

Aol.

Katie Mone

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following slide deck is an in-depth analysis of [AOL.com](https://www.aol.com) that was conducted in efforts to redesign the website.

While other news sites are keeping up with the times, AOL is a bit behind design-wise. It is not the most visually appealing or user friendly. This report will go over user and business requirements to consider with accompanying design recommendations.

This report contains a Competitive Analysis, User Personas, User Interviews & Surveys, Card Sorting, and three UX methods: Usability Testing, 5-Second Testing, and a Diary Study. All of these exercises contributed to improve the experience for AOL users.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Results & Recommendations

Based on the methods conducted for user experience, a summary of the results and recommendations can be found below to be applied to AOL's website revamp.

- **Initial observations** – More visual, colorful content should be incorporated into the homepage to reduce clutter, replace text overload, and minimize white space.
- **Card Sorting** – Focus on building a more prominent About page, incorporate carousel images into the top and center of the homepage, move social media link icons up to the top of the website.
- **Usability Test** – Narrow down/rearrange list of categories on left sidebar, minimize scrolling by rearranging/removing some homepage elements, display Tech Support more clearly & prominently.

THE COMPANY

AOL is an American web portal and online service provider based in New York City. Originally founded in 1985 as “America Online”, the service began as an online server called PlayNET. AOL is marketed by the current incarnation of Yahoo! Inc. and was originally founded by Steve Case, Jim Kimsey, Marc Seriff, and William von Meister. AOL was one of the early big guns of the Internet in the early-1990s and the most recognized brand on the web in the United States.

THE WEBSITE

AOL offers numerous different functions including search, email, news, and games. And beyond just everyday news, it covers all the current events bases from sports & entertainment to lifestyle & finance. Since its founding in the 1980s, AOL has been a powerhouse and go-to destination for about 174 million unique visitors a month as computers, email, and the Internet became increasingly prominent. And, according to CNBC News, there are still 1.5 million people paying a monthly subscription service fee for AOL.

Aol.

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- 💖 Lifestyle
- 🏆 Sports
- 🎮 Games
- ☆ Subscriptions



Local News and Weather

New Fairfield

Change your location



Latest Politics News

RNC Touts Focus On 'Working Class' As It Stays At \$1,283-A-Night Pacific Coast Resort

THE WEBSITE

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- 🏆 Sports
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- ☆ Subscriptions

Latest Headlines

- RNC Touts Focus On 'Working Class' As It Stays At \$1,283-A-Night Pacific Coast Resort
- Feds announce massive takedown of fraudulent nursing diploma scheme
- Questions persist on source of George Santos campaign funds

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Entertainment News

- Diane Keaton hasn't been on a date in 15 years: 'I'm kind of odd, but I'm doing fine'
- After Allen and Stallone denials, doc's director backs Pam Anderson
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RNC Touts Focus On 'Working Class' As It Stays At \$1,283-A-Night Pacific Coast Resort



Feds announce massive takedown of fraudulent nursing diploma scheme



Questions persist on source of George Santos campaign funds

It stays at a \$1,283-A-Night Pacific Coast Resort

- Questions persist on source of George Santos campaign funds
- Speaker McCarthy: Santos will be removed from Congress if ethics probe finds he broke law

Daily Horoscope

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ARIES	TAURUS	GEMINI	CANCER
♈️	♉️	♊️	♋️
LEO	VIRGO	LIBRA	SCORPIO
♌️	♍️	♎️	♏️
SAGITTARIUS	CAPRICORN	AQUARIUS	PISCES
♐️	♑️	♒️	♓️

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THE WEBSITE

The site ideally has something for everyone with the different categories and activities that it displays. AOL even offers tech support, providing several online mechanic and security options that users can utilize for their device(s).

Aol.

