FM22220 WEBSITE DESIGN ISSUES GROUP PRESENTATION

In your groups you have been given the task of preparing and presenting a talk which will take the form of a Powerpoint presentation (up to but not exceeding ten minutes) on the subject of a 'competitor analysis' of a website.

In this exercise, imagine that I am the client. I have asked your groups to choose between two ideas for websites:

1. a website promoting engineering careers aimed at women university students; or
2. a clothing website aimed at young men who are identified as 'computer nerds' or 'geeks'[1].

The presentation will consist of

1. **an identification of the proposed target audience**
2. **a 'competitor analysis'**
3. **a conclusion with a 'mission statement'.**

The presentations will take place on **November 2nd** during the website design practicals in Physics 317. These presentations will not be assessed, but they should be a useful rehearsal for the individual presentations that you have to give to support your website proposals as part of the second assignment next year.

With your consent, I will film them using a flip camera and the files will be available for you to copy so that you can assess your performances.[2]

In the session, your presentations will be critiqued by me based on the following criteria:

- **your ability to articulate your ideas clearly and engagingly**
- **the evidence of the research you have done**
- **the quality and imagination of the Powerpoint materials.**

On this last point, please do not just present a series of slides consisting of text bullet points. Think about the design of your Powerpoints so that the images, colour, typeface style and layout of your slides really enhance your talk.

1. An identification of the proposed target audience

---

[1] If neither of these ideas appeals to you, you are also free to submit your own alternative proposal. But it must take the form of a website which is stereotypically associated with men but which is targeting women or *vice versa*: for instance, a cosmetics website aimed at men, or a sports-car website aimed at women. Email your suggestions to me at odm@aber.ac.uk) so that I can advise you on the suitability of your choice.

[2] To protect your privacy I will not be keeping the files and I will respect the rights of anyone who does not wish to be filmed.

Who is the target audience? Answering this question involves addressing certain challenges because the target audiences I have chosen for this exercise can be easily stereotyped. The assumptions that there are women who play rugby or computer nerds who like clothes may seems fairly odd to some people (or in semiotic parlance, 'marked') because it challenges widespread assumptions about young men and women in society. I'm sure you have ideas about what a computer nerd or a female rugby player is like, but I doubt that many of them are positive in the sense that any person identified as a member of these groups would be pleased to be associated with such stereotypical characterisations (although it is often the case that people who are the victims of stereotyping do try to reclaim and redefine negative connotations to suit their own purposes). The point is that you must try to get beyond mere stereotyping and see your target audience as they see themselves.

In order to do this you will have to do some research, and this needs to be incorporated into your talk. You will either have to do some reading about women rugby players or computer nerds and/or solicit the opinions of people who are members of these target audiences in order to find out what they feel about these issues.

Remember that an effective website 'speaks' to its target audience. Just as there are people in life who appear to you to be more friendly, likeable and approachable than others, so there are websites that appear to be more approachable and appealing to their target audiences than others.

2. A competitor analysis

A competitor analysis is where you assess the strengths and weaknesses of the websites that you judge to be working in the same area as yourselves. This consists of choosing a selection of competitor websites and identifying similarities and differences in their designs (i.e. typography, layout, use of colour, use of images). Ask yourself: are the websites you have chosen typical of the kind of websites that exist in this area? Are they effective in defining a positive image of their target audience? What are they 'saying' to their target audience in terms of their connotations?

If you cannot find any websites that specifically deal with your area then you will need to widen your search to include categories that are relevant. So, for example, if there are no websites specifically dealing with 'computer nerd clothing', try looking for websites aimed at young men who like computers and at websites aimed at young men who are interested in fashion. Are there any common themes that link these two websites? Use these themes as the basis of for your own design decisions.

The trick to analysing anything is being able to identity things that are similar and things that are different according to some criteria. For example, as Daniel pointed out in his lecture, a broadsheet newspaper website contains a lot more text than a tabloid website which has a lot more photographs. So he was using the criteria of a photographs to text ratio in order to make the comparison. On the basis of this evidence therefore we can make a hypothesis, a kind of prediction which states that a tabloid website will always contain more photographs than a broadsheet one. We can then test this hypothesis on other websites sites to what extent they prove or disprove this hypothesis.

The hypotheses that you formulate from your competitor analysis will be the ones that will inform the design of your website. For example, if you find that a lot of websites

about female rugby players emphasise the social aspects of the sport (by having photographs of groups of girls looking as if they are having fun) then your website should contain such images also. Furthermore testing your hypotheses also provides the rationale for you design decisions. i.e. the reason you put social picture in your website is because you found this to be a significant factor in other rugby websites. Remember design is not just about the idea but also the execution so remember to think about presentational aspects of layout, colour, typeface styles and use of photographs. It is a good idea to have to themes of sense of stylistic consistency to these. For example, do not use every typeface or colour available but rather restrict them to specific colour and typeface palettes.

3. Conclusion

The conclusion of your talk should tie together all your findings in the form of a proposal which is a 'mission statement' of how you will move forward from here with your design. For example, you might find that men who get into fashion at university do so primarily because of the social benefits its affords them. Therefore you will be looking at design ideas that connote social success from being well dressed. These you can build into your design.

Successful targeted website design is all about the 'fuzzy logic' of the connotations which suggest certain ideas. Connotations are informed by conventions that dictate how certain ideas should be expressed. For example, this document is almost entirely in the font TIMES NEW ROMAN which has the connotation of being quite formal and serious (partly because a lot of academic documents use this typeface). Think about how different this document would seem if it were all written in a different font: COMIC SANS for instance? or this typeface which is called --aaaiight!--- but connotes a meaning that i am hip and street-- waaan!!!!
Appropriate connotations are at the heart of targeted website design.

Remember that for this exercise you will not be producing a website or even a mock-up of one. Given the time constraints for your talk, you should find you that have plenty to say to fill the time of five to ten minutes allotted to you.

Any questions?

If anything is unclear or if you have any questions about anything else please email me (odm@aber.ac.uk).