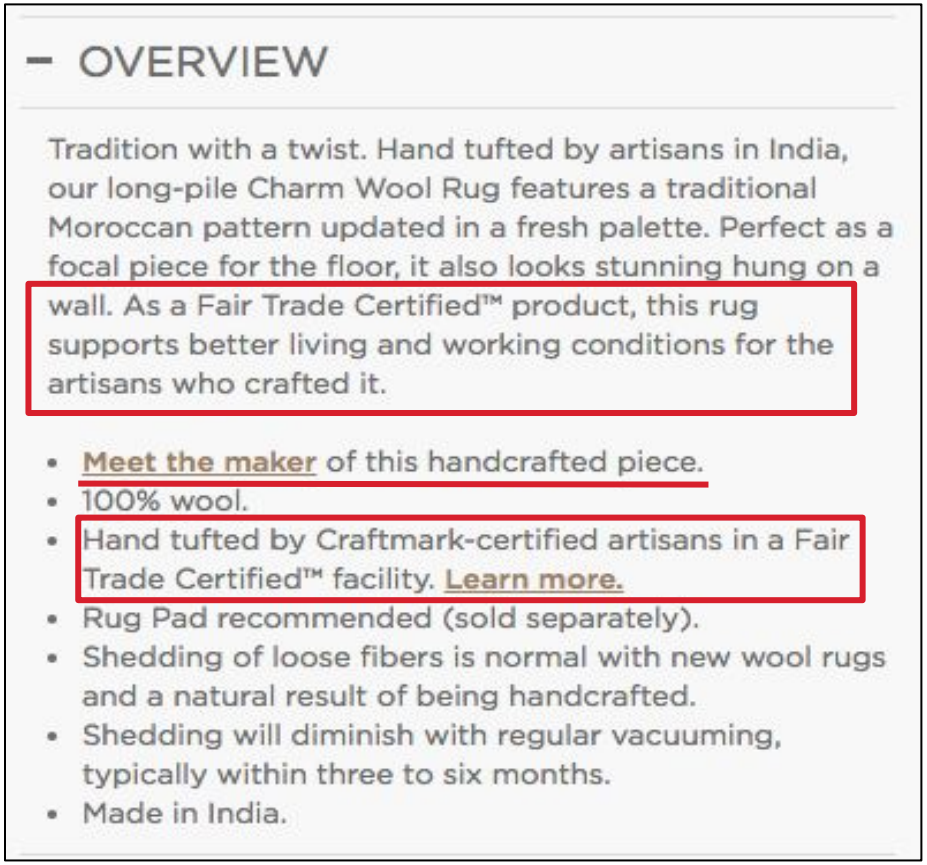
Site Component - Product Information > Product Description
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

Guideline #183. Be altruistic, sell for a "cause"

Site Component - Product Information > Product Description
Conversion Heuristic - Motivation

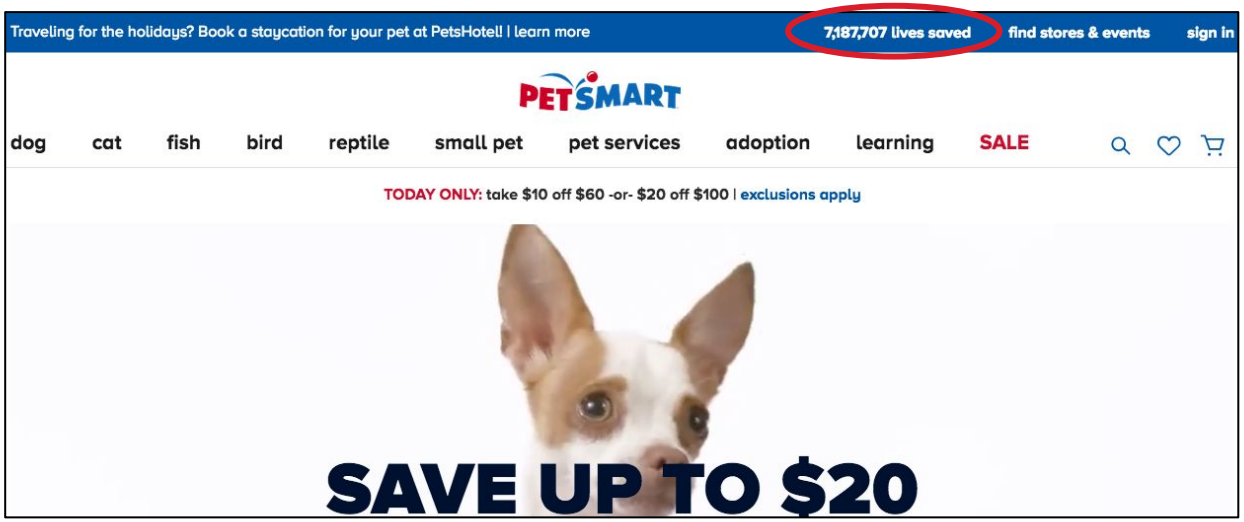
One survey found that 94% of people would switch to a brand that supports a cause, and 20% would pay more if the product supported a caused.

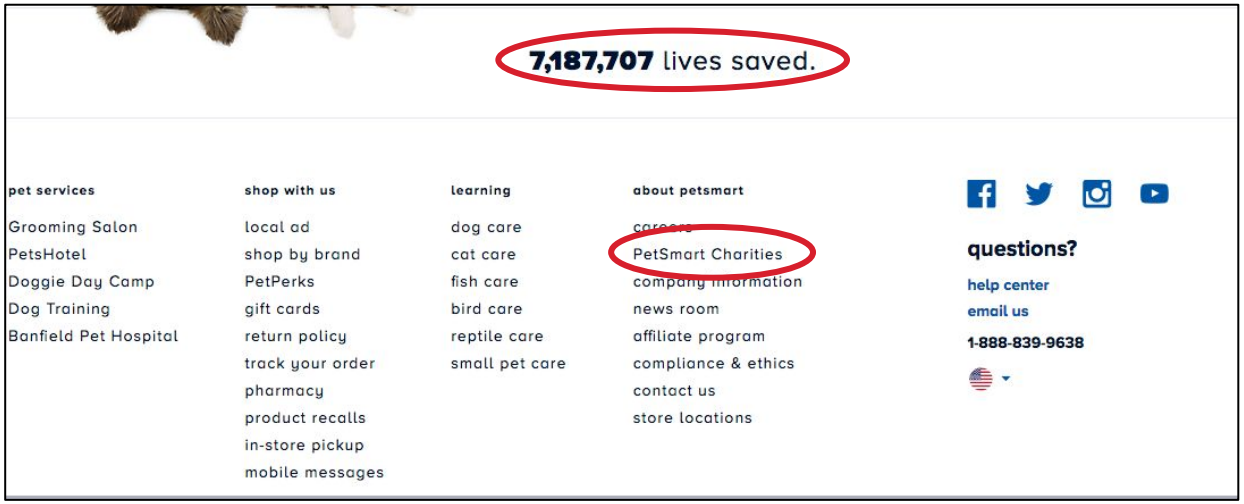
Consumers favor philanthropy. Here's how West Elm does it on a rug product page:



Adherence example

Guideline #183. Be altruistic, sell for a "cause"





Using a site wide banner on the top of every page *and* in the footer, Petsmart reminds their visitors that they donate to charities across the country and of their mission to save lives and end animal homelessness.

Product Page » Product Information » Shipping & Returns

2 Guidelines

Product Page > Product Information > Shipping & Returns

184. Display shipping and return policy on product page
185. Show estimated shipping time

Shipping and return policies now play a large role in purchase decisions online.

If a customer can't quickly find the shipping and/or return information for your products, they will quickly leave your site for another that *does* provide this information up front.

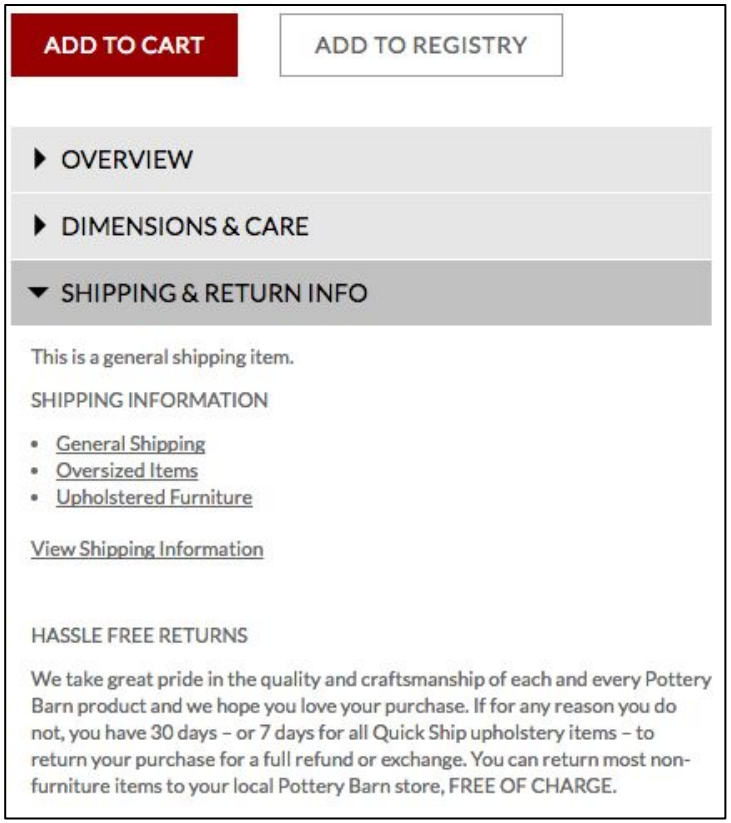
These next few guidelines explain how to inform users of shipping and return information in a clear, intuitive way.

Guideline #184. Display shipping and return policy on product page

There are several ways to display the shipping and return policy. However they're displayed, make sure the policies (or links to the policies) are prominent.

Site Component - Product Information > Shipping & Returns
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

Pottery Barn includes a shipping and returns description with links for even more information:



Guideline #185. Show estimated shipping time

Some purchases depend on how soon customers can receive an item. Communicate estimated shipping times clearly so your site visitors don't have to root around to find them.

Need a new bath fan ASAP? Home Depot shares the information you need in a clear and concise manner:

Site Component - Product Information > Shipping & Returns
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

Product Page » Trust Elements

4 Guidelines

Product Page > Trust Elements

186. Show reviews and ratings on product page
187. Don't be afraid to include a few negative reviews
188. Offer sorting options for reviews
189. Ask "was this review helpful?"

A recent study by the Department of Commerce found that half of American Internet users are "deterred" from buying things online because of fears over privacy and security.

Without any prompting, 84% of online households named at least one concern they had about online privacy and security risks, and 40% cited at least two different concerns.

The four most common reasons for people's distrust:

"News reports of information being stolen from retailers" (43%),
"My information was stolen" (17%),
"I don't believe that the store will take good care of me if there is a problem" (12%)
"I tend not to trust companies, employees or technology" (10%)

The product page provides an opportunity to build trust. Take advantage of it using ratings and reviews. Sharing all the details about your products, both good and bad, will foster a sense of transparency and trust.

User quote - *"I would buy from this site because it is a company that I trust"*

User quote - *"[I would very likely buy because] I really trust the brand name and I know it's a company that sells good products."*

Guideline #186. Show reviews and ratings on product page

According to the 2016 BrightLocal survey, 84% of people trust reviews as much as personal recommendations. Most people prefer reading 4-6 reviews before making a purchasing decision.

Product reviews are essential and relevant to the product page. Don't just display one top review, but a few reviews that cover the scope of the product.

Place the reviews in a distinguished area on the page so customers can quickly find them. Offer a link to "see more reviews". Let users upvote or downvote. Let them organize reviews. Incorporate pictures and videos into reviews. However you do it, make sure ratings and reviews are on the product page.

Site Component - Trust Elements
Conversion Heuristic - Motivation

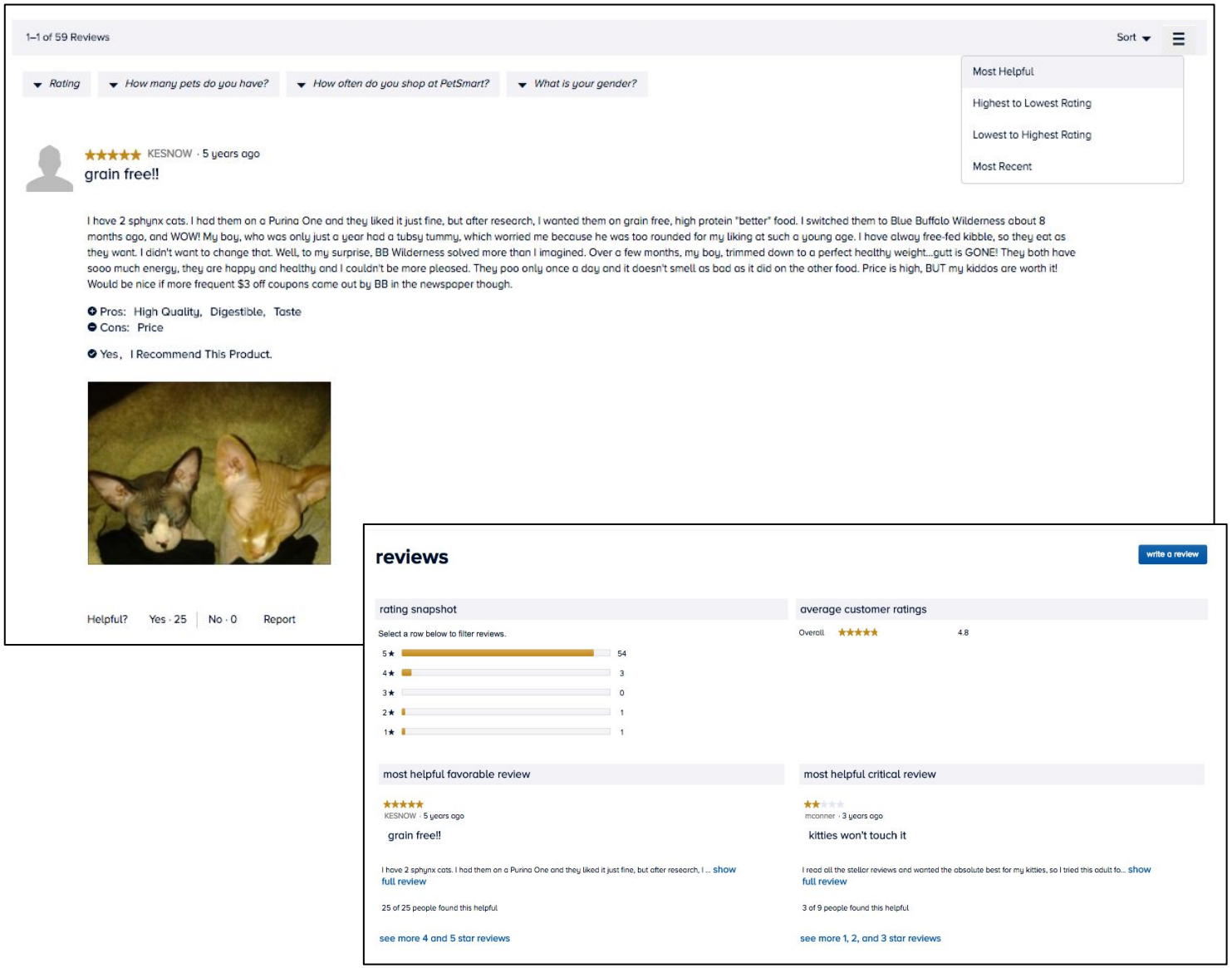
User quote - *"I really appreciated the customer reviews! I was able to easily identify customer review "star" ratings visually, giving [me] confidence in my product selections"*

User quote - *"I would eventually add some more user comments and reviews as they really add value to the site."*

User quote - *"I really liked the fit slider (that would tell you if an item had a true fit or not) that seemed like such a helpful feature."* **Fit slider data is collected via customer reviews (e.g. runs small, runs big, fits perfectly)**

Adherence example

Guideline #186. Show reviews and ratings on product page



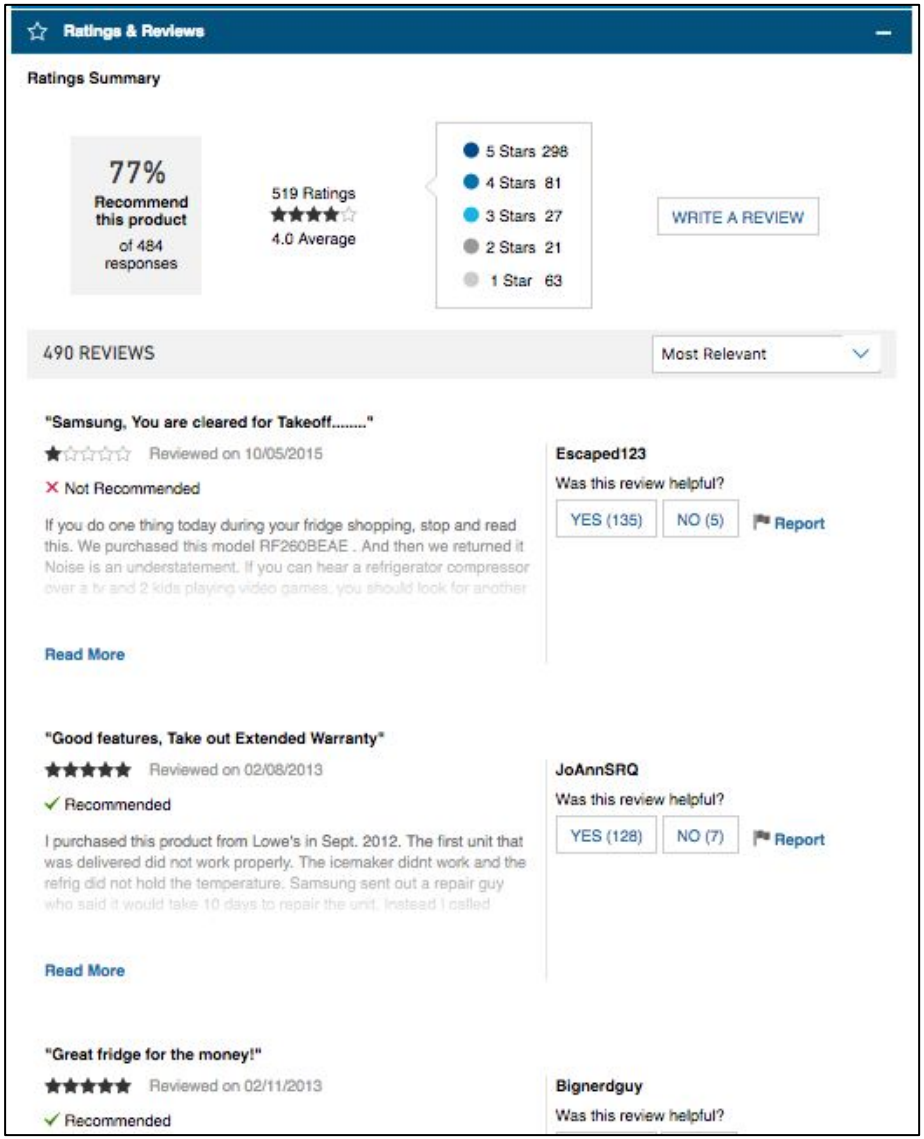
Petsmart provides a “rating snapshot”, most helpful positive review, most helpful negative review, and a list of full reviews underneath.

Users can sort, filter, upvote, downvote, and report reviews.

Reviewers can add photos, videos, main pros and cons of product, and details for filtering purposes like number of pets, gender of pets, etc.

Adherence example

Guideline #186. Show reviews and ratings on product page



Lowe's devotes a large section of their product page to reviews, complete with sorting options and the capability to include photos in product reviews.

Guideline #187. Don't be afraid to include a few negative reviews

Site Component - Trust Elements
Conversion Heuristic - Motivation

The inclusion of a few negative views contributes to the believability of positive reviews. There is no product in this world that all people love. Seeing a few complaints and issues with a product truthfully represents a full scope of opinions, making the good opinions conceivable.

Remember, this guideline is about including a FEW negative reviews. If you have 10 positive reviews one (maybe two) of these can be negative without seeing a detrimental impact. Use reason when deciding which negative review to display as well. Don't share anything too terrible that will undoubtedly drive potential customers away.

On one of Petco's product pages, a "helpful" negative review is showcased alongside helpful positive reviews (notice the praise about Petco's returns?):

Guideline #188. Offer sorting options for reviews

Reviews are going to pile up for popular products. There needs to be an organizational system so site visitors continue to get value from them.

Site Component - Trust Elements
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

Sorting options allow users to view what *they* consider to be the most helpful reviews. Sorting options commonly include:

- Newest to oldest (and oldest to newest)
- Highest to lowest rating (and lowest to highest)
- Top contributors
- Expert reviews first
- Photo/video reviews
- Most helpful
- Verified purchases
- Longest/shortest reviews

Design sorting options as a dropdown box. Here's how REI does it:

Guideline #189. Ask "was this review helpful?"

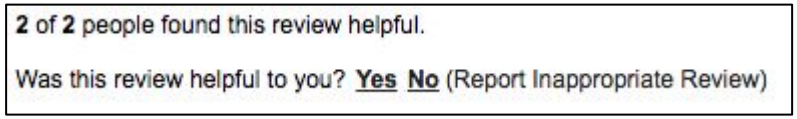
Site Component - Trust Elements
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

Asking this question allows for the best reviews to naturally make their way to the top of the list. Create a ranking system that gives priority to reviews which are considered “most helpful”. Users should be able to share whether they thought a review was helpful, but also whether a review was not helpful. Users should also be able to report inappropriate reviews.

Consider showcasing both the most helpful positive *and* negative review.

Home Depot includes this tool at the end of every review:

Bass Pro’s approach:



Hayneedle:

Product Page » Navigation

2 Guidelines

Product Page > Navigation

190. Breadcrumbs should be near top of page, following convention
191. On product page, offer hierarchy-based breadcrumb links

Breadcrumb navigation provides a search history that users can interact with.

Users can reference breadcrumbs to remember their navigation path to the product page they're on. Additionally, they can click on the breadcrumbs to navigate back to a previous page.

The next two guidelines explain how to create usable breadcrumbs on the product page.

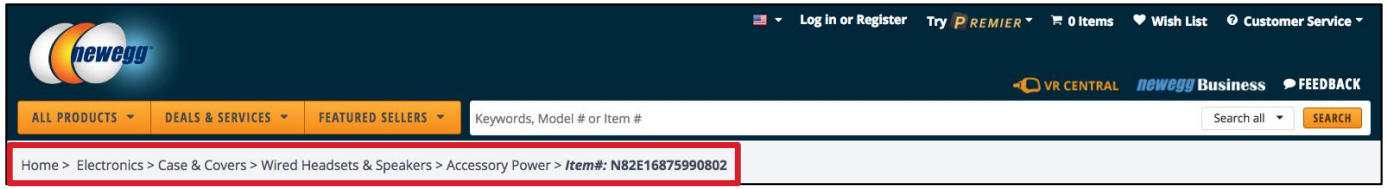
Guideline #190. Breadcrumbs should be near top of page, following convention

Site Component - Navigation
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

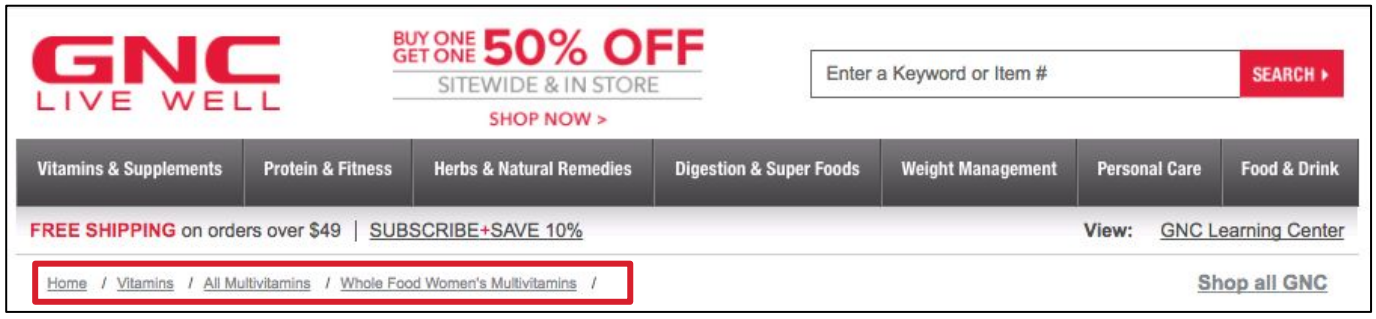
Place breadcrumbs where people expect to find them for maximum usability and minimum friction.

While breadcrumbs should be near the top of the page, they should be under —and secondary in visual hierarchy to— the main navigation bar.

Newegg:



GNC:



Guideline #191. On product page, offer hierarchy-based breadcrumb links

Site Component - Navigation
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

Hierarchy-based breadcrumbs show the journey of clicks the user took to arrive at the current page. They show the "hierarchy" path, from parent category, to subcategory, to sub-subcategory, and so on.

Hierarchy-based breadcrumbs provide an easy path back to an earlier location. For instance, if a user decides they want to browse tablets instead of laptops, they can click on the Electronics link in their breadcrumbs and smoothly navigate to a page where the can select the Tablets subcategory.

The last link in the breadcrumb trail should take users back to the most recent results page, acting as a "back to results page" sort of button.

User quote - When asked what could be improved on a site: "*When I was viewing a product I could not go back to the search. I needed to right click and use the browser back button feature.*"

Pottery Barn's hierarchy-based navigation:

American Eagle:

Product Page » Accessories & Related Products

6 Guidelines

Product Page > Design > Accessories & Related Products

192. Offer similar/recommended products to the product page
193. Offer accessories and add-ons to the product page
194. Link any other products to their rightful product pages
195. Similar products, recommended products, and accessories/add-ons should be in distinct and separate areas of the product page
196. Show "recently viewed items"
197. Allow users to clear or disable "recently viewed items"

When implemented correctly, accessories, recommended items, and related products are an easy additional profit.

Sometimes users really *do* need that additional accessory and you've simply saved them the hassle of looking for it. Other times they may not have initially planned on the additional purchase; due to the complementary placement of the item, however, it just seems like the perfect add-on.

These guidelines illustrate the potential of accessories, recommendations, and/or related products, and how to successfully add them to a product page.

Guideline #192. Offer similar/recommended products on the product page

Product recommendations (based on legitimate data) can have a powerful impact. MyBuys saw a 411% conversion rate increase when "smart" product recommendations were added to the product pages of 100 ecommerce sites.

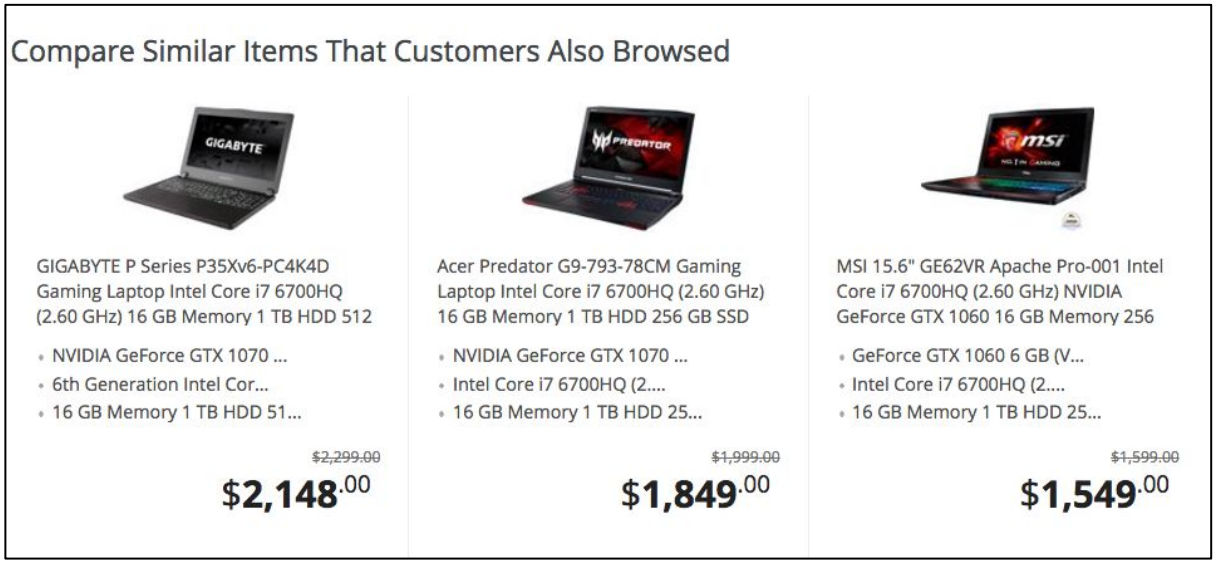
Recommended —and similar— products should be *relevant* to the product page. If a shopper is browsing for a grey sweater, showing them similar sweaters on the product page can facilitate their journey and help them make the smartest purchase.

When executed correctly, sharing recommended products on the product page can increase purchases, items per purchase, and overall conversion rate.

Site Component - Accessories & Related Products
Conversion Heuristic - Motivation

Adherence example

Guideline #192. Offer similar/recommended products on the product page



Newegg titles similar products, “Similar Items That Customers Also Browsed”. This collection provides social proof for the similar products in that these items have been viewed and considered by other customers.

Guideline #193. Offer accessories and add-ons to the product page

Similar to the last guideline, accessories and add-ons complement the shopping journey. On the product page, they're in the perfect location for an impulse buy. Again, these items should be chosen with care.

Recommended accessories and add-ons should be compatible with the product currently be viewed (e.g. smart phone screen protectors that are size-compatible with the smart phone product page being viewed).

If your customer is shopping for a large bouquet of flowers, there's a chance they also need to buy a vase. Don't show them a tiny, one stem trumpet vase, but something large enough to hold the entire bouquet they're looking at.

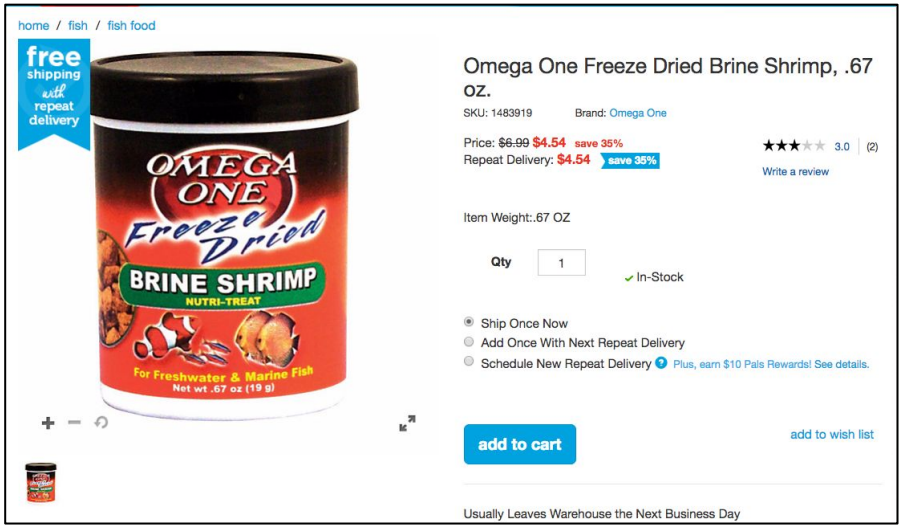
Show a wide variety of accessories to increase the likelihood that shoppers will find a relevant accessory.

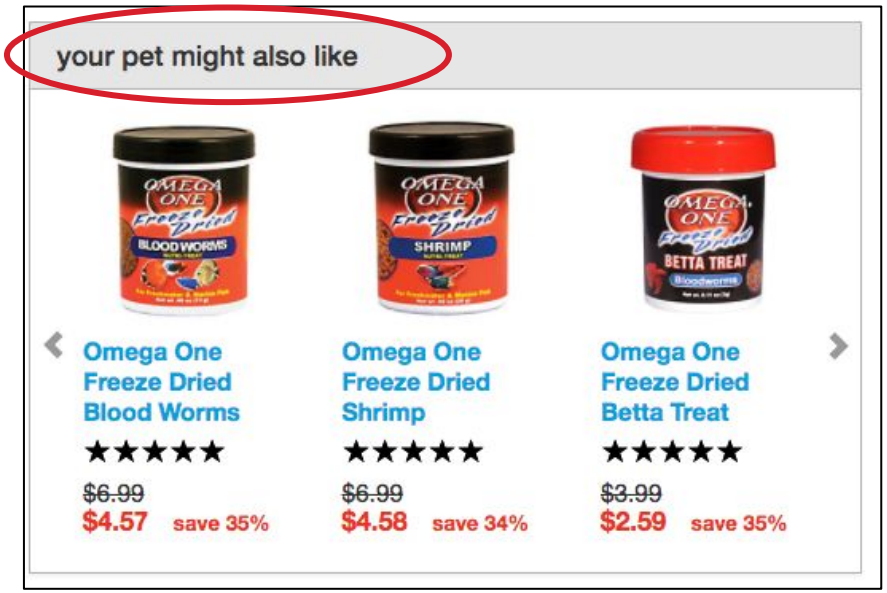
Site Component - Accessories & Related Products
Conversion Heuristic - Motivation

User quote - "*I also really liked the section that recommended things to go with the item of clothing you were looking at. That would really help someone who is not used to shopping for clothes feel more confident in their purchases, and might encourage them to stay on the site for longer.*"

Adherence example

Guideline #193. Offer accessories and add-ons to the product page

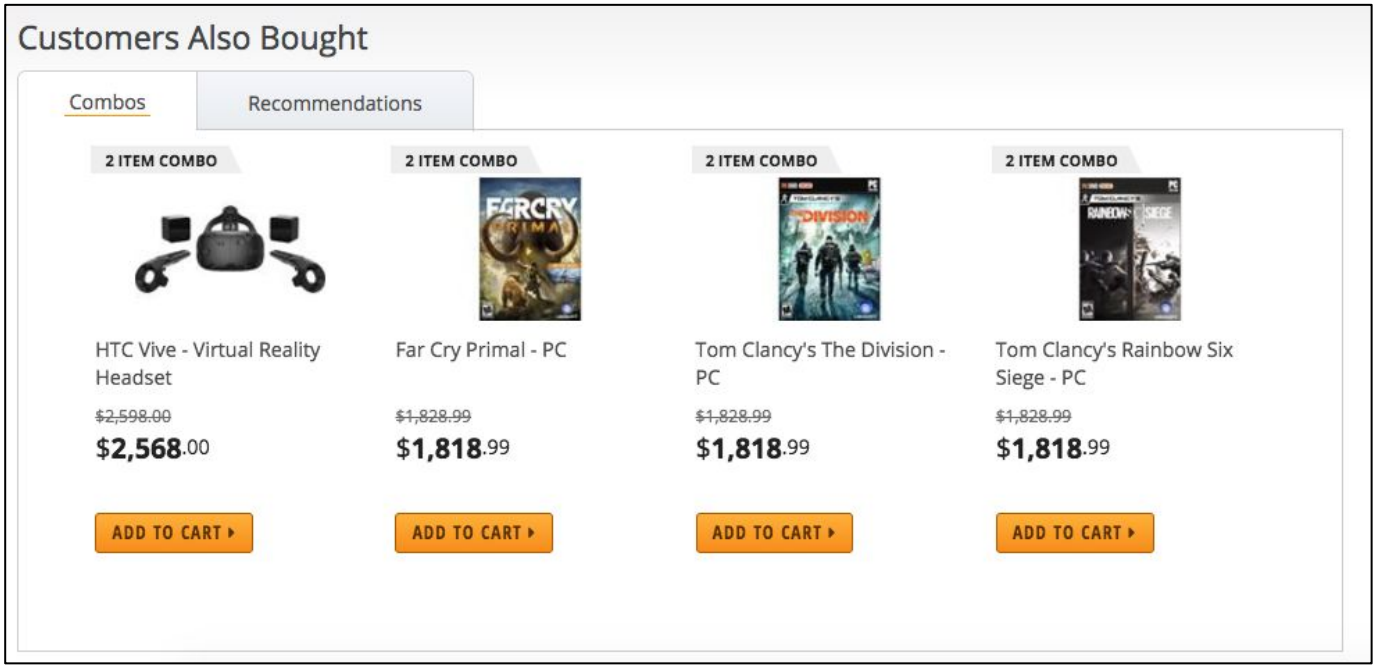




On many of Petco's product pages, users are shown this "your pet might also like" box just below the fold, linking to additional products complementary to the current product being browsed.

Adherence example

Guideline #193. Offer accessories and add-ons to the product page

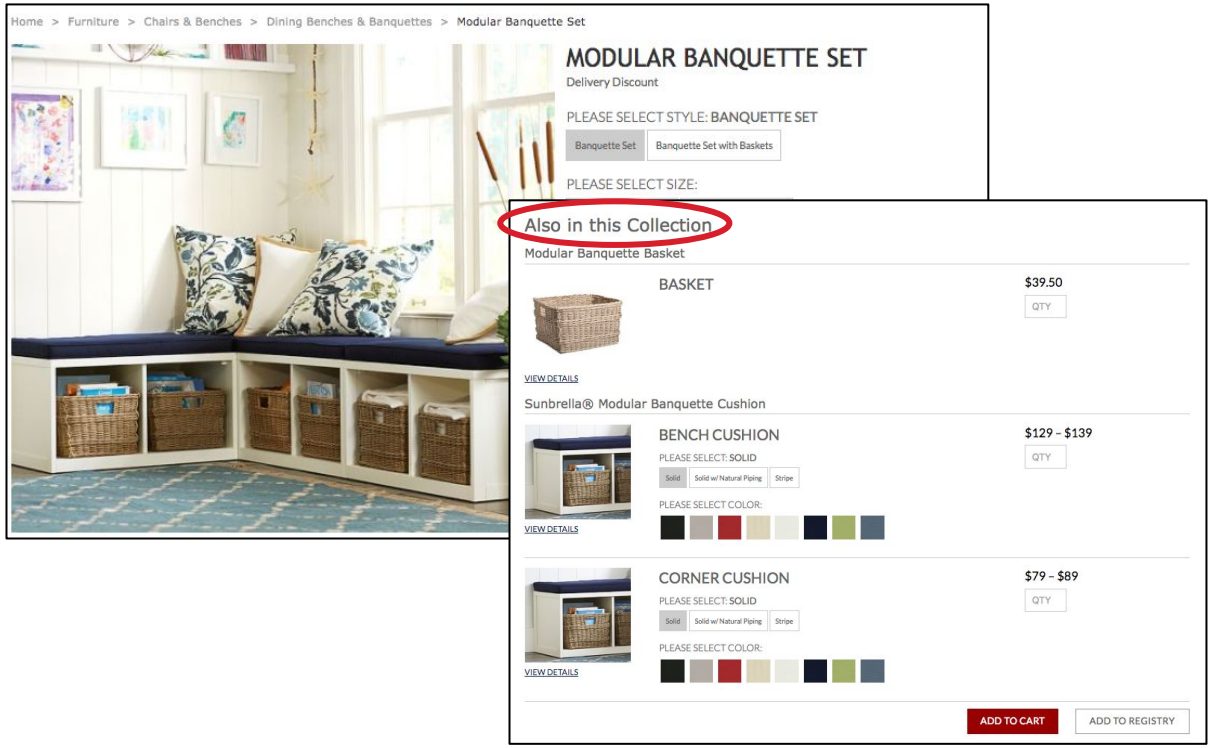


When browsing the product page for a gaming laptop, customers are shown "Combos" and "Recommendations" that are complementary *and* compatible to the gaming laptop. The "Customers Also Bought" description provides social proof, communicating that these are products that other people like. The Add to Cart CTAs make it almost too easy for shoppers to add a few impulse buys to their order.

Guideline #194. Link any other products to their rightful product pages

What's the point in advertising a product if people can't figure out where or how to buy it? If you add any other products to the product page (similar items, accessories, etc.), make sure shoppers can navigate to each item's respective product page by clicking on the product thumbnail.

Pottery Barn links to all the products in a product picture for a bench, even providing an "add to cart" CTA for those who are ready to buy the look:

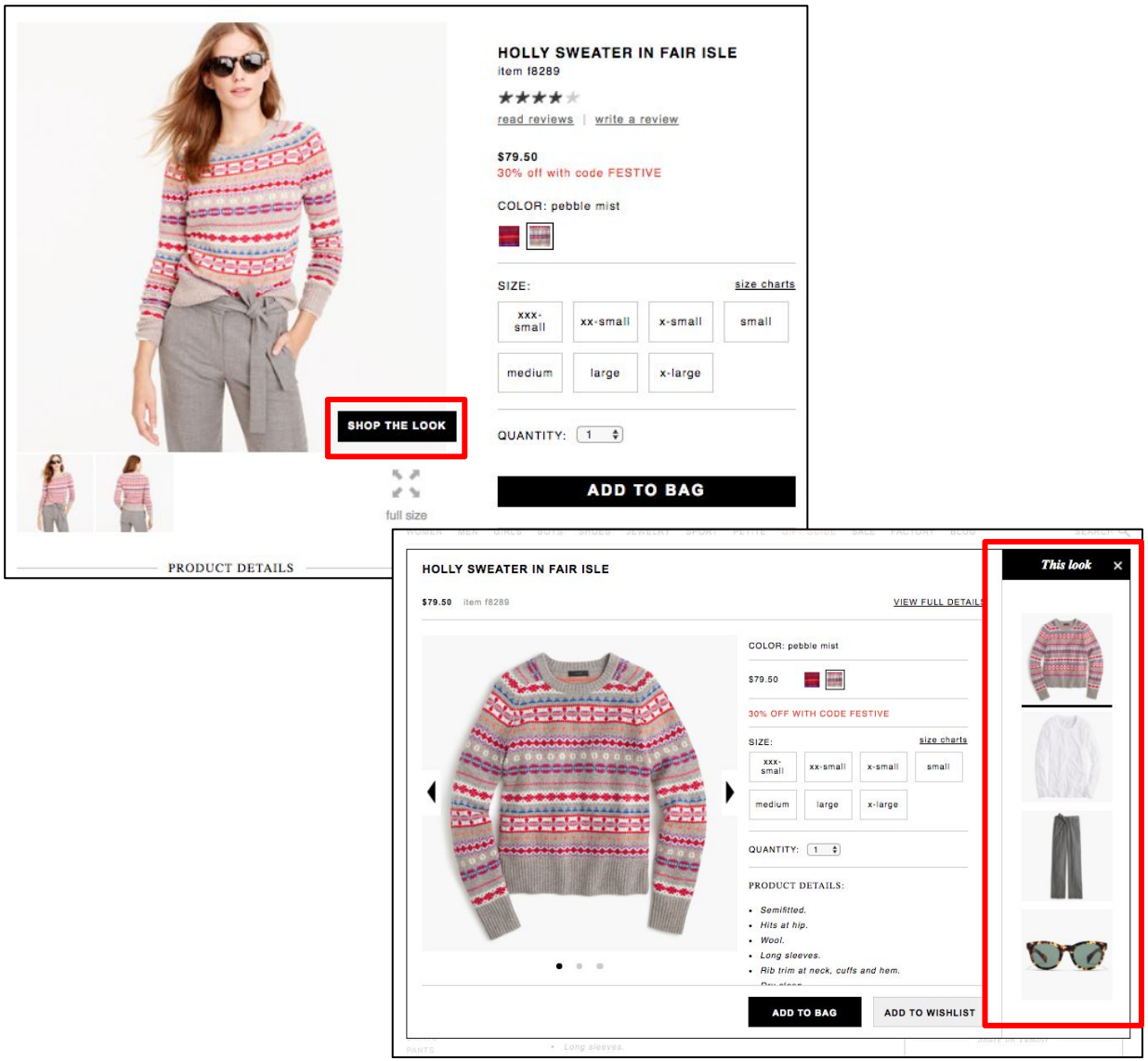


Site Component - Accessories & Related Products
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

User quote - "*What I enjoyed about the site was how you have the ability to actually view and purchase an entire "collection" or "look" of items that were identical to the ones that the model is wearing in given picture on the webpage.*"

Adherence example

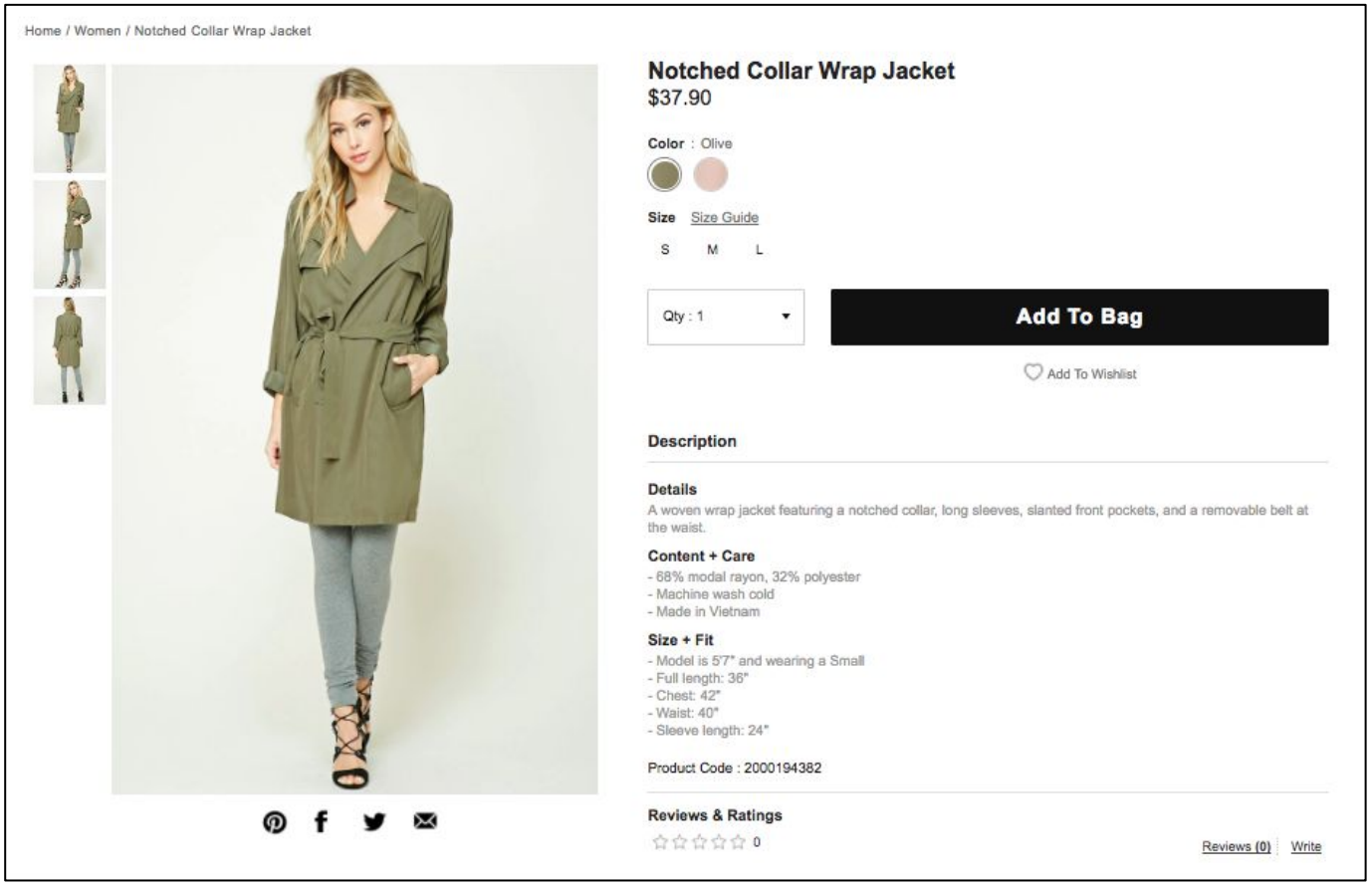
Guideline #194. Link any other products to their rightful product pages



J. Crew offers a “Shop the Look” tool. When clicked on, it shows customers thumbnails of each product the model is wearing which direct them to the corresponding product page.

Non-adherence example

Guideline #194. Link any other products to their rightful product pages



Forever21: Want the shoes to match the jacket? Users have to browse the site to find them.

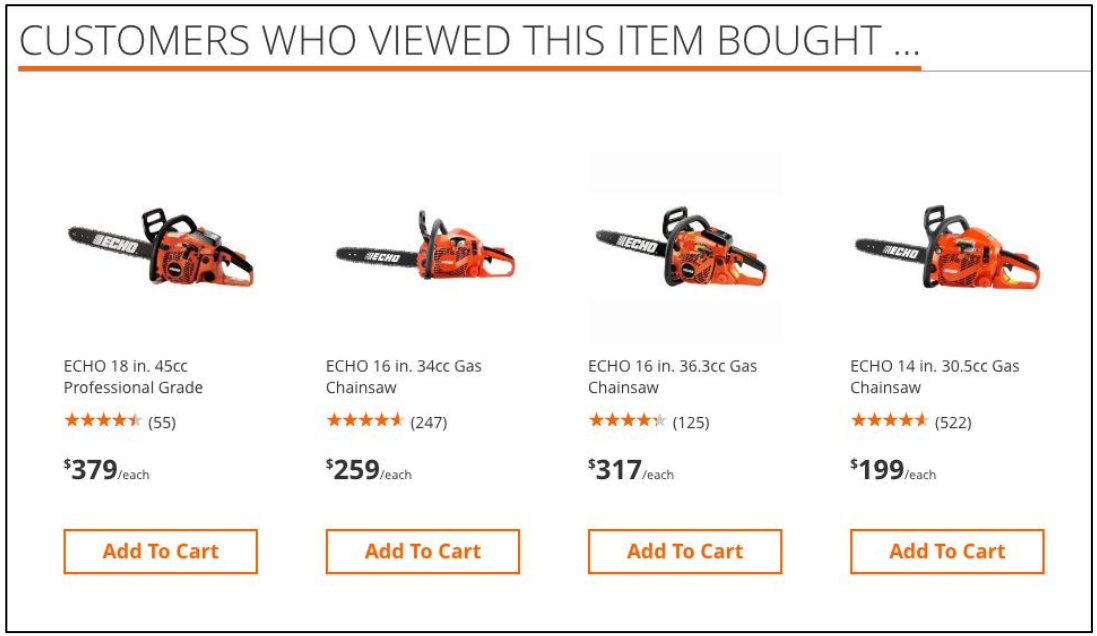
Guideline #195. Similar products, recommended products, and accessories/add-ons should be in distinct and separate areas of the product page

This guideline deals with the organization and appearance of a product page.

If you go to the trouble to curate a special collection of products or accessories, make sure the theme of the collection is understandable. Use ample whitespace, borders, and descriptive titles to separate these collections.

Site Component - Accessories & Related Products
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

Using whitespace and a large title, Home Depot makes it clear:



User quote - When asked what could be improved on a site: *"The pages were too jam packed [with] internal ads for other products, in banners both above AND below the item being looked at. These were also all over the place ... so that I wasn't even sure what was in my cart and what wasn't."*

User quote - *"I thought it was weird and distracting in a bad way that other items were displayed in the same size as the one that I was actually looking at."*

Guideline #196. Show "recently viewed items"

Showing recently viewed items can help shoppers in a few ways.

First, recently viewed items can serve as a search history. Shoppers can glance at them to remember what they browsed and what brought them to the current product page.

Other people use the recently viewed items section as a comparison tool, especially with visually-driven products.

A “recently viewed items” section can also serve as navigation. Instead of using the back arrow to revisit a previous product page, users can simply click on the product in the recently viewed items box.

Most importantly, recently viewed items have become a common feature and, for many reasons, people rely on them. Not having this feature hurts overall user experience.

Note: "Recently viewed items" should be session based, users shouldn't have to log in to have access to this capability

Site Component - Accessories & Related Products
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

Guideline #197. Allow users to clear or disable "recently viewed items"

People don’t always want their fellow computer users to know what they’ve been shopping for. For this reason, give users the option to clear the “recently viewed items” area history. Similarly, you can offer the ability to disable recently viewed items.

Site Component - Accessories & Related Products
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

Product Comparison CUX Guideline Chapter

Product Comparison Tool Guidelines

Design & Interaction

198. Pick the right comparison method for your situation: Compare Tool, Filter Method, or Standalone
199. Show notification when a product is added to comparison list, then tell users what to do next
200. Comparison select indicator should be sticky or otherwise extremely accessible
201. Follow conventional design: Display a checkbox under or above the product image, indicate ‘select to compare’ or simply ‘compare’
202. Comparison tool should also be offered on search results pages
203. Add "add to cart" CTA for each product
204. "Close" or "Back to results" button should be visible
205. Allow users to email, print, & save comparison tables
206. Offer capability for users to mouse hover over technical phrasing/jargon to see a definition or description
207. Each product picture should be clickable, leading to product page
208. If there are many specs to compare, they should be organized, grouped, and easy to scan

Product Information

209. Avoid product comparison if all differentiating product information is displayed on the product list page
210. Comparison page consistently shows the same specs for all products, consistent names, no empty cells, etc.
211. Prominently include rating and number of ratings for each product on the comparison page

Product Comparison Tool » Design & Interaction

11 Guidelines

Product Comparison Tool > Design & Interaction

198. Pick the right comparison method for your situation: Compare Tool, Filter Method, or Standalone
199. Show notification when a product is added to comparison list, then tell users what to do next
200. Have the comparison select indicator be sticky or otherwise extremely accessible
201. Follow conventional design: Display a checkbox under or above the product image, indicate ‘select to compare’ or simply ‘compare’
202. Comparison tool should also be offered on search results pages
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208. If there are many specs to compare, they should be organized, grouped, and easy to scan

Customer’s will comparison shop. It’s what they do. After they decide on a specific product they’ll open 10 tabs to compare 10 ecommerce shops, but before then, they’ll compare within a product category. This blender with those features compared to that blender with these features. That sort of thing.

It’s crucial that you allow them to do that well on your site. That way they’re more likely to stick with you after they’ve picked what they want.

So how to get them to stick with you? Design the comparison tool so that it’s 1. Easy, and 2. Apparent.

Easily said.

The following guidelines are aimed at prototypicality of the comparison tool experience. There are many ways to implement it, but these guidelines should be the starting point for an acceptable comparison experience.

If you’re missing these, you're hurting your conversions.

User Quote - *“this site needs no improvement. It is very easy to find what you are looking for and it is so easy to compare products”*

User Quote - *“I would make the "compare" button bigger and the "Add to cart" button smaller”*

User Quote - *“The only thing I noticed was the lack of side by side comparison. Or at least it wasn't super obvious if there was one.”*

User Quote - *“ I loved the ability to compare up to four items side by side.”*

Guideline #198. Pick the right comparison method for your situation: Compare Tool, Filter Method, or Standalone

There are three common approaches to comparing products online:

1. 'Select & Compare' Tool - This approach involves selecting "compare" checkboxes for 2 or more products and then clicking the (sometimes hard to find) compare button.
    - Good for prototypicality (people expect it) and especially good for spec-driven products like consumer electronics.
2. Filter Method - an increasingly common method that allows more sophisticated filters to narrow down and do much of the heavy comparisons, via elimination, leaving the product list page to convey the rest.
    - This is the default method. Best for product types that aren't as spec-driven such as apparel, art, and jewelry.
3. The Standalone table - doing the work for the customer, this is a pre-designed table that does well at what it's suppose to do because it's a dedicated landing page.
    - Limited to comparing a small set of products

The rest of the guidelines in this 'Comparison Tool' section refer mainly to approach 1, as the other two rely on either the filter/sorting of the product list and search pages (for approach 2) or a standalone landing page (for approach 3).

UXmag shares more on these 3 approaches.

Site Component - Design
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

User quote - *"I would have liked some kind of an option to compare on different items against each other. Just something where I could say add a couple of items and then click compare and have all the items on one page and I can just go through the different angles and views of each item without having to go back and forth between the results page and then details page for a specific item."*

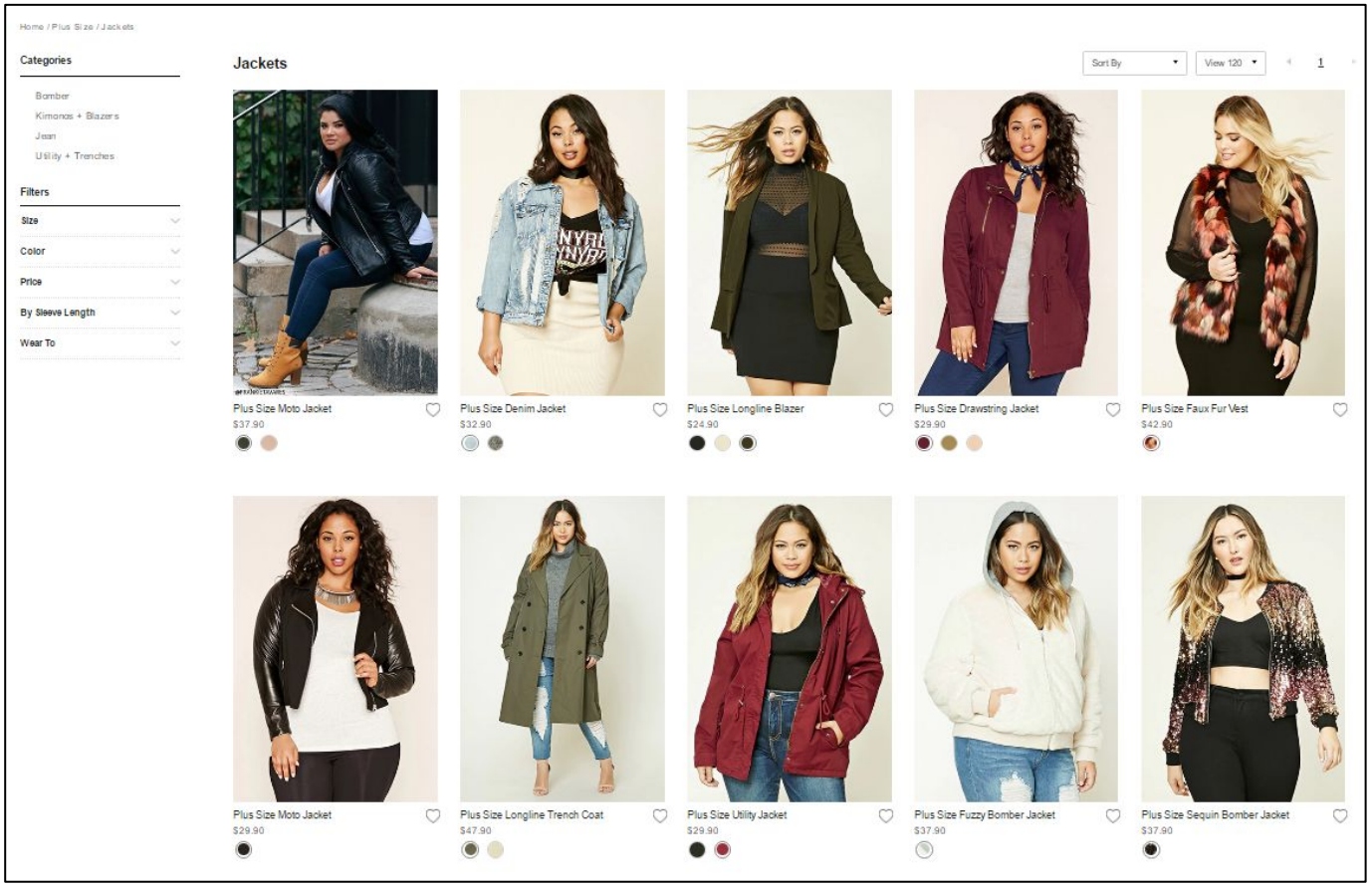
User quote - *"I felt it would be nice if there's a compare button/option so I can make a comparison among 2-3 products"*

User quote - *"Includ[e] COMPARE button/option to make comparison among different products on search results page"*

User quote - *"The website absolutely needs an option to compare multiple products. Having to go back and forth between the search results page and item details page is unnecessarily frustrating.*

Adherence Example

Guideline #198. Pick the right comparison method for your situation: Compare Tool, Filter Method, or Standalone

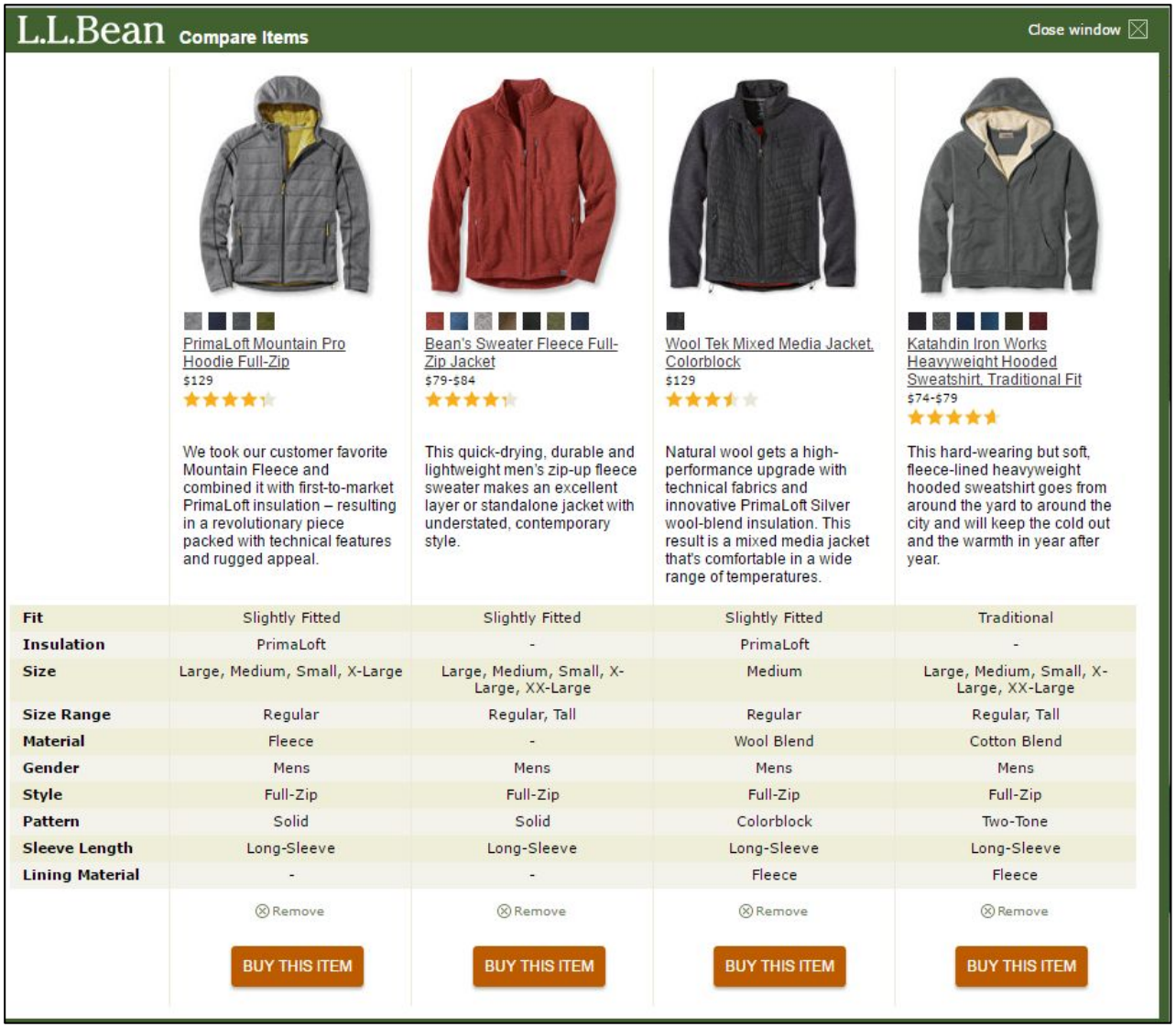


Forever21 doesn't have a compare tool, instead allowing the filtering and images on the product list page to do the work for the comparison shopper. This isn't necessarily a bad thing as user's didn't mention lack of comparison as a problem often. Only 1 in 10 during user testing mentioned it as a frustration (see user quote). And that's considering we explicitly asked testers to compare products. Experience goods like clothing and apparel are less spec-driven and therefore aren't as reliant on people evaluating specifications before purchase as say they would for a hard drive or dishwasher.

User Quote - *"I had a real problem trying to figure out how to compare similar items."*

Adherence Example

Guideline #198. Pick the right comparison method for your situation: Compare Tool, Filter Method, or Standalone

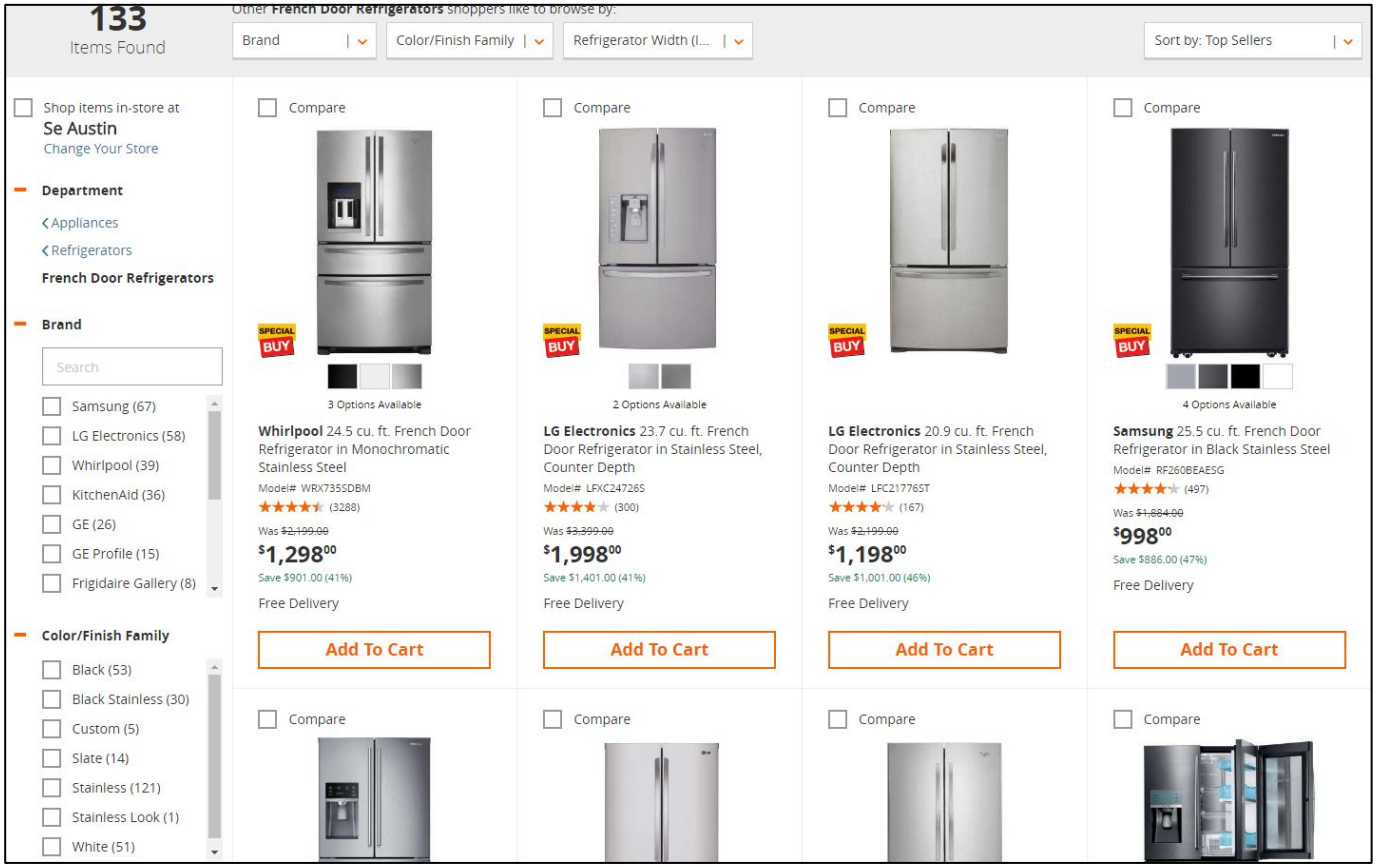


L.L. Bean uses the standard 'select-and-compare' method, even for their apparel products as seen here. And see the user quote below, many users commented that L.L. Bean did got it right with their comparison method.

User Quote - *"I loved the ease of use for the compare tool. Out of all of the sites I've utilized that tool on, I would say the ease of use was in the top 5 for this site. Very impressed."*

Adherence Example

Guideline #198. Pick the right comparison method for your situation: Compare Tool, Filter Method, or Standalone



Home Depot sells many 'search good' types of products, meaning the products can be relatively evaluated online without actually experiencing them. Because of this, they have the traditional select-and-compare tool, allowing users to compare up to four items at once.

User Quote - *"I loved the ability to compare up to four items side by side."*

Guideline #199. Show notification when a product is added to comparison list, then tell users what to do next

A simple checkmark or x symbol in the checkbox is the first step, but people also need to know what to do next.

After an item is selected:

1. Indicate that they must choose more items to compare
2. Indicate how many, what's the max?
3. Provide a prominent CTA to tell the shopper what to do when enough products are selected to compare.

Site Component - Design > Interaction
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

Guideline #200. Comparison select indicator should be sticky or otherwise extremely accessible

After the shopper selects 1 checkbox, they're on the hunt for other products to compare, which means they're going to be scrolling around. Make sure it's easy for them to:

1. Know how many more they need to compare, and
2. Find the compare button once they've found that number.

A simple solution is to have a sticky bar that lists the items in the comparison tool 'queue', along with a 'Compare' CTA.

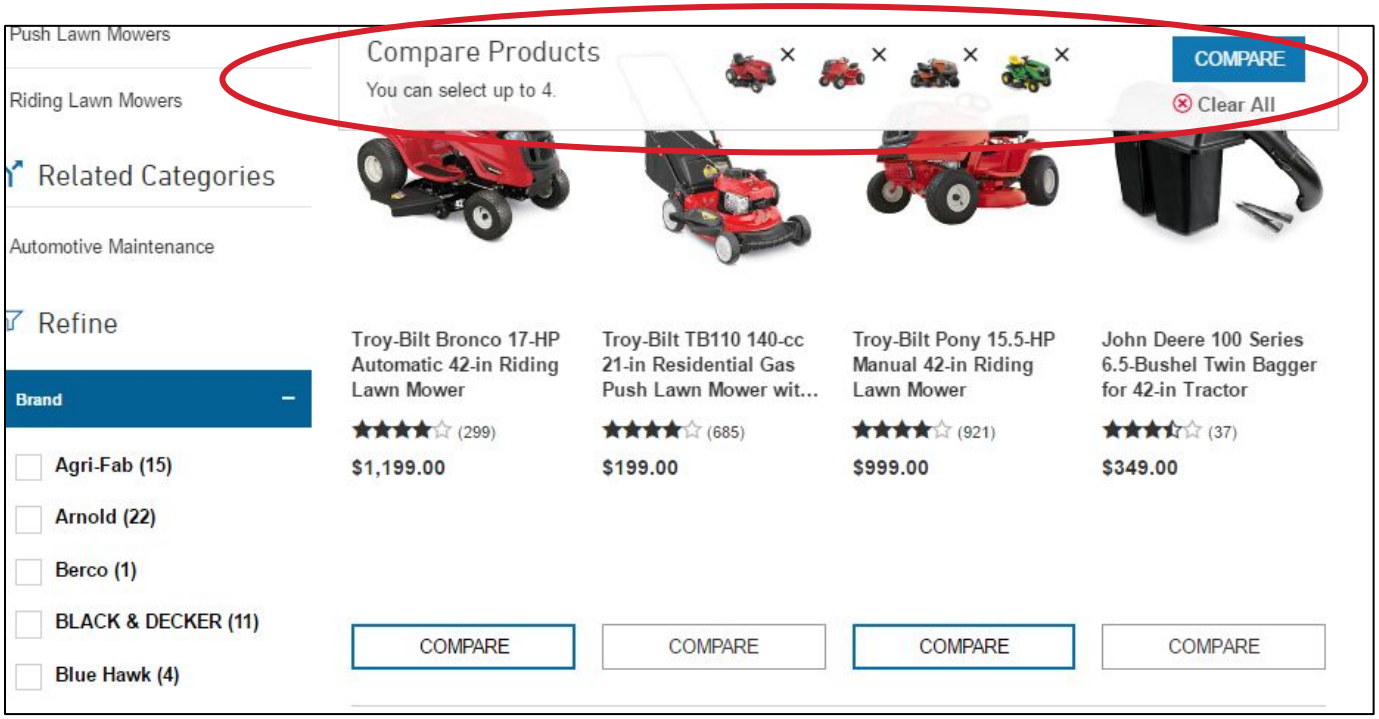
Site Component - Design > Interaction
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

User quote - "*I would prefer not to have to scroll to the top or the bottom of the page to hit compare*"

Adherence Example

Guideline #199. Show notification when a product is added to comparison list, then tell users what to do next

Guideline #200. Have the comparison select indicator be sticky or otherwise extremely accessible.

