**Representative User Test Report for WebMD Website**

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## Website

The selected website ([http://www.webmd.com/](http://www.webmd.com/)) for this user test is called WebMD (see figure 1).
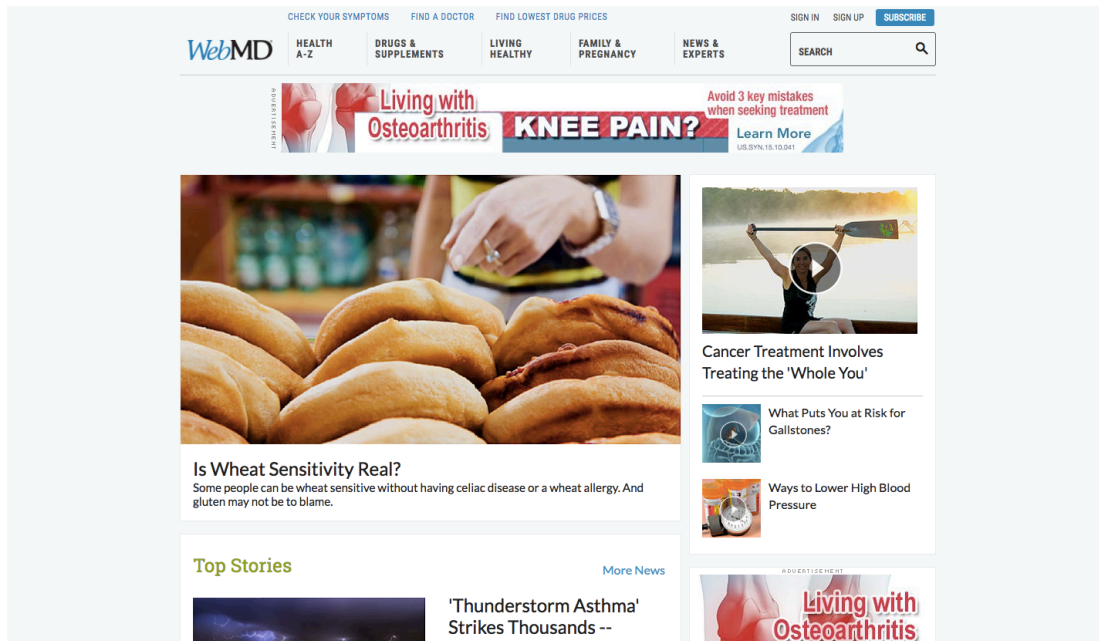


*Figure 1*

WebMD is a website which provides original and timely information, supportive communities, and in-depth reference materials about health. It is said that WebMD Medical Team works closely with a team of over 100 nationwide doctors and health experts across a broad range of specialty areas to ensure WebMD's content is up to date and accurate. The WebMD content staff blends board-certified physicians, award-winning journalists and trained community moderators to give their users a variety of trustful ways to find what they are looking for.

During the year of 2016, WebMD has completed several design changes. However, the changes seem to be unsuccessful but make their previous community shrink. The Alexa Traffic Ranks also show that there is a downward trend for the popularity of WebMD (see figure 2).



*Figure 2*

**Subject**

WebMD's target group is anyone who are looking for health information, which is very broad. It means users could be anyone at any age, from any places of the world and with any cultural and education background, as long as they can read and have access to the Internet. The data from Alexa shows its visitors are mainly from the United States. Indians and Chinese are the next two biggest audience groups when viewed by country (see figure 3).
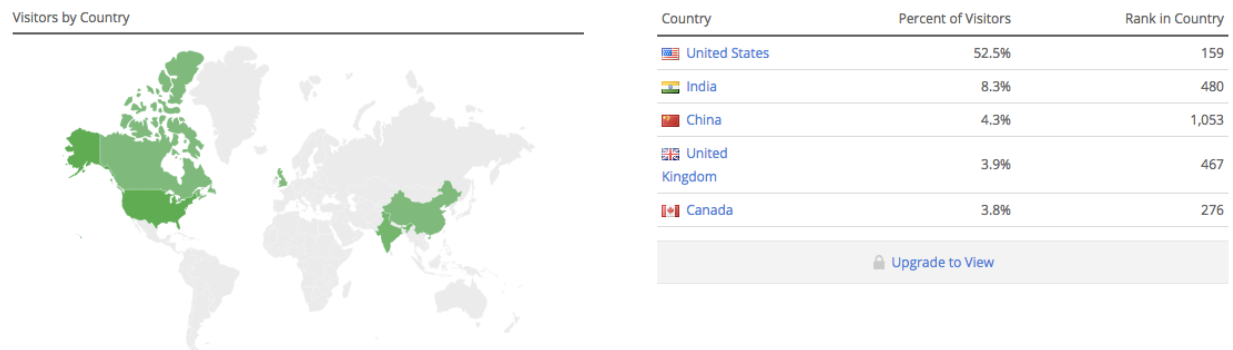


