Expert Review

Gold Canyon
http://www.goldcanyoncandle.com

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Executive Summary

An expert review was undertaken of the Gold Canyon (www.goldcanyoncandle.com) website. The review focused on identifying any usability issues, along with identifying the strengths of the website that should be kept in place.

The most significant usability issues identified in this evaluation include:

- Location within the website is not always indicated by the navigation links. The current navigation links do not always indicate the current location on the site. The proposed changes in navigation links, both background and text colors, will clarify the user's location.
- Navigation links are not consistent across the site. The placement of the local navigation links varies between the sub pages. The redesign of the sub pages makes the location of the local navigation links and their appearance uniform across the site.
- Ordering products is a more complex process than it needs to be, possibly deterring users from ordering. Recommendations include a reorganization of the product pages to make the ordering process less complex.
- There is no help content of any kind on the website. Providing a FAQ section with information about the Gold Canyon sales process would be beneficial to users looking to purchase products and those wishing to become a salesperson.
- Labeling of global navigation links is not clear. Some of the links are misleading ('Home' meaning a product line, not the Home page; 'Opportunity' -- for what?). There is enough space to change and/or replace some of these.
- The layout and design of the sub pages in the site is inconsistent and confusing to the
 user. Redesigning some of the sub pages to make the layout consistent among sections and
 adding page titles to every sub page would make the website much easier to use.
- Much of the most important information on the Home page is 'below the fold'.

 Recommendations include a redesign of the Home page to move the content 'above the fold' and thereby make it more obvious and accessible to the user.

The issues mentioned above are the considered to be the most pressing usability issues for the Gold Canyon website. Other issues that also deserve attention to improve the usability of the website are addressed in the analysis, with recommendations for solutions.

Terminology and Conventions Used

Different terms are often used when referring to the same part of the browser window or web page. To facilitate understanding of this analysis, one term was used consistently for each browser/web page element. The terms are:

Field name: Field names are the labels that go with text input boxes; drop-down menus, and other form elements.

Global navigation: Links/buttons available from every page, leading to major sections of the website and/or significant pages.

Link label: The label in this case is the word or words that are linked. These words can be in graphical form or HTML text that is linked.

Local navigation: Links/buttons for moving between pages within a section of the website.

Utility navigation: Navigation links to service-oriented parts of the site, such as login/register, search, and help; located in the upper right corner of the web page.

Page header: The primary heading for the page, often shown in larger text and located between the global navigation buttons at the top of the layout and the text content of the page.

Masthead: An area at the top of the web page usually containing the company logo and/or name, the global navigation, the utility navigation, and, sometimes, images or graphics pertaining to the company's business.

Window name: The text at the upper left of the browser window, specified through the(X)HTML <title></title> tags.

Single quotes are used to indicate link labels, page headers, and window names. Double quotes indicate non-linked body text, field names, alt text, and are used when generally referring to a page. Any divergence from these conventions is noted in the analysis and is done for the purpose of improving clarity.

Priority Levels

The issues identified in this evaluation are grouped into three levels of priority:

High priority: These issues are likely to impact a large number of users significantly. They should be resolved as quickly as resources allow.

Medium priority: Issues at this priority level are also likely to affect a large number of users but generally are less disruptive to the user experience, relative to the high priority issues. If resources are available to address these issues, they should be addressed.

Low priority: Low priority issues typically impact a small subset of the overall user base, although they may impact a larger group. Regardless of the number of users affected, these issues carry only a minor negative impact. Low priority issues are generally easy to resolve. There is less time pressure to fix low priority issues, compared to medium priority issues and especially high priority issues.

Usability Guidelines

Efficient Navigation

Navigation is the process of traversing a website by clicking links to move from page to page. Navigation should be an intuitive, natural process leading the user where they want to go without taking the wrong path, getting lost, or not being able to retrace their steps at a later time.

Practices to Continue

• Keep the logo and global navigation at the top of each page. These provide indicators to the user that they are still on the same website and allow them to move between major sections of the site easily. The color choices are pleasing to the eye and complement the company's product line, while the use of tabs makes them stand out. The use of the global mouse-over color for local navigation links sets those apart on the sub pages of the site.

