

Annex 8. Assessment of Commission website dedicated to prizes



HEURISTIC EVALUATION REPORT FOR
https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/find-funding/prizes_en

scope

A division of
netcompany

intrasoft

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1. Executive summary

1.1 Goals

We evaluated the desktop and mobile version of the Commission prize website (https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/find-funding/prizes_en) using the 10 general principles for interaction design (heuristic criteria), as described by Nielsen Norman Group.

The purpose of the evaluation is to assess how well the prizes website performs against each of these criteria. Furthermore, we aimed to develop a set of practical recommendations that can be considered, if a new website or page makeover is to be implemented in the future.

1.2 Findings & recommendations

Not all criteria were eventually deemed relevant during the evaluation, but the main findings are presented below:

- ✓ **Finding 1:** The two main headings of the page (e.g., Prizes, Conditions) are similar in size. Also, titles within text are not clearly visible.
Recommendation: Increase page's header title size and make titles in the text bold, to have better hierarchy.
- ✓ **Finding 2:** Option to follow on social media is missing.
Recommendation: If social media is important, they should be added to every page, to give the user the option to follow.
- ✓ **Finding 3:** Spacing between titles and text is not the same across the page.
Recommendation: Distances between titles and copy must remain consistent throughout the interface.
- ✓ **Finding 4:** Section titles are not visible when selected from the side menu.
Recommendation: When a section is selected, the title should be visible, to provide context to the users.
- ✓ **Finding 5:** External links open in the same browser window.
Recommendation: Let external links open in a new browser window to retain users.
- ✓ **Finding 6:** There is no indication for visited links.
Recommendation: Change state (e.g., color) to visited links to inform users about the ones they already have visited.
- ✓ **Finding 7:** The “European Commission website” in the footer doesn't look like a link.
Recommendation: A “home” icon or the EC logo could be used to inform the user that he/she is going to return to the home page.
- ✓ **Finding 8:** The footer is highly populated with elements / links with no logical segmentation. This requires from the user mental effort (cognitive demand) to navigate and chose the desired subsequent action/s.
Recommendation: Groups of items under the same context or similar categories should be created in the footer to help users differentiate content faster.
- ✓ **Finding 9:** There are terms (e.g. Bauhaus initiative) that many users may not be familiar with.
Recommendation: Unknown terms should be accompanied by references or links.

1.3 General recommendations

✓ General use of images

Visuals are always a great addition, given the nature of the info presented (i.e., prizes have a people and social side that must be highlighted). Images (for example photos of the awards' ceremonies)

can be used in combination with text to create a livelier experience for the user.

✓ **Special section about previous winners**

Provided information about past winners or contests including interviews and award-winning work would also increase engagement. Other visual tools, like photos and videos, or non-visual, like podcasted interviews, should be considered.

✓ **A call to action**

A call to action, for example “*Apply to a European Prize*” and/or “*Follow the 2023 edition of the xxx European Prize*”, etc, would improve engagement and would also urge people to be more actively involved.

2. Introduction

2.1 Scope and goal

We performed a heuristic evaluation review on the page https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/find-funding/prizes_en This review focused on desktop and mobile responsive view.

The review consisted of the following activities:

- Analysis of the desktop and mobile view, focusing on the 10 main pillars of usability heuristic principles using Nielsen' s Heuristic List.
- Recommendations for improvements to streamline the user journey.

This kind of review allows to identify usability issues and formulate actionable (prioritized) recommendations. In case a new site or a page redesign is to be developed, these recommendations should be taken under consideration.

2.2 Usability heuristics

Our process to make the assessment is based on the following usability heuristics principles:

- Visibility of system status
- Match between system and the real world
- User control and freedom
- Consistency and standards
- Error prevention
- Recognition rather than recall
- Flexibility and efficiency of use
- Aesthetic and minimalist design
- Help users recognize, diagnose, and recover from errors
- Help and documentation

3. Analysis

In this chapter the analysis of the task at hand is divided in 10 subchapters, one for each usability heuristic.

