Educational Toy Guide
Website Redesign Project
http://www.educational-toy-guide.com/

Project Report

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Prepared for Dick Waldimar
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Executive Summary

The AGG Team has been hired by Dick Waldimar to redesign his site, The Educational Toy Guide (ETG). This report documents our goals, strategy, and research for the ETG website redesign. ETG has three main objectives: to educate users about the importance of toys and games to a child’s development, to present suggestions of toys for specific age groups / developmental stages / learning needs, and to help the site’s users acquire those toys. The target users for the ETG website are parents, guardians and professionals such as teachers, caregivers, therapists and counselors seeking information about developmentally appropriate educational toys and games for children. However, the current ETG site suffers from a lack of organization, is difficult to learn, and much of the content is not findable. The main objective of the AGG Team is to address these weaknesses, improving the clarity, learnability and findability of the site and thus enabling ETG to better serve the needs of its target users and thereby meet its business objectives. The redesign also addresses Mr. Waldimar’s goal of providing better service to his users and thus to draw more visitors to the site, encouraging them to stay longer and to return to the site to meet their informational needs about educational toys.

To gain an understanding of how the ETG’s users learn about educational toys, where they go to find educational toys and how their current searching process can be improved, the AGG Team conducted user interviews with identified users of the ETG website. These interviews allowed our team to gain insight into the information needs of the ETG’s target users and will allow us to redesign the site so as to best address those needs.

In addition, our team has performed a full content inventory and we are still in the process of analysing the results. Thus far, the audit shows that ETG, in its current form, lacks a clear organizational system, which confuses its users and makes finding information difficult. The site also suffers from significant content duplication and content gaps. Results from the initial user research via survey affirm that ETG’s current navigation system is inefficient and does not allow for complete discovery of the ETG website. The current organization structure and the labels are confusing and users have a difficult time accomplishing tasks using the current navigation system. Users are unable to make sense of how the information is organized and will abandon a task when they get lost within the website.

To get a better understanding of how the ETG website’s users would prefer information organized, our team has also performed a card sorting exercise. Through the card sort we have learned that most users would like to access content first by age, and then be able to narrow by toy category, learning skill or type of play. Another important finding is that for older kids, users imagine items grouped by category of toy, ie
building toys, rather than merely by age group. On the other hand, for younger kids, users seem to prefer simple age categories.

Using the data gathered through the various stages of user research, the AGG Team will create a prototype that will then undergo user testing. Based on the results of our user research, the AGG Team has included specific recommendations that can be found in the Recommendations section of this report.

Objectives

→ Business Objectives
The Educational Toy Guide’s business objectives are information-focused. The site was first conceived of by a parent to help users support the development of children in their lives. ETG seeks to educate parents, teachers, and other adults about the importance of toys and games to a child’s development and to present suggestions for the most appropriate toys for various age groups / developmental stages / learning needs and to help users acquire those toys. While the website does host affiliate links, selling is not the main priority of the site nor is it a priority of the redesign project. The ultimate goals of the redesign are to improve the user experience of visitors to the site, draw more visitors to the site, engage these visitors with site content so that they stay on the site longer, and ensure that they return to the site again and again to meet their informational needs about educational toys.

→ Design Objectives
The primary IA objectives for this redesign are to improve the clarity, learnability and findability of the ETG site in order to better serve the informational needs of its users. Currently the website has problems with consistency, organization and findability, which impede users from meeting their information needs. The information is not easily findable, the navigation paths are not clear, and the current design is not controllable or quick to learn. The redesign will make the ETG site more usable through reorganized content, redesigned navigation paths, and more intuitive labeling to better represent the relationships between content items. The redesign will allow users to more effectively search for content and browse the website. Users will be able to quickly understand how the site is structured, the breadth and scope of the site and the path to finding information on the site, all without frustration or confusion.

Content Strategy & Inventory

The AGG Team has conducted a complete inventory of ETG’s content. Our strategy consisted of thoroughly working through the site’s navigation system in order to uncover all of the site’s content, or at least all of the content accessible by way of the site’s navigational structure, namely the header, side and
footer menus. We then recorded every link and its place in the hierarchy, page by page, for a total of 92 pages. Next, to verify whether we had overlooked any content (as no source files were made available to us) we scraped the website’s sitemap XML for all relevant pages using an online extractor tool that listed all URLs in a .CSV. In this way, we located an additional 20 pages of content. We then recorded all of our findings in a spreadsheet.