Suggested Changes

High Priority

- Clarify the user's location within the website by changing the background and text color of the current section. The global navigation links do not always indicate the section of the site the user is on. The background and text color of the 'Opportunity' and 'Who We Are' sections should be used on all sections of the site.
- Place the local navigation at the left side of each sub page and indicate the current page
 as inactive by changing to the color of the page header. This placement and color is used
 in many sections of the site already, and will provide a consistent look across the site.
- Relocate the 'Login/Register' and 'Shopping Cart' links to a utility navigation section in the masthead. Relocating these links would make them easily accessible to the user.

Medium Priority

- Use the local navigation link formatting for the navigation links in the footer. It is not clear that the text in the footer of the site pages represents site page links.
- Provide a 'Home' link in the global navigation. A link labeled 'Home' that links to the home page of the site is a standard practice in website design. This is also addressed in the product section redesign.

Low Priority

- Remove the 'Enroll Now' link form the 'Who We Are' page. Removing this link from this page eliminates user confusion as to its purpose.
- Change the alt text of the logo image to read "Gold Canyon Home' when it is moused over. This alerts the users that the logo is a link to the home page.

Organizational Clarity

Organizational clarity addresses how the content of a website is grouped and sequenced. The user experience on the website depends considerably on how well the information on the site is organized, and how easy it is for the user to understand the groups to find the information they are seeking. The product sections of www.goldcanyoncandle.com depend highly on the user being able to find what they are looking for easily and quickly.

Suggested Changes

High Priority

- The product content is fragmented and not easily accessed for the user to view and order. The products are spread among three sections of the site and within each section are broken down into multiple pages. This creates an overly complex process for selecting and ordering any given product.
 - Group all products in a new 'Our Products' section, with sub pages for each type of product.
 - Make the local navigation for each product type page a list of products available.
 - Each individual product page will be a description of the varieties of the product that are available. These could be different scents, different styles, or different colors, and order options for that variety. (See Appendix A for wireframes of the redesigned product section).

Low Priority

• Create categories for job listing and group available jobs into these categories. This would make it easier for the user to find a job they might be interested in pursuing.

Clear Labeling

The wording of labels on a website is vital to the usability of the site. Labels for links, field names, buttons, and page headings all provide clues to the user of where they are and how they can get to where they want to go. Keeping the labeling consistent throughout the site also contributes to making the user's experience simpler.

Suggested Changes

High Priority

- The 'Catalog', 'Request a Catalog', and 'Shop by Catalog' links are repetitious and do not always lead to the same location. These links usually lead to a request form for a printed catalog, but sometimes open a new window with a Flash version of the catalog. There is no indication of what will happen when the link is clicked. To alleviate confusion, and frustration, the link should be labeled 'Request a Catalog', be placed in the utility navigation, and lead to a request form for a printed catalog.
- The 'Home' link in the global navigation should link to the 'Home' page. This link will be redirected as part of the 'Products' redesign.
- Page titles should use the same wording as the navigation link label that led to the page. This assures the user that they are viewing the page they selected.

Medium Priority

- Re-label links that open something other than a new page to reflect the destination of the link. It can be frustrating to the user when they click a link and a new window opens, particularly when the process of opening the new window takes some time. An indicator of the type of file being opened (pdf) and the size of the file (20kb) would allow the user to decide whether or not to click the link.
- Create submit buttons for 'Login/Register' and 'Shopping Cart'. As they appear now they are not distinguishable as clickable links.
- The active links should all be the orange color they currently are, and inactive links should change to match the page header.

Consistent Design

Consistent design pertains to all aspects of the layout of a website; page layout, formatting of page headers and navigation buttons, presentation of error messages, formatting of links (active and inactive), and even the use of color across the site. The main inconsistencies on goldcanyoncandle.com are the placement of local navigation and layout of sub pages.

