



# Visual Design and Usability Yellow Brick Road

Brien Johnson

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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.

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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.

# Visual Design and Usability Yellow Brick Road

**THE Watchery.com** | Shop with Confidence! Guaranteed 100% Authentic! | 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

**CLEARANCE 70-90% OFF**

**WINTER TRENDS SAVE UP TO 90% NOW!** | Stylish & smart with FREE shipping on all watches | [SHOP 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: 26% 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	116519	
Series	Daytona	
Style	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	
Markers	Silver tone and luminous indices. Silver tone Arabic numerals	
Strap	Light brown genuine crocodile with white contrast stitching	
Clasp Type	Deployment with safety	
Bezel	Fixed 18k solid gold with engraved tachymeter scale	

**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.

**Gender**  
Men's Watches  
Women's Watches  
Unisex Watches

**Dial Color**  
black white grey gold  
blue green orange brown

**Choose A Brand** VIEW ALL  
Swiss Legend  
Cartier  
Invicta  
Movado  
TAG Heuer

**Case Shape**  
Round  
Oval  
Square

**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 grey gold  
blue green orange brown

**New Items**  
New Arrivals  
Best Selling Watches  
Clearance Watches

**Watch Information**  
Watch Education

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 screenshot shows the website 'THE Watchery.com' with a navigation bar containing 'MEN'S WATCHES', 'WOMEN'S WATCHES', 'BEST SELLERS', 'DIAMOND WATCHES', 'FEATURED WATCH', and 'SALE'. A search bar is present with the text 'Enter brand or style number' and a 'GO' button. A red banner on the right says 'CLEARANCE 70-90% OFF'. Below the navigation is a promotional banner: 'SAVE UP TO 90% ON WINTER TRENDS' with 'Stylish & smart winter trends with free shipping on all watches' and a 'Shop Now >' button. The main content area features a large image of a Rolex Daytona watch with a white dial and a brown leather strap. To the left of the watch is a 'NARROW YOUR CHOICE' sidebar with filters for GENDER (Men's, Women's, Unisex), DIAL COLOR (Black, White, Gray, Gold, Blue, Green, Orange, Brown), BRAND (Swiss Legend, Cartier, Invicta, Movado, TAG Heuer, + More), and CASE SHAPE (Round, Square, Rectangle). To the right of the watch is a product description for the Rolex Daytona, including the price '\$17,995.00' and an 'ADD TO CART' button. Below the watch image is a 'Zoom' button and a 'Email a friend' button. At the bottom of the page, there is a table with columns 'DETAILS', 'GUARANTEE', and 'CONTACT US'.

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

Zoom

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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until February 1, 2012  
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My Account | Info | Shopping Cart (0)

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Search: Enter brand or style number  GO

**CLEARANCE 70-90% OFF**

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**DIAL COLOR**  
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**CASE SHAPE**  
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**Rolex**  
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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.