

**Usability Inspection
Pet Supplies Plus
www.petsuppliesplus.com**

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Executive Summary

A usability inspection was completed on petsuppliesplus.com, examining all pages and aspects of the website. The purpose of the inspection was to point out any usability issues throughout the website, as well as find the strengths which should be continued.

Some of the usability issues found as most important include:

- **Support of global navigation is not present on all sections of the website.** A few sections of the website, such as ‘Store Locator’ and ‘Gift Cards’, eliminate the global navigation. This can be disconcerting to the user and should be corrected so that every page of the website supports the global navigation.
- **Too many colors are used for links.** The links should all be blue with an underline to help the user identify what is a link and what is not.
- **‘Online Store’ descriptions are no more descriptive than the items’ title.** Providing the user with the items’ title as the description is not helpful and is frustrating to the user. A more descriptive sentence about the item will help the user understand what they are buying.
- **The Logo in the masthead does not link to the home page.** Most users are accustomed to the logo linking back to the home page. This should be implemented on petsuppliesplus.com to improve user familiarity.
- **There is a lack of user help and support.** A page should be created to provide help, FAQ, and support for users who encounter problems or have questions.
- **The ‘Online Store’ lacks restrictions.** The user should not be allowed to add an unlimited quantity to any item. This is misleading to the user and they have no way of knowing if the selected quantity is available.
- **There is a lack of cross browser compatibility.** Certain aspects of the layout fall apart in various browsers. A cross browser check would be beneficial to the website and users.

These usability issues are some of the more important and general issues found in this inspection. A more detailed and elaborate look at these issues, as well as others, are contained in this inspection along with recommended solutions.

Terminology & Conventions Used

Different terms are often used when referring to the same part of the browser window or web page. To facilitate understanding of this analysis, one term was used consistently for each browser/web page element. The terms are:

Global navigation: Links/buttons that are available from every page, leading to major sections of the website and/or significant pages.

Link label: The label is the word or words that are linked. These words can be in graphical form (such as the graphical buttons on the left side of the petsuppliesplus.com interface) or HTML text that is linked (such as the “Take our holiday survey...” link on the petsuppliesplus.com Home page).

Local navigation: Links/buttons for moving between pages in a section of the website (such as the fly-out menus on the petsuppliesplus.com global navigation).

Page name: The primary heading for the page, often shown in larger text and located between the top graphical aspect of the window and the text content of the page.

Masthead: The top portion of the web page containing the logo.

Single quotes are used to indicate link labels, page names, and window names. Double quotes indicate non-linked body text, field names, alt text, and are used when generally referring to a page. Any divergence from these conventions is noted in the analysis and is done for the purpose of improving clarity.

Priority Levels

The issues identified in this evaluation are grouped into three levels of priority:

High priority: These issues are likely to impact a large number of users significantly. They should be resolved as quickly as resources allow.

Medium priority: Issues at this priority level are also likely to affect a large number of users but generally are less disruptive to the user experience, relative to the high priority issues. If resources are available to address these issues, they should be addressed.

Low priority: Low priority issues typically impact a small subset of the overall user base, although they may impact a larger group. Regardless of the number of users affected, these issues carry only a minor negative impact. Low priority issues are generally easy to resolve. There is less time pressure to fix low priority issues, compared to medium priority issues and especially high priority issues.

Usability Guidelines

Efficient Navigation

Navigation refers to browsing a website, clicking links to move from page to page. Navigation should be an intuitive experience, so the user does not take the wrong page, get lost or disoriented, or have difficulty retracing their steps on a future visit.

Practices to Continue

- **Showing which link in the global navigation is being selected.** Changing the color of the link being moused over is helpful for the user and prevents clicking the wrong link.
- **‘Forward’ and ‘Back’ links within sub pages serve as a good recovery.** These in page links serve as good recovery for the user if the wrong link is clicked.
- **The online store has consistent navigation.** The local navigation within the store holds together well throughout the users’ shopping experience.

Suggested Changes

High Priority:

- **Support global navigation throughout every page of the website.** Pages ‘Store Locator’ and ‘Gift Cards’ lose the global navigation. The navigation should be continued on these pages to help the user have options of where to go from that page.
- **‘Pet Care’ local navigation needs to be layout out in a clearer manner.** Main sections such as “dogs” and “birds” should be a link to a landing page titled the same (“dogs” or “birds”). This landing page should contain the local navigation that is currently being displayed as menus that randomly appear when moused over on the ‘Pet Care’ landing page. This attempt of “mystery meat” navigation is disconcerting for users and should be avoided.

Medium Priority:

- **‘Forward’ and ‘Back’ buttons should only be available when they can prove useful.** Most sections of the website contain ‘forward’ and ‘back’ links in the page. On some pages these links simply go back to Home or lead the user in a continuous circle between 2 or 3 pages. To avoid confusion and frustration these continuous loops should be removed along with the ‘forward’ or ‘back’ button if they are not going to go any further into the website. If the link goes to Home, it should be removed for the reason that there are already 2 ways on the page to get back to Home.