Suggested Changes

High Priority

- The design of the content area of many of the site pages is not consistent across the site. The placement, content, and formatting of the local navigation varies from page to page, and the choice of colors differs from the other sections of the site. The use of the colored background should be consistent across the site, since this a design element that helps creates the look and feel of the website.
- The placement, labeling, and formatting of the page header should be consistent across the site. All sub pages should have a page header that repeats the link selected to reach it and should appear left-aligned at the top of the content area of the page with the same capitalization and color on each page.
- The global navigation links should always have some indication of the current section
 of the site. This is not consistent across the site and is addressed more thoroughly in the
 'Efficient Navigation' section of this analysis.

Medium Priority

- Page header and window names should be consistent across the site. The window
 names currently in use do not always identify the site. They should include the name of the site
 and then the page header as another indicator of the location within the site (i.e., Gold Canyon
 Page Header).
- **Product descriptions are not consistently applied.** Some products are described several times in the same section and some, including some unique products, are not described at all. This is addressed in the products redesign discussion.

Matching User Expectations

Users have developed certain expectations of how websites should look and behave. For example, the global navigation and company logo appear at the top of the page, and local navigation appears on the left or right side of the content on the sub pages. For links, if text is underlined, blue, and/or changes color when it is moused over, it is assumed to be a link. When these expectations are violated the user may become confused or annoyed and leave the site.

Practices to Continue

 Local navigation links are in a different color than content text. The color currently used provides a good contrast to regular text and differentiates them as links.

Suggested Changes

High Priority

- Provide a drop-down/pop-out of the local navigation menu on mouseover of the global navigation links. This allows the user a quick view of the local navigation and helps them determine if this is the direction they want to pursue.
- Change the 'Home' link in the global navigation to link to the Home page. As part of the product section redesign, this link will be redirected.
- Provide a 'Search', 'Help', 'Customer Service', and/or 'FAQ' link in the utility navigation.
 Most users expect to see a link to some form of help at the top of site pages.

Medium Priority

Relocate 'Host a Party' link to the global navigation. Since this is one of the main reasons
a user might be visiting Gold Canyon, moving this link would make it much more visible and
accessible.

Effective Visual Design

Visual design refers to the 'look and feel' of the website, relating to how well interface design principles of balance, alignment, use of negative space, and similarity and proximity are used throughout the site. This section of the analysis addresses site-wide issues; page-specific issues are addressed in Additional Usability Issues by Page & Section.

Practices to Continue

- Colors used in www.goldcanyoncandle.com are well-chosen and reflect the products offered. Many of the products are geared toward providing a soothing, comforting atmosphere and the choice of colors on the site reflects this.
- The content area text is, for the most part, well grouped by similarity of information. For the most part, the content is grouped to provide descriptions of what is on the sub pages.

Suggested Changes

High Priority

- Use of Flash image between masthead and content is pushing the content 'below the fold'. Moving or removing the area between the masthead and the content area and removing some of the white space from the masthead would allow the content to move up and make it readily accessible for the user. (See Appendix A for a redesign of the 'Home' page which shows the removal of this white space). This redesign should be applied to all the pages of the site.
- There is a disruption in the alignment of the header and content sections of the pages when an item is added to the Shopping Cart. The addition of an item to the Shopping Cart generates the 'Checkout' button which pushes to content area beyond the right margin of the rest of the page. This could be confusing, or at least disconcerting, to the user, and disrupts the right alignment of the sections of the page. The 'Checkout' button should be moved below the 'Shopping Cart' or be made smaller so that it does not impact the right margin of this area.

Low Priority

 White space could be used more effectively in the content area by moving the right side navigation over to allow more space for content text. This would allow the user to differentiate between the content and the right navigation more easily.

Supporting Readability and Scannability

Much of a user's time spent online involves reading; scanning pages looking for headings and links that will lead to information of interest. Text should be designed for easy reading and headings and links should stand out so they are easy to pick out.

Practices to Continue

 The current links are set apart by color and bulleting. This sets them apart from the rest of the content and makes them fairly easy to find.