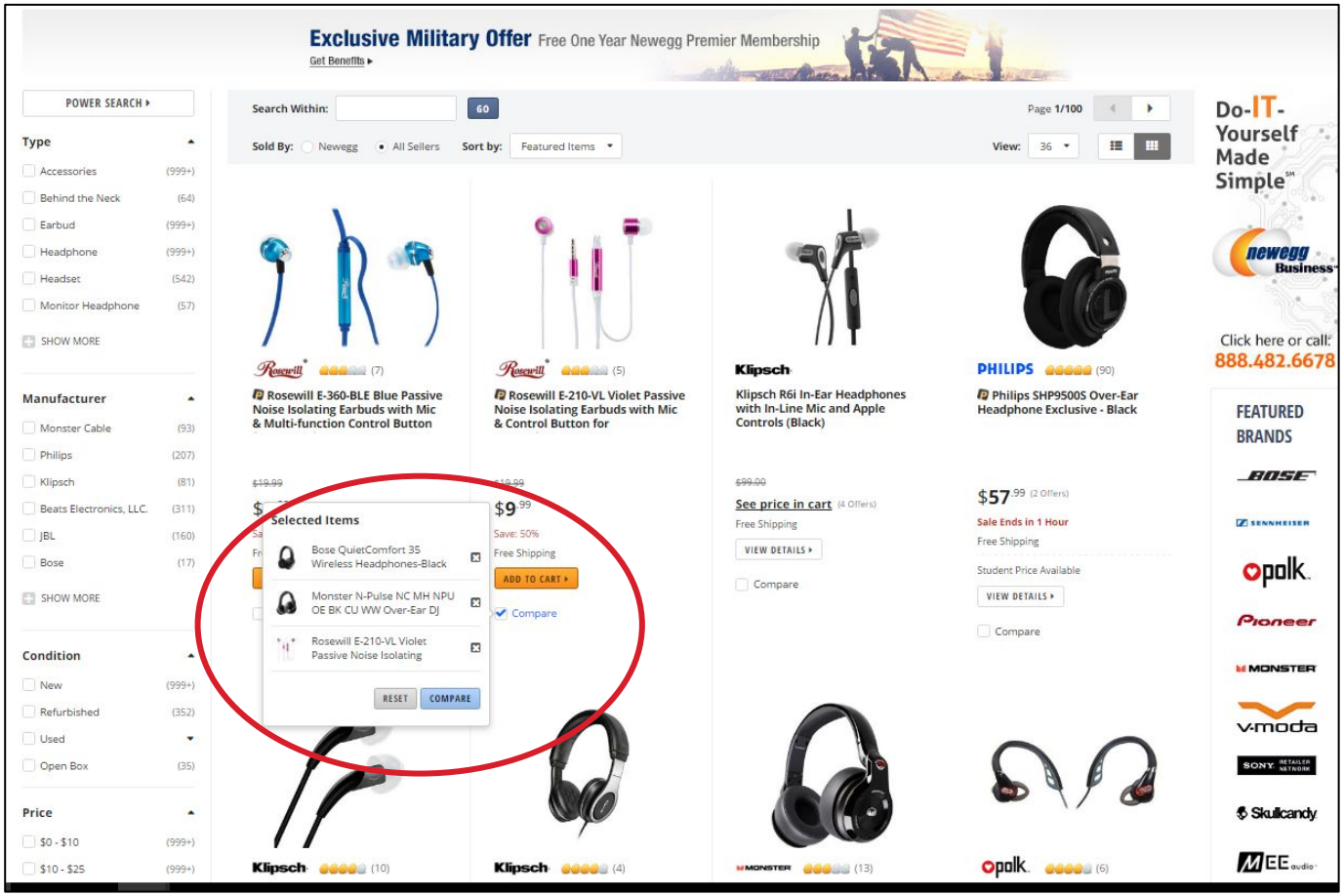


Lowe's has one of the better solutions for allowing people to see what items they've selected to compare, complete with sticky interaction, ability to remove items or clear all, a nice 'Compare' CTA, and very slick little product thumbnails. All done with a lot of whitespace.

Adherence Example

Guideline #199. Show notification when a product is added to comparison list, then tell users what to do next

Guideline #200. Have the comparison select indicator be sticky or otherwise extremely accessible.



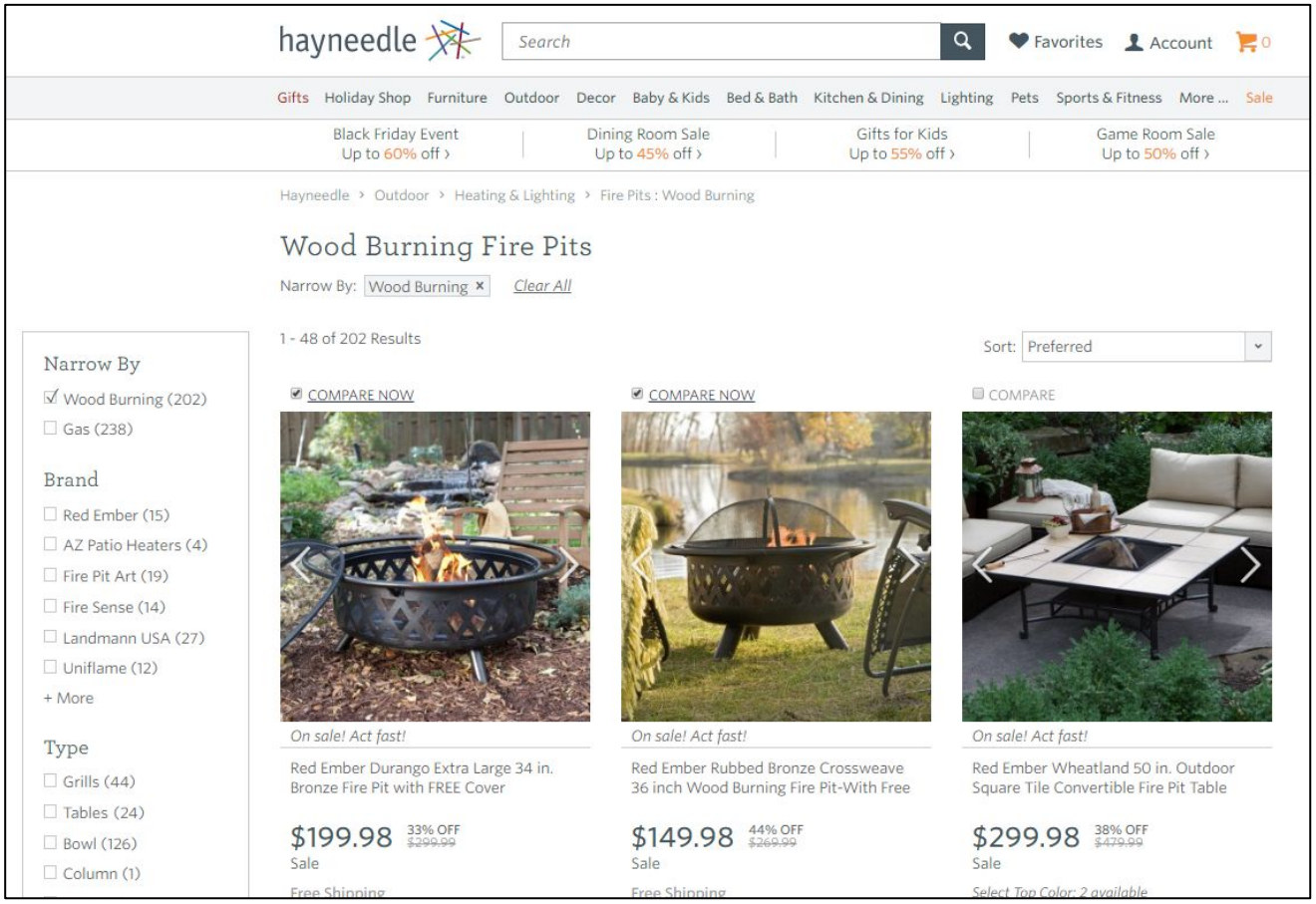
Newegg allows for an accessible 'selected-items table' by showing it whenever a shopper hovers over the checkbox next to the 'compare' button. This way, wherever on the page they're at, the box will display and they're able to easily remove items and click the 'compare' cta. It's a bit less apparent, and obtrusive, compared with a sticky bar approach. But it's easily familiarized by the user.

User Quote - *"I liked the comparison feature, it really helped to have a comparison table suggested to me"*

Non-adherence Example

Guideline #199. Show notification when a product is added to comparison list, then tell users what to do next

Guideline #200. Have the comparison select indicator be sticky or otherwise extremely accessible.



See if you can find the 'Compare' CTA on Hayneedle's website where we've selected the first couple items to display. It took some of our test users a while to notice that the 'Compare' CTA changes to a 'Compare Now' CTA instead of a more apparent indication like a 'selected item table' popping up. It's a slick way to save space but isn't as noticeable. Notice the user quote below, a user completely missed the comparison tool.

User Quote - *"I would have liked to see an option to compare items side by side. It isn't anything that I felt was missing, but it would be nice to have."*

Guideline #201. Follow conventional design: Display a checkbox under or above the product image, indicate ‘select to compare’ or simply ‘compare’

This guideline applies to the “select & compare” type comparison tool from guideline 198.

Prototypicality is key here. The compare tool shouldn’t be overly complicated or difficult to navigate. Simple, intuitive, and typical design wins.

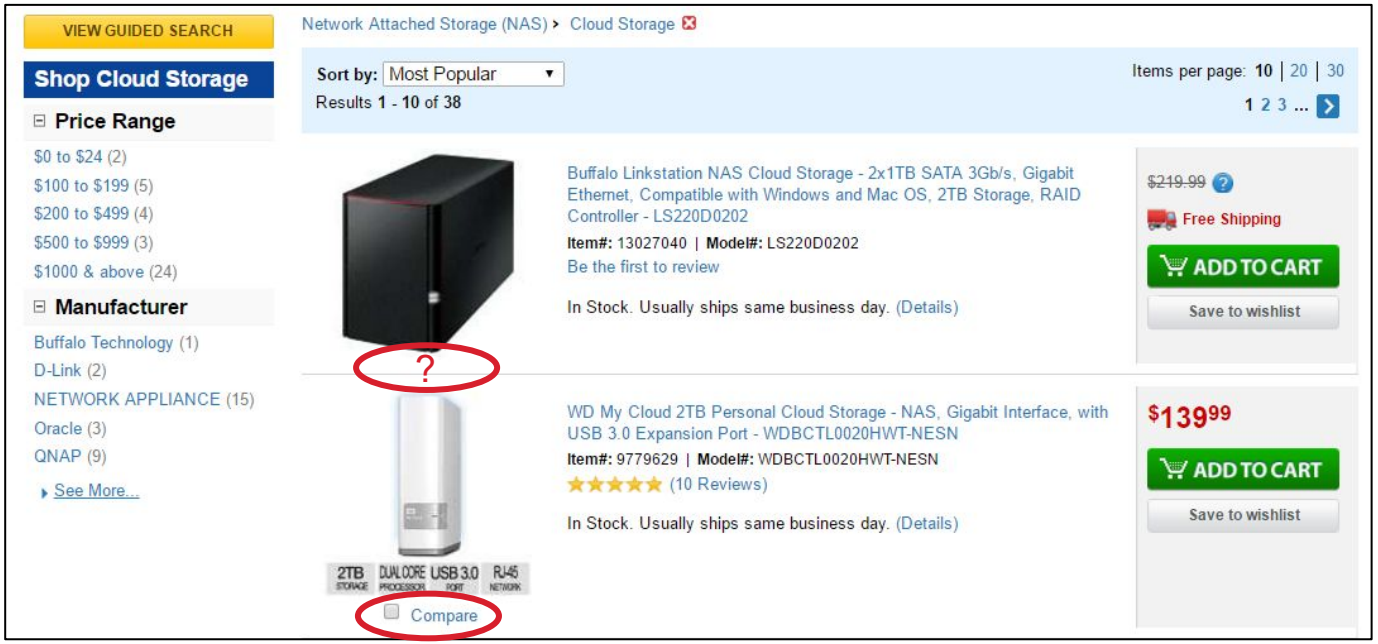
Place a ‘select to compare’ CTA next to each product thumbnail on the product list. The CTA should be noticeable, but less prominent than the ‘add to cart’ CTA.

Site Component - Design
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

User Quote - *“The only thing I saw from my short interaction was the lack [of] direct side by side comparisons of products. A user would need to use multiple tabs or the back and forward button to really compare stats.* **This quote was about a site that *did* offer product comparison tool, but the user didn’t notice the CTA**

Non-adherence example

Guideline #201. Follow conventional design: Display a checkbox under or above the product image, indicate 'select to compare' or simply 'compare'

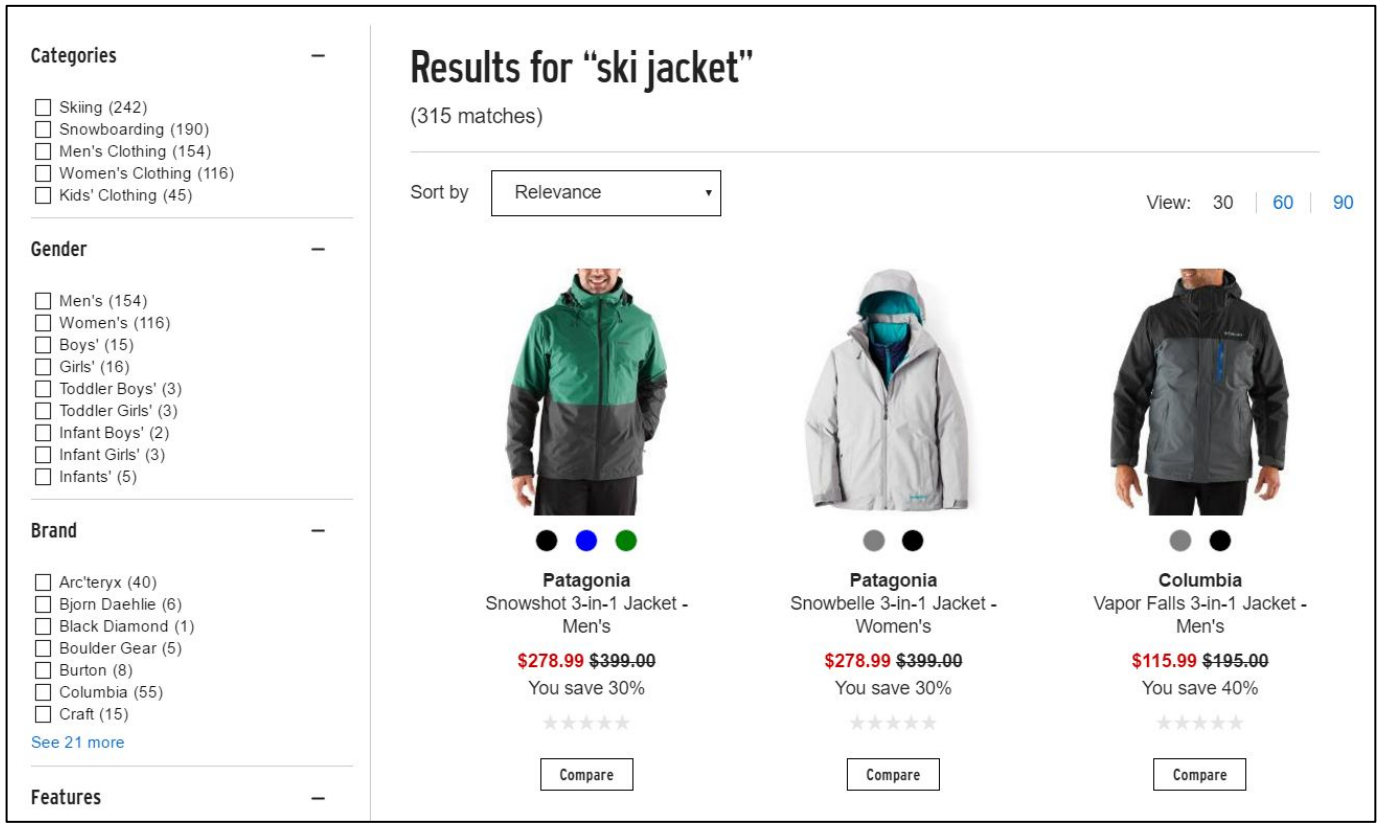


TigerDirect doesn't allow comparison on some of their product list or search pages. And when they do, sometimes not every product is comparable. They do offer a 'Tablet Finder' which allows comparison, but it is separate from the product list page with its own icon and interface that the shopper must initiate.

Guideline #202. Comparison tool should also be offered on search results pages

The search results page is effectively a product list page. The products displayed on the search results page are inherently related and thus should be comparable either via the click-and-compare tool, or by displaying product information consistently so shoppers can easily scan products to find and compare relevant information.

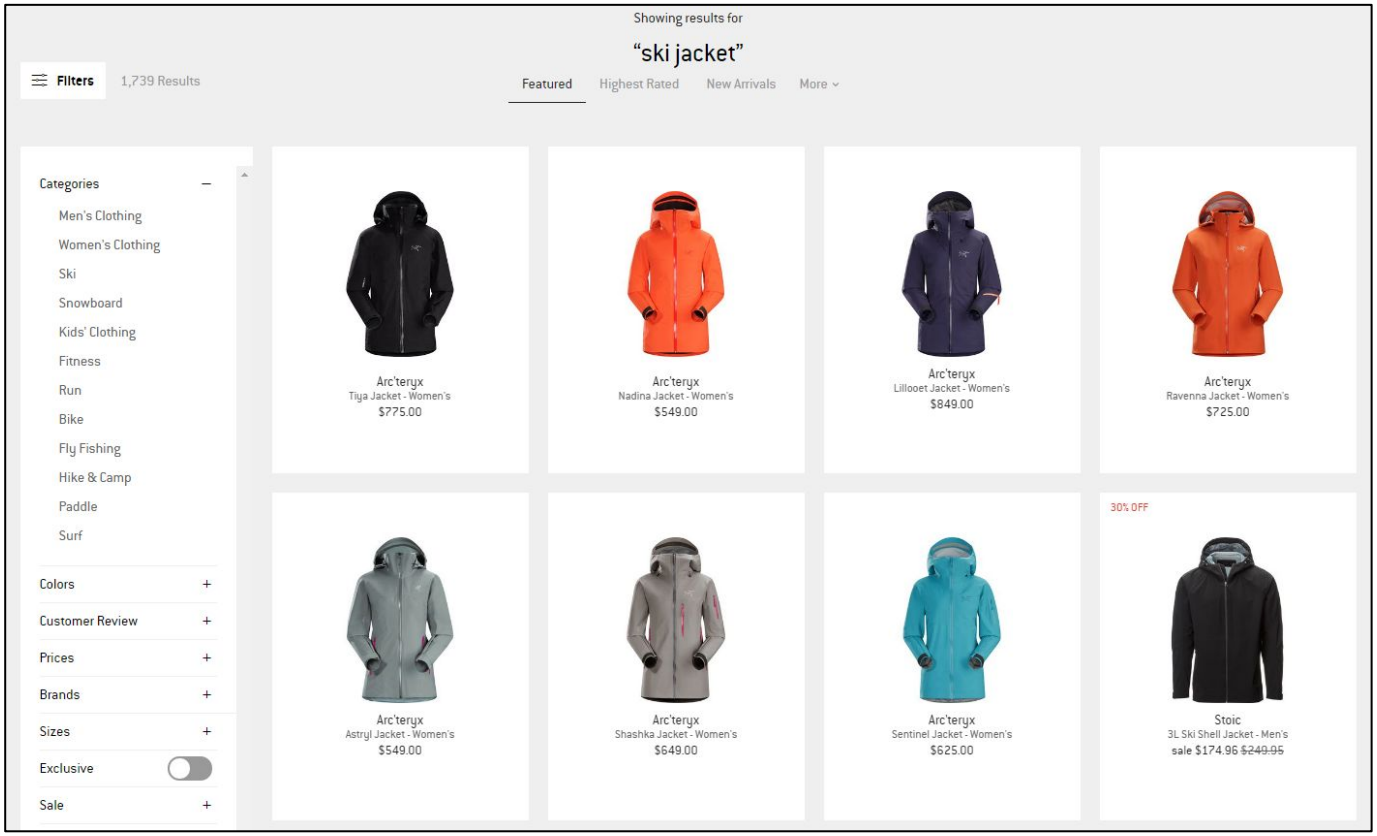
Site Component - Design
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus



REI allows comparisons in a very typical way via their product list pages as well as their search results pages. Here, after searching for ski jackets we can readily see the prominent 'compare' button below each item. REI knows we're not going to add-to-cart from this display, so they make the CTA 'compare'. When selected, a screen popup appears from the bottom of the page directing users to select more products to compare. The one problem with this design is that there's no apparent way to get to the product page, customers are expected to know to click on the product picture.

Non-adherence example

Guideline #202. Comparison tool should also be offered on search results pages



Backcountry doesn't offer comparison on their product list or search results pages.

User quote for Backcountry.com - *"Also, there was no compare tool that I saw so the only way I could compare items without leaving the search results page was just to eyeball everything and make a decision from there."*

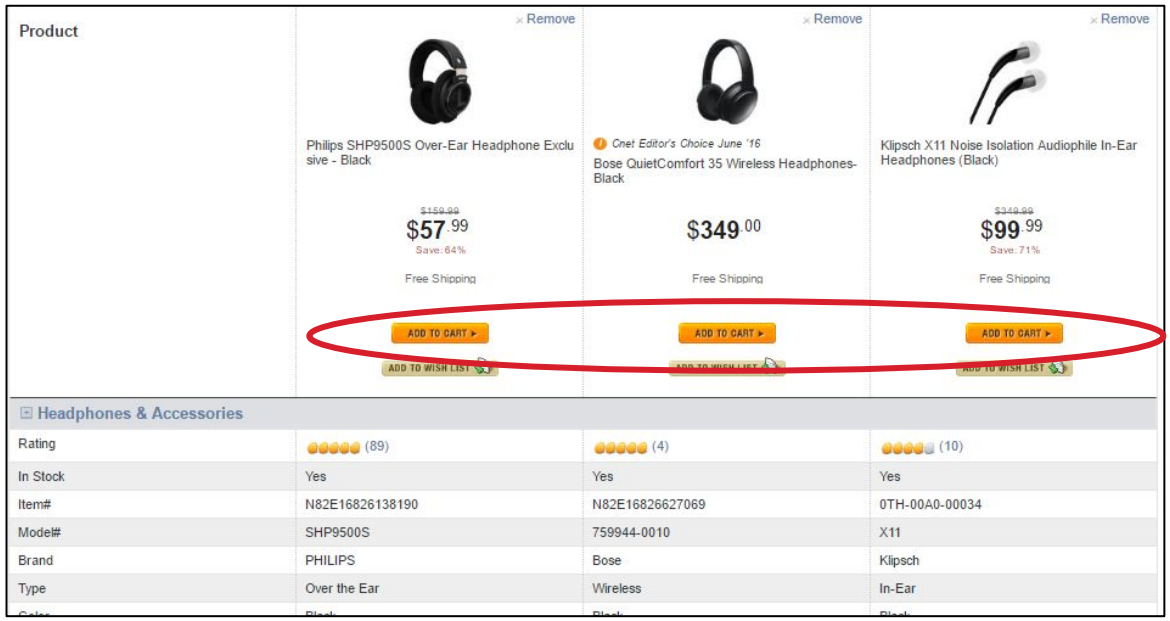
User quote for Backcountry.com - *"Definitely add a compare tool so that you can get a side by side comparison of similar items."*

Guideline #203. Add "add to cart" CTA for each product

People compare products because they want to buy one. Don't make it difficult.

Every product on a product comparison page (or within a popup) should have an 'add to cart' CTA.

Typical placement is just below the product description:



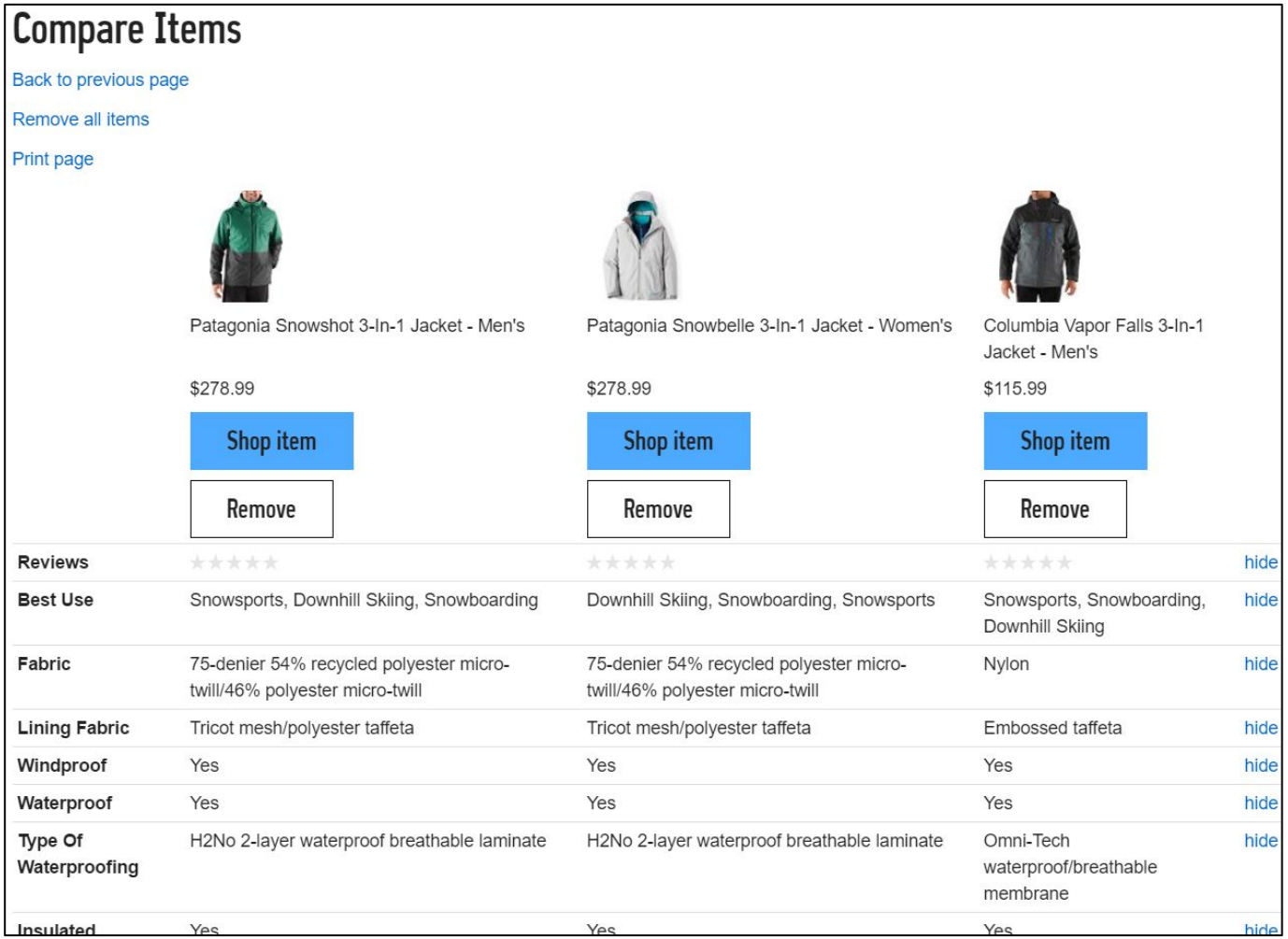
Newegg's 'select-and-compare' tool prominently displays an 'Add to Cart' CTA.

Site Component - Design > Interaction
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

User quote - *"I would allow for add to cart functionality from the compare screen to match behavior when shopping via a list of products."*

Non-adherence example

Guideline #203. Add "add to cart" CTA for each product



Compare Items

Back to previous page

Remove all items

Print page

	Patagonia Snowshot 3-In-1 Jacket - Men's	Patagonia Snowbelle 3-In-1 Jacket - Women's	Columbia Vapor Falls 3-In-1 Jacket - Men's	
	$278.99	$278.99	$115.99	
	Shop item	Shop item	Shop item	
	Remove	Remove	Remove	
Reviews	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	hide
Best Use	Snowsports, Downhill Skiing, Snowboarding	Downhill Skiing, Snowboarding, Snowsports	Snowsports, Snowboarding, Downhill Skiing	hide
Fabric	75-denier 54% recycled polyester micro-twill/46% polyester micro-twill	75-denier 54% recycled polyester micro-twill/46% polyester micro-twill	Nylon	hide
Lining Fabric	Tricot mesh/polyester taffeta	Tricot mesh/polyester taffeta	Embossed taffeta	hide
Windproof	Yes	Yes	Yes	hide
Waterproof	Yes	Yes	Yes	hide
Type Of Waterproofing	H2No 2-layer waterproof breathable laminate	H2No 2-layer waterproof breathable laminate	Omni-Tech waterproof/breathable membrane	hide
Insulated	Yes	Yes	Yes	hide

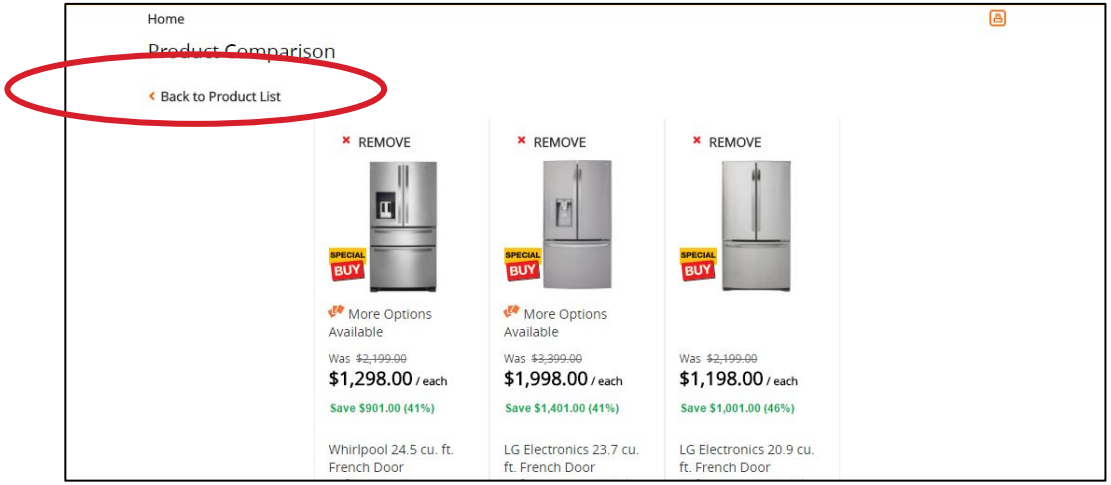
REI uses a ‘shop item’ CTA instead of an ‘add to cart’. We’d be curious how their add to cart conversions and purchase conversions would change with the simple change. They do provide the CTA in a visually contrasting way, making it extremely apparent against all the tabular data presented.

Guideline #204. "Close" or "Back to results" button should be visible

Clear navigation enables shoppers to fluidly browse products. Any kind of friction in the browsing experience results in the loss of potential buyers.

The product comparison tool is one where people need to know where they are, especially because they've taken a detour to get there and need a quick method to return to the standard funnel of search>list>product page.

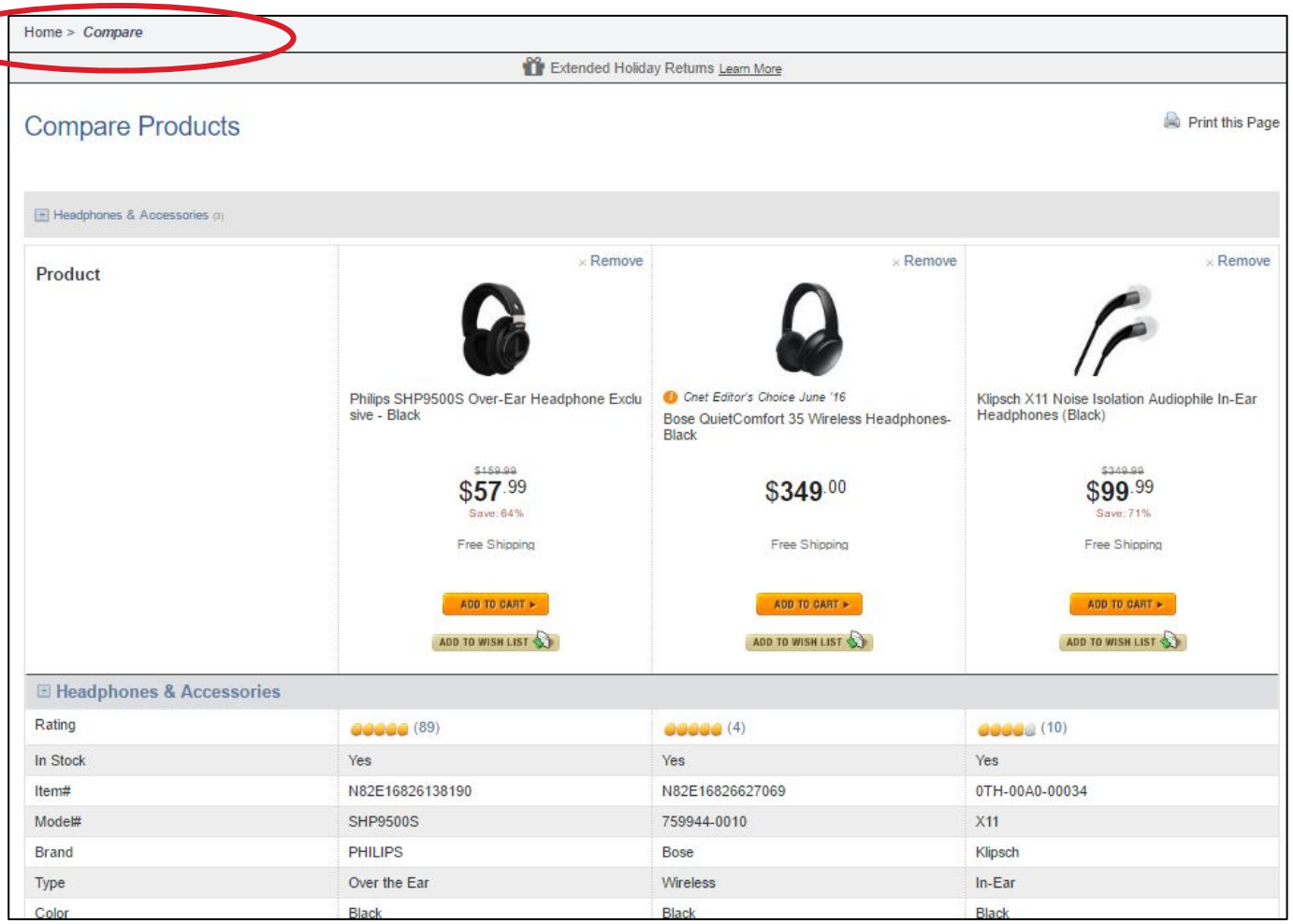
Site Component - Design > Interaction
Conversion Heuristic - Friction



Home Depot explicitly states how to get back to the product list, with the link placed where users look first: the top left corner.

Non-adherence example

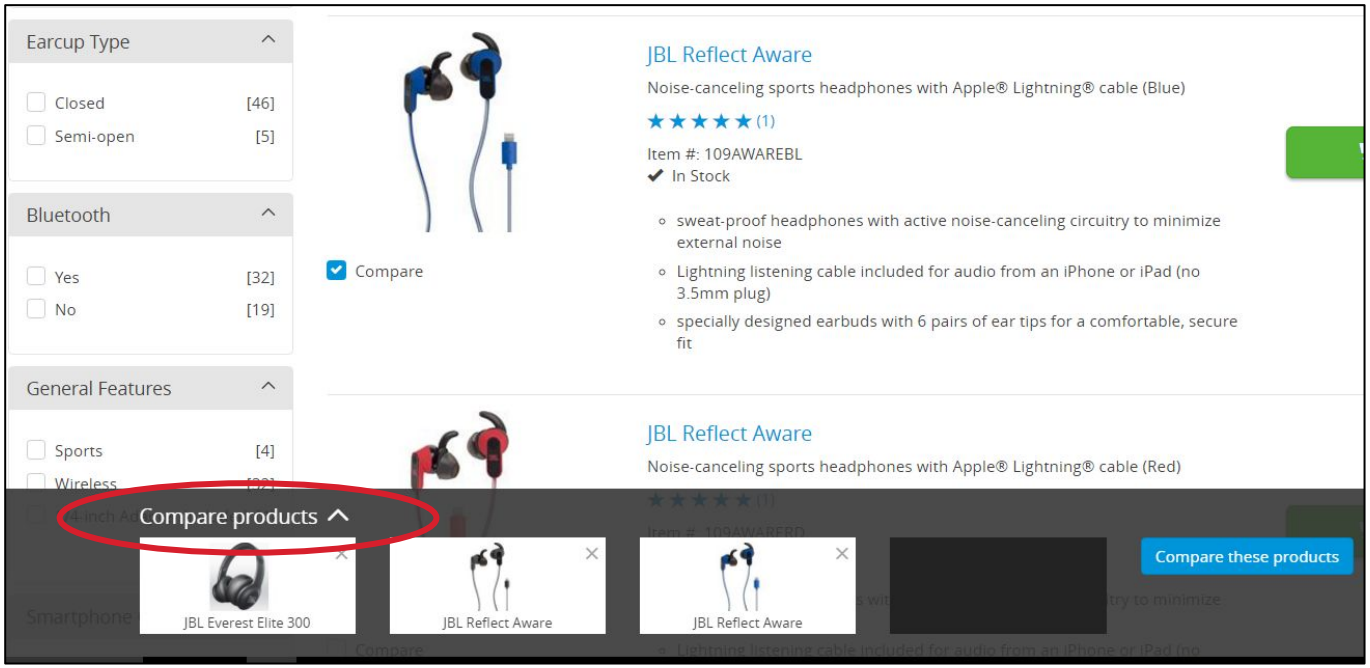
Guideline #204. "Close" or "Back to results" button should be visible



Ok Newegg, your breadcrumbs tell me that I've come from home, but I certainly didn't. So not only do I not know how to get back to the product search I performed, but you've confused me about where I am on your site.

Non-adherence example

Guideline #204. "Close" or "Back to results" button should be visible



Crutchfield offers a nice compare bar at the bottom, which is somewhat common. But they don't have a clear way to cancel or go back, which created problems for some users during testing.

User quote on what frustrated them about the site - *"Definitely was the compare bar at the bottom. When I clicked the arrow, which I thought was going to bring it up more on the screen, it disappeared into the bottom and I couldn't get it back."*.

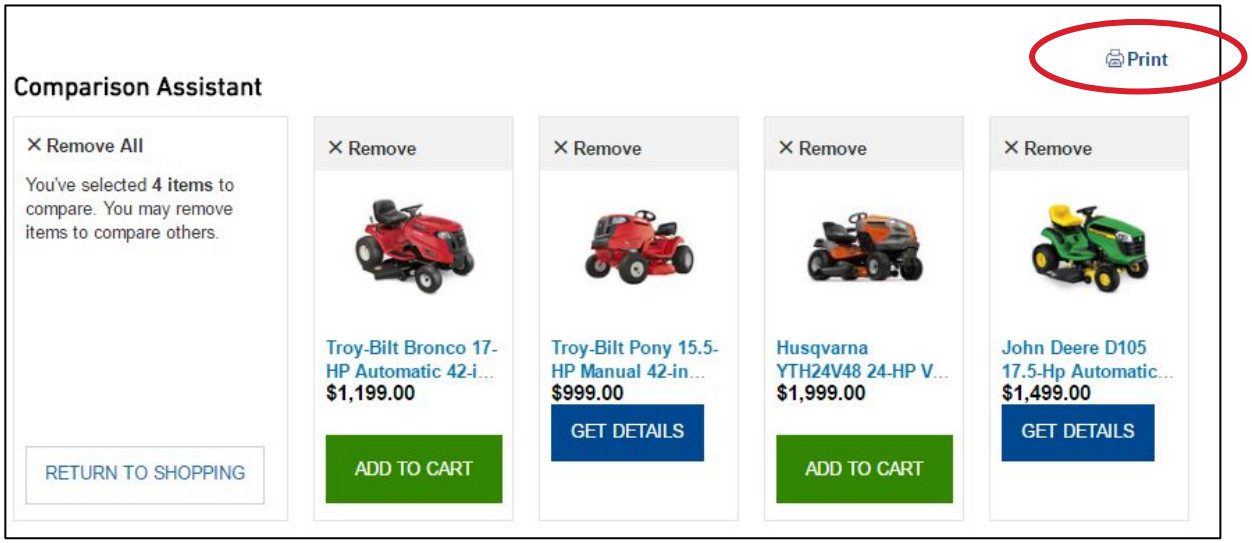
Guideline #205. Allow users to print comparison tables

Though unlikely to hurt or help conversions, this is an often referenced feature of comparison tools. Perhaps users want to print and share with a family member, or email to a colleague?

For whatever reason, people want the ability to extract the comparable information. We've seen examples where sites allow users to save or email the tables directly, but these actions can be done via print by pdf easily, and it saves the development of the save or email functions.

Most websites offer this function via a link in the upper right of the comparison tool.

Site Component - Design > Interaction
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus



Like many websites with a 'select-and-compare' feature, Lowe's puts their print link in the upper right of the page.

Guideline #206. Offer capability for users to mouse hover over technical phrasing/jargon to see a definition or description

What are ohms anyway? Is a high number good or bad? Do I really have to google this?

If people have to leave your site to look up the definition of a term, chances are you'll lose them in the process. Explain what things are, as even intelligent shoppers don't know all the jargon.

Site Component - Design > Interaction

Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

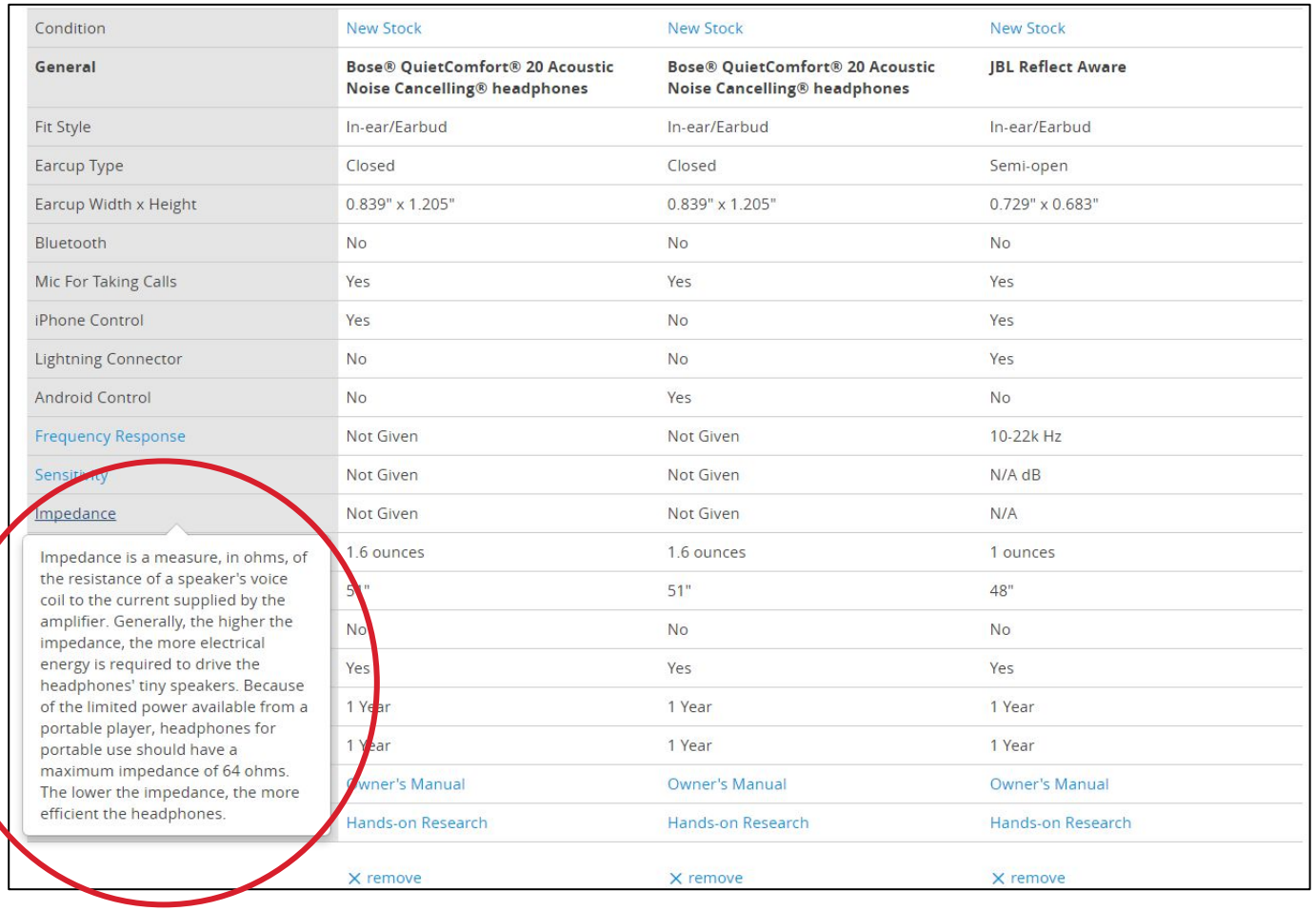
Headphones & Accessories				
Rating	(5)	(90)		(4)
In Stock	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Item#	N82E16826193092	N82E16826138190	N82E16826138309	N82E16826627069
Model#	E-210-VL	SHP9500S	L2BO/27	759944-0010
Brand	Rosewill	PHILIPS	PHILIPS	Bose
Type	Earbud	Over the Ear		Wireless
Color	Violet	Black		Black
Driver Unit	10mm	50mm	40mm	
Frequency Response	10Hz-22KHz	6Hz-35Khz	6Hz - 40KZ	
Input Impedance	20 ohms	32 ohms	16 ohms	
Sensitivity	105 dB +/- 3 dB at 1kHz	102 dB/mW	105 dB/mW	
Connector	3.5mm	3.5mm		
Cord Length	4 feet Asymmetrical	1.5 m		
Features	Enhanced Bass Response Aluminum Construction Inline Mic & Control Button for taking and ending calls on your smartphon	Exquisite open-back, over the ear de sign for authentic sound 50mm neodymium Drivers Deliver F ull Spectrum of Sound	High Resolution audio reproduces m usic in its purest form High-definition optimally vented neod ymium speaker drivers	QUIETCOMFORT35, WIRELESS, HDPH, BLACK, WW

Newegg has a pretty techy comparison table for some headphones we selected to compare. It would be handy if they had hover-over windows explaining some of the features.

User quote about Newegg.com - "Also when i did the comparison of the products, having the headers like for the earbuds, the Input Impedance, i didn't know if a higher ohms or lower was better"

Adherence example

Guideline #206. Offer capability for users to mouse hover over technical phrasing/jargon to see a definition or description



Condition	New Stock	New Stock	New Stock
General	**Bose® QuietComfort® 20 Acoustic Noise Cancelling® headphones**	**Bose® QuietComfort® 20 Acoustic Noise Cancelling® headphones**	**JBL Reflect Aware**
Fit Style	In-ear/Earbud	In-ear/Earbud	In-ear/Earbud
Earcup Type	Closed	Closed	Semi-open
Earcup Width x Height	0.839" x 1.205"	0.839" x 1.205"	0.729" x 0.683"
Bluetooth	No	No	No
Mic For Taking Calls	Yes	Yes	Yes
iPhone Control	Yes	No	Yes
Lightning Connector	No	No	Yes
Android Control	No	Yes	No
Frequency Response	Not Given	Not Given	10-22k Hz
Sensitivity	Not Given	Not Given	N/A dB
Impedance	Not Given	Not Given	N/A
	1.6 ounces	1.6 ounces	1 ounces
	5"	51"	48"
	No	No	No
	Yes	Yes	Yes
	1 Year	1 Year	1 Year
	1 Year	1 Year	1 Year
	Owner's Manual	Owner's Manual	Owner's Manual
	Hands-on Research	Hands-on Research	Hands-on Research
	× remove	× remove	× remove

Impedance is a measure, in ohms, of the resistance of a speaker's voice coil to the current supplied by the amplifier. Generally, the higher the impedance, the more electrical energy is required to drive the headphones' tiny speakers. Because of the limited power available from a portable player, headphones for portable use should have a maximum impedance of 64 ohms. The lower the impedance, the more efficient the headphones.

Crutchfield does it better. They tell us what exactly impedance is, and how its units (ohms) affect energy consumption. Users can successfully compare the efficiency of selected headphones.

Guideline #207. Each product picture should be clickable, leading to product page

This guideline is all about expectations. Most sites adhere to it.

Some sites like REI rely on this to get you to the product image from the product list page. Not so sure this is the best way about things, to solely rely on this interaction, but it's certainly what many people expect.

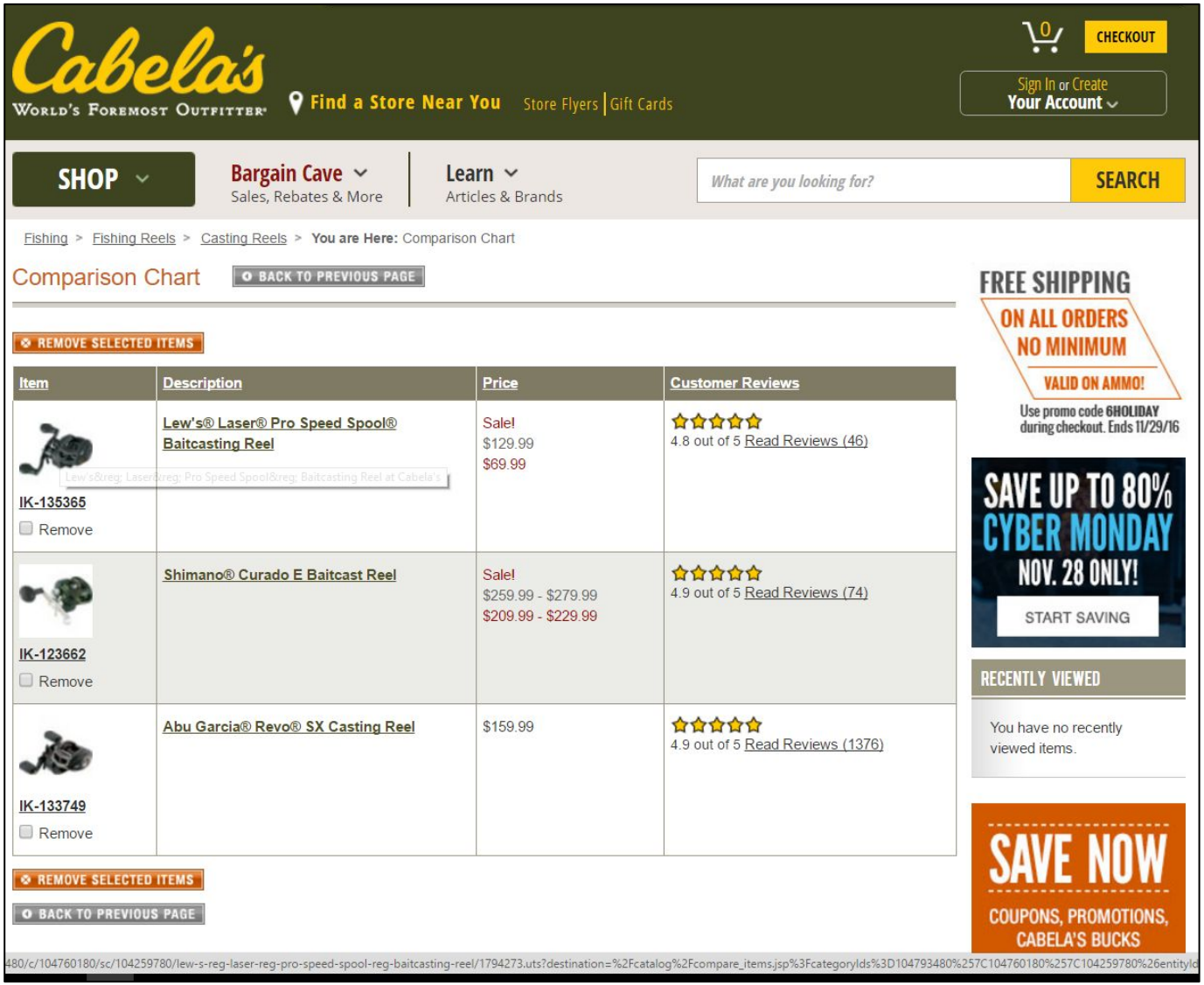
The comparison is a step in the buying process. After assessing the differences, a choice is made. If they don't click the 'Add to Cart' CTA, then they'll want to see the product page.

Within the comparison page, on product image hover, the product image/thumbnail should indicate that it is clickable. Once clicked it should navigate to that product's product page.

Site Component - Design > Interaction
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

Adherence example

Guideline #207. Each product picture should be clickable, leading to product page



Cabela's comparison page view shows small thumbnails of the products being compared, in this case fishing reels. The images are poor, but they indicate that they are clickable and navigate to the product page.

Guideline #208. If there are many specs to compare, they should be organized, grouped, and easy to scan

Comparing technical products can be a hassle. There are potentially hundreds of specifications that could be be presented for such products as computers and many consumer electronics.

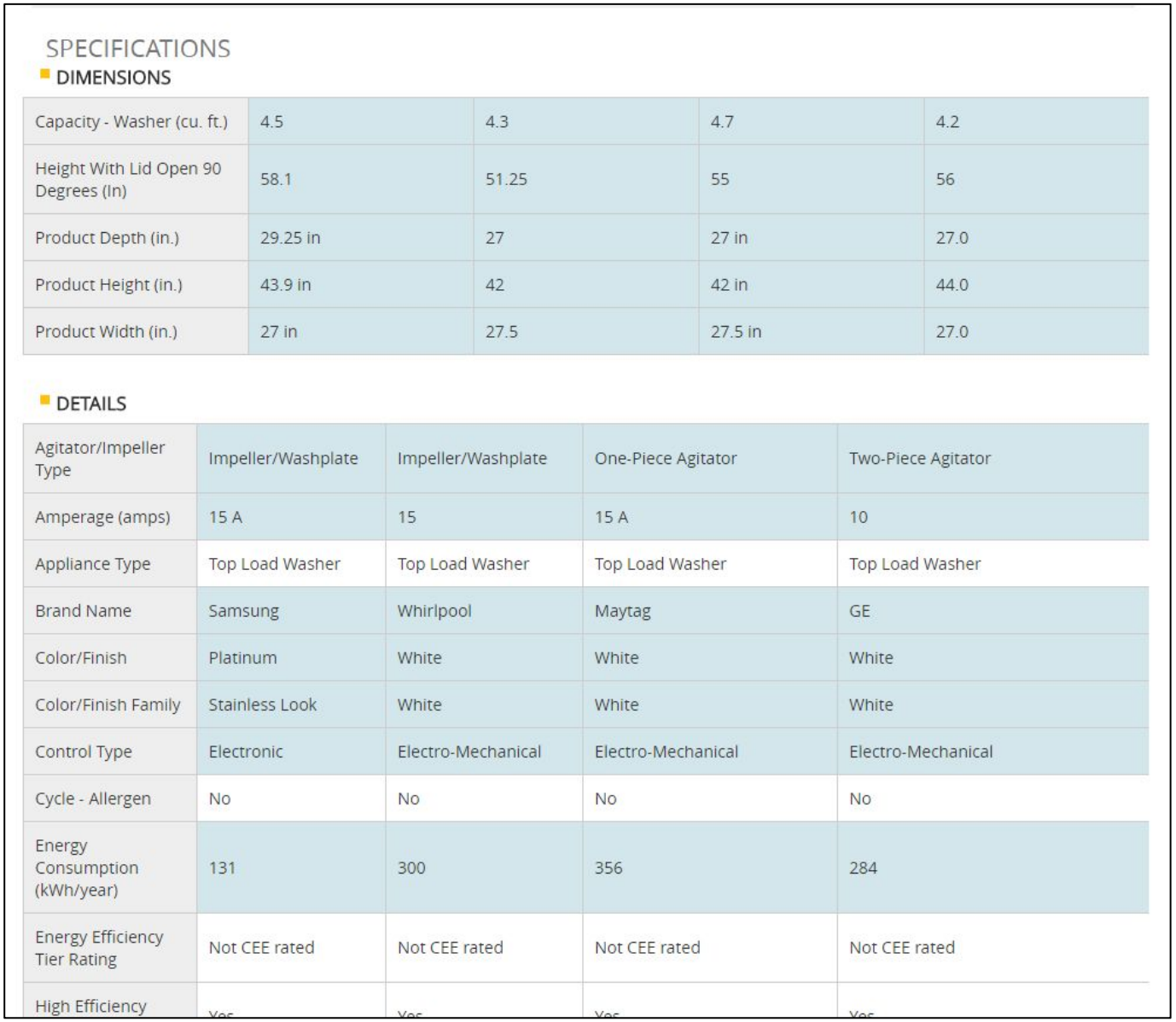
Presentation of such large amounts of text and numbers is important.

Nicely designed comparison tables make people find what they want and doesn't let the anything get in the way of what the user's trying to do. Poorly designed tables put up roadblocks, creates friction and loss of credibility.

Site Component - Product Information
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

Adherence example

Guideline #208. If there are many specs to compare, they should be organized, grouped, and easy to scan



SPECIFICATIONS

DIMENSIONS

Capacity - Washer (cu. ft.)	4.5	4.3	4.7	4.2
Height With Lid Open 90 Degrees (In)	58.1	51.25	55	56
Product Depth (in.)	29.25 in	27	27 in	27.0
Product Height (in.)	43.9 in	42	42 in	44.0
Product Width (in.)	27 in	27.5	27.5 in	27.0

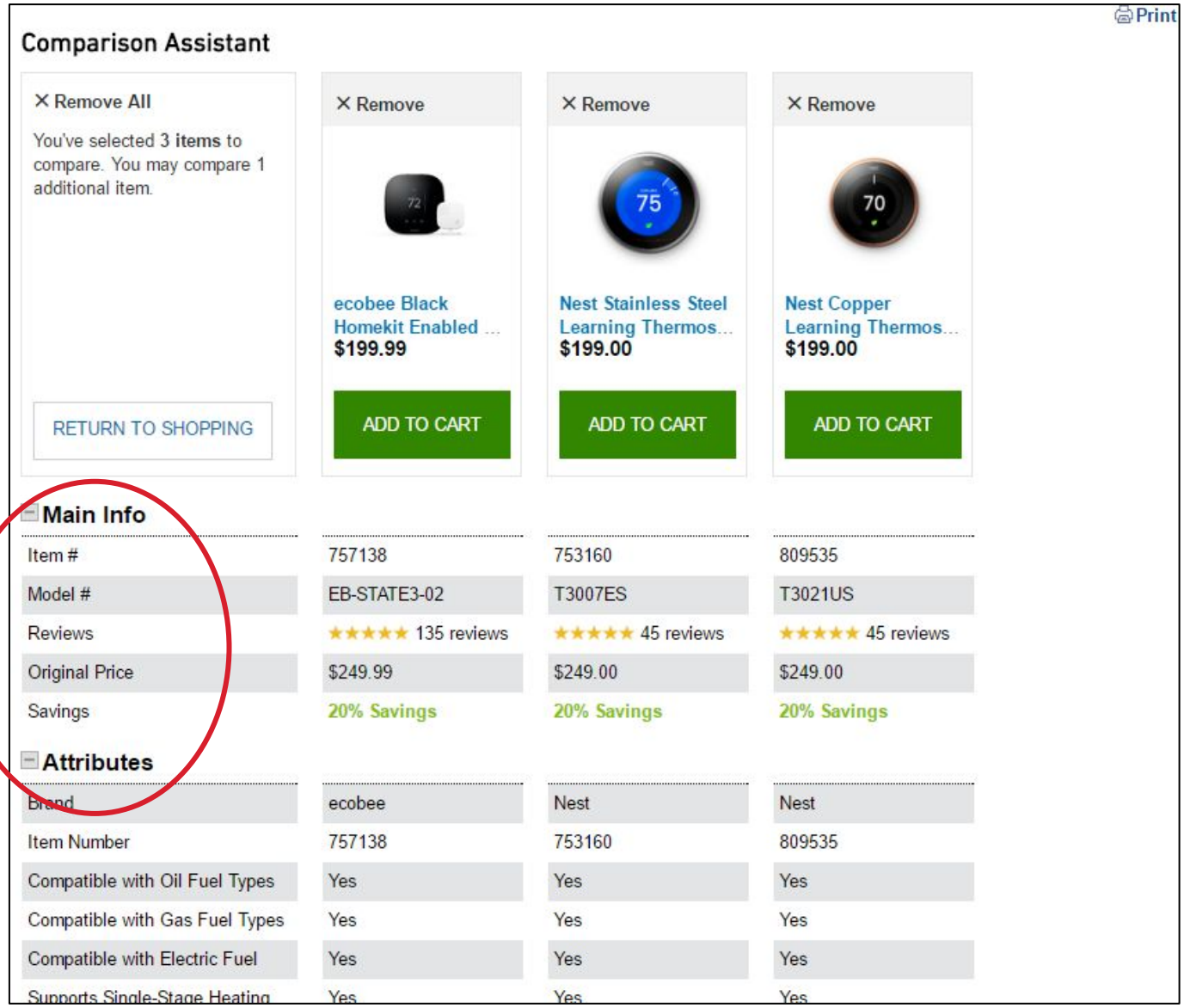
DETAILS

Agitator/Impeller Type	Impeller/Washplate	Impeller/Washplate	One-Piece Agitator	Two-Piece Agitator
Amperage (amps)	15 A	15	15 A	10
Appliance Type	Top Load Washer	Top Load Washer	Top Load Washer	Top Load Washer
Brand Name	Samsung	Whirlpool	Maytag	GE
Color/Finish	Platinum	White	White	White
Color/Finish Family	Stainless Look	White	White	White
Control Type	Electronic	Electro-Mechanical	Electro-Mechanical	Electro-Mechanical
Cycle - Allergen	No	No	No	No
Energy Consumption (kWh/year)	131	300	356	284
Energy Efficiency Tier Rating	Not CEE rated	Not CEE rated	Not CEE rated	Not CEE rated
High Efficiency	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

For a dishwasher comparison, Home Depot's design is well done with relatively large font compared to many other in this subvertical, as well as indication (in blue background) of specifications where differences exist.

Adherence example

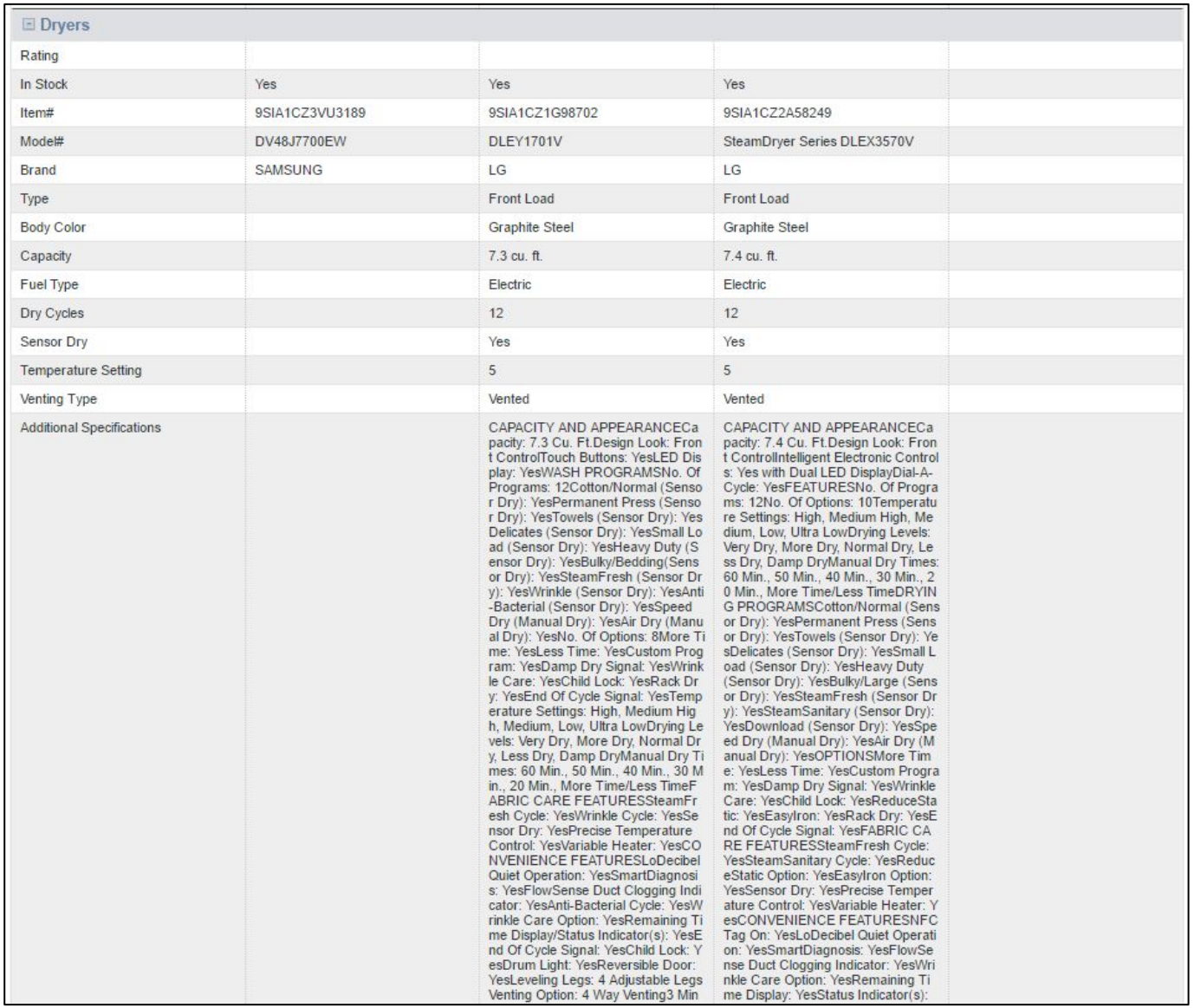
Guideline #208. If there are many specs to compare, either organize them into collapsible groups or create a scrolling lightbox or separate page



Lowe's is similar to many sites that provides two major groupings of product details: a primary area with the main info, and a secondary area with more specific, granular details such as size specs and features.

Non-adherence example

Guideline #208. If there are many specs to compare, they should be organized, grouped, and easy to scan



Dryers				
Rating				
In Stock	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Item#	9SIA1CZ3VU3189	9SIA1CZ1G98702	9SIA1CZ2A58249	
Model#	DV48J7700EW	DLEY1701V	SteamDryer Series DLEX3570V	
Brand	SAMSUNG	LG	LG	
Type		Front Load	Front Load	
Body Color		Graphite Steel	Graphite Steel	
Capacity		7.3 cu. ft.	7.4 cu. ft.	
Fuel Type		Electric	Electric	
Dry Cycles		12	12	
Sensor Dry		Yes	Yes	
Temperature Setting		5	5	
Venting Type		Vented	Vented	
Additional Specifications		CAPACITY AND APPEARANCECapacity: 7.3 Cu. Ft.Design Look: Front ControlTouch Buttons: YesLED Display: YesWASH PROGRAMSNo. Of Programs: 12Cotton/Normal (Sensor Dry): YesPermanent Press (Sensor Dry): YesTowels (Sensor Dry): YesDelicates (Sensor Dry): YesSmall Load (Sensor Dry): YesHeavy Duty (Sensor Dry): YesBulky/Bedding(Sensor Dry): YesSteamFresh (Sensor Dry): YesWrinkle (Sensor Dry): YesAnti-Bacterial (Sensor Dry): YesSpeed Dry (Manual Dry): YesAir Dry (Manual Dry): YesNo. Of Options: 8More Time: YesLess Time: YesCustom Program: YesDamp Dry Signal: YesWrinkle Care: YesChild Lock: YesRack Dry: YesEnd Of Cycle Signal: YesTemperature Settings: High, Medium High, Medium, Low, Ultra LowDrying Levels: Very Dry, More Dry, Normal Dry, Less Dry, Damp DryManual Dry Times: 60 Min., 50 Min., 40 Min., 30 Min., 20 Min., More Time/Less TimeFABRIC CARE FEATURESSteamFresh Cycle: YesWrinkle Cycle: YesSensor Dry: YesPrecise Temperature Control: YesVariable Heater: YesCONVENIENCE FEATURESLoDecibel Quiet Operation: YesSmartDiagnosis: YesFlowSense Duct Clogging Indicator: YesAnti-Bacterial Cycle: YesWrinkle Care Option: YesRemaining Time Display/Status Indicator(s): YesEnd Of Cycle Signal: YesChild Lock: YesDrum Light: YesReversible Door: YesLeveling Legs: 4 Adjustable Legs Venting Option: 4 Way Venting3 Min	CAPACITY AND APPEARANCECapacity: 7.4 Cu. Ft.Design Look: Front ControlIntelligent Electronic Controls: Yes with Dual LED DisplayDial-A-Cycle: YesFEATURESNo. Of Programs: 12No. Of Options: 10Temperature Settings: High, Medium High, Medium, Low, Ultra LowDrying Levels: Very Dry, More Dry, Normal Dry, Less Dry, Damp DryManual Dry Times: 60 Min., 50 Min., 40 Min., 30 Min., 20 Min., More Time/Less TimeDRYING PROGRAMSCotton/Normal (Sensor Dry): YesPermanent Press (Sensor Dry): YesTowels (Sensor Dry): YesDelicates (Sensor Dry): YesSmall Load (Sensor Dry): YesHeavy Duty (Sensor Dry): YesBulky/Large (Sensor Dry): YesSteamFresh (Sensor Dry): YesSteamSanitary (Sensor Dry): YesDownload (Sensor Dry): YesSpeed Dry (Manual Dry): YesAir Dry (Manual Dry): YesOPTIONSMore Time: YesLess Time: YesCustom Program: YesDamp Dry Signal: YesWrinkle Care: YesChild Lock: YesReduceStatic: YesEasyIron: YesRack Dry: YesEnd Of Cycle Signal: YesFABRIC CARE FEATURESSteamFresh Cycle: YesSteamSanitary Cycle: YesReduceStatic Option: YesEasyIron Option: YesSensor Dry: YesPrecise Temperature Control: YesVariable Heater: YesCONVENIENCE FEATURESNFC Tag On: YesLoDecibel Quiet Operation: YesSmartDiagnosis: YesFlowSense Duct Clogging Indicator: YesWrinkle Care Option: YesRemaining Time Display: YesStatus Indicator(s):	

Newegg presents a wall of text in the ‘additional specification’ section. Further, they don’t provide the same information across all four washers being compared here, or provide groupings of specifications.

Product Comparison Tool » Product Information

3 Guidelines

Product Comparison Tool > Product Information

209. Avoid product comparison if all differentiating product information is displayed on the product list page
210. Comparison page consistently shows the same specs for all products, consistent names, no empty cells, etc.
211. Prominently include rating and number of ratings for each product on the comparison page

How a comparison tool displays product information is crucial for getting the comparison shopper what they want.

Customer's need to be able to interact with the comparison tool in an efficient and intuitive way. But they also need to get the right information, quickly, without the cognitive load of searching for it.

Comparison tables are popular in consumer electronics and search product types as these technical products have many important and comparable specifications that users need to know about in order to evaluate one choice from another.

Guideline #209. Avoid product comparison if all differentiating product information is displayed on the product list page

Many of the clothing and apparel sites that we tested and benchmarked do not have 'select-and-compare' functionality. The products don't have many technical specifications that consumers would use to evaluate one pair of jeans over another, for example.

Therefore these sites simply use filtering and sorting to allow customers to shop and compare products.

Though not a hard rule, if you sell 'Experience Goods', those which need to be experienced in order to be evaluated then it's likely that filter comparison method will suffice.

An easy way to evaluate if your customers would appreciate a dedicated compare tool is to run a round of user testing on 5-15 users and setting a task to 'evaluate' (don't use the word compare) a couple products. See if users have trouble with this task.

Site Component - Product Information
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

User quote - "*The compare feature was pretty bad. Basically all it showed me was product name, price, and overall rating. This was exactly the same information I could see while just browsing inventory.*"

Guideline #210. Comparison page consistently shows the same specs for all products, consistent names, no empty cells, etc.

This can be difficult for general merchandise sites or generally with sites that sell tons of products from tons of different manufacturers. It's easy to imagine that it's difficult to generate every field for every product in an efficient way.

That said, the better this is done, the more complete the comparison, the more credibility the site will have.

See the examples below on Home Depot and Newegg in comparing washing machines.