*Figure 3*

The subject for this user test is a twenty-two years old male student from Michigan State University. He studies in Human Medicine College. He usually spends two hours per day browsing websites. He likes browsing health websites and thinks health websites is helpful for solving specific health problems. This is the first time he browsed WebMD.

**Methods**

A combination of a usability evaluation and the think aloud method has been used in this user test. Background interview, user observation and post interview have been used for better understanding of the user.

After an introduction about the user test's aim, process and notes, the subject was asked to answer several background questions read aloud by the tester. After the background interview, he was led to complete the tasks which has been prepared in a word document on the tester's laptop. During the process, the subject

was allowed and encouraged to think aloud and the tester took notes through observation. After he completing all the tasks, he was asked some questions. Answers were recorded by hand.

The observation method is chosen because the user's real-time interaction with the website needs to be observed and recorded without intervention. Background interview is needed to make the tester get a better understanding of the user. Think aloud method and post interview can give the tester a better understanding about their behaviors and offer a chance to adjust the judgement which made during observation.

## Tasks

The tasks assigned for the user can be divided into two parts:

**Seven short tasks**

Scenario: Recently, your skin feels itchy which is very annoying, you want to use WebMD to find useful information based on your condition.

1. Where can you find information about "skin problems"?

2. Can you find ways to prevent pruritus?

3. Can you find out whether your skin problem is acute or chronic in this site?

4. Where is its online community for skin health?

5. Where can you create a new post about skin health?

6. Where can you find any blogs from experts about skin health?

7. Where can you find a dermatologist near Lansing, MI?

**One comprehensive task**

8. As the final exam week is approaching, you feel stressed out and cannot sleep well these days. What will you do to help yourself by using WebMD?

## Analysis

**Overview**

In general, the user completed most of the tasks quite smoothly. However, there are several tasks reflecting some problems of the website.

| # of Task | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Where do they go first?** | Navigation> A-Z Health | Navigation> A-Z Health | Navigation> A-Z Health | Navigation> news/ expert | Navigation> A-Z Health | Navigation> A-Z Health> helpful links | Navigation>A-Z Health | Navigation>A-Z Health |
| **Problems locating this information?** | No | Not very clear about the terms' meaning. | No | Not sure whether Facebook group is their community | Not very clear where to go | No | No | No |
| **Do they detour?** | No | No | No | Yes | Yes | N/A | Yes | N/A |
| **Do they really locate the right info?** | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| **How many seconds do they use for the task?** | 16.9s | 1min19s | 20s | 41s | 1min17s | 13s | 31s | 3min9s |
| **How many clicks for the task?** | 1 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 6 | 7 |
| **Was it clear how to get the info you needed?** | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | Not really | Yes | Yes | Yes |

| Was it easy to get the info? | Yes | Yes | | Yes | Yes | Not really | Yes | Yes | Yes |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Any other problems or suggestions? | Since I always use the navigation bar to find information, it could be better to make the navigation always there while I scrolling down. | | | | | | | | |

**Findings**

According to the results of observation and interview, the biggest problem the user encountered is he did not know there is specific online communities in the website, even though the task instruction mentioned that there is an online community. He firstly used navigation bar to go to the NEWS & EXPERTS page but found nothing. Then he went back to the home page and scrolled down and found a section about social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, and he was not sure whether the social media platform was their online community. This problem shows that although the website offers a trustful community resource, it is hard for them to notice its existence.

Another problem he encountered is a problem related to the one above. He then saw the task asking him to find a way to post in the skin health community. Then he noticed the online community might not just mean social media platform. Then he started to look for the community in the skin health section. While he scrolling down to the bottom of the page, he found the information about "Related WebMD Community" (see figure 4). However, he thought there should be a link of the title "Related WebMD Community" and tried to click the title, but that does not work. And he stopped continuing scrolling down and ignored the "Message Boards" below the "Second Opinion". Instead, he scrolled up and finally found the "message boards" on the left (see figure 5), which took him a quite long time to complete this task.