In each subchapter we make a short explanation of the heuristic followed by examples where we encountered usability.

3.1 Visibility of system status

The “Visibility of system status” refers to how well the state of the system is conveyed to its users. Ideally, systems should always keep users informed about what is going on, through appropriate feedback within reasonable time.

This is important because it provides a sense of control and eventually will help users to figure out what is needed to do next to reach their goal.

No findings based on based on “Visibility of system status” heuristic.

General recommendations

- *Users should always be updated on the system's status and operations through suitable visual signals and timely feedback. (e.g., When you finish watching an episode on Netflix, the system a little screen is displayed with the estimated loading time for the next episode.)*
- *Quick feedback to the user. Feedback is not necessarily visual; it can be audio. (e.g., the Apple Mac sound at startup).*

3.2 Match between system and the real world

The system should speak the user’s language, with words, phrases, and concepts familiar to the user, rather than system-oriented terms. Follow real-world conventions, making information appear in a natural and logical order.

No findings based on “Match between system and the real word” heuristic.

General recommendation

- *Skeuomorphism is the design concept of making items represented resemble their real-world counterparts. (e.g., When you read on a kindle, the pages turn with a swipe simulating turning pages in a real book.*

3.3 User control and freedom

Users often choose system functions by mistake and will need a clearly marked “emergency exit” to leave the unwanted state without having to go through an extended dialogue. Support undo and redo.

Part of a great user experience is nurturing users feeling of control over the user interface (UI) they happen to be using. Users should be able to quickly correct mistakes or backtrack on choices made. The ability to easily get out of trouble encourages exploration, which facilitates learning and discovery of features.

Conversely, when the UI doesn’t support these actions, users feel trapped and typically report dissatisfaction.

No findings based on “User control and freedom” heuristic

General recommendation

- *Sometimes users regret their decisions or make errors. It’s important that the system can allow them to undo and redo their actions as necessary. (e.g., Gmail provides a confirmation popup with an undo option, that allows users to cancel the sending, if the message was sent accidentally).*

3.4 Consistency and standards

"Consistency and standards" heuristic is a principle that identifies the need for language, icons, symbolism, and all other recurring visual elements within user interfaces to remain the same across different tasks.

In simpler terms, when visiting a website and we encounter a recurring element (icon, button, layout, style, font etc.) in different occasions it needs to be the same to make it easy for the user to identify it and be familiar with its function and thus reduce the overall learning load needed.

When user has learned something and for no justifiable reason, we deviate from that, we create confusion which might cause frustration, and frustration leads to poor user experience.

Furthermore, when a layout is not structured consistently (spaces between elements, sections etc.) it fails to create a rhythm. Having the user get familiar with a layout rhythm (ex. Image-text-CTA, space, image-text-CTA, space, image...) it helps him focus better on the content and absorb easier the information at hand. When rhythm

fails, user focus and information absorption are disrupted.

Here are the findings based on “Consistency and standards” heuristic.