Site Component - Product Information
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

User quote - *"The product details on the compare and product pages weren't as detailed as I would want to really decide which product was best."*

User quote - *"...one of the headphones I was looking at didn't have a easy-to-read "specs" list. I could only reply on a paragraph to decide whether I wanted to buy the item or not."*

Adherence example

Guideline #210. Comparison page consistently shows the same specs for all products, there should be no empty cells

SPECIFICATIONS

DIMENSIONS

Capacity - Washer (cu. ft.)	4.5	4.3	4.7	4.2
Height With Lid Open 90 Degrees (In)	58.1	51.25	55	56
Product Depth (in.)	29.25 in	27	27 in	27.0
Product Height (in.)	43.9 in	42	42 in	44.0
Product Width (in.)	27 in	27.5	27.5 in	27.0

DETAILS

Agitator/Impeller Type	Impeller/Washplate	Impeller/Washplate	One-Piece Agitator	Two-Piece Agitator
Amperage (amps)	15 A	15	15 A	10
Appliance Type	Top Load Washer	Top Load Washer	Top Load Washer	Top Load Washer
Brand Name	Samsung	Whirlpool	Maytag	GE
Color/Finish	Platinum	White	White	White
Color/Finish Family	Stainless Look	White	White	White
Control Type	Electronic	Electro-Mechanical	Electro-Mechanical	Electro-Mechanical
Cycle - Allergen	No	No	No	No
Energy Consumption (kWh/year)	131	300	356	284
Energy Efficiency Tier Rating	Not CEE rated	Not CEE rated	Not CEE rated	Not CEE rated
High Efficiency	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Home Depot's comparison page table provides details for every field for every product compared. See the page HERE. Also note the nice color scheme and grouping of dimensions and details.

Non-adherence example

Guideline #210. Comparison page consistently shows the same specs for all products, there should be no empty cells

Dryers				
Rating				
In Stock	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Item#	9SIA1CZ3VU3189	9SIA1CZ1G98702	9SIA1CZ2A58249	
Model#	DV48J7700EW	DLEY1701V	SteamDryer Series DLEX3570V	
Brand	SAMSUNG	LG	LG	
Type		Front Load	Front Load	
Body Color		Graphite Steel	Graphite Steel	
Capacity		7.3 cu. ft.	7.4 cu. ft.	
Fuel Type		Electric	Electric	
Dry Cycles		12	12	
Sensor Dry		Yes	Yes	
Temperature Setting		5	5	
Venting Type		Vented	Vented	
Additional Specifications		CAPACITY AND APPEARANCECapacity: 7.3 Cu. Ft.Design Look: Front ControlTouch Buttons: YesLED Display: YesWASH PROGRAMSNo. Of Programs: 12Cotton/Normal (Sensor Dry): YesPermanent Press (Sensor Dry): YesTowels (Sensor Dry): YesDelicates (Sensor Dry): YesSmall Load (Sensor Dry): YesHeavy Duty (Sensor Dry): YesBulky/Bedding(Sensor Dry): YesSteamFresh (Sensor Dry): YesWrinkle (Sensor Dry): YesAnti-Bacterial (Sensor Dry): YesSpeed Dry (Manual Dry): YesAir Dry (Manual Dry): YesNo. Of Options: 8More Time: YesLess Time: YesCustom Program: YesDamp Dry Signal: YesWrinkle Care: YesChild Lock: YesRack Dry: YesEnd Of Cycle Signal: YesTemperature Settings: High, Medium High, Medium, Low, Ultra LowDrying Levels: Very Dry, More Dry, Normal Dry, Less Dry, Damp DryManual Dry Times: 60 Min., 50 Min., 40 Min., 30 Min., 20 Min., More Time/Less TimeFABRIC CARE FEATURESSteamFresh Cycle: YesWrinkle Cycle: YesSensor Dry: YesPrecise Temperature Control: YesVariable Heater: YesCONVENIENCE FEATURESLoDecibel Quiet Operation: YesSmartDiagnosis: YesFlowSense Duct Clogging Indicator: YesAnti-Bacterial Cycle: YesWrinkle Care Option: YesRemaining Time Display/Status Indicator(s): YesEnd Of Cycle Signal: YesChild Lock: YesDrum Light: YesReversible Door: YesLeveling Legs: 4 Adjustable Legs Venting Option: 4 Way Venting3 Min	CAPACITY AND APPEARANCECapacity: 7.4 Cu. Ft.Design Look: Front ControlIntelligent Electronic Controls: Yes with Dual LED DisplayDial-A-Cycle: YesFEATURESNo. Of Programs: 12No. Of Options: 10Temperature Settings: High, Medium High, Medium, Low, Ultra LowDrying Levels: Very Dry, More Dry, Normal Dry, Less Dry, Damp DryManual Dry Times: 60 Min., 50 Min., 40 Min., 30 Min., 20 Min., More Time/Less TimeDRYING PROGRAMSCotton/Normal (Sensor Dry): YesPermanent Press (Sensor Dry): YesTowels (Sensor Dry): YesDelicates (Sensor Dry): YesSmall Load (Sensor Dry): YesHeavy Duty (Sensor Dry): YesBulky/Large (Sensor Dry): YesSteamFresh (Sensor Dry): YesSteamSanitary (Sensor Dry): YesDownload (Sensor Dry): YesSpeed Dry (Manual Dry): YesAir Dry (Manual Dry): YesOPTIONSMore Time: YesLess Time: YesCustom Program: YesDamp Dry Signal: YesWrinkle Care: YesChild Lock: YesReduceStatic: YesEasyIron: YesRack Dry: YesEnd Of Cycle Signal: YesFABRIC CARE FEATURESSteamFresh Cycle: YesSteamSanitary Cycle: YesReduceStatic Option: YesEasyIron Option: YesSensor Dry: YesPrecise Temperature Control: YesVariable Heater: YesCONVENIENCE FEATURESNFC Tag On: YesLoDecibel Quiet Operation: YesSmartDiagnosis: YesFlowSense Duct Clogging Indicator: YesWrinkle Care Option: YesRemaining Time Display: YesStatus Indicator(s):	

Here is an analog to the above comparison of washing machines at Home Depot, this one is at Newegg.com. Notice that many fields are missing, no fields for the fourth column! See the comparison HERE.

Guideline #211. Prominently include rating and number of ratings for each product on the comparison page

Site Component - Product Information
Conversion Heuristic - Motivation

Reviews are a form of social proof.

Both the quantity and quality matter. When you're looking at buying a book on Amazon, you want to know how many people bought the book and also how many thought the book was excellent (as well as why those who rated it poorly did so). This information removes a little bit of the uncertainty of online shopping.

Reviews, as a Harvard Business School article put it, "fill in the gaps by providing a tremendous amount of information on which to base decisions."

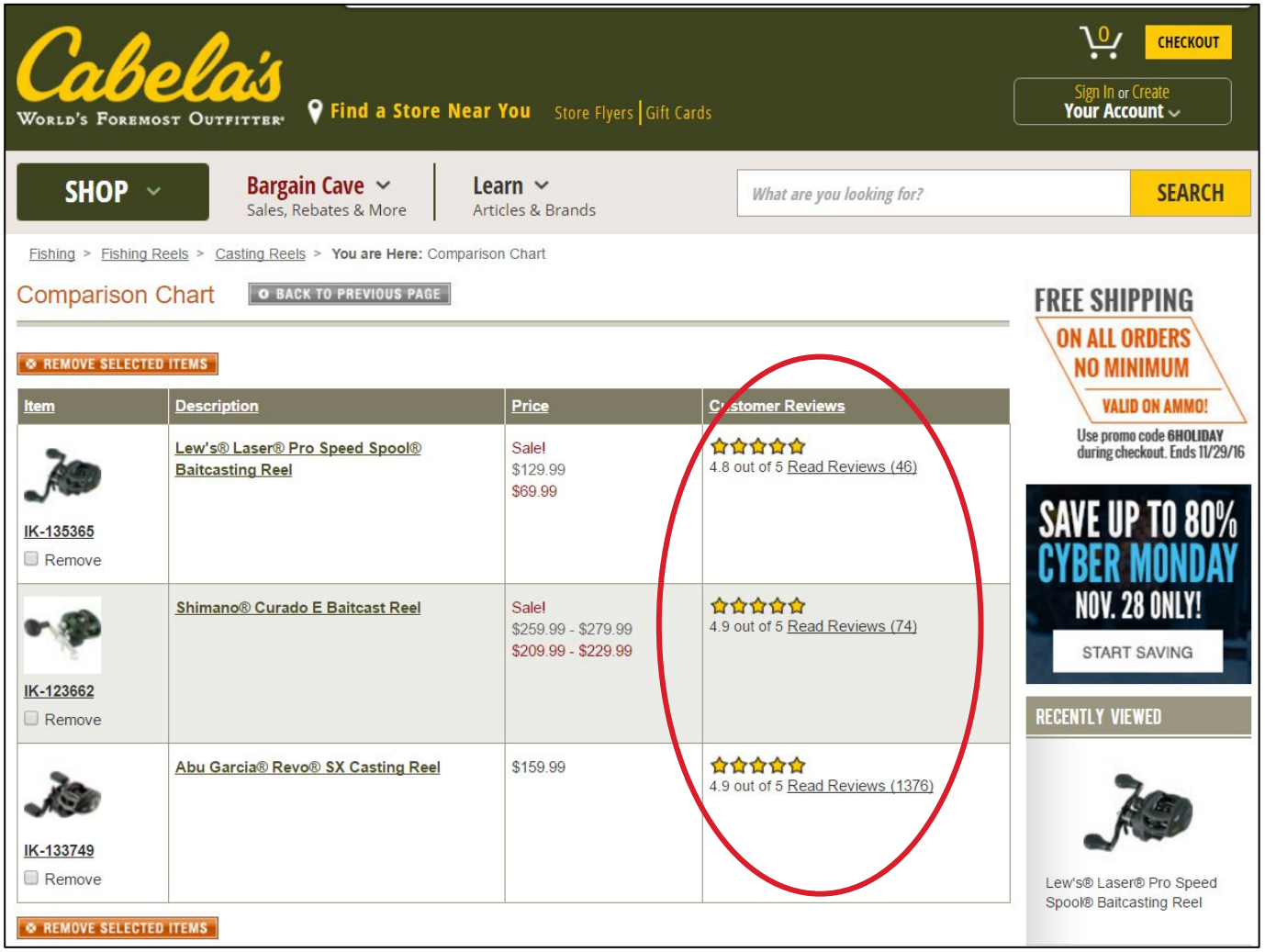
There are primarily two ways customer reviews are executed online:

- Internal word of mouth (WOM): Reviews located on the retailer's website.
- External WOM: Reviews located on a third party website (think Yelp reviews).

Whichever you have, use them. People expect them, and they can remove barriers to purchase. And importantly make sure to include how many people reviewed the items, and allow people to read the reviews.

Adherence example

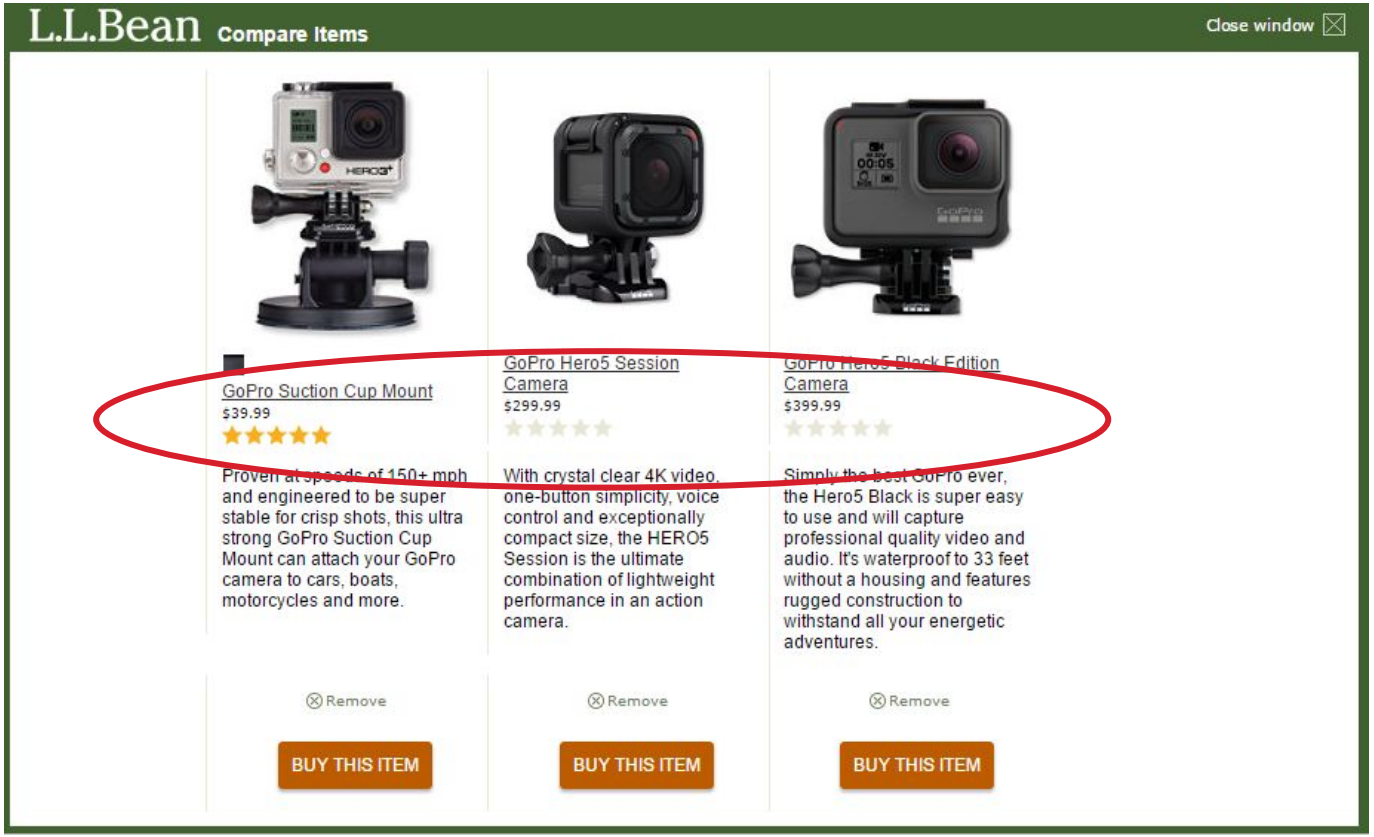
Guideline #211. Prominently include rating and number of ratings for each product on the comparison page



Cabela's provides both the number of reviews and the ability to read the reviews. Now we can see that the reel number three has WAY more reviews than the first two, and at a high average rating...makes a compelling case to stay on this site to pick that reel.

Non-adherence example

Guideline #211. Prominently include rating and number of ratings for each product on the comparison page



L.L. Bean provides stars in their comparison tool display, but they fail to provide how many reviews make up the reviews. This comparison tells the shopper that the two cameras on the right are likely not rated at all, and the one on the left is likely rated by very few people, as a full 5-star rating is difficult to get if there are many reviews.

Cart & Checkout CUX Guideline Chapter

Cart & Checkout Guidelines

Cart Interaction

212. Consider next move after adding product to cart: Take to checkout screen or remain on product page?
213. If remaining on page, mini cart should appear whenever an item is added to the shopping cart
214. Keep shopping cart notification/contents open until the user clicks elsewhere or is taken elsewhere
215. Display essential information on cart page: product thumbnail, name, and price, etc.
216. Product thumbnail should display the appropriate variation (if customer ordered a BLUE shirt, the thumbnail should show a BLUE shirt)

Checkout Navigation

217. Checkout process should be linear and clear
218. For checkouts with many form fields, accordion format works well
219. Show progress indicators throughout checkout process
220. Avoid "reset" and/or "clear" buttons
221. Avoid contextual words for CTA buttons (e.g. "continue")

Trust Elements

222. Show security badges on checkout page
223. Visually reinforce credit card form fields
224. Provide link to privacy policy throughout checkout process
225. If payments are made secure with SSL, tell your customers
226. Provide contact info and live chat for any questions throughout checkout process

Customer Accounts

227. Don't force buyers to register with your site before buying, offer guest checkout
228. Offer an incentive for OPTIONAL account registration upon checkout
229. When creating a password, requirements should be clearly displayed

Cart & Checkout Guidelines

Form Fields

230. When designing forms: Fields should be ordered easiest - hardest to fill out
231. Make typing easy: autoformat, support copy/paste, make suggestions (not always!), etc.
232. Indicate whether each field is required or optional, unless they're all required
233. If a required field has been missed or incorrectly filled out, immediately create a visual alert
234. Expiration date format in form and on credit card should match
235. Name and phone number fields should be one field, not multiple
236. Form should be a single column (not multiple columns)
237. Forms should offer radio buttons over dropdown box selection
238. Shoppers should be able to edit credit card information without pausing or leaving the checkout process
239. Don't make coupon code fields prominent

Shipping & Billing

240. Total should be itemized: Price, taxes, shipping, discounts
241. Provide and clearly display shipping options (including in-store pickup)
242. Provide free shipping if possible or offer free shipping when spending $X or more
243. Billing address should be shipping address by default
244. Display acceptable payment options

Gifting

245. Include a "this is a gift" checkbox to set up gift-wrapping options
246. Offer multiple gifting options like messages, e-gifts, wrapping options, and gift kits
247. Show customers what the gift will look like for the recipient

Cart & Checkout » Cart Interaction

5 Guidelines

Cart & Checkout > Cart Interaction

212. Consider next move after adding product to cart: Take to checkout screen or remain on product page?
213. If remaining on page, mini cart should appear whenever an item is added to the shopping cart
214. Keep shopping cart notification/contents open until the user clicks elsewhere or is taken elsewhere
215. Display essential information on cart page: product thumbnail, name, and price, etc.
216. Product thumbnail should display the appropriate variation (if customer ordered a BLUE shirt, the thumbnail should show a BLUE shirt)

The standard ecommerce site allows shoppers to find items, add them to a shopping cart, and checkout. Pretty straightforward. But in our research, people rarely behave so simplistically.

The nice linear funnel turns into a revolving carousel of interaction. Most of it involves comparison shopping. Make sure to check out the section on ecommerce Comparison Tools within this report. But it's important to know that the cart also serves this purpose for many.

People use the cart as it's intended for sure, but more often than you'd think it's used as a holding area, almost like a fitting room to try on and compare different products.

So it's important to have proper interaction and information presentation with the shopping cart. It needs to help shoppers in not just understanding what exactly they're about to purchase, but also in making final decisions about what they buy.

Guideline #212. Consider next move after adding product to cart: Take to checkout screen or remain on product page?

Site Component - Cart
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

Once The Product Is In The cart, Then What?

There are 2 main approaches here.

- Show ‘cart add’ confirmation and remain on the same page. Pros: people didn’t ask to move to another page, so there are no surprises and thus good experiences. They might also consider adding more items to the cart before checking out. Cons: they already have the product they’re now staring at in the cart. It would be way more useful to you if they’d look at something else they’d might want to buy!
- Transfer the user to the cart page. The advantages here is that you’re taking them one step closer to making a payment. This is also a great opportunity to make upsell offers. Cons: you might be losing out on “items per cart”.

The exact strategy to choose depends on your industry and strategy, and you definitely want to test this.

Metrics to keep in mind here:

- Average transaction value
- Average quantity per transaction

We don’t want to just increase the number of transactions, but also the amount spent for each transaction.

User quote - *“I didn't like that once i clicked to add something to my cart that it took me to my cart so then i had to back out to get to where i was or research. I didn't notice a clear button that said back to search results or back to product overview. I prefer ecommerce sites to add the item to my cart and just have a little dropdown or notification that the item has been added.”*

User quote - *“"add to cart" feature should confirm that you've added an item to the cart but not take you directly to the checkout page.”*

Guideline #213. If remaining on page, mini cart should appear whenever an item is added to the shopping cart

When people add something to the cart on your product pages, what should happen?

Most importantly: it should be stupidly obvious they've added something to the cart. Clear confirmation. It's ridiculous how many sites screw this up either by not displaying a proper confirmation or showing a tiny animation, or small confirmation text that's hard to notice.

It's also important to keep the minicart notification/contents open until the user clicks elsewhere, this allows for control as well as the clear notification.

Site Component - Cart
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction & Focus

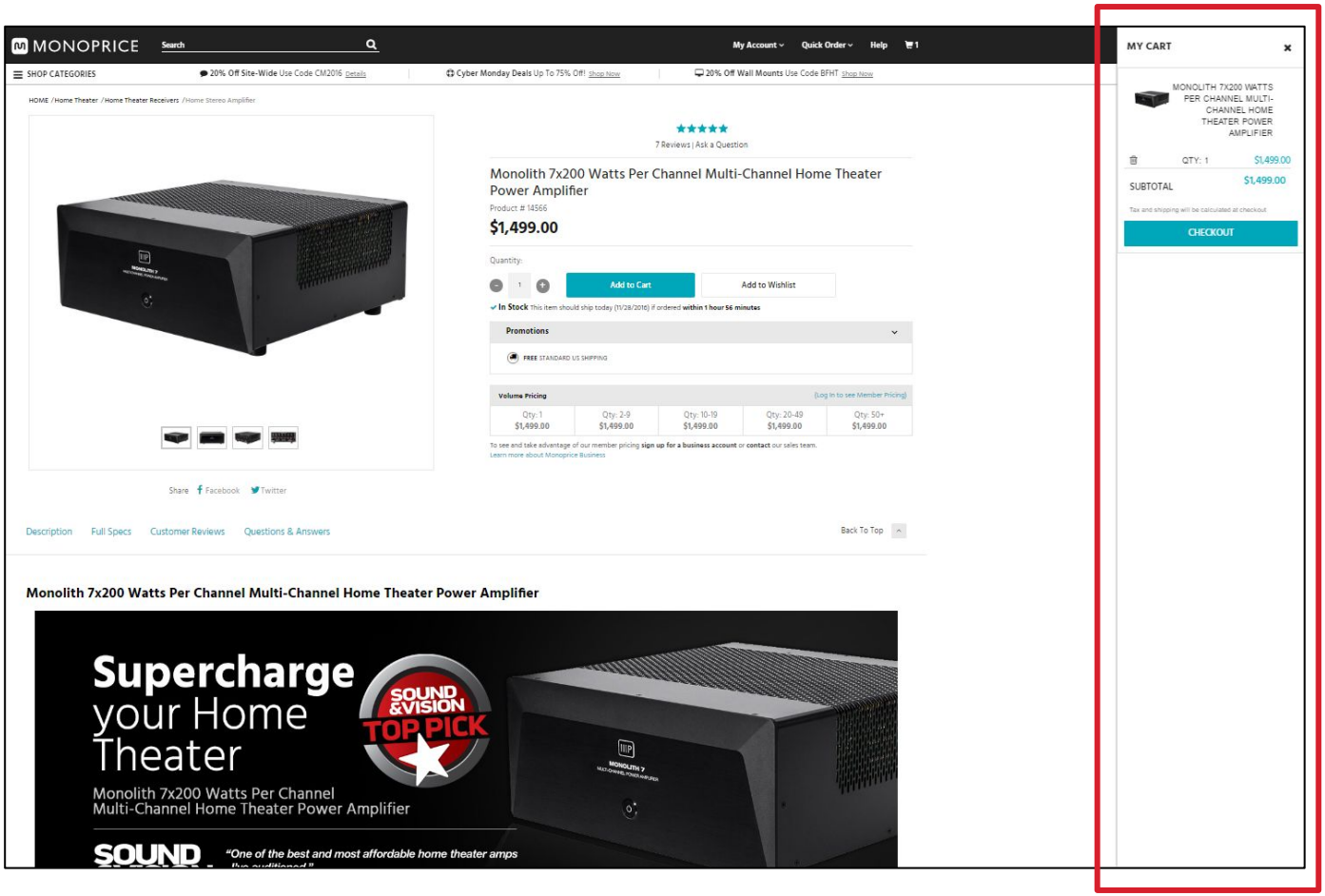
User quote - When asked how they'd improve a site: "*When adding an item to the cart I would like to see a visual representation of the item in the cart rather than just the button changing to "added to cart". And as I continue to add items to the cart I would expect to see the pop up each time showing all items in the cart and updated total.*"

User quote - "*The other most frustrating thing about the site was not being notified when items were added to the cart unless hovering over the cart.*"

User quote - "*The cart was easy to manage and it told me that I have added items to the cart to confirm*"

Adherence example

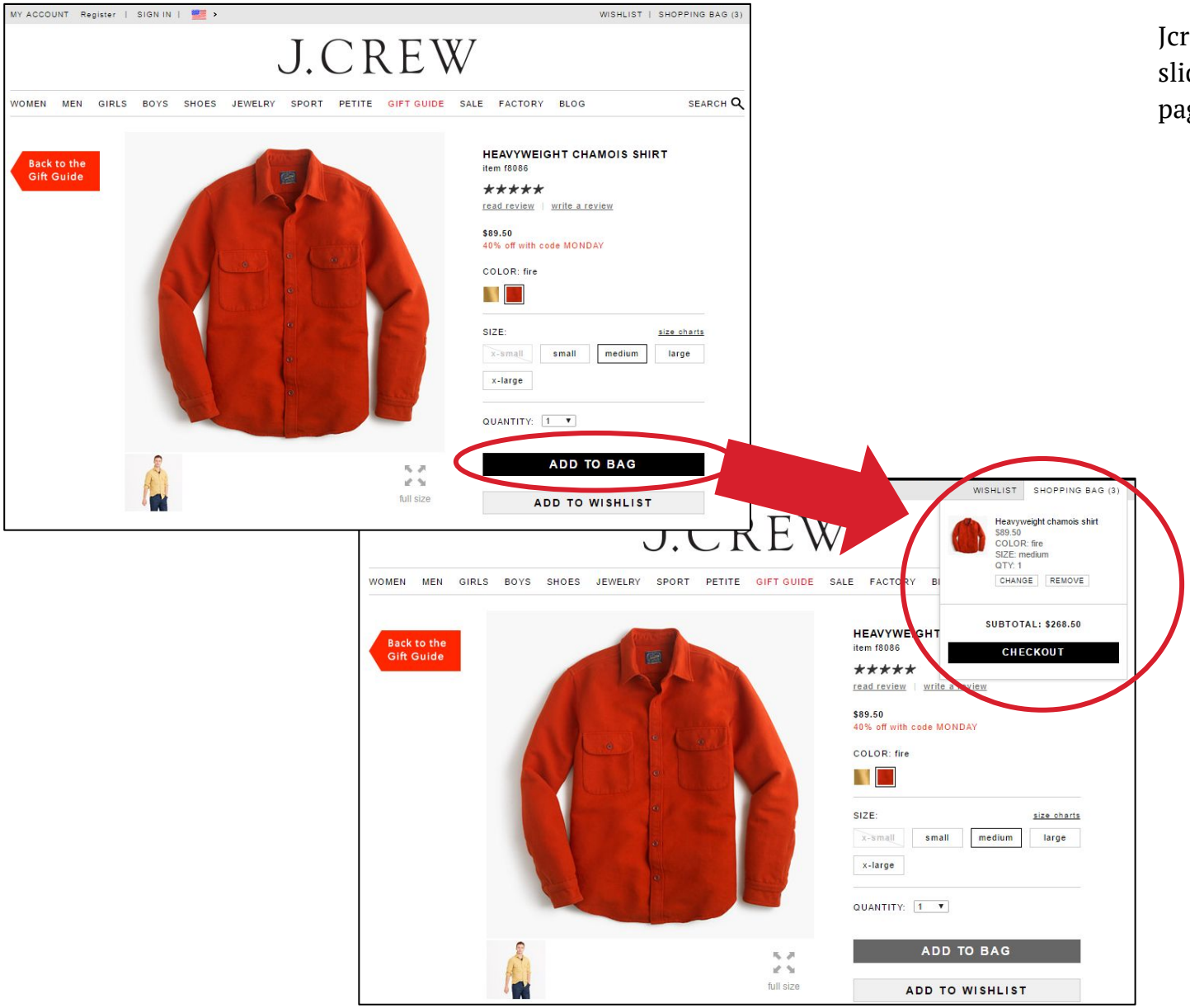
Guideline #213. If remaining on page, mini cart should appear whenever an item is added to the shopping cart



Monoprice.com provides the same apparent effect with a sliding minicart that comes in from the right. The cart appears with a small animation which is good because human eye reacts to movement, and it's a subtle visual cue that indicates the shift from visitor to buyer.

Adherence example

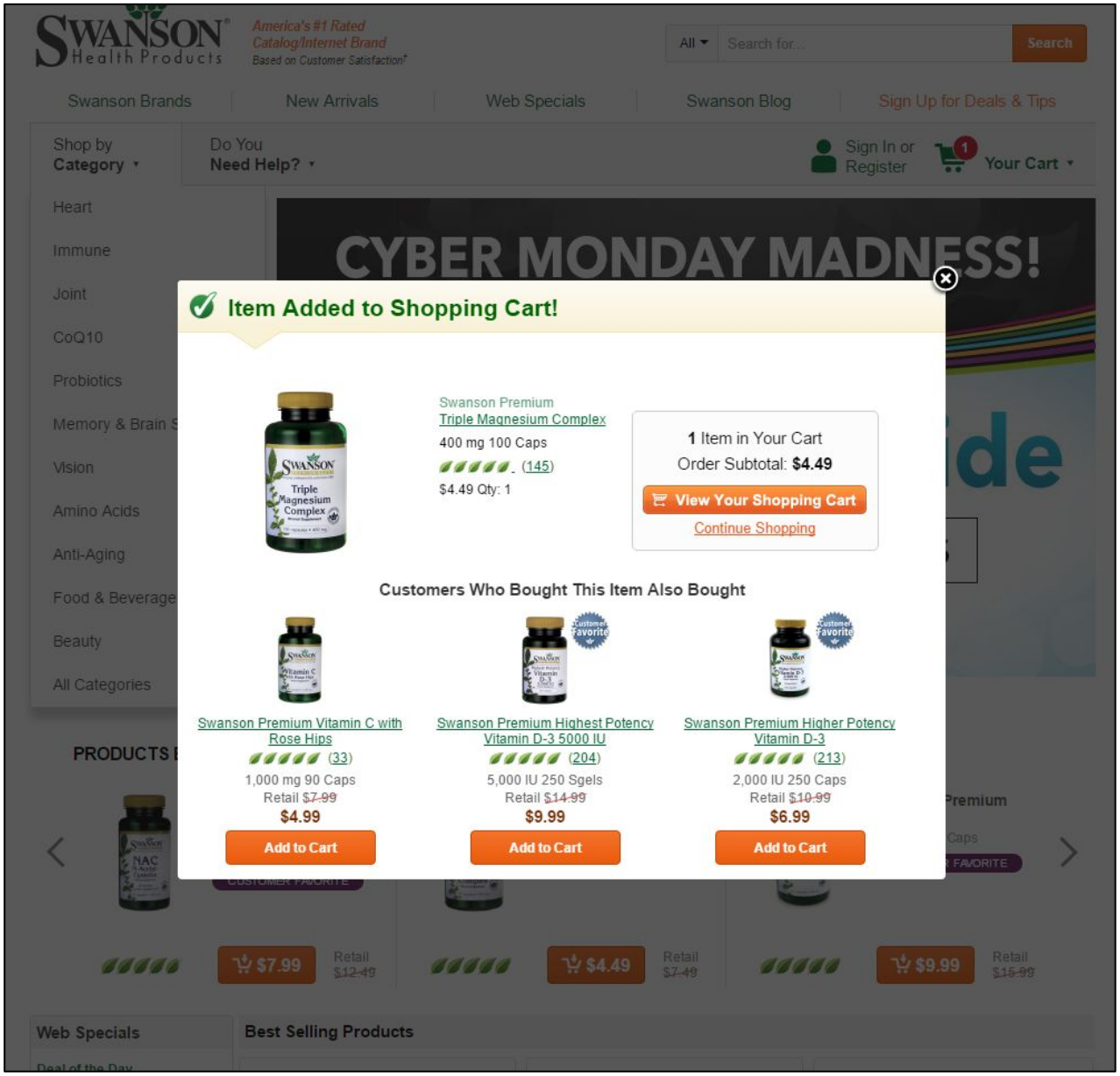
Guideline #213. If remaining on page, mini cart should appear whenever an item is added to the shopping cart



Jcrew.com has the minicart slide down from the top of the page.

Adherence example

Guideline #213. If remaining on page, mini cart should appear whenever an item is added to the shopping cart



Swanson Vitamins makes it VERY apparent that there's been a product added to the cart with a pop-up interruption that clearly states what to do next.

Guideline #214. Keep shopping cart notification/contents open until the user clicks elsewhere or is taken elsewhere

The first step was to make the ‘add to cart’ indicator apparent via a popup or menu navigation slide-down.

After this, as a general rule it’s important to not have it auto-hide after a certain amount of time. This can create frustration if the customer is reading the contents, about to click on it, and it just disappears.

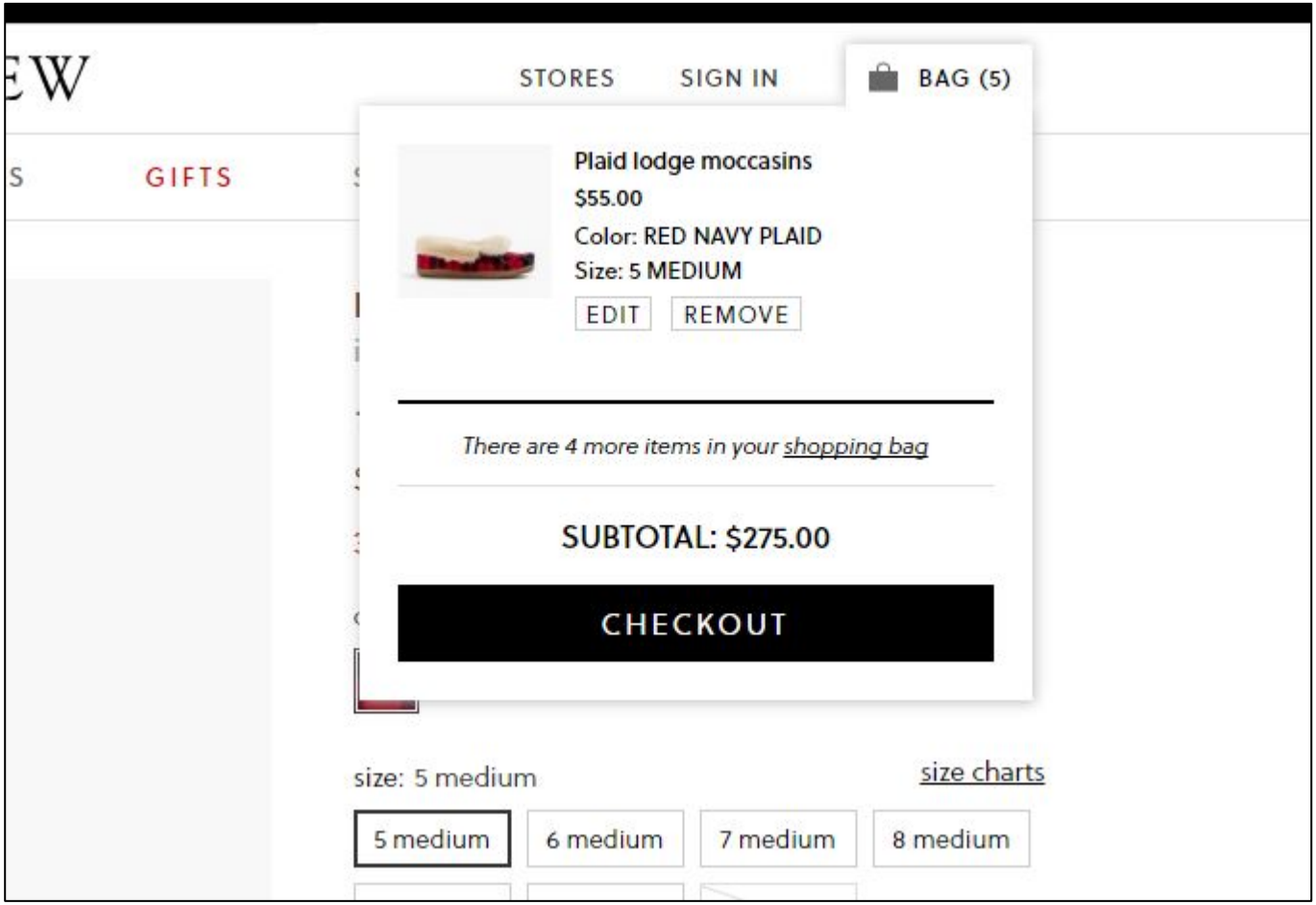
User’s are getting accustomed to the action of clicking off a popup to exit, use this inclination by only closing out the mini-cart when a user clicks elsewhere.

Site Component - Cart
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

User quote - “*at times, it appeared as though I did not receive confirmation that an item was added to the cart. I would certainly add that confirmation. ”*

Non-adherence example

Guideline #214. Keep shopping cart notification/contents open until the user clicks elsewhere or is taken elsewhere



The mini-cart of J. Crew only stays open for approximately 3 seconds. Is that enough to read what's in there and casually click the checkout CTA?

Guideline #215. Display essential information on cart page: product thumbnail, name, and price, etc.

Key principles for displaying cart contents are clarity and control.

Clarity: it's easy and obvious to understand what's in the cart and what's the final cost including shipping and taxes. Surprises cost down the line and make people abandon carts. It's also crucial to keep things simple. It's a delicate balance between upselling and efficiently getting customers down the funnel.

Control: it's easy to make changes (update quantity, remove products)

The essentials:

- Product photos
- Product name & price
- Ability to remove, save for later, change details like size
- Show the kind of payments they accept
- Show total price with the option to change shipping
- Checkout Now CTA
- An upsell - attempt to get you to add more items in the cart

Site Component - Cart
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

User quote - *"I also had a lot of trouble a checkout because it seemed like less important things (ads and such) were being displayed in place of the important ones (the checkout button)."*

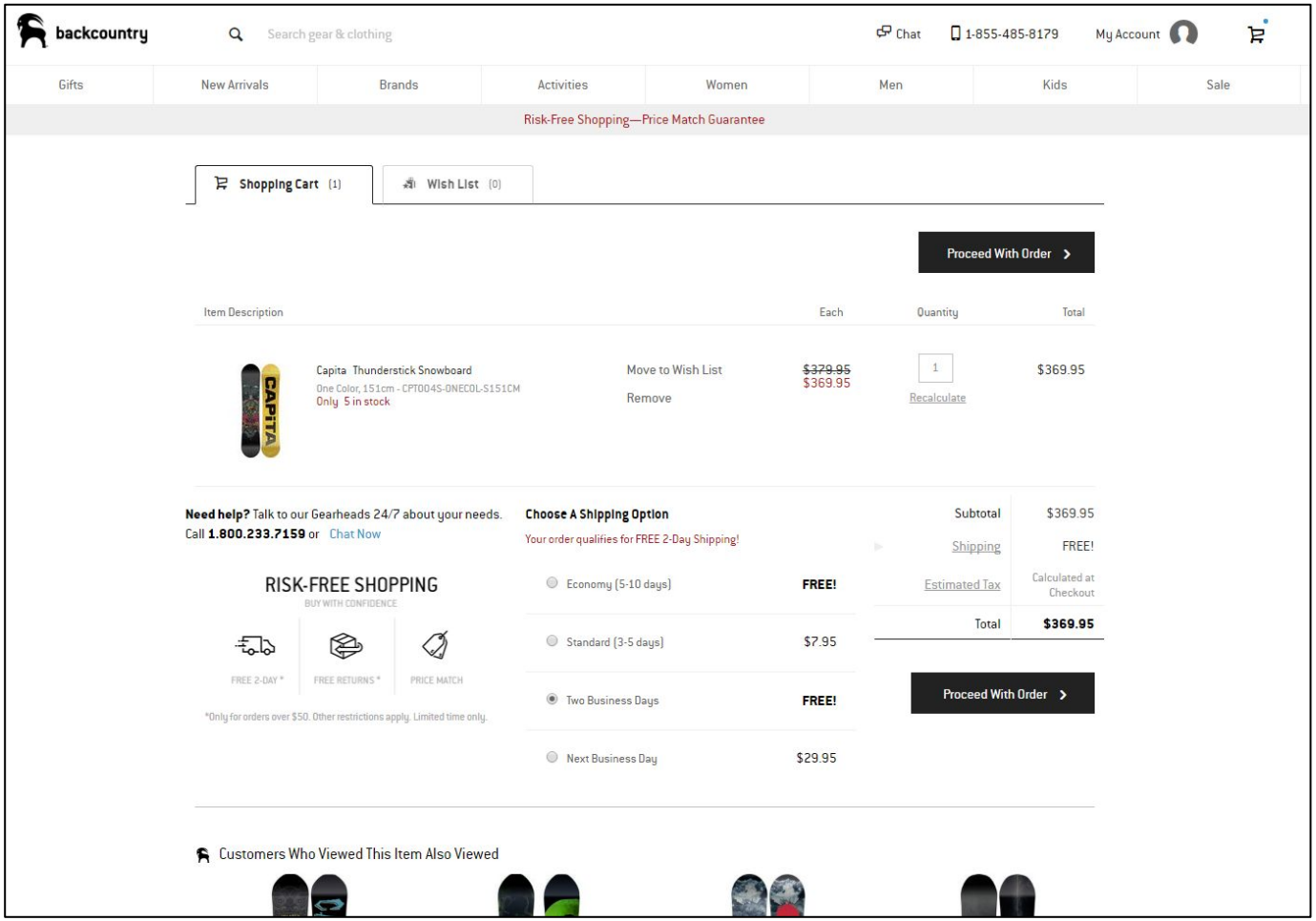
User quote - *"I might suggest to also include the product image inside of the shopping cart, for visual confirmation as well."*

User quote - *"I liked that you could estimate your tax before you started the checkout process so that you could really get a better understanding what your total price will be."*

User quote - *" In the one instance where I did receive confirmation of a product being added to the cart, there was no indication of the price of the product that was recently added; only a subtotal of all products in the cart. I might suggest adding an indication of individual product price for items recently added to the cart."*

Adherence example

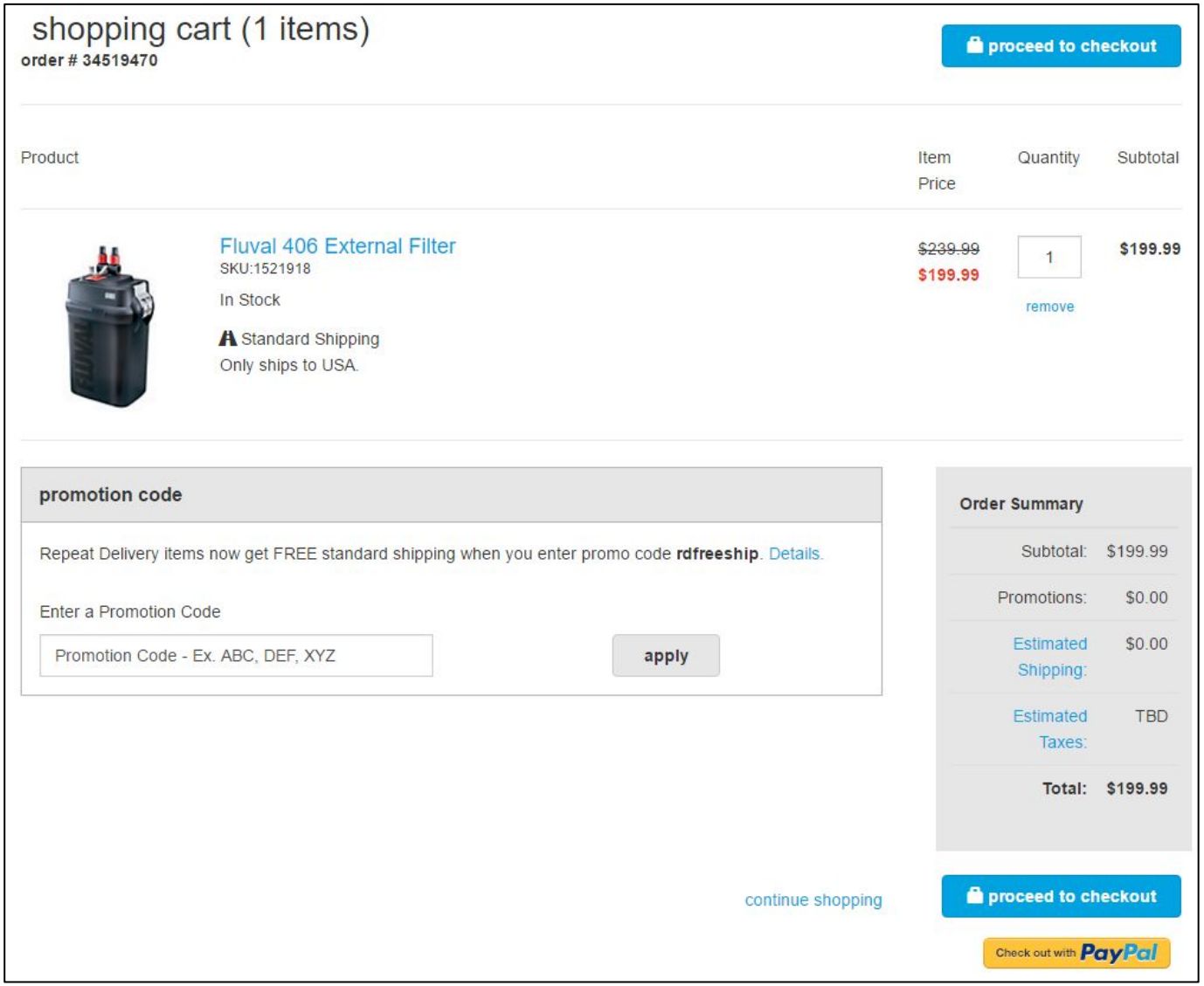
Guideline #215. Display essential information on cart page: product thumbnail, name, and price, etc.



Backcountry has a nice minimalist approach to the cart page with nice highlights such as the free shipping and price match guarantee and indication of the sales price.

Adherence example

Guideline #215. Display essential information on cart page: product thumbnail, name, and price, etc.



Petco likewise gets all the essentials right with the exception of a coupon field that might be a bit too prominent.

Guideline #216. Product thumbnail should display the appropriate variation (if customer ordered a blue shirt, the thumbnail should show a blue shirt)

Site Component - Cart
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

Have a unique picture for every variation, make it clear. This is somewhat obvious and most major retailers are getting this right these days.

Don’t add confusion at this stage of the game. If customer’s get a whiff that there might be hiccups or confusion with the order they can always go somewhere else.

It’s a lot less effort to find the same product at a competitor than the prospect of having to return an item because it’s the wrong color or size.

Cart & Checkout »
Checkout Navigation

5 Guidelines

Cart & Checkout > Checkout Navigation

217. Checkout process should be linear and clear
218. For checkouts with many form fields, accordion format works well
219. Show progress indicators throughout checkout process
220. Avoid "reset" and/or "clear" buttons
221. Avoid contextual words for CTA buttons (e.g. "continue")

The checkout flow is where the money is at.

Think about it, random people leave the site before ever entering the checkout funnel, while motivated buyers come here to finish their order. Any small increase in this step usually has a direct impact on how much more money your site makes.

Example: An Ecommerce site that we analyzed recently had a payment page where 84.71% of the traffic proceeded to buy. We calculated that if we can increase that to 90%, that would result in 461 more orders and additional $87,175/month. That would be 23.94% growth in revenue. So yes – "small" gains here can be very big.

So, the question is how do we get more people to go through our checkout flow and complete purchases?

Specific tactics depend on your site, but the principles for coming up with the answer are universal.

And the principles are generally to make it simple, clear, and fast.

User quote - *" I really enjoyed how simple and quick the whole checkout process was, especially having the guest checkout option"*

User quote - When asked what was most frustrating: *"Check-out process is long. Most websites these days have 1-2 step check-out process"*

Guideline #217. Checkout process should be linear and clear

The less clicks (the less pages), the better; simplify the checkout process as much as possible.

Most checkout processes are linear, and have been for quite some time. So when there's an exception, it sticks out, and customers get either annoyed or confused.

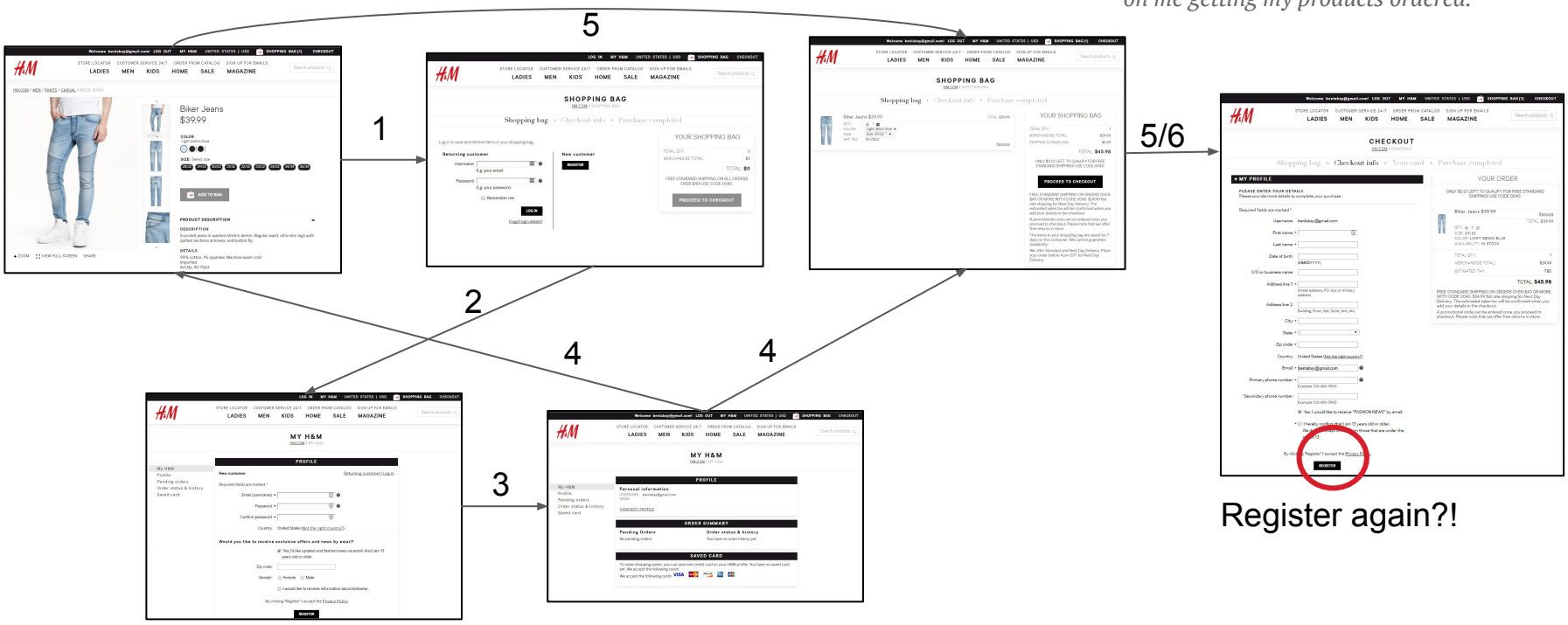
Most of the time it happens when a site wants to force registration before checkout.

Here's the path that some users had with H&M, where they were forced to register, and some users lost cart contents after registering, forcing them to go back and find the item. On top of this, even when registered and logged in, the checkout made users 'register' again as the first step in the checkout process.

Site Component - Design & Copy
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

User quote - *"The payment section is what frustrated me the most. I felt like the order of the steps was not very intuitive and quite confusing."*

User quote - *"The pages had too much information on them during checkout. It was overwhelming and distracting. (Free shipping several different places, images and links to other sections of the website, etc.) For checkout I want it to be clean and focused on me getting my products ordered."*



Guideline #218. For checkouts with many form fields, accordion format works well (if done right)

Accordion style checkout processes are becoming more and more popular, for good reason.

They allow a lot of fields to be organized and therefore processed easily. A checkout process is a commitment, so the easier it is the better.

Accordion checkouts are a take on an organized and dynamic linear checkout process, but the fields and data and content is chunked into manageable parts all without any page loads if implemented well with AJAX.

There are two important things to keep in mind when using them:

1. Don't completely hide info in the higher levels, provide summaries, and
2. Make it apparent that the user is still on the same page and if they want to edit previous sections they'll select an edit button instead of the back button.

Site Component - Design & Copy
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

User quote - *"the payment was too many pages long and quite slow to load."*

User quote - *"It is a little cluttered with information at the checkout"*

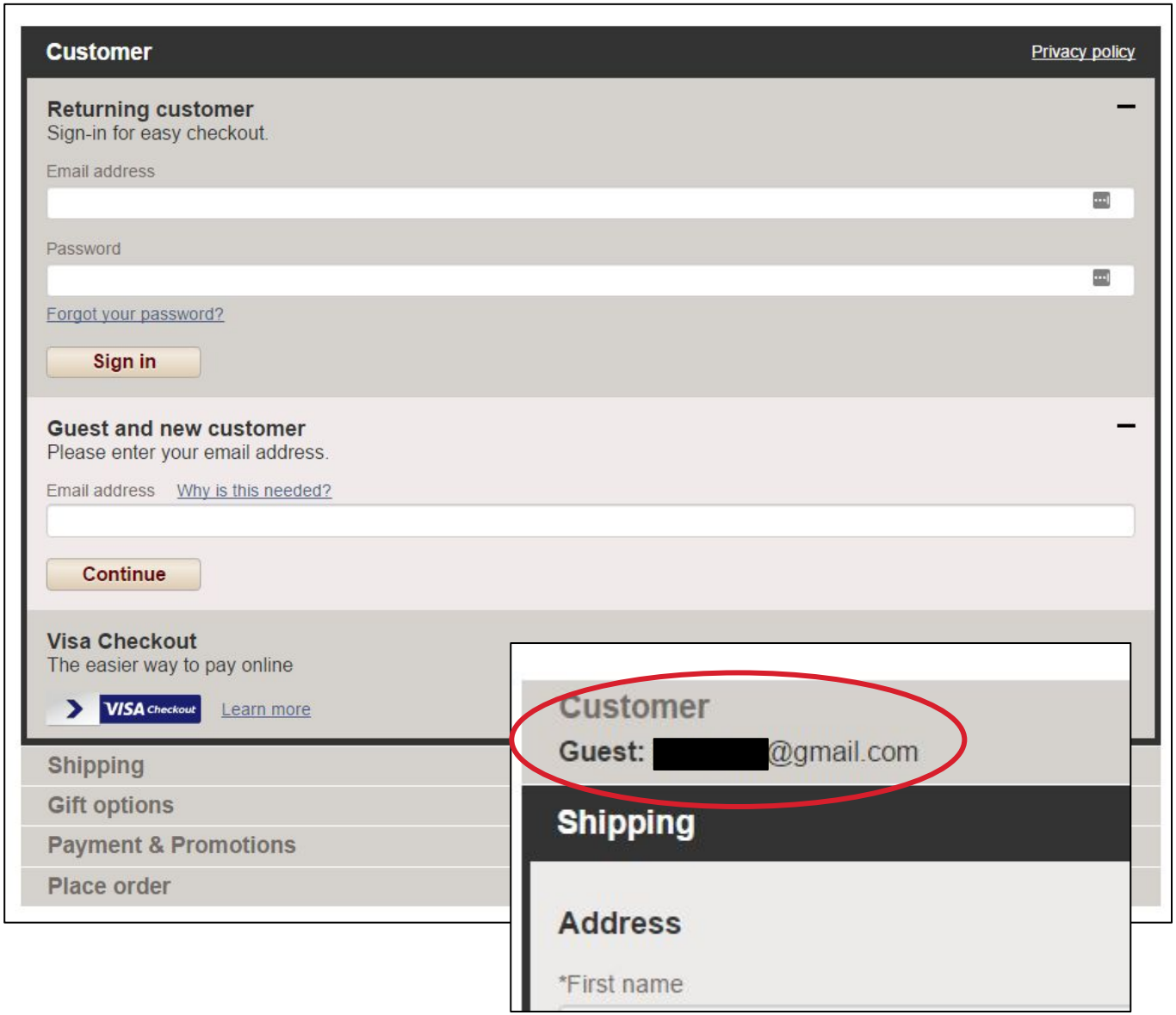
User quote - *"I would have liked the checkout to be more simple and displayed on 1 page instead I felt like I had to go through 4 pages to complete it."*

User quote - *"Make check-out task a one step process"*

User quote - *"I felt like having to click continue after ever section made the process feel more complex than it actually was. But if I reflect back on the content of those steps it's not really asking me to fill out any more information than any other retail site would, but somehow it gave me that impression."*

Adherence example

Guideline #218. For checkouts with many form fields, accordion format works well (if done right)



Gap (Banana Republic, Old Navy, and Athletica too) use this accordion style. Even though they require an email even for guest checkout, it's obvious to the user what's coming next. Note the smaller second figure where the summary of the previous inputted info is displayed.

Guideline #219. Show progress indicators throughout checkout process

This can be implemented in many ways, but the goal is to orient the user and to not make them wonder where they're at or that the process will take a long time.

The convention here is the progress bar at the top of each checkout page, indicating where they are in the progress.

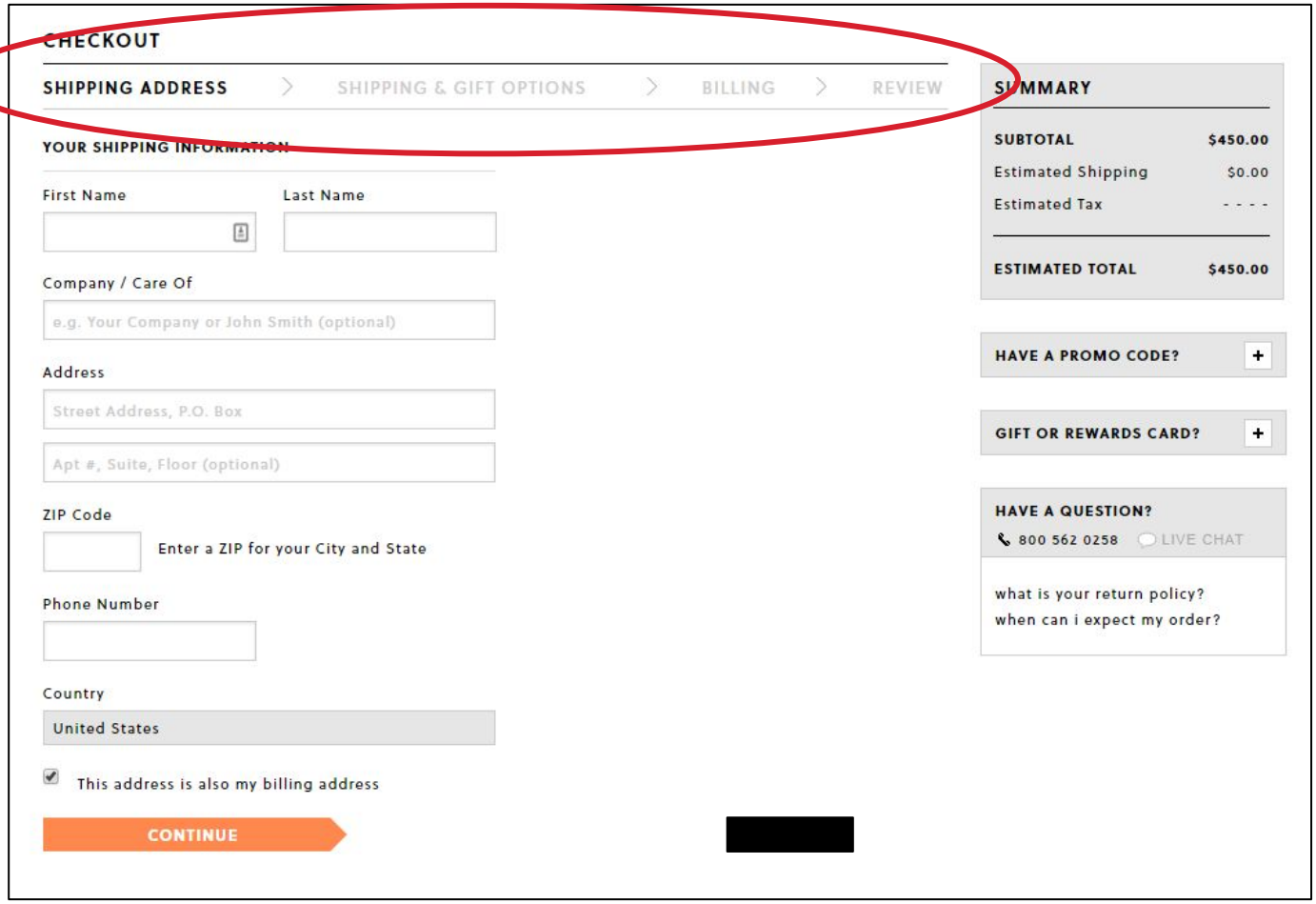
Accordion-style, single page checkouts are increasing in popularity because it allows for all the steps to be on one page (no extra page load times) and allows the user to see where they are in the process and to go back and edit information if needed.

Site Component - Navigation
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

User quote - "*I really liked the checkout process At the top it was pretty clearly displayed which step I was on and what need to do to complete my order.*"

Adherence example

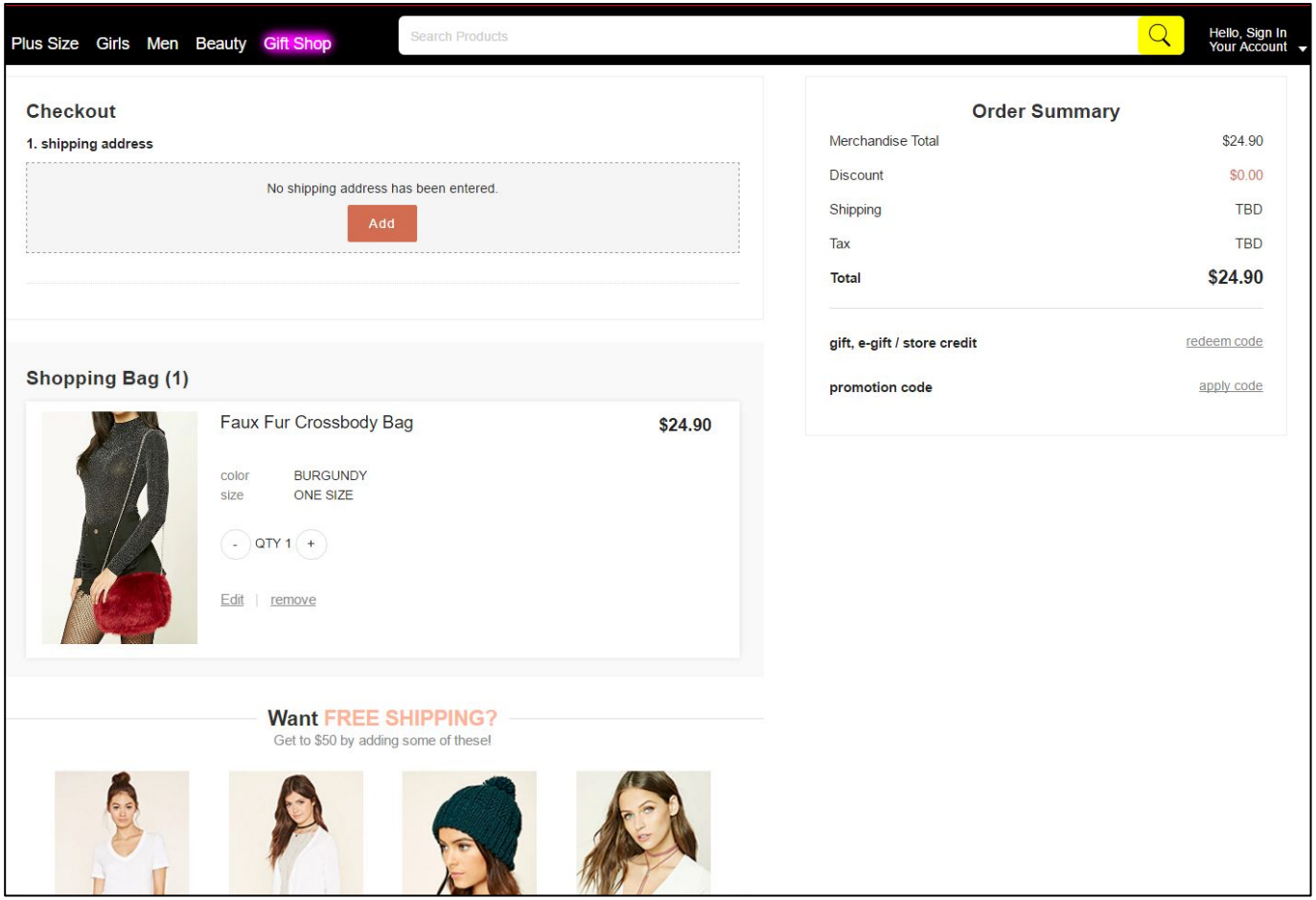
Guideline #219. Show progress indicators throughout checkout process



J. Crew has a nice minimalistic site and checkout process. They follow convention here with the progress bar at the top of the each page through the funnel.

Non-adherence example

Guideline #219. Show progress indicators throughout checkout process



Forever 21 doesn't provide any indication of where in the checkout process we're at relative to other steps. We see we need to add a shipping address, but why have a CTA for this, why not just ask me? And what's going to happen after?

Guideline #220. Avoid "reset" and/or "clear" buttons

The risk of accidentally resetting all the information outweighs the rare benefit of someone needing it.

Additionally, when information is partitioned with the increasingly popular accordion-style of checkout process, then resetting or clearing is needed less often, as simple manual edits work well.

Sometimes a cancel button is used with sensitive information fields in order to allow users to delete the critical information before abandoning. There's an argument to be made that even here it's not necessary, but if added it's important to make any kind of cancel, clear, or reset button not obvious and certainly not placed near the submit button where a user would confuse the two.

Site Component - Design & Copy
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

Guideline #221. Avoid contextual words for CTA buttons (e.g. "continue")

Site Component - Design & Copy
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

The issue with ambiguous words for the CTA is that they're confusing.

'Continue' could mean submit and next step, or it could mean be confused with continue shopping, often used as well in the checkout process.

So the question is, Continue where? Next checkout step, or continue shopping?

Another example is "Back." Back where? Back to the previous page? Back to the homepage, search page? Where?

And how about "Proceed" or "Next" or "Apply"?

Depending on the customer's thinking and the context for how they arrived at the page, these contextual words mean different things.

Be clear. Tell them where they're going. Don't leave room for interpretation. Say 'Shop More', 'Check out Now', 'Provide Shipping Info', etc.

Cart & Checkout » Trust Elements

5 Guidelines

Cart & Checkout > Trust Elements

222. Show security badges on checkout page
223. Visually reinforce credit card form fields
224. Provide link to privacy policy throughout checkout process
225. If payments are made secure with SSL, tell your customers
226. Provide contact info and live chat for any questions throughout checkout process

You and I may have a hard time believing it, but many people are afraid to shop online.

A recent study by the Department of Commerce found that half of American Internet users are "deterred" from buying things online because of fears over privacy and security.

Without any prompting, 84% of online households named at least one concern they had about online privacy and security risks, and 40% cited at least two different concerns.

This study was published in 2016, but it seems not much has changed since 2015, when another study by Connexity (n=4,902) found that many people were afraid to purchase online.

And the four most common reasons for people's distrust:

- "News reports of information being stolen from retailers" (43%),
- "My information was stolen" (17%),
- "I don't believe that the store will take good care of me if there is a problem" (12%)
- "I tend not to trust companies, employees or technology" (10%)

Let's keep it practical: what can you do to make people less afraid – less hesitant – to shop on your website?

You can't do much about security breaches at Paypal or mishandling of data at other companies or the government, but you can make your site more trustworthy.

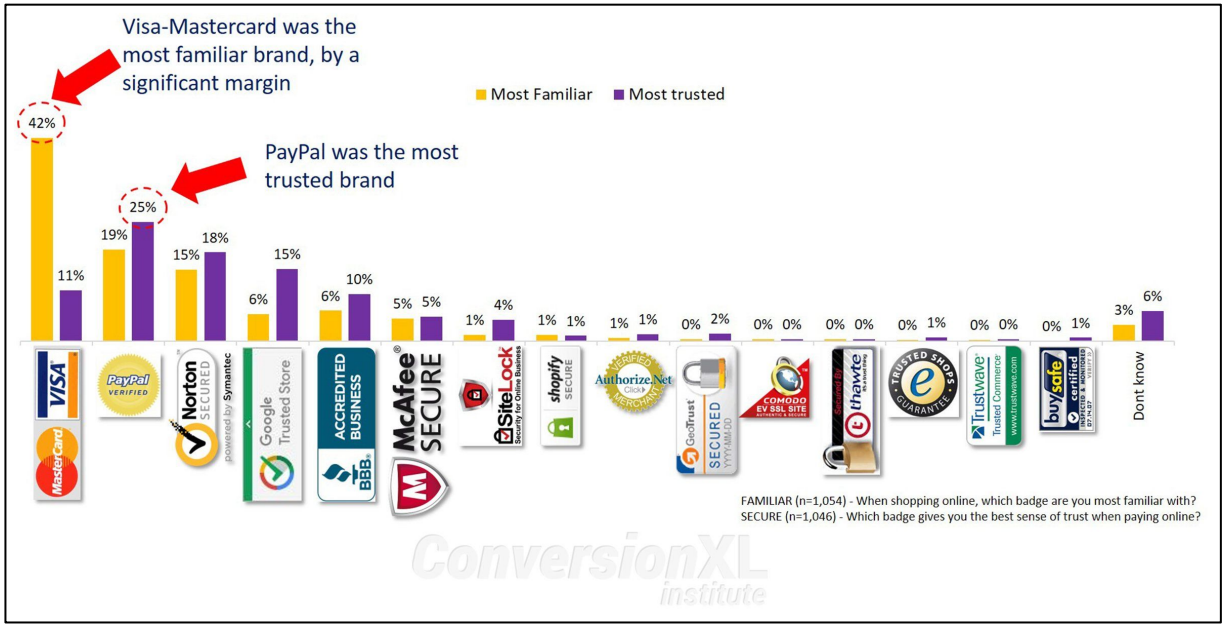
Guideline #222. Show security badges on checkout page

Site Component - Trust
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

Customer's have become accustom to security badges, trust seals, and third party payment systems like Paypal.

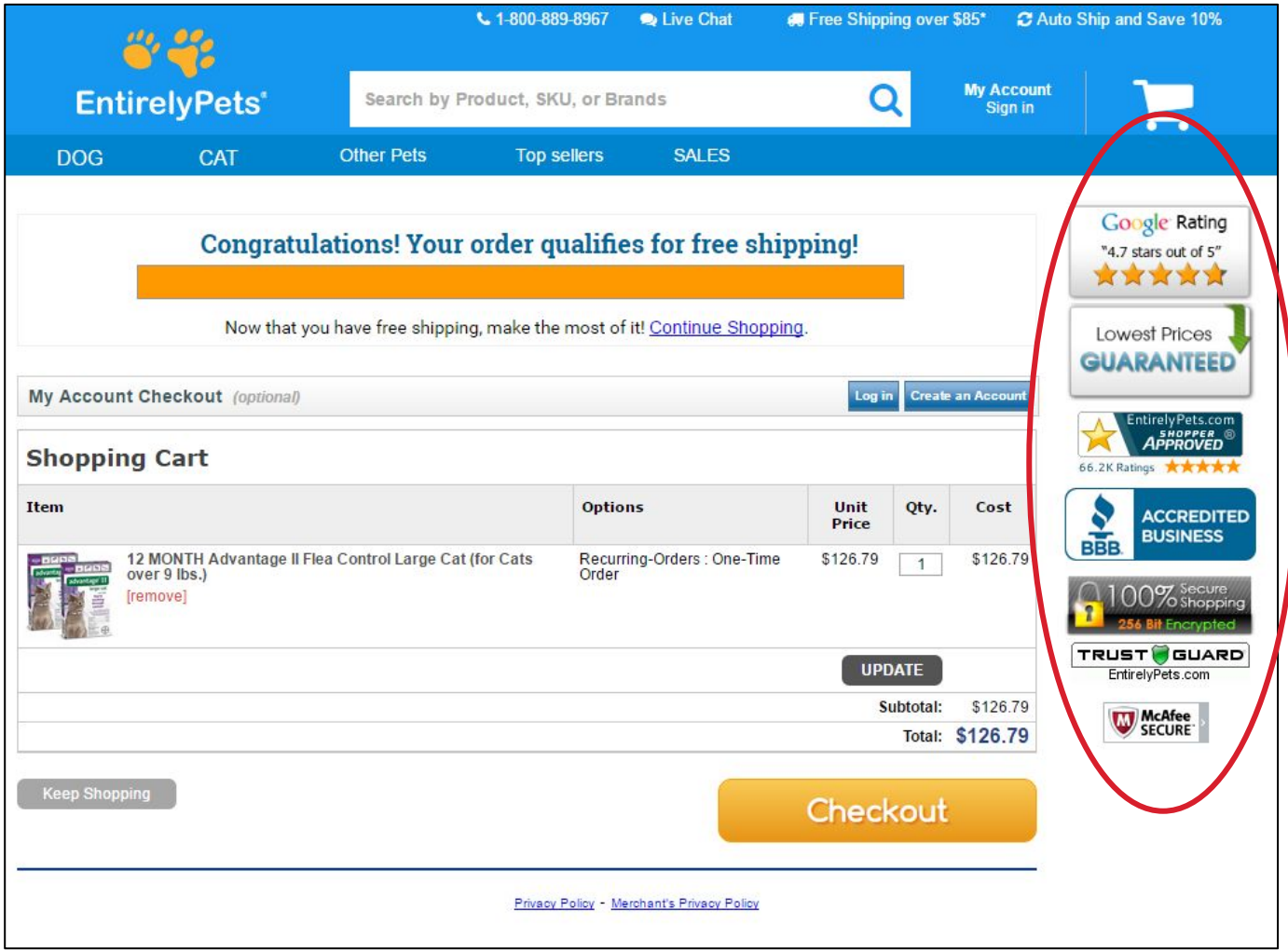
Familiarity isn't a surrogate for security, but when it comes to providing perceptions of security it helps. See our research on Trust Seals where we look at the questions around familiarity vs perceptions of security.