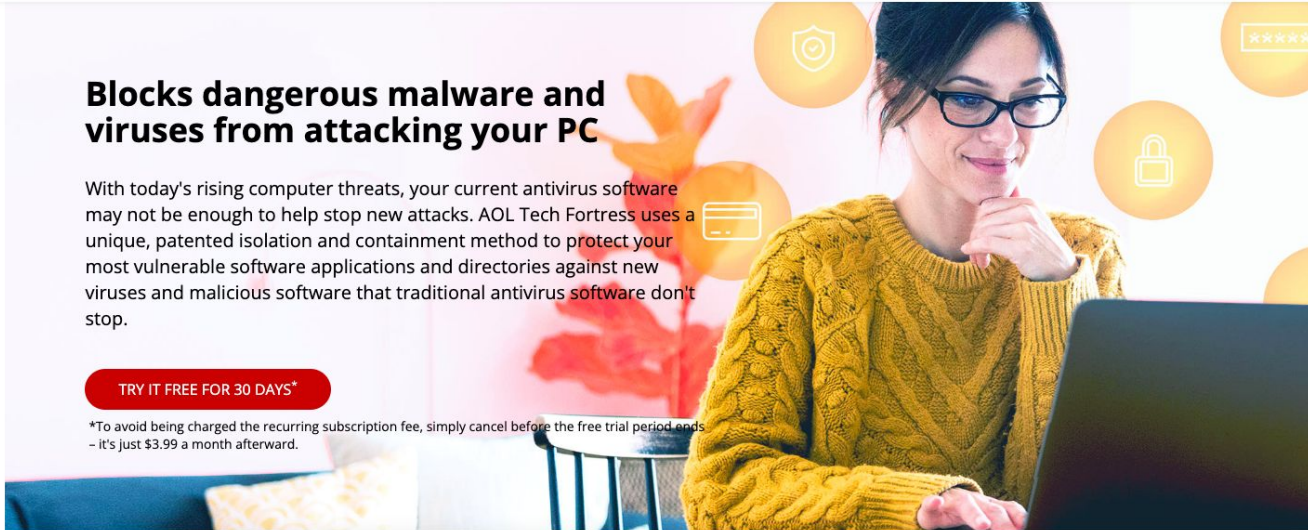


Blocks dangerous malware and viruses from attacking your PC

With today's rising computer threats, your current antivirus software may not be enough to help stop new attacks. AOL Tech Fortress uses a unique, patented isolation and containment method to protect your most vulnerable software applications and directories against new viruses and malicious software that traditional antivirus software don't stop.

TRY IT FREE FOR 30 DAYS*

*To avoid being charged the recurring subscription fee, simply cancel before the free trial period ends - it's just \$3.99 a month afterward.



REASONS FOR REDESIGN

AOL falls a bit behind when it comes to their website's design and layout. While the website has improved and changed since its original launch, AOL still seems to be playing catch up with modern user interface design as they adapt to modern digital standards.

Upon going on the site, the design is immediately very cluttered. It's likely that the average visitor may get lost or confused about where to go and what to do if they are being bombarded with so much content at once.

REASONS FOR REDESIGN

AOL has the potential to be something great. It is still well known by most members of older generations, but the name is typically a foreign concept to younger folks. The company, despite having so much to offer, is not getting the recognition or volume that it deserves. And the blame can certainly be heavily placed on its design and marketing methods. Thus, a website revamp is more than necessary.

USER REQUIREMENTS

In order to achieve a more successful website that is in line with today's demands, there are some requirements to fulfill. It will be vital to have a website that is highly functional, accessible, and easy to utilize for users of all demographics and capabilities. The following list is what will be focused on for users.

- Easy navigation
- Even balance of images and text
- Appropriate placement of different links & categories
- Clear homepage content that is not too detailed/overwhelming

BUSINESS & MARKETING REQUIREMENTS

In addition to requirements specifically to the user, there will also be business requirements that need to be put in place. The marketing team will need to reevaluate and make some adjustments to ensure that AOL becomes a prominent site again that is no longer phasing out.

SOCIAL MEDIA

AOL does have an active social media presence. But this is not known to the vast majority and could be more integrated into the website. This would not only help boost their social platforms but also make them more up-to-speed digitally. Moving the social app icons from the bottom to the top of the page would also be ideal so users wouldn't have to scroll all the way down to access them.

BUSINESS & MARKETING REQUIREMENTS

Additionally, it will be crucial to consider how AOL generates revenue and the role that its website can play in this. If the website can make some changes that will fulfill this need, it will make all the difference.

BRAND CONSISTENCY

In order for a brand to be truly successful and maintain a long-term audience, there must be consistency within AOL's website. This will not only help AOL grow and maintain its audience, but also enhance its brand image and give it a leg up against competitors.

COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

Currently, some of AOL's competitors are MSN, Yahoo, and Hearst. These are all media corporations and online service providers that entail the same or similar features as AOL. While similar, each website has aspects that distinguishes it from the others. Some features from competing companies may be crucial for AOL to acquire as well. MSN (which is connected to Microsoft) and Yahoo have a more outdated layout, much like AOL. Hearst takes a more visual approach with more aesthetically pleasing imagery and color. Despite having the lowest user count, AOL still dominates for being a more well-known brand than some of its competitors. So it is key that this analysis maps out what needs to be implemented to keep AOL on the map.

	<u>AOL</u>	<u>MSN</u>	<u>Yahoo</u>	<u>Hearst</u>
Unique features	- Side columns with activities	- Overhead bar of links	- Live sports scores column	- Carousel video banner
Design strengths	- Clean theme - Easily accessible content	- Clear layout - Easy access to all of Microsoft Office	- Straightforward layout - Easy access content	- Images throughout - Lots of color
Design weaknesses	- Text-heavy - Plain design - Content overload	- Plain design - Content overload - Heavy scrolling	- Plain design - Small visuals - Empty white space	- Large imagery w/ little description
Customer base	1.5 million users	350 million users	700 million users	Not found

CORE FEATURES

	<u>AOL</u>	<u>MSN</u>	<u>Yahoo</u>	<u>Hearst</u>
News	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sign-in option	✓	✓	✓	
Search bar	✓	✓	✓	✓
Links to outside locations	✓	✓	✓	✓
Branded content		✓		✓

COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

Based on these charts, there are some features that competitors have on their websites that AOL could incorporate into their own site to make it a more user-friendly environment.

VISUAL CONTENT

First, it is very important to have a homepage that will reel users in, not push them away. A large factor in this is incorporating engaging visual content, including photos, videos, and graphics. It would be wise for AOL to follow in Hearst's footsteps in terms of visuals. Hearst utilizes lots of large, colorful photographs that take up a good portion of the website, while AOL's visual component is severely lacking. Incorporating this into the site would help AOL become more appealing and user friendly, as they will be more drawn to colorful visuals.

COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

BRANDED CONTENT

Building off of the visual component, AOL could also incorporate content specific to its brand. Besides advertisements, there is really not much going on for AOL's own company content. While MSN and Hearst incorporate paid and organic content that promote their brand image, AOL falls short in that department. All of AOL's advertising is for outside brands and companies.

