

Boswell Books Usability Study

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Introduction

Boswell Books is a local independent book store in Milwaukee, WI. Their website includes everything from book club support and bookseller recommendations to high school reading lists and local book events. They have a very large following in the Milwaukee area and usually host a large number of community events including book clubs and author events.

The Boswell Bookstore website was chosen for this usability study because it is a staple in the Milwaukee area. The website has become even more crucial for book lovers in the area throughout the COVID-19 pandemic as the brick and mortar store is temporarily closed and they are only accepting online orders. Being that it is a small, local establishment, the

This usability study took about forty minutes per participant. Three individuals participated in this study which was looking primarily at the navigation of the site and finding and ordering books that were needed. The study took place in a home office. All participants used the same computer for the study.

The participants in this range varied in gender but were all around the same age, between 26 and 29. While this is definitely an age group that utilizes the book store, it is not very representative of the wider customer base for Boswell. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, I did not have access to as wide of a range of individuals as I would have initially preferred.

One of the participants is familiar with the Boswell website; however, the other two have never used the site before. Each individual was tasked with completing three specific exercises and started from the home page for each one. In order to create the exercises for the study, I spent a few minutes clicking around the Boswell website with the intention of finding different tasks in different sections of the website; although I did not click through to the end (such as registering for an event or clicking on a school book list).

Methodology

Three participants partook in the study. They were chosen because of convenience; not ideal, but I wanted to conduct the study in person so my options were limited. All are still valuable participants in the study; however, in a more normal situation, a more diverse demographic in age and education would have been considered. Here is a breakdown of the

three participants. Because all are close relations and in my “bubble” for the duration of COVID-19, I have included their relationship to me for transparency.

Dan (husband): A 28-year-old male with a bachelor’s degree in computer engineering and is working toward his masters in business administration. He has high-level computer skills and has never used the Boswell website before. Dan works for a very large company that specializes in building controls.

Casey (friend): A 28-year-old female with a bachelor’s degree in English and a minor in Spanish. She has medium-level computer skills and has used the Boswell website before. Casey works for a non-profit.

Alexa (sister): A 26-year-old female with a bachelor’s degree in liberal arts, a minor in psychology, and a master’s degree in occupational therapy. She has medium-level computer skills and has never used the Boswell website before. Alexa works for a hospital system as an occupational therapist.

Alexa and Casey were asked via text message to participate in the study several days before the study itself occurred. Dan was asked in person. Once they agreed to participate in the study, they were given some informal information about how long to expect the study to take and what it would consist of. A sample text is below:

“Thanks for agreeing to help out with my usability study! It will take about 40 minutes for the study itself. I have a website I am testing and will have you complete a few tasks as a part of the study. Thanks again!”

The participants each sat at the same desk. The usability study for each of the participants took place on the same day. They all used the same laptop which was open to the Boswell Books website. The participants were given the list of exercises they should work to complete and spoke out loud as they were working. I took notes as the participants worked through the tasks.

The instructions were read aloud to each of the participants (Appendix A). As this is for an assignment and I was not recording them, I did not have the participants sign a consent form. After the instructions were read to the participants, they had a couple of minutes to review the home page of the Boswell Books website. Once they were familiar with the home page, their tasks began. For the tasks, the participants were encouraged to go as far as possible in the process (purchasing or registering) without putting in any personal information. The tasks were as follows:

1. You are the parent of a student who will be going into the 9th grade at Whitefish Bay High School. You are hoping to find and purchase books for her first semester of English class this fall.
2. When you last went into the book store you met and talked books with a bookseller named Rachel. She recommended a lot of books that were her recent favorites but you forgot what they were. You are hoping to find her contact information or favorite books on the website.
3. You want to join a book club that Boswell hosts on a monthly basis. You want to do some research and pick one of the several book clubs they offer. While it is too late for July, you are hoping to join in August. Ideally, you want to register for the book club so you commit yourself, and don't forget to come back later!
4. You saw on social media that your favorite local author, Liza Wiemer will be hosting a virtual event for her newest book. You want to find out information and register for her event!

These tasks are quite direct and not meant for browsing so the usability was measured based on the ease and efficiency with which the participant found the information they were looking for. The layout and appearance of the site were also examined. In order to provide consistent and organized information across each of the participants, a note-taking form was created for personal use. A blank form and the notes that were taken during each usability study session are included in Appendix B. Each participant also completed a short survey to provide basic quantitative data for the results which are documented in Appendix C.