Low Priority:

- **Global Navigation should be continued in the online store.** Once the user selects a store to order from, the global navigation is eliminated. This leaves the user with no way of getting back without using the browser back button or the Home button provided. Users need a way to retrace steps.

Organizational Clarity

Organization refers to how content is chunked (broken up into sections and discrete units), sequenced, and grouped. The quality of an organizational system is dependent on how well content is divided, as well as how easy it is for the user to see and understand the system being used.

Practices to Continue

- **All links under global navigation feel like they fit well under that piece of navigation.** Content in each section fits well with both the global navigation piece that it lives under and the other content grouped with it.
- **'Pet Care' page has appropriate chunks of information.** There is a separate section for information on each type of animal.

Suggested Changes

Medium Priority:

- **The 'Pet Care' section should contain a section for general information.** Throughout this section there are pages under many categories that take the user to general, non pet specific, information. These pages would be less confusing if they were held under a general area rather than scattered in various pet areas.

Clear Labeling

The choice of labels is vital to website usability. Most online activity involves reading, so the name given to part of a page or a link label is crucial to accurately understanding and using the website. Poorly chosen and/or vague labels confuse users, leading them down the wrong paths on websites or causing them to leave the website because none of the labels appear to represent the desired content. Labeling issues that pertain to other guidelines may be mentioned used that guideline and are therefore not mentioned here.

Practices to Continue

Suggested Changes

High Priority:

- **Local navigation in the ‘Pet Care’ section needs to have page headers.** Users can easily be confused if they don’t see the effects of actions spelled out. When a link in the ‘Pet Care’ section is clicked, the page header needs to reflect exactly what the user has clicked. This is one of the most confusing places in the website and page headers will help clear up some issues with it.

Medium Priority:

- **The ‘Brochure’ link needs to go to a page with the header “Brochure”.** Currently the link goes to the page “A Better Concept”. This should have a header of “Brochure” and a sub header should contain the link of the brochure title (“A Better Concept”).

Low Priority:

- **‘PSP Story’ should be relabeled ‘About PSP’.** ‘PSP Story’ links to a page with the header “About Pet Supplies Plus”. The header of the page should be the same as the label, in this case “About PSP” would be best for the label because most users are used to seeing an about page.
- **The phrase “on Line” should be worded as “Online”.** Improper grammar can make the user question the professionalism of the website.

Consistent Design

Consistency pertains to all aspects of a website: layout, labeling, error messages, whether something in HTML text or graphical text on all pages, even the choice of colors.

Widespread (multi-page) inconsistencies are noted here, with issues specific to a given page provided in Additional Usability Issues.

Practices to Continue

- **Layout colors chosen for PetSuppliesPlus.com are consistent.**

Suggested Changes

High Priority:

- **Global navigation needs to all be links.** The global navigation appears to be links, however they are not. This is confusing for users. There are 2 (3 when the Home button is displayed) pieces of global navigation that are links. This is an inconsistency and should be fixed.
- **A 'Home' button needs to be available on the global navigation at all times.** 'Home' is only on the global navigation list when the user is on a sub page. When the button is added it changes the navigation layout. The navigation needs to stay exactly the same on every page and leaving the 'Home' button will help.
- **Page titles need to be in the same place on all pages.** Page titles are displayed in the masthead on almost half the pages. They should be displayed as headers before the pages' information.

Low Priority:

- **Global navigation spacing should remain the same.** The home page navigation has no spacing between links. On all sub pages there is spacing. To improve consistency, spacing should be added to the navigation on the home page as well.

Matching User Expectations

The Web has been in existence long enough for users to develop consistent, widespread expectations concerning web page behavior, such as what underlining and colors represent. Underlines are interpreted automatically as indicating a link and the color blue is interpreted automatically as indication a link.

Practices to Continue

- **Underlining links.** All links on the website are underlined; this is helpful for the user when figuring out what is a link and what is not.

Suggested Changes

High Priority:

- **Make all links the same color.** Currently PetSuppliesPlus.com has numerous colors to display links in. All links should be changed to the conventional blue that the users know and feel comfortable with.
- **Logo needs to link to the 'Home' page.** Users are accustomed to clicking on the logo to return to the 'home' page. Currently only a couple pages have the logo linked to 'home'. This can become frustrating to the user when the logo is randomly linked.
- **Online store descriptions need to be different than the item name.** Users expect the item description to give them more information about the product, not restate the item name.

Medium Priority:

- **Remove the "home" link from the top of select pages.** Only some pages give the user a "home" link at the top of the page. This is unnecessary because there is a 'Home' button on the global navigation.
- **Global navigation needs to all be links.** Users know the "hand cursor" to be a sign that the item they are hovered over is a link. In the global navigation all links prompt the "hand cursor". However, only a couple links work, the others require the user to move into the fly out menu to make a page selection.