Hearst, in particular, stands out with brand content as they clearly display different movements and topics they are involved with, as well as brand-related hashtags. If AOL could become more with-the-times in this regard, it would likely help them retain their current audience as well as gain a larger one.

USER PERSONAS

In order to get a better idea of who would be using and benefitting AOL's redesigned website, I created 3 professional user personas representing three different potential segments of AOL's audience. I included bios and scenarios for each hypothetical user.

Scroll to next pages to view.

Denise Anderson



"I'm looking for a place where I can easily access some news without confusion."

Age: 76

Work: **Retired**

Family: **Widow, 3 children, 5 grandchildren**

Location: **Newburgh, NY**

Character: **Quietly Curious**

About Denise

Denise is a kind woman who enjoys spending time with her loved ones. Since the global pandemic, she has had a hard time being alone as an immunocompromised person. The passing of her husband has been hard on her, and she finds it difficult to stay informed on her family's life as well as what's going on in the world around her.

Denise recently got a new computer in an effort to keep in touch with her growing grandchildren. And while she usually gets her daily news from her TV or reading the newspaper, she's also interested in using her computer for it. She wants a news website that is functional and easy to navigate. Denise is not very familiar with computers and doesn't understand modern technology too well, but she could manage to operate a basic news site that meets her needs and shows her news in a variety of different categories. **Denise would be interested in utilizing the regular News function as well as Lifestyle.**

Goals

- Connecting with her family from other states.
- Staying up to date on current events.

Frustrations

- Not being technologically savvy.
- Being a high-risk individual during the pandemic.

Determined

Hardworking

Empathetic

Motivation

Family



Pets



Growth



Knowledge



Preferred Media Forms

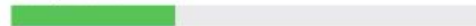
Television



Print Media



Computers





"I would like quick access to a variety of news stories and categories all in one place."

Age: **46**

Work: **Marketing Manager**

Family: **Married, 4 children**

Location: **Newport, RI**

Character: **Trendy Leader**

About Kelly

Kelly is a working mom of 4 living in Rhode Island. She is the Marketing Manager of a fashion company in Newport and is hoping to one day open her own boutique. Kelly is a busy woman who finds she does not have much free time. She has many responsibilities in both her home life and work life. While she has a pretty good balance going between the two, Kelly sometimes struggles with her own personal needs, which is the dream she has: to start her own business. She has tried researching and taking classes, but she just can't seem to make progress as she tries to learn and grow more as a businesswoman.

As someone who tries to follow trends, Kelly wishes that there was a way to actively keep up with current business and fashion news consistently. She used AOL when it first came out for both news and email but lost interest as the website became less prominent. **Kelly currently interacts with the Entertainment, Finance, and Lifestyle sections of AOL.** She hopes to find an all-in-one platform that can provide her with daily updates on fashion and business trends.

Goals

- Growing her fashion business.
- Staying up to date on current fashion & business news.

Driven

Detail-Oriented

Empowering

Motivation

Family



Growth



Power



Knowledge



Preferred Media Forms

Mobile Phone



Computer



Television



Frustrations

- Little knowledge of running a business
- Minimal free time to do in-depth research

Jack Wilson



"I want to be on the same level as others in my field with modern financial trends."

Age: 55
Work: **Financial Advisor**
Family: **Married, 2 children**
Location: **Boston, MA**
Character: Analytical Ace

About Jack

Jack is a hardworking financial advisor for a credit union in Boston. He lives in the suburbs with his wife and 2 children. Jack is very analytical and quick-thinking. He is very good at what he does, but, like many people, he feels that he could be even better. He believes that there is always something new to learn.

Jack finds great value in gaining new knowledge, especially in his field. In the hustle and bustle lifestyle of finance combined with being an active father and husband, he sometimes feels set back from his younger colleagues. While they have all the advantages of having no children and understanding current trends, Jack sometimes feels under-qualified. **He currently browses the Finance section of AOL from time to time**, and he wants to figure out a way to actively keep up with finance news on the go while also still having time for his other responsibilities.

Goals

- Becoming up-to-speed on modern finance.
- Improving tech skills.

Personable

Curious

Proactive

Motivation

Family



Growth



Power



Knowledge



Preferred Media Forms

Mobile Phone



Computer



Television



Frustrations

- Being older than most colleagues.
- Not feeling knowledgeable enough in a field he's been devoted to for decades.

INTERVIEW

To better gauge user experience, we created a set of 10 interview questions that we would ask a sample of people. We would aim to interview people who match the qualifications of AOL's target audience. The user personas provided examples of specific demographics and psychographics of hypothetical AOL audience members that we would likely want to interview.

Overarching Research Question

How can the online experience be improved for AOL users?

INTERVIEW

Introduction

Hello, and welcome to the interview! Thank you so much for coming. This will be an interview to better understand your thoughts and experiences with online news websites, particularly AOL. You will be asked questions about AOL as a company and how its website reflects that.

As our team works to provide the optimal experience for AOL users, your participation in this interview is very helpful and important to us. Thank you for taking the time to be here today! Let's begin the interview

INTERVIEW

Warm-Up

1. Do you follow news and current events of any kind?
2. Do you utilize online news networks or websites? <answer> Which site(s) do you usually look at for news?