From our research we find that familiar brands like Visa, Mastercard, PayPal, Norton and Google were also the most trusted seals when paying online.



Adherence example

Guideline #222. Show security badges on checkout page



Entirely Pets has kind of a busily designed checkout page, but they aggressively let the customer know that they're safe to shop with.

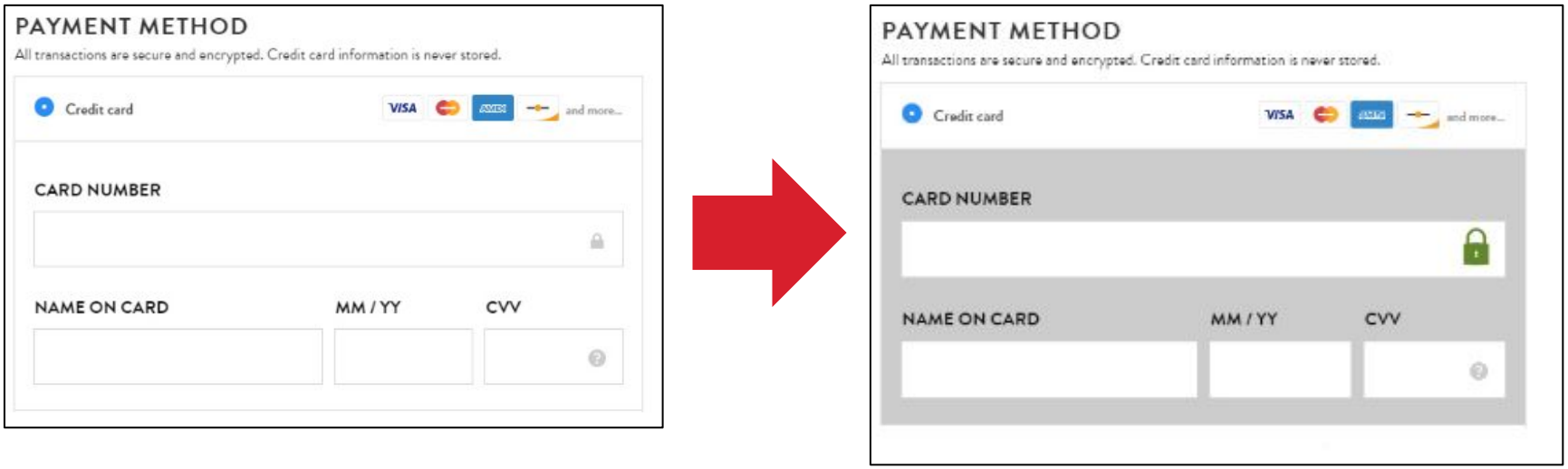
Guideline #223. Visually reinforce credit card form fields

Credit card information is some of the most sensitive data that consumers regularly share online.

Using “visual clues” during the checkout process online helps customers feel safer when sharing sensitive information.

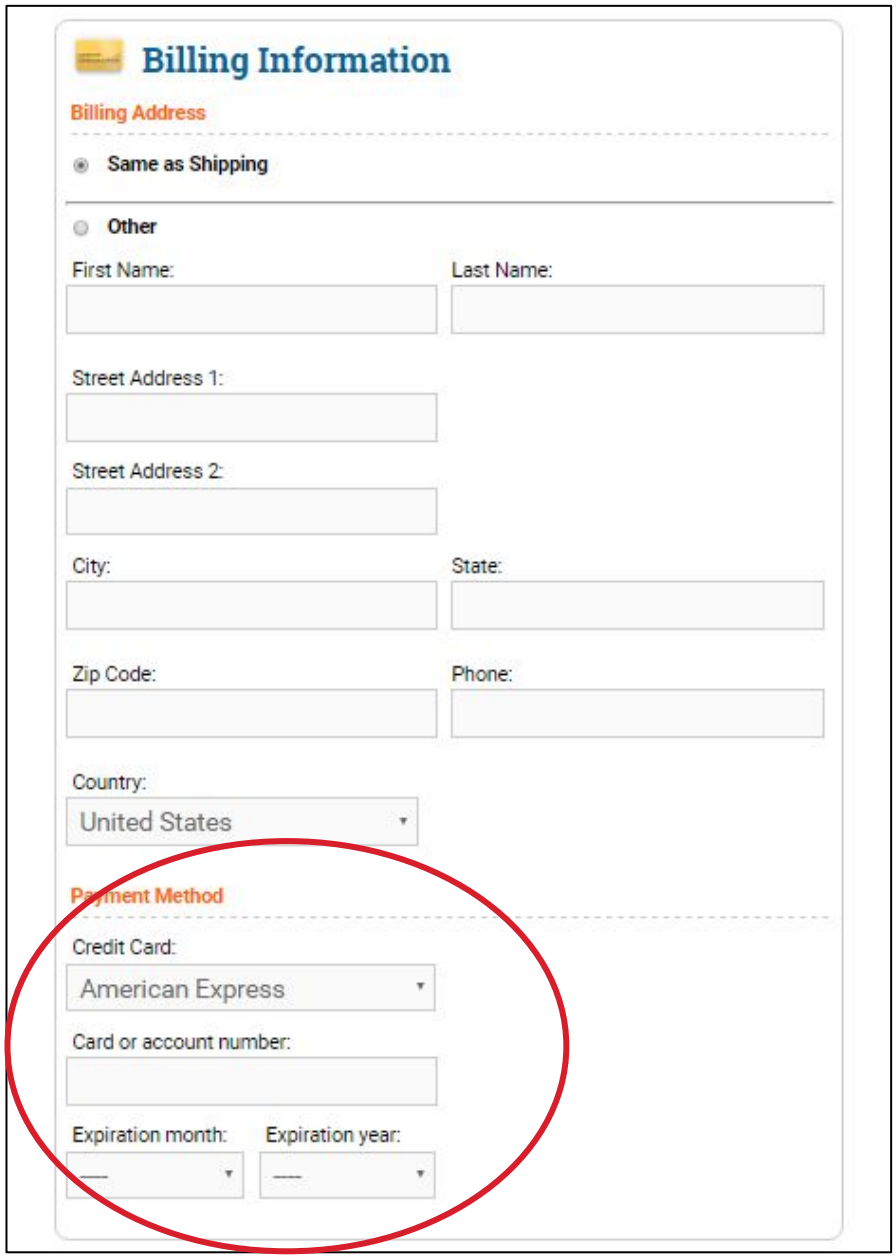
There are a variety of ways to visually enhance the checkout process. In our original research study we found that increasing visual reinforcement on the credit card fields increased perception of respondents’ feelings of security.

Site Component - Trust
Conversion Heuristic - Friction



Non-adherence example

Guideline #223. Visually reinforce credit card form fields



Entirely Pets did a decent job above on the cart page with the security badges, but they fail on the checkout page, not keeping security on the forefront of customer's minds.

Guideline #224. Provide link to privacy policy throughout checkout process

Site Component - Trust
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

It's clear that people are worried about security breaches and identity theft, but they're also worried about privacy and what you're doing with their data.

According to Pew Research (2015), 93% of adults say that being in control of who can get information about them is important, and 90% say that controlling what information is collected about them is important. Another study actually found people are more concerned about online privacy than they are about losing their main income.

In general, people believe keeping control of their information and privacy is important. Yet few trust that their information will remain private...

This isn't hard to implement, and should probably be sitewide in the form of a link within the footer.

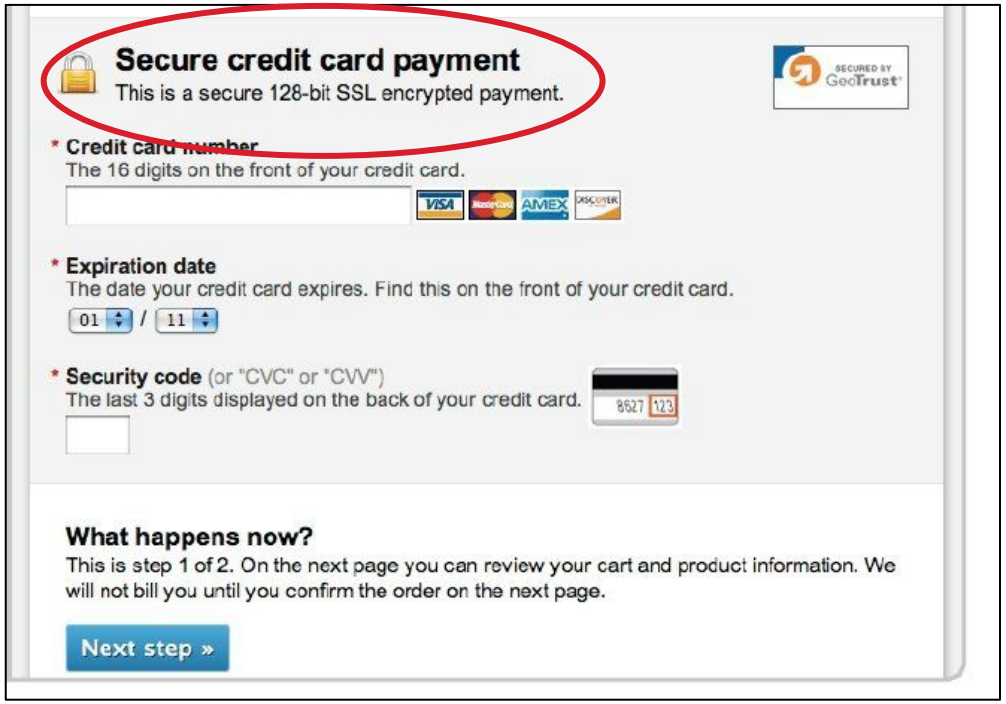
Guideline #225. If payments are made secure with SSL, tell your customers

Site Component - Trust
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

Security is a serious concern for many. Besides making payments actually secure by using SSL, tell people about it.

Note that if your audience is not tech savvy, they might not know what SSL and https are, so better to speak in plain terms.

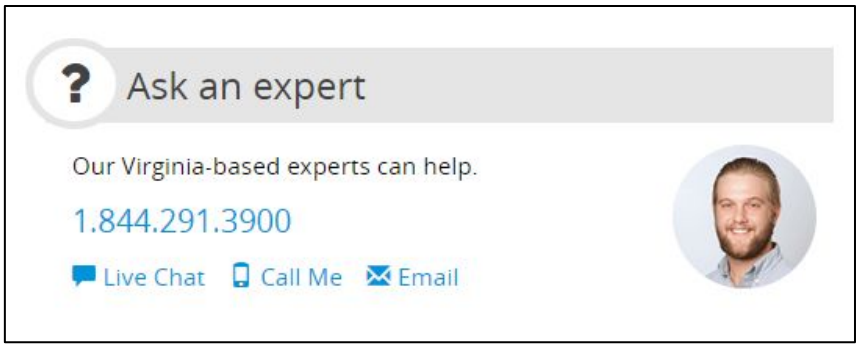
Written statement: “Secure credit card payment. This is a secure 128-byt SSL encrypted payment.”



Guideline #226. Provide contact info and live chat for any questions throughout checkout process

It's a small thing, but known to boost conversions – especially important for small, less known stores. It's a trust thing – making your email and phone number clearly visible shows you're a real business.

Even better is offering to talk to an expert. This is especially important when selling technical products. See how Crutchfield.com does it:



A live chat service we've used and can strongly recommend is intercom.io. We get compliments on it all the time and it provides a ton of great features and integrations.

Site Component - Trust
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

User quote - *" I liked that there were "live chat" and "feedback" buttons"*

User quote - *"I loved that I saw a chat option"*

Cart & Checkout » Customer Accounts

8 Guidelines

Cart & Checkout > Customer Accounts

227. Don't force buyers to register with your site before buying, offer guest checkout
228. Offer an incentive for OPTIONAL account registration upon checkout
229. When creating a password, requirements should be clearly displayed

This section is really about the first guideline - “Don't force buyers to register with your site before buying, offer guest checkout”

One of the largest dropoffs or reasons for cart abandonment is forcing users to register before they checkout.

Surely you know the $300 million dollar button story.

Guideline #227. Don't force buyers to register with your site before buying, clearly offer guest checkout

Again, see the $300 million dollar button story. Don’t force people to register.

What you should do instead?

You should always offer a guest checkout.

There are two good approaches:

- Don’t even mention the word “register”. Say New Customer or use other similar terminology.
- Wait until they check out, and offer account creation on the Thank You page - see next guideline.

Site Component - Customer Accounts
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

User quote - When asked what they liked about a site: *“you can check out without needing [an] account.”*

User quote - *“It was frustrating when I was kind of forced to create a profile. It would have been nice to have a guest check out option, or an option to create a profile at the end of the checkout process (after you already have my email, shipping address etc.)”*

User quote - *“The checkout process didn’t make it clear that I could checkout as a guest.”*

User quote - *“I'm forever frustrated by not being told shipping information until I've been forced to sign up to an account on retail sites.”*

User quote - *“I liked that it was very clear that I could continue to checkout as a guest and that I wasn't forced to create an account or led to believe that creating an account was necessary in order to checkout.”*

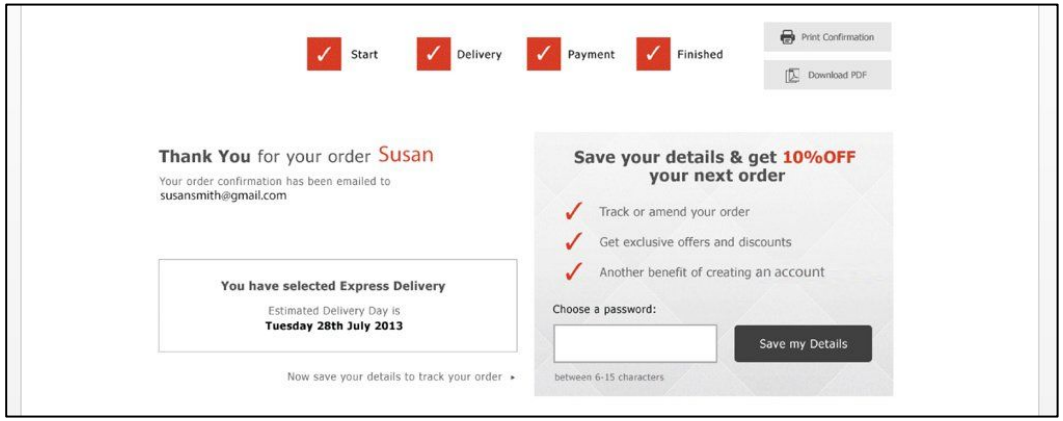
Guideline #228. Offer an incentive for OPTIONAL account registration upon checkout

Site Component - Customer Accounts
Conversion Heuristic - Motivation

You're asking them for their name, email and address anyway so they could buy and get their stuff, you already have this info.

So now on the last page you can just offer to create an account with 1-2 clicks: ask for their desired password (or provide option to auto-generate it for them) along with just the permission to create an account.

Checkout this example from Speedo:



People are not bothered with any account stuff until they pay you money (if you had to choose, what's more important to you: account registrations or purchases?).

Guideline #229. When creating a password, requirements should be clearly displayed

It’s a common experience. How many times have you entered a password only to be taken back with red ink proclaiming “Error! password needs a capital letter, two numbers, a character, and a quote from a Fetty Wap song.”

Well, at least they told you after you messed up! Better yet, better to let the customer know beforehand, clearly.

Something like - “*Passwords must be at least 8 characters long and contain at least one of the following: upper case letter, number, or special character.”

It’s also important to remember that if they guest checkout, you’ll have their name and email address, you could always send an email with a temporary password for them to create an account with.

Site Component - Customer Accounts
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

Cart & Checkout » Form Fields

10 Guidelines

Cart & Checkout > Form Fields

230. When designing forms: Fields should be ordered easiest - hardest to fill out
231. Make typing easy: autoformat, support copy/paste, make suggestions (not always!), etc.
232. Indicate whether each field is required or optional, unless they're all required
233. If a required field has been missed or incorrectly filled out, immediately create a visual alert
234. Expiration date format in form and on credit card should match
235. Name and phone number fields should be one field, not multiple
236. Form should be a single column (not multiple columns)
237. Forms should offer radio buttons over dropdown box selection
238. Shoppers should be able to edit credit card information without pausing or leaving the checkout process
239. Don't make coupon code fields prominent

Form conversions are the centerpiece of lead generation, sign ups and ecommerce sales. They are the gatekeeper to leads, revenue, and survival.

And nothing is more frustrating than filling out a badly designed form. (except for slow site speed...)

Form optimization is a key component of conversion optimization. It's easy to measure, and optimizing bottlenecks in your forms is a way to produce solid ROI upfront.

Most forms are boring, uninspiring, and not fun to fill out. We therefore need to throw everything we have at them: analytics, copywriting, UX and UI design.

Your traffic and audience are unique and they interact with your forms uniquely. It's good to research and test your specific situation, but here is a list of low-hangers to get things started.

User quote - *"I was annoyed that the order form required a phone number."*

Guideline #230. When designing forms: Fields should be ordered easiest-to-hardest to fill out

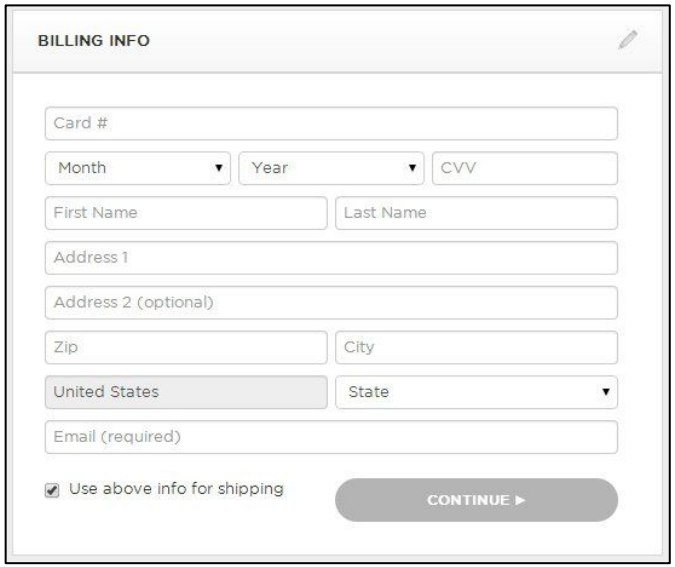
Site Component - Form Fields
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

Have people complete shipping information before they get into billing. This puts Cialdini's principles of commitment and consistency into action. Once people start doing something, they feel like they should finish.

They've already been asked to enter their name, email, and shipping info (which ideally is the same as billing address, so they don't need to type it again).

Same principle applies for form fields – start with the easier fields first, like name. Credit card number field is the hardest so it should come last.

Don't do this:



Guideline #231. Make typing easy: autoformat, support copy/paste, make suggestions (not always!), etc.

Autofill - Whenever possible do the work for the customer. When thinking about form fields, ask yourself:

- Do you have any good defaults for this field?
- What's the history available?
- Do we have any commonly used values?
- Can you use the browser or mobile features or settings (camera, GPS, voice, contacts) to populate it?
- Can you calculate it (e.g., state based on zip code)?

Autoformat - Do you allow users to enter field information it in whatever format they like? (e.g., phone numbers, credit cards). You should. And your system should be smart enough to allow for it. If so, it's good to autoformat after the information is entered. This includes to enable and disable auto-capitalization appropriately, transform dates, etc.

And others:

- **Support Copy/Pasting**
- **Provide the right keyboard for the field if mobile**
- **Do you account for typos or abbreviations?**
- **Don't autocorrect for certain fields like names, addresses, emails**

Site Component - Form Fields
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

User quote - "*Cheeckout was really nice and simple in terms of the interface and I could easily get through the whole process without any difficulty as all the fields were very clear. The content in the checkout fields were very clear to understand and big enough that I didn't have any problem interacting with it.*"

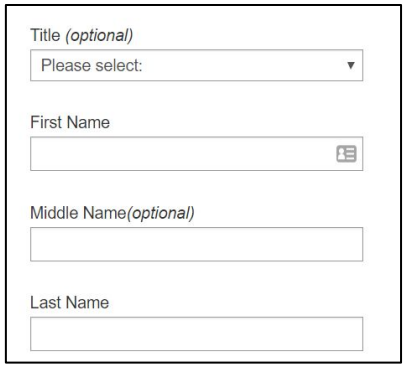
Guideline #232. Indicate whether each field is required or optional, unless they're all required

Site Component - Form Fields
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

First, ask yourself hard whether you need those optional fields.

If you have optional fields on your form, you're likely asking for "nice to have" information too soon.

Come on L.L. Bean, do you really need my title and middle name?! These four fields should be 1!



Initially, focus on what information is necessary to get the visitor started. The number isn't so important. What's important is that your visitors aren't sitting at home thinking, "Why do they need this?!"

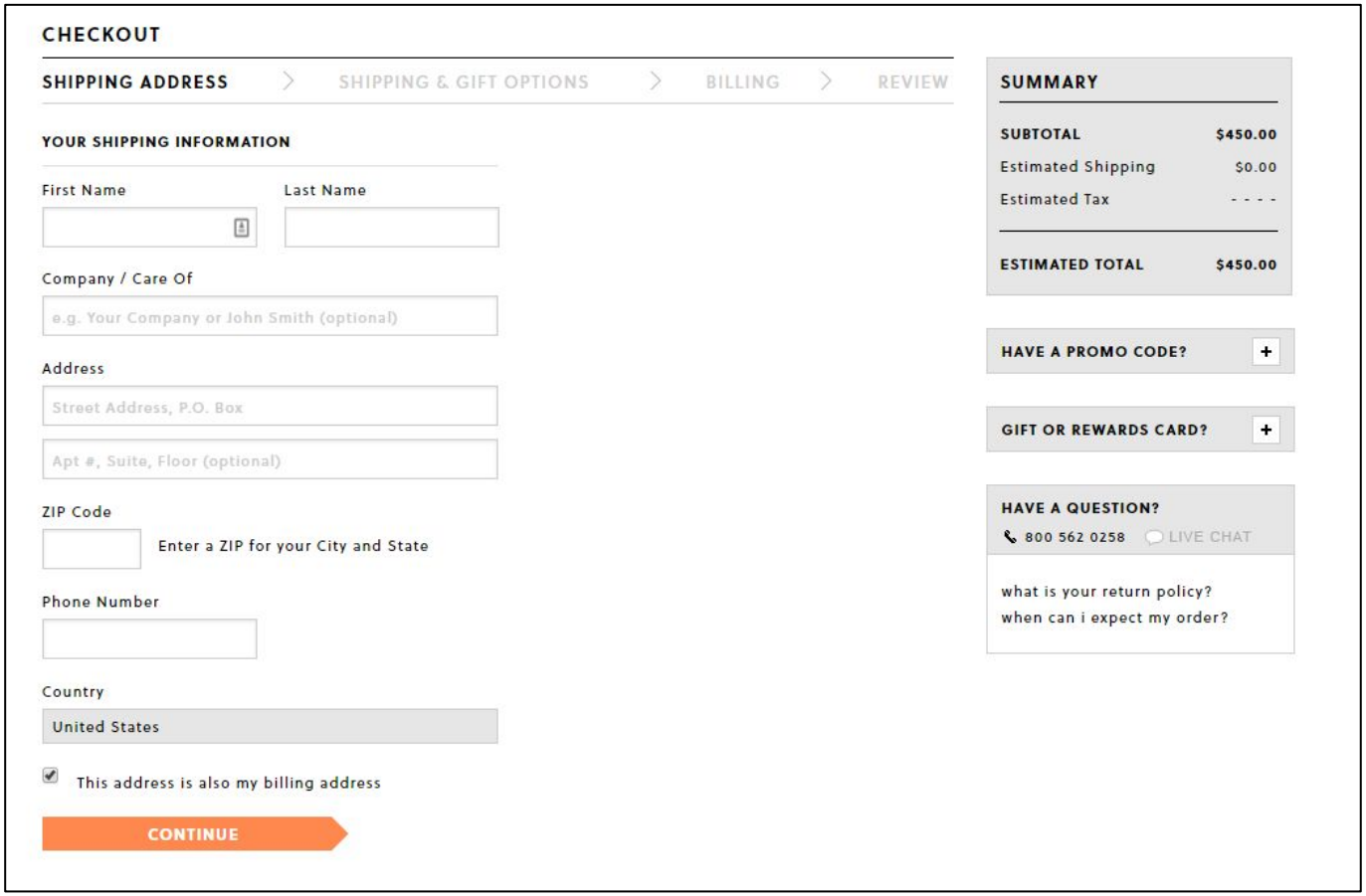
Why do they need my email? My phone number? These pieces of info are particularly interesting to request as people are all tired of spam calls and emails. Giving that info away means yet another opportunity for more calls and emails.

User quote - "*There were a few extra fields that I don't normally see during checkout, such as middle name and gender. I would remove them as I do not see them as necessary to complete my order.*"

User quote - " *I hesitated when I was ready to check out and then asked for an email. Maybe explaining why you need the email would make a person more willing to move ahead.*"

Adherence example

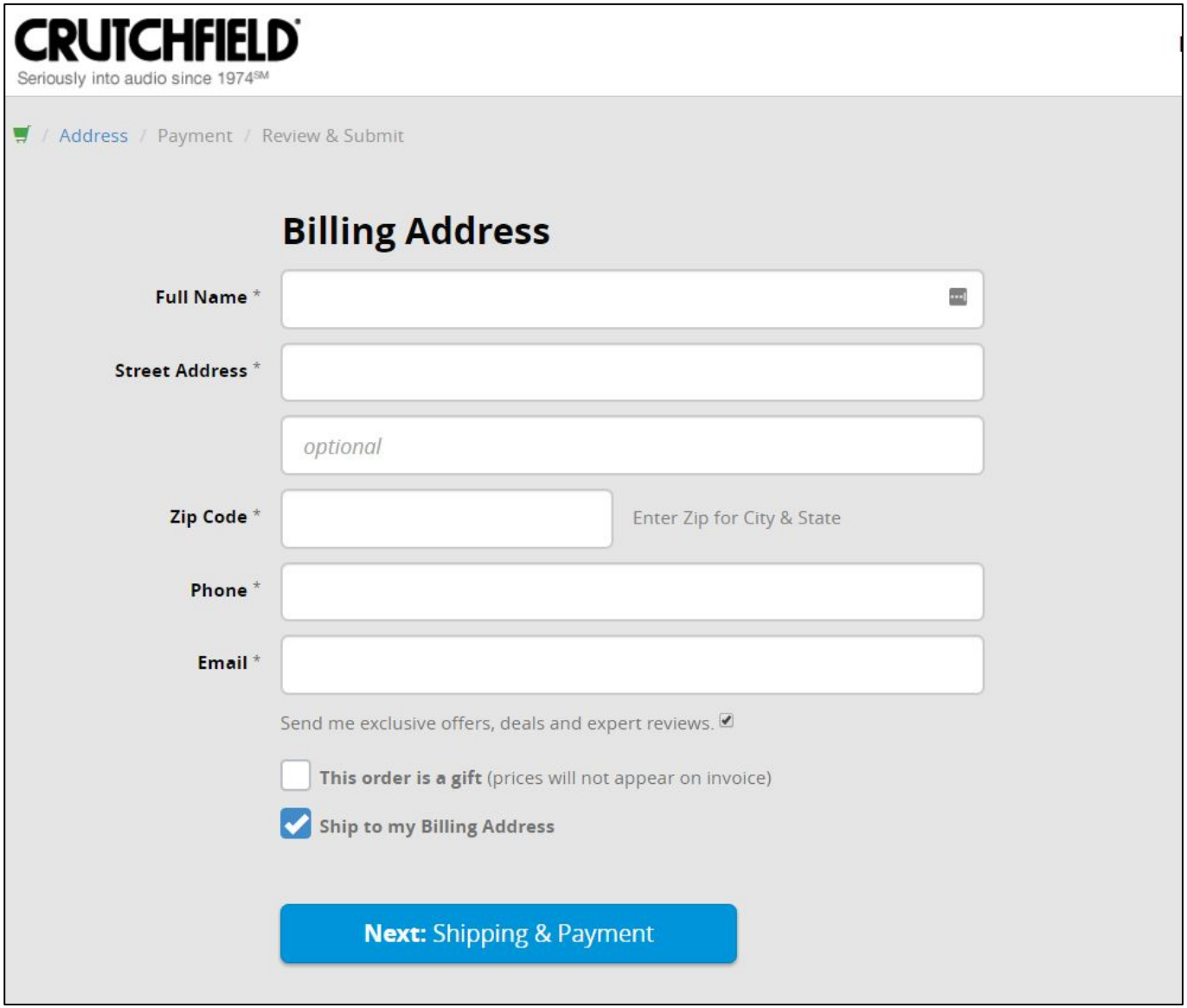
Guideline #232. Indicate whether each field is required or optional, unless it's all required



Jcrew.com tells us subtly that fields are not required with the inline 'optional' copy.

Adherence example

Guideline #232. Indicate whether each field is required or optional, unless it's all required

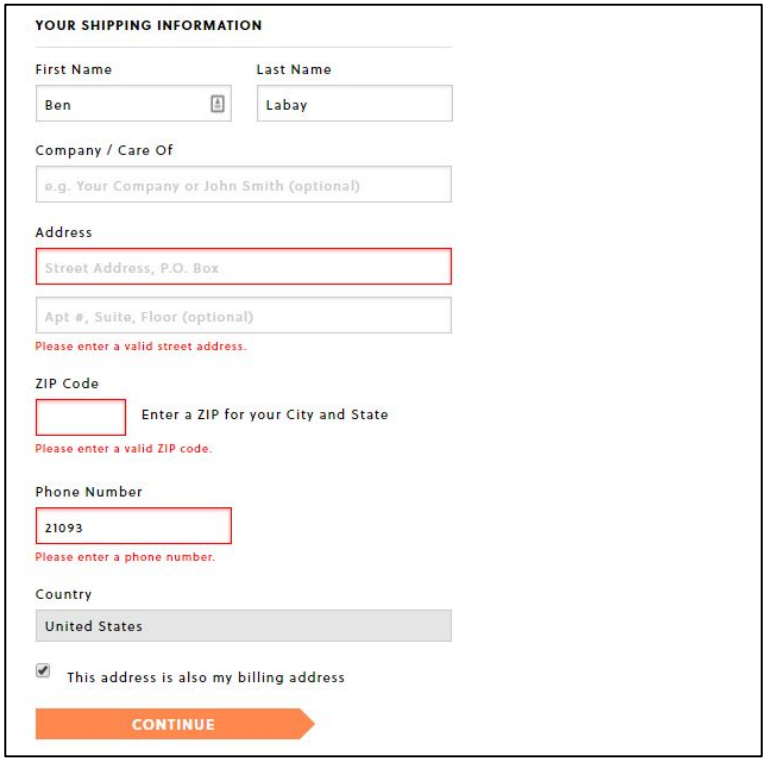


Crutchfield.com does it even better, starts with name (one field, good) and the easy stuff and clearly has the asterix that is universally understood to indicated a required field. They do this even though everything is required, maybe J. Crew thinks it's unnecessary, but it is certainly more clear.

Guideline #233. If a required field has been missed or incorrectly filled out, immediately create a visual alert

This should happen as soon as they start entering in the information in the field just below/after the required field.

J. Crew does a great job, see below as an incorrect phone number is entered just below the address and zip code fields that were skipped. All fields light up and tell the user what to do.



Site Component - Form Fields
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

User quote - *"I also found it frustrating that during the checkout, an error was presented for not supplying an email address, however, i was not automatically brought to the place on the page where the error occurred. Instead, the page loaded and placed me at the top of the page with no indication of an error until I scrolled down the page."*

User quote - When asked what they would improve on a site: *"I would make the form error messages more noticeable to the eye"*

User quote - *"I liked that I was given a second chance to enter my payment information if there was an error. Some websites will clear the order and your cart history so the user has to go through the process again by adding items to the cart and checking out a second time.."*

Adherence example

Guideline #233. If a required field has been missed or incorrectly filled out, immediately create a visual alert

Again, Crutchfield does it even better, the entire field and field label turns a shade of red, and it even indicates that I need to enter a full name via two words.

When done right it gives me a nice green-to-go color indicator.

Guideline #234. Expiration date format in form and on credit card should match

This is one of those simple things worth mentioning but without need to explain. Don't confuse your users!

Site Component - Form Fields
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

Guideline #235. Name and phone number fields should be one field, not multiple

Dividing up these fields isn't worth the gain. Most people get it right, and for those who don't enter 10 digits for a phone number or two words for a full name, just have a field-level error indication.

The main problem with multiple fields is interaction issues. Generally, the less fields the better. Imagine on your mobile device having to go through 5 fields for name and number (2 for name, 3 for number) instead of just 2?

Site Component - Form Fields
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

Guideline #236. Form should be a single column (not multiple columns)

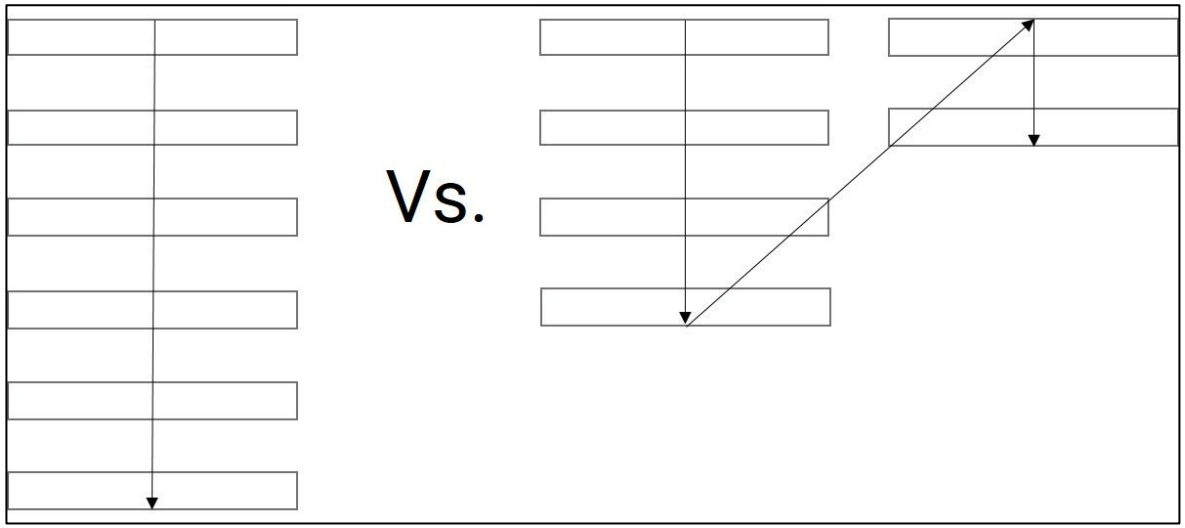
Site Component - Form Fields
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

Always use a single column. Just how bad is a multi-column form layout?

A short study conducted through ConversionXL Institute compared form completion time on a single column form vs. a multi-column form.

The single-column form was faster to complete.

Survey participants completed the linear, single-column form (n = 356) an average of 15.4 seconds faster than the multi-column form (n = 346). This was significantly faster at a 95% confidence level.



Guideline #237. Forms should offer radio buttons over dropdown box selection

Site Component - Form Fields
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

uxmovements.com published an article last month (16 June 2016) sparking our curiosity towards the use of multi-select form fields when another form field type would work. In their piece, "Why Users Abandon Forms with Select Menus", they argue that forms with select menus often get abandoned because they "take more time and effort to complete".

More specifically they say they slowed users down by interrupting user flow, being hard to read, and requiring dexterous mouse maneuvering.

BUT, they provide no data to support this.

Well, it's easy enough to test. So we did. We were just launching a large survey on online trust perception, so we had a good opportunity to simply manipulate a survey form and ask different groups of people the same questions in different formats (multi-select vs. radio buttons) to see how form completion time compared.

The form with radio buttons was faster to complete.

Survey participants completed the radio button form (n = 354) an average of 2.5 seconds faster than the form with multi-select buttons (n = 354). This was significantly faster at a 95% confidence level.

Guideline #238. Shoppers should be able to edit credit card information without pausing or leaving the checkout process

Site Component - Form Fields
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

Past users' information changes. If they're in the middle of a purchase don't make them exit out into an account page in order to edit information like changing a credit card.

Let them update payment information within the checkout process.

Guideline #239. Don't make coupon code fields prominent

When people see a “Enter coupon code here” field, they feel less special. “How come I don’t have one?” Many go to Google to find a coupon; many never return. Leaving the site in search for coupons is a common reason for shopping cart abandonment.

So this is not a good idea:

Instead, have a text link saying “Got a coupon?” or something similar, and clicking on the link makes an input field – like the one above – appear. Text links are not visually very prominent, so less people will pay attention to them.

Customers who already have a coupon code will be looking for a way to enter it – so unless you hid it really well, they will find it and will be able to apply their coupon code. And If a customer has received a coupon (via email) automatically apply it to total and display the discount.

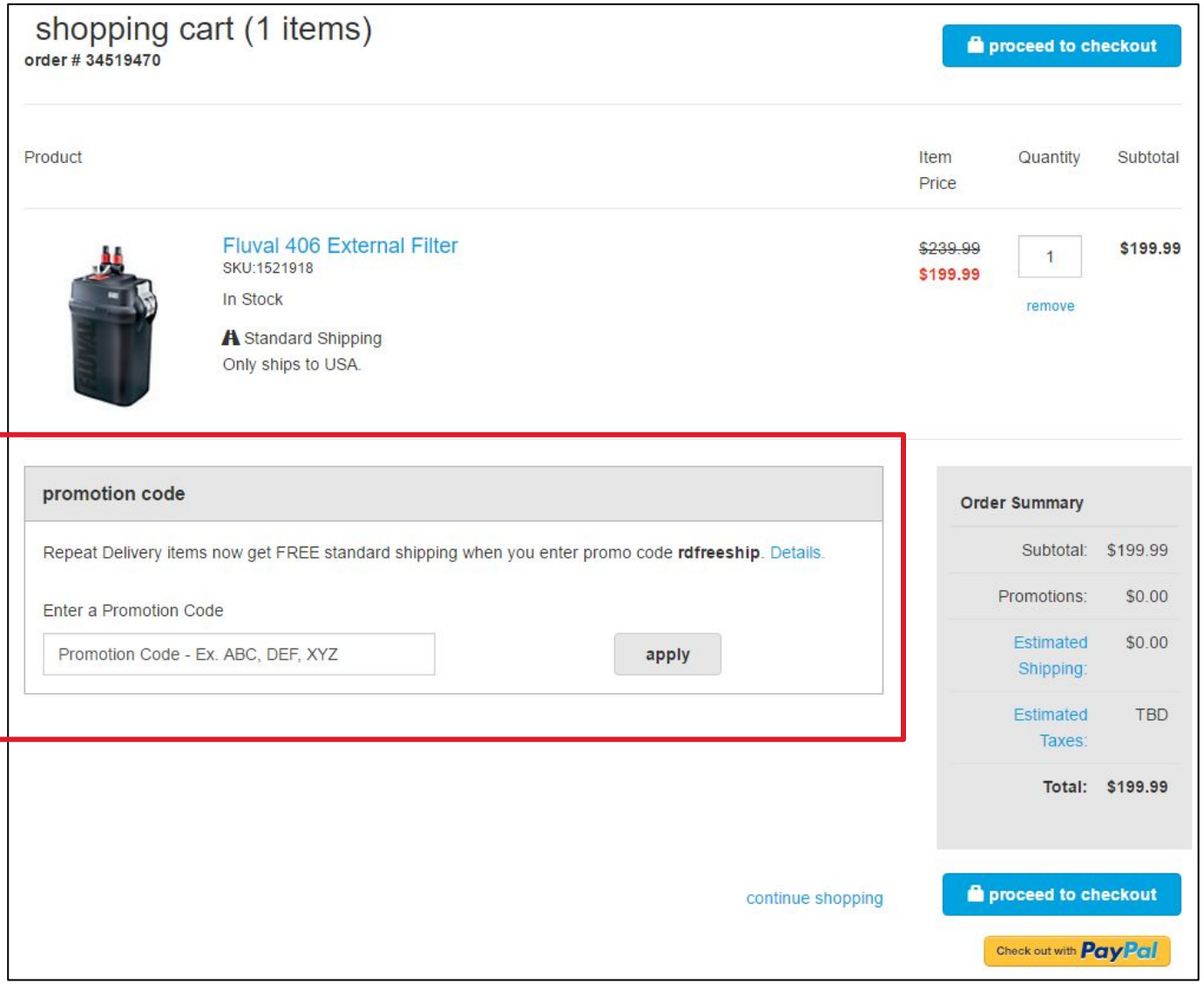
Site Component - Form Fields
Conversion Heuristic - Distraction and Focus

User quote - “*The window to enter a gift card was before all other payment information and just seemed very out of place on site. I kept putting my credit card in that box.*”

User quote - “*The promo code in check-out was very prominent. I generally go and look at the internet to see if there are any promo codes when I see this. “*

Non-adherence example

Guideline #239. Don't make coupon code fields prominent



Petco gets most things right with their cart but the coupon field is way too prominent.

Cart & Checkout » Shipping & Billing

8 Guidelines

Cart & Checkout > Shipping & Billing

240. Total should be itemized: Price, taxes, shipping, discounts
241. Provide and clearly display shipping options (including in-store pickup)
242. Provide free shipping if possible or offer free shipping when spending $X or more
243. Billing address should be shipping address by default
244. Display acceptable payment options

The information exchange related to shipping and billing can be a major drag on conversions and it centers on the customer's idea of how they're getting what they're getting, and how much it's going to cost them.

It boils down to:

- Don't have hidden fees
- Don't surprise them
- Provide a range of shipping options

The guidelines provided in this section get at these points above. They help to operationalize what many ecommerce sites have figured out for a while, to be clear and concise at this stage in the buying process.

Guideline #240. Total should be itemized: Price, taxes, shipping, discounts

It's easy and obvious to understand what's in the cart and what's the final cost including shipping and taxes.

Surprise costs down the line make people abandon carts.

When you're looking at all of the abandoned orders, it's easy to imagine that customers leave their shopping carts simply because they changed their mind at the last minute. But digging in, you find that's simply not the case.

In fact, most research indicates that the #1 reason people abandon their carts is "unexpected costs" like shipping, taxes & fees.

In this study by Worldpay, "Decided against buying" isn't even the second or third, but rather the fifth reason that people leave at the checkout

The top 4 reasons people abandon their cart have to do with "Price" and "Timing". The top reason: "being presented with an unexpected cost".

Site Component - Shipping and Billing
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

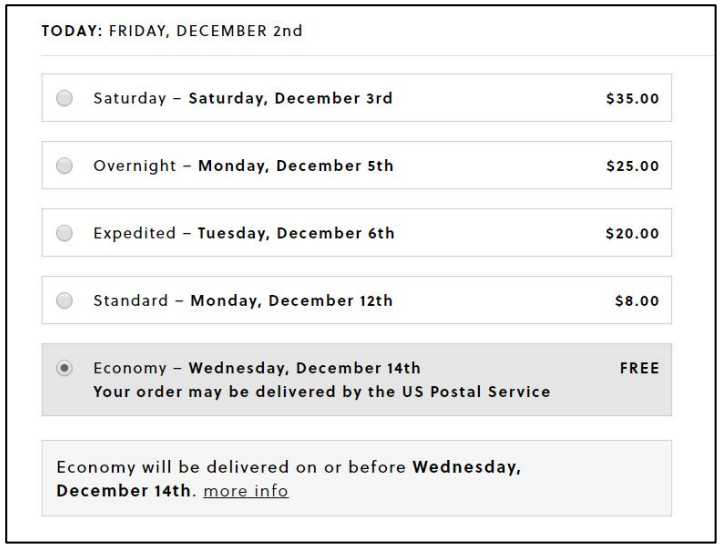
User quote - *"there was no indication of the price of the product that was recently added; only a subtotal of all products in the cart. I might suggest adding an indication of individual product price for items recently added to the cart."*

Guideline #241. Provide and clearly display shipping options (including in-store pickup)

We know that checkout abandonment is still very much linked to nasty high delivery surprises. Providing a range of options can kick in an anchoring effect, like when restaurants add one super expensive wine to the mix to make everything else look reasonable.

It also pays to appease the various schedules and needs of your customer by allowing a range of delivery options and methods. 1, 2, 3-day, in store pickup, etc.

Check out how J. Crew does it.



Site Component - Shipping and Billing
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

User quote - *"I also do not recall seeing estimated shipping costs at any point until after I had selected my shipping option. It may have been nice to see estimated "standard" shipping (if a zip code is supplied) while adding items to the cart. This helps to ensure that I am staying under a certain budget while adding items into the cart."*

User quote - *" I also had trouble understanding what shipping method was selected, because one item in my cart could not be shipped with Next Day shipping, but did not see an indication of Standard shipping selected. I might indicate the shipping option selected, displaying even those that cannot be selected, but graying them out."*

User quote - *"One last suggestion might be to make the shipping selection box contrasted or highlighted, to show the selection and maybe not have the other boxes seem so grayed out. I wasn't aware during the checkout process that I could change my shipping selection because they all looked as if they could not be selected."*

Guideline #242. Provide free shipping if possible or offer free shipping when spending $X or more

Back in 2011, comScore reported nearly half of all online online purchases had some sort of “free shipping” offer.

That same 2011 report noted that 61% of consumers said they are “somewhat likely” to cancel their order if free shipping is not offered.

According to Deloitte, 20% of consumers believe “free shipping” is top reason to shop with a particular retailer. Turns out, “Free shipping” is a huge factor in online customer experience.

If you’re thinking free shipping is restrictive to your business, consider the different ways you could offer it to your customers:

- All Free or Qualifying Free (L.L. Bean, Nordstrom)
- Free Shipping to Members Only (Amazon Prime)
- Free Shipping With Minimum Order (Staples, Lego, American Apparel, J. Crew)
- Special Free Shipping Days (Fossil, Levi’s)
- Free Ship-To-Store (Wal-Mart, Ace Hardware)

Site Component - Shipping and Billing
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

User quote - *“I was surprised there was no "pick up in store" option for the chaise, and the shipping cost of $55 (or $180 for expedited -- seriously?) was sort of absurd. Maybe that was uncommon, and just that particular item?”*

User quote - When asked why they liked the site: “*They offered free shipping on orders over $49 and various other specials and promotions if you use their credit card.”*

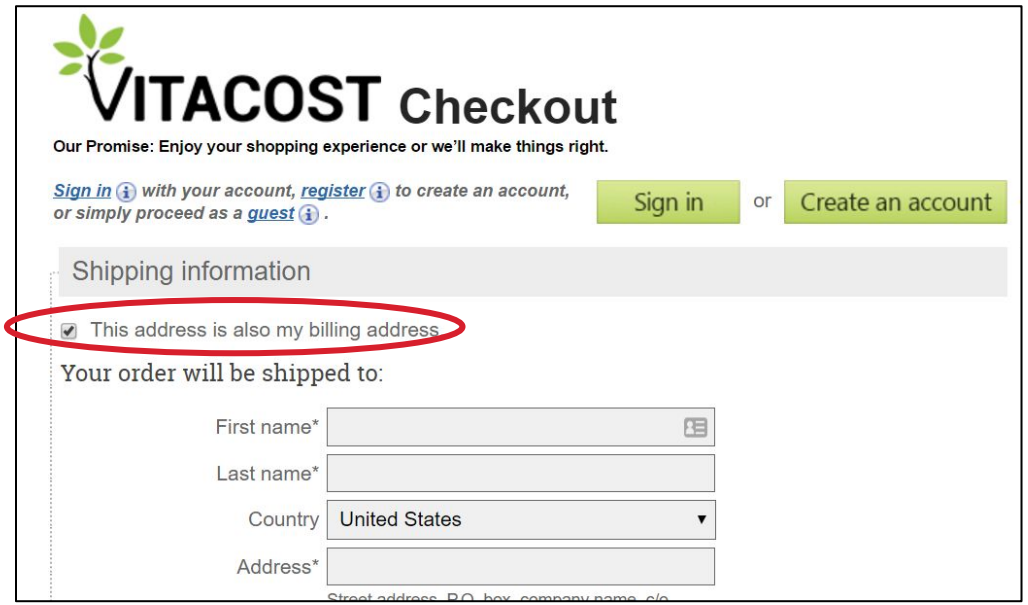
User quote - When asked what was most frustrating: “*There is shipping charge for anything that you buy compared to most websites which offer free shipping after you buy certain $ value”*

Guideline #243. Billing address should be shipping address by default

Sometimes we've seen websites ask for shipping first, sometimes billing. We recommend asking for shipping, as it's psychologically more distant from your money and thus 'easier' to fill out.

Either way, have a checkbox that's default to say that whichever you've filled out the other is the same. Unchecking it would allow for the rare event of allowing for different addresses.

See how Vitacost.com does it:



Site Component - Shipping and Billing
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

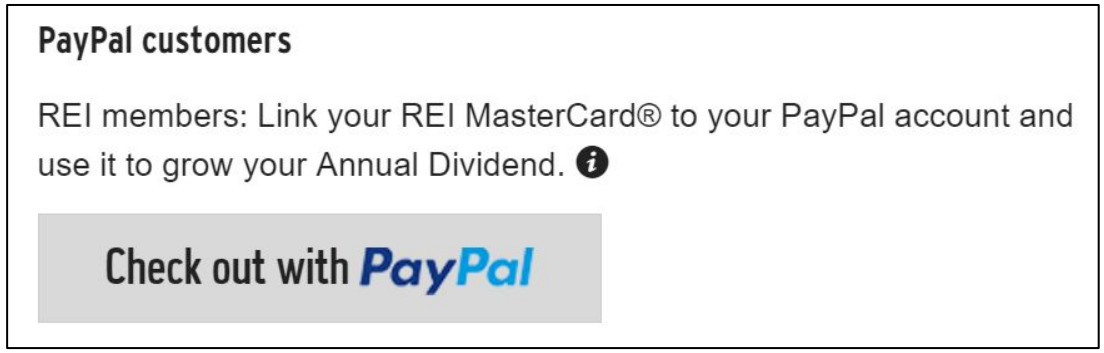
User quote - *"There needed to be in option to auto fill the input fields for billing address with my shipping address. For most people the billing and shipping address will be the same, so having us manually type it twice is very frustrating, and off-putting."*

User quote - *"[frustrated by] having to enter my personal info twice, once for shipping and once for credit card"*

User quote - *"During the checkout process, provide a checkbox that allows you to select billing address same as shipping address."*

Guideline #244. Display acceptable payment options

Paypal is trusted and easy to use by those who use it. Check out how REI gets you to use Paypal:



They connect their popular dividend benefit to it, removing doubts about how it would work. Pretty slick.

Paypal, Pay by Amazon, Apple Pay: Third-party payment gateways are popular and make things familiar and convenient for the customer because the get to skip forms! This is especially powerful on mobile.

Site Component - Shipping and Billing
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

User quote - "*In shopping cart at the bottom, there needs to be a PayPal button like the Chase so that companies or pet owner can know that they can pay with PayPal too. Adding more banks that you pay with too.*"

Cart & Checkout » Gifting

6 Guidelines

Cart & Checkout > Gifting

245. Include a "this is a gift" checkbox to set up gift-wrapping options
246. Offer multiple gifting options like messages, e-gifts, wrapping options, and gift kits
247. Show customers what the gift will look like for the recipient

According to 2014 Retail Delivery report by Oracle, 16% offered at least one gift wrapping option.

Of these, many offered gift wrapping for free. That's only 16%.
It doesn't make sense to be 100% because many sectors don't apply. Car part as a gift? Cat food? Maybe, but not likely.

But we know people do give gifts, and offering a seemless experience in providing a gift can be one of those stand-out benefits that gets gift-givers returning over and over again.

These guidelines are a start. They provide the bare necessities if you're interested in providing a gift-buying experience.

User quote - *"I really liked the Gift Section. It made my task of finding a gift VERY easy. There was a good amount of options within the Gift Category as well, so I was able to easily choose something in my price range, or for the occasion"*

Guideline #245. Include a "this is a gift" checkbox to set up gift-wrapping options

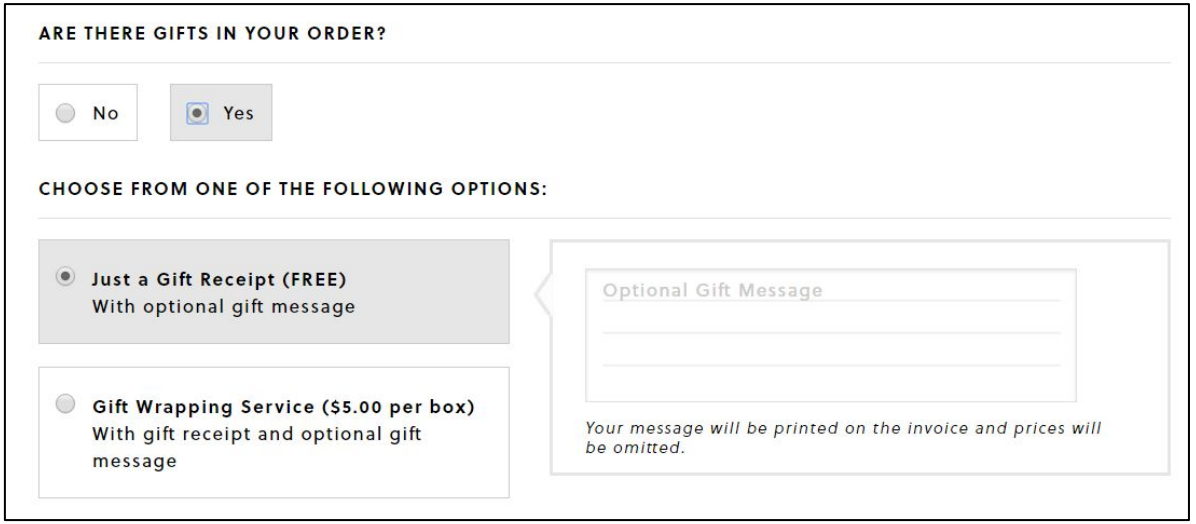
Site Component - Gifting
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

If you offer products that are likely to be gifted then having gift options, and being clear about what they offer/include can greatly improve conversion rates, especially around the holidays.

And if you make it truly easy, customers will come back again and again for their gifting needs.

On the shipping options page or part of the checkout process ask if they want to send the purchase as a gift.

See how J. Crew does it, and note that the 'choose from the following' options only display after the 'yes' is chosen above.



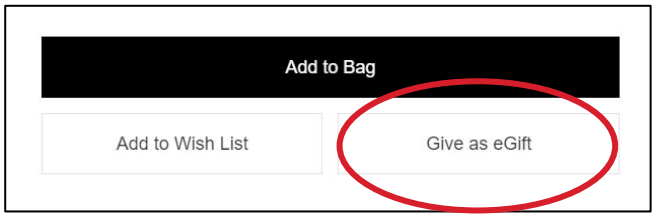
Guideline #246. Offer multiple gifting options like messages, e-gifts, wrapping options, and gift kits

Site Component - Gifting
Conversion Heuristic - Friction

At minimum there needs to be a gift receipt, without the price. But it is worth considering other options:

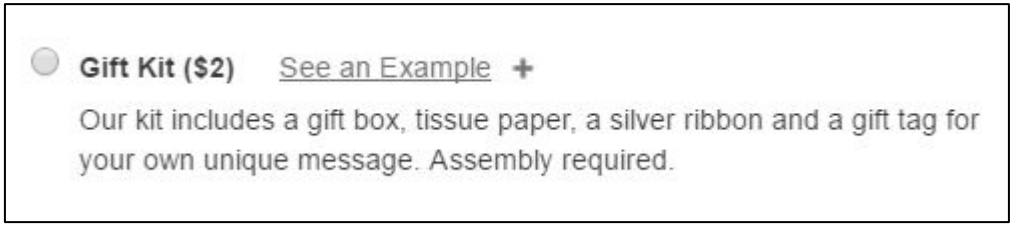
A gift message - easy and pretty standard to include

E-gift - Sort of like a pre-paid gift card, but for a specific item. The recipient organizes shipping.



Themed wrapping options - For girls, boys, men, women, birthdays, christmas, etc.

A gift kit - Where the customer can get the supplies themselves to wrap it. Includes wrapping paper, tissue paper, bow, etc. Assembly required!



User quote - When asked what the user liked most about a site: *"Ability to send [products] as a gift (so price tag won't be there)"*

User quote - When asked what the user liked most about a site: *"The option to include a gift message during checkout."*

Guideline #247. Show customers what the gift will look like for the recipient

People want to see what they're getting, but they really need to know what they're giving. A large part of giving is the thought and anticipation. The wrapping adds to the charm, if done well it will get gifters coming back to gift more from your store. It's great for word-of-mouth.

So it's important to show what it's going to look like, especially if you offer many of the different wrapping options. Don't make people guess.

Couldn't find one of our tested sites that did this, but check out how Norstrom does it:

Site Component - Gifting
Conversion Heuristic - Clarity

Competitive CUX Benchmarking Chapters

Ecommerce subverticals

Clothing & Apparel

Consumer Electronics

Home & Garden

Pets

Recreation

Nutrition

CUX Benchmarking Methods

(repeated in methods appendix)

A major component of this user-testing-based report is a supplement to the the qualitative data in the form of user survey-based quantitative data on users perceptions of website quality via a standardized questionnaire component. It allows us to benchmark the user experience of a website in a unique and highly useful way for conversion-minded practitioners. We call the approach *C*UX Benchmarking.

The features & benefits of this *C*UX benchmarking approach:

- **Conversion Focused:** developed with a UX dimension quantifying user's perception of a website's value proposition, or why they should consider a site compared to its competition.
- **Quantitative**: based on 100+ user datapoints for each site
- **Generalizable & Transferable**: It can describe the quality of any website - ideal for relative context, understand how scores relate to each other when measuring before and after a design change, or compared to a competitor.
- **Multidimensional**: It includes the main factors for measuring website user experience and general quality of a website.
- **Standardized, Normalized, and Validated**: It has been developed through extensive testing on a massive user testing database (see the peer-reviewed paper on it's foundation) and the metrics produced for any one website is able to be placed in context relative to its peers and relative to itself if replicated after website modification.
- **Repeatable:** Ideal for quantifying a baseline for comparison against later site design changes.
- **Ideal for Competitive Benchmarking**: Quickly and reliably know how your website is perceived (in dimensions of appearance, clarity, usability, and credibility) relative to your competition. Comparing against multiple websites provides context for what's working and not working to make inspired, hypothesis-driven design decisions.
- **Ideal alongside User-Testing results**: 5-10 user sessions providing qualitative, open-ended responses to questions relative to similar UX dimensions as what's in the CUX metric will provide actionable direction for design improvements.

CUX Benchmarking Methods

(repeated in methods appendix)

The UX benchmark metric is adapted from the SUPR-Q: a comprehensive measure of the quality of the website user experience. Published in 2015 in the Journal of Usability Statistics, Jeff Sauro presents this new standardized survey metric that has four subcomponents to measure perceptions of a website's usability, credibility, appearance and loyalty. We modified this metric by adding an additional subcomponent, clarity. Website clarity, or specifically, clarity of the value proposition a website offers on it's homepage, is a primary driver for customer motivations and thus extremely important to conversion rates and customer perceptions generally.

The five subcomponents and their associated survey question(s) presented in a likert-scale format:

USABILITY
This website is easy to use.
It is easy to navigate within the website.

CREDIBILITY (Trust)
I feel comfortable purchasing from this website.
I feel confident conducting business with this website.

LOYALTY
How likely are you to recommend this website to a friend or colleague?
I will likely visit this website in the future.

APPEARANCE
I found the website to be attractive.
The website has a clean and simple presentation.

CLARITY (our additional question, not part of SUPR-Q)
I clearly understand why I should buy from this website instead of its competitors.

CUX Benchmarking Methods

(repeated in methods appendix)

With the data from these questions across participants (ranging from 55 - 108 per site), we calculated a competitive UX benchmark metric among the sites studies, and within sub-verticals (e.g., apparel, nutrition, recreation) and thus provide a quantitative perspective that complements the qualitative user-testing data.

The results between the quantitative and qualitative testing aren't explicitly comparable, but they both should be a foundation for where hypothesis testing and benchmarking should start.

Note that we developed a unique calculation of the benchmark metric for this report, as we had the addition of the UX dimension of clarity. Thus it is not directly comparable to the SUPR-Q metric calculation. However, the metric we derived leverages the psychometric validation work to create and qualify the list of questions, and in our opinion improves the benchmark by adding a valuable perspective related to customer motivation towards buying from one vendor instead of another.

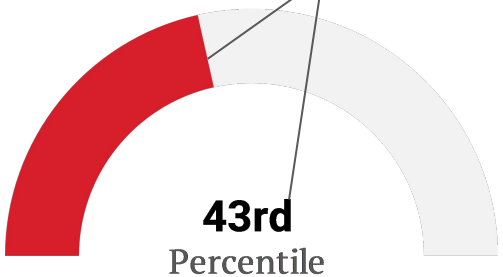
The value proposition, a part of our thinking in creating the clarity question, has proven to be one of the most important test variables in creating consistent and significant lifts in conversion optimization rate. Ecommerce business today are competing with the likes of Amazon, Best Buy, Zappos, and need to differentiate by clearly relating the benefits for why a customer needs to buy from them and not from Amazon.

CUX Benchmarking Methods

» Explanation of Figures

With the data from the survey questions across participants, we calculate percentile ranking for each website on each UX dimension subcomponent and for a global metric. We also calculated the metric for the sub-verticals (clothing&apparel, electronics, home&garden, nutrition, pets, and recreation). The figures below represent example visualizations of the data.

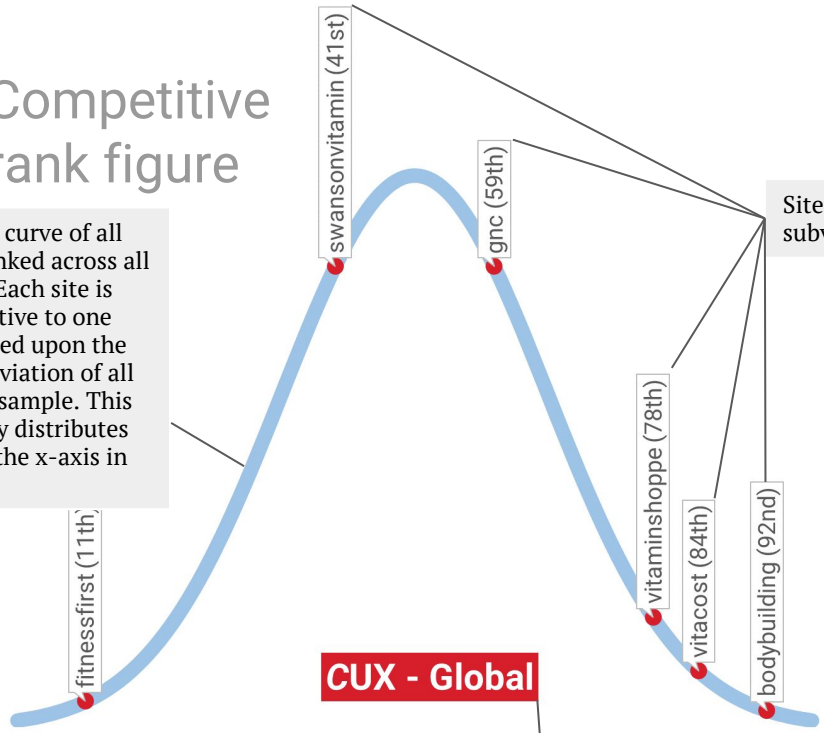
Standalone rank figure



Percentile Rank - In this case, 43rd percentile, meaning out of full database of websites ranked, 57% rank higher

CUX dimension - indication of global metric or subcomponent (appearance, clarity, credibility, loyalty, usability)

Competitive rank figure



Normalized curve of all websites ranked across all industries. Each site is plotted relative to one another based upon the standard deviation of all sites in the sample. This curve evenly distributes sites along the x-axis in balance

Sites within a subvertical

CUX dimension - indication of global metric or subcomponent (appearance, clarity, credibility, loyalty, usability)

Ecommerce subvertical:
Clothing & Apparel

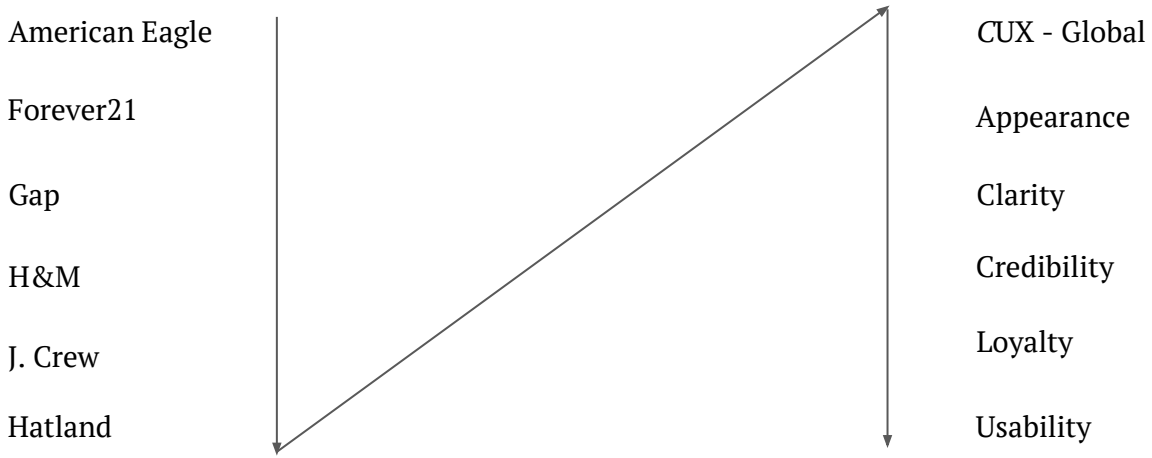
Alexa top 25

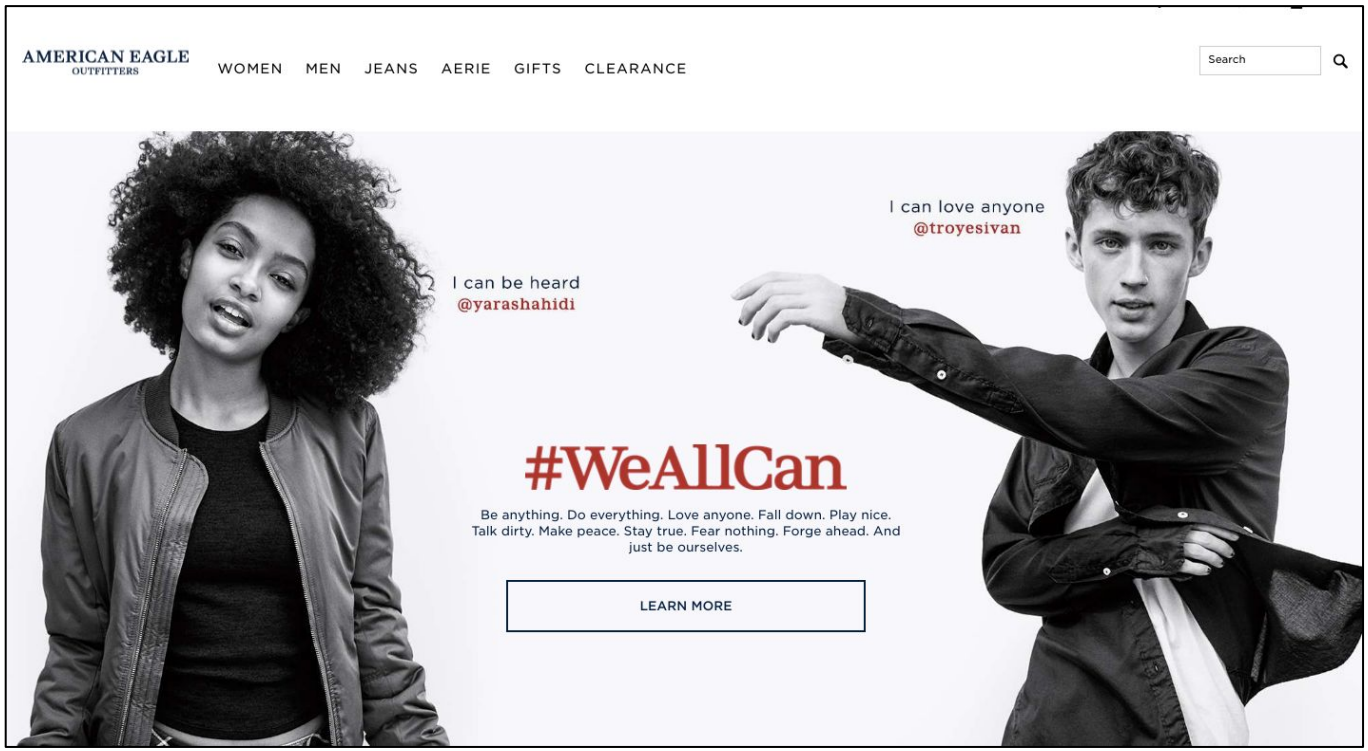
Alexa lower 400

Clothing & Apparel Contents

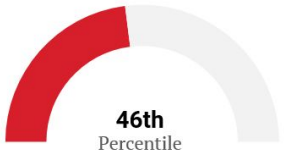
Standalone website rank profiles

Competitive benchmarking per UX dimension

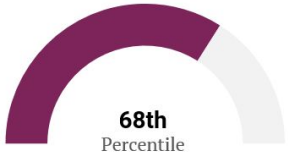




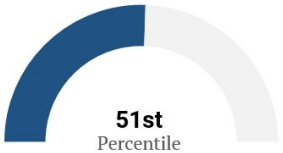
AMERICAN EAGLE OUTFITTERS
ae.com



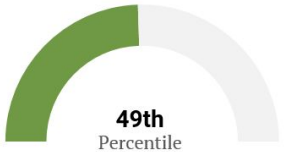
CUX - GLOBAL



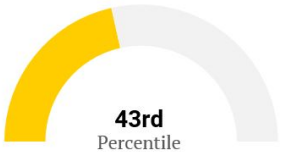
CUX - APPEARANCE



CUX - USABILITY



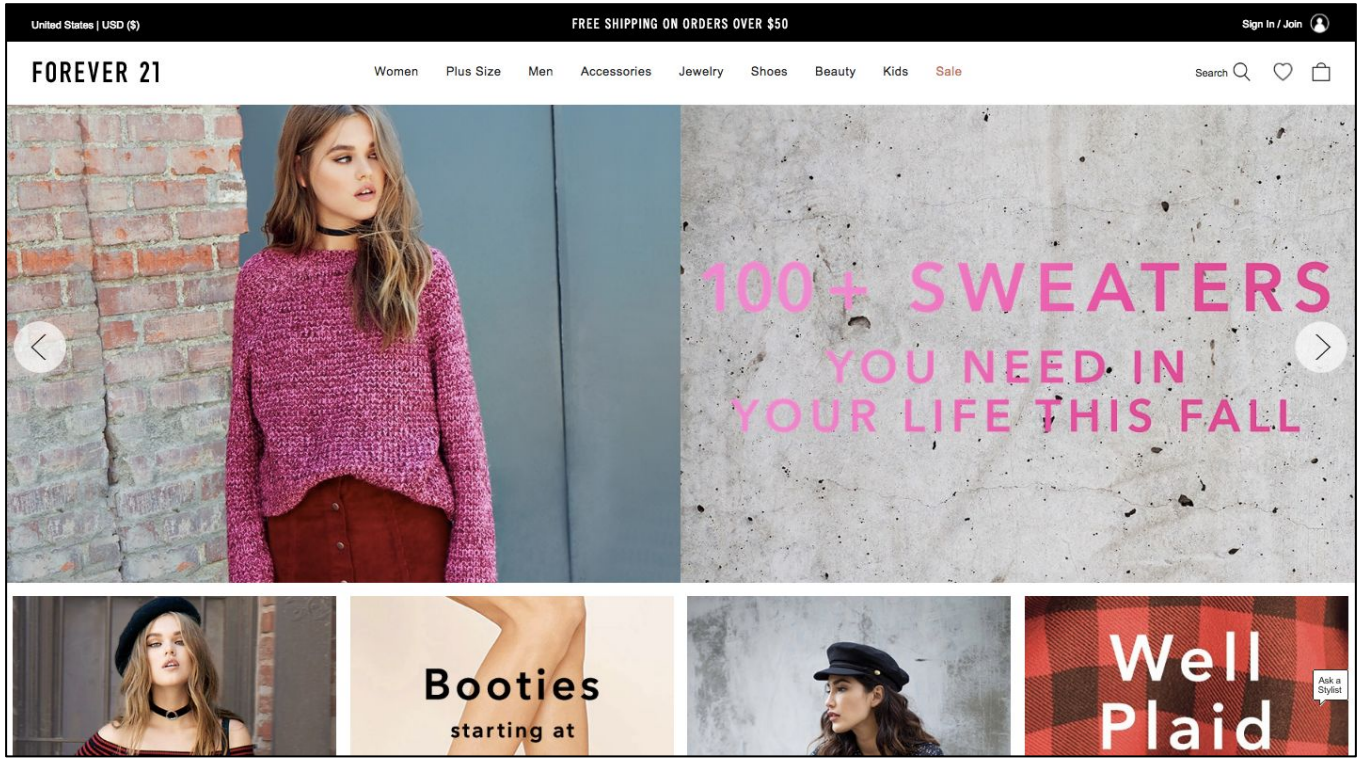
CUX - CREDIBILITY

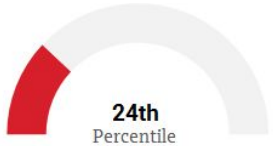


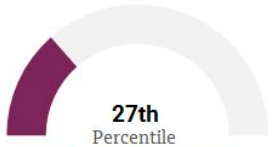
CUX - LOYALTY

CUX - CLARITY

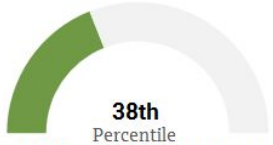
FOREVER 21


United States | USD ($)
FREE SHIPPING ON ORDERS OVER $50
Sign In / Join
FOREVER 21
Women
Plus Size
Men
Accessories
Jewelry
Shoes
Beauty
Kids
Sale
Search
100+ SWEATERS
YOU NEED IN
YOUR LIFE THIS FALL
Booties
starting at
Well
Plaid
Ask a Stylist