Results

The results were consistent across the three participants in the study though, they each had individual frustrations with the site. All participants were unable to complete the first task because the link was broken. Each participant did have successes and frustrations but in different parts of the website. For example, Alexa was negatively impacted by the website from the moment she saw the home page (Figure 1). She noted that the text was too small and there was way too much information on the page. Alexa also commented that the logo looked like it was just copied and pasted from clip art. She indicated that by the home page alone she would not continue to use the site. Dan, on the other hand, agreed that the home page was very busy

and looked outdated, but noted that the site looked easily searchable and had a lot of navigation options.

Features

- Upcoming Events
- Boswell Best Selections - 20% Off
- Boswell Bargain Books
- Booksellers and Recommendations
- Book Club Recommendations
- Boswell-Branded Stuff
- Boswell-Run Book Clubs
- Calendars and Journals
- Gifts and Toys
- Gift Cards
- Puzzles and Games
- Award Winning Books
- Virtual Event Video
- New and Noteworthy

Shopping cart

0 Items Total: \$0.00

Indie Next List

Mexican Gothic
By Silvia Moreno-Garcia
"Creepy and romantic."

Welcome to Boswell Book Company's website!

Thank you for visiting our website. Due to COVID-19, our physical store is closed to the public for browsing and when we figure out when that opening date for browsing is, we'll let you know. We have expanded our phone and email response hours to 7 pm on weekdays. Our event programming and book clubs have gone virtual, as have many of our partnership events.

Sidewalk pickup is available during store hours - our pickup hotline is (414) 906-4083. We ship by media mail, UPS, and do a limited amount of Boswell delivery to closer neighborhoods. Our media mail shipping and local delivery is a very reasonable \$4 within Wisconsin, \$6 elsewhere within the United States. For puzzles and games, our UPS rates are \$10 within Wisconsin, \$12 in the contiguous United States. We do not ship internationally. We suggest that out-of-state shipments upgrade to UPS as it may take as long as a month to get books via media mail. Local media mail delivery is often quite speedy. Order \$75 more of books or gift items to one address and we will cover the shipping costs. One last thing - remember that just because you order something doesn't mean we can get it.

Our booksellers are available by phone at (414) 332-1181 or email at info@boswellbooks.com between 10 am and 7 pm on Monday through Friday, 10 am to 5 pm on Saturday, and 11 am to 5 pm on Sunday.

Please note it's not quite business as usual. We may not be able to answer your phone call in a timely manner and web orders generally take a day to process. All purchases must be paid for by credit or debit card before pickup - we're temporarily not taking cash. More importantly, we are not taking returns at this time. Packages are not going to always come as quickly as you'd like - we expect serious delays on both USPS and UPS, particularly outside the Milwaukee area. For those placing orders via this website, please understand that our technology is not automated, and while we are processing these orders as fast as we can, there may be some delay between the time you place the order and when it is ready to pick up or ship - we will contact you when your order is ready. And at this time, we're also not able to take returns. We are working towards limited browsing hours, but we're not there yet.

Gift cards are available for purchase online or by phone.

Second-hand mystery grab bags **available here**. Each package has at least four books: one general fiction or story collection, one mystery or thriller, and two nonfiction titles, all for \$20. Or get a **Bargain Bag** for \$25, which includes a selection of three bargain books: one hardcover fiction title, one hardcover nonfiction title, and one surprise paperback.

The Coming Week's Virtual Events

Visit our [Upcoming Events Page](#) for a complete listing of our upcoming virtual events.

Contact Information and Hours

- 2559 N Downer Ave, Milwaukee, WI 53211
- (414) 332-1181
- info@boswellbooks.com

Online/Phone Temporary Hours

- Mon - Fri: 10 am - 7 pm
- Sat: 10 am to 5 pm
- Sun: 11 am to 5 pm

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Email Lists

Book Clubs

Figure 1: Boswell Books Home Page

None of the three participants were able to complete the first task because the link did not exist; however, Casey was the only one to read the top description on the page stating that they do not have the book lists yet and that they will be coming out soon. Both Dan and Alexa went straight to the links. This could be that Casey was not as "click-happy" as Dan or Alexa, or that Casey has visited the website before and knows a lot of the information is in the text on the site.

