Introduction

Two user groups, Two tests

CMS testing focused on beginner users and experienced users. We tested five beginners and four experienced users on the current CMS to gauge timing, usability and satisfaction with the product. Both user groups created a *listicle** (all content assets were provided) which is considered to be one of the simplest types of *breaks*[†] in our current CMS. Also, a listicle was chosen because it would be one the easiest and commonly created types of organic breaks. A freelancer, Connelley employee, or a beginner user would create listicles in our CMS, when/if we want to open up the CMS to users outside of the dailybreak team.

Beginner users were tested on primary tasks required to build a listicle. They were timed on completion, graded with a pass/fail on execution. After the initial task, users were asked to scale the level of perceived difficulty of the task, and their confidence that they had completed it correctly. After any failed tasks, users were given the same coaching directions (as a handbook might) and they were again timed, graded and given the same difficulty and confidence scales. Tasks had a maximum time-limit based on the difficulty of the task and to keep the test within an hour. After the tasks, the beginning users were given a list of questions as well as free-form comment time.

Experienced users were tested on time to completion, and then given a list of questions, as well as free-form comment time.

All users were given a short background on the project and asked to narrate their thoughts as they performed any task in the CMS. We had the same person deliver the same script for all of our users and we had the same two people documenting their choices and transcribing the users narrations as they performed all testing. We have a lo-fi audio as a back-up in case we missed any timing or were confused by comments.

*A **listicle** example on dailybreak.com: https://www.dailybreak.com/break/october-2017-tv-premieres

[†]A **break** on dailybreak.com is any segment of content, such as an article, a quiz, a puzzle, sponsored content, etc.--and they generally have specific point values to them when completed.

Beginner's user test

No surprises

Based on the beginner group, their overall reaction to the CMS was described by them as: confusion, redundant, uncertainty, frustration, time consuming and in some cases—anger.

Their most difficult tasks were (in order):
Adding photos, text formatting, adding social images, reordering the list, the preview link

They all felt they could not create a listicle in the CMS without training, and three out of the five expressed concern they would still have difficulty even if they did have training.

They also all agreed the navigation between tabs and tasks and work that had to be completed seemed counter-intuitive and created an experience that was a lot more complicated than they would expect it to be.

"How are you guys not pulling your hair out all the time? Are you all wearing wigs?"

Most beginners found the language used to be very difficult to understand. The nomenclature for the fields and different sections seemed "foreign" and contributed to the over all confusion and confidence using the CMS.

Despite being walked through the tasks, not a single beginner was able to create a listicle successfully. All of them failed to set the type correctly and all of them made errors uploading images and/or placing them into the correct section, so every beginner failed to create a listicle despite the training they received.

The CMS system also failed to work properly in all of the beginner testing, which contributed to their confusion and mistrust of the system. Beginning users were told to refresh and given other 'fixes' to work around the inconsistencies in the system.

When asked how they expected the CMS to work in terms of workflow and producing the listicle, they all answered similarly:

"[My} expectation is that it would be implemented in a linear way, like how it is set up when it is finished"

Experienced user's test

Points for style

Despite the experienced users averaging a time of about 16.5 minutes completing the tasks we restricted them to doing for CMS testing purposes (there would be a few more tasks to do and they were provided all assets—so creating an actual listicle would require more time), they all ran into CMS errors and they all had different ways to resolve them.

Their most difficult breaks in the current CMS are (in order):
Personality quiz, Mad Libs, Trivia

Their most difficult tasks in the current CMS are (in order):
Adding photos, Text formatting, Duplicate field entry, Paid platforms not reliably synchronizing

All of experienced users approached creating a listicle in different ways and had learned different work-arounds that affect the way they built their listicle.

Some focused on image upload first, and some created the type first, etc. Not one experienced user approached it the same way. All of them were able to create a viable listicle and they explained all the work arounds they had to understand in order to be successful.

They all expressed a certain pride having mastered the current CMS, yet they also talked about feeling beaten down by it as well.

**"It's like building a house of cards—if you break one thing,
it will all come crashing down"**

When asked how long it took to feel comfortable using the CMS without assistance, the average time was over 3 weeks and all of them required considerable training by a co-worker. They all felt the learning curve was steep and continue to feel the CMS does not always work the way they expect it will.