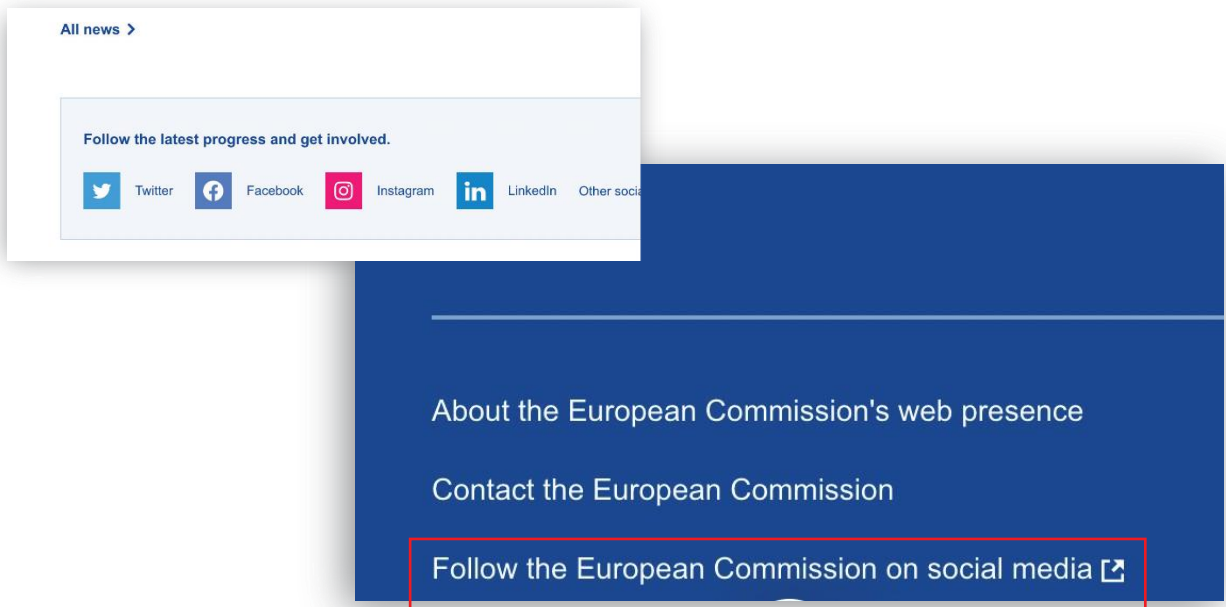
- H2 title is competing the main heading. H1 and H2 are quite close visually. The H1 title also, has different font size between the home page and the inner pages. This disrupts the hierarchy consistency. Consistent typography makes all copy readable, legible, and scalable to the audience.

The design system should be checked or a design system compliance assessment should be conducted.



- The option to follow the EC website is only in the home page, through the dedicated component. There isn't such option in the page (and other pages) except the external link in the footer which is a filter for every media channel.

The Social Media component at the bottom of the page or the dedicated social media icons in the footer should be added, to let the users make their option.



- Spaces between texts and titles are not consistent.

The same space should be in every section between title and text. Additionally, the text should be closer to the title to create a visual group and distinguish the sections of the page.

Conditions

Prizes are given directly by the Commission, usually to those working on projects that contribute to societal development. Scientists and researchers are good candidates for this type of incentive. The winner of a contest will receive cash, publicity coverage or promotion.

Prizes are awarded in accordance with the principles of transparency and equal treatment. Prizes cannot be awarded directly without a contest.

The rules of a contest specify

- eligibility criteria
- final date for the registration of applicants, if required, and for the submissions of
- exclusion criteria
- award criteria
- amount of the prize or prizes
- arrangement for the payments of prizes to the winners after the award

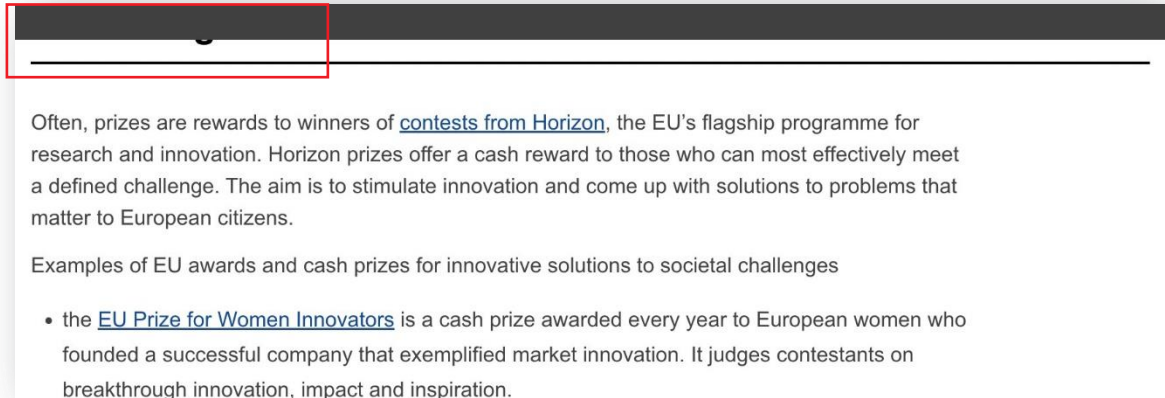
Applicants are informed as soon as possible of the outcome of the evaluation of their submissions and in any case within 15 calendar days after the award decision has been taken by the award officer.

