

Web usability review for



tracy thompson

tracyzthompson.com

03.27.2009 | by Eddie James

Save a tree. Print only as needed.

A report by **Smart tweaks**

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We watched real users use your website and you can too!



We recruited **3 small business owners** and recorded them using your site. You can view their sessions at the url below. This link was also included in the email we sent with this report.

We used these user sessions and our own expert analysis to create this report.

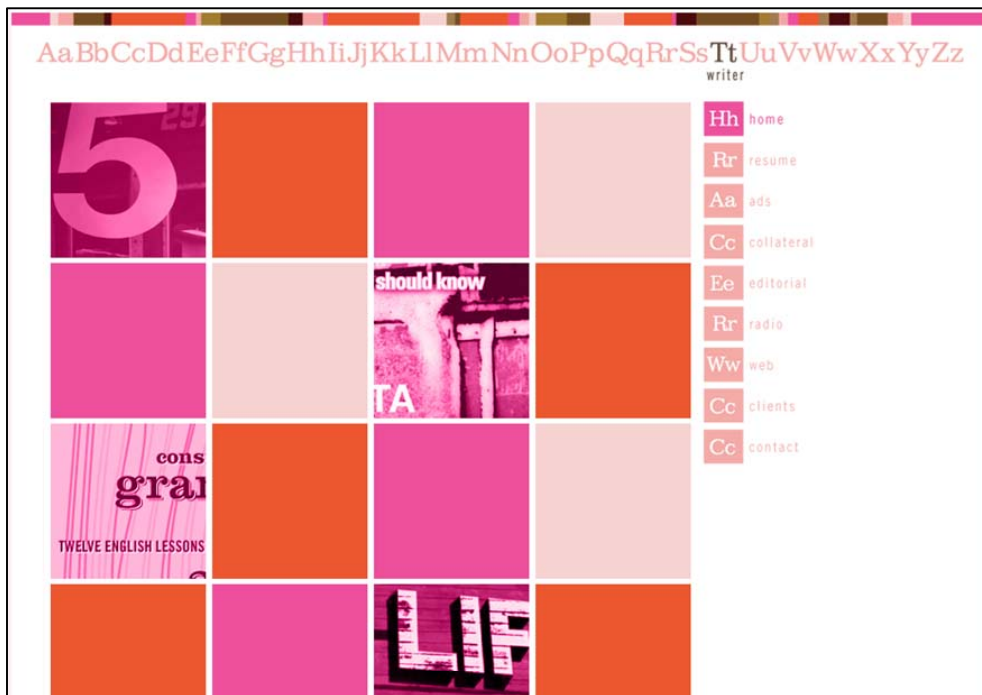
Please call us if you have any questions.

Watch the videos of real users using your site at:

<http://www.usertesting.com/popups/ViewMovie.aspx?file=CdxVIsKELRo%3d>

The Problem:

The site generates few business leads and little organic search engine traffic.



Tracyzthompson.com is a beautifully designed site, but it fails to convert visitors into new business.

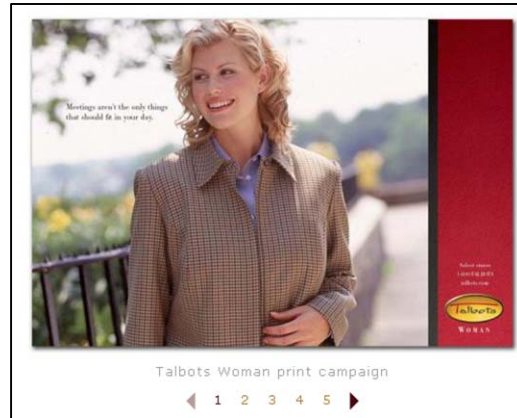
The site also ranks poorly in search engine key words, so people looking for a writer for the types of projects most suited to Tracy have difficulty finding her.

What's working well



Distinctive visual design

The visual design is memorable and fun.



Strong portfolio of work

It's clear that Tracy has done a lot of writing for a variety of companies. This is very impressive to potential customers.



Clear method of contact

The phone and email address are front and center making it easy for potential customers to get in touch.

Long term thinking needed.

Joe and Amy McAtee fell in love over food. The legendary The Landing Restaurant, Joe (you have opened Honey, a decidedly unfussy Doyle Inspired American Dining. Inspired by tra cooking shows, wanderlust and true love, Hon to eating, and eating well.

This 56-seat bistro takes its name from the

Add writing samples in text

People interested in hiring a writer will want to see samples of the writer's work. Your site doesn't offer any samples in text. It only offers samples in graphics, which are difficult to read.

Having a clear link in the navigation to sample writing would allow users to experience your unique writing style and better evaluate if you mesh with the needs of their project.

Text articles also allow search engines to index the copy, which means more eyeballs will be seeing your work.