The second task was very easy for each of the three participants to complete. They were able to navigate quickly to the bookseller's recommendations and find Rachel's reading list. Similarly, the navigation for task three was simple. The link to the information was right on the left bar on the home page. However, for this task, finding the appropriate information was hard. Not all of the book clubs hosted by Boswell had books associated with them. And the information indicating which book was for which club and the meeting dates and times were so small all three participants had to pick up the laptop to see the information. Additionally, some of the book clubs had registration links while others did not. There was very little consistency on the page and the information was not thorough. Figure 2 has some examples of the inconsistencies on the page.

Our upcoming book club selections are below.



Circe (Paperback)

By Madeline Miller

\$15.29

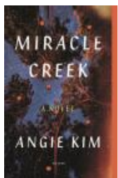
ISBN: 9780316556323

Availability: On Our Shelves Now

Published: Back Bay Books - April 14th, 2020

[Add to Wish List](#)

Books and Beer Book Club, Monday, July 20, 7 pm, virtual or at Cafe Hollander. [Register for this event here](#). Please contact jen@boswellbooks.com with any questions.



Miracle Creek: A Novel (Paperback)

By Angie Kim

\$15.30

ISBN: 9781250251305

Availability: On Our Shelves Now

Published: Picador - April 7th, 2020

[Add to Wish List](#)

In-Store Lit Group, Monday, August 3, 7 pm, virtual or at Boswell

Figure 2: Book Club Selections

Here you can see how the first book on the page has a registration link but the second one does not. Additionally, the text is very small.

The fourth task was easy to complete by all three participants. Initially, Alexa looked on the home page for the event information because other events are listed there. After she did not find what she was looking for on the home page, she navigated to the events tab on the left side of the page. Dan and Casey both went directly to the events tab. Dan was frustrated that the registration link did not open a new page in his browser, but neither Alexa nor Casey expressed the same frustration. All three did comment at how busy the page was and how much unnecessary information was included on the page which made it hard to navigate.

Overall the usability study was a success. Each participant found slightly different frustrations with the site, but overall found the same major issues, such as broken links or inconsistent information. Two of the three participants got frustrated and said they would give up and go to Amazon to get what they needed. The third participant is a loyal Boswell customer so noted that while it was frustrating, she wants to purchase her books from them so would work through the frustrations on the site.

Recommendations

One of the key recommendations that can be applied to the entire website is to pare down the text on the pages. Information that could be communicated in a few sentences take paragraphs and no one is going to read them. Only one participant read the details and that was only when she could not find the information quickly. The text could also be broken up more into smaller chunks to help visitors to the site read quickly.

The pages are extremely busy and packed with information. While this is not necessarily a bad thing, the important information is getting lost. One participant suggested that each of the events links to their own information page. This way the critical information such as the event title, date, time, and registration could be on the home or events page but the detailed information could be on its own page and not clutter up the page itself.

A third recommendation is consistency and correctness among the information provided. For instance, in the first task, it seemed like there were links to the school book lists, but in reality, they were not active links. It might be more valuable to delete the fake links and have a statement that notes the lists have not been received yet and to check back on a certain date. Similarly, the book club information was very inconsistent. Some had links to register, others did not. Not all of the book clubs they say they offer had books for listed. This page clearly needs to be updated and standardized a bit for navigation purposes.

The fourth and final recommendation is to use appropriate font sizes. In some areas of the website, important information is very small and hard to read. This means information could be missed. Also, people don't want to have to move closer to the screen to read information.

One part of the website that is done well is the overall navigation. Finding the place where the information should be was pretty easy for all three participants, but the information itself was the problem.

Boswell is a book store with a large local following, so many of their regular customers are willing to work through frustrations to find what they want; however, they are likely losing the general population who maybe want to support a local establishment but choose a more efficient route, such as Amazon, in the end, because the site is hard to use.

Appendix A: Survey Script (Edited from the *Rocket Surgery Made Easy* Script)

Hi, _____. My name is _____, and I'm going to be walking you through this session today.

Before we begin, I have some information for you, and I'm going to read it to make sure that I cover everything.

You probably already have a good idea of why I asked you here, but let me go over it again briefly. I am asking people to try using a Web site so I can see whether it works as intended. The session should take about forty minutes.

