



Visual Design and Usability Yellow Brick Road

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One of the main disadvantages of online shopping compared to in-store shopping is the lack of guidance. Walking into any retail location, customers may be greeted with a smiling face asking, “May I help you find what you’re looking for?” Online shoppers, on the other hand, are often forced to find their own way, and secretly wish for that smiling face to help them.

Visual designers have the power to change this scenario and pave the yellow brick road for users, creating a seamless and enjoyable browsing experience that can replace the smiling greeter at the door.

The yellow brick road is the users’ visual path. It allows them to follow a pattern to not only find their final destination, but also to always know where they are within the broader context of the site—no matter how many turns, bumps, distractions, and forks in the road they traverse along the way.

Visual paths guide users from one element to another, and allow designers to control how information is being perceived and in what order. Because readers can only absorb a certain amount of information at one time, it’s imperative to present content using a phased approach. Guide users through information-carrying areas that will help them determine which turns to take next in order to arrive at their final destination or, at a minimum, their next turn/action.

Designing Visual Paths

To begin designing visual paths, designers must label each page element (images, content, links, buttons, etc.) and determine the level of importance each has for the user. This sets the framework for the visual hierarchy and helps in making correct decisions when designing the overall visual path.

Let’s look at The New York Times’ cover page as an example.



The page is made up of text and images, which are all set in different sizes, allowing readers to skip from one headline to the next and scan the overall composition prior to deciding which article to read in depth.

The designer of this cover page decided on the following visual path and hierarchy:

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Content	Heirarchy	Visual Path
1. Main Story of the day	Most Important	Look here first
2. Additional Stories	Important	Look here second
3. Article Content	Important - For interested readers	Read if you are interested

A composition may have elements that share the same level in hierarchy. In this case, it allows users to scan all the daily stories and decide which they will read, if any.

Case Study - Example Redesign of The Watchery

The image below is a product page from watchery.com. The page is busy and somewhat overwhelming, making it difficult for users to quickly scan and find imperative product information. The composition lacks visual paths, and throws users to various areas of the page without a logical flow.

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THE Watchery.COM

Shop with Confidence!

Guaranteed 100% Authentic!

Learn More ▶

1.866.752.3681

My Account | Info

Shopping Cart (0)

MEN'S WATCHES

WOMEN'S WATCHES

BEST SELLERS

DIAMOND WATCHES

SALE

Search: enter brand or style number

GO

FEATURED WATCH

SHOP WITH CONFIDENCE!

FREE Ground Shipping OR 2nd Day Only \$5

Extended Holiday Returns
Until February 1st, 2012

Gender

Men's Watches

Women's Watches

Unisex Watches

Dial Color

black

white

gray

gold

blue

green

orange

brown

Choose A Brand

VIEW ALL ▶

Swiss Legend

Cartier

Invicta

Movado

TAG Heuer

Case Shape

select material

Select Price Range

From \$ 100 to \$ 10000

Go

Movement Type

Quartz

Automatic

Mechanical

Kinetic

Case Width

Smaller than 38mm

38mm-43mm

44mm-49mm

Larger than 50mm

Case Material

select material

Band Color

black

white

gray

gold

blue

green

orange

brown

New Items

New Arrivals

Best Selling Watches

Clearance Watches

Watch Information

Watch Education

WINTER TRENDS

SAVE 90% NOW!

Interested? Make an offer! We are giving you a rare opportunity to make a reasonable offer on this item. Please enter your email address along with your reasonable (We mean reasonable) offer and we will respond via email within a few minutes.

Email Address:

Amount: \$

USD

Send Offer

(This promo cannot be combined with any other offers. Please verify that your email spam filters allow an email from donotreply@TheWatchery.com. We will contact you via email about this offer and future secret sales and deals.)

Rolex

GO BACK

Men's Daytona Automatic Chronograph White Dial Light Brown Genuine Crocodile

Style: 116519 WABR

Write a Review

30 DAY MONEY BACK GUARANTEE

Free Shipping in USA

Need Help? 1-866-752-3681

Currency Exchange Rates

MSRP: \$25,400.00

Our Price: \$18,995.00

Price \$17,995.00

You save: 25% 29% off with sale!

ADD TO CART

Like

Send

One person likes this. Be the first of your friends.

Details

Guarantee

Contact Us

Brand

Rolex

Style

116519 WABR

Model Alias

Daytona

Series

Chronograph

Gender

Men's

Strap Width

18 mm (20 mm at widest)

Case

18k solid white gold

Dial Color

White

Hands

Silver tone, black and luminous hour and minute. Silver tone second and subdial. Silver tone and luminous indices. Silver tone Arabic numerals

Markers

Light brown genuine crocodile with white contrast stitching

Strap

Deployment with safety

Clasp Type

Fixed 18k solid gold with engraved tachymeter scale

Bezel

Zoom Image

Email a Friend

This timepiece may be a store display model. Store display models have NEVER been used. These items are 100% authentic and purchased directly from authorized dealers. Take advantage of these amazing discounts simply because these items were displayed in a store.

This Rolex timepiece may be a store display model. Store display models have NEVER been used. While we are not affiliated with Rolex USA these items are 100% authentic and purchased directly from suppliers who were authorized dealers. Take advantage of these amazing discounts simply because these items were displayed in a store. Ships same business day if ordered before 2pm EST.