WORK

Freelance Writer
Havertown, PA
2003 to present
clients: Comcast, dropps, Free Libr
Sprout, Pennsylvania Tourism Board
Health Systems, Wharton School of

Talbots - Senior Copywriter
Hingham, MA
2001 to 2003
advertising, store windows & collat

Add more Tracy

When someone hires a freelancer, they aren't just hiring a body to do the job; they are hiring a unique person who has to fit in with the project team.

Your site lacks any information about you other than your resume and a portfolio. People want to know if you are a good candidate to write for their project. Are you an expert in the subject matter? Are you better at writing copy for ads? Where are you based?

People also want to see a face. What sets you apart is you are not an agency. You are you. Show yourself.



Add a blog

Along the same lines, a blog would add a lot to your site.

It would show how you write, provide information about you and your background, and will give you more text for search engines to gobble up.

What you would say is a whole project in itself, but it would be very worthwhile to start planning a blog.

Also adding some social features to your site would be a good way of keeping your clients (and potential clients) updated and educated.

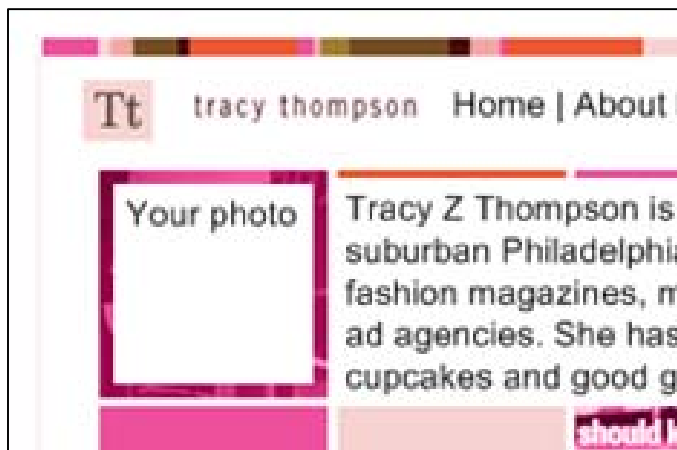
Focus on: Identifying your site.

Issue: What site am I on? Am I in the right place?



When a user arrives at your site, they often want to make sure they are on the correct site (did they type it correctly? Is this a good search result?). Your site identification (tracyzthompson.com) falls below the fold, so it's not clear where the user is or what the site is about.

Tweak: Put your site name, phone and email above the fold.



Your site should make people want to contact you to inquire about working with you. The graphic of your name, phone and email could easily be moved to the standard place logos go (above the 5 graphic on your homepage). Be sure to link this logo to the homepage.

Make space for your logo by moving the alphabet graphic to the bottom of the page. It will still give visual style, yet not take up the spot where the eye goes first of the page.

Focus on: Linked images.

Issue: It's difficult to know where they go or what to expect.



When an image is a link, it's difficult for users to know what it is they are clicking on or even that it is indeed a link.

Tweak: Make all images that are links have a hover state and text.



When a user hovers over an item in your portfolio or the navigation, have a hover state (the graphic visually changes) and some text that tells the user what they will get when they click on the item.

This should be done for your portfolio square in the middle of the page as well as the navigation, if the navigation continues to be displayed in graphics.

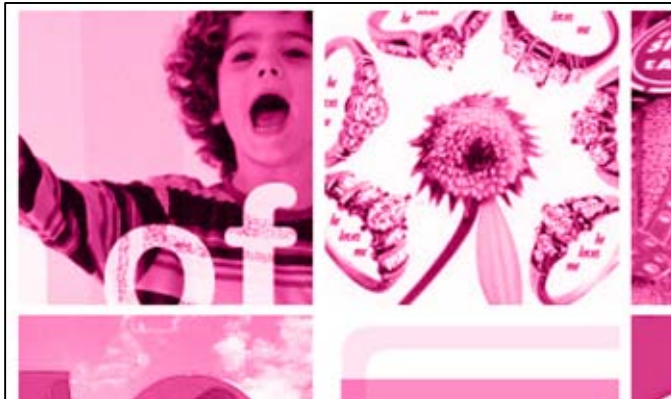
Focus on: The behavior of similar elements.

Issue: Consistency



User Interface elements should behave consistently throughout the website.

Tweak: Make all similar user interface elements work similarly.



The large blocks of color on the page scream to be clicked on, but they aren't always clickable. The homepage blocks are not clickable (which is a lot of space that isn't very useful to potential customers), yet they are clickable within each item in the navigation.

The goal of these blocks seems to be getting the user into the portfolio, yet they don't always accomplish this goal.

Make these blocks always clickable.

