



Flights With Friends

Trip Planning meets Social Media

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Project Scope

- Form a team with 3 other students.
- Imagine that the creators of the “Flights With Friends” website has asked the team to help evaluate the usability of their website.
- Focusing on **evaluation methods**, perform the following phases:
 1. Perform a detailed evaluation of the site.
 2. Identify top areas of concern.
 3. Implement a usability test with sample users.

Phase 1: Detailed Evaluation

What is (was) “Flights With Friends?”

The (now defunct) “Flights With Friends” website allowed any number of travellers to plan trips by collaborating online. Friends look up flight and hotel information, while chatting instantly with each other about the plans.

The screenshot displays the "Flights With Friends" website interface for a trip titled "Our New York City Trip". The top navigation bar includes the user's name "Todd Astroth" and links for "My Trips", "Contact Us", and "Sign Out".

Left Sidebar:

- To Do List:** A checklist with items: "Start planning your trip" (checked), "Decide who's coming", "Invite friends", "Vote on the best flights", "Vote for hotels you like", and "Book flights & hotels". Below the list is a text input field "We should..." and an "Add" button.
- Multiple Cities?:** A section with the text "Add as many searches as you need to round out your trip." and two buttons: "Add Flight Search" and "Add Hotel Search".

Main Content Area:

- New York flights:** A section with a dropdown menu set to "Anytime". Below it is a map showing a flight route from MDW to JFK, labeled "MDW → JFK ROUNDTRIP", with dates "10 MON FEB" and "17 MON FEB". A user profile for "Todd Astroth" is shown below the map.
- Saint Louis hotels:** A section with a date range "13 TUE JAN" to "16 FRI JAN" for "Saint Louis". Below it is a "Show hotels" button and a link "Add friend to search".

Right Sidebar:

- Friends:** A list of friends including "Todd Astroth" (MDW) and "Sally Benson" (MDW). There is a "Reinvite" button next to Sally Benson and an "Add Friend" button at the bottom.
- Messages:** A section with a chat bubble that says "Have a question? We'd love to help. invite us to chat anytime." and a button "Chat with Kyle and Arthur". Below this is a "Flights With Friends" section showing a list of trip updates: "Todd A. added a hotel search New York, NY, US, Feb 10 - Feb 17", "Todd A. added a roundtrip flight search MDW-JFK, Feb 10 - Feb 17", "Todd A. added Angus to the trip", "Todd A. added a roundtrip flight search BOS-JFK, Feb 10 - Feb 17", "Todd A. added a hotel search in Saint Louis, MO, US, Jan 13 - Jan 16", "Todd A. added Sally Benson to the trip", and "Todd A. removed Angus from the trip".

Phase 1: Detailed Evaluation

Heuristic Evaluation

Each team member tested the basic functionality of the *Flights With Friends* website, with the following 10 heuristics (guidelines) in mind:

1. Visibility of system status
2. Match between system and real world
3. User control and freedom
4. Consistency and standards
5. Error prevention
6. Recognition rather than recall
7. Flexibility and efficiency of use
8. Aesthetic and minimalist design
9. Help with errors
10. Provide help if needed

Phase 1: Detailed Evaluation

Cognitive Walkthrough

The team also performed an in-depth cognitive walkthrough of 5 basic tasks within *Flights With Friends*.