**Content Audit Snapshot:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ID</td>
<td>Hierarchy</td>
<td>Navigation Label</td>
<td>Page Title</td>
<td>URL</td>
<td>Comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td><a href="http://www.educational-toyguide.com/index.html">http://www.educational-toyguide.com/index.html</a></td>
<td>Which educational toy is just right?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>Articles</td>
<td><a href="http://www.educational-toyguide.com/articles/about.html">http://www.educational-toyguide.com/articles/about.html</a></td>
<td>Which educational toy is just right?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>Fun-Chances - Should My Child Play Online Games to Get Smarter?</td>
<td><a href="http://www.educational-toyguide.com/articles/fun-chances.html">http://www.educational-toyguide.com/articles/fun-chances.html</a></td>
<td>Discussion of educational toys and what todays really need, whether “Iblog about Toy Chat” — guidelines for selection with adults asks and engage in samples of toys meeting each guidelines, link at bottom of page “Educational Toys”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>Fun-Chances - Melissa and Doug Blocks &amp; 2nd level navigation as 1.1, 1.2, etc. and third level navigation as 1.1.1, 1.1.2, etc. We have interpreted contextual navigation links on a given page as leading to content at the next level down in the overall hierarchy. A full legend explains the color-coding used throughout the spreadsheet.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Our work to date suggests that there is little to no meta-tagging, e.g. keywords, tag clouds, categories, etc., of data within the site. The current content structure is very broad and shallow. Users can select from some 16 labels on the main menu, with most of these leading to a landing page on the topic. However, embedded within these landing pages are often multiple contextual links leading out to yet other pages. These pages then have yet more links within them. Users have no way of identifying where they are within the site once they have left the main page. The inventory also highlights that the current site suffers from significant data duplication as well as from significant content gaps. For instance, three separate
pages discuss the developmental benefits of playing with toy castles, and each highlights several recommended castles, not all the same. In terms of gaps, while there is content related to children of all ages (0 to 12 years), there is far more content geared towards babies and toddlers than towards children 5 and over. The site contains a lot of valuable information about selecting specific toys for babies, toddlers and even preschoolers in order to support their development of a given learning skill, but contains far less information about doing so for older children (5+). As a result of the flat structure, duplication and content gaps, finding information on the ETG site is not a simple task for users. The AGG team proposes to create a new and deeper organizational structure for the content on the site thus leading to greater clarity, findability and learnability of the site.

**User Research Plan**

This is an initial plan of user research currently in progress for the ETG site redesign. User research is being done two parts: in the initial phase of the project before restructuring the site’s content, and then after a prototype of the new site has been developed. The purpose of research in the early stages of the project is to gather data about the needs and behaviors of target users, as well as any frustrations of current users. The data gathered highlights what users expect when entering the ETG site and what content is most important to them. Further data will inform the type of organizational structure and organizational schemes that will best suit the ETG site and its users, while also supporting the primary mission of the site. In this first phase of research, we are employing a range of research tools including usage analytics, interviews and card sorting to gather data about users, while the latter phase will involve testing the prototype through assigned tasks.

**→ Phase One: Getting To Know Your Users**

**User Interviews:** User interviews are being conducted with potential users of the ETG site in order to learn how individuals learn about educational toys, where they go to find educational toys, and how their current searching process can be improved. The user interviews will help our team gain information about users’ search processes and allow us to design personas to help tailor the redesigned ETG website to the user. Our team has designed a list of questions to use as a guide and one member of the team will conduct a one-on-one interview with a participant that will last about 45-60 minutes. User interviews do not need to be done in person, and the participant will have the option to do the interviews online using web-conferencing or by phone. If a participants prefers to meet in person, the location of the interview will vary depending on the preference of the participant, but can include an office, home, coffee shop, etc. Three interviews have already taken place, which have given our team insight into the major problems of
the ETG website. Our goal is to achieve a minimum of 15 interviews and have the process take no more than 4 weeks after all of the participants are identified.