The first thing I want to make clear right away is that I'm testing the *site*, not you. You can't do anything wrong here. In fact, this is probably the one place today where you don't have to worry about making mistakes.

As you use the site, I'm going to ask you as much as possible to try to think out loud: to say what you're looking at, what you're trying to do, and what you're thinking. This will be a big help to me.

Also, please don't worry that you're going to hurt my feelings. I am doing this to improve the site, so I need to hear your honest reactions.

If you have any questions as we go along, just ask them. I may not be able to answer them right away since I'm interested in how people do when they don't have someone sitting next to them to help. But if you still have any questions when we're done I'll try to answer them then. And if you need to take a break at any point, just let me know.

OK. Before we look at the site, I'd like to ask you just a few quick questions.

1. Roughly how many hours a week altogether—just a rough estimate— would you say you spend using the Internet, including Web browsing and email, at work and at home?
2. What kinds of sites (work and personal) are you looking at when you browse the Web?
3. Do you have any favorite Web sites?

First, I'm going to ask you to look at this page and tell me what you make of it: what strikes you about it, whose site

you think it is, what you can do here, and what it's for. Just look around and do a little narrative.

You can scroll if you want to, but don't click on anything yet.

Thanks. Now I'm going to ask you to try doing some specific tasks. I'm going to read each one out loud.

I'm also going to ask you to do these tasks without using Search. I'll learn a lot more about how well the site works that way.

And again, as much as possible, it will help me if you can try to think out loud as you go along.

Appendix B: Usability Study Notes

Participant Name:

Participant Age:

- Roughly how many hours a week altogether—just a rough estimate—would you say you spend using the Internet, including Web browsing and email, at work and at home?
- What kinds of sites (work and personal) are you looking at when you browse the Web?
- Do you have any favorite websites?

Home Page Observation:

Task 1 Notes:

Task 2 Notes:

Task 3 Notes:

Task 4 Notes:

Participant Name: Alexa

Participant Age: 26

- Roughly how many hours a week altogether—just a rough estimate—would you say you spend using the Internet, including Web browsing and email, at work and at home? 35
- What kinds of sites (work and personal) are you looking at when you browse the Web? social media, email, Amazon, google
- Do you have any favorite websites? Amazon, social media

Home Page Observation:

Boswell can tell it is about books. She wouldn't spend a lot of time on the site because it is a lot of words and not a lot of interaction, it is in small font; it looks like it is thrown together because the logo looks like it was copy and pasted from clip art; it is all the same font and font size; Wishes they would have done different pages for different authors; so many words on one page get bored quickly

Task 1 Notes:

Clicks booksellers and recommendations; it wasn't the right place so going to scroll through the features; then looks at bargain books; no inventory page; Finds book lists. Link is broken

Task 2 Notes:

Was able to quickly navigate b/c found it during task 1.

Task 3 Notes:

Navigates to book club recommendations; Then navigates to Boswell Run Book Clubs. Needs to call or email to register. Would choose books and beer club; Text is very small; participant didn't notice the small writing to find the right book club book for August at first but eventually found it.

Task 4 Notes:

Scrolling through the home page where some events are, did not find the correct person. Frustrated that only some of the events were listed on the home page and had to navigate to a different page to complete the task. Was able to find the correct information.

Participant Name: Dan Kass

Participant Age: 28

- Roughly how many hours a week altogether—just a rough estimate—would you say you spend using the Internet, including Web browsing and email, at work and at home? 60
- What kinds of sites (work and personal) are you looking at when you browse the Web? Social media, email, Microsoft Teams, Slack, news websites, financial (Mint, Banking), etc.
- Do you have any favorite websites? Reddit, XKCD

Home Page Observation:

Old, hasn't been updated in a long time, very busy, looks searchable; it looks like a book searching website; the shopping cart was noted after looking at it for a minute

Task 1 Notes:

Scrolled and navigated to the high school lists easily; found the 9th-grade reading lists but the links are broken and there is no information. The participant was unable to complete the task.

Task 2 Notes:

Confused about finding that information on the website. After initial confusion found the link for booksellers. There were a lot of names but was able to navigate to Rachel's list fairly easily. The user was not able to find contact information.

Task 3 Notes:

Navigates to Boswell run book clubs on the left navigation bar. Found the descriptions for the book clubs. The books for the book clubs are not listed in the same order as the descriptions. There are registration links for some book clubs but not all. The text is very tiny and confusing. It is hard to tell what months they are for and not every book club has a book. The participant got frustrated and stopped trying to complete the task.