Effective Visual Design

Visual design concerns the ‘look and feel’ of the website, specifically how well interface design principles have been applied or followed. Adherence to these principles improves both aesthetics and functionality, because users are able to locate desired information more readily. This section covers widespread (multi-page) interface design issues; consideration of interface issues that are unique to a given page are provided in Additional Usability Issues.

Practices to Continue

- **Using the masthead graphic on every page.** The look and feel of the website is dictated by the masthead on every page and the colors therein. By keeping the masthead the same on all pages the user won’t get confused as easily.

Suggested Changes

High Priority:

- **Implement some visual design.** The “visual design” used is very eclectic and has no functional purpose.
- **Clip art graphics should be removed.** Several pages have animated clip art images. These images serve no purpose and slow down page load time.

Supporting Readability & Scannability

Most of the time users spend online is spent reading and a good portion of that reading is done by scanning through pages, looking for headings and links to follow. The fact that reading from a screen is slower and more taxing than reading from a printed page suggests that the content should be designed for optimal display.

Practices to Continue

- **Pages with a lot of text content have appropriate paragraph spacing.** The 'FUN Stuff' pages have more content than most pages across the site. The information is handled properly by providing appropriate paragraph spacing to help the user scan sections of information.
- **Headers stand out as a differently color.** The use of blue for headers is helpful in separating the header and page content.

Suggested Changes

High Priority:

- **Content text should be black.** There are currently at least 5 colors being used for normal text throughout the website. Using so many colors leads the user to believe the information is more important or related to the rest of the content differently. The color red is used dominantly throughout the 'Our Stores' section as well as other places. Red is an alarming color and should be used sparing. The user would be more likely to follow the flow of information if all the content were black. This would also help the user scan through information easier without getting drawn to colors.
- **Provide good text color/background color contrast.** In the 'Store Locator' section, state headers have a background of bright blue with a text of bold red. This is difficult to read and would cause many problems for users with poor eyesight. The text should be changed to black with a background of white.

Facilitating User Tasks

Web users are task-oriented. Websites that support these tasks by facilitating access and reducing the time required for the task are best positioned to keep visitors returning and satisfied with the experience.

Suggested Changes

High Priority:

- **When adding an item to the cart, there needs to be restrictions.** The user is allowed to add an unlimited quantity to any item. This is extremely misleading to the user and they have no way of knowing if the selected quantity is available.
- **The user should not be allowed to order an item “not in flyer”.** The “order an item not in flyer” link allows the user to make up an item and description and place an order for that item. This function allows unacceptable, non-existent items to be ordered. This link should be removed completely because it serves no purpose and can not help the user.
- **The ‘Shopping Cart’ should have buttons instead of sentence links.** Buttons should be provided for the actions available in the ‘Shopping Cart’. The links currently being provided are small and unclear.
- **A “next” button should be provided.** Users expect to find a way to continue in the checkout process.
- **‘Special Events’ need to specify when there are no current events.** This section of the website fails to give feedback to users when a link with no events is clicked on. The user will be taken to a page with a header but no information. A statement explaining that there are no current events can prevent confusion.

Providing Help

Even the most carefully designed website may need a help section, especially if the site functionality is fairly complex and users are expected to step through various processes. Unfortunately, the label 'Help' is generally off-putting to users who resist visiting that area of the website because of previous 'Help' experiences (with desktop software or other websites) that were not satisfying. Users may also associate 'Help' with other technical problems and not visit that area for more content-based questions.

Practices to Continue

- **An email link is provided.**

Suggested Changes

High Priority:

- **There needs to be a help section.** Currently PetSuppliesPlus.com does not provide users with any type of a "help" section or an "faq". The user needs to have a place to ask questions and read other questions. This is even more important in the 'Shopping Cart' area.
- **'Contact Us' should have more information.** The 'Contact Us' link in the global navigation opens a composition for the user to email Pet Supplies Plus. The user should be given the option of email addresses, mailing addresses, and phone numbers at the very least. The user also does not have any way of knowing who the email is being sent to. 'Contact Us' would be more useful if it was a webpage giving the users various way of contacting Pet Supplies Plus.

Additional Usability Issues

Further usability issues specific to a page or section. Some repetition may occur with issues noted in the general analysis, if the page or section in question required significant and/or specialized assistance with that issue. Only the pages and sections with further issues are considered.

Franchise Application

High Priority:

- **The Franchise ‘Application’ needs to be a download and not a web page.** The current ‘Application’ page presents the user with a two page HTML document and a Word document. Having two documents with the same information can be confusing to the user. The HTML document should be removed, and the ‘Application’ link should simply be a download of the Word document.

General Usability Issues

High Priority:

- **The “home” links should always link to the home page.** Throughout the website various “home” links send the user back to the Flash intro page. This can be confusing for users and also frustrating because it forces them to start over.
- **Needs to be aware of cross browser compatibility.** The text runs off the intended text area on many pages when viewing the site with Mozilla Firefox. When viewing the site with the Mozilla Firefox browser, images are not properly lined up. Also certain areas of the table are much wider on some pages than others.