When asked how they *want* to feel with a new CMS, they responded with similar sentiments: Confident, Productive, Excited by efficiency

"[I'd like to feel] Confident that I can do my job"

Beginners' averaged results

All the things must pass

The beginners were given 11 tasks, and then asked questions. All tasks were timed and pass/fail. Any initial fail was recorded and then the user would receive the same scripted coaching, and then would attempt the task again.

These are all the beginners results and primary comments. Included are recommendations based on performance, time, difficulty and user comments.

Task 1: Enter title and description

Initial max time: 45s
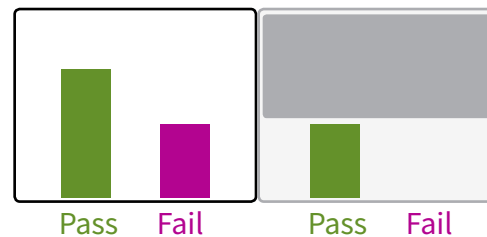Coached max time: 45s

User perception:
Ease of use: 1.4
Confidence: 2
Notes:
It took cognitive effort for users to get their bearings, and they struggled with the perceived surplus of fields

Initial avg: 37s   Coached avg: 22s

Averaged total time:

45s

Pass   Fail   Pass   Fail

UX Considerations/Recommends:
Burying primary tasks in not clearly labeled tabs became difficult for all users to navigate. Recommend ordering fields in a more linear way corresponding to the break so it feels more intuitive. Also, setting up tabs as accordions and just having one list of user-defined tabs to navigate. Also, reorganizing fields that are seldom used into either an 'advanced' section or marking them more clearly as optional, and reducing their hierarchy in the layout. Its also important to not have multiple areas with the same name controlling different areas.

Beginners' averaged results

Task 2: Add a listicle step
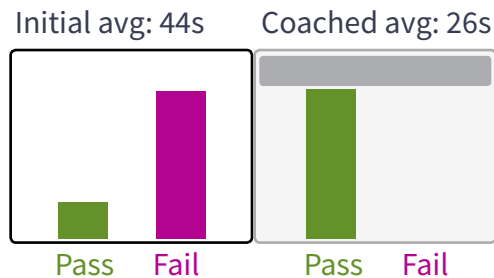
Initial max time: 60s
Coached max time: 60s

User perception:
Ease of use: 4.4
Confidence: 4.4

Notes:
Links were difficult to visually understand, new users often did not recognize "+ Add Step" as clickable

Initial avg: 44s   Coached avg: 26s

Pass   Fail   Pass   Fail

Averaged total time:
70s

UX Considerations/Recommends:
Recommend creating a step type first, after choosing sponsored/editorial and then only offering fields for that particular step in a more linear work-flow. Use highly recognizable buttons, drop downs and consistent calls to action in a meaningful, learnable hierarchy throughout the entire CMS. "I think this is a trap."

Task 3: Make every item on the list shareable on social media on hover
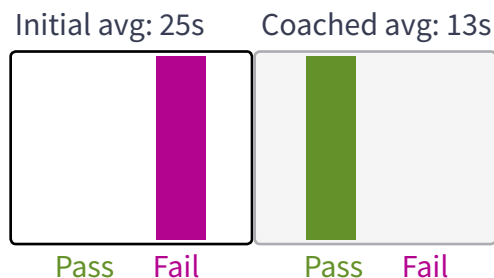
Initial max time: 30s
Coached max time: 30s

User perception:
Ease of use: 3.2
Confidence: 4

Notes:
No users passed. Language and tabs misled the users

Initial avg: 25s   Coached avg: 13s

Pass   Fail   Pass   Fail

Total time:
39s

UX Considerations/Recommends:
Language and training should be very specific and more intuitive. Field names should be thoughtfully considered and represent the end behavior closely.