*Figure 4*



*Figure 5*

The third finding is while completing the sixth task, the user went back to the skin message board page and used the link in the "Helpful Links" section (see figure 6) to find the blogs of experts. Actually there is a quicker way to locate the information. He could directly use the navigation bar to enter the "NEWS & EXPERTS" section and scroll down to find the blog posts. The reason why he didn't use this way is, as he said, he already saw the links while doing the last task. So, he did not want to search but use his own

way which he is sure about. In that case, this detour should not be seen as a design failure as long as users find the right information by using their own way and it is convenient to them.
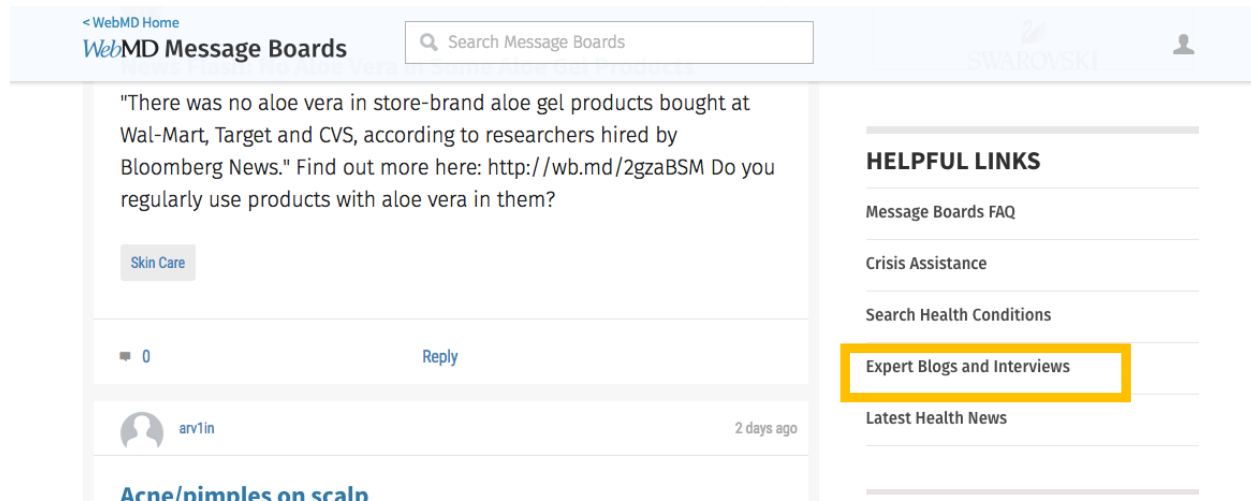


*Figure 6*

The forth problem happened while the user completing the seventh problem, he still went back to the skin health page to find the doctor. Actually, there is a very quick entrance called "FIND A DOCTOR" at the very top of the website just above the navigation bar appears in every page (see figure 7). I thought the reason why he did not use this link might because he already saw the link in the skin health page. So, I added a question in the post interview to get better understanding of his behavior. However, he said he did not know there is a link for finding a doctor, he just had a try. He also said he never noticed the small blue letters at the top of the website although they just near the navigation bar.



*Figure 7*

The final problem is not very related to the website design. While he looking for health information, he was not very familiar with some professional terms which slowed down his speed to locate the correct information.

### Design recommendations

Based on the findings summarizing from the user test, here are some design recommendations for improving the usability of WebMD's interface.