**Survey:** A survey will be conducted to gain insight into the current ETG site structure and organization. The survey will ask questions aimed to find out if users are able to search the current ETG website effectively, understand what navigational paths are available to them, and grasp the the overall organizational structure of the content. The survey will also assess whether the current website is addressing users’ information needs. The survey will be conducted online and will take the participants about 5-10 minutes to complete. Actual users of the ETG website will be prompted to complete the survey, but we will also identify other likely users of the ETG site as potential survey participants.

**Card Sorting:** An important tool in assisting with the ETG site redesign is an open card sort. Traditional open card sorting is a powerful and inexpensive way to gain insight into users’ mental models and to how they naturally expect items to be grouped on a website. We will employ an online tool, OptimalSort to assist with the card sorting exercise and the subsequent analysis of the results. Members of the target user communities will be invited to participate in the study. We also recommend that key stakeholders in the project, namely the owner of the site, Dick Waldimar, and any frequent contributors to the site also participate. All participants will have the option of participating remotely or coming to our offices; we will ensure that at least a few participants do so in our presence in order to gather useful data about their thought processes and challenges they encounter in completing the sorting task.

Regardless of their location, all participants will first respond to a few simple questions that will provide us with some basic demographic information. Next, the system will provide them with 30 cards, each with a unique label and image. The sample of cards represent a range of existing or planned content items and types. Participant will sort the cards into groups that make sense to them and then name each of the groups they have created. For those who participate in the study from our offices, we will observe how they place the cards, listen as they think aloud and then ask clarifying questions when they are done. This additional qualitative data will shed light on the more quantitative results obtained from the system itself.

Prior to conducting the full card sorting exercise, we have already completed a small pilot study with 9 participants to test our questions and gather some preliminary results. In terms of demographics, five of the participants were parents, one was a healthcare professional and one was a teacher. The other two identified as having a significant relationship with a child in their lives. Over three-quarters of respondents said that in seeking educational toys on a website, they would first want to be able to narrow selections by age of child. The remaining respondents said they would prefer to first narrow selections by learning skill. Narrowing results first by type of toy or type of play were not options favored by this group. In terms of
naming age groups, two thirds of respondents prefer labels with numeric values (such as “0 to 18 months”) over those with words (such as “Babies”). A larger study will allow us to verify if these findings hold up with a larger sample.

In terms of the card sorting exercise itself, we obtained some interesting preliminary results. Overall, respondents classified toys more often by category type than by age (e.g. “Building Toys” vs “4 to 9 year olds”). However, this tendency to classify items by category was much stronger for items geared to older kids; items geared to younger children were far more likely to be categorized by age group, and items geared specifically to babies were almost always all grouped together under a category labeled as “Baby”, “0 to 18 months” or some other variation on these. It seems that the clearer the participants were that a toy or item was not aimed at babies, toddlers or preschoolers, the more likely they were to place it in a category by toy type or activity type, such as “Games & Puzzles” or “Reading & Writing”. These results suggest that users might want more specific groupings of items for older child toys, but less for younger child toys. It does seem though, that users had different opinions as to whether certain toys were more appropriate for babies, toddlers or preschoolers. This uncertainty could be what led some to group these items together more generically by age rather than by category. It should be noted as well, that although most participants grouped items by age or toy category, a few also used play type to distinguish items. For instance, there were categories such as “Active Play”, “Imaginative Play” and so on. It is important to keep these variations in mind as we move forward towards a new design. Play type might be another way some users would want to access content. Such groupings would also support the site’s mission of education - these labels hint at the types of skills supported by particular toys and so could be quite instructive to users.

We also included various articles from the site in the sorting exercise. The results show a clear preference for grouping the “big picture” articles together (e.g. “Developmental Milestones of Children Ages 0 to 12”). However, for articles related to a specific age group or type of item (e.g. “All About Toy Storage”) participants were as likely to group them with items related by age or type, as they were to group them separately as “Resources” or something similar. This finding supports the idea that we must provide several access points to content in order to meet the differing needs and preferences of users.
Similarity Matrix: The similarity matrix indicates how often, in terms of percentages, items were grouped together by participants during the card sorting activity. The darker blue triangles suggest clear groupings for many of the sample items, and as such, the information gathered from the similarity matrix will guide our organization of the ETG website and allow us to ensure that groupings of content on the site make sense to target users.