Suggested Changes

High Priority

• Use a sans-serif font (verdana, geneva, or arial) and a darker color for content text. The background color of the content area is easy on the eyes, but the text is too light to be read comfortably against it. Also, sans-serif text is more easily read on a screen than serif text.

Low Priority

• Provide bullets for the local navigation links. The addition of bullets to list items makes them stand out more and makes it easier for the user to scan them guickly.

Facilitating User Tasks

Web users are generally task-oriented and expect to complete their time online with efficiency and a satisfying experience. Websites that support easy access to information and quick task completion will keep visitors satisfied and returning to the site.

Suggested Changes

High Priority

- Provide a more useable alert when a task has failed. Make the text of an alert message relay to the user why the task failed; for example, what information that was required did they leave out. Also, make error alert messages red to make them stand out.
- Indicate which form fields are required. Placing an asterisk after a field name (and including an indicator at the top of the form, such as "Fields with an * are required"), alleviates some of the user's frustration at receiving a message about required information being left out when they were not told that the information was required.
- Provide a more streamlined approach to ordering products. The current process has many pages with duplicated information that the user needs to navigate to finally get to a page where an order can be placed. The redesign of the product pages addresses this issue.
- Provide confirmation when a user has successfully registered or logged in. When there is no confirmation that the registration has been accomplished, the user may give up and leave the site. The user needs a confirmation message that stands out better and is more noticeable. This is addressed further in Additional Usability Issues by Page & Section.

Providing Help

Providing help for users can lead to a more satisfying experience and increase the likelihood that the user will make purchases and return to the site.

Suggested Changes

High Priority

- **Provide a 'FAQ' page.** This would provide users with information they would be most likely to need, and would not duplicate the 'Customer Service' area.
- Provide a 'Customer Service' link in the utility navigation. This could lead to a list of options for contacting the Customer Service department; online help, email, phone number, or address.

Additional Usability Issues by Page & Section

Further usability issues specific to a section or a page within a section are presented here. Some issues may be the same as issues noted in the general analysis, due to the page or section presented here requiring significant alteration in respect to that issue. Only the pages with further issues are presented here.

Candles, Body, Home Pages

Suggested changes

High Priority

- Reorganize these three sections of the site into one 'Our Products' section. This will make the process of finding and ordering products easier for the user. When this is done the home page would include an area with a Flash sequence of product images and links to the associated product section sub page. This would streamline the process of finding a specific product and eliminate the confusion of the 'Home' link in the current global navigation. (See Appendix A for a wireframe of the redesigned 'Home' page and Appendix B for a wireframe of the 'Our Products' home page).
- Reorganize the listing of products within each of the product pages. The current pages are repetitious and require the user to read through many levels of the same product descriptions in order to get to the page where they can actually order a product. The proposed redesign will combine several types of the same product (where only one or two qualities of the product vary, such as the size and scent of the candle) on the same order page, allowing the user to select the specific product they want using drop-down menus. (See Appendix B for wireframes of two Product sub pages).

This redesign would also address the inconsistent visual design of the product pages. These pages would use the same background colors and link colors of the current 'Opportunity' and 'Who We Are' pages, and would employ a right-hand navigation to other product areas.

In addition to the above changes, each product page should include a link to the 'Find a Demonstrator' page. This would go in the right hand side with the seasonal promotions.

Opportunity Page

Suggested changes

High Priority

• Move the 'Host a Party' link to the global navigation. This is too important a part of the company's business to be hidden in the local navigation on a sub page.

Low Priority

• The local navigation links appear twice on this page. The links are included as part of the content text on this page. These links should be removed from the content text and left as part of the local navigation. This will have the added benefit of shortening the content and bringing more of it above the fold.

Host a Party

This page provides information about how to host a Gold Canyon party, but does not provide any contact information to find someone to run the party.

Suggested changes

High Priority

'Host a Party' is an important part of the company business and should have a separate link in the global navigation. This would make it more visible to the site visitor, and possibly spike their interest in hosting a party and selling product. This page should also include a local link to find a demonstrator and/or a way to email a request to be contacted by someone in regards to hosting a party.