Using design fundamentals such as color, type, shape and grids, one can turn the current design into an organized, cohesive, and easy to absorb page that will in turn convert shoppers into buyers.

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Since I'm doing hypothetical work on a sample site for this illustration, one of the constraints is that I have no background information regarding the project, including the business decisions that were made to incorporate certain elements within the composition. Therefore, I'm leaving most of the original page elements in the layout even though I am not convinced they should stay in. For example, considering this is a product details page, one could argue that the faceted search controls on the left hand side should not be on this page.

But the constraint adds to the challenge, and serves us well for what we're trying to demonstrate in this exercise. Instead of making the redesign easy by removing elements, I will show that we can organize elements, create visual paths and clean up the composition while keeping most elements in.

Let's take a look at the redesigned approach and discuss some of the main differences:

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THE Watchery.com

EXTENDED HOLIDAY RETURNS
until February 1, 2012
Free ground shipping or 2nd day for \$5

1.866.752.3681

My Account | Info | Shopping Cart (0)

MEN'S WATCHES | WOMEN'S WATCHES | BEST SELLERS | DIAMOND WATCHES | FEATURED WATCH | SALE

Search: Enter brand or style number GO

CLEARANCE 70-90% OFF

SAVE UP TO 90% ON WINTER TRENDS
Stylish & smart winter trends with free shipping on all watches
[Shop Now >](#)

NARROW YOUR CHOICE

GENDER
Men's Watches
Women's Watches
Unisex Watches

DIAL COLOR
Black White Gray Gold
Blue Green Orange Brown

BRAND
Swiss Legend
Cartier
Invicta
Movado
TAG Heuer
[+ More](#)

CASE SHAPE
Round Square Rectangle

Rolex
Men's daytona automatic chronograph white dial light brown genuine crocodile
Style: 116519 WABR
[be the first to review](#)

\$17,995.00
currently exchange rates

29% savings! Reg \$18,995.00 MSRP: \$25,400.00

ADD TO CART
30 Day Monday Back Guarantee

MAKE OFFER

SALE Save \$1000.00 at checkout.
Promo code: WMP013121028115360

DETAILS	GUARANTEE	CONTACT US
Brand	116519 WABR	
Style	116519	
Model Alias	Daytona	
Series	Chronograph	
Style	Men's	
Gender	16 mm (20 mm at widest)	

Measurements are approximate.
[Measurements and size chart for Women](#)
[Measurements and size chart for Men](#)

1. Color: Use one to two colors that will serve as a visual path.

Select a dominant color and apply it only to key areas that are high on the overall page hierarchy. That color should be used as a yellow brick road to guide the user from one information-carrying element to another.

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The Watchery selected their brand color, purple, as their dominant color. Their composition includes purple in their navigation, banner ads, buttons, labels, icons, and even as a grid in the product details tab section. Because it is used on so many different element types with varying meanings and interaction behaviors (some are links, some are not; some elements are related to the specific product, some are general promotions; etc.), users are not able to learn and trust its behavior and meaning.

Redesign

The suggested redesign still utilizes purple as the primary color but limits the number of times it is used throughout the design. This allows the color to come to the foreground and dominate the composition with its strength rather than its abundance.

A secondary color, yellow (purple's complementary color), is used to highlight the two key actions users may select on this page. The Add to Cart and Make Offer buttons appear in the foreground with their warm tones, helping users to find them quickly and easily.

2. Type: Use consistent font style, color, and behaviors to allow users to quickly scan the page.

It has been proven time and time again: online users don't read. Confusing them with an array of font styles and colors will only push them away from the page faster. Omit information that is not necessary and reduce the number of font styles and colors used. Assign a behavior to type elements and be consistent.

Watchery.com has at least nine font styles in their design, with a confusing range of sizes, color, and behaviors.

Redesign

The suggested redesign minimizes the number of type differences, allowing users to quickly learn patterns and behaviors and concentrate on the important content.

Read more about design and consistency in my previous article, [Think Outside the Box, but Don't Forget the Box Exists](#).

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When all elements seem to lie in their intended positions, compositions are balanced and require no thinking from the user's perspective, allowing them to concentrate on the content. Modular grids allow flexible layouts to come to life while keeping organization intact.

Watchery.com content appears unstructured, as information is separated by inconsistent background colors, shapes (content and banner borders, icons), and misaligned elements, causing users confusion and uncertainty.

Redesign

The suggested redesign opens up the grid, allowing white space to control the flow and separate elements. Fewer background colors and more consistent shapes clearly group elements together and indicate the hierarchy of information for users.

Once all elements are in place, a visual path is formed:

1. Navigation
2. Main product image and title
3. Price
4. Main calls-to-action
5. Sales and promotions to apply during checkout

Items 1 and 2 may switch places depending on how users arrive at this page. If they arrive from within the site, the first item they'll notice will most likely be the product image and title. Users landing on this page from another site (a Google search page, perhaps) will most likely notice the navigation and logo area first to understand where they are and what the site is about, and orient themselves.

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Conclusion

This example redesign is just one of many possibilities for Watchery.com and isn't a finished product, but it makes clear the advantages of paving a yellow brick road.

Prior to redesigning a page or site, one must consider general business goals and user personas to determine element hierarchy. Once the hierarchy is set, employing graphic design fundamentals will help give users a clear visual path and direct their flow through the page and site.