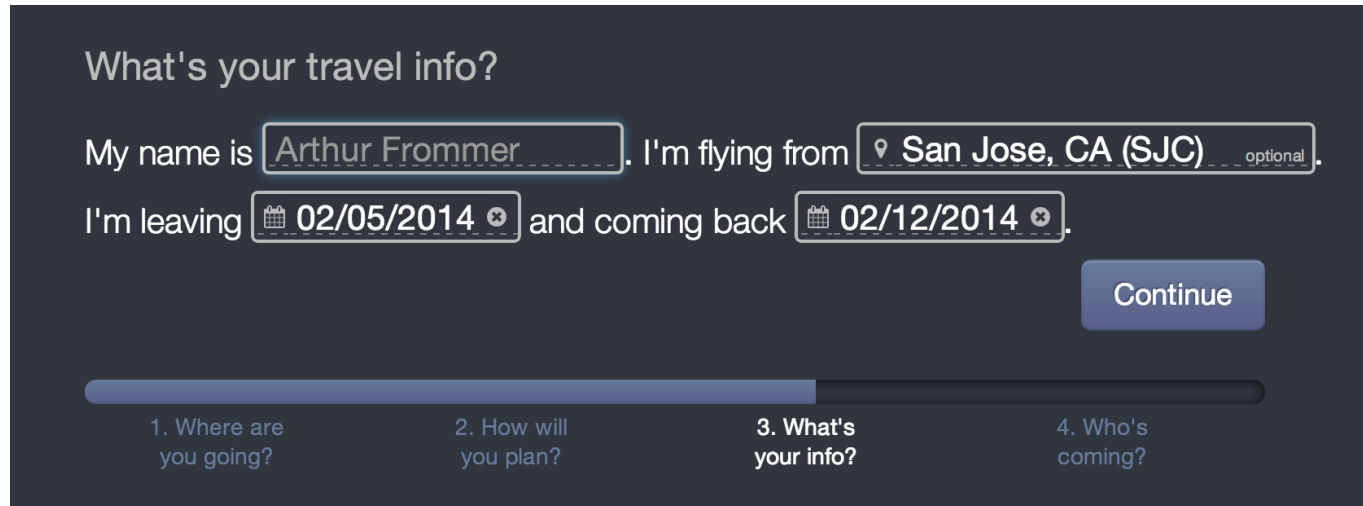
On each step of the task, the following 4 questions were asked:

1. Will users try to produce whatever effect the action has?
2. Will users see the control (button, switch, etc) for the action?
3. Once users find the control, will they recognize that it produces the desired effect?
4. After the action is taken, will users understand the feedback they get so that they can proceed to the next action with confidence?

Phase 2: Identify Areas of Concern

Issue #1: Pre-filled form assumes too much

When creating a new trip, the website automatically fills “dummy data” into the fields, as shown in the screenshot below. This may lead users to skip this step, mistakenly thinking the data is correct and ready to go.



The screenshot shows a travel planning interface with the heading "What's your travel info?". It contains several input fields with pre-filled text: "My name is Arthur Frommer", "I'm flying from San Jose, CA (SJC) optional", "I'm leaving 02/05/2014", and "and coming back 02/12/2014". A "Continue" button is located to the right of the date fields. At the bottom, a progress bar shows four steps: "1. Where are you going?", "2. How will you plan?", "3. What's your info?", and "4. Who's coming?". The third step, "3. What's your info?", is currently selected and highlighted.

Recommendation: leave the fields blank, or insert gray “helper text” in the fields such as “Your name here” and “Departure date.”

Phase 2: Identify Areas of Concern

Issue #2: Unclear navigation to add friends

When creating a trip, it is unclear how to proceed when the user only has one friend to add to the trip. As you can see in the screenshot below, the two options are “Skip” and “Add Another Friend.” If one is to click “Skip”, does that mean that this entire step will be skipped?

The screenshot shows a dark-themed form titled "Who's coming?". It contains the following elements:

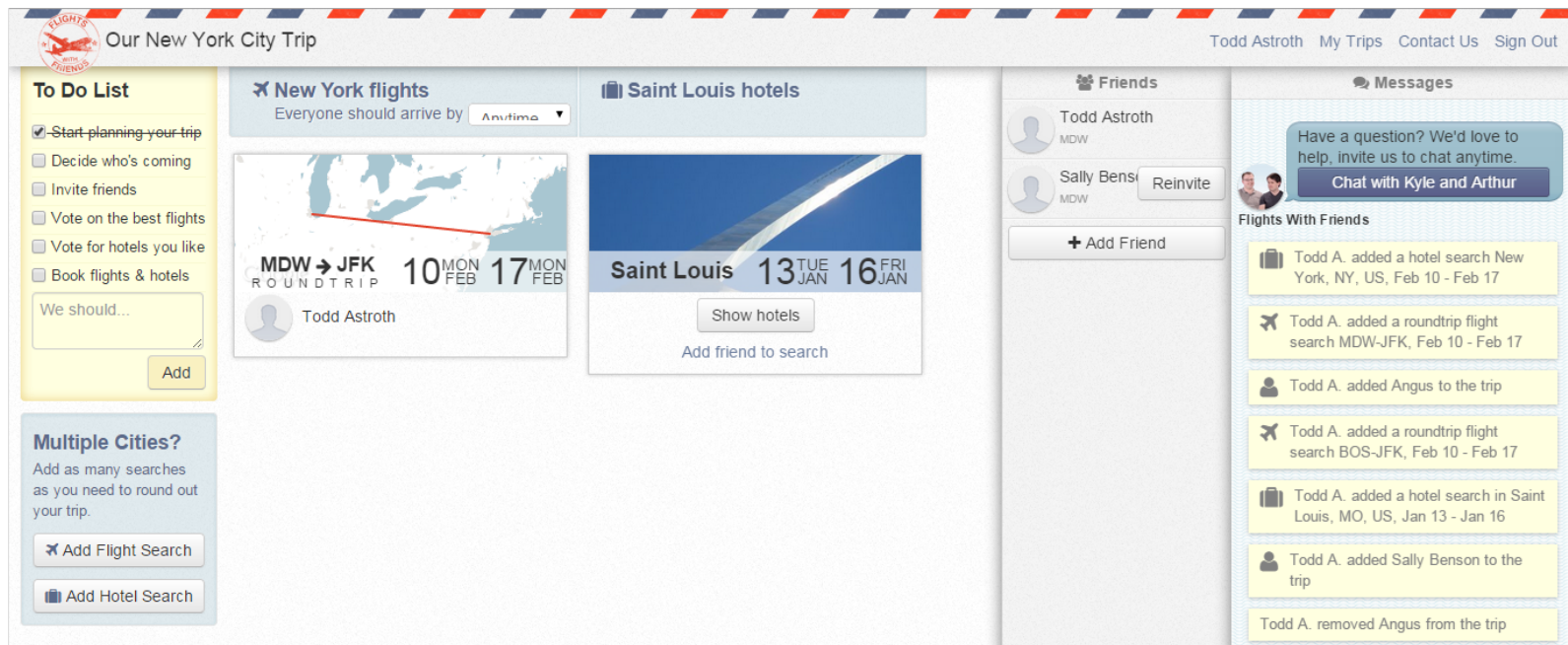
- A text input field for "My friend" with the placeholder "name".
- A text input field for "is flying from" with the placeholder "SJC" and a location pin icon. A small "optional" label is to the right.
- Two date pickers: "They're leaving" with the date "02/05/2014" and "and coming back" with the date "02/12/2014".
- A small note: "If you don't know your friend's dates or airports they can enter it themselves."
- Two buttons: a light gray "Skip" button and a blue "Add Another Friend" button with a group of people icon.
- A progress bar at the bottom with four steps: "1. Where are you going?", "2. How will you plan?", "3. What's your info?", and "4. Who's coming?". The fourth step is currently active.

Recommendation: Change the options to “Add Another Friend” (creates more fields on the form) and “Continue” (go to next step).

Phase 2: Identify Areas of Concern

Issue #3: Unclear what to do after setting up a trip

After a controlled Wizard-like setup process, the user arrives at the screen below. Suddenly the user is “left to fend for themselves.”

