

Van de Lei Industries – Product 1 Web Site Usability Review Report

www.vandelei.com

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Sample

Executive Summary

Approach

Douglas Potts Consulting conducted a usability review of the Van de Lei Industries Web site between February 21 and February 27, 2003.

Equipment: To recreate a typical user experience, we conducted the study using a mid-powered home computer system with high-speed Internet access (DSL)

Each page of the site was accessed to identify potential areas and notes were taken to capture what the reviewer saw and did on each page (see separate file). This information was then compared to industry standards in usability, along with information from various research results to identify areas of the site that are well designed, and areas that might benefit from redesigning.

Where appropriate, findings and recommendations may come not only from usability issues, but its impact on the business objectives of the site.

Key Factors

Target audience: The site is targeted to 14 to 30 year olds, who may or may not have a Product 1.

Business objective of site: The goal of the site is to initiate and enhance relationships with owners of Product 1. The company intends to create a direct channel for marketing Product 1 and accessories in the future.

Key Findings

The following findings are presented by organization of the site. They are not meant to imply any particular order of importance.

Overall Site Design

While the site provides a limited, but varied assortment of activities for the end-user, there are several issues relating to technology and file size that may have a large negative impact on both the success of the site's objective and the end-user's goals.

Flash navigation can test patience of users. While visually inviting, the size and speed of the Flash navigation, especially on the home page, may deter Web users. The average time spent on a page by an Internet user is less than 1 minute. (Nielsen//NetRatings, December 2002). Most end-users will decide within 15 seconds if they want to stay on that page longer. On average, it took us 75.7 seconds to load the home page when first visiting the site. This suggests that many end-users would stop loading the page before it is complete.¹

First time “dial-up” visitors may not come back. Only those end-users with a high-speed connection will probably be repeat visitors. The chance that someone with a dial-up connection will return to play the games or view the ads is very small, due to the very large file sizes.

Home-link button is not easy to find. Recent studies² indicate that most users anticipate links back to home pages will logically be located in the upper left hand corner of each page, or possibly at the bottom center of the page. Another issue is that it is non-functional on the home page. One

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might wonder “Why would you need to provide a link to the home page on the home page?” Due to its non-standard position, end-users might mouse over the logo in an attempt to find an active home page link. Since it wouldn’t work on the first (home) page, they might not try it on subsequent pages.

Additional findings were omitted for the purpose of this sample report.

Home Page

What does this site do for me? The home page lacks a defined set of expectations for why this site exists—why users should explore it, and why they should come back.

Graphic design places most content below the fold. The home page may be designed horizontally for 800 x 600, but vertically, all of the pages content is below the fold at this resolution.³ At 1024 x 768 resolution, the font for the navigational text is very small, and difficult to read. Yet still, very little of the home page content is viewable above the fold.

Logo placement minimizes branding capabilities. Since the Van de Lei logo is in the upper right corner, there is no branding on the page if the browser window is not maximized. There is an occasional logo that appears in the animation, and the logo on the Product 1 itself. However, these do not provide constant reinforcement.

Additional findings were omitted for the purpose of this sample report.

Footer

Font size and contrast reduce both readability and affordance. Due to the small font, relatively low contrast and anti-aliasing, the links in the footer can be difficult to read. The Van de Lei Industries logo is impossible to read at 1024 x 768 resolution, and only slightly readable at 800 x 600. Also, surprisingly, it does not click through to the Van de Lei Industries corporate site. Since only some of the text at the bottom is clickable, end-users must decide on their own which ones can be clicked on, and which ones can’t.

Tell a Friend placement. This type of mechanism is useful for gathering email addresses, and might better be placed higher up the page, in a more prominent position.

Additional findings were omitted for the purpose of this sample report.

Primary Navigation and Site Structure

Primary navigation labels can be difficult to interpret. The primary navigation labels are somewhat cryptic and are grammatically inconsistent. Some are nouns, while some are both nouns and verbs. End-users must view the sub-menu items to get a better idea of what each one means.

Limited delivery of site expectations. End-users can’t talk in the Talk area, but they can play with a puzzle. They can download graphics and screensavers in both the Play and Club areas. The Club area isn’t really a club at all. It’s more like a press room area, with pictures, and ads.

Branding value remains questionable. Except for the product demos, only one of the interactive sections of the site provides Van de Lei Industries branding. The branding in the animated greetings may be considered too overpowering for most end-users to send, as it is a 3-6 second ad at the beginning and end of each animated greeting.

Additional findings were omitted for the purpose of this sample report.

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Registration

“Why register?” End-users are not given a very compelling reason to register. The reasons given for registering are somewhat vague, and in one case, misleading, since users can’t download anything to their product yet.