24th
Percentile
CUX - Global


27th
Percentile
CUX - APPEARANCE

19th
Percentile
CUX - USABILITY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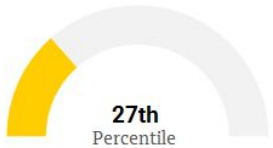
Percentile
CUX - CREDIBILITY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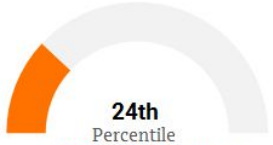
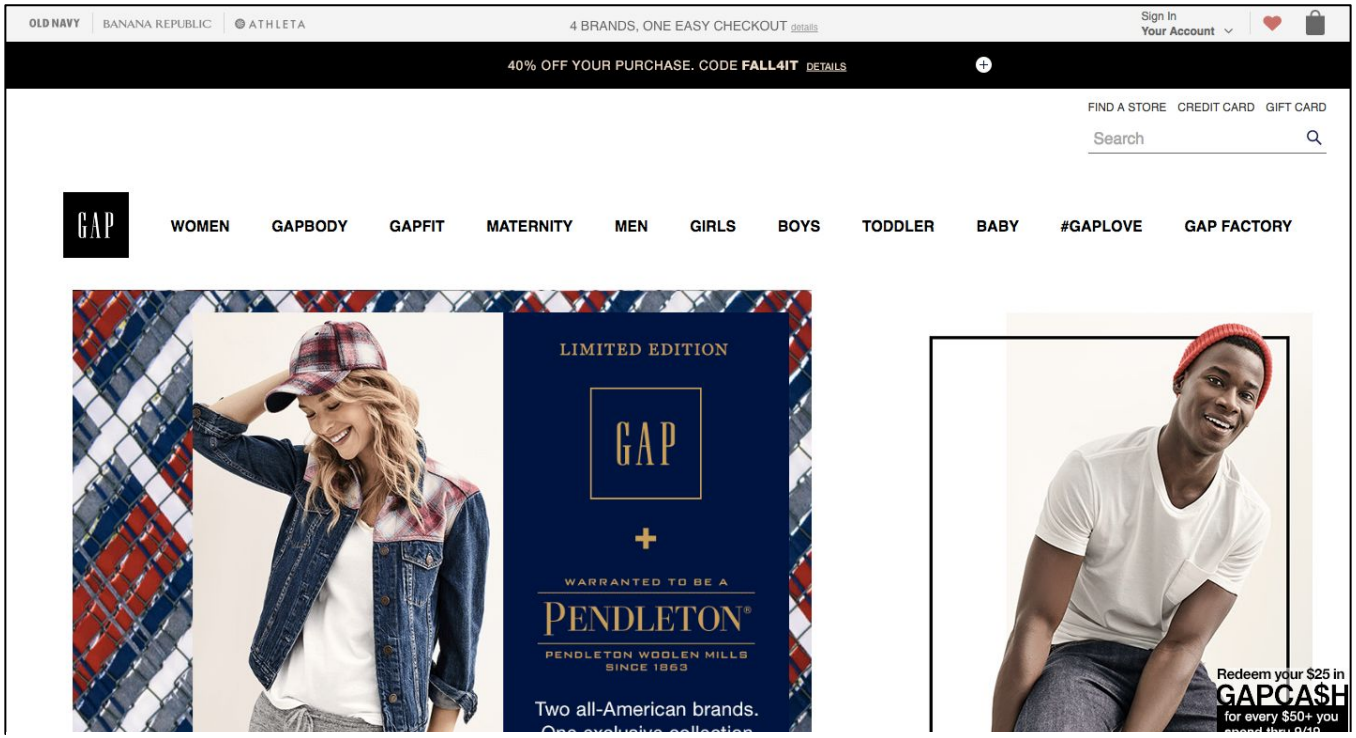
Percentile
CUX - LOYALTY


24th
Percentile
CUX - CLARITY


OLD NAVY
BANANA REPUBLIC
ATHLETA
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Two all-American brands.
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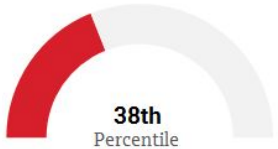
for every $50+ you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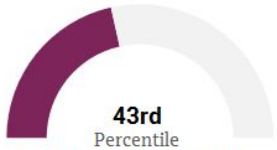
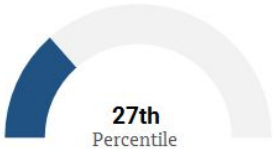
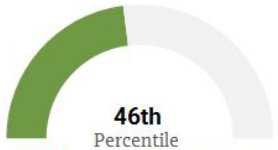
Percentile
CUX - Global


43rd
Percentile
CUX - APPEARANCE


27th
Percentile
CUX - USABILITY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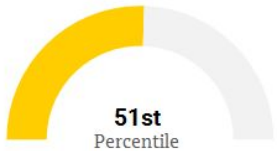
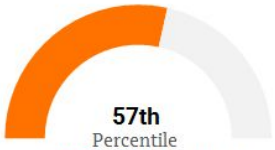
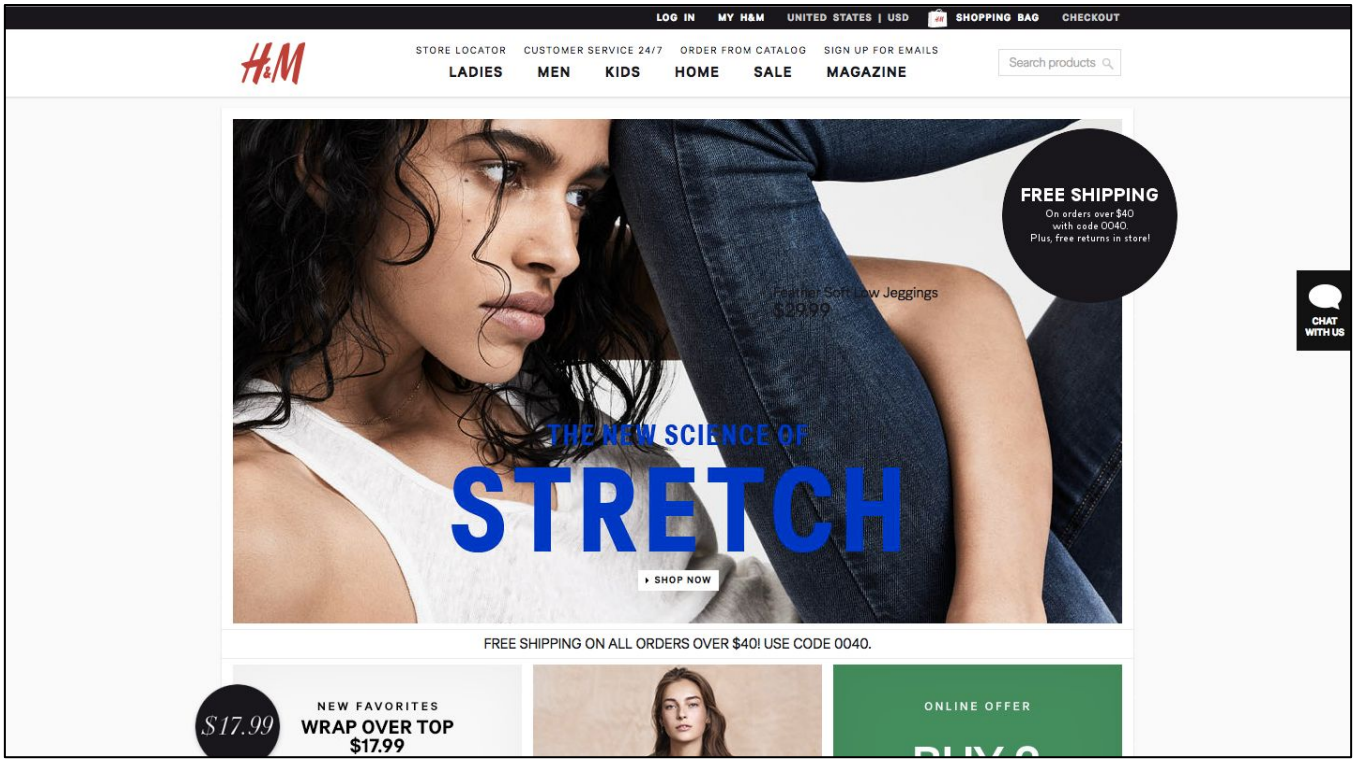
Percentile
CUX - CREDIBILITY


51st
Percentile
CUX - LOYALTY


57th
Percentile
CUX - CLARITY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KIDS
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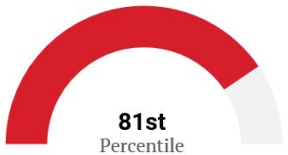
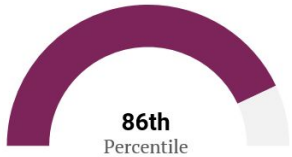
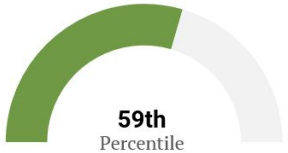

81st
Percentile
CUX - GLOBAL


86th
Percentile
CUX - APPEARANCE

70th
Percentile
CUX - USABILITY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Percentile
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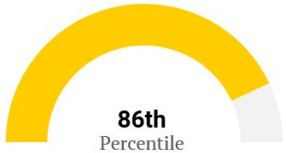
86th
Percentile
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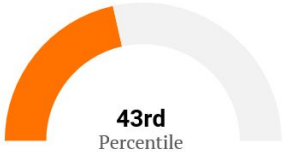
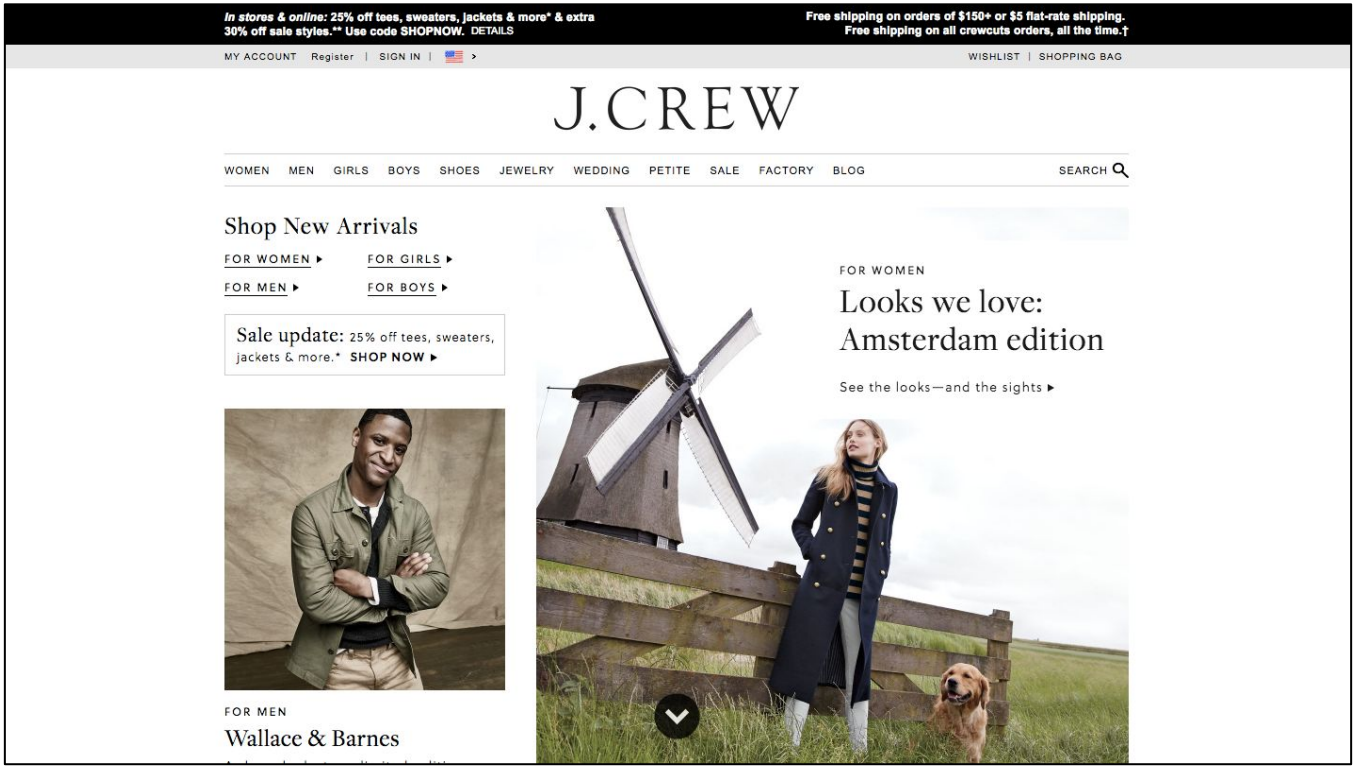

43rd
Percentile
CUX - CLARITY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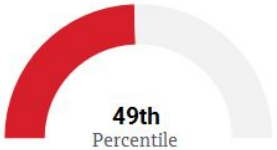
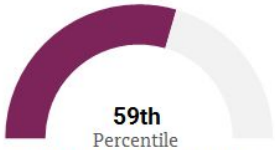

49th
Percentile
CUX - Global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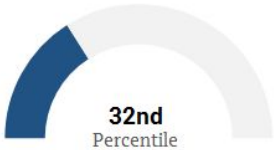
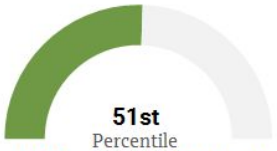

32nd
Percentile
CUX - USABILITY


51st
Percentile
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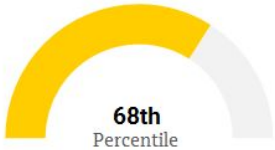
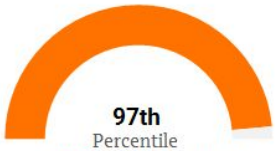
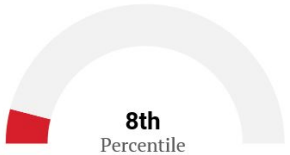
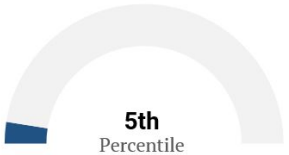

68th
Percentile
CUX - LOYALTY


97th
Percentile
CUX - CLARITY



CUX - GLOBAL

CUX - APPEARANCE



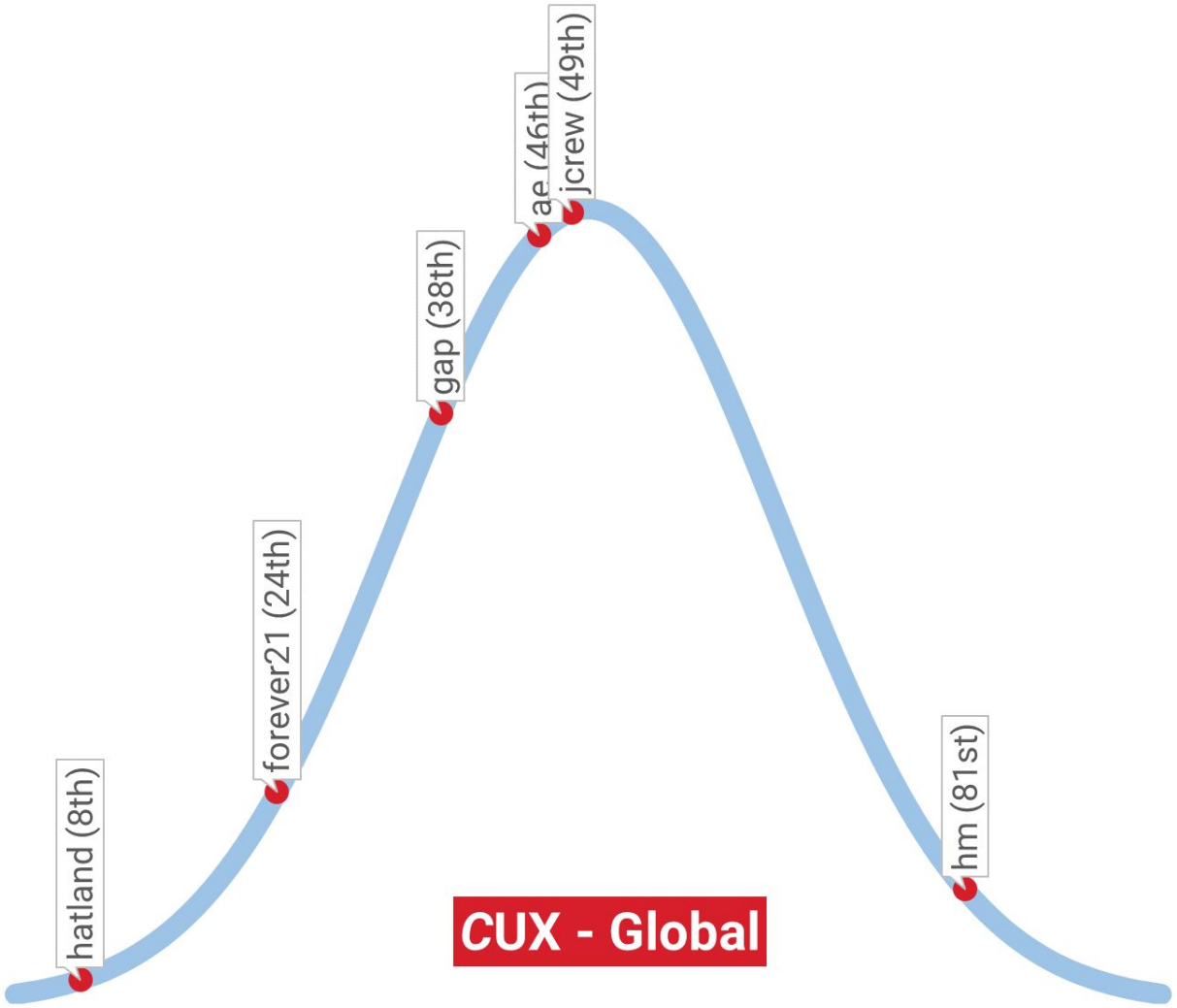
CUX - USABILITY

CUX - CREDIBILITY

CUX - LOYALTY

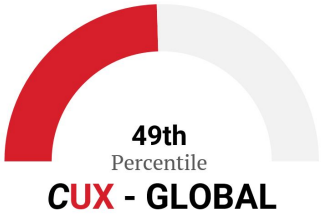
CUX - CLARITY

CUX - Global

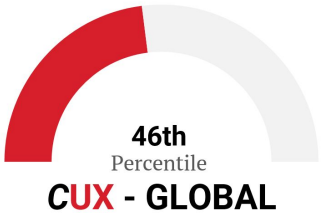

hatland (8th)
forever21 (24th)
gap (38th)
ae (46th)
jcrew (49th)
hm (81st)
CUX - Global

81st
Percentile
CUX - GLOBAL

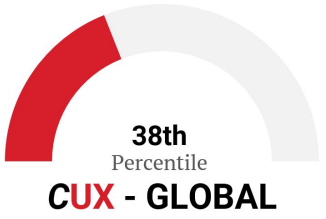
H&M


49th
Percentile
CUX - GLOBAL

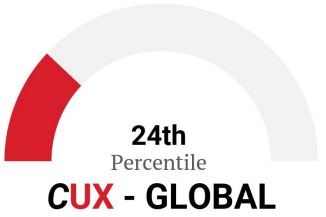
J.CREW


46th
Percentile
CUX - GLOBAL

AMERICAN EAGLE
OUTFITTERS
ae.com


38th
Percentile
CUX - GLOBAL

GAP


24th
Percentile
CUX - GLOBAL

FOREVER 21

8th
Percentile
CUX - GLOBAL

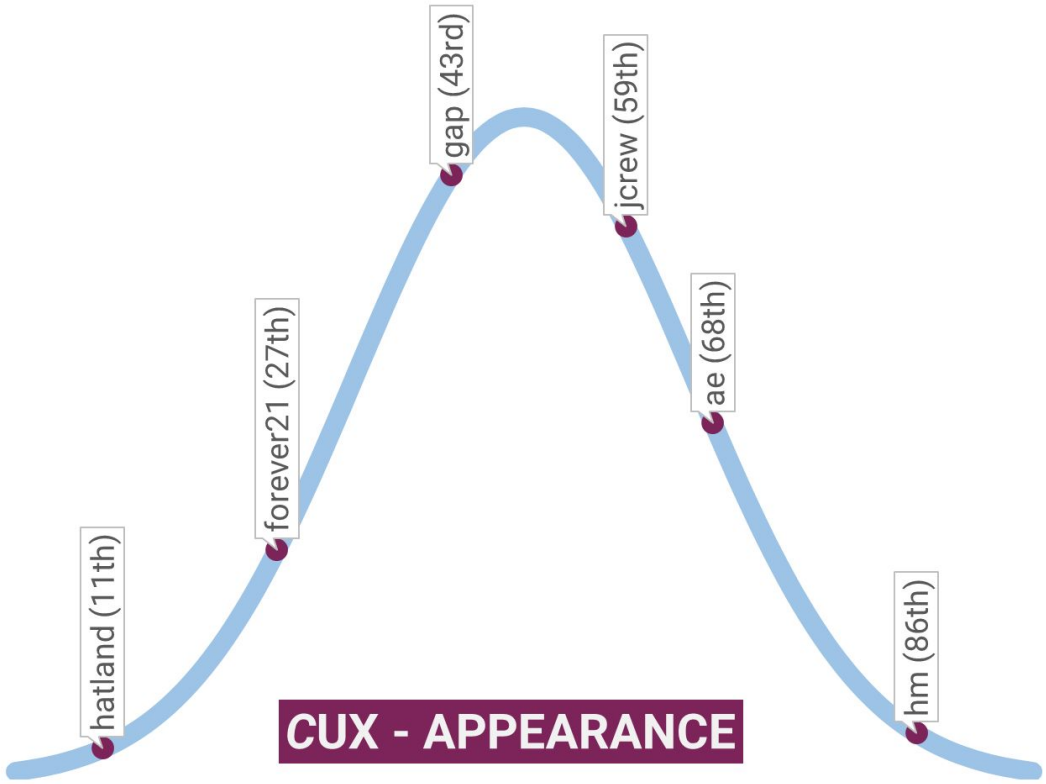
HATLAND.com

CUX - Appearance

Survey questions (likert-scale)

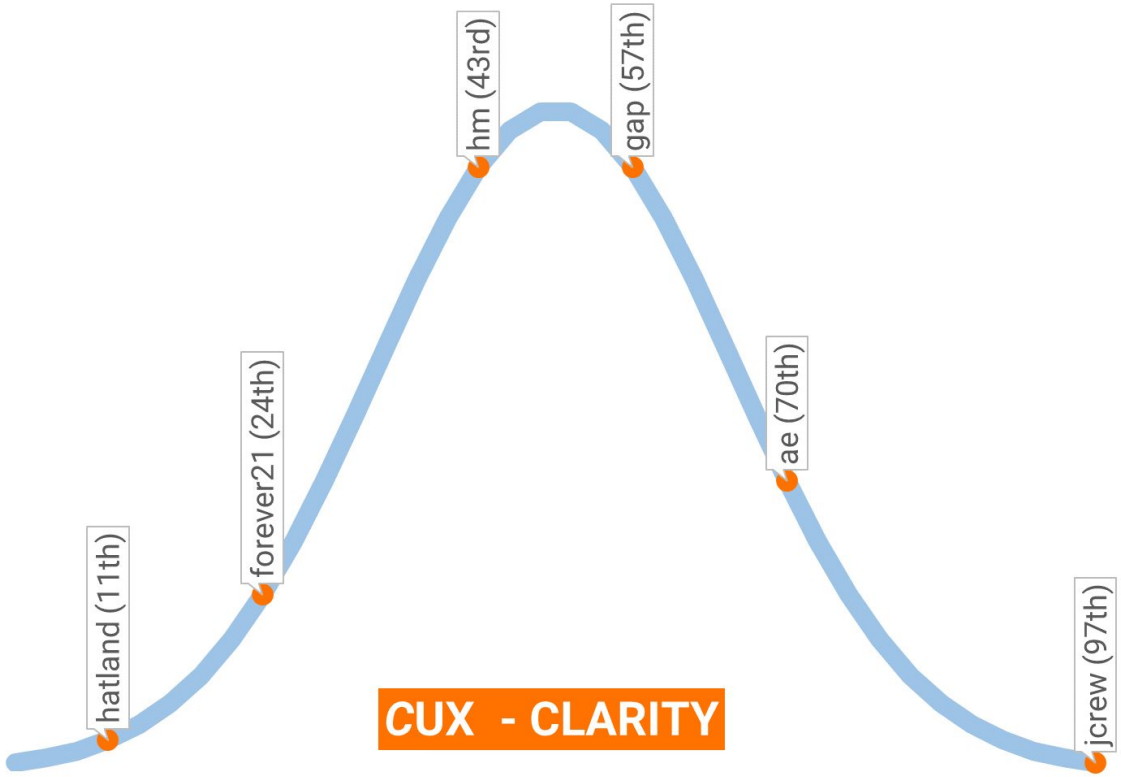
I found the website to be attractive

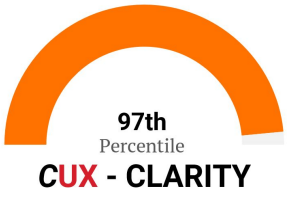
The website has a clean and simple presentation

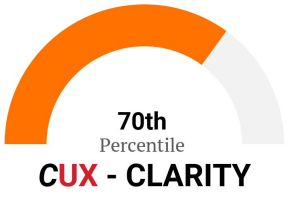


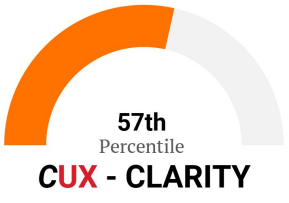
CUX - Clarity

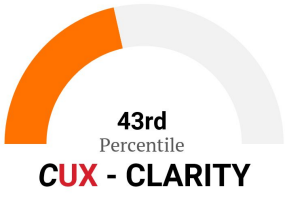
Survey question (likert-scale):
I clearly understand why I should buy from this website instead of its competitors.

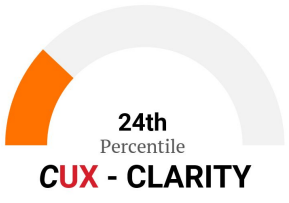










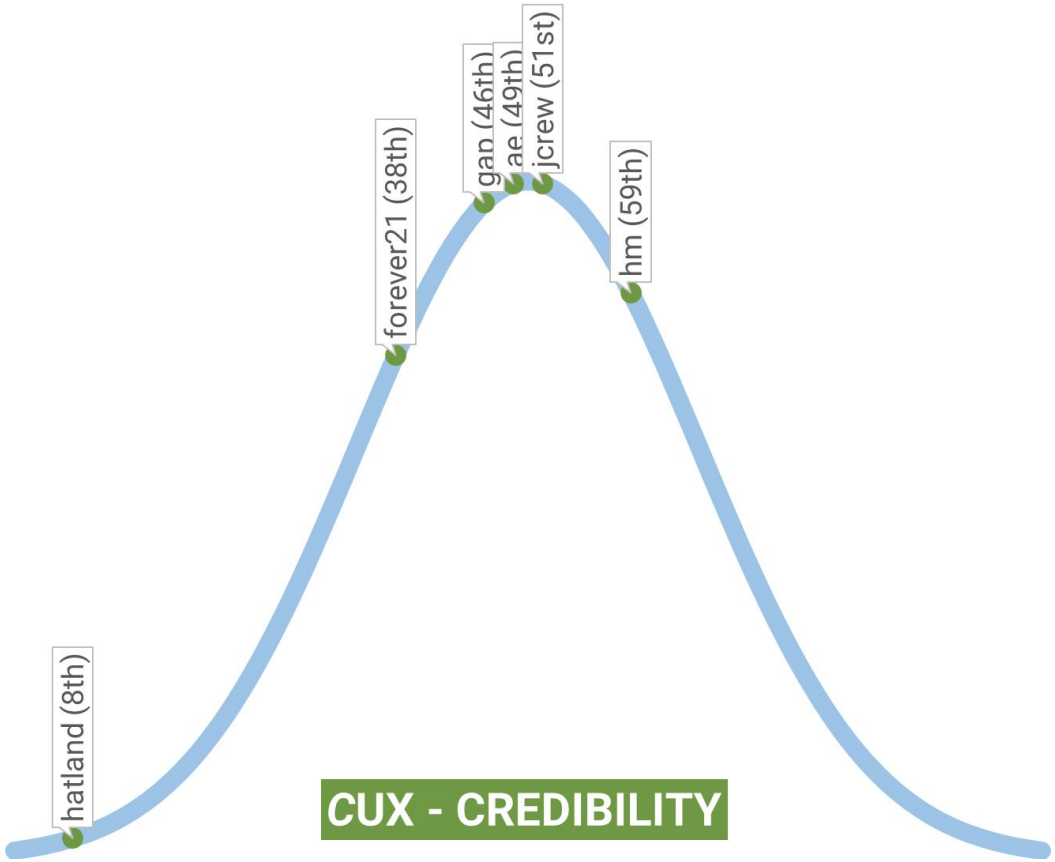


CUX - Credibility

Survey questions (likert-scale):

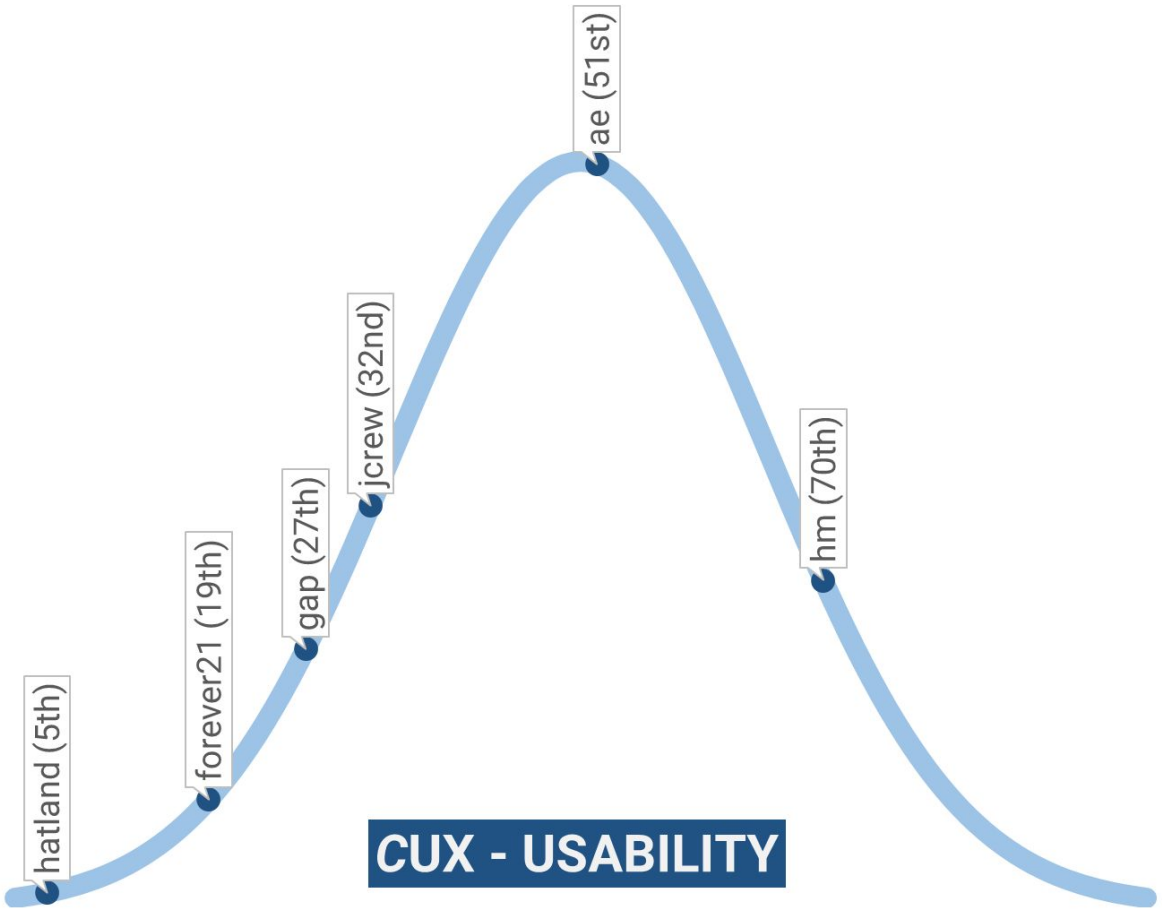
I feel comfortable purchasing from this website.

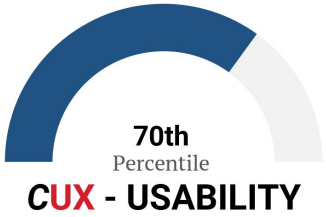
I feel confident conducting business with this website.

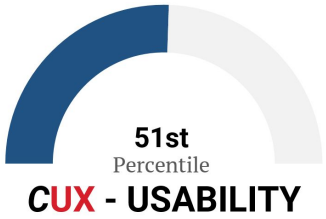


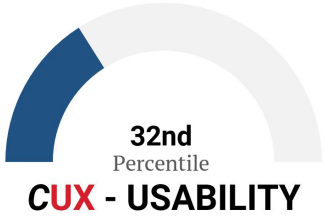
CUX - Usability

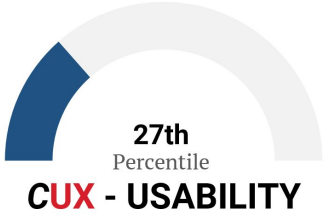
Survey questions (likert-scale):
This website is easy to use.
It is easy to navigate within the website.

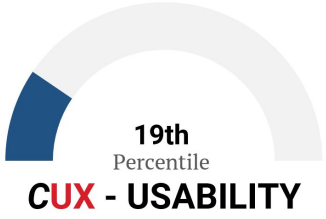


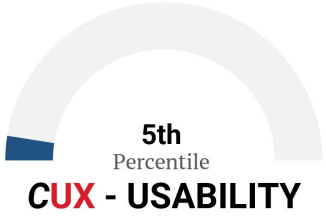








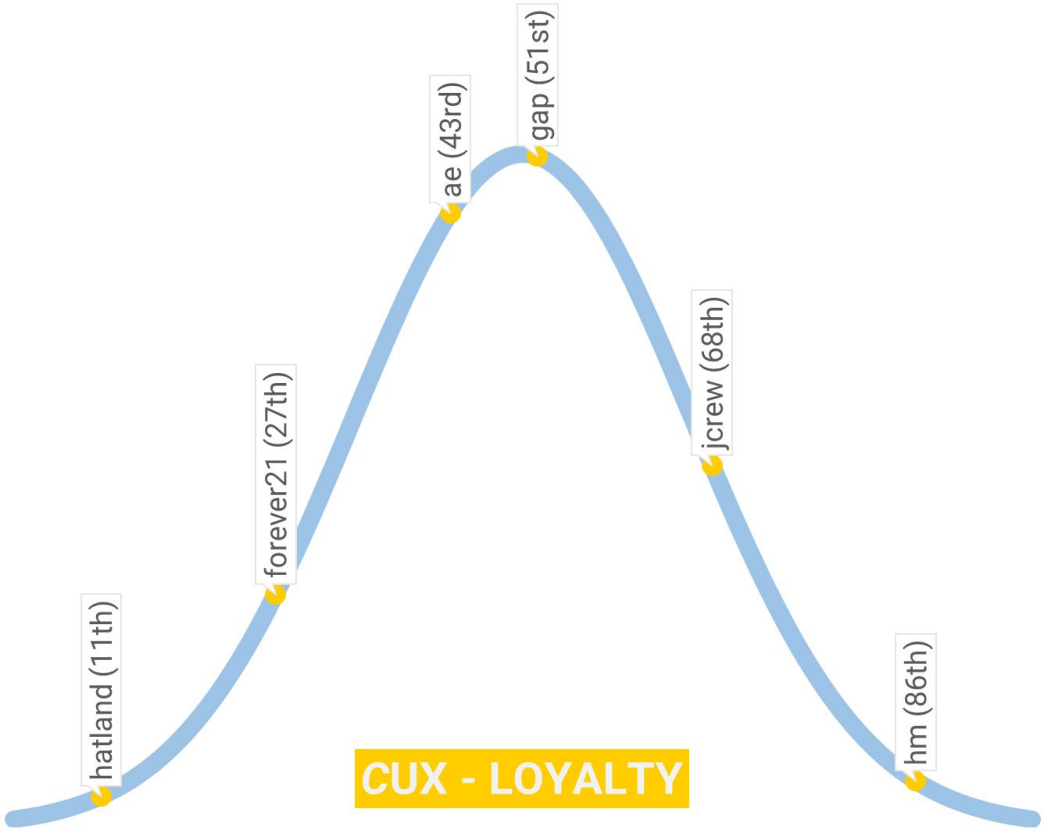


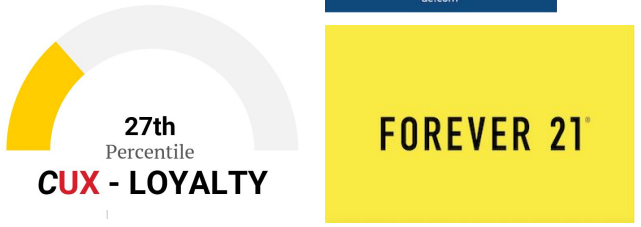


CUX - Loyalty

Survey questions (likert-scale):

How likely are you to recommend this website to a friend or colleague?
I will likely visit this website in the future.



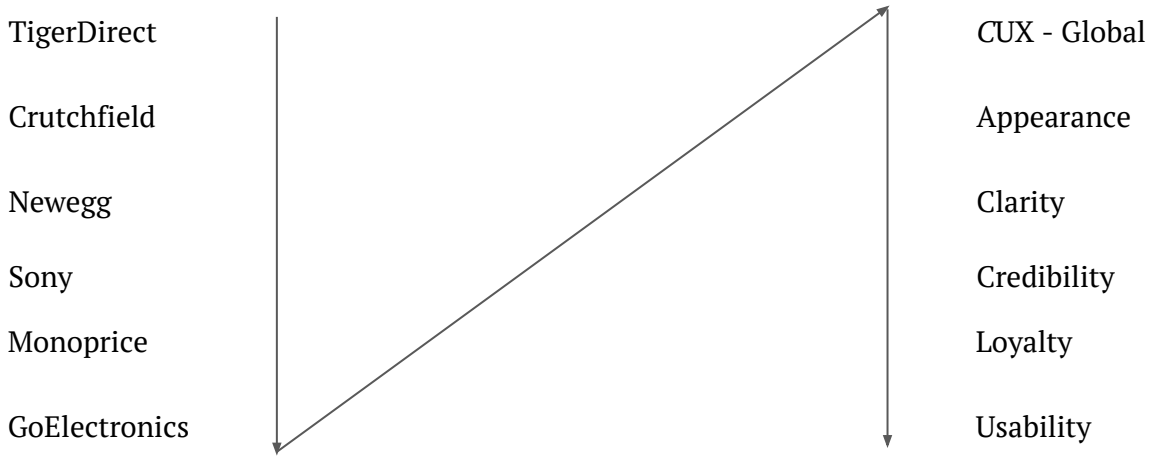


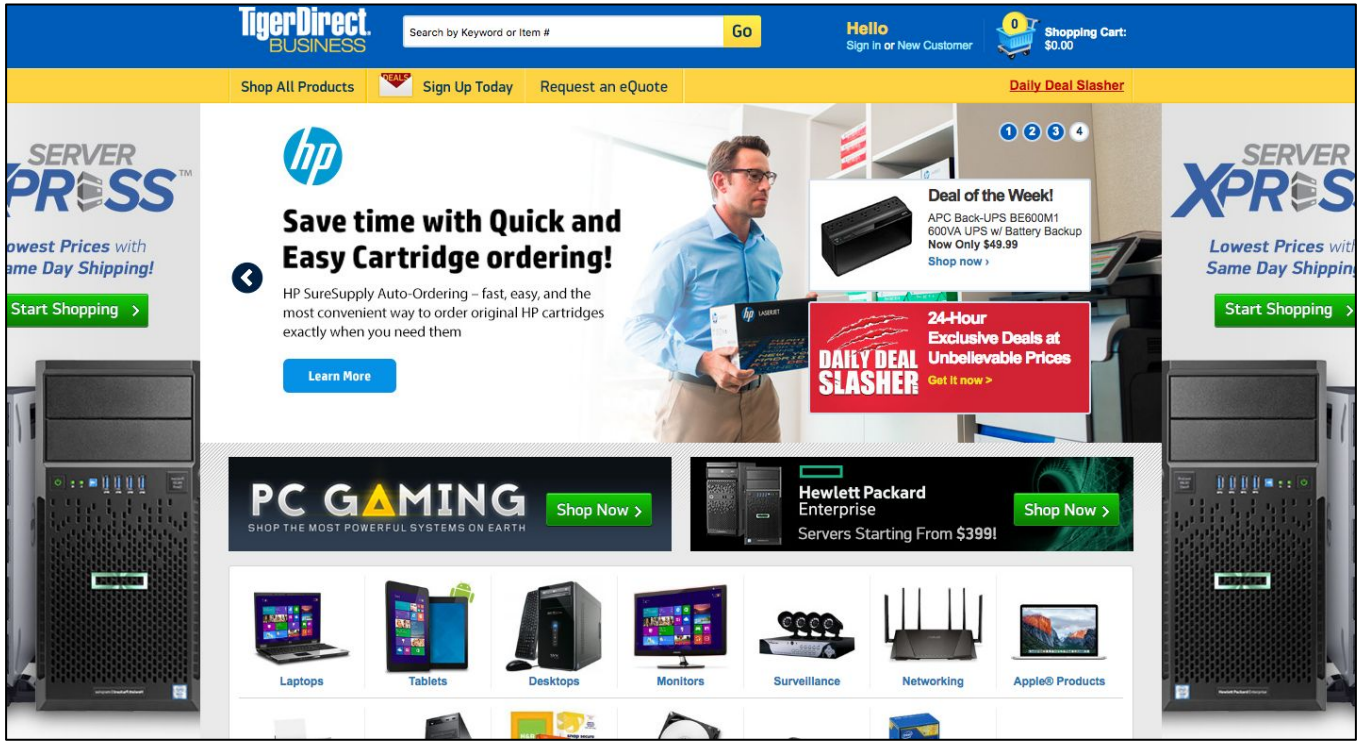
Ecommerce subvertical »
Consumer Electronics

Electronics Contents

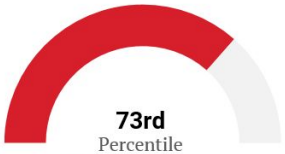
Standalone website rank profiles

Competitive benchmarking per UX dimension

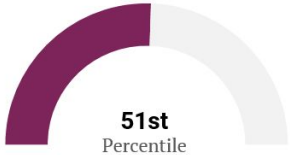




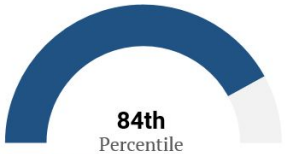
TigerDirect.com



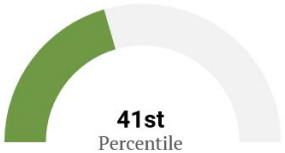
CUX - GLOBAL



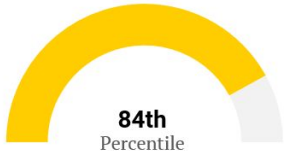
CUX - APPEARANCE



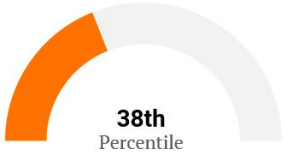
CUX - USABILITY



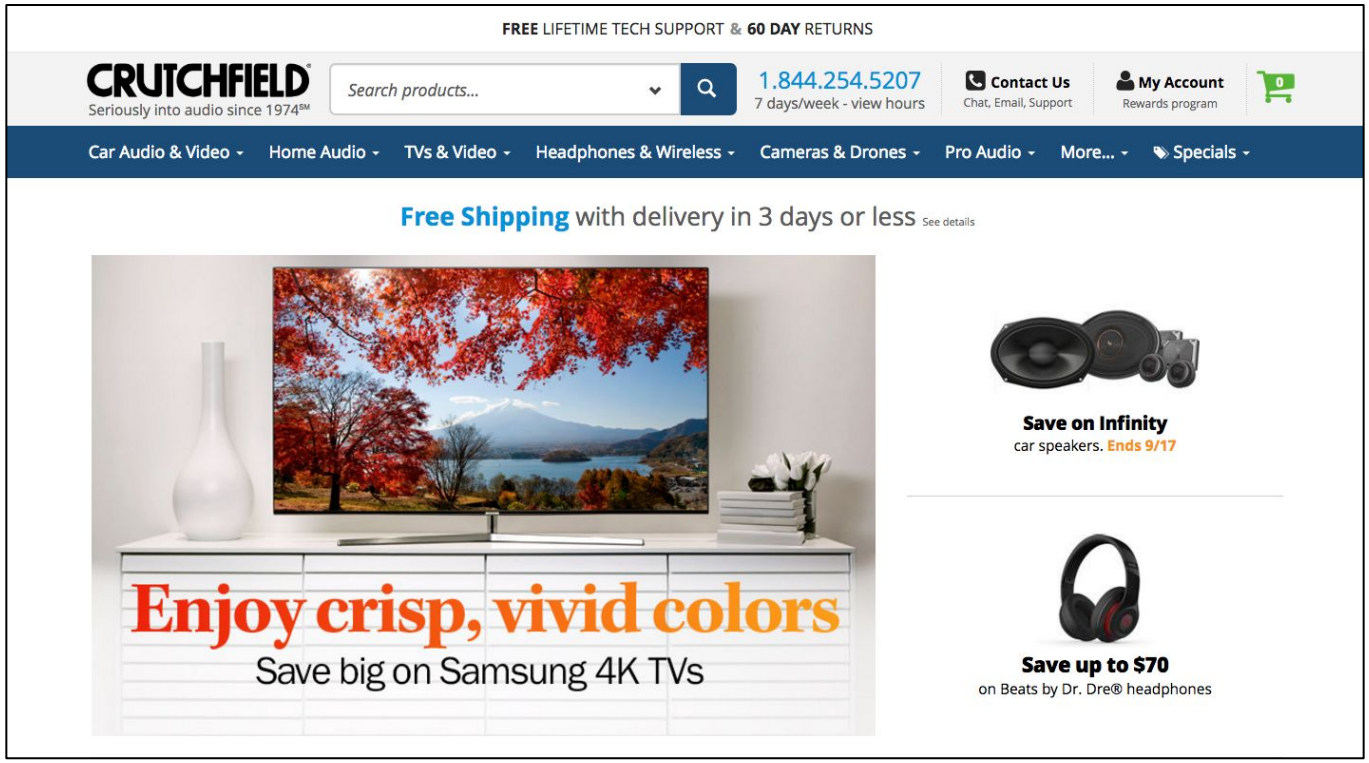
CUX - CREDIBILITY



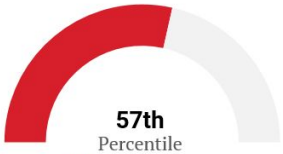
CUX - LOYALTY



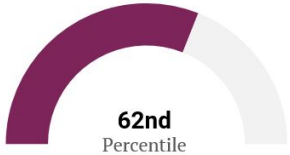
CUX - CLARITY



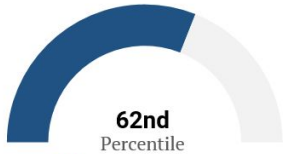
CRUTCHFIELD
Trusted since 1974SM



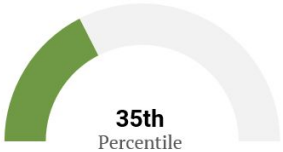
CUX - GLOBAL



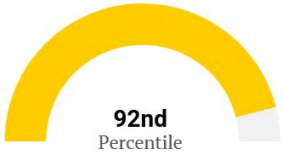
CUX - APPEARANCE



CUX - USABILITY

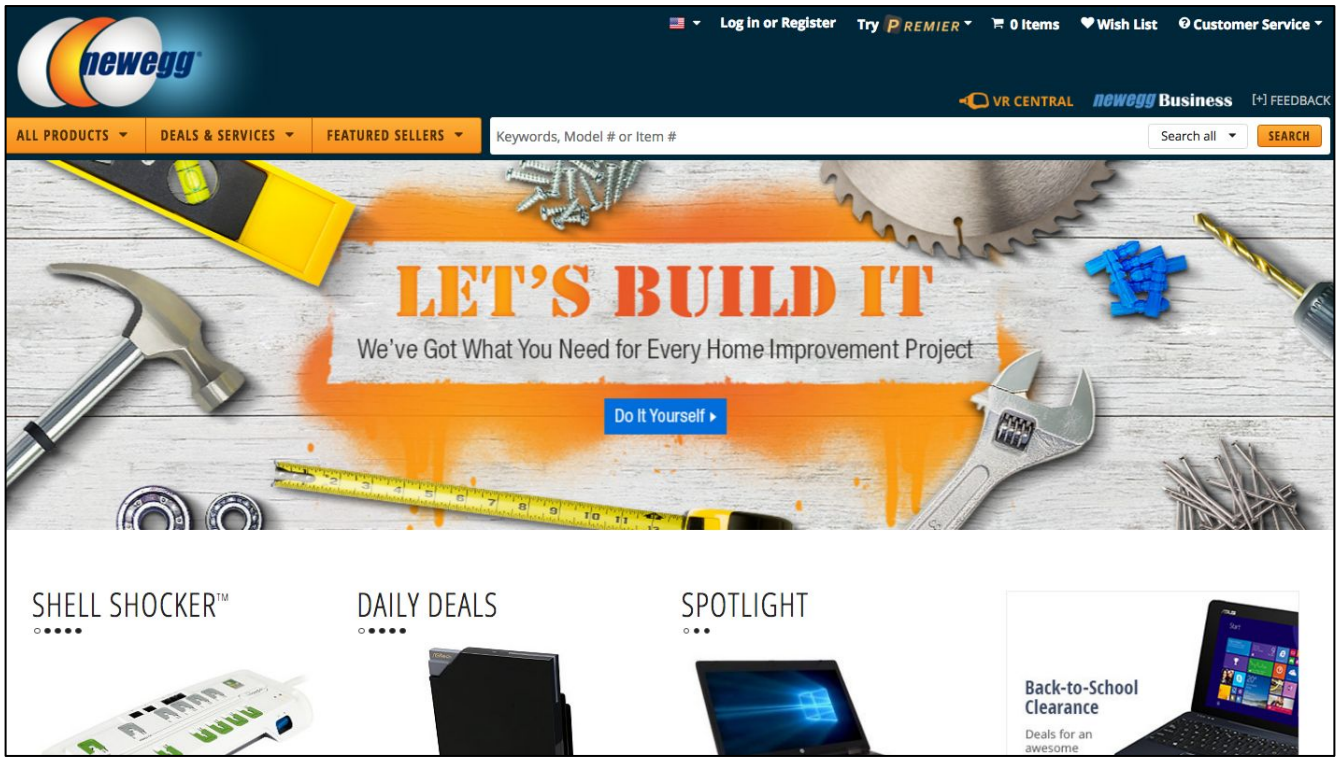


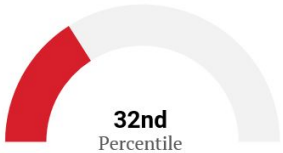
CUX - CREDIBILITY



CUX - LOYALTY

CUX - CLARITY





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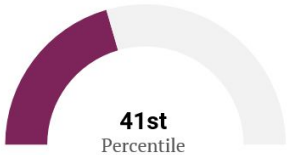

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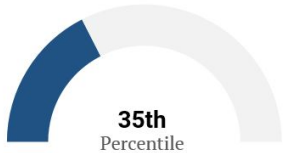
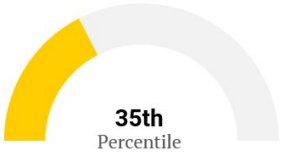


CUX - USABILITY

CUX - CREDIBILITY



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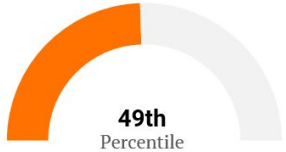

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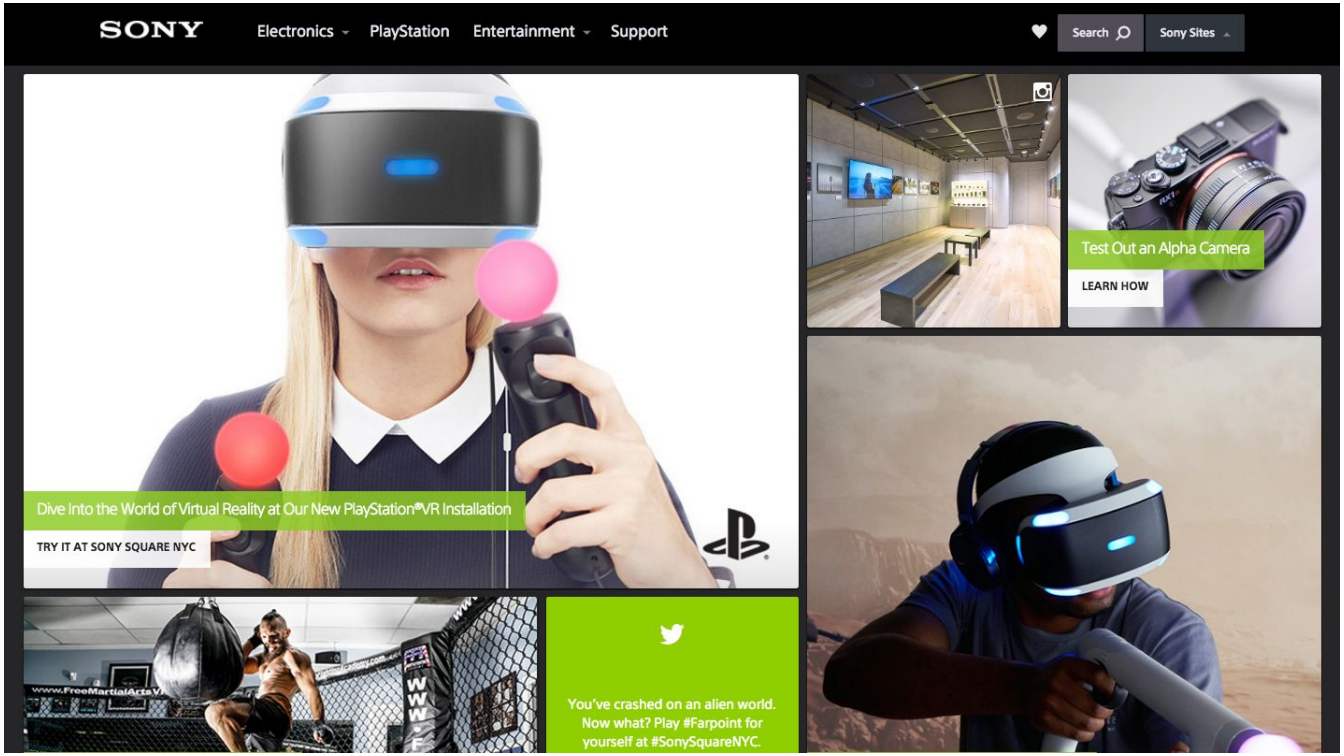
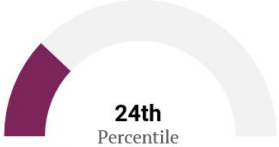


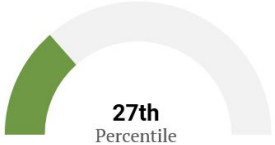
SONY

CUX - GLOBAL



CUX - APPEARANCE

CUX - USABILITY



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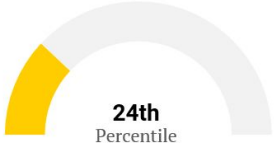

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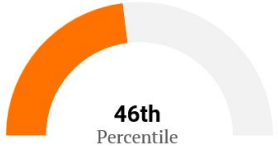

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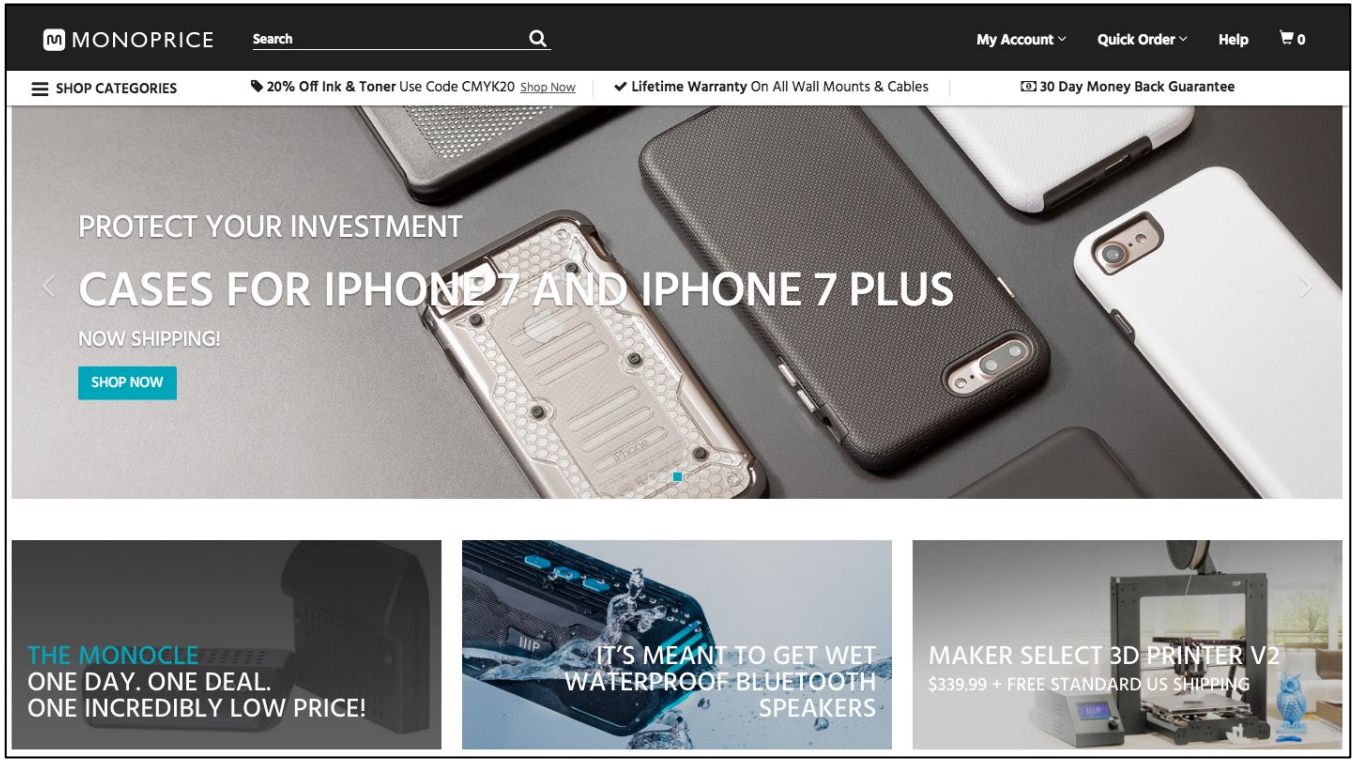

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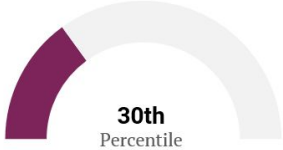

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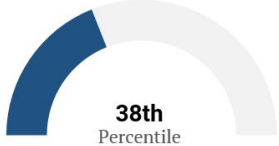

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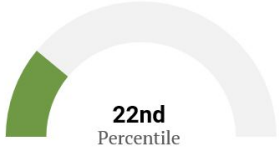

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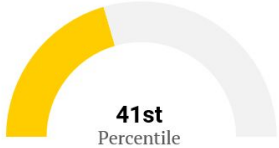

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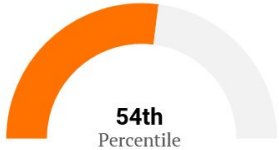
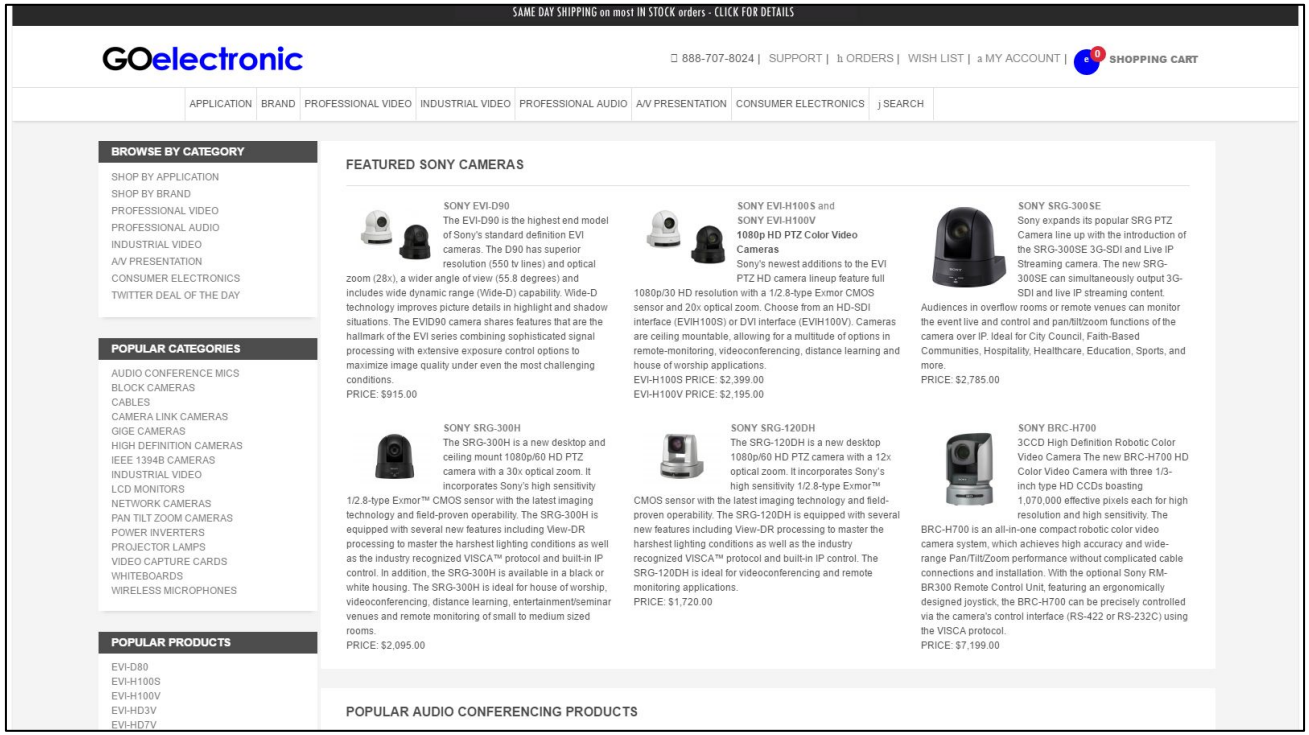
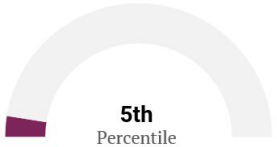
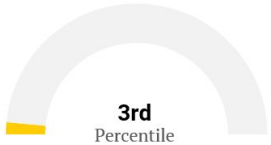


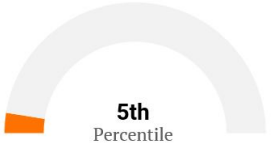
CUX - CLARITY



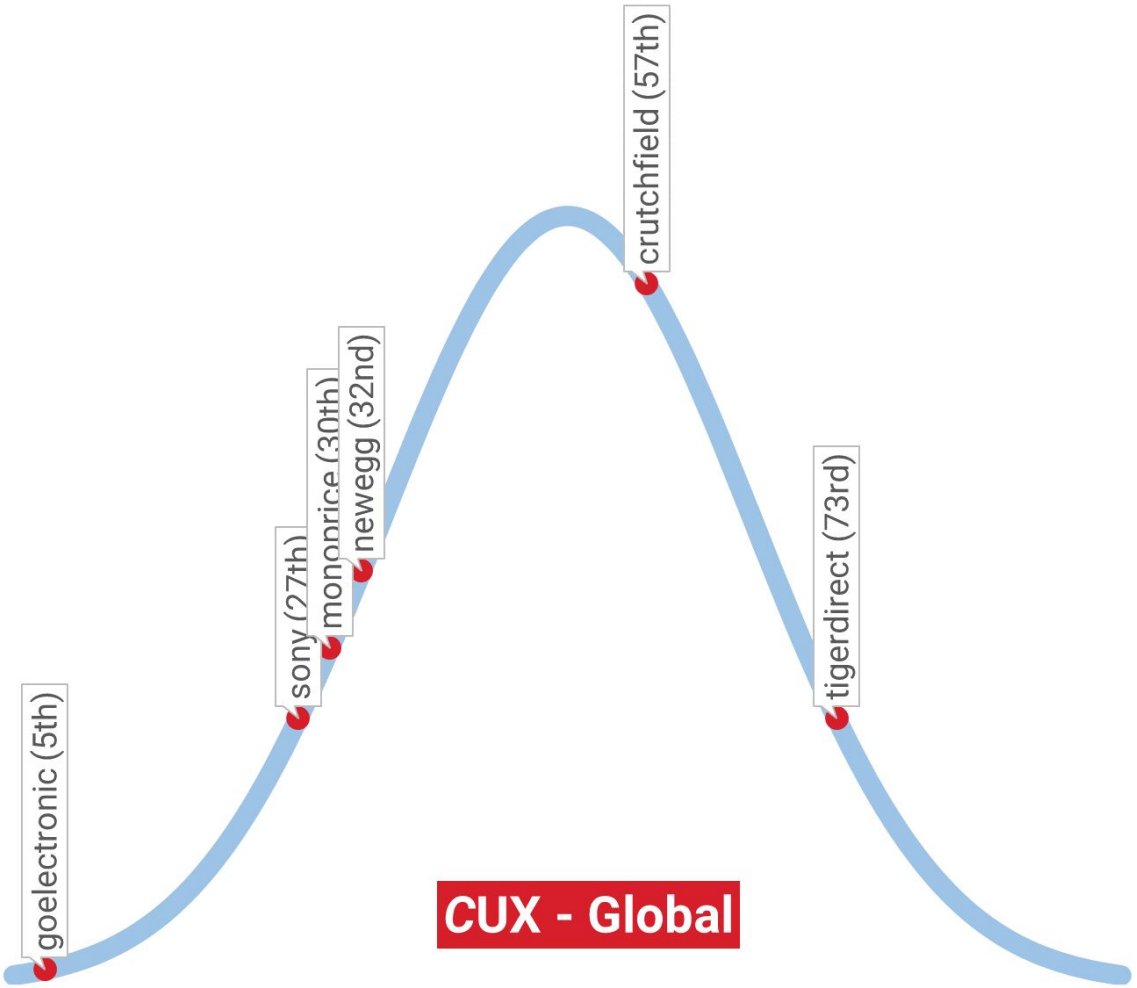
GOelectronic

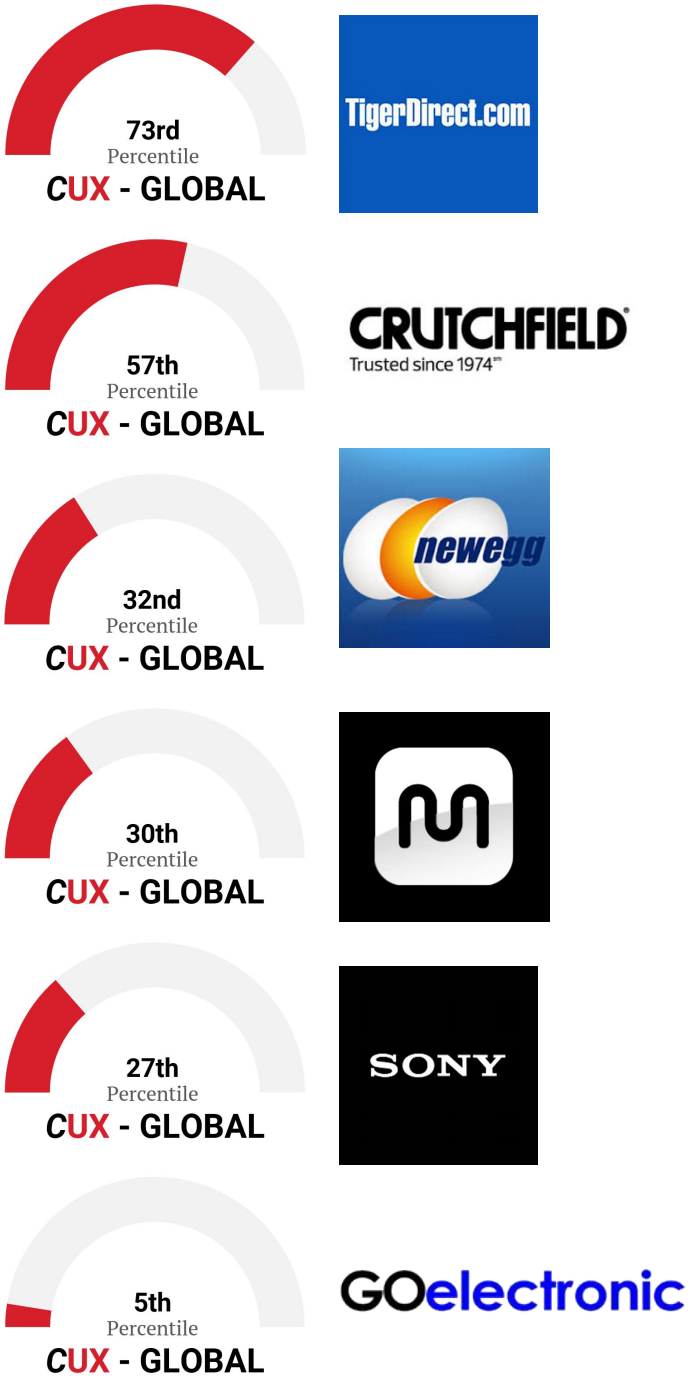






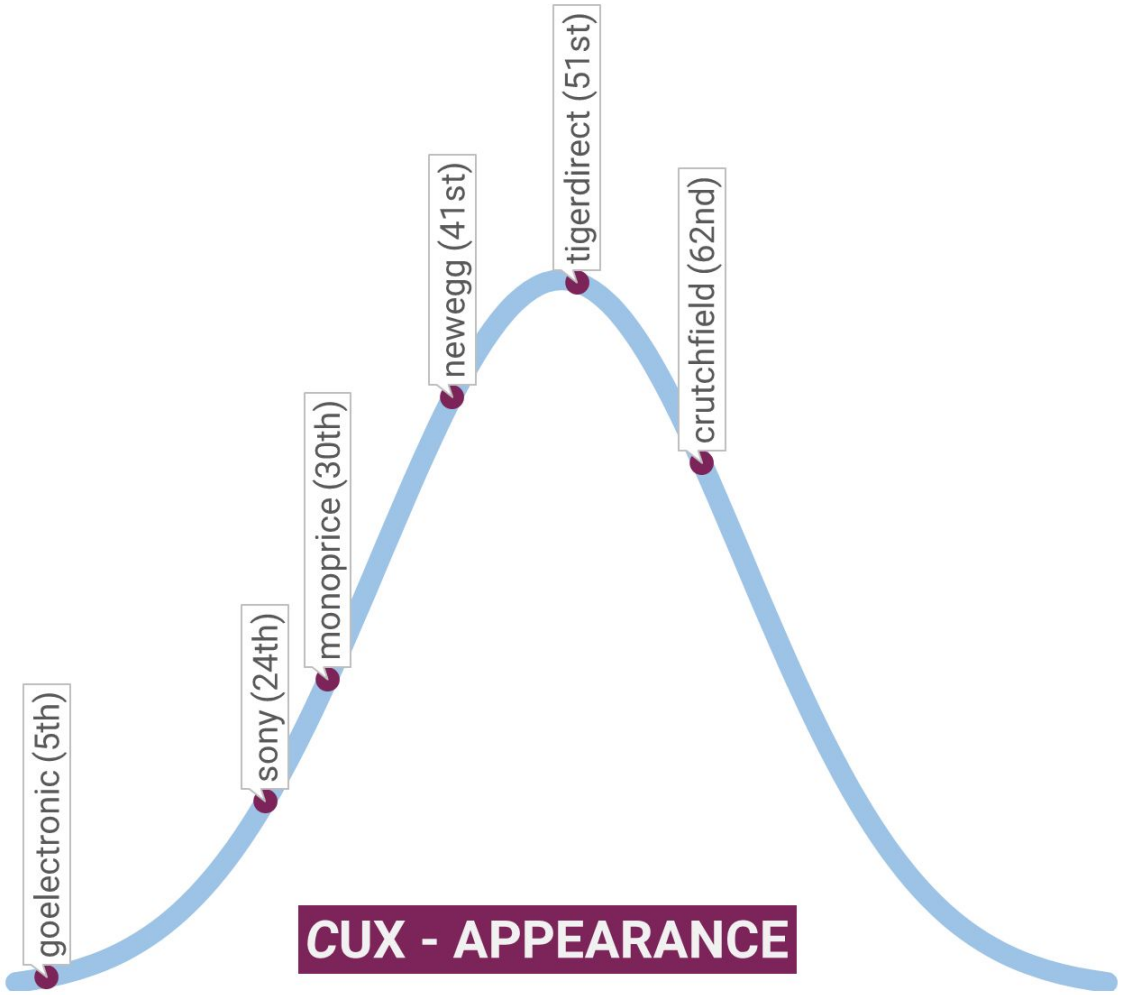
CUX - Global

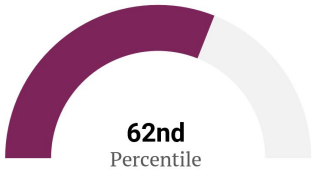

goelectronic (5th)
sony (27th)
monoprice (30th)
newegg (32nd)
crutchfield (57th)
tigerdirect (73rd)
CUX - Global


73rd
Percentile
CUX - GLOBAL
TigerDirect.com
57th
Percentile
CUX - GLOBAL
CRUTCHFIELD
Trusted since 1974
32nd
Percentile
CUX - GLOBAL
newegg
30th
Percentile
CUX - GLOBAL
27th
Percentile
CUX - GLOBAL
SONY
5th
Percentile
CUX - GLOBAL
GOelectronic

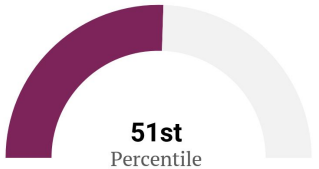
CUX - Appearance

Survey questions (likert-scale):
I found the website to be attractive
The website has a clean and simple presentation

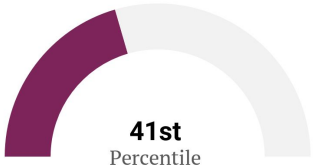




CRUTCHFIELD
Trusted since 1974



TigerDirect.com



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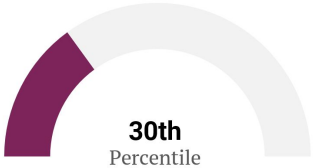

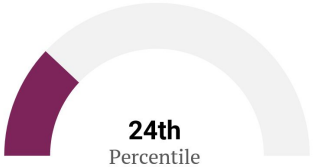

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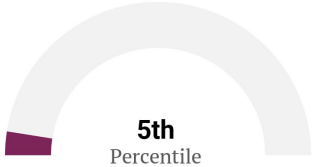
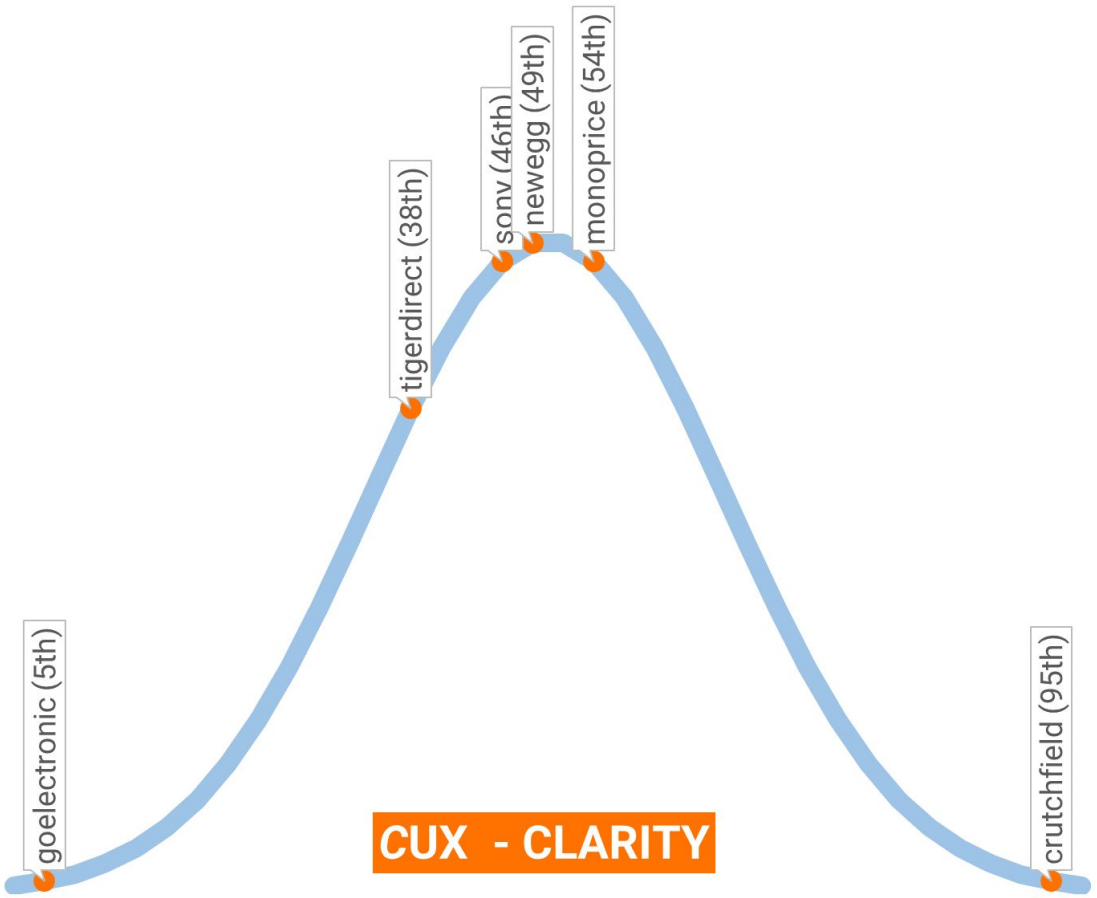
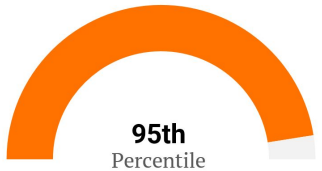


GOelectronic

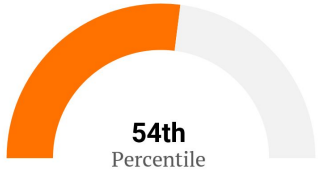
CUX - Clarity

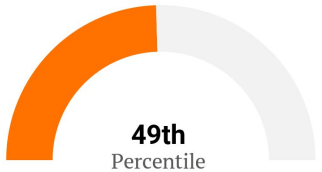
Survey question (likert-scale):
I clearly understand why I should buy from this website instead of its competitors.