Overall, the information gleaned from the card sort will inform the type of organizational structure and organizational schemes that will best suit the site and its users while also supporting ETG’s primary mission. Once we have confirmed the most commonly suggested categories and have a tentative structure in place (i.e. an initial sitemap), we will validate our groupings and labels with a closed card sorting exercise in which participants will be given a set of categories and will simply have to sort the content items into these predefined groups, with the option of renaming groups to better fit their needs or expectations. We will then incorporate the results of this second sort into the design of a revised sitemap and eventual prototype.

→ Phase Two: Testing and Validation

User Testing: Once a prototype of the restructured site has been fully developed, we will conduct user testing with a sample of users drawn from the target audience. User testing will involve observing users as they complete a set of tasks, tracking their behavior, and identifying any common issues. Our goal is to
ensure that the ETG website’s prototype a) aligns with the primary educative mission of the site and supports the key objectives of findability, clarity, and ease of use, and b) fulfills the needs of both the stakeholder(s) and the target users.

Meetings will be moderated by one staff member, one-on-one with a user. Our goal-oriented testing plan consists of simple tasks with no intrusion or influence on the user by the moderator. The user must navigate the prototype with varying task types to ensure that we have covered the needs of multiple user groups (e.g. browsers vs. searchers, parents vs. teachers). By watching how users navigate the site, we can better understand how they seek information. After the tasks are completed, the moderator will conduct a contextual interview to discuss what the user experienced, as well as record any thoughts on or frustrations with navigating the ETG website prototype. Based on the results of this testing, we will either propose minor modifications to the structure, navigation or labeling of the site, or if more major changes are needed, develop a new prototype and then submit this new model to user testing.

User Personas

To view user personas click here.

The users of the ETG website are parents, caregivers, guardians as well as professionals who seek information about developmentally appropriate educational toys and videogames for children. By creating user personas that tell us about our user’s needs, online behaviors and motivations, we are able to more effectively redesign the ETG website to meet the needs of these users. The user personas don’t reflect all the potential users of the ETG website, rather, they reflect the most typical users of the website. The user personas serve as a constant reminder of the typical ETG website user and their needs. The personas will allow the EGG Team to visualize how users will use the website and how they will interact with the redesign thus enabling the EGG Team to create a more redesign that caters to the needs of the users.

User Scenarios

→ User Scenario 1: Limitations of the Current Site
It is Saturday morning, but Samantha is up early getting her boys, 4-year-old Andrew and 7-month-old Noah, ready for the day. This morning they are going to a family storytime presented by their local library. Samantha and the boys are regulars to this Saturday morning storytime and have made friends with the other attendees, so they don’t mind being up early on a weekend.
On their way home, Samantha stops by the local elementary to pick up some informational materials to help Andrew prepare for Pre-K. He is 4 years old and will be starting school this year. When they get home Samantha looks at the materials and notes that Andrew seems to be pretty well prepared for Pre-K; after all, Samantha makes it a point to incorporate a lot of educational activities in his playtime. The only area where he can use more help is counting. Samantha makes a mental note to look at what counting toys Andrew owns and to do an online search to find activities they can do together.

Once Samantha’s husband, Eric, is home and entertaining the boys, Samantha peruses through Andrew’s collection of toys but does not find many counting toys. The counting toys he does own don’t seem to hold his attention, so Samantha decides to look for other toys to purchase. She goes to her desktop computer, opens up Chrome, navigates to Google and types in “counting toys for children.” The search turns up many images of specific toys as well as some websites familiar to Samantha. The numerous results are a little overwhelming and Samantha remembers that a fellow mother suggested a website that had recommendations about educational toys for children, which Samantha noted on her phone. Samantha finds the information she needs, goes back to Google and navigates to educational-toy-guide.com.