Task 4 Notes:

Navigates easily to book clubs. Observes that the page is very busy and in order to see the book covers and the information the eyes need to go back and forth across the page a lot. When registering for the event the link did not open in a new tab so the participant was no longer on the Boswell web page. This frustrated the participant because he wanted to go back and continue looking. Additionally, the registration page did not include what day of the week the event is on and only the date so the participant had to look up a calendar to confirm the day of the week.

Participant Name: Casey

Participant Age: 28

- Roughly how many hours a week altogether—just a rough estimate—would you say you spend using the Internet, including Web browsing and email, at work and at home? 60
- What kinds of sites (work and personal) are you looking at when you browse the Web? The database work site, social media, shopping (big box, books, groceries), Wikipedia, IMDB, AZlyrics.com
- Do you have any favorite websites? AZlyrics.com, IMDB, Instagram, Target,

Home Page Observation: Boswell bookstore site; archaic in the structure; too many words; likes how the covers of books are shown

Task 1 Notes:

Scrolling since not allowed to search; looking at the features on the left side of the page. After some probing and questions, finds a link, but it is broken. Goes back to read the description and finds an explanation that there is not a list yet and should come back at a later date

Task 2 Notes:

Under features, considers multiple options from the features and scrolls. Starts with booksellers and recommendations. Correctly navigates to the page and finds Rachel's book recommendations. There is no contact information.

Task 3 Notes:

Starts by navigating to Boswell run book clubs. She notes that they are meeting virtually. Finds dates and book recommendations. Scrolls through to find dates and book recommendations. Choosing the book club based on the book. But chose a club she is not interested. Has decided to try the In-Store Lit Club. After choosing she scrolls back to the top to figure out how to register. Adds book to cart to see what happens, but does not lead to book club registration. Considers signing up for book club emails. Decides could email to ask how to get Zoom info.

Task 4 Notes:

Navigates to upcoming events; Notes that the page is a mess. Finds the correct event. Reads the description of the event. Clicks to register for the event.

Appendix C: Usability Study Survey

Participant Name:

Participant Age:

1. How many of the tasks were you able to complete successfully?
2. How likely are you to use the Boswell Books website in the future?
 - a. Very Likely
 - b. Likely
 - c. I don't know
 - d. Unlikely
 - e. Very Unlikely
3. How satisfied are you with your experience on the Boswell Books website?
 - a. Very Satisfied
 - b. Satisfied
 - c. Somewhat Satisfied
 - d. Unsatisfied
 - e. Very Unsatisfied

Usability Study Survey

Participant Name: Dan

Participant Age: 28

1. How many of the tasks were you able to complete successfully? 2
2. How likely are you to use the Boswell Books website in the future?
 - a. Very Likely
 - b. Likely
 - c. I don't know
 - d. Unlikely
 - e. Very Unlikely
3. How satisfied are you with your experience on the Boswell Books website?
 - a. Very Satisfied
 - b. Satisfied
 - c. Somewhat Satisfied
 - d. Unsatisfied
 - e. Very Unsatisfied

Usability Study Survey

Participant Name:

Participant Age: 26

4. How many of the tasks were you able to complete successfully? 3
5. How likely are you to use the Boswell Books website in the future?
 - a. Very Likely
 - b. Likely
 - c. I don't know
 - d. Unlikely
 - e. Very Unlikely
6. How satisfied are you with your experience on the Boswell Books website?
 - a. Very Satisfied
 - b. Satisfied
 - c. Somewhat Satisfied
 - d. Unsatisfied
 - e. Very Unsatisfied

Participant Name: Casey

Participant Age: 28

7. How many of the tasks were you able to complete successfully? All four with some minor roadblocks (I struggled with the first one because I didn't know all the information in the hypothetical situation)
8. How likely are you to use the Boswell Books website in the future?
 - a. Very Likely
 - b. Likely
 - c. I don't know
 - d. Unlikely
 - e. Very Unlikely
9. How satisfied are you with your experience on the Boswell Books website?
 - a. Very Satisfied
 - b. Satisfied
 - c. Somewhat Satisfied
 - d. Unsatisfied
 - e. Very Unsatisfied

References

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