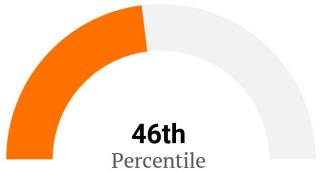


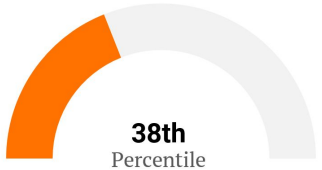


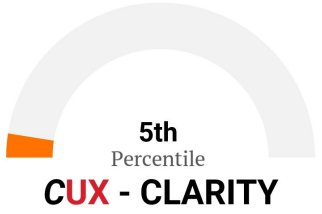
CRUTCHFIELD
Trusted since 1974











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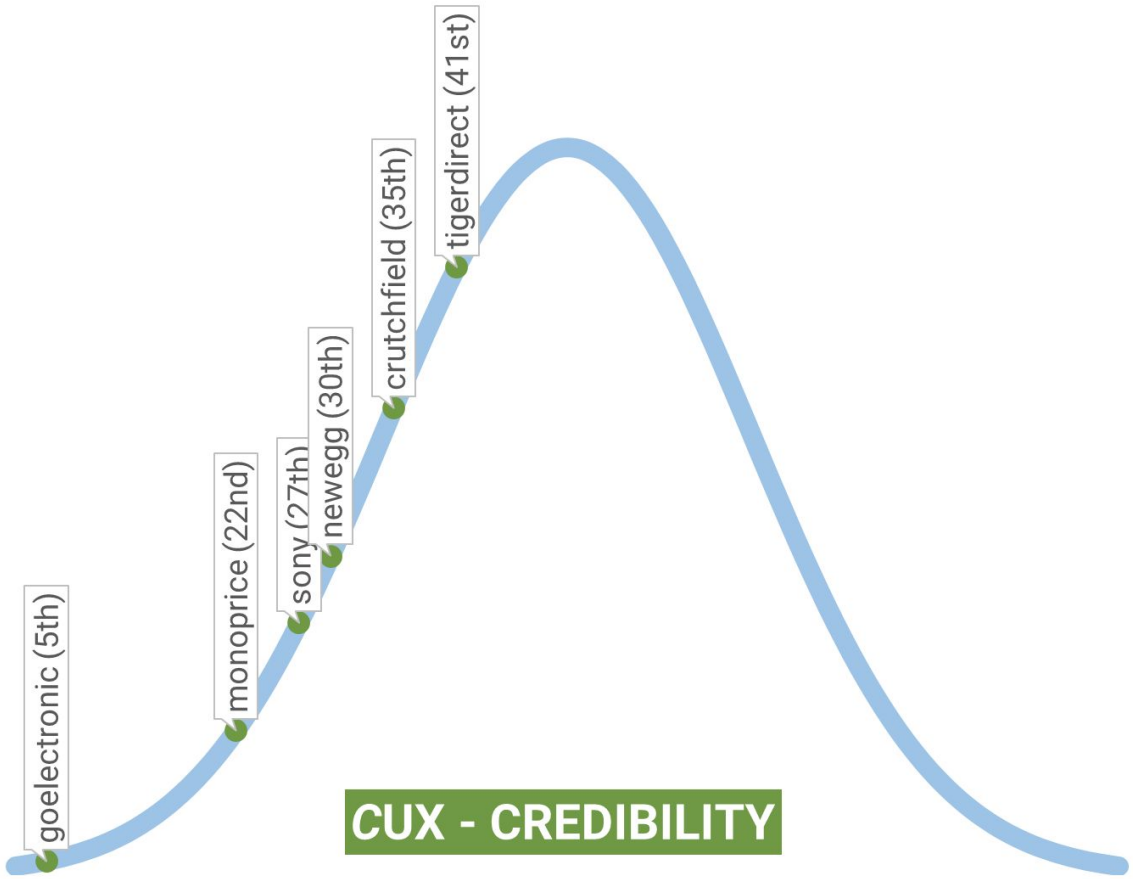
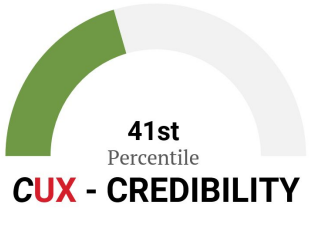
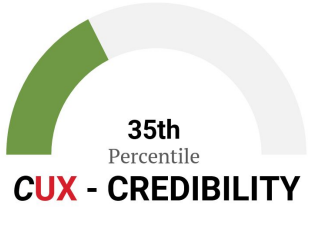
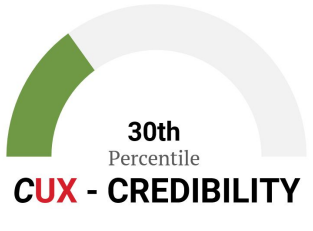
CUX - Credibility

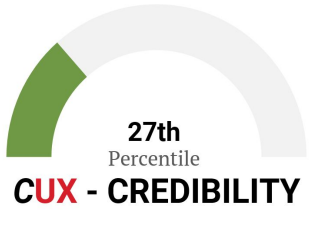
Survey questions (likert-scale):
I feel comfortable purchasing from this website.
I feel confident conducting business with this website.

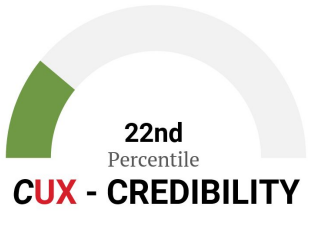


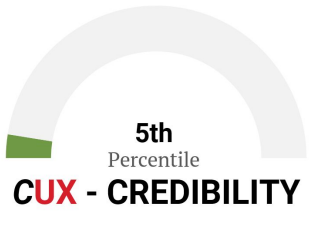






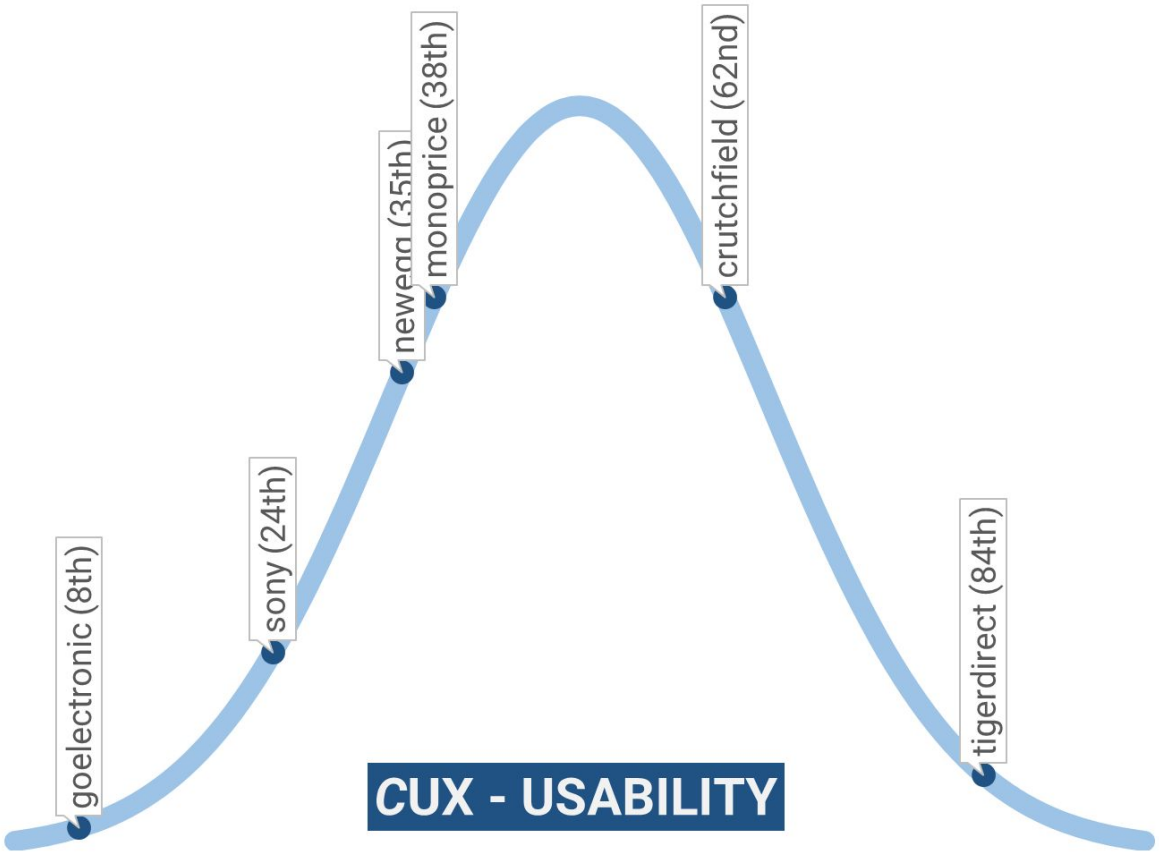


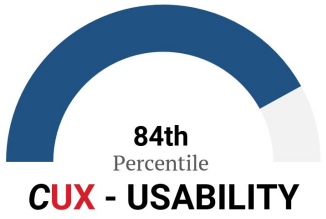


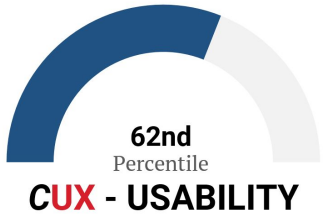


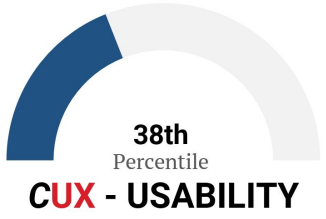
CUX - Usability

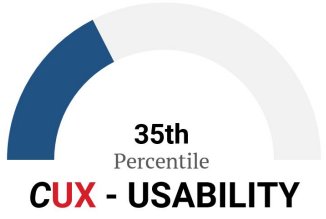
Survey questions (likert-scale):
This website is easy to use.
It is easy to navigate within the website.

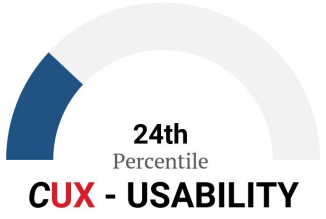


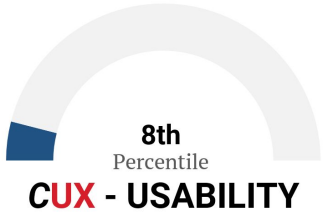






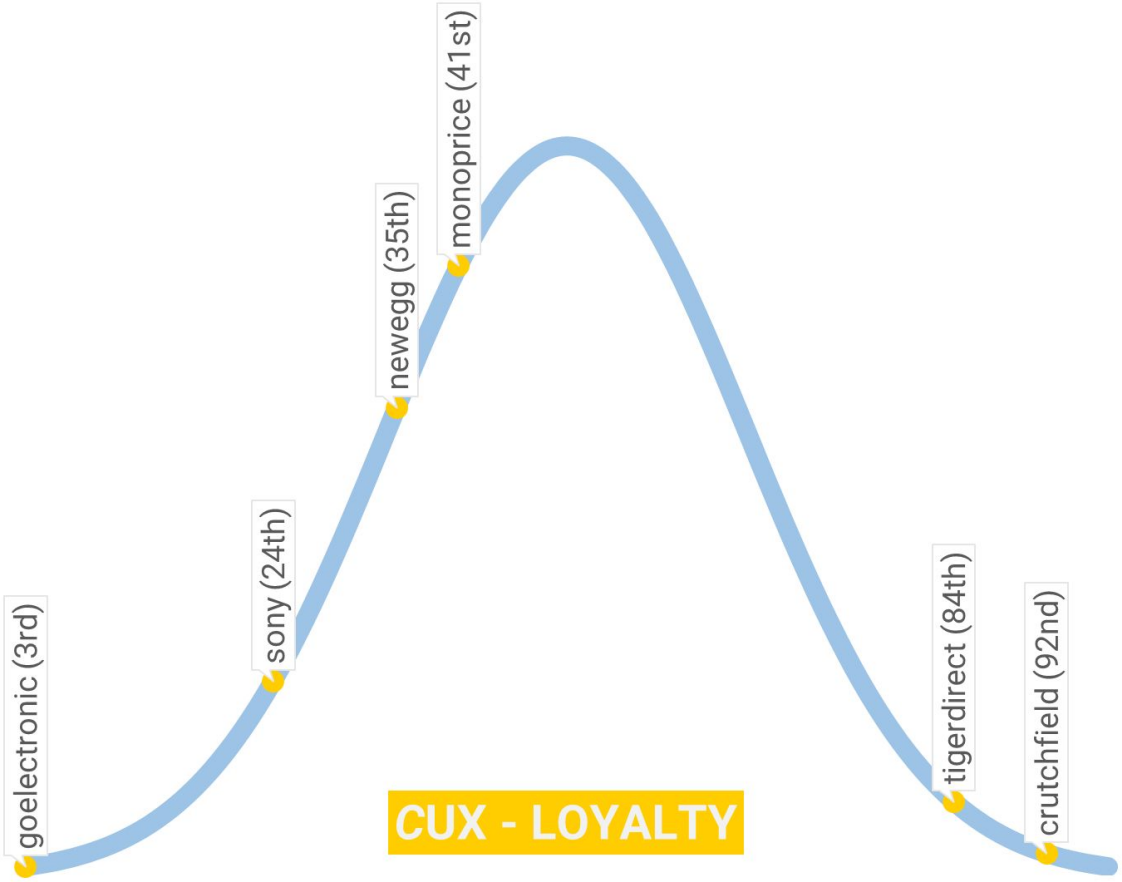






CUX - Loyalty

Survey questions (likert-scale):
How likely are you to recommend this website to a friend or colleague?
I will likely visit this website in the future.



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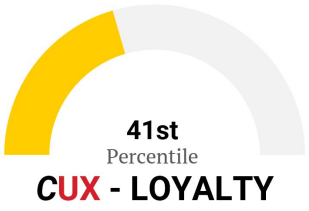
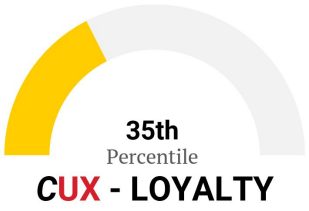
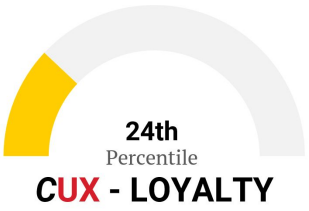




newegg



SONY

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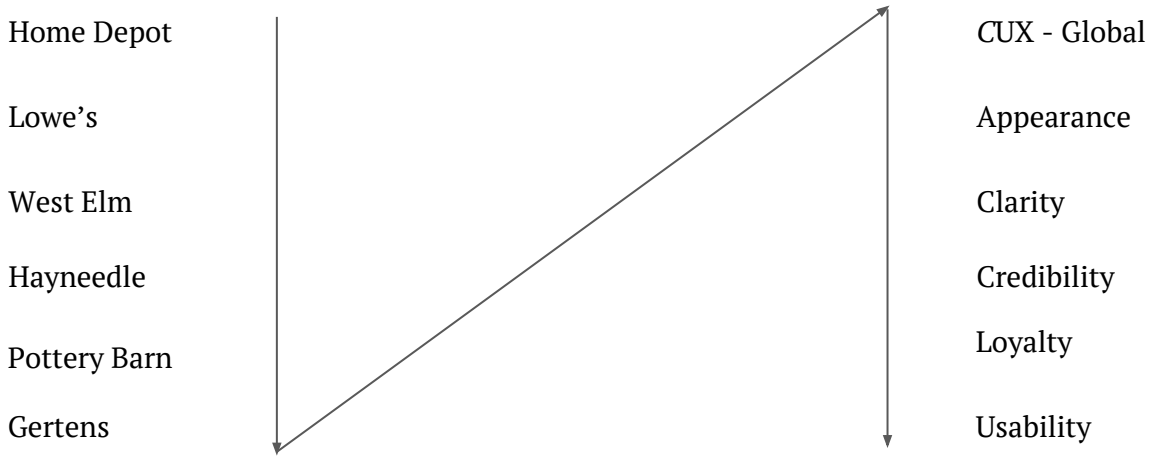
Ecommerce subvertical »

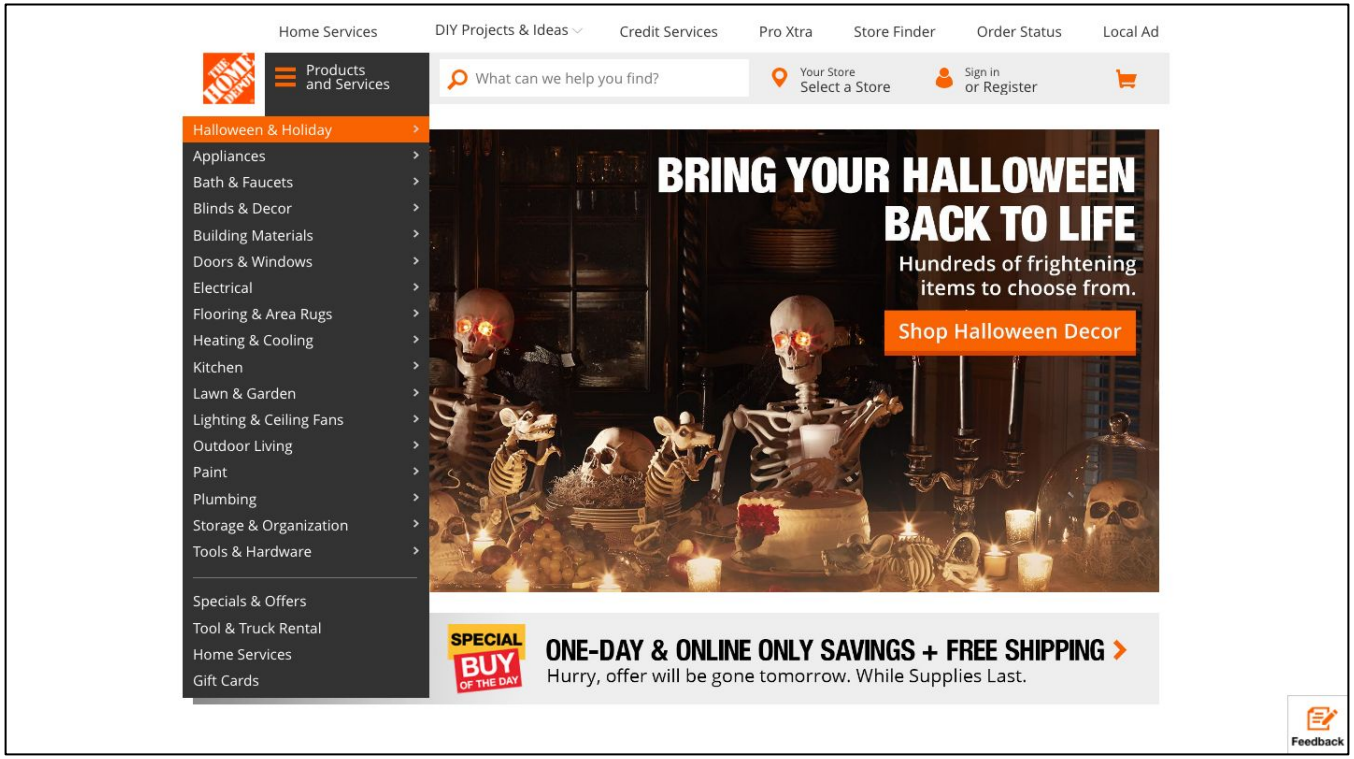
Home & Garden

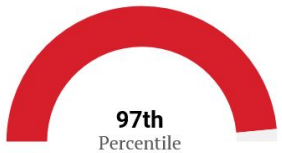
Home & Garden Contents

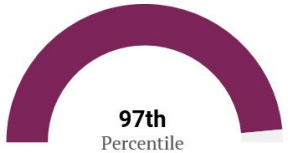
Standalone website rank profiles

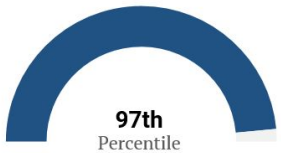
Competitive benchmarking per UX dimension




Home Services
DIY Projects & Ideas
Credit Services
Pro Xtra
Store Finder
Order Status
Local Ad
Products and Services
What can we help you find?
Your Store Select a Store
Sign in or Register
Halloween & Holiday
Appliances
Bath & Faucets
Blinds & Decor
Building Materials
Doors & Windows
Electrical
Flooring & Area Rugs
Heating & Cooling
Kitchen
Lawn & Garden
Lighting & Ceiling Fans
Outdoor Living
Paint
Plumbing
Storage & Organization
Tools & Hardware
Specials & Offers
Tool & Truck Rental
Home Services
Gift Cards
BRING YOUR HALLOWEEN BACK TO LIFE
Hundreds of frightening items to choose from.
Shop Halloween Decor
SPECIAL BUY OF THE DAY
ONE-DAY & ONLINE ONLY SAVINGS + FREE SHIPPING
Hurry, offer will be gone tomorrow. While Supplies Last.
Feedback


97th
Percentile
CUX - GLOBAL

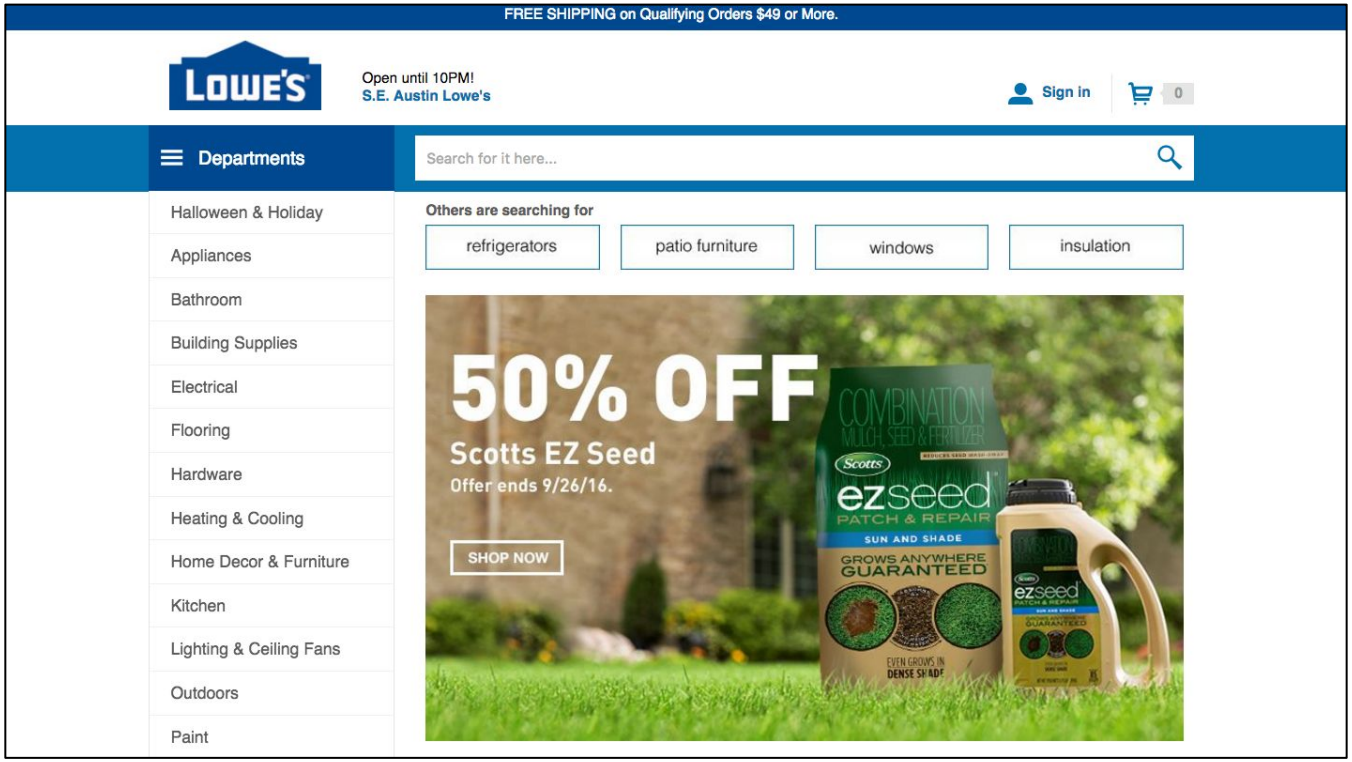

97th
Percentile
CUX - APPEARANCE

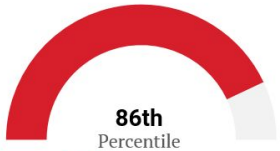

97th
Percentile
CUX - USABILITY

97th
Percentile
CUX - CREDIBILITY

97th
Percentile
CUX - LOYALTY

51st
Percentile
CUX - CLARITY





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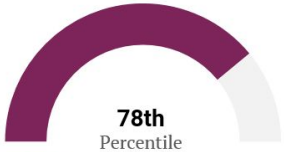
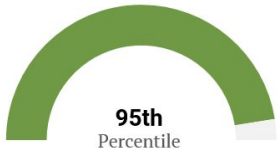
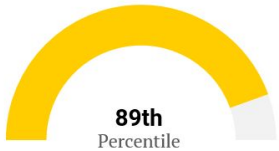


CUX - APPEARANCE

CUX - USABILITY



CUX - CREDIBILITY



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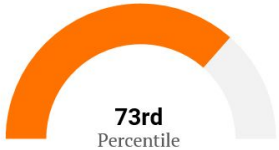

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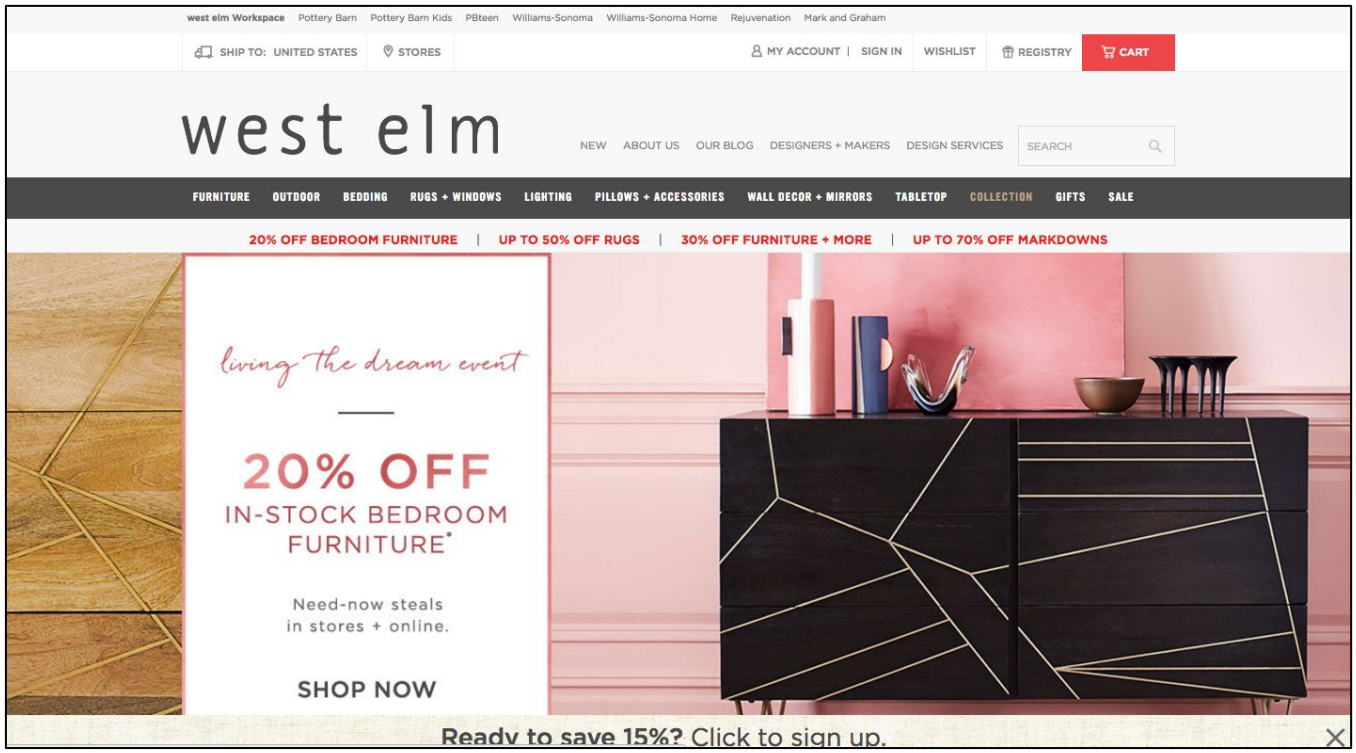

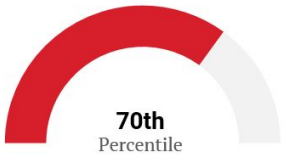

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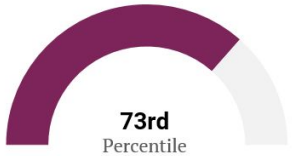

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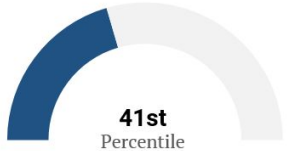
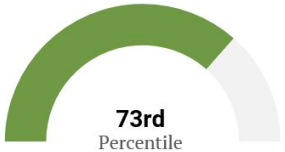


CUX - USABILITY



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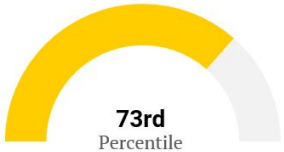

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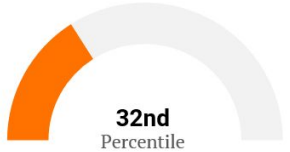

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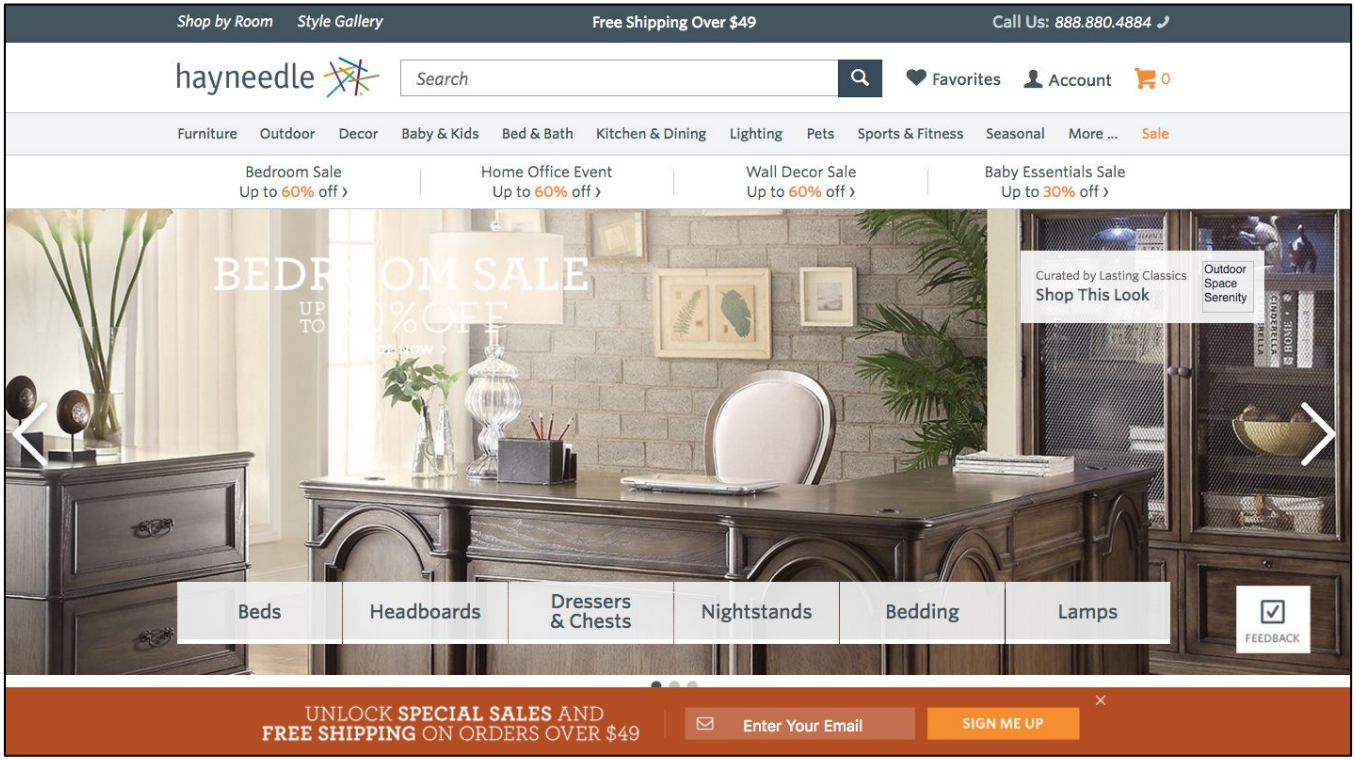

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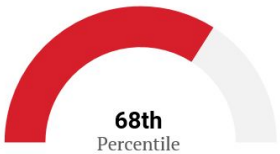
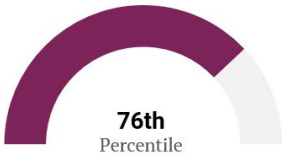


CUX - GLOBAL



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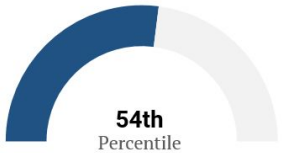

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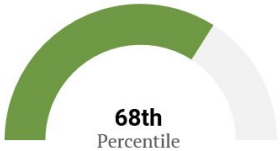

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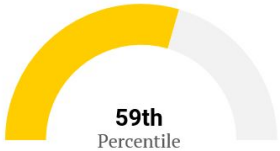

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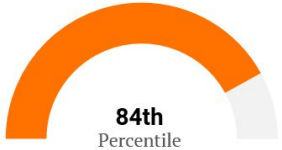

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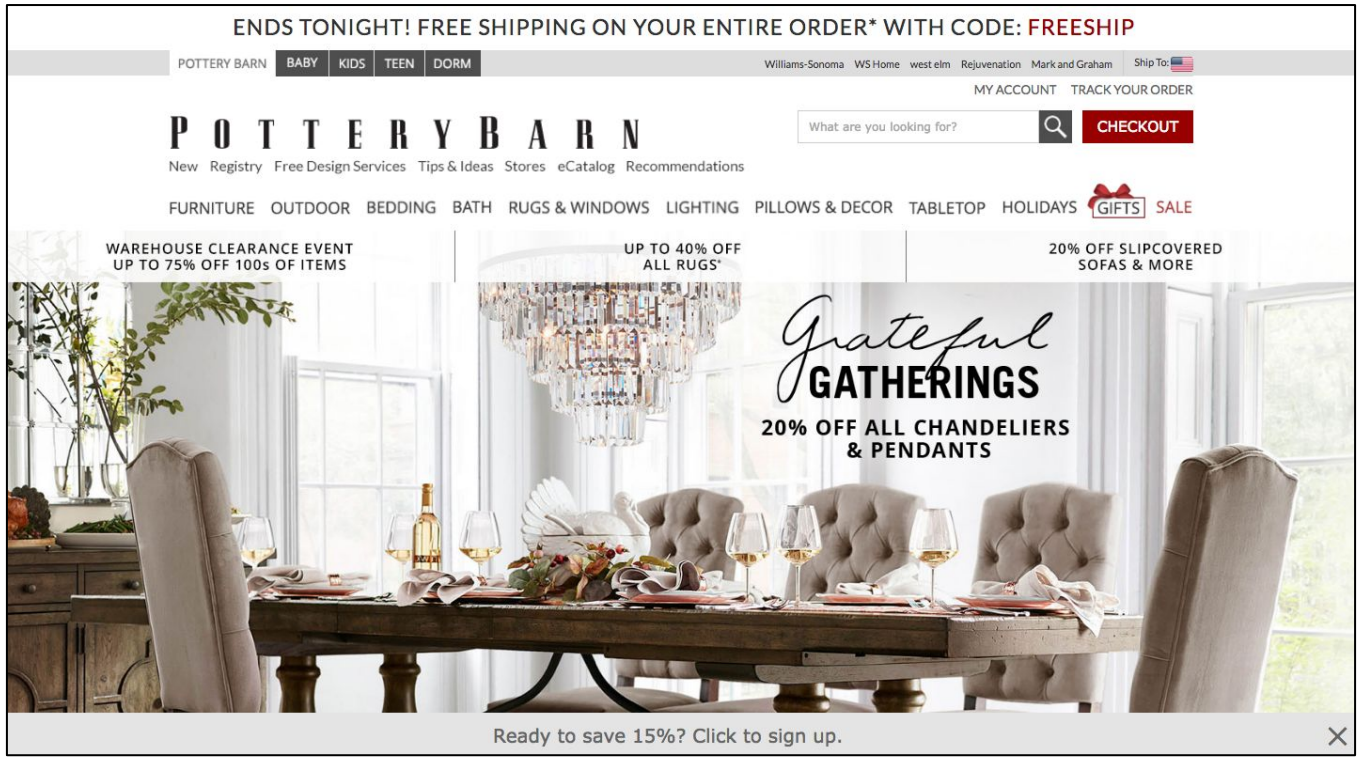
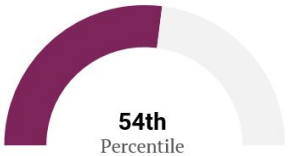


POTTERY BARN

CUX - GLOBAL



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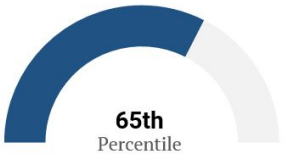
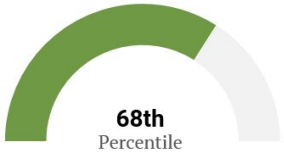
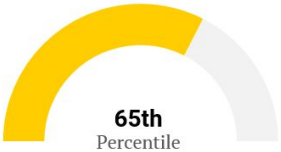


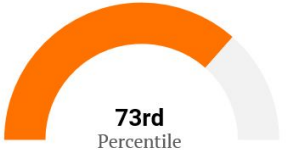
CUX - USABILITY



CUX - CREDIBILITY



CUX - LOYALTY



CUX - CLARITY

Gertens

CUX - GLOBAL

CUX - APPEARANCE

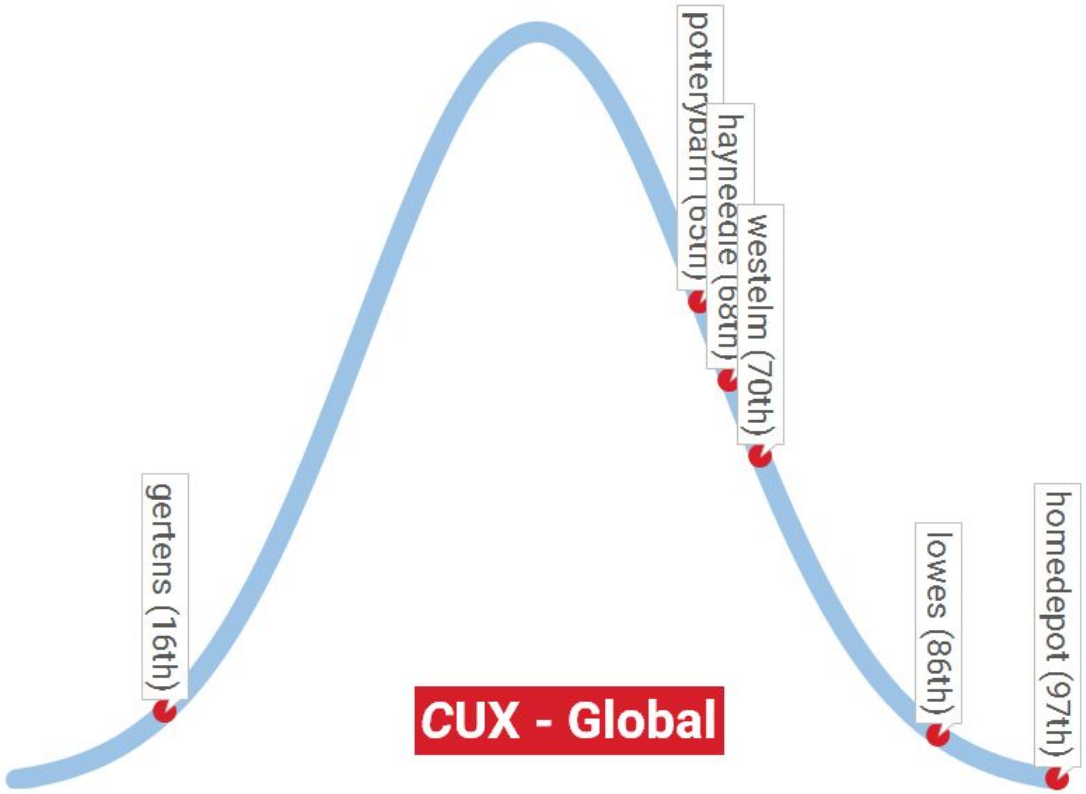
CUX - USABILITY

CUX - CREDIBILITY

CUX - LOYALTY

CUX - CLARITY

CUX - Global


gertens (16th)
potterybarn (65th)
hayneedle (68th)
westelm (70th)
lowes (86th)
homedepot (97th)
CUX - Global

97th
Percentile
CUX - GLOBAL

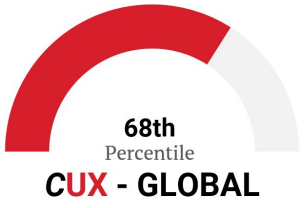
THE HOME DEPOT

86th
Percentile
CUX - GLOBAL

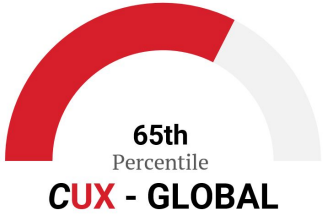
LOWE'S

70th
Percentile
CUX - GLOBAL

west elm


68th
Percentile
CUX - GLOBAL

hayneedle


65th
Percentile
CUX - GLOBAL

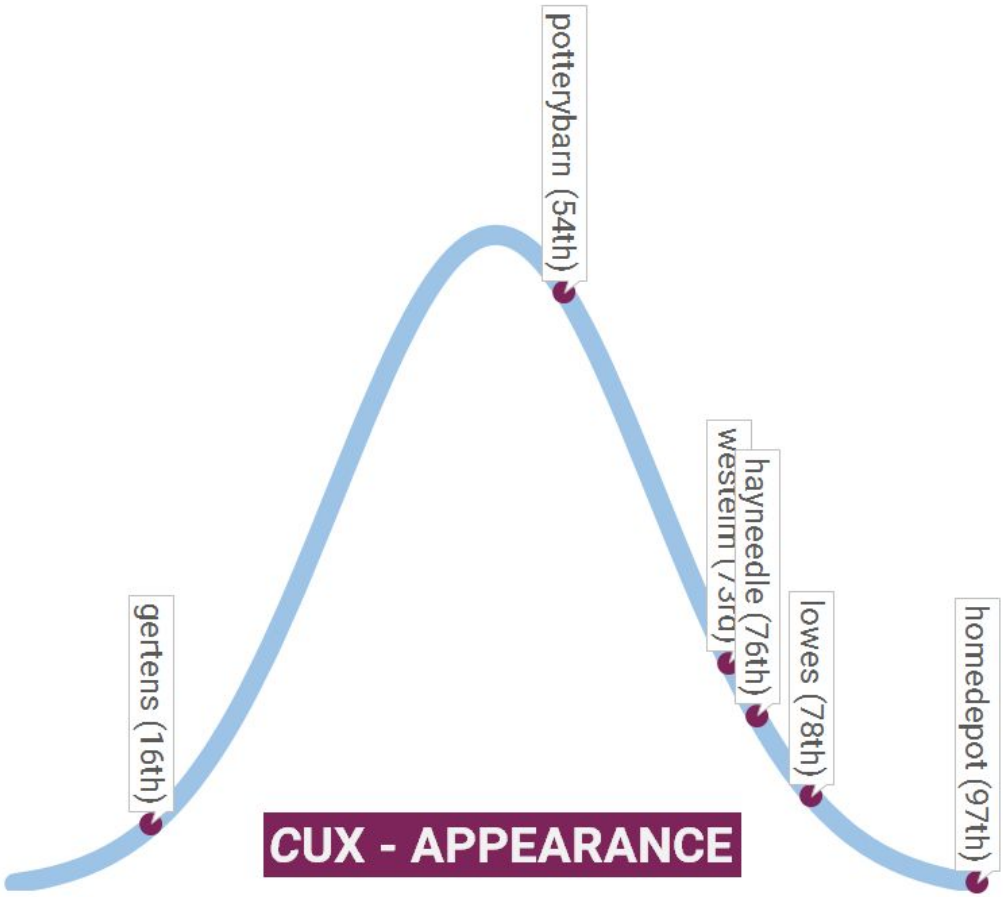
POTTERY
BARN

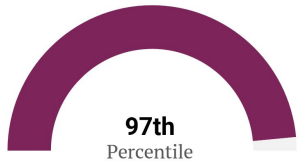
16th
Percentile
CUX - GLOBAL

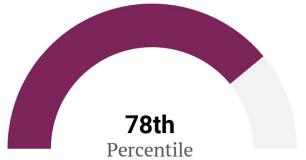
Gertens

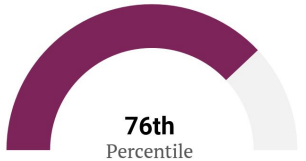
CUX - Appearance

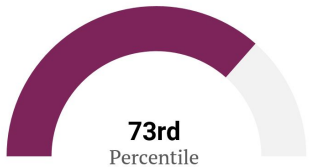
Survey questions (likert-scale):
I found the website to be attractive
The website has a clean and simple presentation

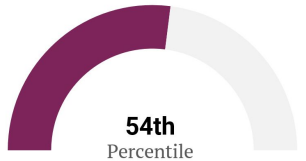






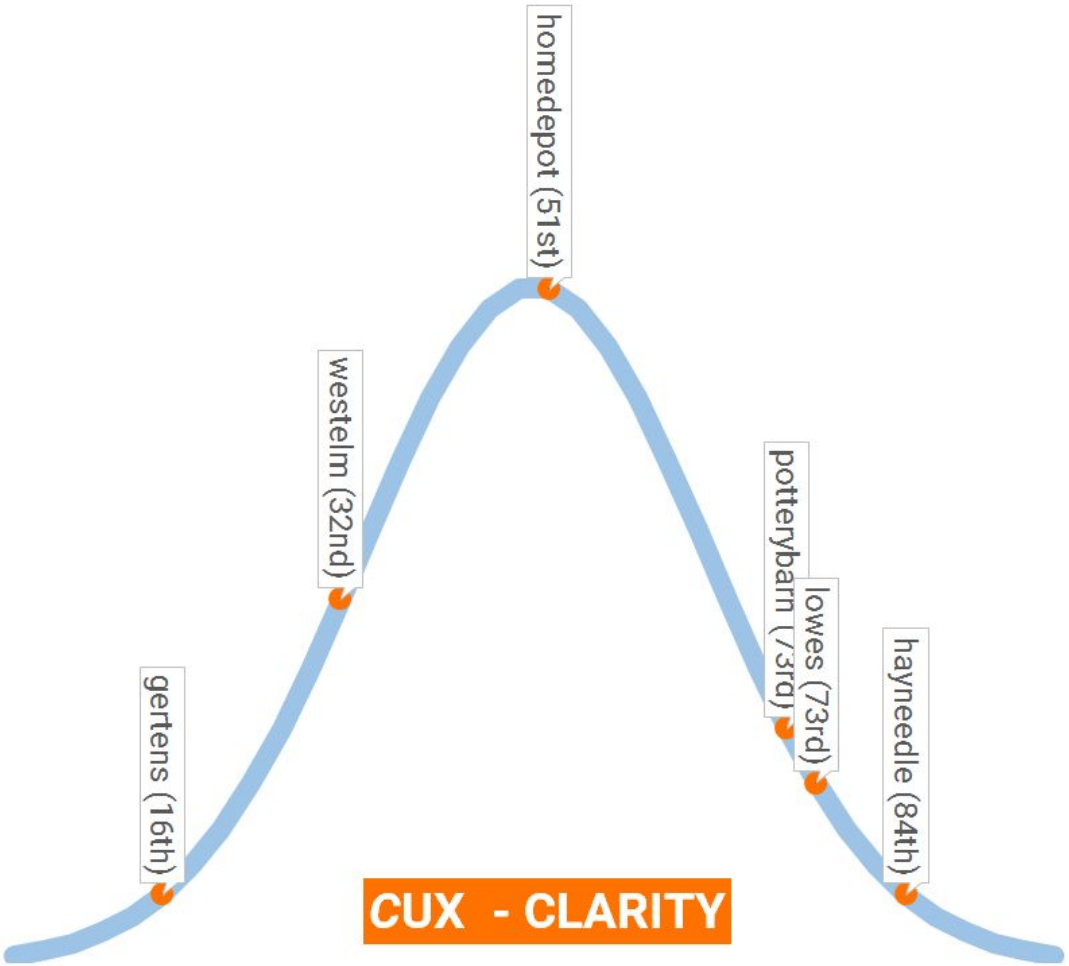


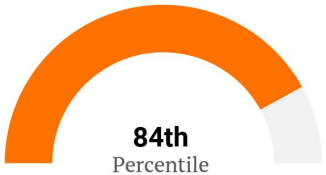




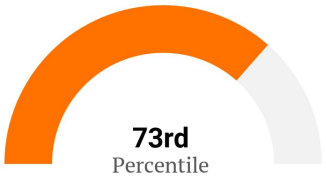
CUX - Clarity

Survey question (likert-scale):
I clearly understand why I should buy from this website instead of its competitors.

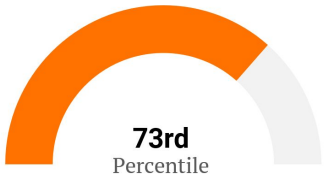




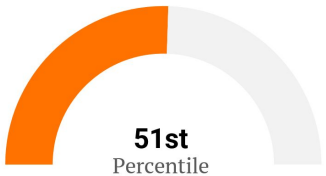
hayneedle



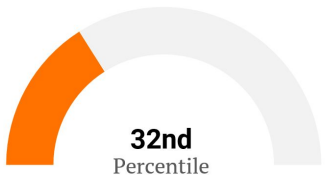
LOWE'S



POTTERY BARN



THE HOME DEPOT

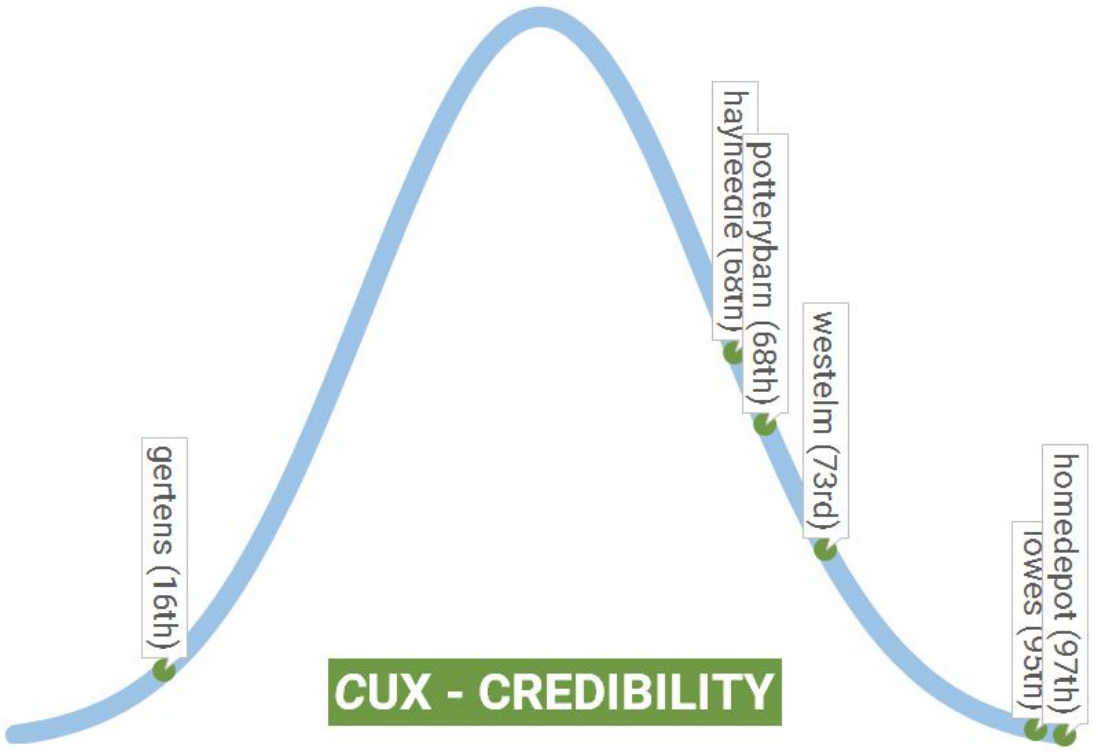


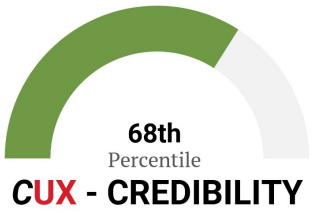
west elm

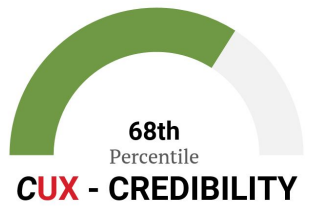
Gertens

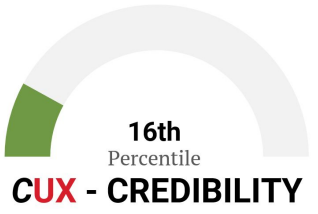
CUX - Credibility

Survey questions (likert-scale):
I feel comfortable purchasing from this website.
I feel confident conducting business with this website.



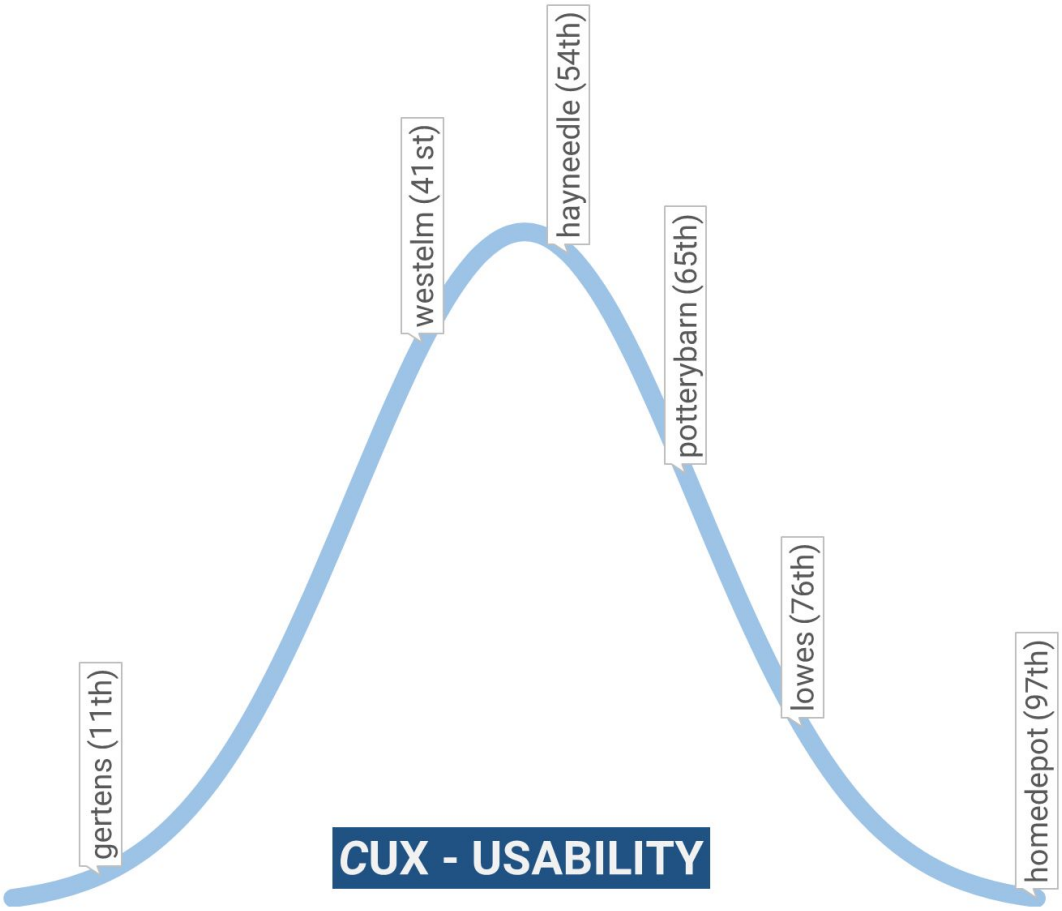


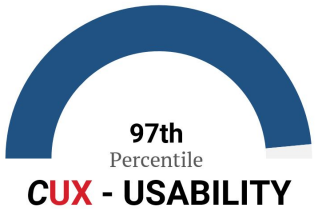


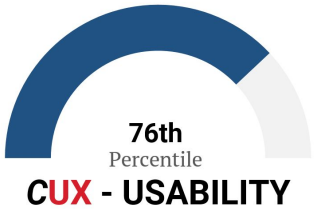


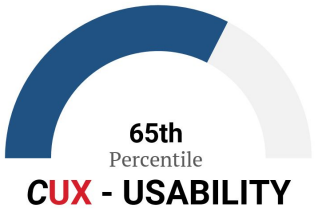
CUX - Usability

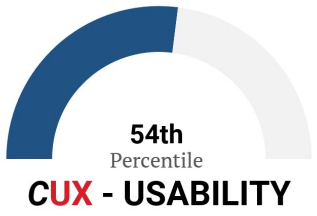
Survey questions (likert-scale):
This website is easy to use.
It is easy to navigate within the website.

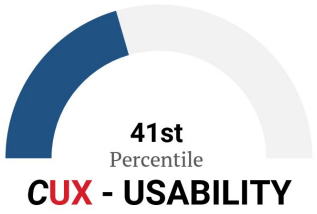


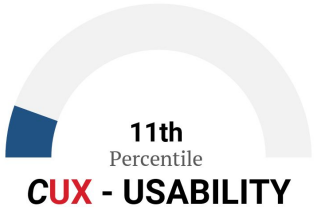








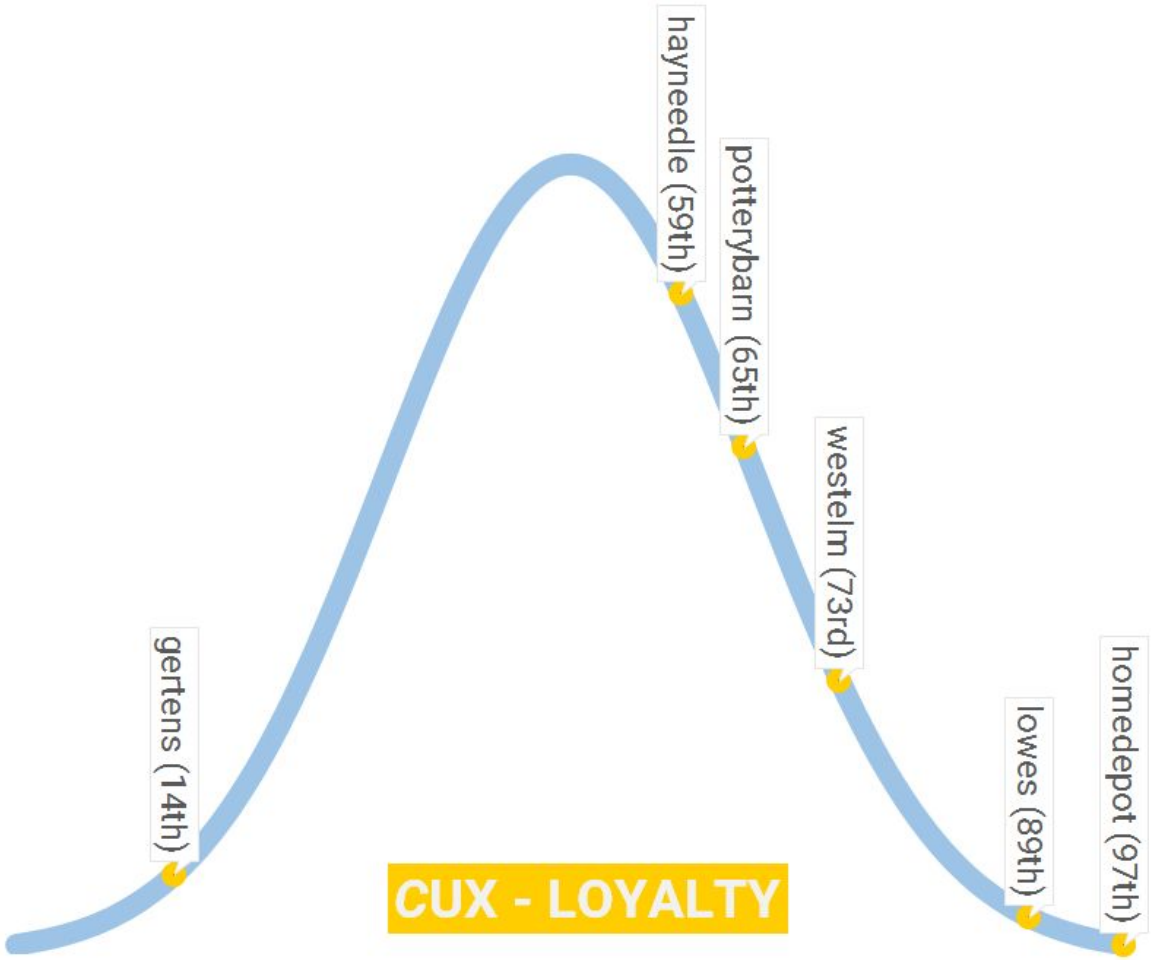


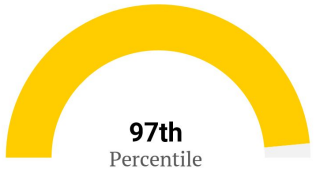


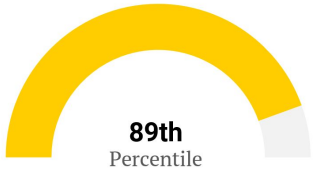
CUX - Loyalty

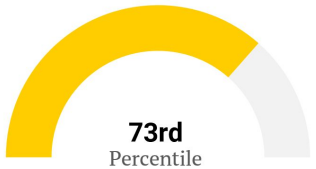
Survey questions (likert-scale):

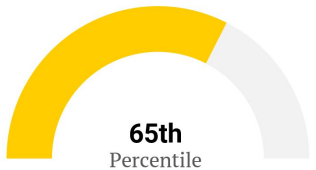
How likely are you to recommend this website to a friend or colleague?
I will likely visit this website in the future.

