

User Validation Session for website IA.

Date: 28/02/13

STARTS

First impressions of Nesta

Anna: I spent 10 minutes navigating around your site last night and after that I still couldn't work out what you do or what you're for. I asked my husband to take a look too to see if he could shed some light on it, but even he couldn't say confidently what it is you stand for.

Graham: I'm interested in seeing if Nesta can help me, if I want to do something further. I'm retired now, but I might still want to start a business or get some training. I'd like to see how it can help me do that.

James: We've got a society of about 6000 active biochemists. Because I work in policy I'm interested in all the work that Nesta does around growth, especially in the context of the science budget. I'm pretty sure there can be a role for Nesta working with our members to increase the entrepreneurship and commercial awareness, of what is a large but a very academic focused community. That side of things is very much missing from the world of academic science at the moment.

Sharna: I think the creative side might be useful to me. It's such a big organisation though, and I'm surprised I haven't heard of it before!

Al: [Picking up from what OA said about lack of profile] A lot of people have said the same thing, that even if they know a bit about Nesta, and browse the site, a lot of them say, what can I do now I've read some content? What's my next step?

Gathered around the table, looking at the cards of our draft IA

Monica: I don't understand Data. I don't know what that means. It's such a broad thing.

Carys: There are no verbs. It's all nouns. There are no action words. It should be about doing – getting a task done.

[[ALL: Our Work is fine as a label – its' what we're currently working n.]]

Monica: [talking about whole IA] Are you offering a service here? It's very broad, isn't it? It's kind of huge.

Alice: I want that four line paragraph on the homepage saying "We do this" [everyone agrees] Nesta is a charity, doing this kind of activity.

Carys: I want to explore and learn and explore some more

Sharna: If you know what you're looking for, you go direct, but you've got to presume that you've got new people coming to the site, and unless it's more obvious what you're offering, you're going to lose them.

Alice/Peter: I often just go to find out what you're up to, just explore.

Sharna: I think for me there's so much information, so many things that you can click on that you would definitely need brief summary at the top.

Graham+Nicola: I wouldn't know where to start [Nicola: I wouldn't either].

Monica: You need some case studies, or some references. This is suitable for XYZ type people, and a flavour of what you do. I'd be looking at what you offer in terms of educational services, for instance.

Carys: The blogs are a personal way in, and they get you excited. [I watched a Geoff video and got terribly terribly excited!].

If you're a policy maker you might have different needs than if you're a new visitor. So it might be that a new visitor needs a little overview,

Peter: blogs reveal the passions of the site. It's a good way to penetrate new sites – it tells you what they are interested in. The other thing is time. It's a timeline thing. You can see thoughts changing over time.

Jakob Nielsen's 21 seconds:

Monica: What can Nesta do for me as an individual? That's what I want to know. But if I'm bombarded with lots of detail, it becomes frustrating. I'll make the effort if I understand what's happening, but if I find that the detail is swamping then I'll just leave the site. It needs to quick in communicating something relevant, and then I'll spend more time on it.

Alice [off the back of what's currently popular]: I suppose it depends on whether you want to reinforce that behaviour, or if you want to divert people more into skills and other things. And that all depends on what your strategy is, and what you want to look like over the next 5 years.

Sharna: You should add "making the case" for everything you do, all the labels. At the minute you present everything as if we understand what it means. But there's an argument behind everything you're doing – but that's not apparent at all at the minute.

Monica: Is that 5 hour thing research then? See I would never have taken those two together [ageing and research]. Automatically I think that's relevant to social services, and a friend who's in commissioning and contracts, that would be really interesting to her.

Alice: if I wanted to watch video, I'd go in deeper, to get context.

James: I wouldn't look for a home for videos, I'd look for a blog, or news or something.

[ALL = consensus]

AI: So in terms of content strategy Infographics may become more and more popular. [OA – I still think we need a section for this]

[ALL = argument about bad title for Hot Topics]

Orwellian language

Sharna: When you use sophisticated words it can mean 101 different things. **Personally I think you should keep it simple, simple language, so everyone knows exactly what it is. Laymans language works.**

Skills discussion

Alice: When I came in and looked at Skills, I thought – what is that. Is that developing skills, or is about the skills industry?

[And similarly with funding I thought, are you after funding, or are you giving funding?]

Monica: When we were speaking earlier about what can I do on the site, or what can I get out of the site, these kind of things [Skills and Funding] will be perfect.

Carys: I quite like the word Skill because there's something very specific about it. Learning I'd think of as some boring introduction, but Skill I feel – there might be a TOOLKIT! Toolkit gets me excited straight away, because I think – aha! I can take that away. It feels like a structured set of things that are going to be useful.