Promoting the green and digital transitions

The New European Bauhaus initiative has the ambition to make the Green Deal a central, shared, centred and positive, tangible experience. Everyone should be able to feel, see and

- When the user clicks on the Page Contents menu on the left, the page scrolls to the respective text. However, the title of that section is not visible, making the user feel unsure about his selection.

When selecting a section from the Page Contents menu, the page should scroll down more so the title will be visible.



- There is an "Open in new" icon which states an external link in a new browser window. However, the new website opens in the same browser window, creating confusion. By opening the external links in the same window causes users to abandon the website.

All external links take users to a different website should be followed by the proper icon, and they should open in a new tab

Promoting the green and digital transitions

The New European Bauhaus initiative has the ambition to make the Green Deal a cultural, human-centred and positive, tangible experience. Everyone should be able to feel, see and experience the [green and digital transformation and the way](#) it enhances our quality of life. Read more about the [2022 New European Bauhaus Prize](#) winners.

Promoting innovation

3.5 Error prevention

Essentially, it involves alerting a user when they're making an error, with the intention to make it easy for them to do whatever it is they are doing without making a mistake. The main reason this principle of error prevention is important is that we humans are prone to- and will always make mistakes.

No findings based on “Error prevention” heuristic

General recommendation

- *Even better than good error messages, is a careful design which prevents a problem from occurring in the first place. (e.g., Inline validation in forms can be used to validate the data on the fly, so the user doesn't need to tap the Submit button).*

3.6 Recognition rather than recall

Showing users elements, they can recognize improved usability over needing to recall items from scratch because the extra context helps users retrieve information from memory.

How easily information can be retrieved from memory depends on how often we've encountered that information, how recently we've used, and how much it is related to the current context. Richer contexts (recognition rather than recall) make memory retrieval easier.

Interfaces that promote recognition give users extra help in remembering information, be it about tasks and items that they had seen before or about interface functionality.

Here are the findings based on “Recognition rather than recall” heuristic

- When a link has been clicked the user gets no feedback that he has already clicked that link.

Perhaps giving a different state to links (e.g., Different color) after they have been selected, would help users identify the ones they already have visited and saves them time in the process by not interacting with the same link-button twice (unless they choose to).

Promoting innovation

Often, prizes are rewards to winners of [contests from Horizon](#), the EU's flagship programme for research and innovation. Horizon prizes offer a cash reward to those who can most effectively meet a defined challenge. The aim is to stimulate innovation and come up with solutions to problems that matter to European citizens.

Examples of EU awards and cash prizes for innovative solutions to societal challenges

- the [EU Prize for Women Innovators](#) is a cash prize awarded every year to European women who founded a successful company that exemplified market innovation. It judges contestants on breakthrough innovation, impact and inspiration.
- [EIC Horizon Prize](#) aims to solve a major challenge facing society, without detailing how this should be achieved or who should achieve it. These prizes are open to anyone willing to think outside the box across sectors and disciplines. The prize is awarded to those who best meet the challenge.
- the [Horizon Impact Award](#) recognises and celebrates outstanding projects that have provided value to society

- The “European Commission website” title in the footer is a link to the home page. However, the user cannot recognize it as a link until hover. Additionally, it looks like a different website.

A “home” icon or the EC logo would make clear to the user that he is going to return to the home page of the EC.

European Commission website

This site is managed by the Directorate-General for Communication

Strategy

About the European Commission

Business, Economy, Euro

Live, work, travel in the EU

- In the footer, there are multiple links that include useful information. Problem here is that they are presented with the same way which does not help the user focus or understand the difference between them.