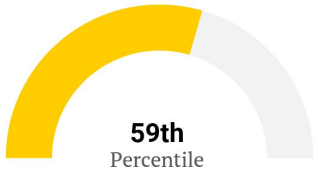












Ecommerce subvertical »
Nutrition

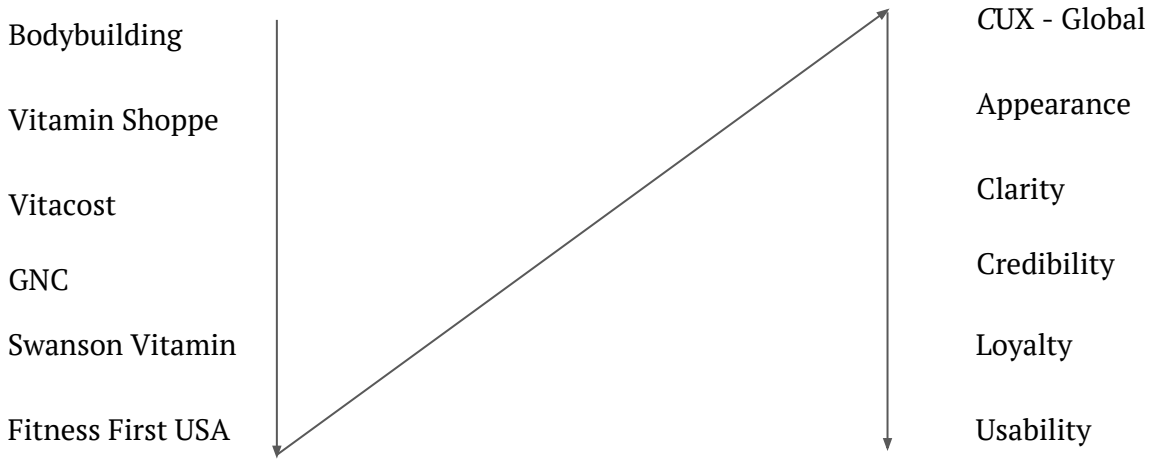
Alexa top 25

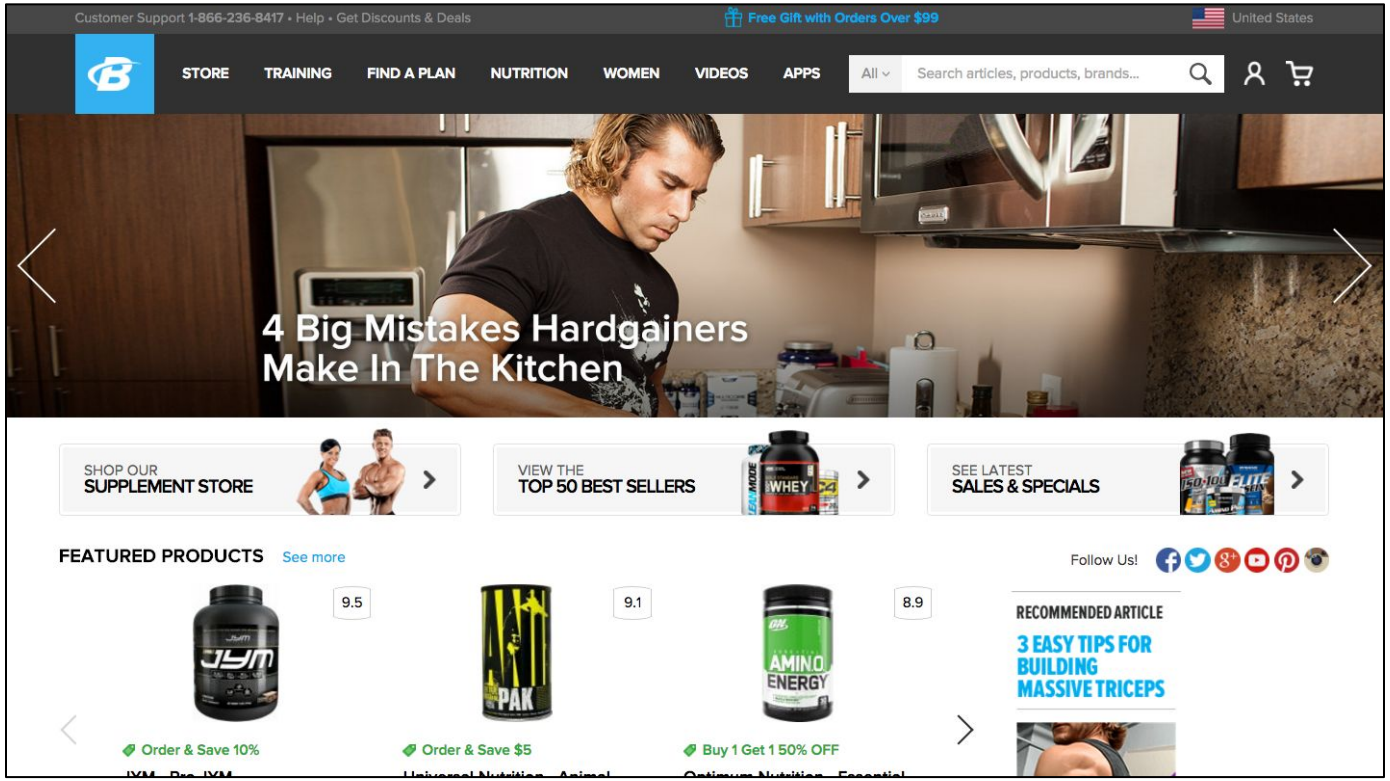
Alexa lower 400

Nutrition Contents

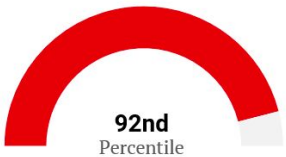
Standalone website rank profiles

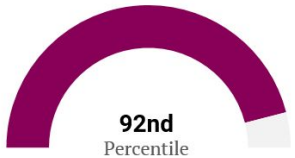
Competitive benchmarking per UX dimension

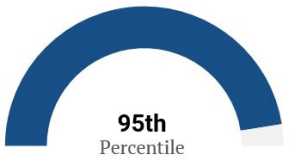


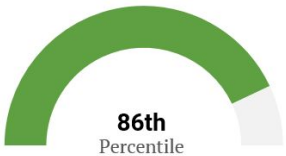


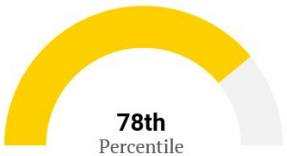
BODYBUILDING.com

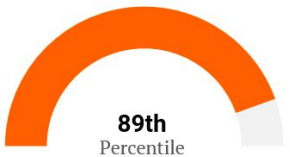


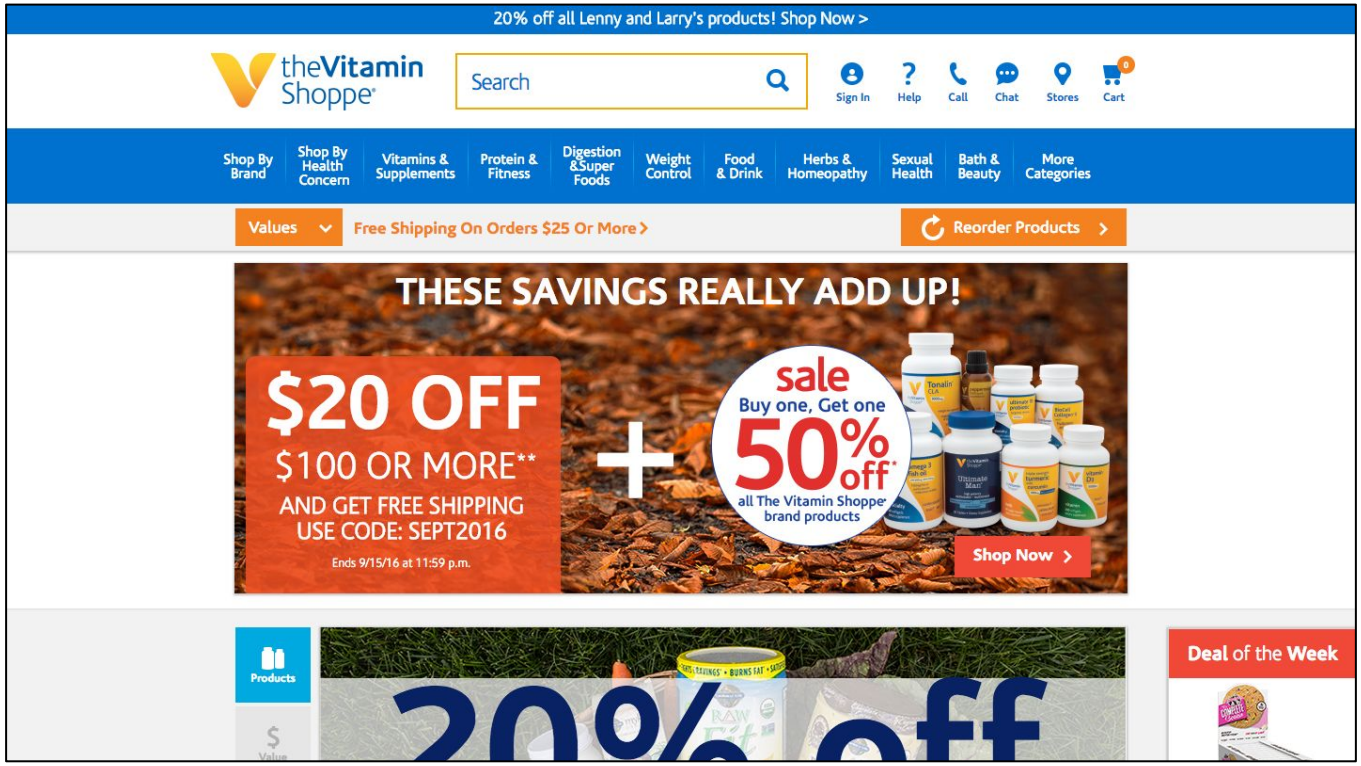




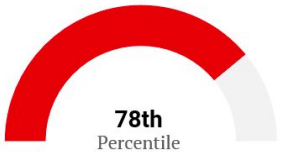




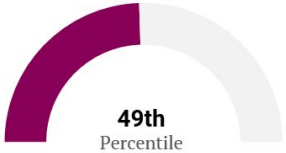




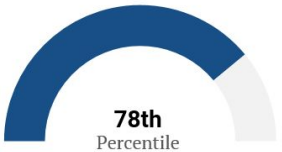
theVitamin Shoppe



CUX - GLOBAL

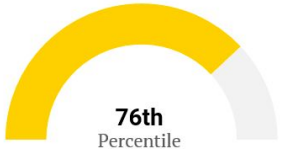


CUX - APPEARANCE



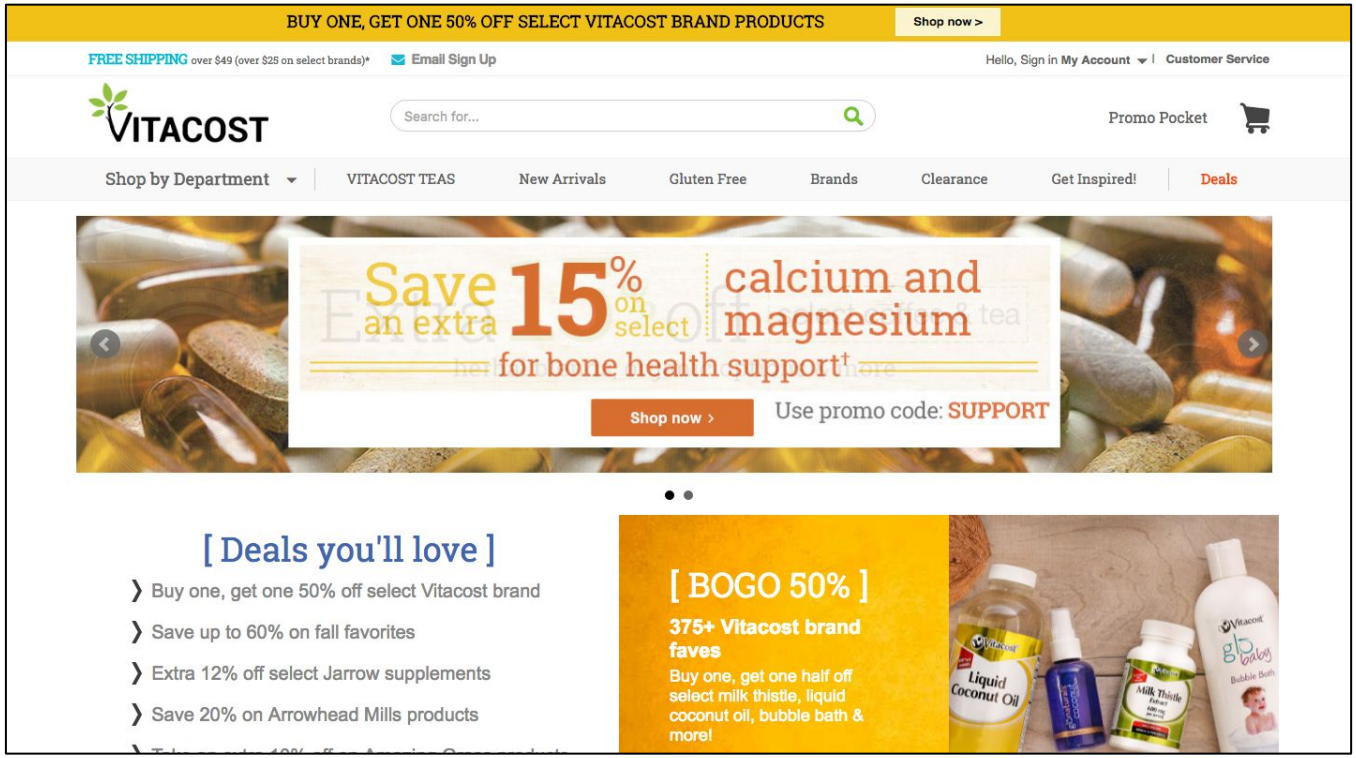
CUX - USABILITY

CUX - CREDIBILITY

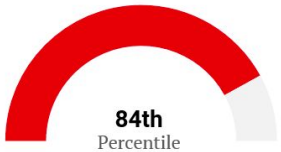


CUX - LOYALTY

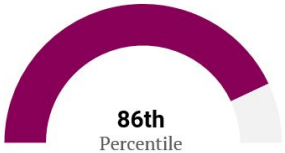
CUX - CLARITY



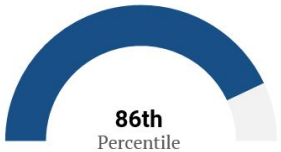
VITACOST
Healthy living, delivered



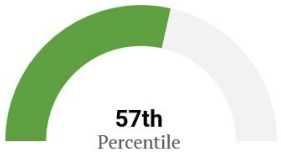
CUX - GLOBAL



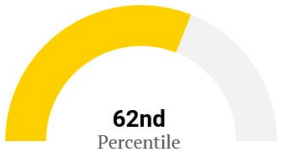
CUX - APPEARANCE



CUX - USABILITY

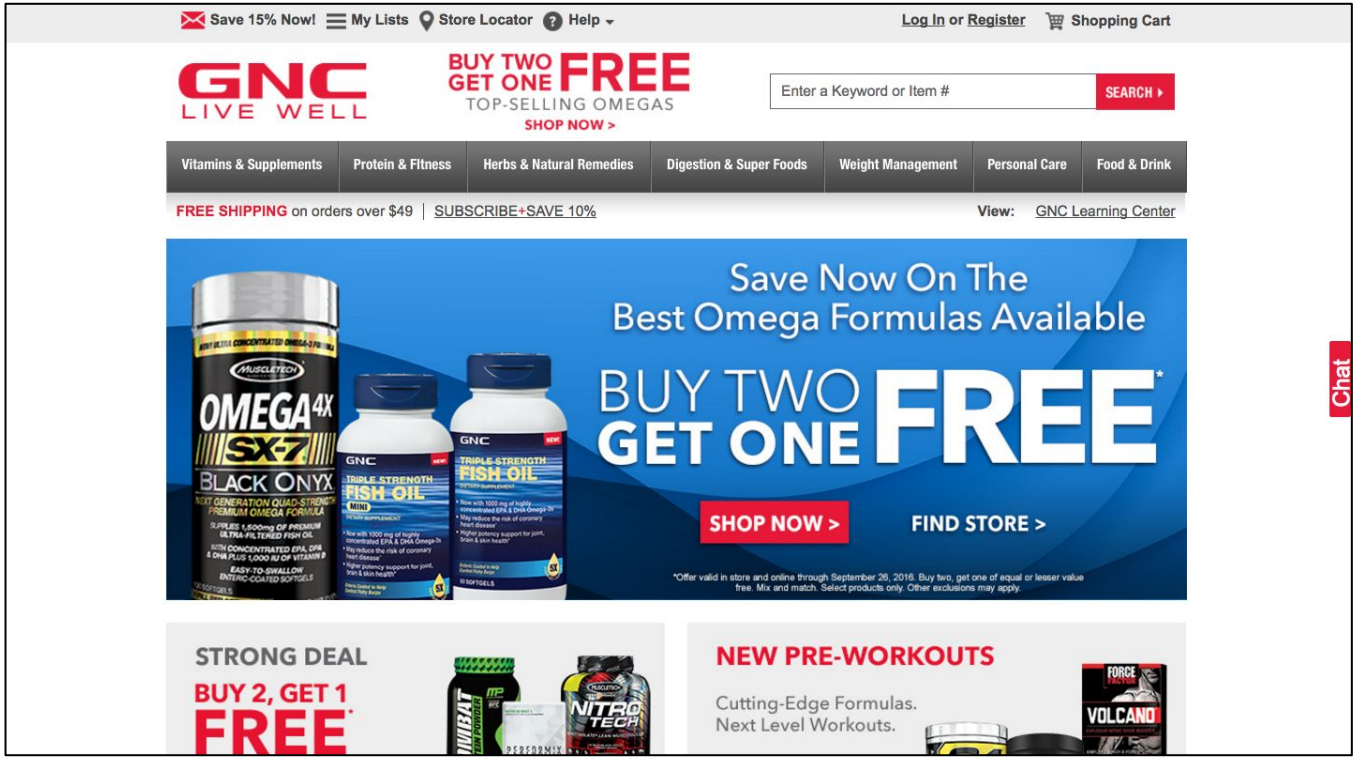


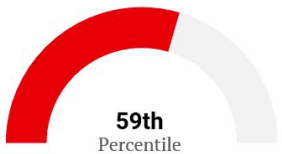
CUX - CREDIBILITY



CUX - LOYALTY

CUX - CLARITY





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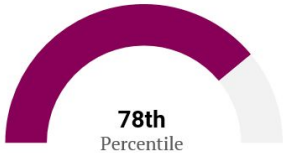
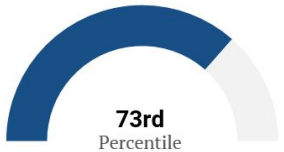


CUX - APPEARANCE



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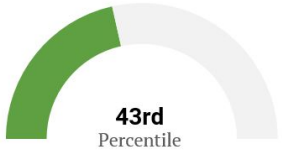

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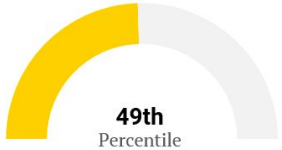
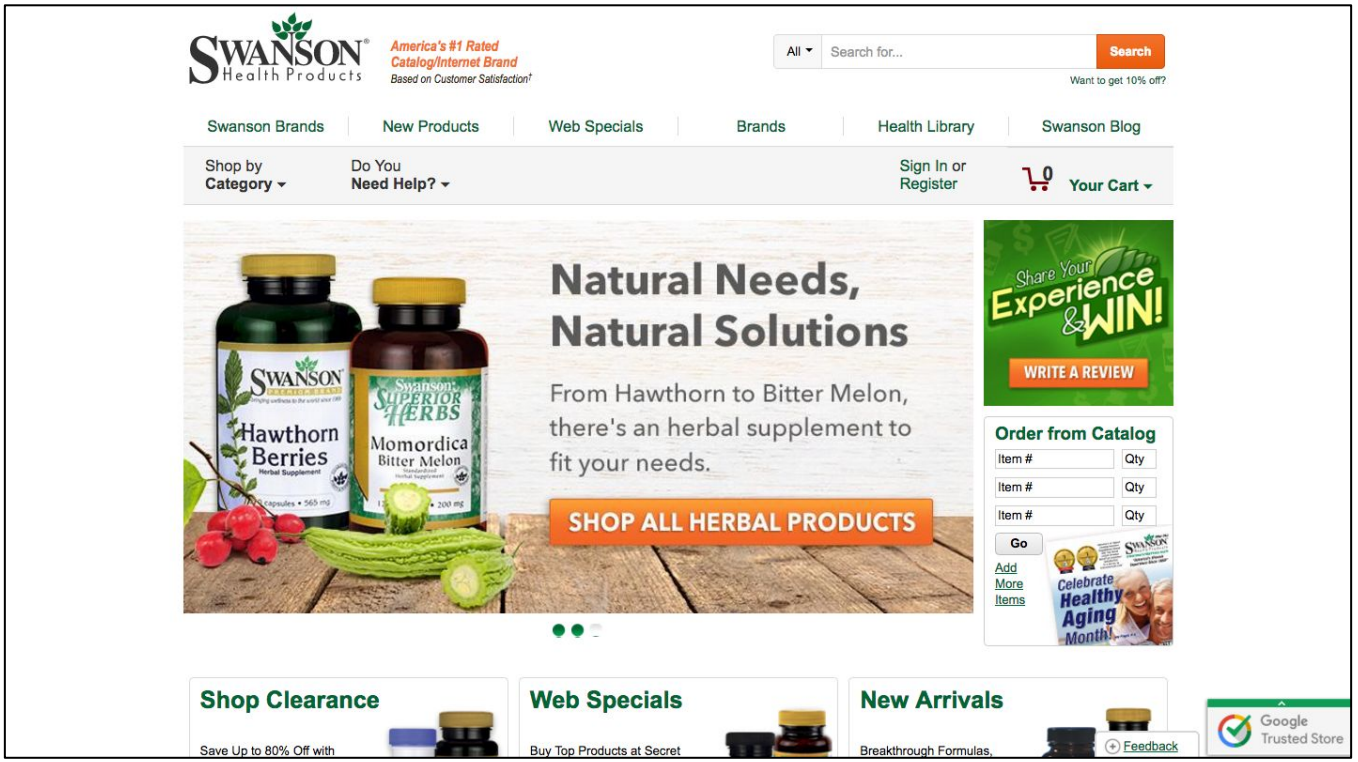
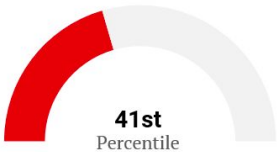


CUX - LOYALTY

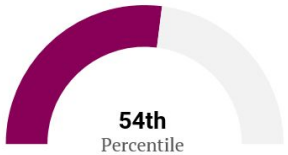
CUX - CLARITY



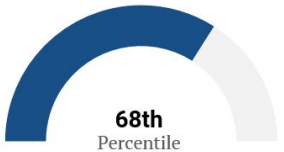
SWANSON Health Products



CUX - GLOBAL



CUX - APPEARANCE



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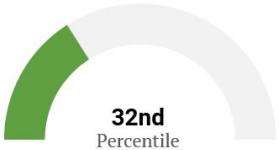

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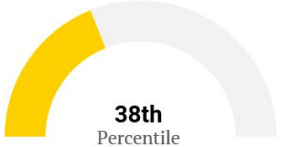

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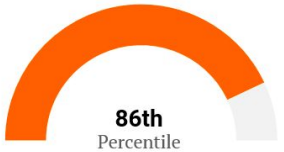
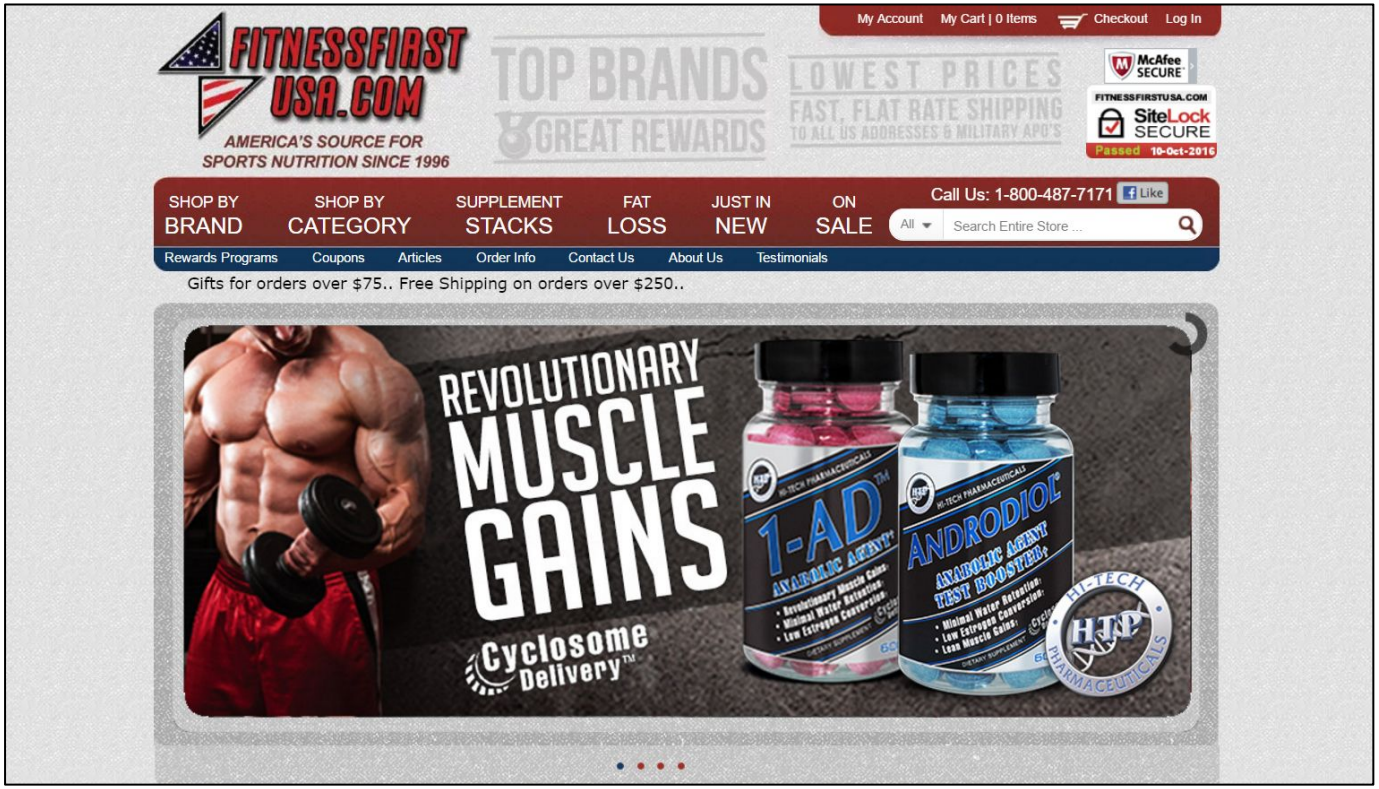


CUX - CLARITY



CUX - GLOBAL

CUX - APPEARANCE

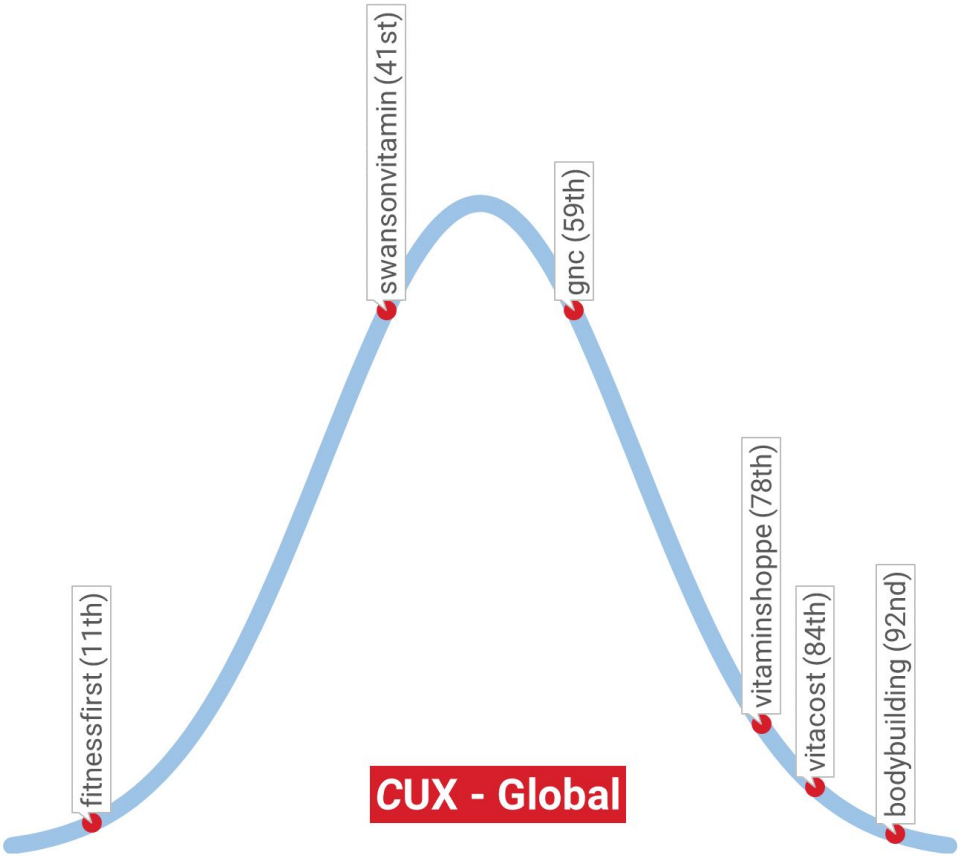
CUX - USABILITY

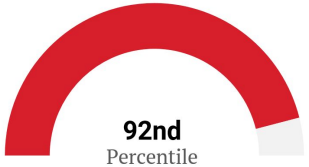
CUX - CREDIBILITY

CUX - LOYALTY

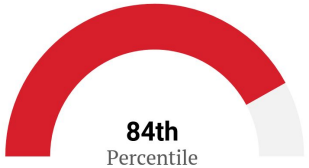
CUX - CLARITY

CUX - Global

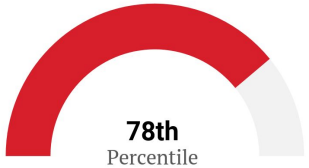

fitnessfirst (11th)
swansonvitamin (41st)
gnc (59th)
vitaminshoppe (78th)
vitacost (84th)
bodybuilding (92nd)
CUX - Global


92nd
Percentile
CUX - GLOBAL

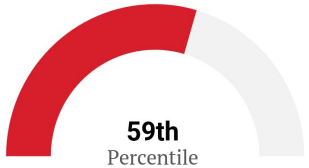
BODYBUILDING.COM


84th
Percentile
CUX - GLOBAL

VITACOST
Healthy living, delivered


78th
Percentile
CUX - GLOBAL

theVitamin
Shoppe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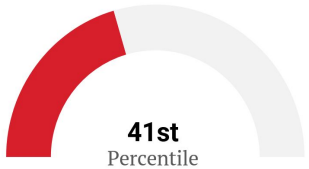
Percentile
CUX - GLOBAL

GNC
LIVE WELL


41st
Percentile
CUX - GLOBAL

SWANSON
Health Products

11th
Percentile
CUX - GLOBAL

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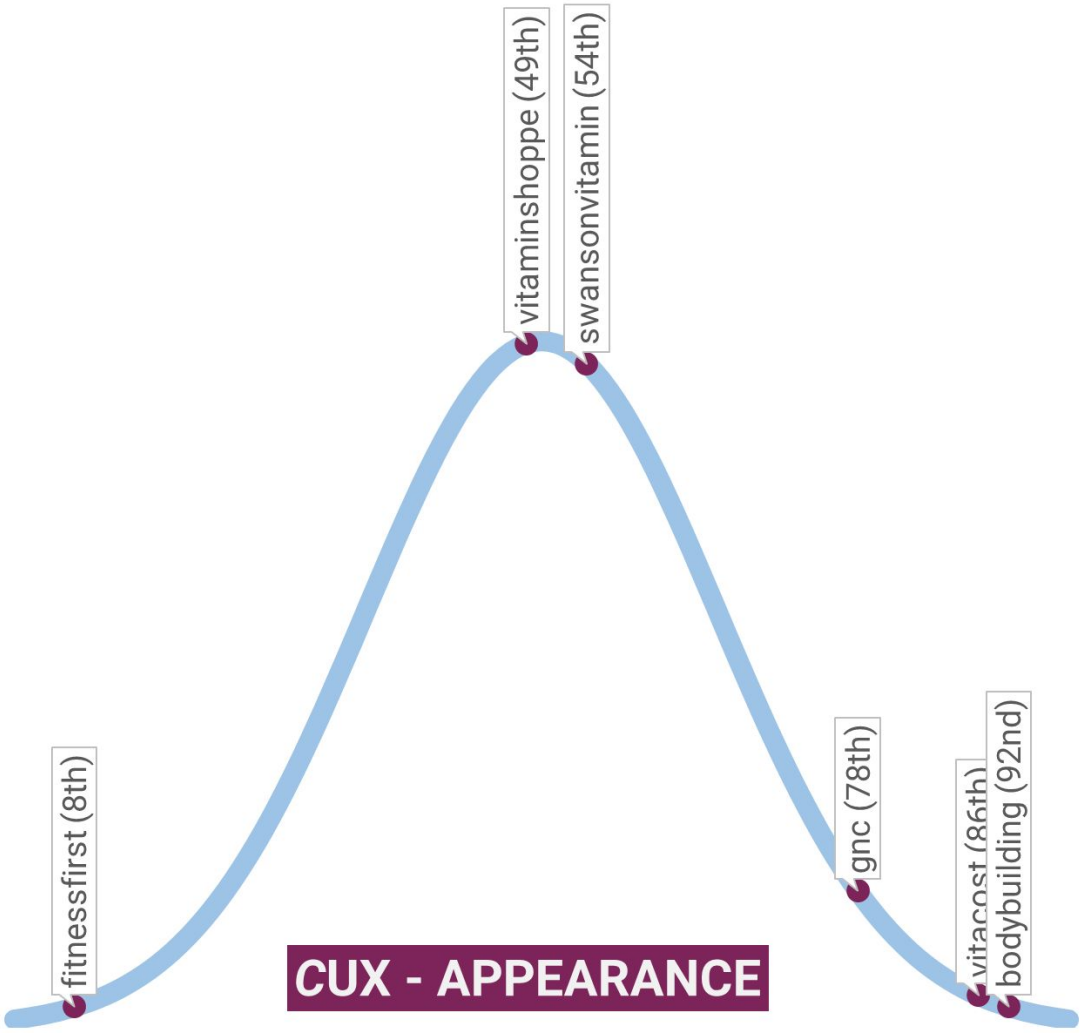
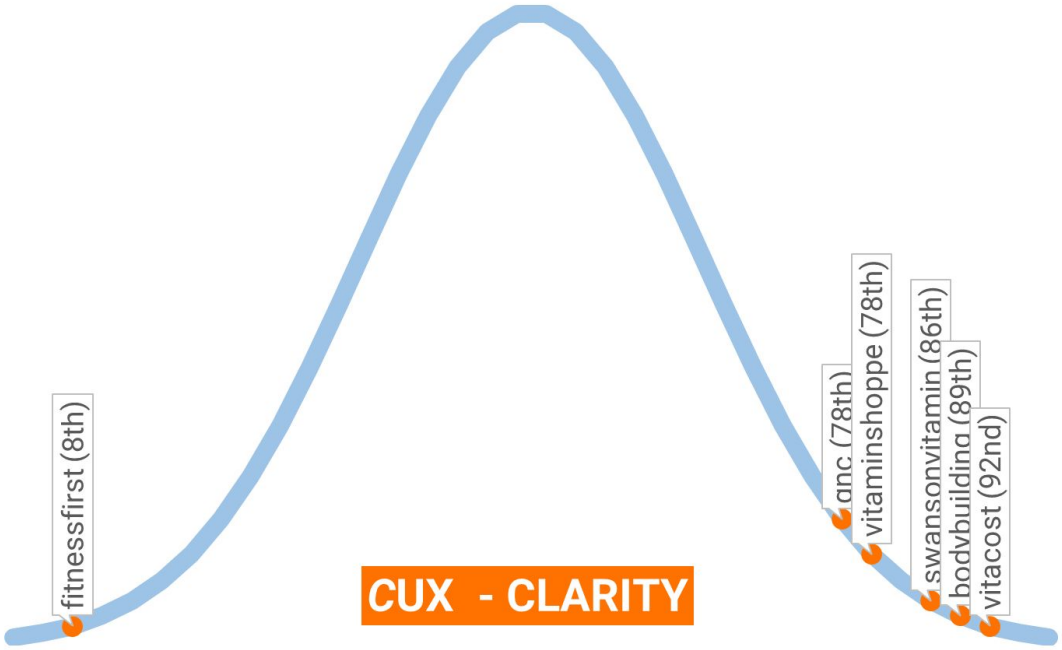
CUX - Appearance

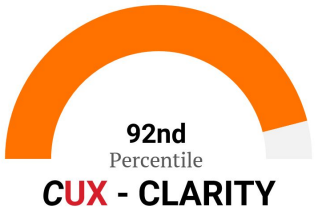
Survey questions (likert-scale):
I found the website to be attractive
The website has a clean and simple presentation

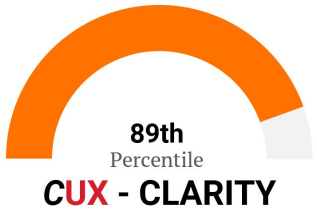


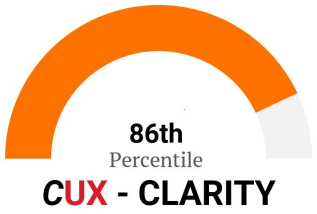
CUX - Clarity

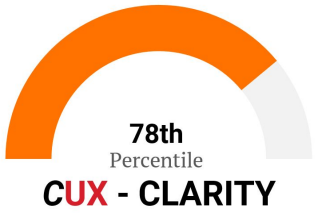
Survey question (likert-scale):
I clearly understand why I should buy from this website instead of its competitors.

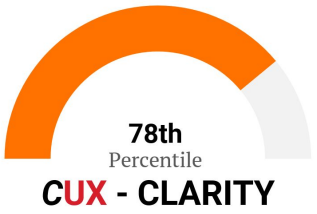


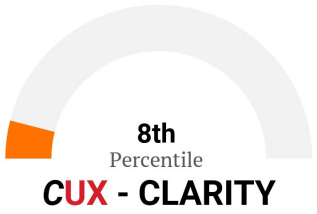






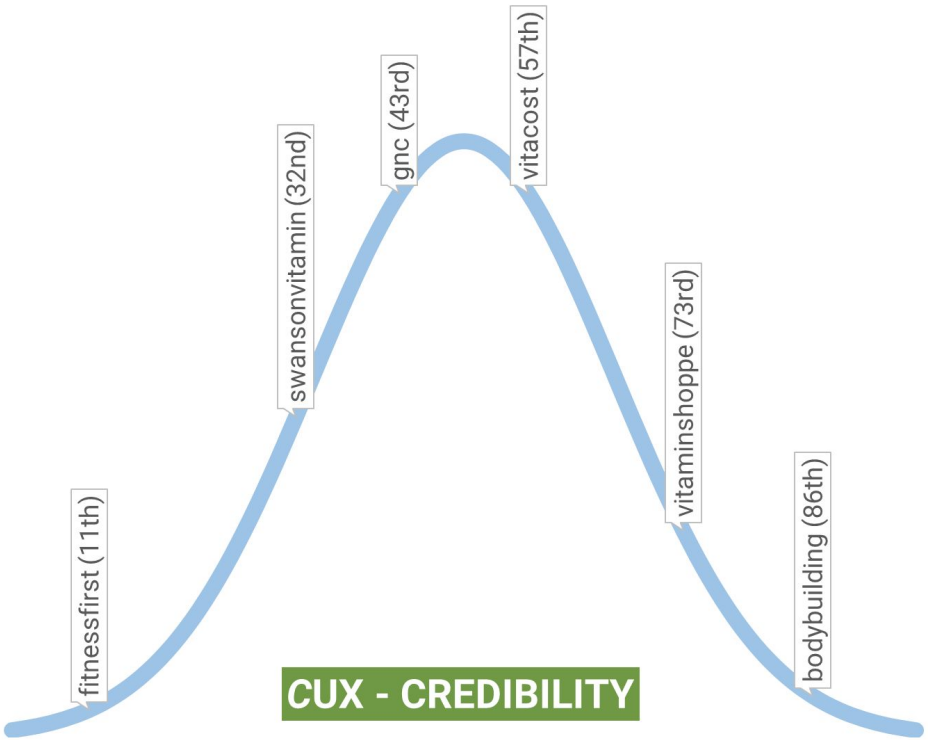


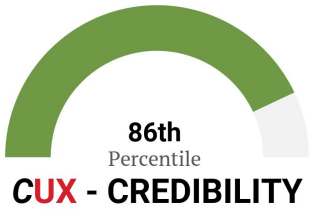


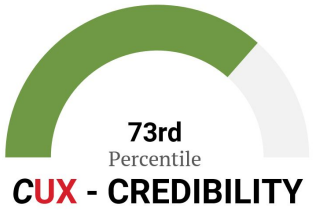


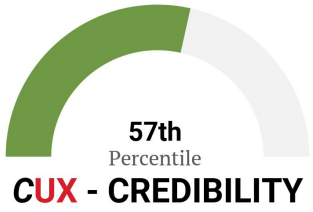
CUX - Credibility

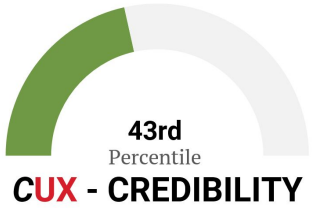
Survey questions (likert-scale):
I feel comfortable purchasing from this website.
I feel confident conducting business with this website.

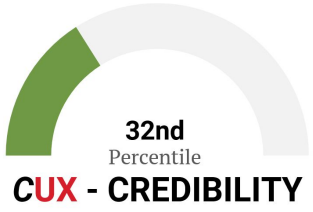






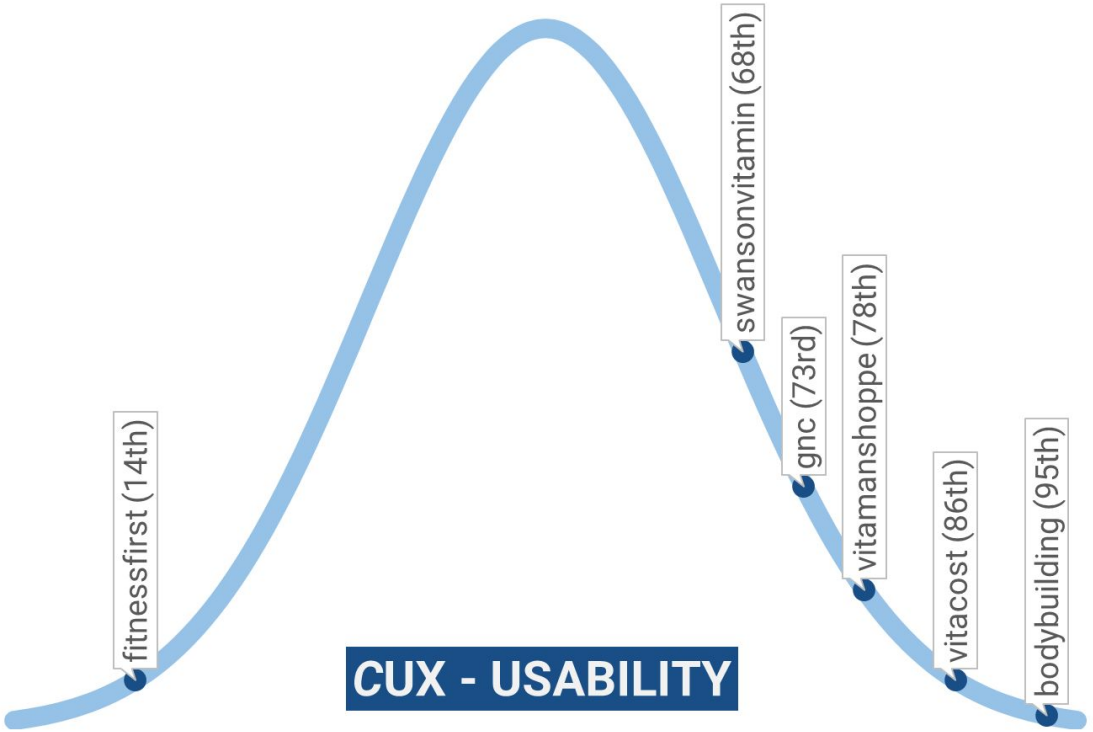


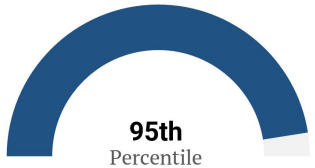




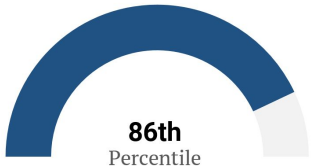
CUX - Usability

Survey questions (likert-scale):
This website is easy to use.
It is easy to navigate within the website.

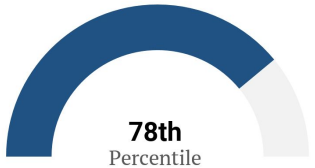




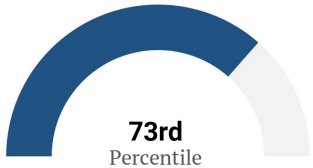
BODYBUILDING.COM



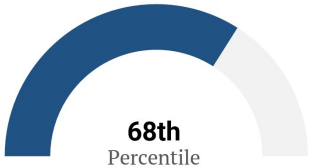
VITACOST
Healthy living, delivered



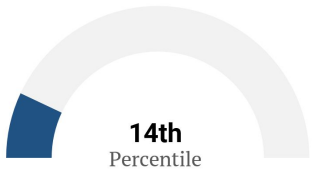
theVitamin Shoppe



GNC LIVE WELL



SWANSON Health Products



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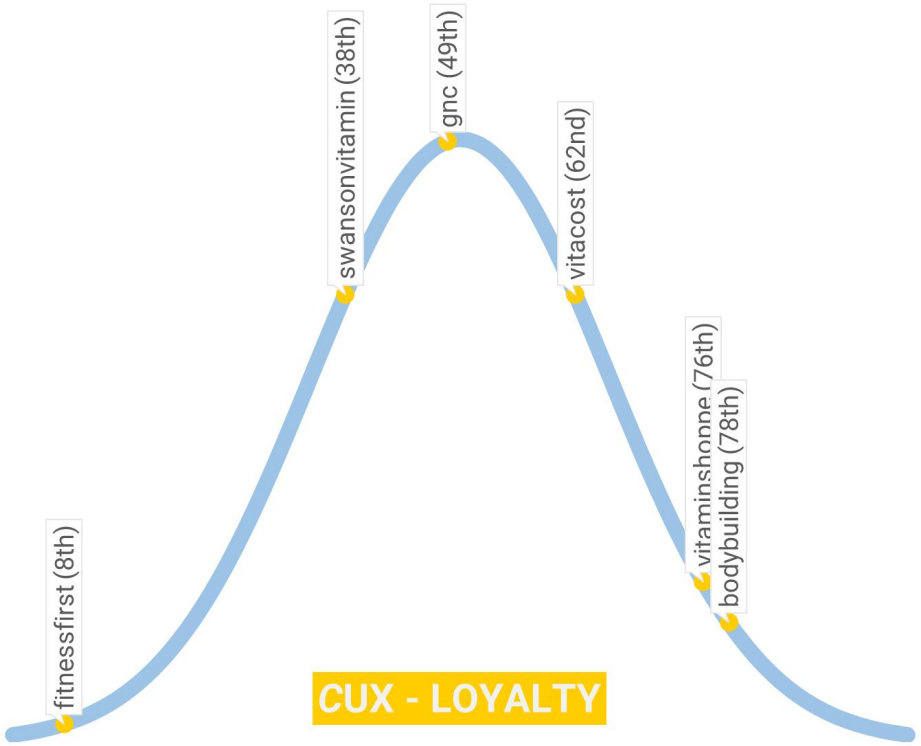
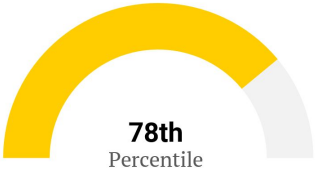
CUX - Loyalty

Survey questions (likert-scale):
How likely are you to recommend this website to a friend or colleague?
I will likely visit this website in the future.





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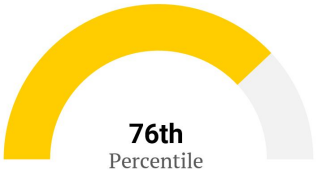
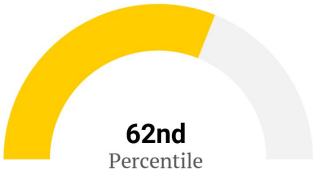
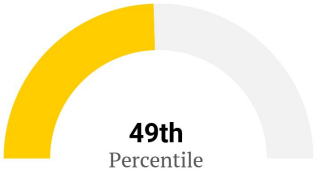


theVitamin Shoppe



VITACOST
Healthy living, delivered



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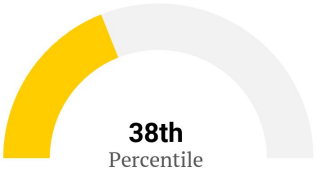
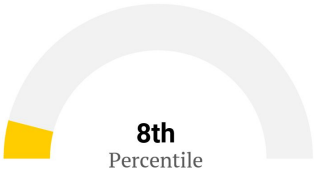


SWANSON Health Products



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Ecommerce subvertical »
Outdoor Recreation

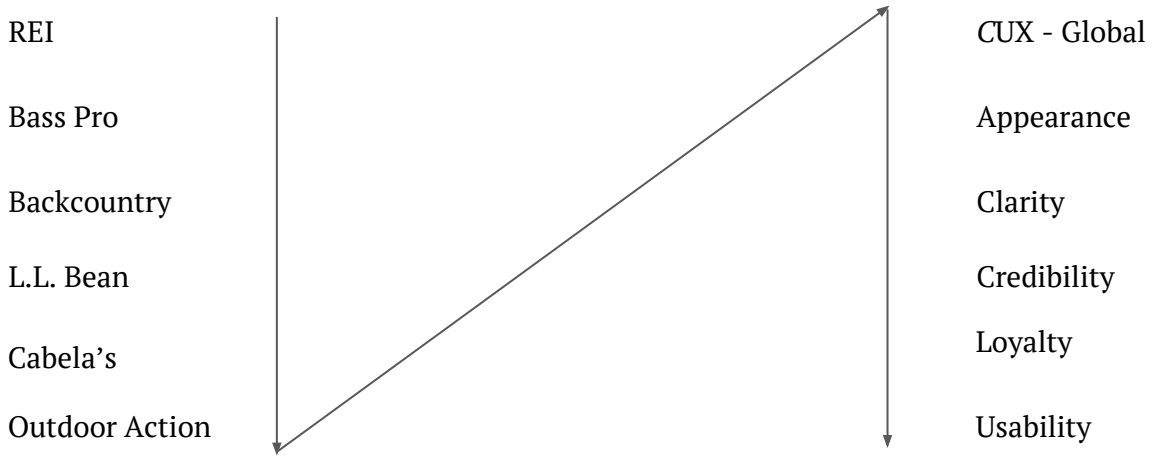
L.L.Bean, Cabela's World's Foremost Outfitter, Bass Pro Shops, backcountry.com, REI — Alexa top 25

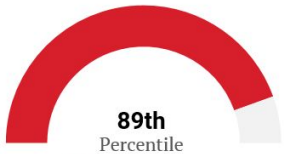
outdooraction — Alexa lower 400

Recreation Contents

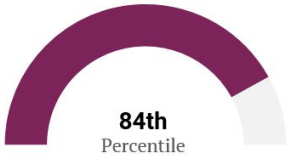
Standalone website rank profiles

Competitive benchmarking per UX dimension

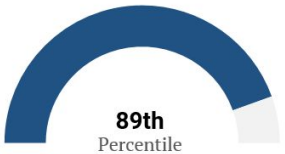




CUX - GLOBAL

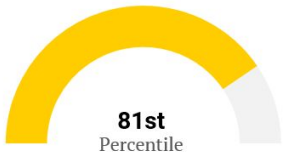


CUX - APPEARANCE



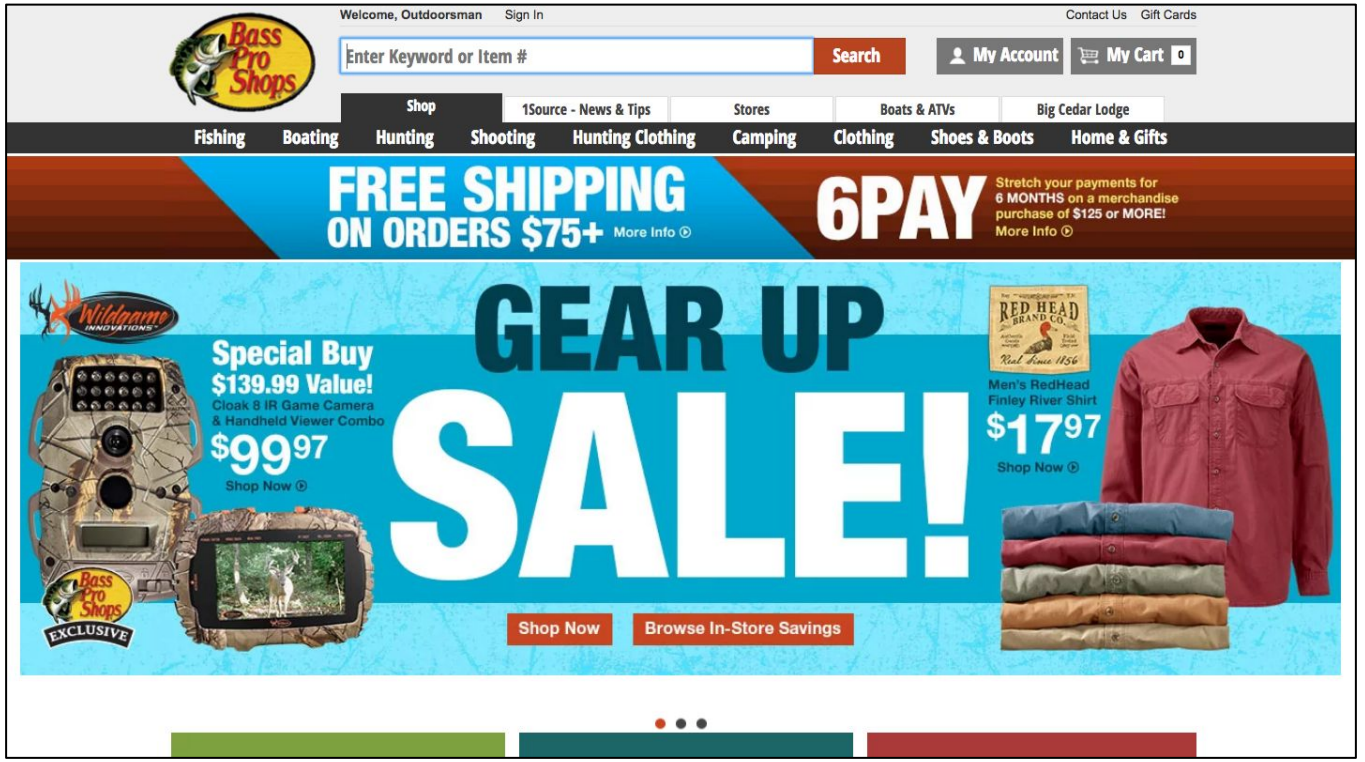
CUX - USABILITY

CUX - CREDIBILITY



CUX - LOYALTY

CUX - CLARITY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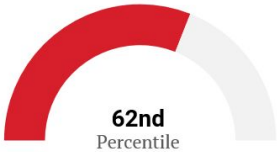
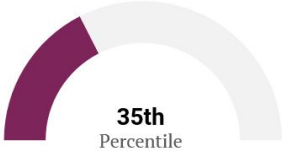

62nd
Percentile
CUX - GLOBAL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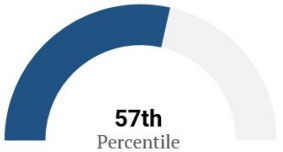
Percentile
CUX - APPEARANCE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Percentile
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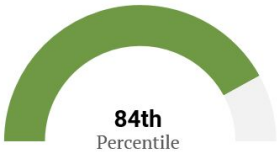
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Percentile
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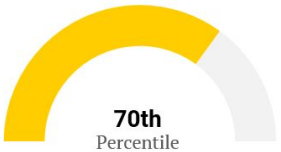
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Percentile
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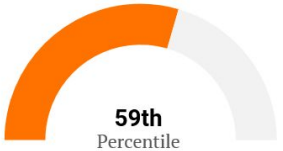
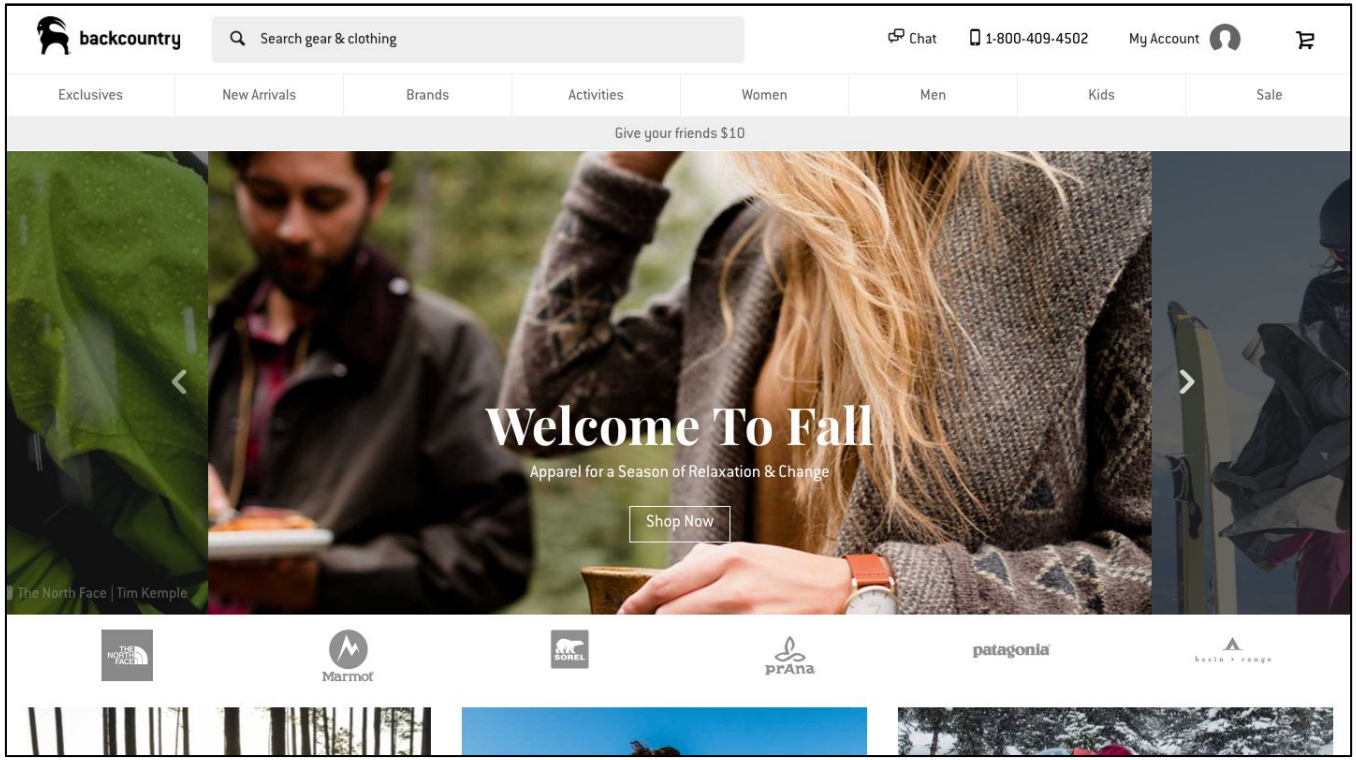
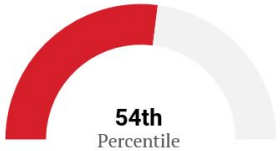
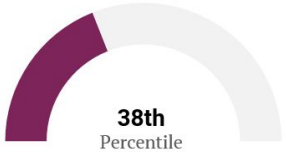

59th
Percentile
CUX - CLARITY



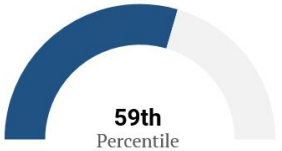
backcountry.com



CUX - GLOBAL

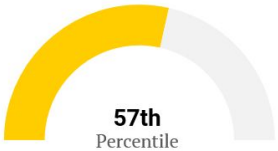


CUX - APPEARANCE



CUX - USABILITY

CUX - CREDIBILITY



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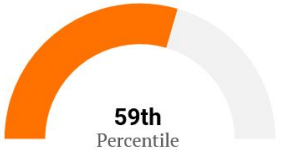
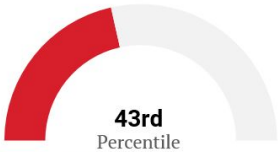
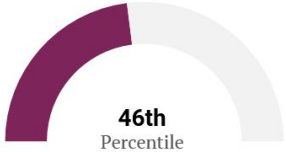


CUX - CLARITY

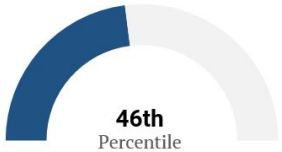
L.L.Bean



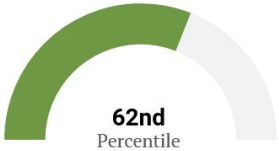
CUX - GLOBAL



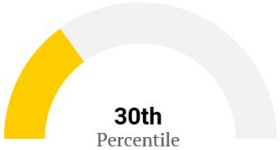
CUX - APPEARANCE



CUX - USABILITY

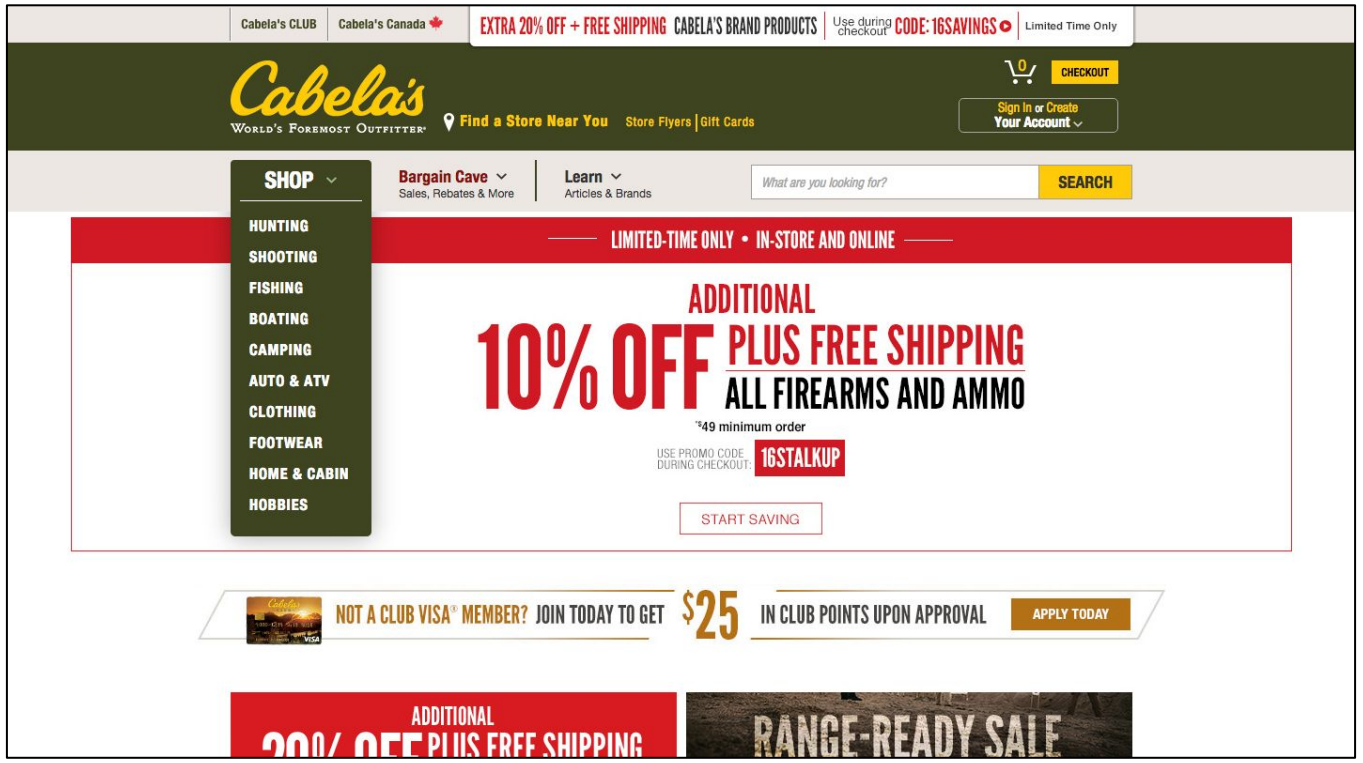


CUX - CREDIBILITY



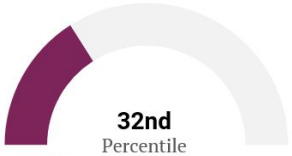
CUX - LOYALTY

CUX - CLARITY

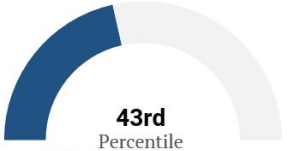


Cabela's
World's Foremost Outfitter

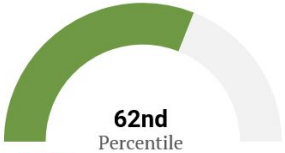
CUX - GLOBAL



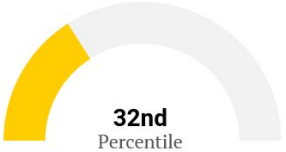
CUX - APPEARANCE



CUX - USABILITY



CUX - CREDIBILITY



CUX - LOYALTY

CUX - CLARITY

outdooraction

CUX - GLOBAL

CUX - APPEARANCE

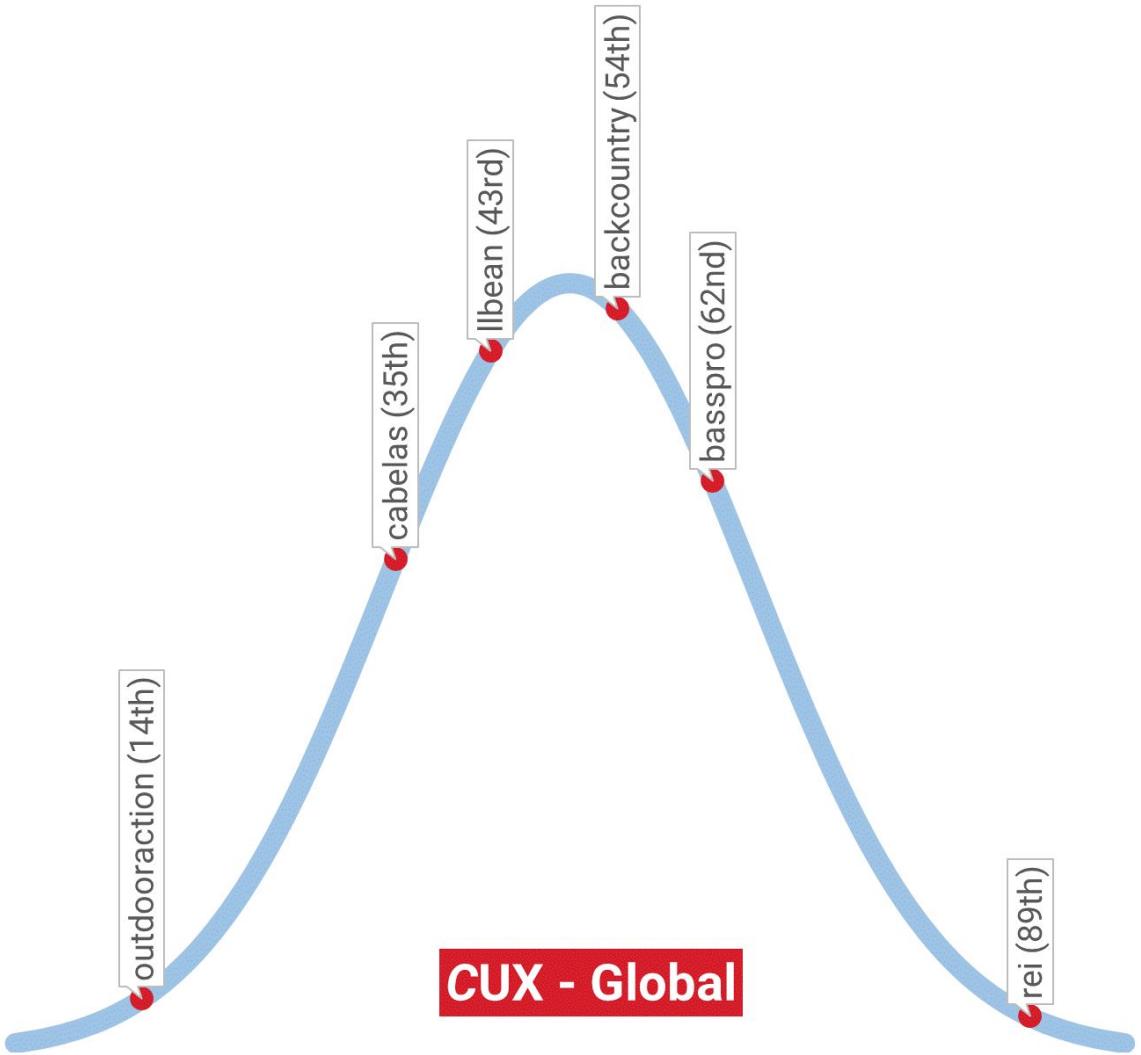
CUX - USABILITY

CUX - CREDIBILITY

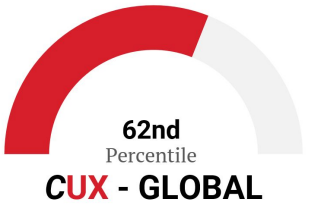
CUX - LOYALTY

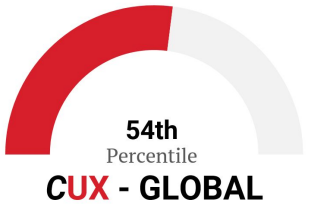
CUX - CLARITY

CUX - Global


outdooraction (14th)
cabelas (35th)
llbean (43rd)
backcountry (54th)
basspro (62nd)
rei (89th)
CUX - Global

89th
Percentile
CUX - GLOBAL


62nd
Percentile
CUX - GLOBAL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Percentile
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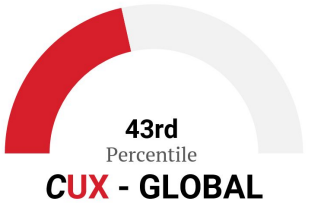
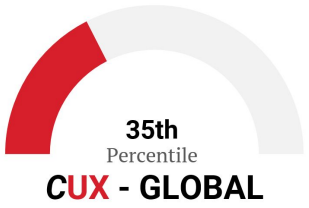
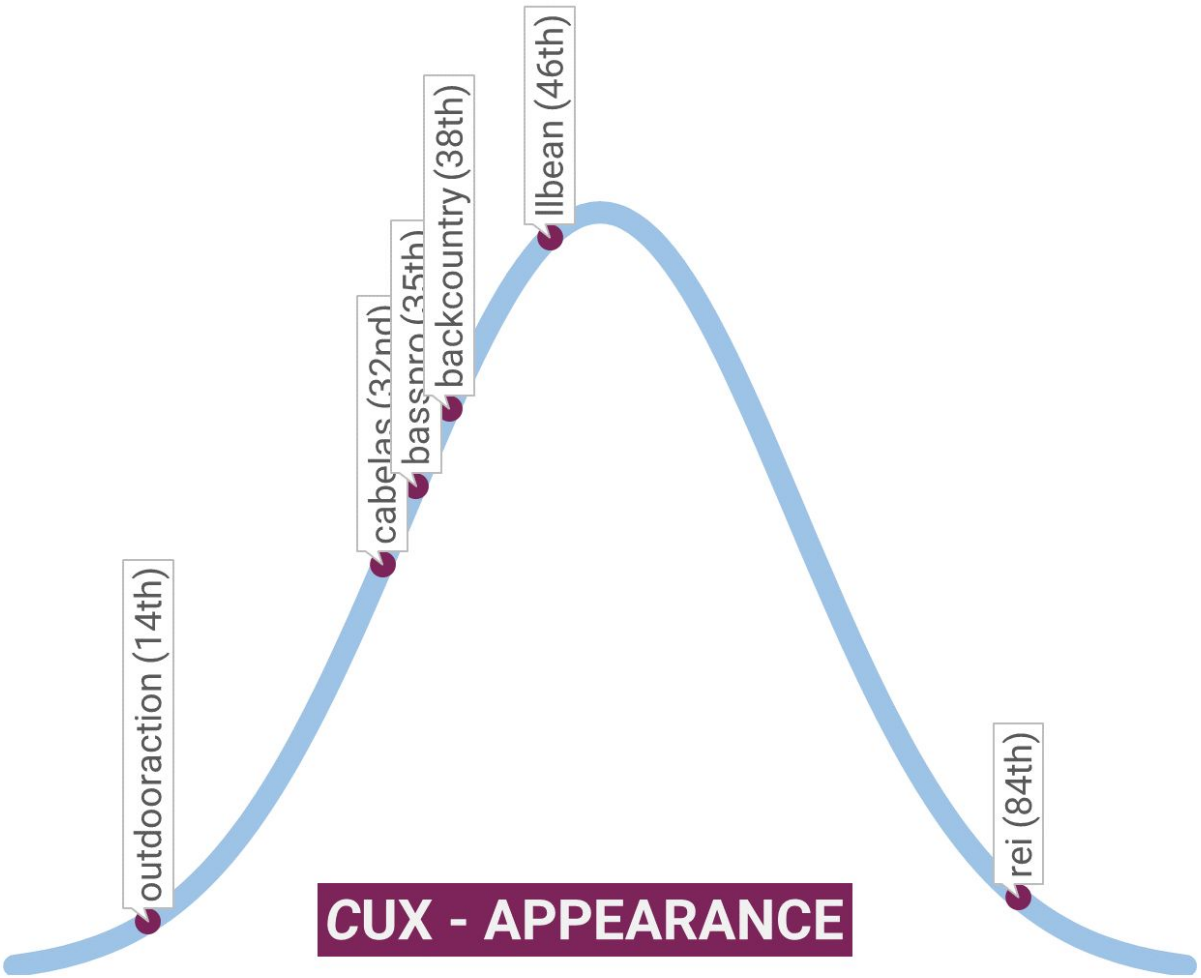

43rd
Percentile
CUX - GLOBAL

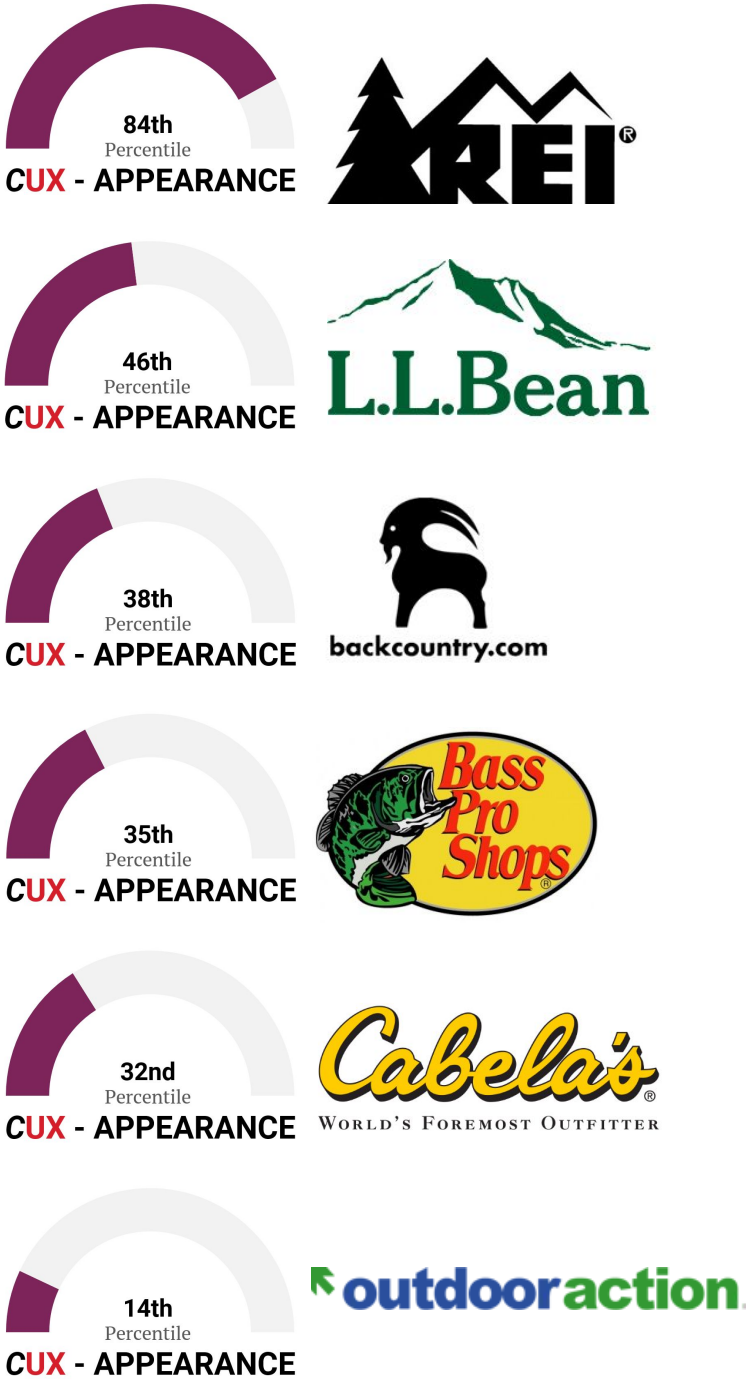

35th
Percentile
CUX - GLOBAL

14th
Percentile
CUX - GLOBAL

CUX - Appearance

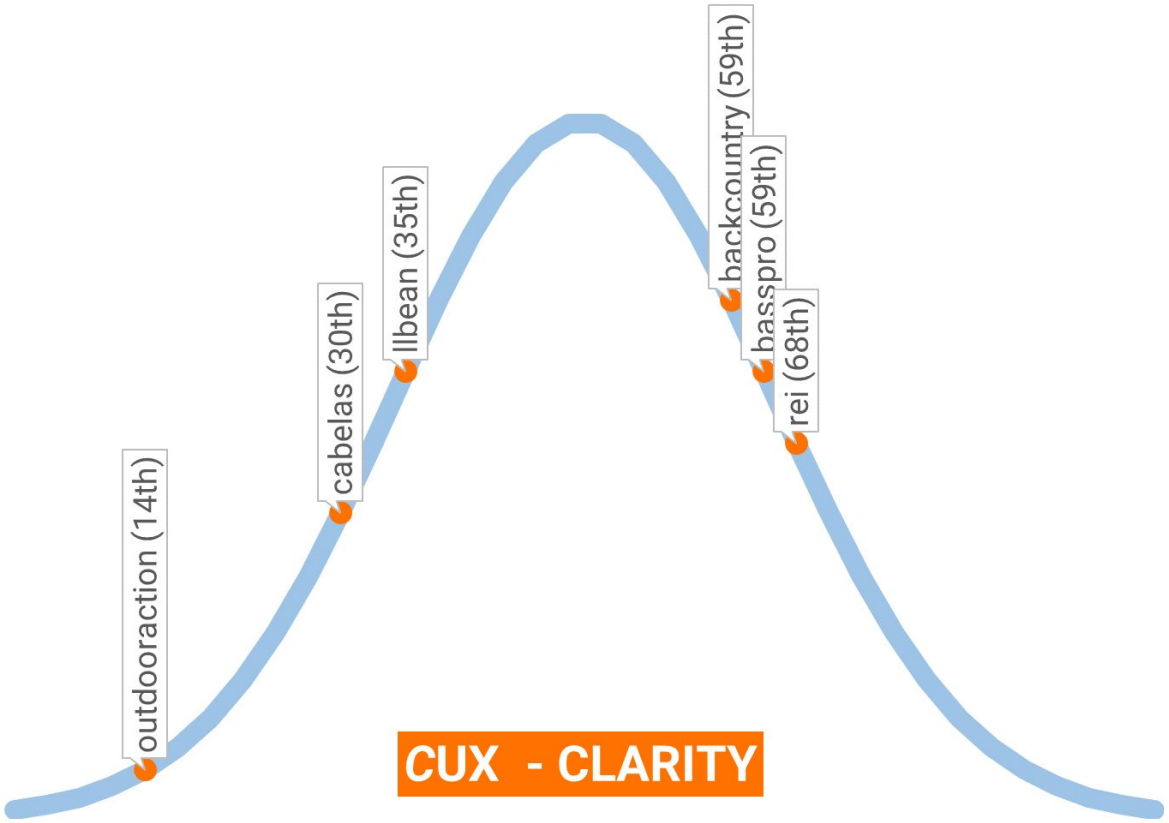
Survey questions (likert-scale):
I found the website to be attractive
The website has a clean and simple presentation

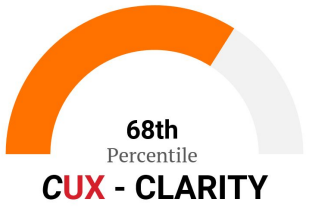


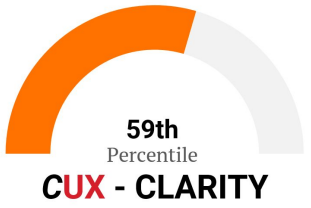


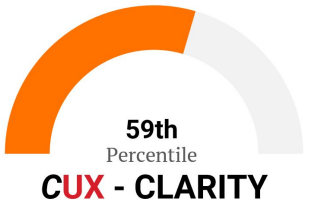
CUX - Clarity

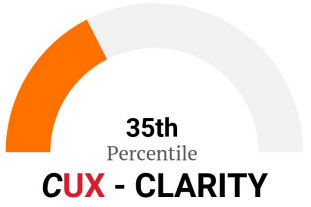
Survey question (likert-scale):
I clearly understand why I should buy from this website instead of its competitors.