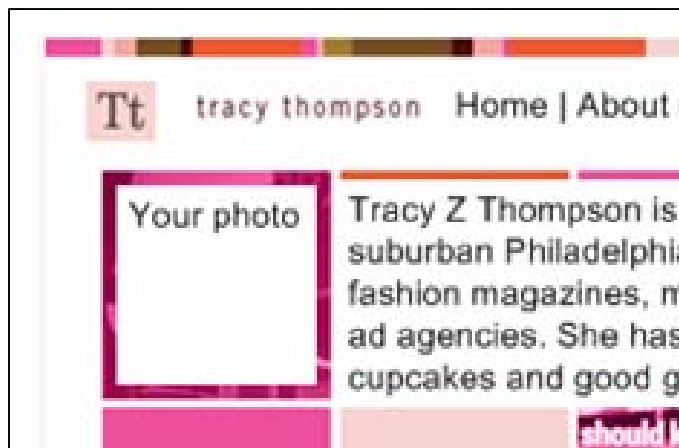
Focus on: Every link being extremely clear.

Issue: Navigation and labeling



The navigation divides the portfolio up in categories like “Collateral” and “Web”. It’s not clear what the user will get when clicking on these items or that they are even portfolio items.

Tweak: Simplify the navigation to include a Portfolio link



Have a simple Portfolio link in the navigation and then the subcategories (web, ads, etc) under it will greatly increase the chances of users finding what they are looking for.

You may want to call the Portfolio link something like Writing Samples since you want to make it absolutely clear that you are a writer and not a graphic designer, which your site often conveys.

Consider relabeling the subcategories. Words like “Collateral”, “Web”, and “Radio” aren’t always clear to users. Do you need subcategories at all? How many examples do you need to convey your services?

Focus on: Talking about yourself.

Issue: What did you do for each project?



Your portfolio doesn't give the user a sense of what you did for each project. Did you write everything? Did you edit it? Did you assist in the images? Did you work on a large team? Was it a difficult environment with challenging deadlines?

This is very important for potential customers.

Tweak: Tell your story.



Tell users what you did and what the work was like. You might want to share with your users what you learned from the project.

Not only does this give a potential customer an idea of how you work, it also provides text for search engines to index and thus more traffic to your site.

Focus on: The upper left-hand corner.

Issue: Where am I? Visual page titles aren't displayed.



When a user clicks on a portfolio link the only indication of where they are is the highlighted navigation item. The upper left-hand corner is where the eye goes first and should indicate that you got to the right place.

This is also extremely important for search engine traffic. If a user lands on this page from a Google search, they wouldn't immediately know what this page is or if it will meet their needs.

Tweak: Put a title and description on each page.



By placing a simple title (ex: Radio copy I wrote, etc) and a short description of the category, you allow search engines to know what the page is about and you help users understand what they are seeing.

You may want to consider getting rid of the category pages and simply linking directly to the first example in each category. This gets the user right into the content they want and focuses the user on your work and not on your website.

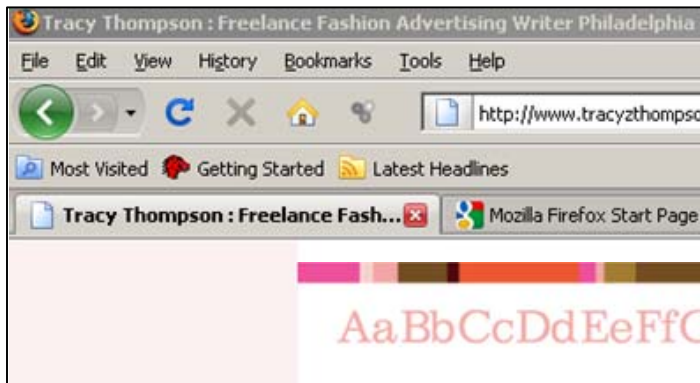
Focus on: Search engine optimization.

Issue: Your site isn't search engine friendly

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height="147" border="0" /></td><td width="147" height="147" border="0" /></td><td width="147" height="147" border="0" /></td></tr><tr><td width="25%" align="center" valign="middle"></td><td width="25%" align="center" valign="middle"></td><td width="25%" align="center" valign="middle"></td><td width="25%" align="center" valign="middle"></td></tr><tr><td colspan="4" align="center" style="background-color:#FFFFFF"><img name="spacer_mi
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Your site doesn't use alt tags on each image or clear page titles for each page. This is extremely important since search engines weight the page title over all other page information when indexing. Also, since your site is graphics heavy, search engines don't have any information as to what the page is about. Alt tags on the images would help provide this information.

Tweak: Add clear page titles, alt tags, and meta data to code.



Adding clear meta data to your code is a fairly quick process and will greatly increase your search engine rankings and traffic.

Every image should have alt tags describing what it is (this also helps users who use screen readers understand your site).