Career Plan Page

The tables used on this page are images, probably imported from another program. The colors of these images are not consistent with the rest of the site, and the text is very difficult to read due to the poor quality of the images. There is also too much information on the one page; many users would not bother to continue scrolling to find the information they want.

Suggested changes

Low Priority

• The 'Career Plan' page design is not consistent with the rest of the site. Creating the charts with (X)HTML tables would make the layout and presentation consistent with the rest of the site. In addition, within-page links could be added to access the information more quickly and easily.

Login/Register

When the user logins or a new user completes the registration page, they are automatically taken to the 'Candles' product page. The only indication that they have logged in is a small welcome message below the 'My Account' name on the right of the screen which is not very noticeable.

Suggested changes

Medium Priority

 Make the message "Welcome, Joan Smith" a larger and bolder font and place it below the global navigation of the right side of the page. The current message is too small and light to be easily noticed.

Registration Page

Suggested changes

Medium Priority

 Replace the 'Keep Shopping' button with a 'Register' button and provide a registration confirmation page. If a user does not receive some confirmation that their registration was

- received they may not trust the site enough to keep shopping or return.
- Change the 'Save' and 'Cancel' links to buttons and align them with the 'Register'. This makes it clear they are buttons, as well as making them more aesthetically pleasing to the user.

Shopping Cart

Suggested changes

High Priority

• Put a shopping cart link in the utility navigation. This makes it accessible to the user the entire time they are on the website.

Shop Our Catalog

This link leads to either a catalog request form or a Flash version of the printed catalog. However, it is misleading because the Flash catalog is not interactive. When the user clicks an image in this catalog they go to the web page associated with that product. Recommendations were made about this link in the 'Clear Labeling' analysis and these are additional suggestions.

Suggested changes

High Priority

• Put an indicator with the link to this version of the catalog about what it is and an approximate download time. This does take some time to download, and is something the user should be aware of before clicking the link.

Low Priority

• The use of the Flash version of the catalog should be re-evaluated, with the recommendation that it be removed. It does not add any real value to the user experience, as clicking an image in this catalog takes the user back to the web page associated with that product and they end up shopping from the web site.