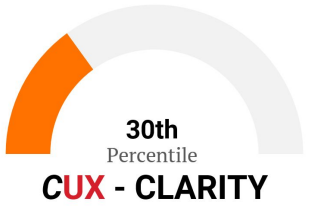


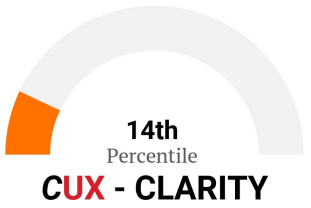










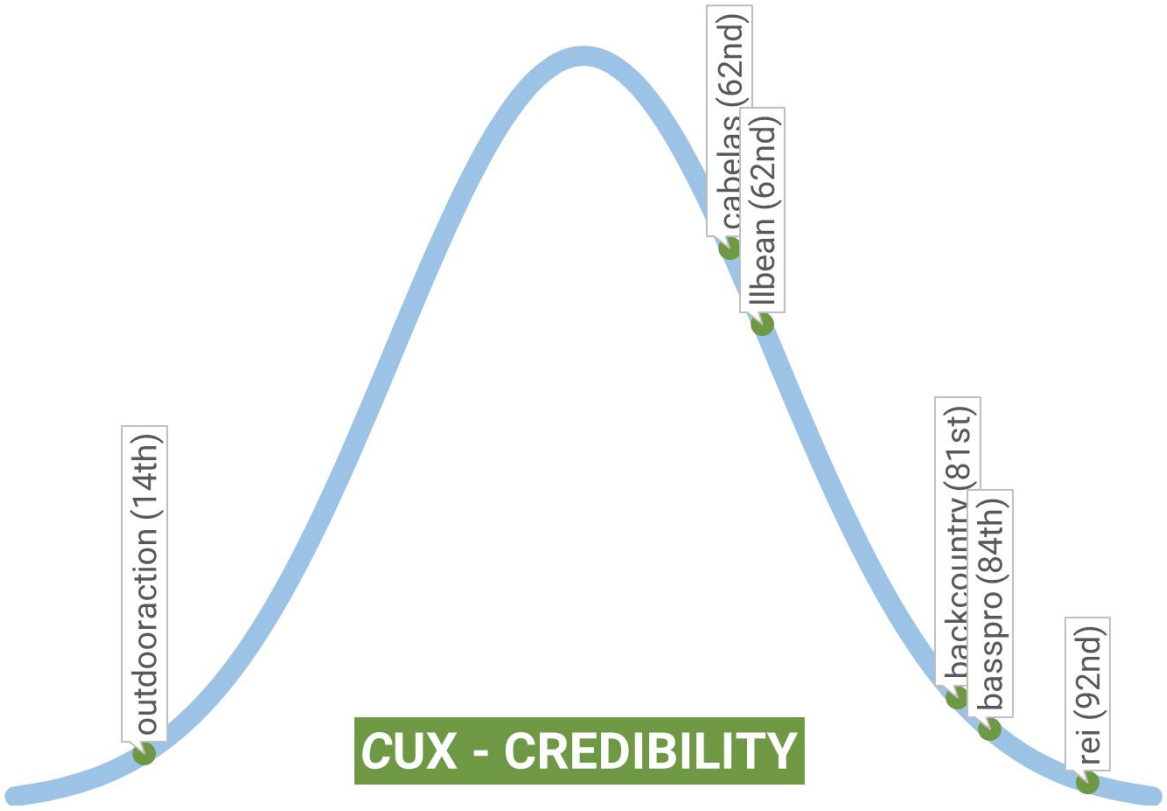


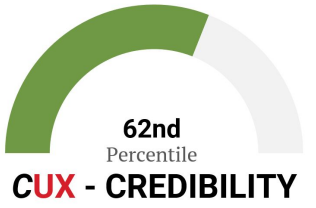
CUX - Credibility

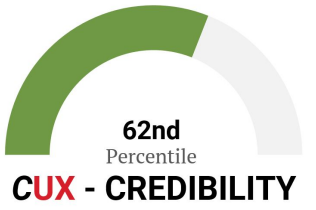
Survey questions (likert-scale):

I feel comfortable purchasing from this website.

I feel confident conducting business with this website.

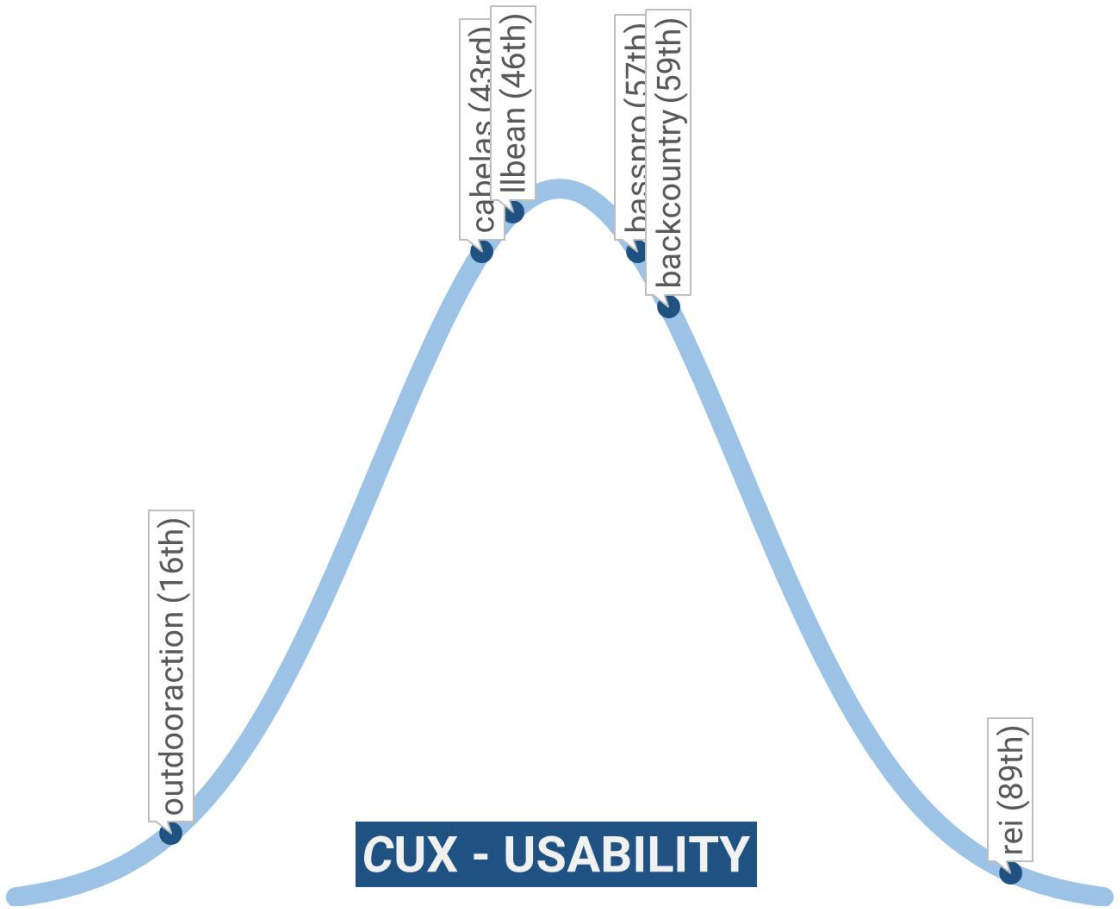


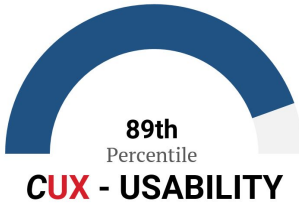


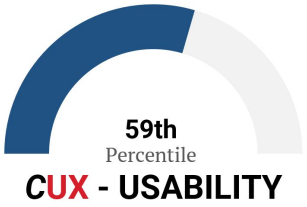


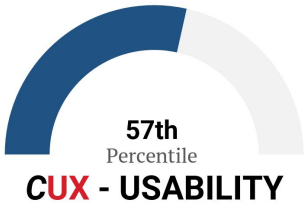
CUX - Usability

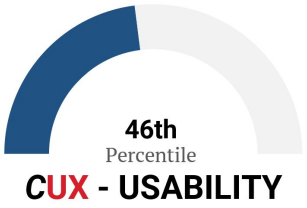
Survey questions (likert-scale):
This website is easy to use.
It is easy to navigate within the website.

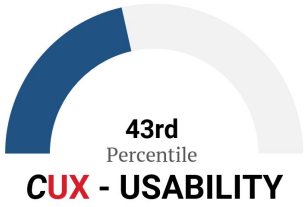


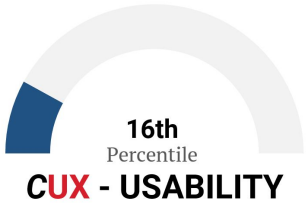








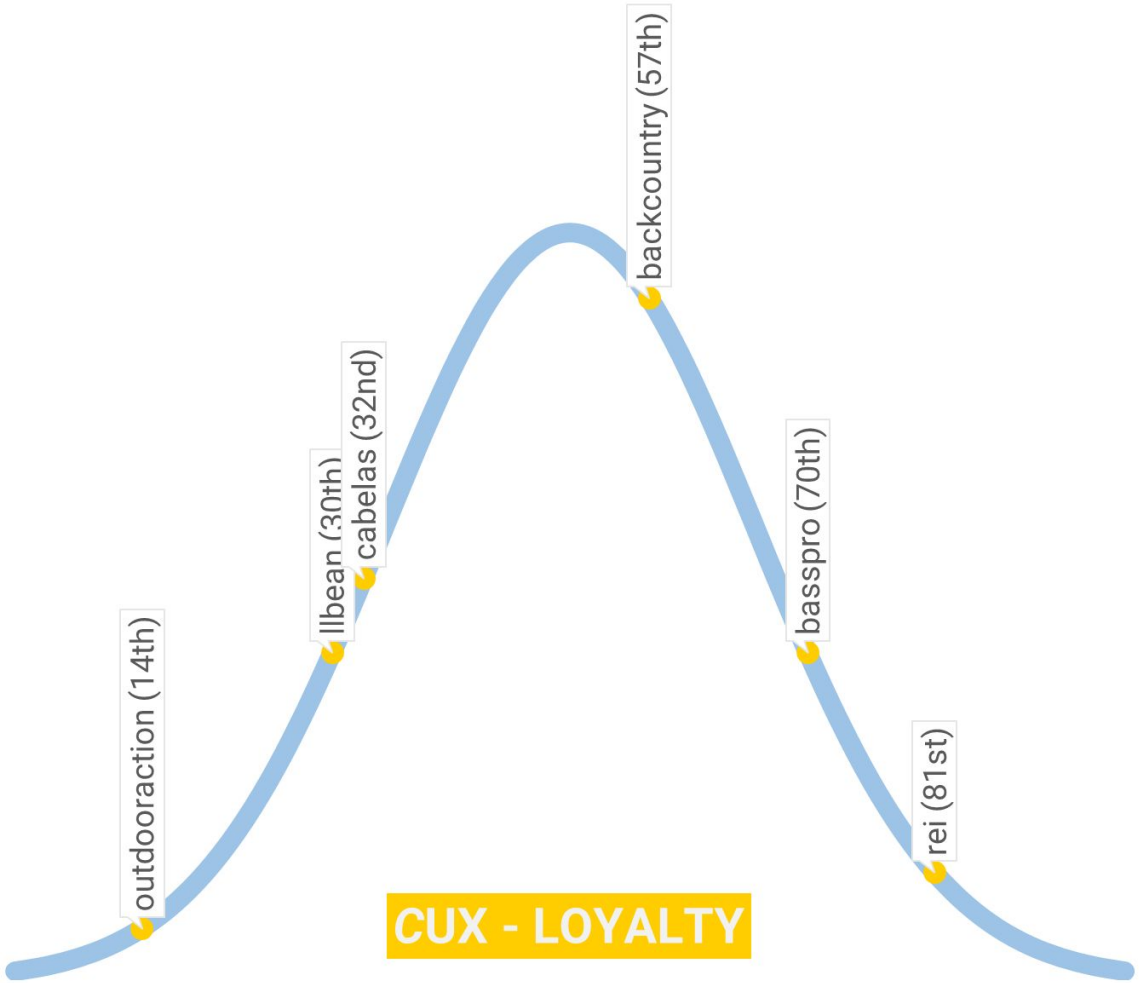


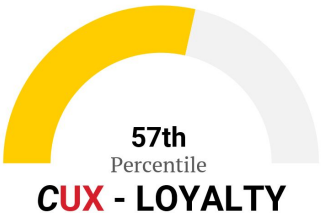


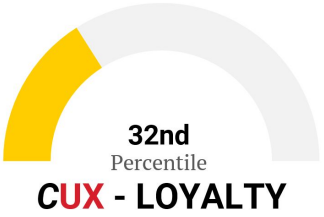
CUX - Loyalty

Survey questions (likert-scale):

How likely are you to recommend this website to a friend or colleague?
I will likely visit this website in the future.







Ecommerce subvertical »
Pets

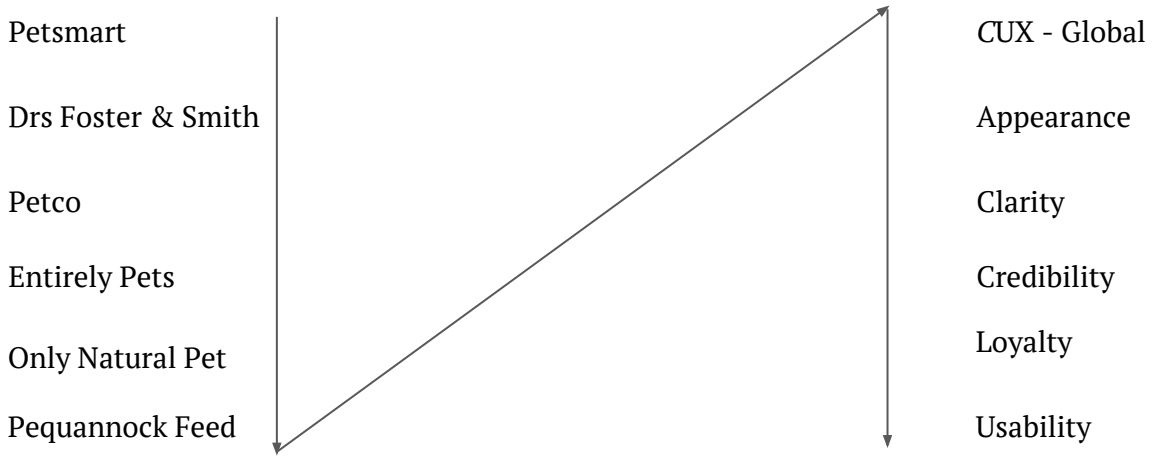
Alexa top 25

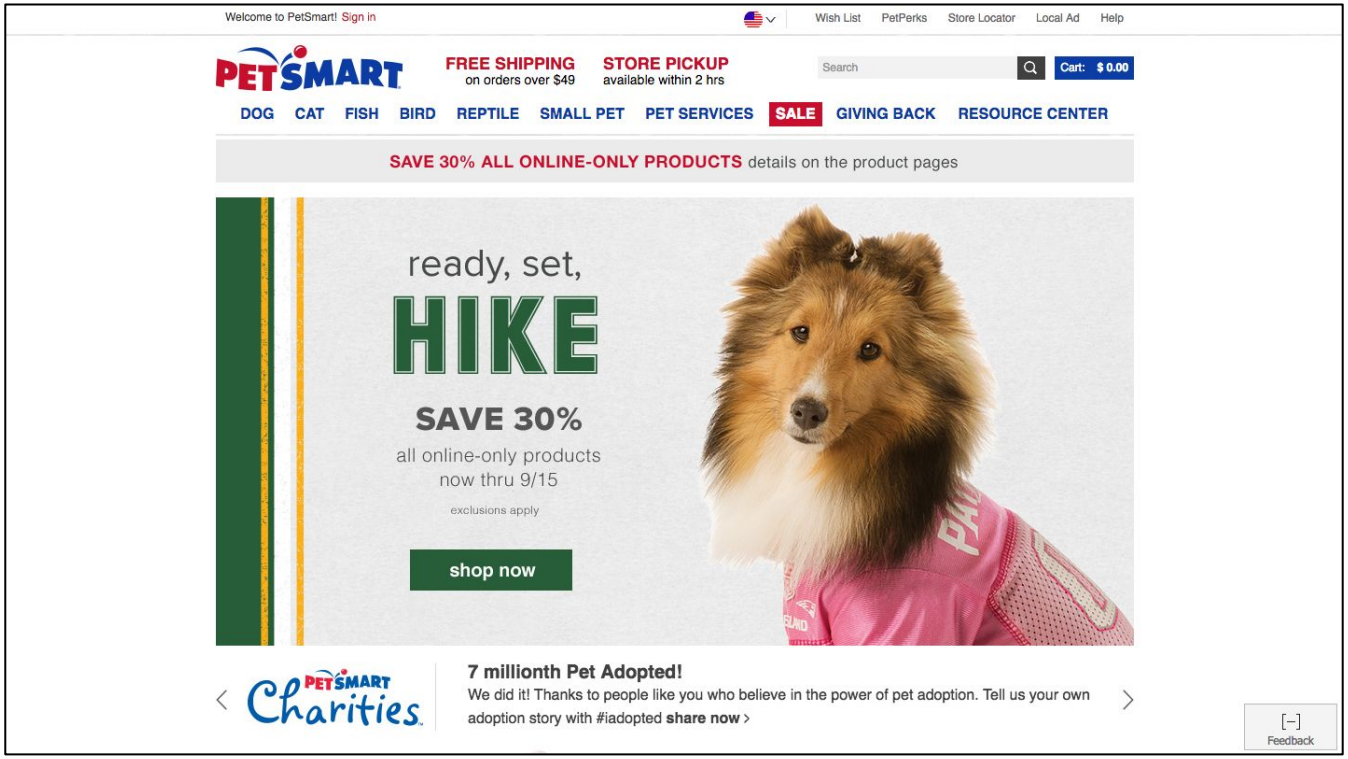
Alexa lower 400

Pets Contents

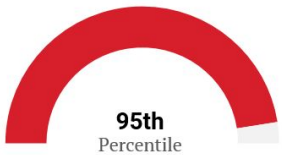
Standalone website rank profiles

Competitive benchmarking per UX dimension

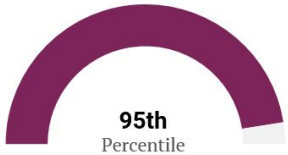




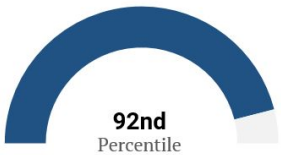
PETSMART



CUX - GLOBAL



CUX - APPEARANCE



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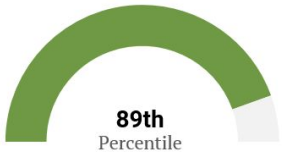

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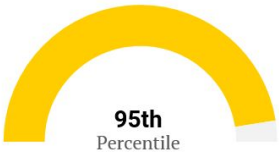
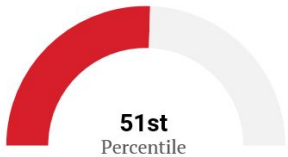


CUX - LOYALTY

CUX - CLARITY

DOCTORS FOSTER and SMITH



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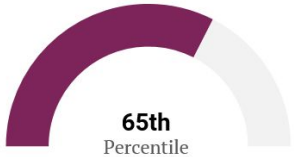

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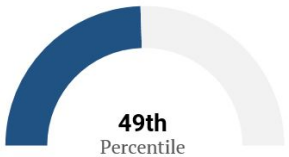
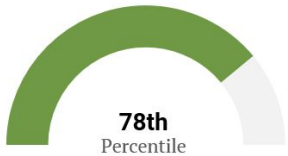


CUX - USABILITY



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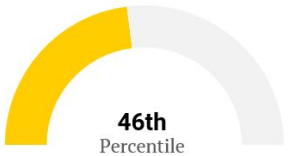
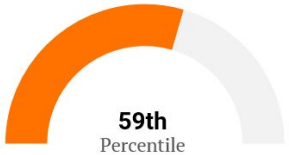


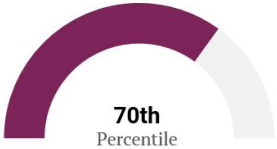
CUX - LOYALTY



CUX - CLARITY

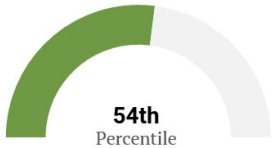
PETCO
Where the pets go

CUX - GLOBAL

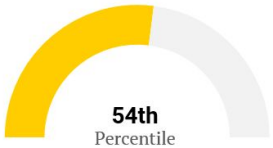


CUX - APPEARANCE

CUX - USABILITY



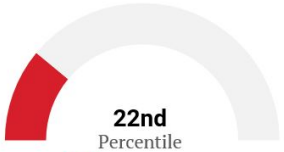
CUX - CREDIBILITY



CUX - LOYALTY

CUX - CLARITY

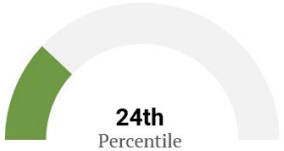
EntirelyPets®



CUX - GLOBAL

CUX - APPEARANCE

CUX - USABILITY



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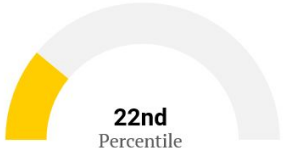

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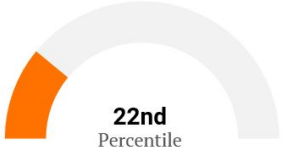
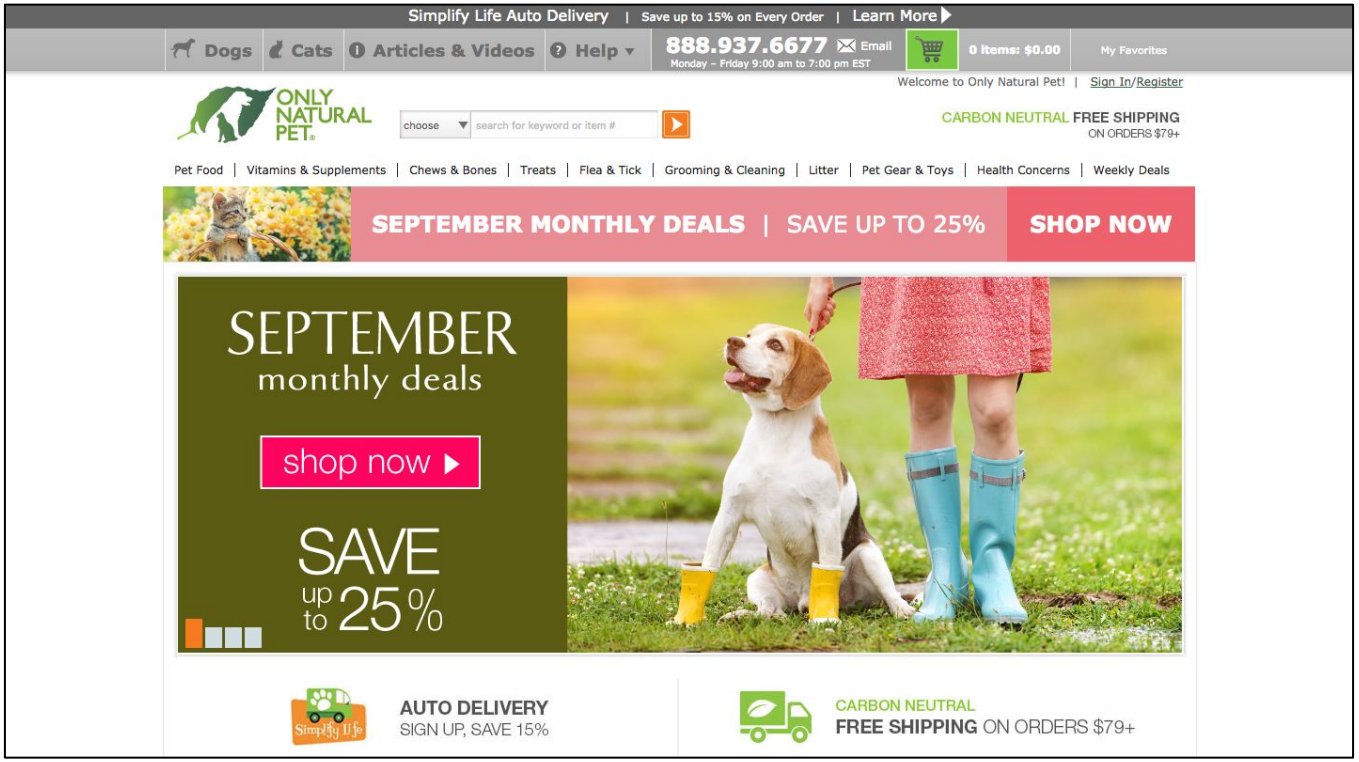
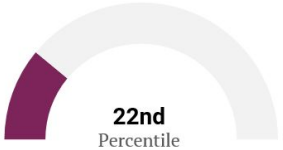


CUX - CLARITY

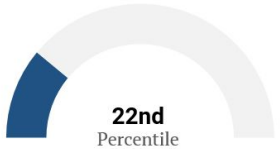


ONLY NATURAL PET.

CUX - GLOBAL



CUX - APPEARANCE

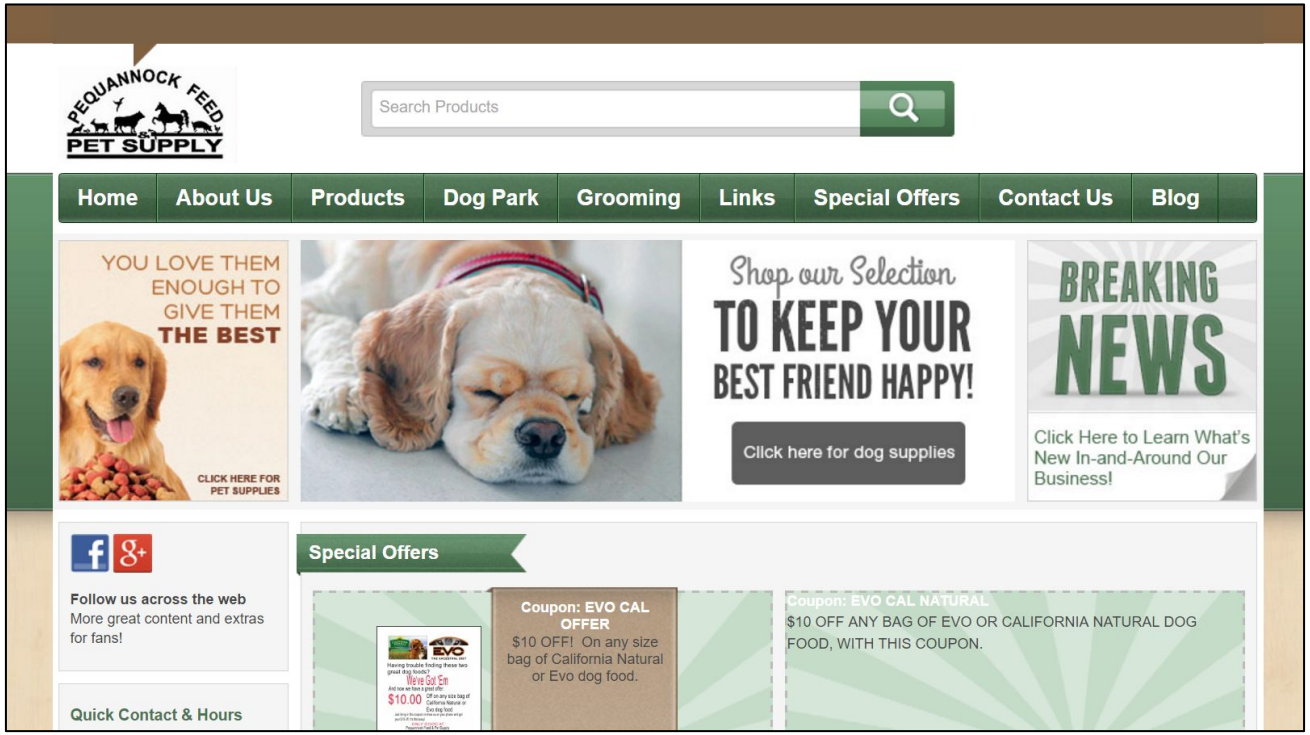


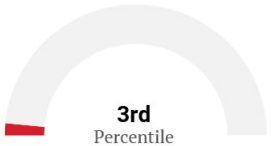
CUX - USABILITY

CUX - CREDIBILITY

CUX - LOYALTY

CUX - CLARITY





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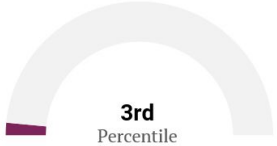

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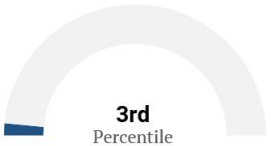
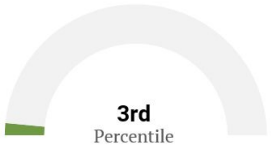
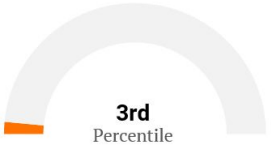


CUX - USABILITY



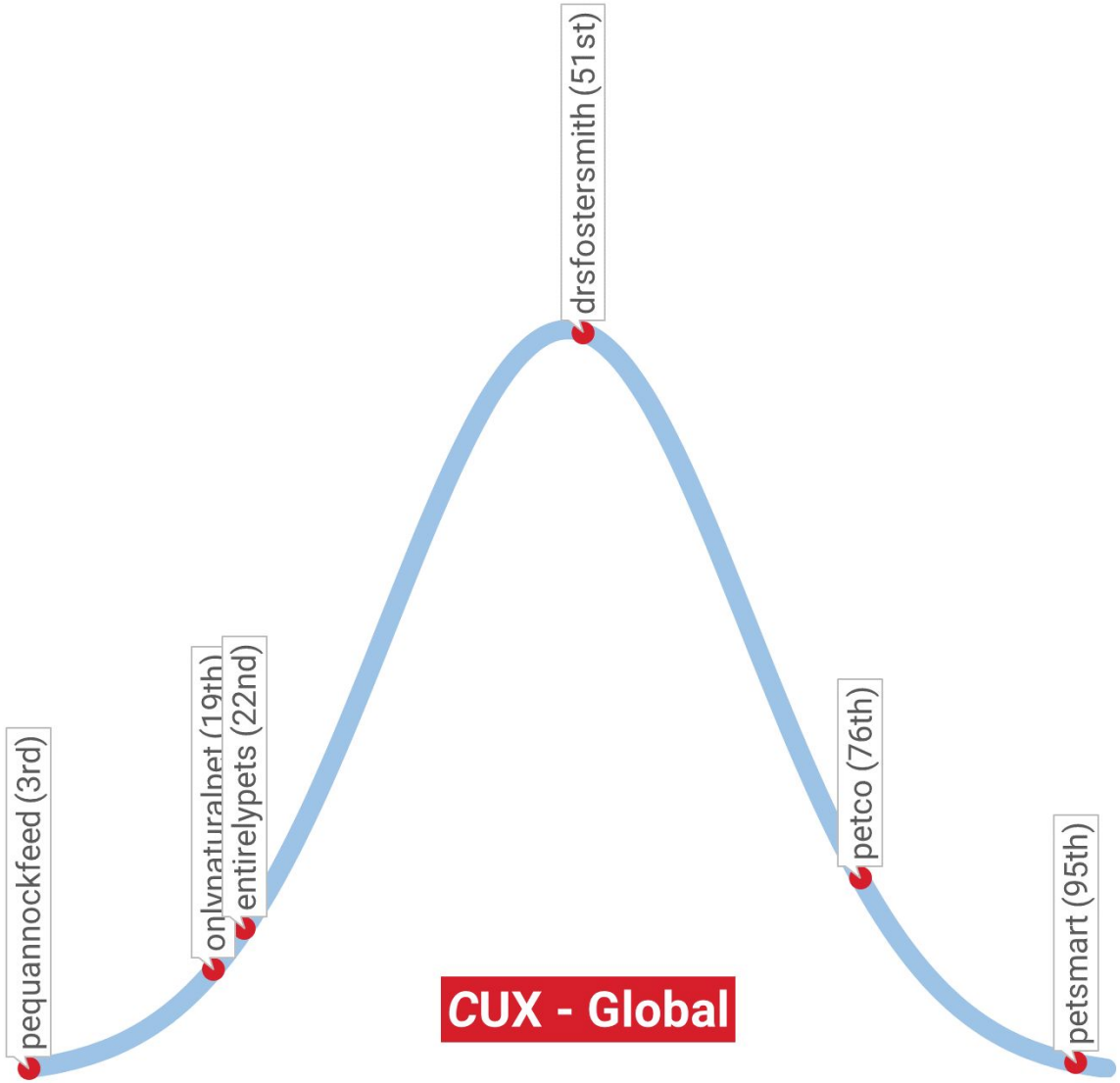
CUX - CREDIBILITY

CUX - LOYALTY



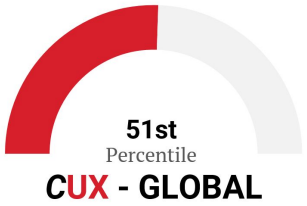
CUX - CLARITY

CUX - Global



PETSMART

PETCO
Where the pets go



DOCTORS FOSTER and SMITH

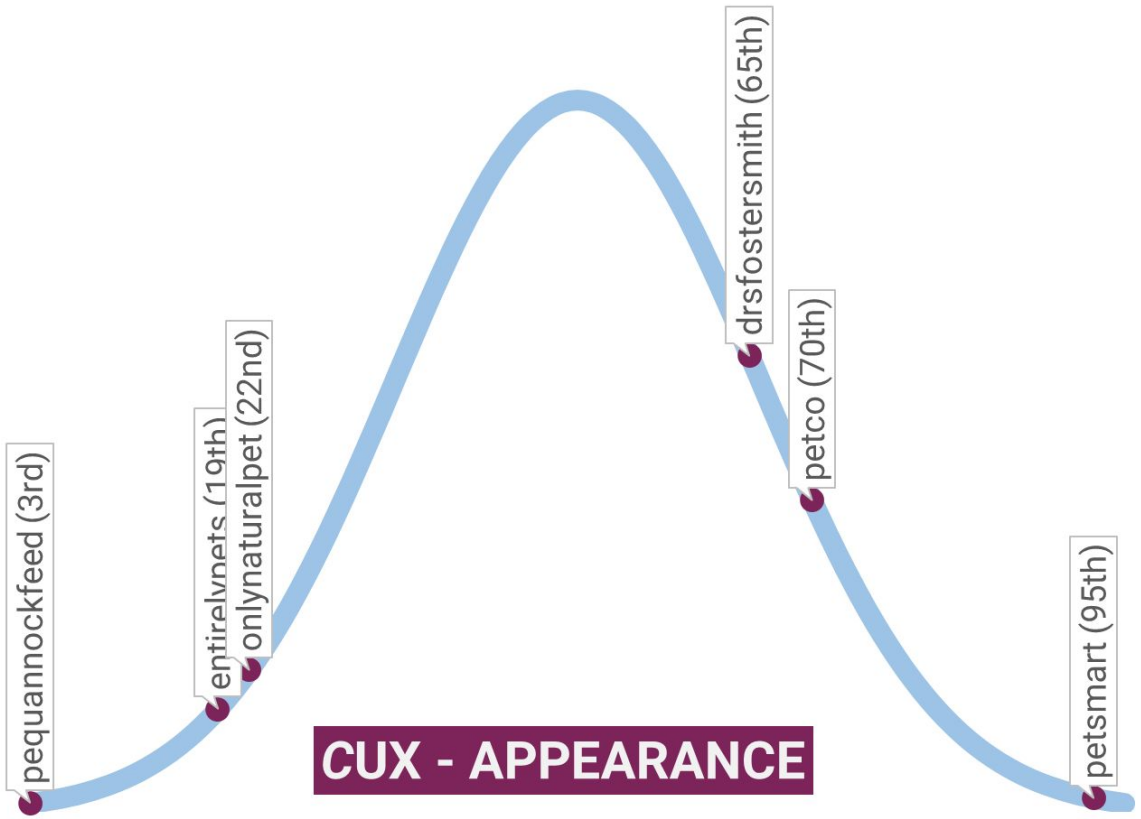
EntirelyPets®

ONLY NATURAL PET

PEQUANNOCK FEED & PET SUPPLY

CUX - Appearance

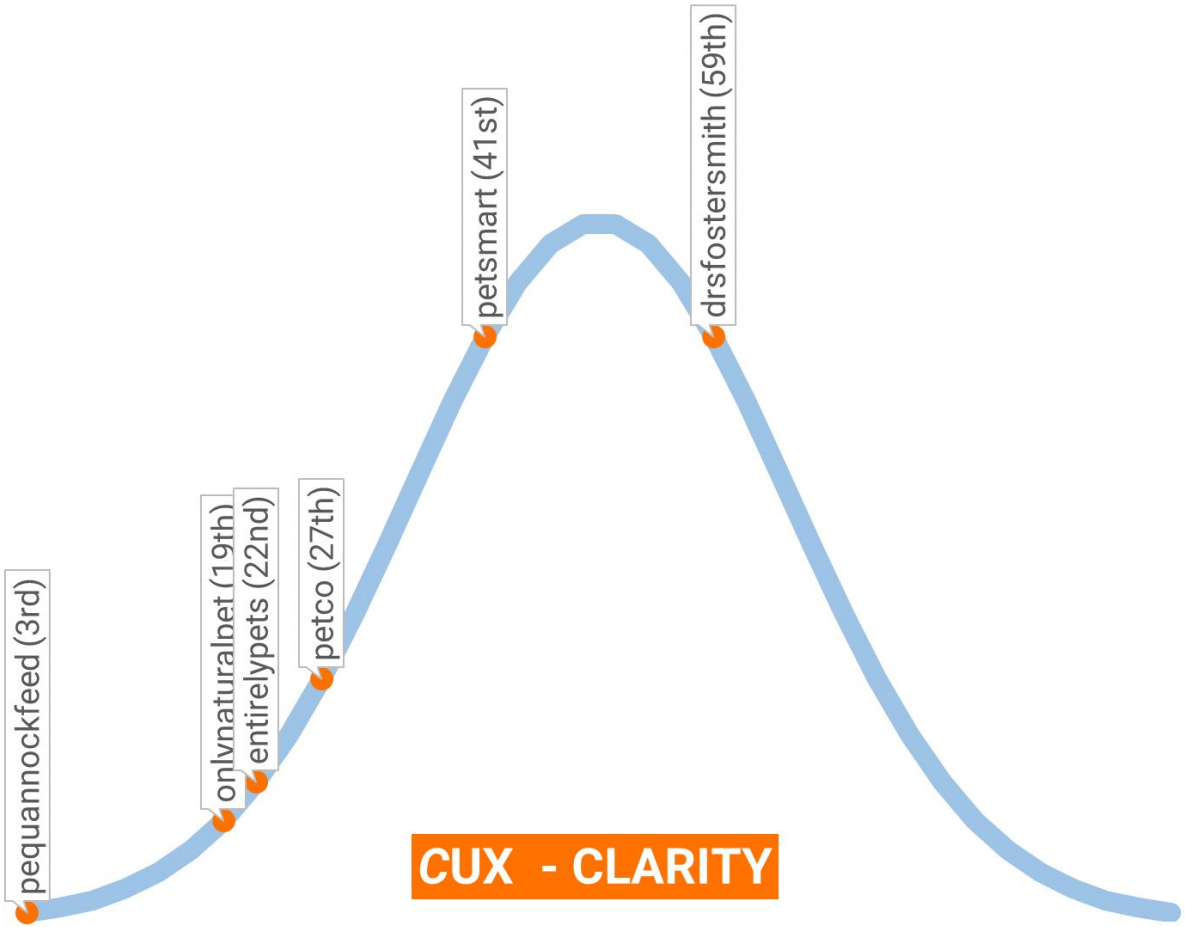
Survey questions (likert-scale):
I found the website to be attractive
The website has a clean and simple presentation

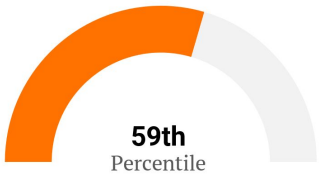


CUX - Clarity

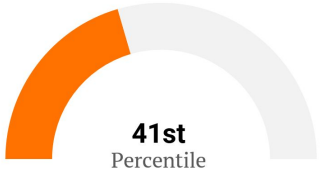
Survey questions (likert-scale):

I clearly understand why I should buy from this website instead of its competitors.

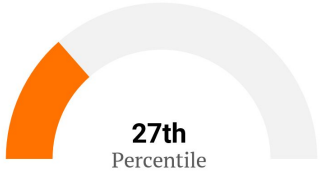




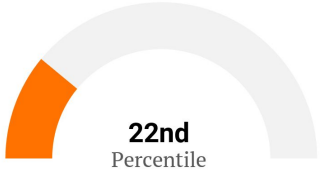
DOCTORS FOSTER and SMITH



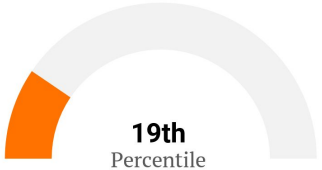
PETSMART



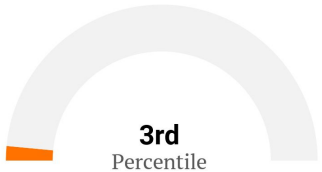
PETCO
Where the pets go



EntirelyPets®



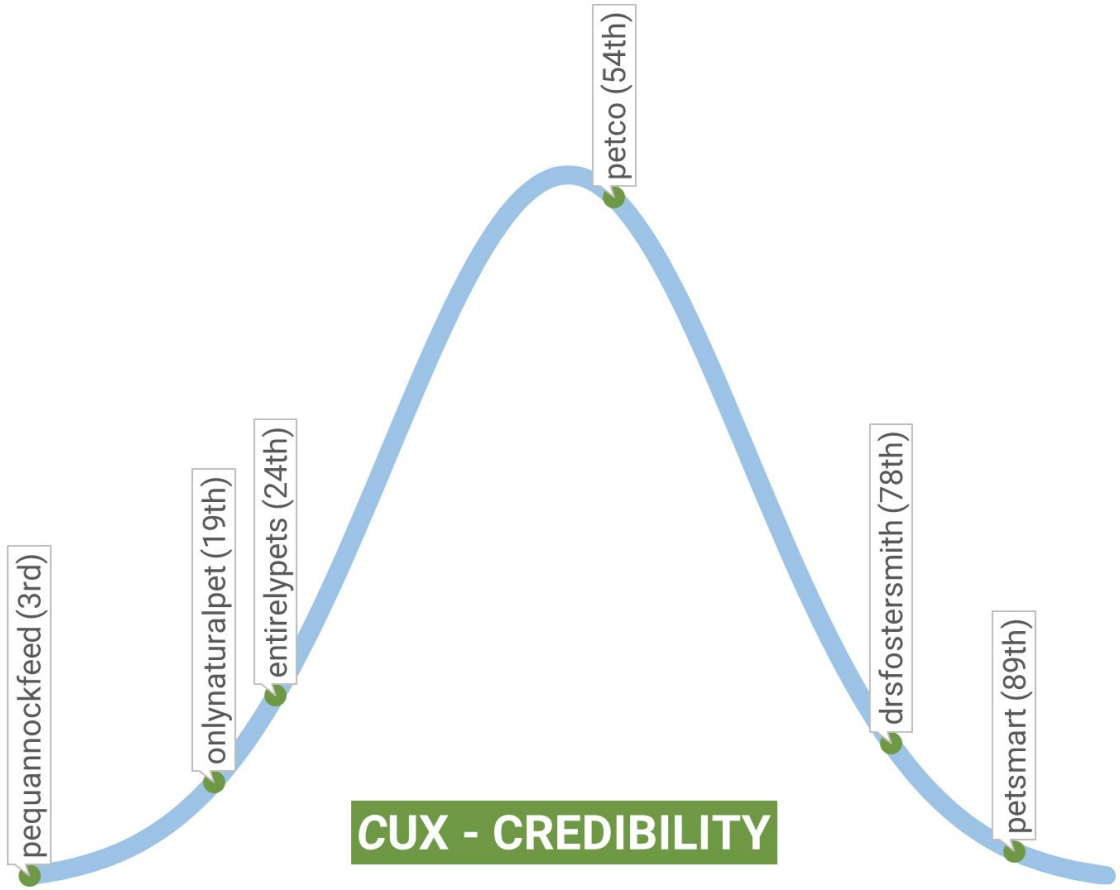
ONLY NATURAL PET

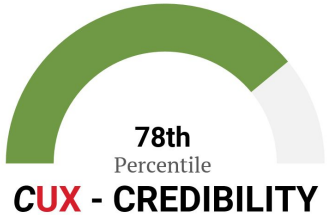


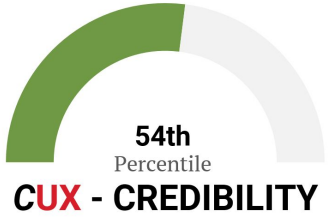
PEQUANNOCK FEED & PET SUPPLY

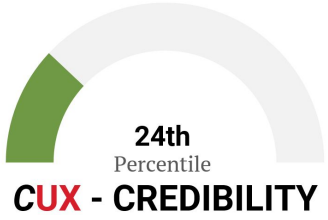
CUX - Credibility

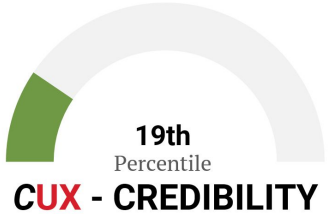
Survey questions (likert-scale):
I feel comfortable purchasing from this website.
I feel confident conducting business with this website.





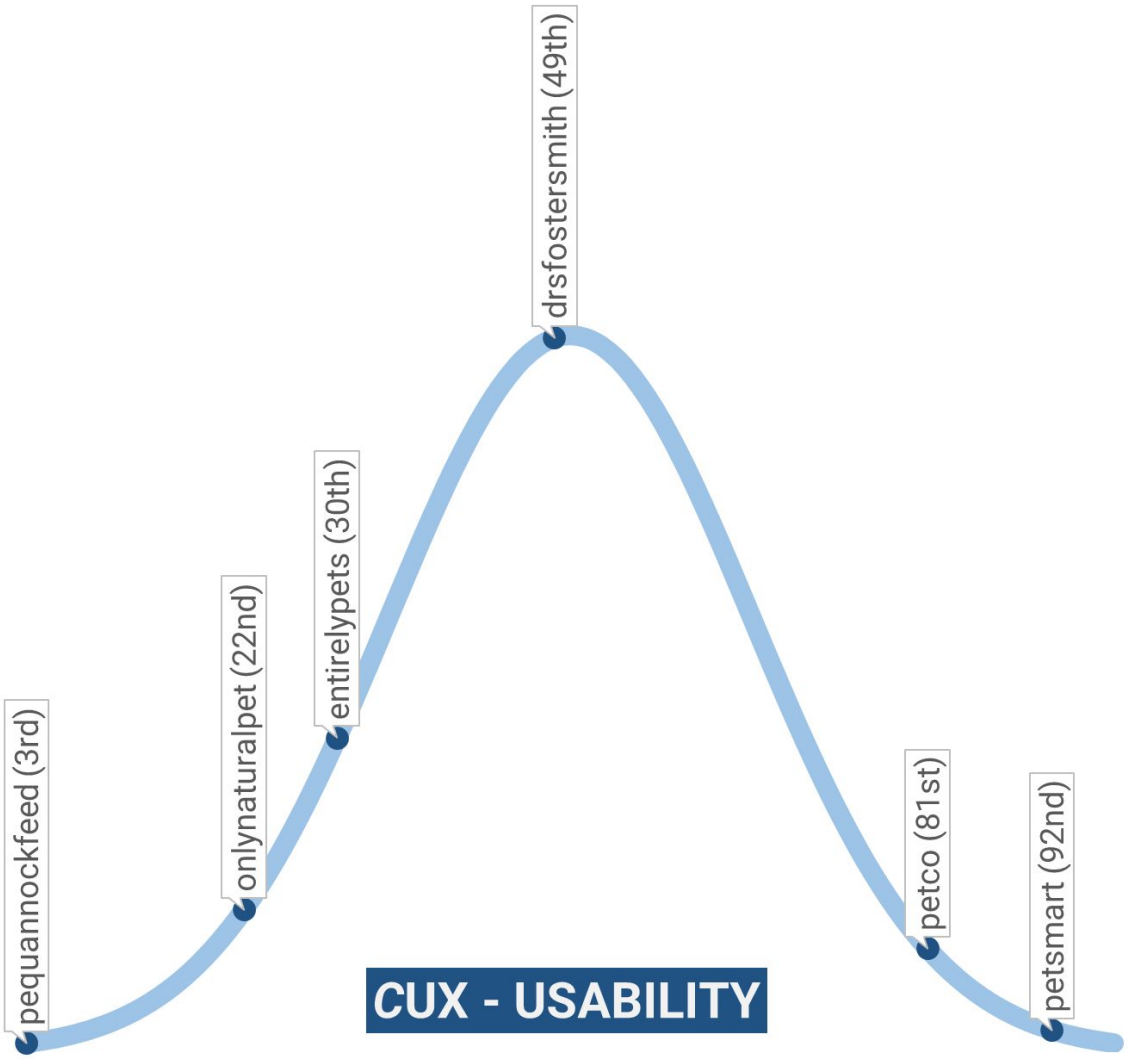


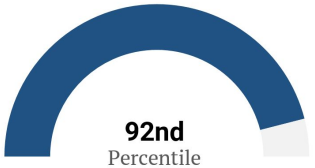




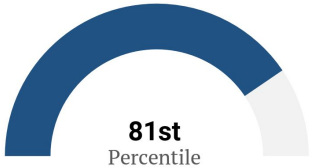
CUX - Usability

Survey questions (likert-scale):
This website is easy to use.
It is easy to navigate within the website.

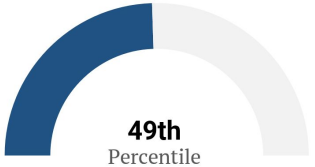




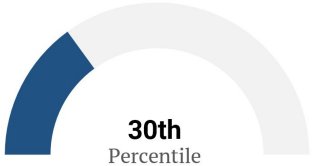
PETSMART



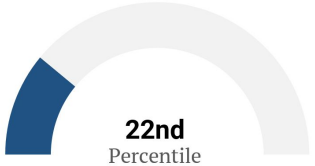
PETCO
Where the pets go



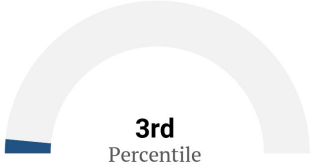
DOCTORS FOSTER and SMITH



EntirelyPets



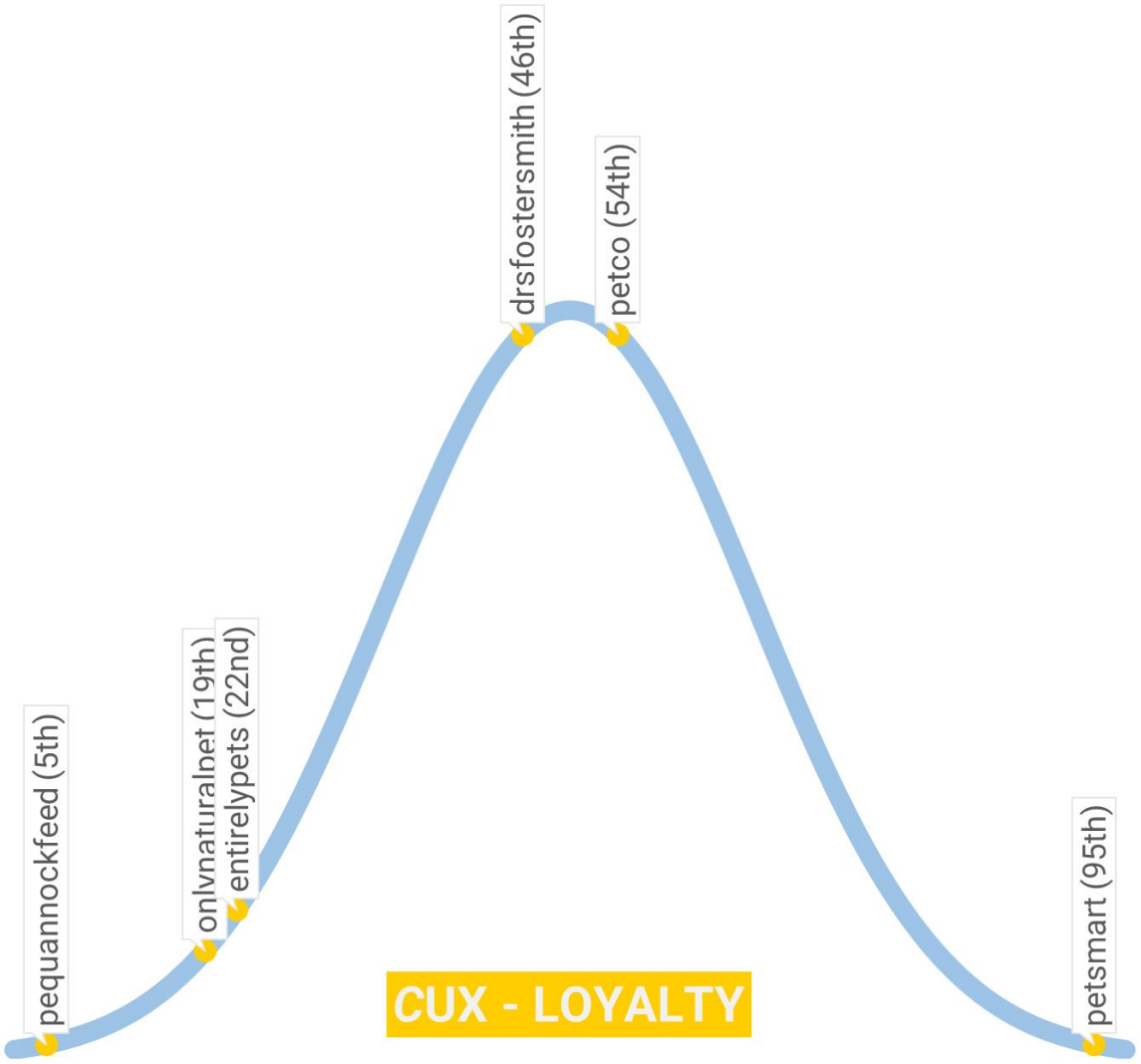
ONLY NATURAL PET

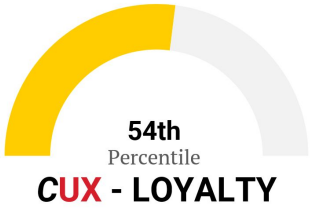


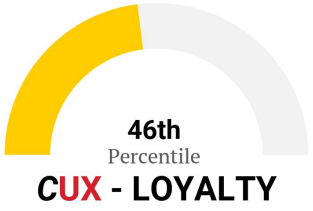
PEQUANNOCK FEED & PET SUPPLY

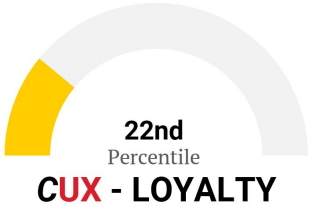
CUX - Loyalty

Survey questions (likert-scale):
How likely are you to recommend this website to a friend or colleague?
I will likely visit this website in the future.









Methods

The information in this report was primarily derived from two large rounds of user surveys and testing, described in detail below. We supplemented those efforts with extensive agency client research findings and 30+ user experience research studies conducted by the ConversionXL Institute research team.

A sample of the studies are referenced within guideline sections in the report, and include (but aren't limited to):

- Visual Cue Study: Lead Generation Form on a Landing Page
- Ecommerce Product Page Study (Part 1/3): Value Perceptions and Image size
- Ecommerce Product Page Study (Part 2/3): Visual Perceptions and Image Size
- Ecommerce Product Page Study (Part 3/3): Visual Perceptions and Text Format
- Social Proof Study: Which Kind Increases Perception and Recall
- Value Proposition Study: Effects of Layout on Perception & Message Recall
- Pricing Page Study (Part 1) Effects of Plan Price Order
- Pricing Page Study (Part 2) Effects of 'Highlighting' a Plan
- Video Voice-Over Preference Study
- Testing the Presenter's Paradox - Do People Really Average (Not Sum) Object Values?
- Trust Seals (Part 1) - Security Vs. Familiarity
- Trust Seals (Part 2) - Online Security Perceptions & Trust Seals
- Security on Checkout (Part 1) - Visual Perception and Recall of Trust Seals
- Security on Checkout (Part 2) Effects of Visual Reinforcement on Credit Card Fields
- Form Field Usability - Single Vs. Multi-Column Form Completion Time
- Benefit List Placement on an Ecommerce Product Page
- Form Field Usability - Multi-Select vs. Radio Buttons
- Credibility Effects of a 'Human Authority Image' (e.g., picture of the founder) on an Agency Website
- The Presenter's Paradox Revisited: No Effects of Visuals on Perceived Value
- How Distracting are Banner Advertisements on Home Pages? A Case Study
- Distraction of Internal Promotion vs. Third-Party Banner Advertisements
- User Reading Patterns of the New York Times - 2004 vs. 2016

Methods » Website Selection

36 sites were selected from 6 categories or subcategories of Alexa's Top 500 Sites on the Web representing 6 ecommerce subverticals, which are ranked by their 1 month alexa traffic. The 1 month rank is calculated using a combination of average daily visitors and pageviews over the past month. The site with the highest combination of visitors and pageviews is ranked #1.

Five sites from each subvertical were chosen from the first top-ranked 20 options, and for the quantitative survey methodology one site was selected from the 20th top-ranked pagee options (so a site ranking near 400). This site serves as a reference against the top tier sites and was included to validate the UX benchmark metric calibration (see Qualitative User-testing methods below).

Subverticals included (* indicates the low-tier benchmark site):

- **Clothing and Apparel**
  - Hatland*
  - Forever21
  - Gap
  - American Eagle
  - J. Crew
  - H&M
- **Nutrition**
  - Fitness First USA*
  - Swanson Vitamin
  - GNC
  - Vitacost
  - Vitamin Shoppe
  - Bodybuilding
- **Home Electronics**
  - Go Electronics*
  - Monoprice
  - Sony
  - Newegg
  - Crutchfield
  - TigerDirect
- **Pets**
  - Pequannock Feed*
  - Only Natural Pet
  - Entirely Pets
  - Petco
  - Drs Foster & Smith
  - Petsmart
- **Recreation**
  - Outdoor Action*
  - Cabela's
  - L.L. Bean
  - Backcountry
  - Bass Pro Shops
  - REI
- **Home & Garden**
  - Gertens*
  - Pottery Barn
  - Hayneedle
  - West Elm
  - Lowe's
  - Home Depot

Methods »

CUX Benchmarking - Quantitative Insights

A major component of this user-testing-based report is a supplement to the the qualitative data in the form of user survey-based quantitative data on users perceptions of website quality via a standardized questionnaire component. It allows us to benchmark the user experience of a website in a unique and highly useful way for conversion-minded practitioners. We call the approach *C*UX Benchmarking.

The features & benefits of this *C*UX benchmarking approach:

- **Conversion Focused:** developed with a UX dimension quantifying user's perception of a website's value proposition, or why they should consider a site compared to its competition.
- **Quantitative**: based on 100+ user datapoints for each site
- **Generalizable & Transferable**: It can describe the quality of any website - so can be used for competitive benchmarking and is ideal for relative context, understand how scores relate to each other when measuring before and after a design change, or compared to a competitor.
- **Multidimensional**: It includes the main factors for measuring website user experience and general quality of a website.
- **Standardized, Normalized, and Benchmarked**: It has been developed through extensive testing on a massive user testing database (see the peer-reviewed paper on it's foundation) and the metrics produced for any one website is able to be placed in context relative to its peers and relative to itself if replicated after website modification.
- **Repeatable:** Ideal for quantifying a baseline for comparison against later site design changes.
- **Ideal for Competitive Benchmarking**: Quickly and reliably know how your website is perceived (in dimensions of appearance, clarity, usability, and credibility) relative to your competition. Comparing against multiple websites provides context for what's working and not working to make inspired, hypothesis-driven design decisions.
- **Ideal alongside User-Testing results**: 5-10 user sessions providing qualitative, open-ended responses to questions relative to similar UX dimensions as what's in the CUX metric will provide actionable direction for design improvements.

Methods »

CUX Benchmarking - Quantitative Insights

The UX benchmark metric is adapted from the SUPR-Q: a comprehensive measure of the quality of the website user experience. Published in 2015 in the Journal of Usability Statistics, Jeff Sauro presents this new standardized survey metric that has four subcomponents to measure perceptions of a website's usability, credibility, appearance and loyalty. We modified this metric by adding an additional subcomponent, clarity. Website clarity, or specifically, clarity of the value proposition a website offers on it's homepage, is a primary driver for customer motivations and thus extremely important to conversion rates and customer perceptions generally.

The five subcomponents and their associated survey question(s) presented in a likert-scale format:

USABILITY
This website is easy to use.
It is easy to navigate within the website.

CREDIBILITY (Trust)
I feel comfortable purchasing from this website.
I feel confident conducting business with this website.

LOYALTY
How likely are you to recommend this website to a friend or colleague?
I will likely visit this website in the future.

APPEARANCE
I found the website to be attractive.
The website has a clean and simple presentation.

CLARITY (our additional question, not part of SUPR-Q)
I clearly understand why I should buy from this website instead of its competitors.

Methods »

CUX Benchmarking - Quantitative Insights

With the data from these questions across participants (ranging from 55 - 108 per site), we calculated a competitive UX benchmark metric among the sites studies, and within sub-verticals (e.g., apparel, nutrition, recreation) and thus provide a quantitative perspective that complements the qualitative user-testing data.

The results between the quantitative and qualitative testing aren't explicitly comparable, but they both should be a foundation for where hypothesis testing and benchmarking should start.

Note that we developed a unique calculation of the benchmark metric for this report, as we had the addition of the UX dimension of clarity. Thus it is not directly comparable to the SUPR-Q metric calculation. However, the metric we derived leverages the psychometric validation work to create and qualify the list of questions, and in our opinion improves the benchmark by adding a valuable perspective related to customer motivation towards buying from one vendor instead of another.

The value proposition, a part of our thinking in creating the clarity question, has proven to be one of the most important test variables in creating consistent and significant lifts in conversion optimization rate. Ecommerce business today are competing with the likes of Amazon, Best Buy, Zappos, and need to differentiate by clearly relating the benefits for why a customer needs to buy from them and not from Amazon.

Methods »

User Testing - Qualitative Insights

Remote unmoderated user-testing was performed in partnership with TryMyUI.

TryMyUI is a remote, cross-platform user testing tool that enables the customer to get qualitative video data on their website/webapp/mobile-app from their target demographic users.

With a host of analytical tools like Collaborative annotations, UXCrowd and UXDiagnostics, TryMyUI enabled our researchers to extract key user insights from the video and survey data.

Methods »
User Testing - Qualitative Insights

Testing was performed on each of the 30 top-tier sites (see Site Selection) with 10 users for each site performing tasks in a 'talk-aloud' protocol. Each of the 300 user sessions lasted 15-20 minutes.

Tasks provided were meant to mimic common experiences with an ecommerce site, including finding and purchasing a relatively specific item, comparing multiple items, browsing for an undefined item, and the checkout process.

The participants were given the following type of scenario and task list, here presented for the Clothing & Apparel subvertical:

> ***Scenario:*** *Imagine you accidentally destroyed your friend's shirt and need to buy them a new one. You're browsing the Gap website to see if they having something similar.*
>
> *1) Find a women's black short sleeve shirt for $35 or less.*
> *2) Now that you've found a shirt, compare it to others that are similar and add the one you'd prefer to buy to the shopping cart.*
> *3) Imagine you need a birthday gift for your friend. Find something you think they'd like and add it to the shopping cart.*
> *4) Now please go to your cart and complete the purchase; Credit Card#: 1111 2222 3333 4444 CVV: 111 Expiration Date: 06/01/2017. Your task will end when you see an error message after submitting the proxy credit card information.*

Methods »
User Testing - Qualitative Insights

For each task, users rated task difficulty on a 7 point likert scale, and task completion time was recorded.

Post-task questions for all sessions included:

1. *What frustrated you most about this site?*
2. *If you had a magic wand, how would you improve this site?*
3. *What did you like about the site?*
4. *How clearly do you understand why you should buy from this website instead of its competitors? (0=Not at all likely, and 10=Very Likely)? Please tell us why you chose this answer.*

The first 3 questions were designed to get a standard set of responses across sites.

The 4th was exploratory in a sense, as we asked this same question in the quantitative survey method. Here, we wanted to see how people answered this with some reasoning *behind* the numeric response (the "why" part of the question).

About » Authors

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About » ConversionXL Institute

The ConversionXL Institute is where people go to become advanced conversion optimizers and t-shaped marketers. Through the conversion course, students (marketers and other professionals) learn how to improve conversion optimization, UX, and web analytics skills.

We provide on-demand CRO, UX, and digital analytics video courses created and presented by top experts. Quizzes after each lesson along with a final exam ensure that our students are absorbing the content, and that they're truly qualified conversion optimizers by the time they earn their certificate.

ConversionXL is a data-driven growth & conversion optimization agency. We use UX research, A/B testing & analytics to drive continuous improvement.

We help clients increase revenue:

- We identify where your website is leaking money and where the biggest sources of gains hide
- We create optimized design, copy, & structure improvements, based on the data received
- We run extensive, iterative tests to figure out which optimized treatments work for your site
- We perform conversion research via User Testing and CUX Benchmarking Services - understand UX issues on your site and see how you compare against your competitors.