Making groups could help differentiate content faster and easier.

| | |
|--|--|
| Strategy | Aid, Development cooperation, Fundamental rights |
| About the European Commission | Food, Farming, Fisheries |
| Business, Economy, Euro | EU regional and urban development |
| Live, work, travel in the EU | Jobs at the European Commission |
| Law | Statistics |
| Funding, Tenders | News |
| Research and innovation | Events |
| Energy, Climate change, Environment | Publications |
| Education | |
| <hr/> | |
| About the European Commission's web presence | Languages on our websites |
| Contact the European Commission | Cookies |
| Follow the European Commission on social media | Privacy policy |

3.7 Flexibility and efficiency of use

Shortcuts -unseen by the novice users- speed up the interaction for the expert users such that the system can cater to both inexperienced and experienced users.

No findings based on “Flexibility and efficiency of use” heuristic

General recommendation

- Customization should be offered. Customization may involve moving items around an interface to reflect the users' priorities, selecting topics of interest, or other factors related to the visual design of an interface. (e.g., Trading apps provide the users the ability to make their “Watchlists” to have a watch on the stock prices whenever they want.)

3.8 Aesthetic and minimalistic design

Aesthetically pleasing designs can provide memorable experiences that differentiate a brand. However, the design needs to be aesthetic as well as minimalistic. Interfaces should only include necessary elements, with high informational value. Clarity will always win

over visual flourish.

Here are the findings based on “Aesthetic and minimalistic design” heuristic

- Beyond contrasting colors, the contrast between different type sizes, weights, and styles is also key to creating typographic hierarchy.

Bulleted paragraph titles, should be bold for better scannability and visual hierarchy

Prize recipients

The most common categories of prize winners are young people/students, professionals, and public bodies.

Some examples of past winners include:

- a university student working on shaping competition policy in the era of digitalisation
- a young film maker designing a poster for a European film festival
- a journalist showcasing journalistic excellence covering migration
- a teacher exploring best practices in teaching about the EU
- a recently graduated architect competing for a young talent architecture award
- a company designing an incubation centre or best practices in environment
- a local authority working on European mobility week

General recommendation

- *The use of images would improve aesthetics, efficiency, and create an overall, more engaging experience. Images also have the power to evoke strong emotions and would give the page context and depth.*

3.9 Help users recognize, diagnose, and recover from errors

Error messages should be expressed in plain language (no codes), precisely indicate the problem, and constructively suggest a solution.

No findings based on “Help users recognize, diagnose and recover from errors” heuristic

General recommendation

- *Traditional error message visuals should be used, like bold, red text. Also, technical jargon should be avoided.*

3.10 Help and documentation

It's best if the system doesn't need any additional explanation. However, it may be necessary to provide documentation to help users understand how to complete their tasks.

Any such information should be easy to search, focused on the user's task, list concrete steps to be carried out, and not be too large.

Here are the findings based on “Help and documentation” heuristic.

- Unknown terms (e.g., The New European Bauhaus initiative) should have a reference or a link

Promoting the green and digital transitions

The New European Bauhaus initiative has the ambition to make the Green Deal a cultural, human-centred and positive, tangible experience. Everyone should be able to feel, see and experience the green and digital transformation and the way it enhances our quality of life. Read more about the [2022 New European Bauhaus Prize](#) winners.

Promoting innovation

General recommendation

- *Whenever possible, the documentation should be presented right at the moment that the user requires it. Documentation should be a part of the product design backlog; it should be a living document that will be updated regularly.*