1. Make it easier for user to notice and get access to online community

As WebMD introduces themselves, online community is a very important part for their website. However, it is not clear for users to find and it makes no sense since the user tends to even cannot notice the community's existence. To be more specific, so far, the community section can be located under the NEWS & EXPERTS section (see figure 8) which is not clear enough if the user does not put their mouse on the NEWS & EXPERTS to see its details. And since the user was trying to click the title and failed to find the "Message Boards" below the "Second Opinion", it would be better that the "Related WebMD Community" which can found in every specific health condition page have a working link. Or just move the "Message Boards" up above the "Second Opinion". Since the "Second Opinion" right below the "Related WebMD Community" is likely to make the user confused and think the community section is over (see figure 9). In sum, it is really necessary to make online community section more visible and noticeable.
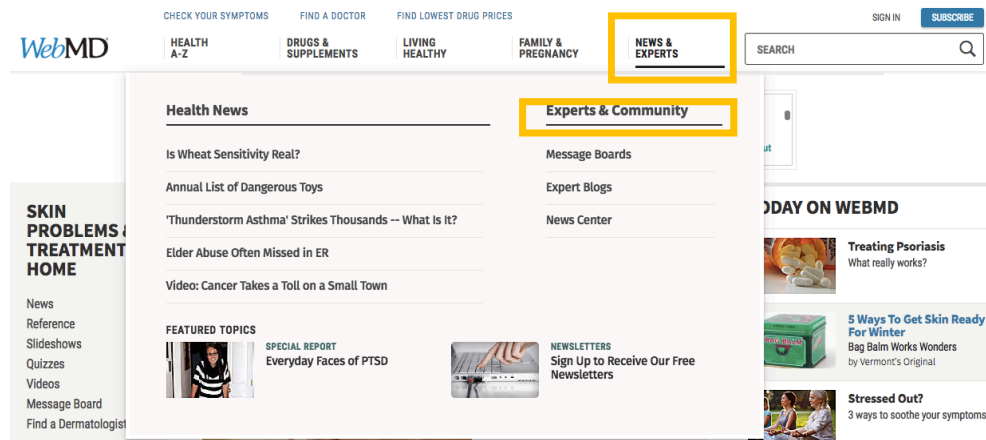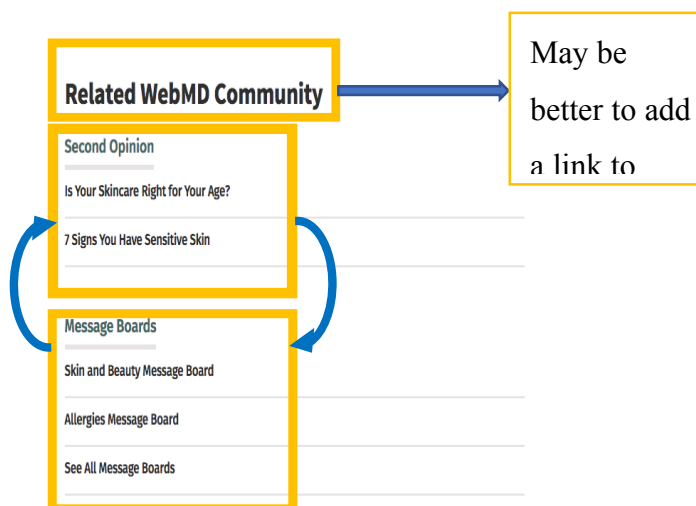


*Figure 8*



*Figure 9*

2. Make it the blue letters at the top of the page bigger, otherwise, just remove them to keep the page simpler and clearer

According to the observation and interview, the user showed that he never noticed the blue-letter links (see figure 10). The reason is the size is very small. In sum, possible design changes could be making the letters big enough or just remove them since they are not redundant and make the structure more complicated.
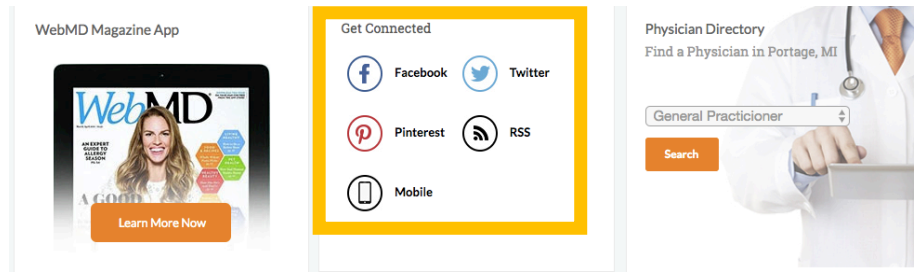


*Figure 10*

3. According to the user's interesting suggestion, it could be better to make the navigation bar always there no matter how the user scrolling the page down or up, and remove the redundant section to make the home page shorter and simpler.

The home page has twelve modules which make the whole page too long to be read. But there are some sections could be removed or combined. For example, there are two sections both about Twitter and Facebook (see figure 11& figure 12), which can be integrated and simplified.



*Figure 11*

*Figure 12*

4. Since this website's target user group can be very complicated and broad. Users are from different countries, whose first language might not be English. Also, users are in various education levels. Therefore, it would be better if WebMD could offer small "term cards" next to those rare medical jargons, or add helpful links of external medical vocabulary website for users to refer to.

# References

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