Beginners' averaged results

Task 4: Turn off the numbers on the list subheads

Initial max time: 30s
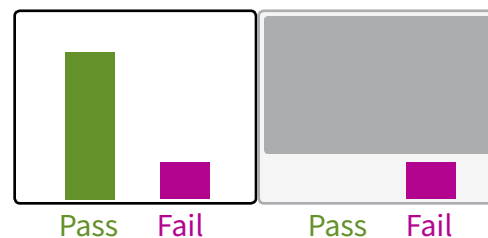Coached max time: 30s

User perception:

Ease of use: 1.8
Confidence: 2.4

Notes:
Most passed, but felt uncertain

Initial avg: 16s   Coached avg: 30+s

Pass   Fail   Pass   Fail

Averaged total time:

28s

UX Considerations/Recommends:
The internal jargon on the site is too difficult to understand for a new user, and we also found our experienced users did not really understand the language either. They just memorized what the fields meant to complete a break or step.

Task 5: Turn on and change the text on the default voting buttons

Initial max time: 60s
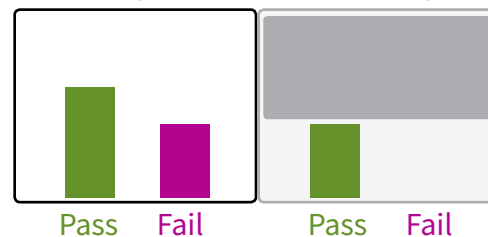Coached max time: 60s

User perception:

Ease of use: 1.5
Confidence: 1.2

Notes:
3/5 passed, but felt order of fields was confusing

Initial avg: 41s   Coached avg: 14s

Pass   Fail   Pass   Fail

Averaged total time:

46s

UX Considerations/Recommends:
Tab names confused most of the users. Sections should be clearly labeled and fields should be organized more intuitively based on work flow. Some users failed because they just didn't turn it on, but only changed the text.

Beginners' averaged results

Task 6: Add all the copy

Initial max time: 5m
Coached max time: 5m
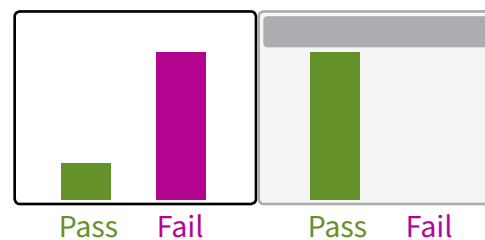
User perception:

Ease of use: 3.3
Confidence: 3

Notes:
None of the beginners were able to format the copy properly

Initial avg: 4m 5s   Coached avg: 1m16s

Averaged total time:

5m6s

Pass | Fail   Pass | Fail

UX Considerations/Recommends:
The users were all very confused about where to input the source copy. Recommend a required text field for source in the image upload. The delete buttons are currently on the right, causing a user to almost delete their work. Move primary CTAs to more intuitive placement. The text fields should control all formatting, users should only be able to select bold, italic and hyperlinks inside a text box.

Task 7: Upload and add images

Initial max time: 5m
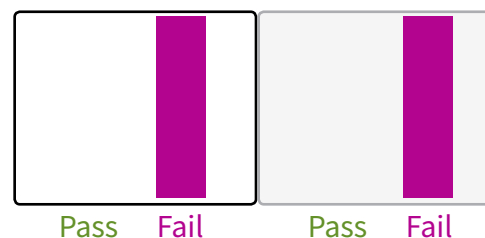Coached max time: 2m

User perception:

Ease of use: 3
Confidence: 3

Notes:
None of the beginners were able to execute this task. All stopped for time

Initial avg: 4m 28s   Coached avg: 1m21s+

Averaged total time:

6m49s+

Pass | Fail   Pass | Fail

UX Considerations/Recommends:
"Why is this so hard?!" Beginners and experienced users agree that the photo upload and add process needs an overhaul. This is the highest risk issue tested.

Beginners' averaged results

Task 8: Reorder an item in the list

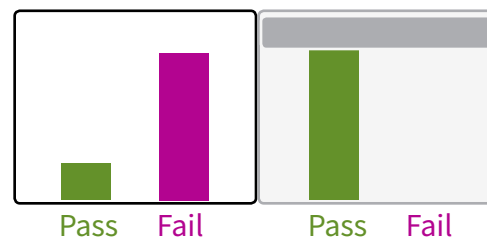Initial max time: 30s
Coached max time: 30s

User perception:

Ease of use: 3.4
Confidence: 3.6

Notes:

A seemingly simple task is very difficult for a beginner

Initial avg: 1m20s Coached avg: 31s

Pass Fail Pass Fail

Averaged total time:

1m9s

UX Considerations/Recommends:

"I am freaking out!" The CMS appeared to delete content, and the headlines that were inputted did not show, so users were struggling and confused. The hamburger icon used for the drag function was noted as confusing as well.