Body

3. How familiar are you with AOL? <answer> What component(s) of the site have you used?
4. Have you used AOL recently? <answer> If so, for what? News? Email?
5. Tell me more about why you may have stopped using AOL.
6. How do you think AOL compares with other online news sites? <answer> Are there certain ways it could be improved?

INTERVIEW

Body (cont.)

7. How do you feel about the visual appearance of the website?

8. Would you like a website that has more visual content? <answer> Would this resonate with you more than content with a lot of text?

9. How do you feel about websites that present lots of different types of content at once? <answer> Does it impact your visiting time?

Cooling-Off

10. What would you say is the greatest advantage of AOL as a website?

11. What might be the biggest disadvantage?

Wrap-Up

Thank you so much for taking the time to participate in this interview!

SURVEY

In addition to conducting interviews, we plan to send out a survey to gather data about AOL's usability. Ideally, we would gather results from primarily AOL users. We examined the user personas as guidelines for targeting AOL's audience and went from there when formulating my survey, using the sample individuals as inspiration for my audience members.

We've compiled a set of 20 questions for a survey about. The questions are a mix of multiple-choice, open-ended, and scaled questions. I have also provided brief descriptions for each question that explain why the question is important and how it is relevant to design. My questions are more geared towards site users, how they use the site, what their goals are, etc. rather than design-oriented questions, as those topics will be covered in usability testing.

SURVEY

Introduction

Hello! The design and marketing teams at AOL are looking for a way to make our website more reliable, accessible, and create a better user experience across the board—and we need your help!

Please take 5-7 minutes of your time to fill out this survey where you will be asked to share your thoughts and experiences with AOL, and what can be done to improve it. You will remain anonymous and the data will be utilized for research and professional purposes only.

Thank you so much for your participation! Your feedback is very important to us!

SURVEY

1. **How old are you?**
 - a. **Under 18**
 - b. **18-29**
 - c. **30-44**
 - d. **45-59**
 - e. **60-74**
 - f. **75+**

For a website with a specific target audience with specific demographics, this question is very important. It will be beneficial to get a gauge of who is responding to our survey in relation to who may actually use AOL. Age also heavily factors into how websites should look and be designed, especially when measuring the accessibility of a site and what types of people can and cannot use it successfully.

SURVEY

2. What is your gender?
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Other
 - d. Prefer not to say

AOL's audience is 55.39% male and 44.61% female, a relatively even split. Even so, it is more male-dominated. Having an idea of what genders are responding and what certain genders may want more than others will be very important for collecting data as well as how the website should be laid out.

SURVEY

3. Do you enjoy reading your news online?

- a. Yes
- b. No

A very simple but very significant question, especially since our primary audience is on the older side. Many people in AOL's age demographic may prefer newspapers and TV over online news. Thus, designers should adapt according to how older age groups respond and what would suit their needs from a visual perspective.

4. How often would you say you use online news websites?

- c. Extremely often
- d. Moderately often
- e. Slightly often
- f. Sometimes
- g. Not at all

This relates to the previous question and gives teams a better gauge of who actually uses online news among different demographics and how often they use it. It also gives teams a chance to implement new ideas that could make AOL stand out from competitors.

SURVEY

5. Have you used AOL recently?

- a. Yes**
- b. No**

Another simple question that will be very important nonetheless. The survey will likely reach a younger, post-AOL demographic that may have never heard of the site. Respondent knowledge of the website itself will factor into the design process, as many of these folks may compare AOL to other, more modernized news sites.

6. On a scale of 1 to 5, how familiar are you with AOL? (1 being Not Familiar and 5 being Extremely Familiar)

5 4 3 2 1

Relating back to the previous question, this familiarity will serve to help the design team consider factors that they can implement into the site's revamp. For familiar users, it is a chance to improve the design with the idea that AOL will retain its site traffic. If people have less experience with the site, it's more of a clean slate where new ideas can be formed for the most optimal design.

SURVEY

7. **What have you used AOL for? Select all that apply.**
- a. **News**
 - b. **Email**
 - c. **Search engine**
 - d. **Technical support/computer help**
 - e. **I have never used AOL**
 - f. **Other (please specify) _____**

This gives the design and marketing team a better idea of what areas to focus on and how to make each section of the website cohesively cater to all audience members.

8. **Which of these categories, if any, are of interest to you? Select all that apply.**

- a. **Entertainment**
- b. **Finance**
- c. **Sports**
- d. **Video Games**
- e. **Health and Wellness**
- f. **Life Hacks**
- g. **Fashion**

This is an effective way to get to know participants better and get a better idea of psychographics in addition to demographics. Having a better idea of what different respondents are like gives the marketing and design team an advantage in catering to audience members and what they'll want to see as users.

SURVEY

9. Did you know that AOL offers multiple categories of news?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. I'm not sure

Posing this question will ideally spark an interest in respondents who may not be thrilled with their AOL experiences. This awareness (or lack thereof) will give design and marketing teams a clearer picture of what users might expect from the website.

10. On a scale of 1 to 5, how likely would you be to use a news website that caters to your personal interest(s)? 5 being Extremely Likely and 1 being Extremely Unlikely.

5 4 3 2 1

Going along with the previous question and the initial awareness of the multiple categories, now users can give their personal thoughts on sites curated for them. The overall consensus of this idea and who may prefer it more than others will be helpful data to have when it comes down to designing the website and its content.