4. Heuristics analysis report

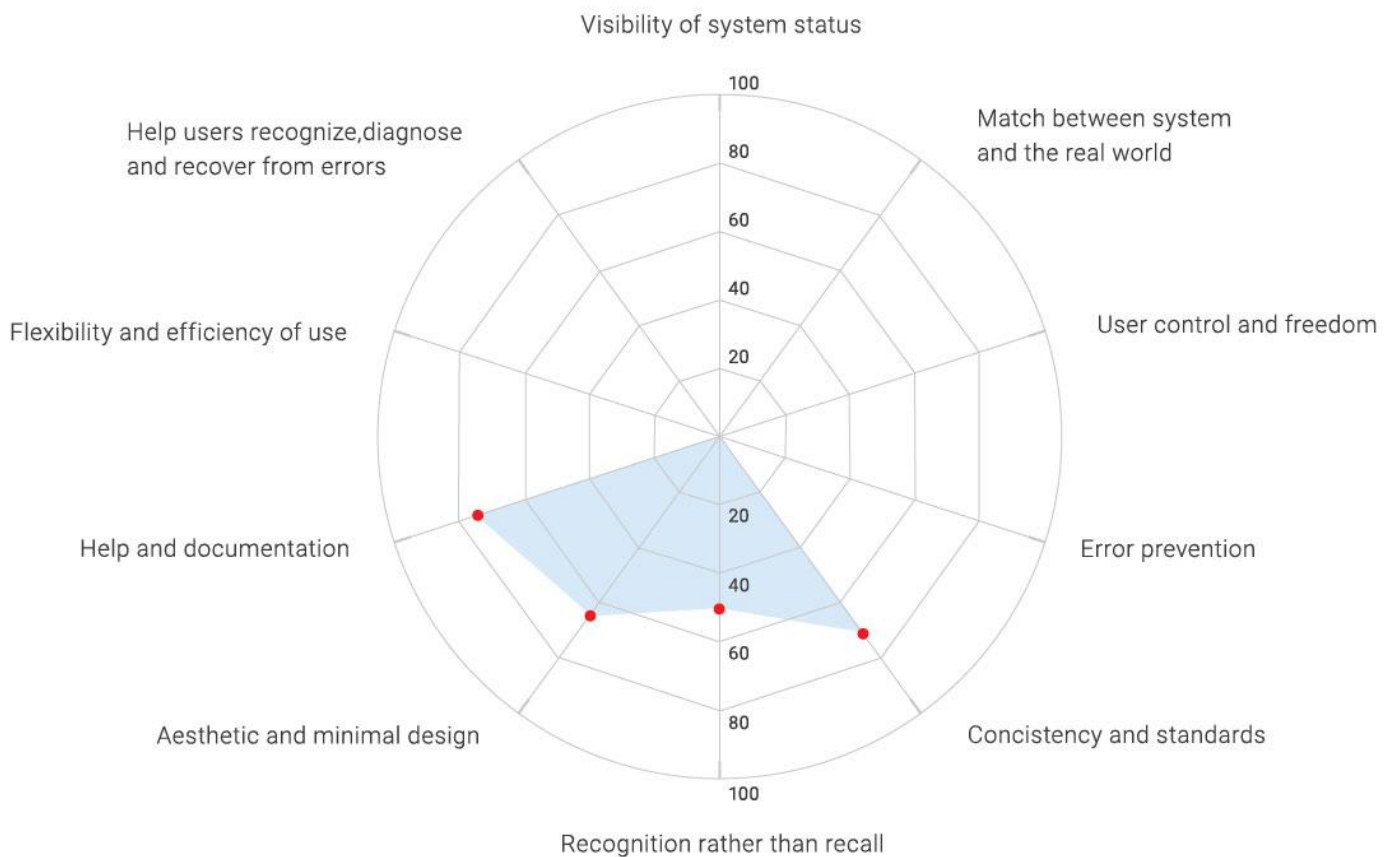
Analysis results are based on how many and how often usability principles (as explained in each occurrence) were violated by the design in each case.