Once on the homepage, she immediately looks for a search box. Not seeing one, she scrolls up and down the home page for a few seconds trying to get a sense of the layout of the site. She notices a navigation menu on the left side of the homepage and scrolls down the categories. She pauses momentarily and tries to decide if the counting toys would be found under “Preschoolers” or “Learning toys,” and decides on the latter. She clicks on the link and once she’s on the new page she quickly peruses the information from top to bottom, using her mouse to scroll down. She notices that the page is made up of a lot of photos along with clusters of text and she scrolls back to the top of the page. She skims the first paragraph and begins scrolling down the page looking at the pictures to determine if they seem appropriate for a 4 year old. The toys on this page seem to be aimed at older children and she decides that this is not the appropriate place for her to find what she needs. From this page, she still has access to the navigation menu and this time she clicks on “Preschoolers.” On the new page she again does a quick scroll from top to bottom and again notices that this page is made up of pictures and text, but with no sub-categories or other ways to narrow her options. She scrolls back to the top and skims the first paragraph; she appreciates the guidance about the educational toys but tonight she is pressed for time. She makes a mental note to come back to this section when she has a bit more time and she scrolls down the page looking at the photos to see if any toys look appropriate for her 4 year old. She stops at the sight of photos of abacuses, a familiar sight since she remembers owning one when she was a child. Nostalgia overcomes her; she likes the idea of exploring this toy with her son. She clicks on one of the images for this toy and expects to learn more about the toy, maybe get some suggestions for fun uses or
suggestions on similar toys, but is disappointed to be taken to third party website where she can purchase the toy.

To go back to the previous page, she clicks on the back button of her browser and goes back to the pictures of the abacuses. She notes that there are different types and clicks on another image but as before, she is taken to the same third party website where she can purchase the toy. Frustrated, she decides to stay on this retail website, which also provides her with basic, generic information for the abacus, but does not feed her need for in-depth information about ways to use this toy to help her son with counting. While she eventually purchases the toy on the third party site, she is left confused and frustrated. She is unlikely to ever return to educational-toy-guide.com to meet her informational needs about educational toys, but she has not found a better alternative either.

→ User Scenario 2: Navigating the Redesigned Site (a Prelude to User Testing)

Alyssa is home on a Sunday night working in her home office prepping for the week ahead. She is planning her week on her agenda, making notes of the activities that she and her husband Matthew have planned. She glances at her monthly calendar and notes that her niece Sydney’s birthday is coming up in three weeks. This year she does not want to procrastinate on getting her a present so she decides to start looking early. Last year Alyssa gifted Sydney a set of books, and while educational, Sydney quickly lost interest in them as she opened her other gifts. This year Alyssa wants to again gift her some books to add to her growing collection, but she also wants to find a fun educational toy for Sydney.

Alyssa fires up her laptop, navigates to Safari and finds herself on the Google page, which serves as her homepage. She types “educational toys for 6 year olds” in the search box and is presented with a lot of results. She peruses through them, but then remembers that she should probably also get something for Sydney’s sister, Camilla, whose birthday is only a couple of months away. She does another Google search for “educational toys” and briefly peruses some of the websites. She lands on educational-toy-guide.com and is attracted to this website because she can search for toys by age. Alyssa decides to search first for a toy for Sydney and navigates her mouse to the “Age” category which reveals a drop-down menu. She selects the “5-8 Years” category and is brought to another page. She quickly scans the page to get a feel for the layout; she sees some paragraphs with information about the developmental stages of children between the ages of 5-8 and what type of toys best suit their needs. She also notes that there are links at the top of the page with the labels “Active,” “Communicative,” “Creative,” “Exploratory,” “Imagination,” and “Social.” She quickly peruses the information about the developmental stages of this age group and picks up some tips on finding toys that should interest
Sydney. She returns to the top of the page and clicks on the first label, “Active,” and is brought to another page, where she quickly scrolls down and notices that this page has individual listings of toys, linked to information about each one and an external link to purchase them. Alyssa scrolls back to the top and tries to decide which category to explore. She remembers that last February she bought Valentine cards for Sydney and Camilla and while Camilla was mostly only interested in the candy attached to the card, Sydney was especially excited that the card folded out to reveal puzzles.