SURVEY

11. Rate the importance of the following features in an online news site and web portal from 1 to 5, with 1 being Not Important and 5 being Extremely Important.

- a. **Brand content**
- b. **Multiple category options**
- c. **A search bar**
- d. **Visual elements (images/photos/graphics)**
- e. **Links to relevant outside sources**

Knowing where respondents' priorities lie and what is most significant to their website experience is a helpful way to understand the audience better as well as when it comes to designing and formatting the website.

12. Overall, how satisfied are you with your experience on AOL?

- f. **Extremely satisfied**
- g. **Moderately satisfied**
- h. **Slightly satisfied**
- i. **Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied**
- j. **Slightly dissatisfied**
- k. **Moderately dissatisfied**
- l. **Extremely dissatisfied**

Understanding the satisfaction rate among AOL users and non-users alike will be instrumental in gathering data and applying it to the newly designed site. The goal is obviously to ensure that all users are at option A. The best way to achieve that is to assess the current state.

SURVEY

13. How would you rate your experience on AOL?



This will be very general since usability testing of a more detailed experience will not come until later. Nevertheless, this is still an important question to ask to get an understanding of how respondents felt when navigating the site in terms of what works and what needs improvement for design.

14. How would you rate your experience on other news sites?



Likewise, getting a standpoint on competitors is a good way to figure out what AOL can incorporate into the site based on what works for competing networks.

SURVEY

15. When opening AOL, what is your first impression?

This open-ended question will give respondents the opportunity to share their own personal opinions on how they view AOL at a glance. Factoring in numerous responses, it's possible that patterns and common themes will begin to form within the different answers. These themes will be crucial to consider when redesigning the appearance of the site.

16. Would you say you feel confused upon entering the website?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Maybe

This is just to get a general consensus of how respondents perceive the site and if they feel lost or confused when they go onto it. Factoring this into the data is important when considering elements to make the site more clear and less cluttered.

SURVEY

17. How much time would you imagine yourself spending on AOL?

- a. **Multiple times a day**
- b. **Once a day**
- c. **2 or 3 times a week**
- d. **Once a week**
- e. **A few times a month**
- f. **Occasionally**
- g. **Not at all**

This will help give teams an idea of typical user traffic as well as the lifestyles of different users. Some may not be interested in using AOL for more than a few minutes. Others may just not have the time to do so.

18. Rate your difficulty using the website from 1-5, with 1 being Very Easy and 5 being Extremely Difficult

5 4 3 2 1

Having respondents assess how easy or hard it is for them to quickly bounce through the website will be very telling of what needs immediate improvement and removal, as well as what can be kept and/or rearranged to make it more accessible.³⁷

SURVEY

19. What do you think is the biggest advantage that AOL has?

This open-ended question will give respondents a chance to provide strengths that the design team should consider keeping on the site and building upon it to make it more enhanced, modern, and functional.

20. What do you think its biggest disadvantage is?

Likewise, this open-ended question will leave room for criticism and honest feedback about the site. While it is more negative, these responses will be most important to pay attention to and factor into the redesign. What needs to be improved? What needs to be taken away?

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey!

CARD SORTING

We've conducted a card-sorting exercise to get insight into how users would like to see AOL designed. Card sorts show “how people think content should be organized and named” on a website, and are often performed to generate an “information architecture” (Baxter 304). This architecture involves anything from how content should be labeled and categorized to the layout of a website's navigation.

The card-sorting process for AOL was done remotely through a program called Optimal Workshop. The OptimalSmart free program allows for 20 virtual cards to be created. Due to the large size of AOL's website, we only concentrated on the homepage. The homepage was divided into multiple categories based on different areas and purposes of different parts of the page.

CARD SORTING

Message/Virtual Script

Welcome to this card-sorting study, and thank you for agreeing to participate!

The activity shouldn't take longer than **5 to 10 minutes** to complete.

Your response will **help AOL create a better design for its homepage** and **improve the overall user experience** on the website.

CARD SORTING

Instructions

1. Check out the current AOL homepage [HERE](#).
2. Then take a look at the list of items on the left in this study.
3. We'd like you to sort those items into the groups provided on the right.
4. There is no right or wrong answer, just do what comes naturally.

CARD SORTING

There were 3 participants in the card-sorting study. We opted for the hybrid card sort. Participants were given 6 categories to choose from. They could choose to move a particular item to a certain area of the page or remove it completely from the site. The categories are as follows.

1. Left panel bar
2. Top panel bar
3. Bottom panel bar
4. Center of page
5. Right panel bar
6. Remove from the website

CARD SORTING

Once the results were in from the 3 respondents, we were able to see which cards they had placed in each category. From this first chart alone, it is clear to see some recurring patterns and themes within the different categories.