Each of the 10 heuristic evaluation criteria has been assigned 3 usability rules that support and drive the specific outcome for the heuristic (this number is not set, it can vary). The compliance to each of the usability rules are measured against 4 severity criteria as illustrated in the table below.

| Values | 3 usability rules for each heuristic |
|---------|--------------------------------------|
| 75-100% | Compliance with 3 rules |
| 50-74% | Compliance with 2 rules |
| 25-49% | Compliance with 1 rule |
| 0-24% | Compliance with 0 rules |

| | HEURISTICS | PASS/FAIL | SCORE |
|-----------|--|-----------|---------------|
| 1 | Visibility of system status | | |
| 1.1 | Is the user aware of their current position within the user journey? | N/A | N/A |
| 1.2 | Is the user notified about changes in their user journey? | | |
| 1.3 | Is the user aware of factors that can have a significant impact on their experience? | | |
| 2 | Match between system and the real world | | |
| 2.1 | Are UI elements and interaction prompts easily recognizable? | N/A | N/A |
| 2.2 | Does the online experience replicate the familiarity of offline actions and behaviors? | | |
| 2.3 | Does the website make use of acronyms, technical terms or jargon that need an explanation? If acronyms are used, are they clearly explained? | | |
| 3 | User control and freedom | | |
| 3.1 | Is the user able to exit all states such as pop-ups and multimedia? Is the exit state consistent and clear? | N/A | N/A |
| 3.2 | Is the user able to use the core sections of the website without signing up? | | |
| 3.3 | Does the user have control over their personal information? | | |
| 4 | Consistency and standards | | |
| 4.1 | Is there a consistent design standard for all call to actions (CTA) on the website? | P | 2/3 50-74% |
| 4.2 | Is there a consistent design standard for form controls? | P | |
| 4.3 | Is there a consistent design standard for headings? | F | |
| 5 | Error prevention | | |
| 5.1 | Are there helpful constraints that prevent the user from making mistakes? | N/A | N/A |
| 5.2 | Is the user guided with suggestions to prevent incorrect actions? | | |
| 5.3 | Is the user presented with forgiving formatting for information? | | |
| 6 | Recognition rather than recall | | |
| 6.1 | Is the user presented with a list of recently viewed products or pages | P | 1/3 25-49% |
| 6.2 | Is the user presented with customized content based on previous actions? | F | |
| 6.3 | Is the user presented with navigational items that reduce cognitive load and aids recall? | F | |
| 7 | Flexibility and efficiency of use | | |
| 7.1 | Is the user presented with shortcuts to end goals? | N/A | N/A |
| 7.2 | Is the user able to tailor frequent actions? | | |
| 7.3 | Is the user presented with ambient information for quick actions? | | |
| 8 | Aesthetic and minimalist design | | |
| 8.1 | Is the user interface design simple and easy to understand? | F | 2/3 50-74% |
| 8.2 | Is the user clear on what all the icons mean and why they're included in the design? | P | |
| 8.3 | Are all forms easy to understand and effortless to fill in? | P | |
| 9 | Help users recognize, diagnose, and recover from errors | | |
| 9.1 | Is the user presented with error messages (as opposed to no message) when adding incorrect information in a form control? | N/A | N/A |
| 9.2 | Is the user presented with human-readable error messages that offer useful information on how to rectify the problem? | | |
| 9.3 | Is the user presented with polite error messages that don't blame the user for the error? | | |
| 10 | Help and documentation | | |
| 10.1 | Is the user presented with clear steps/guidelines to use the product service? | P | 2/3 50-74% |
| 10.2 | Does the user have access to documentation with relevant topics to help reach their goal? | F | |
| 11.3 | Is the user presented with other channels of communication to enquire assistance to reach their goal? | P | |

As there is no need to focus on the detail of the scoring but rather on the usability rules that have not met the compliance criteria, a radar chart is an excellent way to get an overview of the areas in which the page is lacking.



| | |
|---|-----|
| Visibility of system status | N/A |
| Match between system and the real world | |
| User control and freedom | |
| Error prevention | |
| Flexibility and efficiency of use | |
| Help users recognize, diagnose, and recover from errors | |

5. General notes

- Could the whole prizes concept be branded, with a dedicated identity?
- Images can be used in combination with copy to create a more engaging experience for the user. Links to registration forms, info from previous winners or contests and a call to action would improve, engagement and would also urge people to participate.