

Greener Heights Website Usability Study

The Greener Heights web presence was designed to be a simple, outward facing blog and twitter feed. The aim of the blog posts and twitter feed is to connect with green roof organizations and experts, and educate our followers on the specifics of green roof technology. The website is hosted through the wordpress blogging platform, which is a straightforward tool to use for a website, but does have some drawbacks. The theme used is Modularity Light, which allows for the prominent display of pictures through the header and background, an important feature for us as we have many good pictures of green roof technology that we wanted to display. The blog posts are displayed in chronological order going down the site, with the newest posts at the top, and we have pages for "Our work" and "About us". One drawback of this theme is the font size is quite small and we are unable to change it, and the different pages are not prominently displayed- a visitor might not see that we have an "About Us" section from the small tab at the top right hand side of the site.

By examining the website with Nielsen's ten usability heuristics we can see what this website does well and what could be improved. The website does have a minimalist design, is flexible and efficient to use, as blog posts are clearly visible on the main page. As far as recognition rather than recall goes, although there are not "breadcrumbs" at the top of the page when one navigates to another page or clicks on the blog post itself, the Home tab is always at the top of the page to guide users back to the landing page. If the site was more complex, it may be difficult for users to return to the home page, but as the site and posts are simple this is not a huge issue. The match between the system and the real world comes from the simply named pages- "Home" "Our Work" and "About Us" are self-explanatory and not confusing to the user. There is also an easily located search box on the page. This website does not have a "help" section because of its simplicity, so we hope that users are able to navigate through the website without that.

Although we wanted the site to be simple and in a "blog" style with posts displayed, one downside of using the Wordpress blogging tool and the chosen theme is that a user needs to scroll down the page to read older posts. When one scrolls down, you lose the search bar, twitter feed, and visibility of the other pages at the top, and the blog posts look very vertical. Rather than have multiple different pages, we have put links into our "Our Work" page which allows the user to download different pieces we have created. We did this as we wanted the site to focus on information about green roof technology, rather than the deliverables for our 506 class. However, there may have been a better way to display this content without forcing the user to download files. We have used the website and twitter accounts to compliment each other, and have promoted new blog posts with tweets, and have a twitter feed on the home page of the blog. Both the blog and the twitter have become sources of information for green roofs, and we have interacted with other green roof websites via twitter, and have shared links that have been retweeted by other users. In general the simplicity of the website and twitter have enabled us to become an easy resource for information and news on green roof technology.