Standardization grid

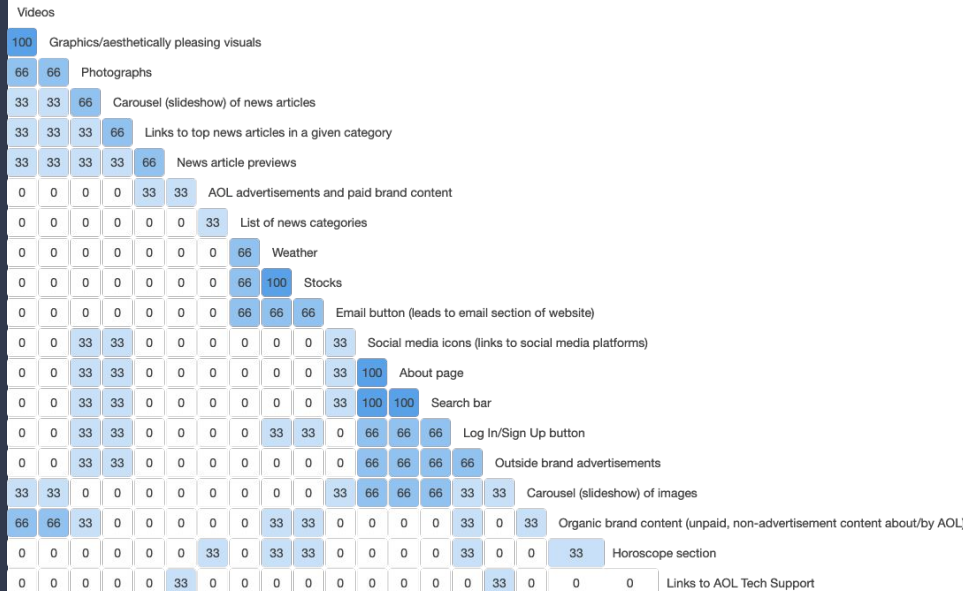
Total participants 0  3

Name	Bottom p...	Center of...	Left pane...	Remove f...	Right pan...	Top pane...	Not standardized
AOL advertisements and paid			1		2		
About page						3	
Carousel (slideshow) of image		1				2	
Carousel (slideshow) of news		1		1		1	
Email button (leads to email s			2			1	
Graphics/aesthetically pleas		3					
Horoscope section				1	2		
Links to AOL Tech Support	3						
Links to top news articles in a		1		1	1		
List of news categories			3				
Log In/Sign Up button					1	2	
News article previews	1	1			1		
Organic brand content (unpai		2			1		
Outside brand advertisement	1					2	
Photographs		2				1	
Search bar						3	
Social media icons (links to s						3	
Stocks			2		1		
Videos		3					
Weather			2		1		

For instance, all three agreed that carousel images should be placed at the top of AOL's website, as well as social media icons. These icons are currently located at the bottom so it is quite telling that all participants chose to move them to the top.

CARD SORTING

Similarity matrix



The similarity matrix gave a more in-depth visual of trends within the results. While we cannot see the categories associated with each card in this chart, the similarity matrix focuses on what participants gravitated toward more as well as their preferences. Based on this diagram, focusing on the About page, the search bar, and videos would be most important.

CARD SORTING

Final Thoughts

Based on the findings from the card-sorting exercise, it is clear that there are common demands and preferences when it comes to website design. It will be very important to create and highlight visual content in the center of AOL's homepage in the site revamp, particularly graphics and photographs.

Social media platforms will need to be easier to access at the top of the page and tech support should also be incorporated at the bottom. Two out of three participants chose to remove certain aspects from the AOL site.

USABILITY TESTING

A usability test was conducted to understand the website from different user perspectives. Three participants were evaluated for this testing session. They were shown the homepage of the website and instructed to think aloud and share their thought processes as they made their way through.

Participants were given a consent form and instructions. They were encouraged to voice their opinions, concerns, and preferences as they navigated through the exercise. Moderators took note of participants' actions and comments as well as the time that it took each of them to perform each task.

The usability test was done in person for all three participants. Names are changed for confidentiality purposes.

USABILITY TESTING

Participant 1 – “Natalie”, Female, 47 years old

Natalie is the Director of Customer Service at a publishing company. She currently has a hybrid work schedule and spends a lot of time on the computer. When she isn't working she often uses her cell phone for Facebook and texting. Originally a fully-remote employee, Natalie had to become very familiar with computers and can typically use one with no issues. In total, Natalie spends 40+ hours online in a week.

USABILITY TESTING

Participant 2 – “Thomas”, Male, 50 years old

Thomas works in a fully remote position as an Executive Compliance Officer at Citigroup. He uses his computer frequently during the day for work and research. He also uses his cell phone to listen to music, text, and occasionally watch YouTube videos. While he's not particularly savvy with computers, he understands the basic terminology. Thomas likely uses the Internet for 40 to 50 hours a week.

USABILITY TESTING

Participant 3 – “Grace”, Female, 12 years old

Grace is a middle school student. She uses her school-provided computer for checking, completing, and submitting her assignments. Grace uses a cell phone as well for texting and social media. She averages about 30 hours weekly online.

USABILITY TESTING

Consent Form

Hello, and thank you for agreeing to participate in this usability testing. We are conducting this study to evaluate how visitors utilize and navigate AOL in an effort to improve the website.

We are asking for your written consent to be recorded during the study so that we can look back at specific comments and steps that are taken in the process. This will help us analyze the data more accurately.

Please read, sign, and date the corresponding areas below. We appreciate you taking the time to be a part of this redesign process. Your contributions will not go unnoticed!

I understand that I am participating in a usability testing session. I understand that this test will be recorded, including my voice and comments. I know that the purpose of this recorded session will be for internal uses only at AOL. I understand that I will remain anonymous and that my information is confidential.

I agree with the statement above and give my consent.

Signature _____

Print _____

Date ____ / ____ / ____

USABILITY TESTING

Script

“Hi [participant name], and thank you so much for being here today! I appreciate your agreeing to participate and filling out the consent form. Before we begin, please answer the following questions so I can learn more about you.