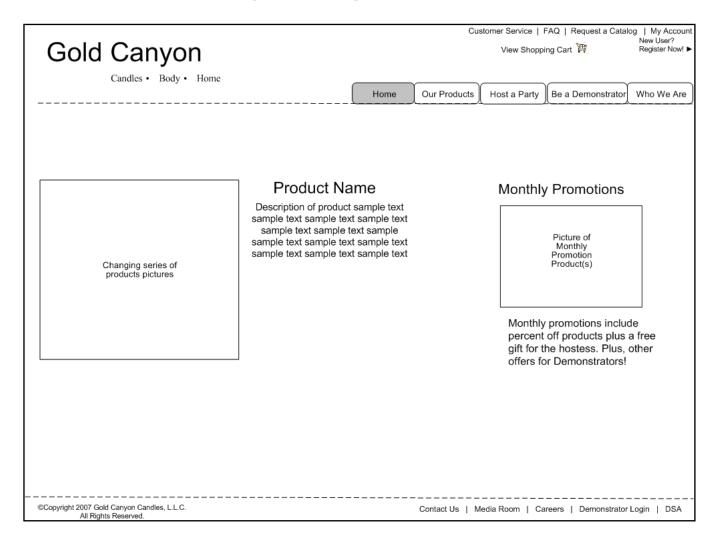
Footer Section

Suggested changes

Medium Priority

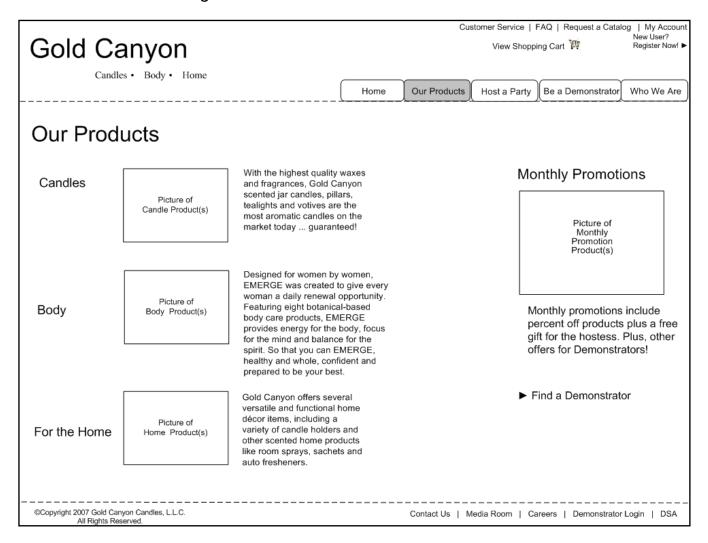
• Provide consistent footer navigation throughout the site. The links in the footer section of the web site should be consistent across the pages. This provides assurance to the user that they are still viewing the same website and gives them access to the same information on each page.

Appendix A: Home Page Redesign

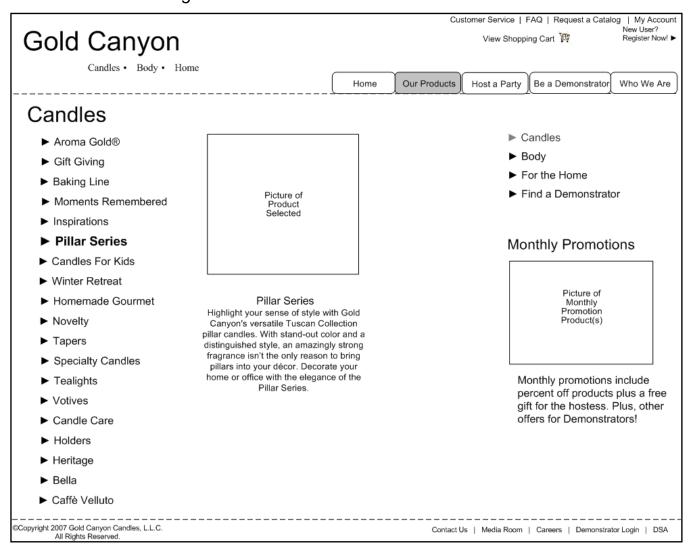


Appendix B: Products Section Redesign Wireframes

Our Products Home Page



Our Products Sub Page



Our Products Order Page 1

	FAQ Request a Catalog My Account New User?				
Gold Canyon				View Shopping Cart	
Candles • Body • Home	Home	Our Products	Be a Demonstrator	Request a Catalog	Who We Are
Candles > Pillar Series				N. Condin	_
Blackberry & Vanilla With subtle hints of sweet vanilla musk and organic wildflowers, the scent of handpicked blackberries transforms into our classic pillar in a regal shade of purple.		Quantity		► Candles ► Body	5
	Select Size		► For the Home		
		4.98			Demonstrator
Heather & Hyacinth Picture of Product Product Picture aromas of honeysuckle, gardenia, jasmine and heather accented by slight traces of warm citrus.	Select Size	0	ı	Monthly Prom	otions
Pineapple & Cilantro Picture of Product Product Picture of Product Product Picture of Product Product Picture of Product Picture of paradise to your home with our sweet fusion of juicy pineapple, tangy orange and refreshing peach, sprinkled with a dash of cilantro and basil.	Select Size	▼ 0		Picture (Monthly Promotic Product(y on
Tangerine & Spice Complement your table with the invigorating scent of fresh clove, splashed with tartly sweet tangerine essence. A perfect companion for your centerpiece!	Select Size	▼ 0		Monthly promoti percent off prod- gift for the hoste offers for Demon	ucts plus a free ss. Plus, other
Yuzu & Ruby Red Picture of mouth-watering aroma of sweet citrus! With	Select Size	▼ 0			

Our Products Order Page 2