Legal protection for Van de Lei Industries: Who Can Register? The process of registering provides no guidelines for age restriction, except that the age group selection box does not allow the end-user to select an age less than 13. Due to the type of activities the site promotes, this may be viewed as a breach of the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act of 1998 (COPPA).

Registration form makes the process cumbersome. The “Check ID” link is a good idea, but you must rely upon the end-user to perform the action. If their email address is already entered (they are not always unique), they will have filled in an entire form, only to find out that the first field entry is not valid.

The privacy policy is not easily accessed during registration. The end-user must scroll down to the bottom of the page. When they click on it, they are taken away from the registration page, and must use their browser’s back button to go back to it.

Additional findings were omitted for the purpose of this sample report.

List of Recommendations

The recommendations presented are purely from a usability perspective, based upon our review, along with our understanding of the target audience and the business objectives of the site. They are intended to be general guidelines. Business objectives, timeline, budget, and infrastructure capabilities will all have an affect on any design decisions related to usability.

Ratings are an indication of the recommendation's affect on allowing the end-user to attain one or more of their goals.

1. Has significant direct impact. Will greatly improve the end-user's experience and better allow them to accomplish their goal(s).
2. Has an indirect impact. Will enhance the end-user's experience and assist in allowing them to accomplish their goal(s).
3. Individually, it has minimal impact. However, the more of these that are implemented, the better the end-user's experience.

Feature/Area	Rating	Recommendation
General	1	Reduce the file sizes of all pages, so they can download in a much shorter time.
	1	Offer a non-flash version.
	2	Provide an estimate of file size for downloads (ads, photos, and demos). Provide lower resolution alternatives for slower connections.
	2	Rewrite content to be more age appropriate.
<i>Additional findings were omitted for the purpose of this sample report.</i>		
Home Page	1	Reduce the area taken up by the flash navigation, to better display the content of the page.
	2	Provide a description of what the web site is for.
	2	Depending upon the business objectives, move the items to the top of the page that support the objective best. If it's to sell products, move them to the top. If it's to get people to register, then provide them the motivation to register at the top.
<i>Additional findings were omitted for the purpose of this sample report.</i>		
Primary Navigation and Site Structure	2	Combine the Talk and Play sections into a single group.
	2	Do not use the primary navigation as a method of showing the end-user where they are.
<i>Additional findings were omitted for the purpose of this sample report.</i>		

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Register	3	Provide an age disclaimer (...must be 13 years or older...) at the top.
	2	Provide a brief but more detailed description of the benefits of registering.
	1	Fix the blank page after successfully registering problem.
	3	Remove the requirements for phone number(s) and address. Make them optional, until you have a sweepstakes or something that would require it.
	2	Don't require me to enter my detailed information in order to register. Provide that as an option later.
	3	Standardize the error messages for all fields. Make the message correspond to the type of data entry (select, enter, etc.)
<i>Additional findings were omitted for the purpose of this sample report.</i>		
Product	3	Change label to "Products"
	2	Provide a way to compare the products
	3	Provide a relative cost indicator (Lowest ? Highest)
	3	Move the feature descriptions further up the page, so that end-users don't have to scroll down to see them. There's lots of white space to the right of the products.
	3	Change the link "Manual" to "Download Manual." Have the manual open in a separate window.
<i>Additional findings were omitted for the purpose of this sample report.</i>		
Ads	2	Make all ads the same format, so the same helper application/plugin is used.
	2	Provide an estimate of file size/download time for each file.
	2	Have the ads open in a separate window.
Contact Us	2	Provide an 800 number to call about the products.
<i>Additional findings were omitted for the purpose of this sample report.</i>		
Tell a Friend	2	Don't require a login.
	2	Move "Tell a Friend" further up the page...maybe to the right side below the Welcome.
<i>Additional findings were omitted for the purpose of this sample report.</i>		

Endnotes

¹ When trying to complete a task, end-users in the 18-30 year age range will wait only and average of 86 seconds and one screen change to complete the task, independent of their Internet experience. (*Examining Tolerance for Online Delays, Paula Selvidge 2003*) While loading the home page is not a specific task, the implications of the young adult's patience can certainly be considered.

In a related paper, studies showed that the longer the load time, the greater the end-user's frustration and perception of task difficulty. (*Selvidge, P. R., Chaparro, B. S., Bender G. (2000). The world wide wait: Effects of delays on user performance. Proceedings of The Human Factors and Ergonomics Society 44th Annual Meeting*)

² Examining User Expectations for the Location of Common E-Commerce Web Objects, Michael Bernard, Usability News 4.1, 2002, (http://psychology.wichita.edu/surl/usabilitynews/41/web_object-ecom.htm)

³ No content is visible, only the Primary Navigation