1. What do you do for a living?
2. About how many hours would you say you spend online?
3. What do you use the Internet for?
4. What device(s) do you use?
5. How knowledgeable would you say you are with technology?

Thank you for responding to these questions. Now that I know more about the type of Internet user you are, we can begin navigating the AOL website.

Also, please keep in mind that the purpose of this exercise is not to test you on your computer/technical skills. Simply share what you're thinking, what actions you'd like to take, etc. There are no wrong answers! All you need to do is think out loud.

(continued on next page)

USABILITY TESTING

Script & Tasks

Now, at first glance, what are some of your thoughts upon opening the website? Any first impressions in particular that you get from AOL's homepage? Just share anything that comes to mind!

Thank you for providing your first impressions. Now I'm going to provide some scenarios and ask you to perform a series of tasks that correspond with these scenarios. Remember to think aloud and that there are no wrong answers!

1. You are an active AOL account user looking to check your emails for the day. Find where you can check your email.
2. You are a stay-at-home mom looking for new recipes to try with cooking tutorials. Find the area for online tutorials and classes.
3. You are a film student interested in the latest in pop culture news. Find this.
4. You are looking to play a quick game in between reading news articles. Find these online games.
5. You do not fully trust modern technology and are interested in getting your computer more secure. Find the tech support and security section.

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USABILITY TESTING

Script & Tasks

Nice work! Thank you for taking the time to go through these tasks and navigate the AOL website. Do you have any last-minute thoughts before we wrap up?

This concludes the usability test. I greatly appreciate the feedback you gave; it will be very useful in AOL's website redesign process. Thank you for your attention and participation! Have a great day!"

USABILITY TESTING

Results

After all testing participants read and signed the consent form and were walked through the process, each of them went through and performed each task. The chart below shows how long it took each participant to complete each task.

	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3
Task 1	0.4 seconds	3 seconds	0.3 seconds
Task 2	1 second	15 seconds	4 seconds
Task 3	7 seconds	20 seconds	16 seconds
Task 4	1 second	2 seconds	0.5 seconds
Task 5	15 seconds	13 seconds	6 seconds

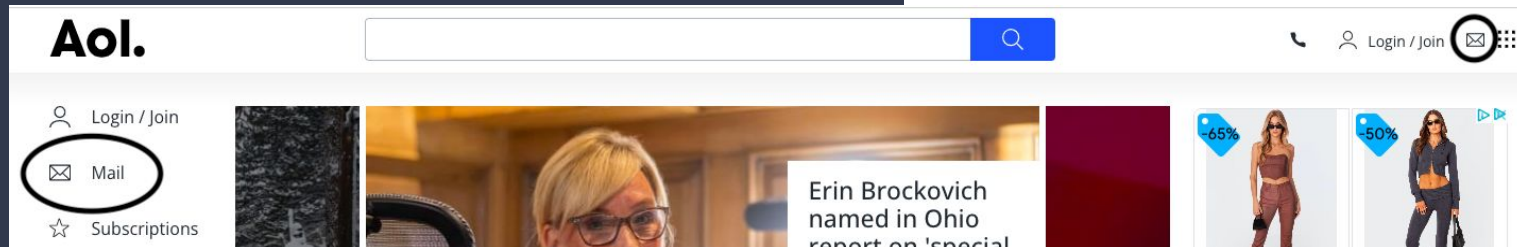
USABILITY TESTING

Results

Task 1: You are an active AOL account user looking to check your emails for the day. Find where you can check your email.

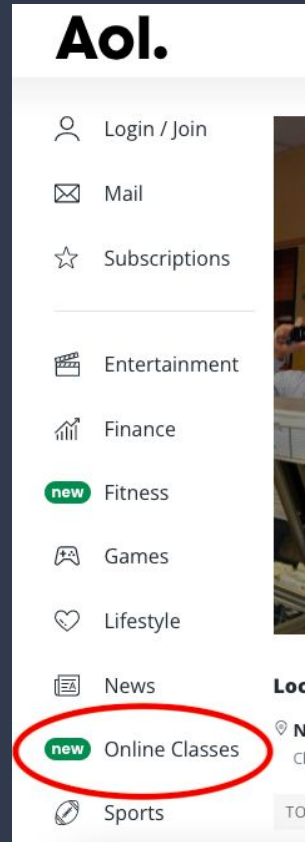
This task was the simplest one for all three participants to complete. They all found the email button right away. Email can actually be accessed in two different parts of the site, but all participants clicked the option on the left corner. Participant 1 noted that she found it interesting and helpful that it was accessible in two places. All participants highlighted the simplicity of this task.

Since this aspect was easy to navigate, we would likely keep the Mail button in the same place as well as leave both buttons to keep it more convenient.



USABILITY TESTING

Results



Task 2: You are a stay-at-home mom looking for new recipes to try with cooking tutorials. Find the area for online tutorials and classes.

The second task was overall simple for everyone to find and complete. Participant 2 had a bit of trouble scrolling since he was using the moderator's laptop when he is used to normally using a desktop with a mouse for his work. This small difference in familiarity caused him to take more time to find the Online Classes section, as it is a bit of a ways down in the categories and required scrolling.

Other than that, the task was straightforward. The other participants were quickly able to find and access the correct section. Participant 3 even shared that it was a cool feature to incorporate into the website. For future redesign, we would likely keep this new category but place it in a more prominent place (higher up in the list).

