

TxDOT

**Texas Highways  
Website Usability  
Study**

# Executive Summary

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- Majority of participants found the site useful, interesting and beneficial
- Overall purpose of the site: Explore and learn about Texas
- Initial thoughts of website upon first view are overwhelmingly “information overload”
- Comments refer to too much text and not enough imagery throughout, but especially for the homepage (i.e. needs to be more visual)
  - Drop downs from main menu are appreciated, but there are too many with too many options
  - Icons for social media are suggested instead of drop down
- Sliders are eye catching, but preference is for larger images
  - The thumbnails underneath are appreciated for returning to a previous image

# Description of Study

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- Research Focus:

TxDOT is revamping its Texas Highways Magazine website and would like to test usability and functionality of the site.

- Primary Objectives:

- Test ease and effectiveness of navigation
- Test usefulness of content
- Test effectiveness of presentation
- Test the success rate of specific tasks

# Description of Study

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- Methodologies:

GDC conducted 13 one on one in-depth interviews with various consumers who have computer use knowledge and capability. The interviews were conducted in Lubbock (4), Dallas (5) and Austin (4) in the participant's homes using their computer systems.

- Targeting:

GDC targeted a 2/3 age split with the majority falling in the 33-55 range and the remaining 55+. A relatively equal mix of males and females were targeted as well.

# Data Presentation

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- Website Homepage Initial thoughts
  - Majority thought the site looked useful and interesting
  - Descriptors (in a few words or less)
    - Comprehensive, Texan, Eclectic, Full, Bland, Sheer Business
  - Upper part of homepage is “information overload”
    - Menu items and drop downs are appreciated, but there are too many options → “Too much text and not enough images.”
  - There is redundancy with items on the page (e.g. Departments, Web Extra, etc.)

*“Too many menu items on the page...many different text heavy items underneath... Probably 50 or more there. Then we have another set of menus over here....it seems duplicated and for me it’s just too many places to go.” –Rich R. (33-55)*

*“It’s the sheer business of it and the word Departments. Even now I’m still not clear of what these departments are.” Shawn H. (33-55)*

# Data Presentation

## Severity/Priority Levels

- 1<sup>st</sup> Priority: must be fixed, brick wall
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Priority: would be good to fix, but can wait
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Priority: okay as is, could be improved

## • Priority 3 items of note

- Slider images catch your eye, but recommend they be larger and scroll a few seconds slower
  - Thumbnails below liked for returning to previous image and quick view
- Current issue magazine image should have alt tags so user can link to actual digital magazine issue: All imagery should have said tags
- Menu bar items such as TextTreks, Departments, and Interactive are ambiguous and confusing
  - Need a good amount of time to absorb the site
  - Drop down lists are equally confusing (e.g. Departments)
- Events, Food, Blog, Subscribe and Search are clearly understood
- Some items seem redundant (e.g. color bars below subscribe today)
- There is too much white space (e.g. space between logo and magazine issue, both sides of content)
- Diagonal microstripe background not preferred → preference towards something more symbolic of Texas (e.g. Longhorn, bluebonnets, Texas flag, etc.)

*“Arizona Highways has giant pictures that are just **dominant**. **These are good**, but I am not seeing what I typically associate with TH magazine; I just mentally associate it with dynamic, huge, dominant images and I’m seeing images here, just nothing dominant...National Geographic style.” –Shawn H. (33-55)*

# Data Presentation

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- **Priority 2 items of note**
  - Colors are bland throughout, too much black and white → website looks too technical, needs to be more fun
  - Expectations for expansive imagery → needs to be a photo gallery
  - Events map is too small and mostly unnoticeable → needs to be expanded and more prominent → MUCH liked when found
  - White text in sliders blends in to the background and is difficult to read → Some question if text is necessary while others prefer a quick description that is more easily legible
  - Advertisements are expected and not bothersome (so long as there are no pop ups and flashing ads) → some suggest increasing their size for easier readability
  - Sponsored streaming video is well-liked so long as the option to start/stop is evident; auto-start was overwhelmingly disliked → (reference to [www.tourtexas.com](http://www.tourtexas.com) Cedar Park video)
    - Most thought it was a “short and sweet” method of information dissemination about a particular area of Texas

*“It’s bland, too much black and white. Everything is crammed in the middle. It needs to be spread out more.” Erin H. (33-55)*

*“Access to them [videos] is great. That makes people interested in them [particular areas]...it shows them what’s going on.” – Erin H. (33-55)*

# Data Presentation

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- **Priority 1 items of note**

- Search functionality (task based):
  - Many requests for static search window rather than a click and pop-up
  - Many failed searches for specific articles
    - Advanced search items difficult to see
    - Advanced search defaults to “All words”
    - Can only enter a certain number of characters in search field
    - Categories, Contacts, Articles, Newsfeeds, Weblinks, Comments difficult to find and confusing
    - Cannot search by date/year (e.g. 2010 issues)
    - Many suggest they would give up and go to Google to find articles
    - Creating a prominent “Magazine Database” link/image would be helpful
  - Home button: it was unclear to many how to find home
  - Finding and reading current issue difficult → No hyperlink on image