Reading the brief descriptions of each type of play, Alyssa decides to explore the “Exploratory” category to look for puzzles and clicks on the link, which is also available from the page she is currently on. As she scrolls through the pictures of toys she comes across a few pictures of puzzle toys, including a brain teaser toy that she thinks Sydney might like. She also comes across an Inventor's Box item that looks like a lot of fun and very educational. Alyssa then has a great idea to incorporate some books into her gift — she will purchase the Inventor's Box, the brain teaser toy, and add in some fun puzzle books for children. She finds both of the toys that interested her, clicks on the third party links and adds both items to her cart. While she is on the third party website, she looks for a couple of fun children's puzzle books and adds them to her cart. She decides to start looking for a toy for 2 year old Camilla and decides to navigate back to educational-toy-guide.com since her experience on the website left her feeling confident that the toy she chose for Sydney was educational and developmentally appropriate. On the page that displayed the exploratory toys for kids ages 5-8 years, Alyssa scrolls to the top, hovers over the “Age” menu and selects the “1-3 Years” category and prepares to do it all again.

**Site Model**

Based on the content inventory and the initial results from our user research, we have developed a new sitemap (see below) in order to provide a broad overview of our proposed organizational structure for the redesigned site. The sitemap includes a deeper hierarchy and multiple access points to content on the site. Users can browse by age (1.x) or by product type (2.x). The age group landing pages (1.1 to 1.5) include age-specific developmental information as well as tips for selecting appropriate toys for the given age group. From these pages, users can then use the local navigation options to further browse by type of play such as “Active Play” or “Imaginative Play”. These sub-landing pages (1.x.x) include tips about play types and how each contributes to a child’s development at various ages and stages, followed by a listing of products with links to individual product pages.

Users who prefer a more categorical organizational scheme can alternatively browse by product type; these landing pages include information about how a particular group of toys such as “Building Toys” or “Musical Instruments” can help support a child’s development from babyhood through age twelve,
followed immediately by related product listings which again lead directly to individual product pages. The last three sections of the site include resources for parents, teachers and other adults, information about the site itself, and contact information.

The labeling on the sitemap reflects terms generated by users during the card sorting exercise and user interviews, terms used within the content itself, as well as terms suggested by researchers in the field. A great majority of users expressed a preference for age groups to be defined by actual age ranges as opposed to less specific linguistic designations (e.g. “0 to 1 Year Olds” vs “Babies”). However, when referencing types of toys, users preferred the linguistic designations, and so we have “Baby Toys” and “Toddlers Toys” as types of toys. In terms of “Play Type”, we were largely inspired by the work of Bob Hughes who identified 16 types of childhood play in his groundbreaking book, *A Playworker’s Taxonomy of Play Types* (2002). Not all 16 types are accessible through the use of toys, but we included all those that are and merged some of the groupings for the sake of simplicity and clarity. We modified the names of some of Hughes’ types so that our labeling would be more consistent with terms found within the content of the site as well as with those terms suggested by users as part of our user research.

In addition to the site map, we have created prototypes of three levels of the redesigned ETG in order to provide a more detailed look at the structure and organization as it will appear on the live site. We have created wireframes for the homepage, level 1.x (Age), and level 1.x.x (Play Type for a given age group). The primary navigation bar is constant across all pages of the site. The homepage includes a brief orientation to the site. Textual content is chunked into short, scannable paragraphs. The landing pages for “Age” (1.x) include a small amount of informational text related to the developmental needs of the given age group and how toys can help support these. In addition, each of these pages includes a secondary navigation menu leading to specific types of play, such as “Active” and “Imaginative”, along with a brief description of each and examples to guide the user (e.g. Active play involves movement, either large muscle movement involved in activities such as running and jumping or small muscle movement involved in fine motor activities such as writing and sewing.) Finally, the landing pages for play type by age (1.1.1 to 1.5.6) include some brief information about the given play type for the selected age range (e.g. “Creative Toys for 5 to 8 Year Olds”), how such play supports a child’s development, and suggestions of types of toys that are best suited to children in this age range. This is followed by actual product listings, each with a product name and image linked to an individual product page. Specific information about each toy is provided on its individual product page, along with an affiliate link to a third party retailer. The prototype in its full form will be used for user testing (see *User Research Plan*) and will allow our team to assess how well the new structure and navigational system are working and what adjustments might be necessary.
→ Part One: Site Map