USABILITY TESTING

Results

Entertainment News

- Rachael Ray to end talk show after 17 seasons
- Missing radio host gave troubling health update before disappearance
- Camila Alves McConaughey details 'chaos' on Lufthansa flight that left 7 people hospitalized: 'Everything was flying everywhere'

[Read more >](#)

Preview section observed by Participant 3

Aol.

 Login / Join

 Mail

 Subscriptions

 Entertainment

 Finance

 Fitness

 Games

 Lifestyle

 News

 Online Classes

 Sports

Task 3: You are a film student interested in the latest in pop culture news. Find this.


The third task averaged out to take the longest out of all the tasks for participants to complete. Even though it is the first category in the sidebar, all participants scrolled right past it at first glance. This could have been because of the way the task was worded and did not include the word "entertainment".

Participants 1 and 3 both initially clicked on "News" when they heard the word in the task, causing them to become misled and confused. Participant 2 was able to find it easily despite his trouble adjusting to using the mousepad. Participant 3 noticed the preview section for Entertainment news as she scrolled. In future redesigning, we'll keep the entertainment category but move it further down on the list so users don't miss it by mistake.

USABILITY TESTING

Results

Aol.

 Login / Join

 Mail

 Subscriptions

 Entertainment

 Finance

 Fitness

 Games

 Lifestyle

 News

 Online Classes

 Sports

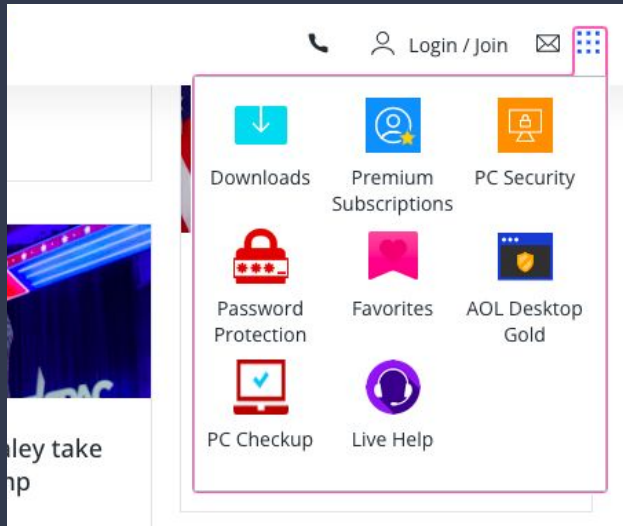
Task 4: *You are looking to play a quick game in between reading news articles. Find these online games.*

This task took the shortest amount of time for all participants. All three of them commented how easy it was to find. This is likely because the task was worded simply and they only had to move their mouse down a tiny bit down the side bar to get from Entertainment to Games. Participant 2 remarked that he found it refreshing for the easily accessible section in the midst of a cluttered homepage that he had trouble scrolling through.

It would be ideal to keep this feature where it is for the revamp process but keep in mind other design issues that are mentioned.

USABILITY TESTING

Results



Task 5: You do not fully trust modern technology and are interested in getting your computer more secure. Find the tech support and security section.

The final task was a bit more difficult and took the second-longest amount of time to complete. Participants 1 and 2 looked to the sidebar, thinking it may be on the list with the news categories. Participant 2 even began scrolling down to the bottom before realizing he never checked the dots at the top. Participant 3 found it quickly only because she saw it before while navigating through the other tasks and clicking that area.

In the future, it would be a good idea to move this important component to a more visible and prominent place that is not as hidden.

USABILITY TESTING

Based on the results of the usability test, we were able to shed light on the most problematic areas of the website that users may face as well as what can be done to improve AOL's homepage. Participant feedback was extremely helpful and will be applied to the redesign process.

Problem Areas

- Too many sidebar category options
- Help lines and security links too hidden
- Too much information to scroll through

Recommendations for Improvement

- Rearrange/remove categories from the sidebar
- Make tech support and computer security more prominent on the top bar and not inside the small 6 dots
- Remove clutter from homepage (excessive advertisements and white space) and incorporate a more aesthetic scrolling experience with photos

ADDITIONAL RESEARCH METHODS

Along with the methods and testing conducted in this report, we determined two additional user-experience research methods that would be beneficial to exercise for the redesign process of AOL.

The research methods chosen were the **five-second test** and **diary studies**. These tests were not actually run, but the next pages will provide recommendations and explain how they could be conducted for this project.

RESEARCH METHOD 1

5-Second Test

The first UX method we would recommend is the **five-second test**. This exercise entails placing a website design in front of a user for five seconds, and then taking it away. From there you present the user with a series of questions to gauge their first impressions of the website and what stands out most to them in a short timeframe.

Conducting the five-second test on AOL's homepage would help us narrow down what areas need the most attention. If we can determine how users perceive the website design, we can create a design that is more curated to the average visitor.

RESEARCH METHOD 2

Diary Study

The second research method we would implement is the **diary study**. This method is a type of survey that is designed to track participant activity on a given website over a defined period of time.

A diary study is a very effective method for news websites because people typically use them regularly, whether it be weekly, daily, or even multiple times a day. People who keep up with news tend to stay informed on a regular basis, so being able to track user experience on a site like AOL everyday would give a real insight into user activity trends, problems they're facing, and what common areas need the most attention overall.

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