Task 9: Auto-generate social images and add name, title and source

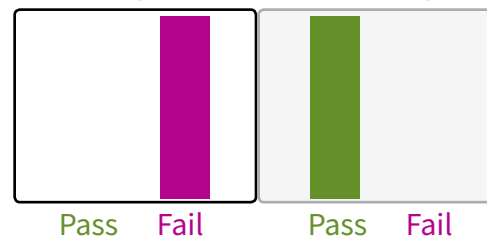Initial max time: 60s
Coached max time: 60s

User perception:

Ease of use: 3.6
Confidence: 4.4

Notes:

"I would not have known [to do that]"
"That's not where it should be"

Initial avg: 1m36s Coached avg: 50s

Pass Fail Pass Fail

Averaged total time:

2m26s

UX Considerations/Recommends:

Grouping of work-flows need to make sense to an end user and the nomenclature must be more intuitive. Feedback and tips would be helpful for beginners. "I hoped it was associated with the content." "Oh my God, this is insane."

Beginners' averaged results

Task 10: Set the filtering

Initial max time: 45s
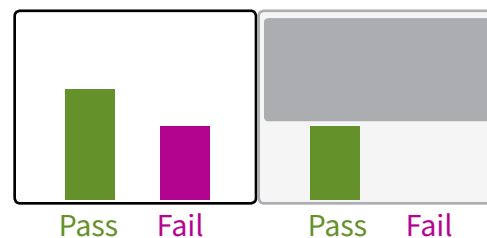Coached max time: 45s

User perception:
Ease of use: 2.1
Confidence: 2.4
Notes:
"Secondary grouping did not make sense"

Initial avg: 33s   Coached avg: 14s

Pass   Fail   Pass   Fail

Averaged total time:

38s

UX Considerations/Recommends:
Burying the tags forced the users to hunt and peck through all the sections. Changing the navigation will help this, but a new layout for this section is recommended.

Task 11: Preview the listicle

Initial max time: 30s
Coached max time: 30s
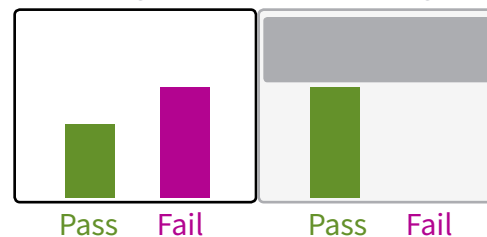
User perception:
Ease of use: 4
Confidence: 3.6
Notes:
"Seems buried and the name is confusing"

Initial avg: 36s   Coached avg: 26s

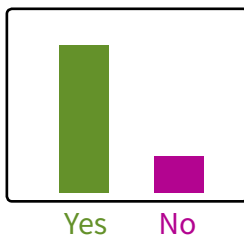Pass   Fail   Pass   Fail

Averaged total time:

1m12s

UX Considerations/Recommends:
There should be a clear preview button grouped with other similar functions like the publish and validate buttons.

Beginners' comments

Question: Have you used a CMS before? If so, which ones?

Yes No

CMSs used, in order of frequency cited:
Wordpress
Sitecore
Adobe CQ
LiveJournal

UX Considerations/Recommends: Despite the complexity of the paid breaks, we should research and leverage some of the interaction design and feedback design in other CMS UIs that are popular and many users can navigate.

Question: What was your overall impression of the CMS?

User perception:
Overall impression: 3.8
Comments:
"I really felt unsure my work was correct"

*"The tabs and navigation seemed random"*

"Tough"

"Confusing and frustrating uncertainy"

UX Considerations/Recommends: While all the beginners recognized that there is no perfect CMS and they are all wrought with tedious elements, they all felt their over-all experience was unnecessarily difficult. Especially for beginners, we should focus on work flow and navigation.