A closer look at the structure:
E.g.: Age >> 3 – 5 Years >> Active >> Individual Product Pages

(Larger PDF version of the sitemap available here.)
(ETG site homepage and site homepage shown with drop-down menu active for "Type.")
(Landing page, “Toys for 0-1 Year Olds” [1.1]. Includes local navigation for types of play available for 0-1 year olds [1.1.1-1.1.4].)
Recommendations

Throughout this report, the AGG Team has recommended a redesign of the ETG site with an eye to improving overall clarity, findability and learnability. First, we recommend a complete reorganization of the site’s content in order to create a hierarchy with more depth, as depicted in the proposed sitemap. In line with the results from our user research, we have also recommended a division of content based on age group, type of toy, and type of play. Such a structure provides users with multiple access points to content, with age being the primary access point, and with the alternative option of browsing by type of toy (i.e. product type). The addition of a search box provides yet another access point to content on the site. We suggest that each category and subcategory have its own landing page including all relevant developmental information and toy selection guidelines, as well as any secondary or local navigation options.

Second, we recommend a complete overhaul of the website’s navigation system in line with the new structure described above. From the new sitemap, we have derived a new primary navigation menu shown in the prototype that reflects the deeper hierarchy of content while simplifying the labeling system across the website. The reorganized labeling should make navigation easier for the user and is representative of the content, comprehensive, and consistent.

Other recommendations include adding breadcrumbs on every page to help users better identify their location within the site and their position within its organizational structure, as well as the addition of a search box (all shown in the prototype wireframes). Further, we suggest placing content, such as specific product information and discussions, on individual product pages. It is also imperative that related content be consolidated into one location and that all duplication be eliminated. We also recommend that ETG create additional content to fill the gaps identified in the analysis of the content audit.

For posterity, the AGG Team recommends making the the sitemap accessible to users to provide them with yet another way to browse the site and its organizational hierarchy. Very importantly, we also suggest the integration of faceted search and / or filtered search as such tools will greatly reduce the time needed for a user to browse ETG. To facilitate this, we have already ensured that each toy or item has its own product page. Future work should include tagging each product item according to a comprehensive metadata scheme including recommended age, learning skill, type of play, brand, and other fields yet to be determined. This metadata will also allow for secondary navigation schemes that would complement the primary one (by age) and help ETG expand in an organized fashion. Subsequent updates should then follow the metadata scheme.
Once the new site has launched, we strongly recommend follow-up user research. Within the month of release, the AGG team will be available to conduct an evaluation of navigation via user interview / testing and comparison to previous iterations. In addition, we would set up a reliable method by which users of the site could communicate with us and report any issues that they are having navigating the site or completing a task such as finding a given product. Finally, we also suggest that ETG gather data on site usage; this information can highlight where users might be experiencing difficulties on the site and provides a great base for future comparisons. Note, however, that user research should be an ongoing affair through the lifetime of the site to ensure that we have satisfactorily restructured the site, simplified the navigation, and given users better opportunities of discovery within ETG. In the event of user difficulties, the AGG team will create a revised prototype based on the new findings and then once again submit this new model to user testing.

It is our belief that the designs and recommendations put forth in this report meet our key IA objectives of clarity, learnability and findability. The structure we are proposing supports the site’s primary mission of educating users and helping them select appropriate toys for a child. By meeting these objectives, we are confident that this redesign will help draw more visitors to the ETG site, that these visitors will stay on the site longer, and that they will return to the site again and again to meet their informational needs about educational toys. Our recommendations for the future are focused on growth and ensuring that ETG can adapt and expand in a continued effort to meet the ever-evolving needs of its users; the proposed structure can well support the addition of new content without necessitating any major changes to the organization, navigation or labeling systems of the site. Continued dialogue with users of the site will allow ETG to quickly identify trouble spots and take action to remedy these. Excellent user experience begins with an open mind, a curious spirit and a willingness to make changes. Thank you for sharing your journey with the AGG team and we look forward to working with you in the future as ETG grows and prospers.