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"F-shaped pattern viewing" aka "please stop adding text to your website!"

Design

Another great guest post by Nicola Trentin, UX Researcher & Neuromarketing @ Neuro Web Design

It's never a simple task to describe our site, our services, our products; there are a lot of information we want to communicate and it is not so easy to do it effectively. On the contrary, we often go into structured presentations, using a sophisticated language, to instill some emotions.

But, does the user read everything we write in our website? I don't think so.

Reading a description or a presentation. the user's attention usually remains high for the first few lines, which are read almost entirely. But as the text continues and the number of words and lines increase, the will to reading gradually declines. Jacob Nielsen, the maximum web usability expert, in 2006, called this behavior **"F Shaped Pattern Viewing"**: watching an eye tracking heatmap of the eye movement on a web page we can see that he creates a sort of "F". It is clear that a long web page with lots of text does not entice the user to deepen in the contents.

Attention to the text element is a topic even more delicate if you take into account the hotel industry. The main goal of a hotel website is to show the atmosphere that a customer could enjoy in the hotel and to describe clearly all the services of the structure. These are the main things that attract the user's interest. The problem is how to do it effectively: better a detailed description or captivating images?

Before answering this question, it is necessary to distinguish the user behavior in two phases. In a first part of browsing, he wants to get an overview of the product (in this case our hotel), while research specific information only later.

We monitored more than 100 tester surfing different hotel websites with different characteristics and we saw that they mostly focus on the graphics and the images, rather than descriptions. Not only in the first phase of the browsing process, which is mainly "exploratory", but also when they are seeking more specific information about what the hotel offer.

For example, what does really interest a user who is looking at the "rooms" section in a hotel website? Well, definitely he wants to watch some pics of the furniture inside the room, if there are double or twin bed, if the bathroom is too small and also he wants to have an idea of all the extra services included (minibar, wifi, satellite tv, etc ...). Speaking of which, a solution that has been appreciated by users we tested it is to represent each service with an icon and just few words: a television with only the words "satellite", the padlock with the word "safe", a pair of binoculars and the word "view." Few elements that give a clear and precise idea of what the room includes.

So don't spend too much time in long descriptions, summarize what you want to say with high-quality photos, logos, icons, which are more immediate and intuitive elements to understand what is included in your offer, in your product. And if you are not sure about that, a usability test to your target customers will surely help you to understand what are the best improvements for your website.

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