Monica: Do you provide a lot of toolkits? Is it a significant offering that Nesta is providing?

OA: We're trying to provide more, but we recognise that we don't do enough. We know from our stats that this is exactly what people want, but the organisation hasn't made this a priority in the past – but now we have a skills team, this is something we want to address.

Monica: Because a lot of people have said they find it very difficult to find them. So if that's a growth area, you need to have them in one place.

AI: So at the moment it's just a content type, like video, but if it's so important maybe it's needed as a section?

ALL: definitely. Under Skills, and also under Publications.

Carys: Although I don't see it as a rigorous teaching thing, it's also just an easy way of accessing content. I wouldn't like it if it was part of some formidable coursework – I'd prefer it to be an easy pick-me-up that doesn't need prior knowledge.

Sharna: yeah, because you need to understand what it is, and what it can do, otherwise you wouldn't have the inclination to go onto a toolkit. You need to what's going on before you even get to a decision about using a toolkit.

Alice: Right, because looking down that list (in Skills) I don't know what those are, I wouldn't know where to start.

Monica: yes, what are they?

Alice: I literally can't imagine what's going to be under these headings. I mean, it is skills or development, I find the whole thing confusing.

Monica: So it's for you, it's got to be Your Skills, to make it relevant to the user.

All: yes – Your Skills.

Monica: Can I be brutal, and just say, can we get rid of all these (Skills terms). And also get rid of all the Funding programmes, and just say: What can you do for me? I don't want to do the hard work – that's something you should be doing for me! Make it much more usable. Pose questions to me: "I want to start a new biz" "I want to learn new skills" etc.

Alice: Yes, make it all goal-oriented.

Monica: What I struggle with, is that I'm not quite certain what your USPs are.

Peter: Olly you need a toolkit on interacting with Nesta!

OA: Hopefully this is what the website is.

Carys: Part of the USP is the criss-crossy thing that you do. The fuzziness is a usp.

Peter: You need to communicate – what excites the Nesta team? What drives you as v smart people, forward? A Mashable-type newsletter would be great, with all your current thoughts. That will answer the serendipity question, as it'll be surprising to everyone.

AI: I think surfacing content and ideas will be relatively straightforward. Converting people into action and figuring out how to get people to spend longer on the site is the challenge. We need to solve this major problem: how can I USE the site?

Monica: It's quite highbrow, this whole site.

Monica: I think news could be really useful for people. If it's new, innovative information that's coming through, that would be something you could imagine coming back to.

Carys: And if I was going to have an RSS feed, I'd have them in publications as well. It's packaged information which you can take away too.

Discussing Skills section

Al: Let's take this back to the point about laymans' terms though. How would you navigate Your Skills then. If you're all saying that these don't make sense to anyone [pointing at the categories underneath the Skills heading], do we even just not bother having them? What would do if you just hit that section?

Alice: Growing, scaling and spreading – that sounds like some kind of agricultural process!

James: It sounds like a disease!

Alice: So you go on to Skills and it's like, well how do you want to develop your skills?

Al: Maybe take that kind of approach [pointing at homepage scamp of user-led tasks for homepage]

Alice: Where is the question: how can we help you develop your skills?

Discussing the Funding section

Alice: Can we do have Getting Funding, or Get Funding – it's more user-friendly. It's got an action verb.

[All – yes]

Monica: I don't understand these terms. "Impact Investment". Is that funding for... what is it?

[OA + SR try to explain]

SR: It's essentially funding social enterprises in 3 main areas.

Monica: So why don't you just call it social enterprise funding?

Alice: yes, and you should just be helpful about who you're trying to help, not listing your funds, but who can apply to them, and how, and when.

Monica: yes, you should categorise it according to a general label, like funding for creative businesses, social enterprises and so on, and then some of these funds will be relevant.

Al: What would be helpful categories for you?

Graham: For me it's business start ups, but, well, are you funding this, I mean what are you funding?

Al: So none of those terms under funding mean anything to anyone?

Alice: No not really, because as someone searching for funding you might go to 3 or 4 of these funds, and you don't want to do that. You want to be helped towards the right one quickly.

Carys: So there's funding for an idea, funding for an idea I'm growing/developing.

Monica: In public sector there are so many funding streams, it's a minefield trying to figure out what you can get hold of.

You need to be much clearer about what you actually are funding.

Al: So you need to advertise what you are funding. Flip it around, so that ppl will know whether they're interested or not.

Relabelling Our Work

Monica: What reaction do you want when people go to this area? What do you want them to do with this information?