Every page needs a clear page title describing the page and not the site (ex: Tracy Z Thompson, philadelphia freelance writer : Radio writing samples)

Meta data such as keywords should be added to the page code.

Focus on: Graphics.

Issue: Are you a graphic designer?



It's difficult to get a grasp of what you do from your site. It's very graphic and many of your examples are very graphic, so it looks like you are a graphic designer. The only indication that you are a writer is in the browser page title (which few people see, but is prized by search engines) and the small "Writer" graphic under the T in the alphabet header.

Tweak: Be super clear that you are a freelance writer.



You must state very clearly in text – not graphics – that you are a freelance writer based in Philadelphia. This needs to come across on every page.

Often – especially in your portfolio -- it's easy to jump to the conclusion that you designed the item the user is looking at.

Focus on: Linking to other sites.

Issue: You have no links out to other sites

Advanta Corp.
Alpha Shirt Company
American Education Services
And Partners
The Bishop's Collar Pub
Calico Corners
Children's Hospital of Philadelphia
Comcast
Dacor Performance Kitchens
dropps Laundry Detergent Pacs
Free Library of Philadelphia
Greater Philadelphia Tourism & Marketing Gr

Search engines base your site's relevancy to keywords based on how many links are coming in to the various pages on your site. So if you have 10 links from other websites linking to your radio page, and the text tells Google that this page is relevant, it would get placed higher in the search result than a page with 8 links to it.

To get links to your page, they have to have value to the user, but you need to also link out to other sites.

Tweak: Link out to other sites via your client list, portfolio, blog.

People I Listen To >

Alexander Osterwalder

Andrew Hinton

Austin Govella

Bill DeRouchey

Chiara Fox

Chris Baum

Christopher Wedel

Simply linking to your clients websites is a great start, but you should also liberally link out in blog posts (if you choose to start a blog), and within your portfolio.

It could also be a good idea to include an area where you link to other freelancers that you like. Sharing the link love helps your customers discover other resources hand-picked by you (someone who they trust) and often results in other sites returning the favor by linking to you.

Being on social media sites also increases links to your site.

Focus on: Making it easy to get in touch with you.

Issue: Your contact link opens a mailto form.



In the old days of the web, mailto forms were standard. Today, most users expect the contact link to lead them to a page with all your contact information displayed, as well as a standard contact form where they can email you.

You are currently using a mailto form, which opens the user's default email client. This is inconsistent with the other links in your navigation, which launch new pages.

Exposing your email address in a mailto form opens you up to increased spam in your inbox.

Tweak: Add a standard contact form page.

A screenshot of a standard contact form. It has a white background and a thin black border. The form contains the following elements from top to bottom: a label 'Contact Name:' followed by a text input field; a label 'Email address:' followed by a text input field; a label 'How did you hear about our company?' followed by a dropdown menu with 'Select' and a downward arrow; and a label 'Ask a question or describe your project be' followed by a text input field.

Adding a standard contact form will allow you to add specific fields that may help you find better leads or tell you how well your marketing is working (ex: how did you hear about us?).

It is also very user-friendly since millions of users use webmail and when they click on a mailto form, it often opens up Microsoft Outlook Express, which is not the users' email address. A standard contact form allows everyone to easily contact you.

Ideas for future evolution of your site.



About Smart Tweaks



Smart Tweaks is a small user experience and strategy consultancy that operates on a simple principal: that small, strategically chosen tweaks can have a big impact on your customers' satisfaction and on your business' bottom line.

We realize that many businesses — especially start ups and small businesses — don't have the resources for an on-staff user experience team or the budget for a major design shop (like Razorfish, or IDEO). And frankly, many small companies don't really need a splashy design or the time it takes to develop one.

Today's websites need constant updating and must meet the needs of the business and users as they come up. This requires quick responses and professional knowledge. That's where Smart Tweaks comes in.

Smart Tweaks was founded by Eddie James.

Eddie has been working on the web since 1994. He holds a BA in Communications and an MA in Interaction Design. He has worked as an information architect and user experience professional at Comcast, the Vanguard Group, Kozmo.com (a now defunct dot com), the Maryland Institute College of Art and the University of Baltimore.

Next steps:

- ❖ We will schedule a review with you, your development team and any contractors you may be using to develop your site.
- ❖ If your development team (or if you don't have one and don't want to make changes yourself) can't make the suggested changes, we can help! We can do the work for you (for an additional fee) or point you in the direction of a great contractor.
- ❖ Monitor your site's performance and keep on tweaking based on what you learn from your users.
- ❖ As always, Smart Tweaks comes with a **money back guarantee**. Contact us if u are unhappy with your report or have any questions.

Smart Tweaks Coupon

Repeat customers get 10% off their next job!

That's \$100 off a single Smart Tweaks Report.

\$1000 off our one year retainer service.

Call or email Eddie for details.