Beginners' comments

Question: With training, do you think you would be able to complete this listicle?

Yes   No
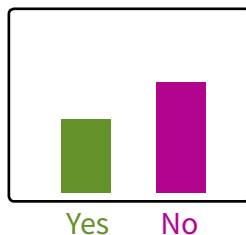
Comments:
"Too much to soak up"

"If I learned all at once, I'd forget"

"I'd still be asking questions"

UX Considerations/Recommends:
It is significant that 60% of beginner users felt they could NOT create a listicle WITH training. There is a need to simplify, and creating user levels to offer only relevant fields will help, as well as focusing on more intuitive navigation.

Question: What was the ease of use for you?

User perception:
Ease of use: 3.6
Comments:
"The navigation was the hardest"

"Not a natural flow"

"It's overwhelming for something so simple"

"It's like being in a corn maze and not being able to get out unless someone helps me"

UX Considerations/Recommends:
Navigation and language should be re-evaluated and redesigned. The CMS should be more intuitive and consistent in terms of work flow. Feedback and tips will also help with confidence for new users.

Experienced users comments

Question: How would you describe the process of creating a listicle?

Comments:

"Tedious"

"You eventually get used to it"

"Uncertainty"

"Manual"

"Hesitant"

UX Considerations/Recommends:
All experienced users expressed a pride in mastering the work-arounds and inconsistencies in the system. None of the experienced users created their listicle in the same way, and they had different strategies for work-arounds. The new CMS should be tested well so that it works as it is designed to work.

Question: What would you change about the CMS?

Comments:

"Image library"

"Platforms should synch properly"

"Auto save"

"More required fields"

"Less random tabs"

"The text formatting is tedious to re-do each text to the right format (size/font)"

UX Considerations/Recommends:
Photo upload and photo library are the biggest pain points, and are since photos are critical to the site experience--image upload and management should be prioritized. Text formatting should be a priority as well, along with clear feedback.

Experienced users comments

Question: How long did it take you to feel comfortable using this CMS?

Average:

Over three weeks

UX Considerations/Recommends:
The new CMS should have organized and scalable training for new admins and any beginner or non-employee user should have an interface that is learnable without training.
Goals for new CMS should include cutting that 'over three weeks' learning curve in half.

Question: How do you want to feel about the new CMS?

Comments:
"I dont want a lot of hacks"
"I want to feel comfortable it wont break"
"Productive"
"Excited about efficiency"

UX Considerations/Recommends:
Training and governance will be important once the new CMS is implemented. Small changes and tweaks should be vetted against entire design so as not to create another complicated experience. Any changes should not be left up to individuals.

Recommendations

CMS + TLC = ✌♡☺

Creating multiple user views will alleviate the confusion caused by erroneous fields. Be sure there is an extremely simple version of steps we want non-employees to use, as well as an advanced view for paid breaks that are much more complex and their results are client-facing.

Presenting information in a more linear, more intuitive to the end-product design should help with some of the confusion and percieved ease of use issues. Focusing on an ideal workflow and training all internal users on that process will help with errors and also users who are not getting optimal use out of the updates in the system. Training should be oart if the implementation schedule.

Using relatable words and descriptions, as well as adding tips to the fields should give users enough information to feel they understand what they are doing and feel comfortable knowing what they are doing is correct—and ACTUALLY being correct.

Provide and obvious and accessible preview button for users to check their work and be able to easily toggle back and forth between views.

Continue to test and re-establish usabilty for any new CMS. Also have monthly training sessions with internal users regarding new updates.

Build and maintain a manual for internal and external users that is avaialble on site for trouble shooting and can be used for training and support.

Photo management shoud be considered a critical part of the the CMS and we should plan to continue to make improvements to that whole process, from upload to file management.

Text formatting should be handled primarily by the CMS text fields, not the user. All of the beginnig users had strong feeling about this and it even confused them. They also all failed to format text successfully.

Simplifying and organizing the navigation, field names, visual heirarchy and feedback will help guide the user throught the workflow and reduce the percieved difficulty and confusion. The new CMS should be trustworthy and clear, with feedback for the user to understand when they are succesful or have made and error.