Because funding and skills are very driven, but in this section, there's no obvious call to action.

Al: Well for instance, it could be comment on a blog article, if it's your area of interest. So there's an element of conversation involved.

Using "Our Work" as a set of filters

Alice: Those [pointing at the list of themes] are just filters, aren't they? They're just ways to quickly jump to content.

Al: Arguably, this serves as a set of filters that could apply to the whole site.

Alice: Oh I think it should, definitely.

James: So long as it doesn't filter out stuff that might have been relevant to you.

Dina: And the terms don't necessarily need to be clear – they just have to be engaging.

Monica: Can they be grouped, so that there are less of them?

[After circular discussion]

Alice: I think maybe this can be guided by your work and what you're doing. I think it's ok to have them as you've got them.

Because I'm from the cultural sector, and I never know what I'm on the website for, so I'll click on the Arts + Creative tag, and then I'll see what you've got going on in the space. Bit of a blog, bit of a toolkit, bit of a publication or something. And actually that's a way of pulling together all the things around a specific topic, rather than just focusing on a specific action.

James: I think perhaps, so long as there's a running theme, like an action on the end of every page, then that would give you a reason to go in there.

Monica: Unless you ask the user what they like before they go in?

Al: Well, that's what we had going before for the homepage – a set of pre-built questions that help different types of people into the site.

Alice: But I don't like being pigeonholed like that

Al: **But you don't have to be – you're a returning visitor who likes browsing the site – you go straight into the content with any handholding. But Monica wants to just know what Nesta can do for her immediately, and she wants that help in.**

Brand animation video

Carys: And what might help would be a video summary as well

Monica: Yes, like rich media, that always help.

Sharna: **And I think because it's so detailed – the work you do – maybe it's even hard to summarise it in even 2 or 3 sentences. So I think maybe a very short synopsis from someone saying what it is, would really help.**

Al [laying out secondary tags]: These are all the other filters that can sit under the primary tags, to allow fine tuning for real specialists. So is 'content type' a useful filter?

All: yes – it means you can get at the actual stuff Nesta produces.

Al: And why would you search by location, by geography?

Alice: that sounds like a funding thing – so probably useful.

Carys: I think it would be useful to see activity in different places

Monica: I think it's incredibly useful, it's sorting out content for a specific area.

Graham: If I found some piece of content that I wanted to ask a question about, would I have to come back out, or would an email and contact number be right there?

Al: that's a really good point, because if you've taken the time to find information and you feel like you're on the right path, then it would be annoying to back out, or just get lumped with a generic contact us. Maybe that's one of the call to actions on pages – a way of getting in contact with the author to get advice.

Carys: **There's a lot of great people in Nesta, and surfacing that would be interesting.**

Al: And that's something on the cards, that we're aiming for. It's not core, it's more value-add.

Monica: but it could create quite a massive following, once people are involved. Especially from a community point of view.

Al: Definitely, it could become a core use case – that you just want to come on to hear what people are talking about and to engage.

Monica: so shall we see the animation?

All: yes.

[Show animation]

James: It makes me want to work with you!

All: [laughter] Yes, exactly!

Monica: It's really good, very inspiring.

Al: Maybe it should just be the whole homepage!

All: Yes!

Monica: You've really simplified it well there. You've said it's all about innovations, and then all the way that leads to innovations, providing you with skills, with money, the networks. Those are the areas. But then you completely dilute it with all this [pointing at all the content cards]. But I think if you kept it simpler like this, then I think it could really work. Because my husband has got this idea, to develop a special kind of reusable bottle, and I'd recommend this website for that, if it was more usable.

A lightbulb actually comes on when watching that, and you think – I've got an idea, what can I actually use from this site.

Alice: Yes, although Nesta's about companies and individuals. It's not just about funding individuals. Actually in my experience, very little individual funding takes place currently.

Al: This is why you need to cater for different audiences.

But the point is well made. I've read the short intro, I've maybe watched the video. Now: what do I do? And all these granular lists underneath the topics, serve only to confuse things, and make people go elsewhere.

Sharna: Once you've seen the video, this all makes a bit more sense. But you need to see the video first on the homepage. Without the video, it's all too mind-boggling to understand.

Monica: And the international map there [pointing at the screen] I never know Nesta was so big – I imagined it was quite small. So a map like that makes it feel relevant to a much wider audience as well.

Graham: I've got a friend who would love to work here. Now I've seen that video, I've got a much better understanding of what you do.

AI: We should have shown it at the beginning!

All: No, it's good trying to figure it out in the dark, then seeing how close we were at the end.

AI: We're out of time now, so thanks so much for coming [etc.]

ENDS