*“I think it should be easier to find an article. Should be more refined...dates more prominent...perhaps note at the top stating if you’re looking for this date.”—Wendy F. (33-55)*

# Data Presentation

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- General comments/suggestions
  - Recipe database link not prominent → It's hidden within the text
    - Index of recipes links also difficult to find (e.g. Appetizers, Beef, etc.)
  - Many generally surprised to find they can access full articles → expected Wall Street Journal style where they can read first paragraph but then have to pay
  - Multiple requests for Destinations, Accommodations, Restaurant and Family sections → Marketplace is unclear → most believe it is a place to buy and be sold items
  - A virtual map with distances from city to city would help with travel planning

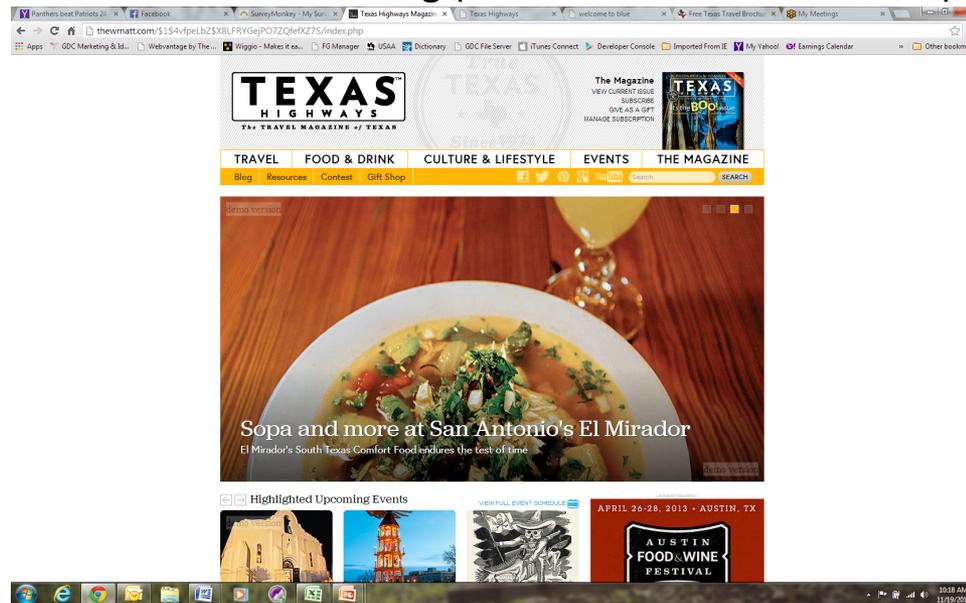
*"If you buy the magazine you should receive the online and tablet version for free." Wendy K. (33-55)*

*"It needs something to help plan trips like links to where to go, eat and stay." Gerald (55+)*

*"I would have expected more nature; more outdoor parks...It's missing nature in Texas." Gerald (55+)*

# Data Presentation

- “Work in progress” comments:
  - “Much better”, “Yes”, “Looks like Texas proud rather than Texas sell you something”
  - Less menu items, drop-downs and more imagery very well-liked
  - Watermark by logo is eye catching and better placed
  - Expanding logo makes it easier to navigate home
  - Large events map easy to see/use
  - Like the social media icons
  - Easier to access current article
  - Surfing overall much less confusing (i.e. Items make more sense)



# Exit Questions

Question	Responses
1. Vague and confusing items?	TextTreks, Search, Departments, Web Extras, Readers Recommend, etc.
2. Overall experience/navigation?	Time consuming, Menu options helpful, but need time to roll over dropdown options, okay overall
3. Expect to see?	Large images, image database, places to go/see, accommodation ratings, restaurant advise, testimonials
4. Like best about the site?	Slider images, Events, Food, Recipes, Full articles
5. Like least about the site?	Too much text, crowdedness, search functionality, white space
6. Likely to subscribe?	Yes, some said they would use to help plan future travel plans; mostly print as a getaway
7. Advertising?	Expected, not overbearing, pertinent to site purpose, helpful

# Summary

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- TH Magazine website is generally liked by all and deemed interesting
- The website enticed many to want to research areas of Texas, many in their immediate regions (e.g. Austin → restaurants, events, etc.)
- The “Search” feature was used most for assigned tasks and should be tweaked for efficiency (e.g. article search)
- The “Events” map and menu bar are popular features and easy to use
- There is confusion around some of the menu drop-down items and what exactly they represent (e.g. marketplace)
- All participants would prefer to see more imagery throughout the website
  - A link to an image database is requested
  - Access to information on nature, Texas parks and the like noted as missing
- The “work-in-progress” website addresses many of the comments mentioned throughout the data (e.g. larger imagery, less menu bar items, more iconography, etc.)
  - The site is much more attractive and appealing to the eye based on color and content layout