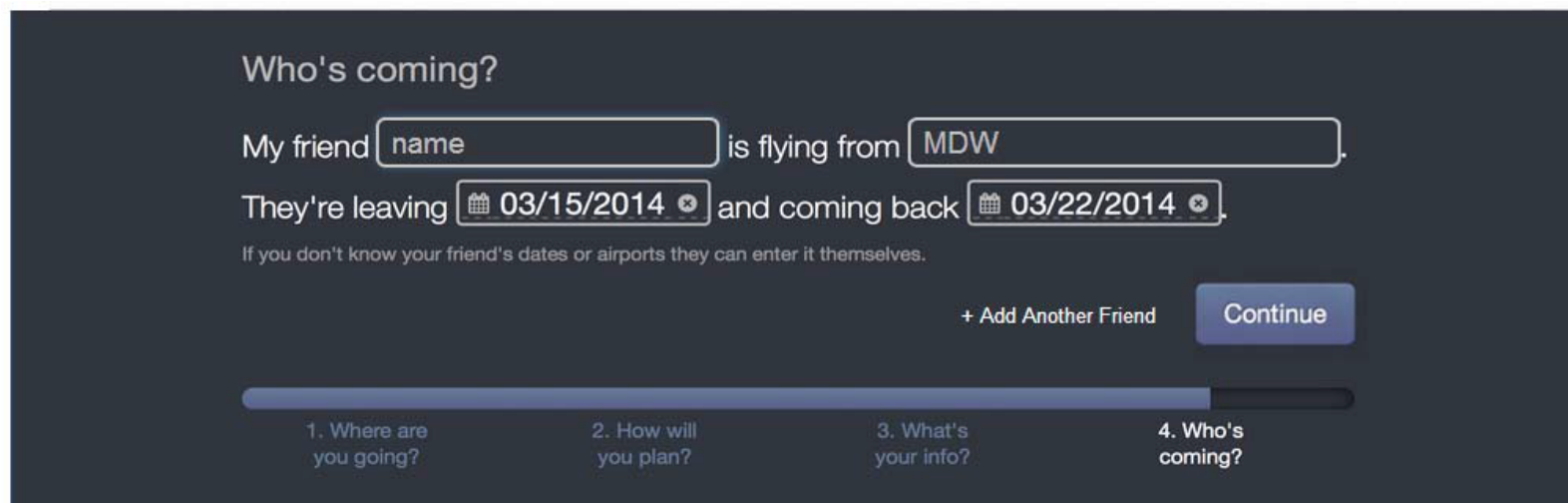


Recommendation: Include a quick tour of this screen after setup. Also, a “progress bar” could be added to the page to show the user’s place in the trip creation process.

Phase 3: Usability Testing

Prepare for Usability (A/B) Testing

The team re-created a clickable prototype of the “add a trip” wizard. However, we made one key difference, which is shown in the screen below: Step 4 now displays “Add Another Friend” and “Continue” instead of the existing buttons.



Who's coming?

My friend is flying from .

They're leaving and coming back .

If you don't know your friend's dates or airports they can enter it themselves.

[+ Add Another Friend](#) [Continue](#)

Progress bar: 1. Where are you going? 2. How will you plan? 3. What's your info? 4. Who's coming? (Current step)

Phase 3: Usability Testing

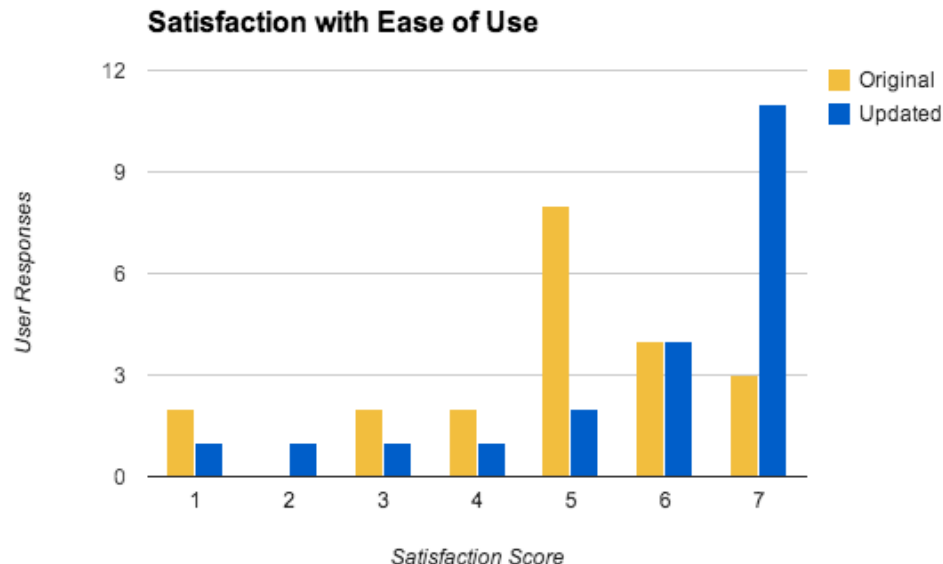
Format of the Usability Test

- The goal was to have participants run through the “add a new trip” wizard using BOTH the existing website and our revised prototype.
- We tested 21 participants. Half of the users were given the existing website first then the prototype, and vice versa (without divulging this information to the participants).
- The participants were then given a survey, comparing their experiences with both designs.
 - *Overall, I am satisfied with the ease of completing the tasks in this scenario.*
 - *Overall, I am satisfied with the amount of time it took to complete the tasks in this scenario.*
 - *Overall, I am satisfied with the support information (online-line help, messages, documentation) when completing the tasks.*

Phase 3: Usability Testing

Usability Test Results

Users were asked to rate their satisfaction with both the original and updated designs. Our results, shown in the graph below, indicate that 11 out of 20 users were “strongly satisfied” with the updated design. Meanwhile, 8 were only “moderately satisfied” with original design.



Conclusions

- Our team identified several areas of concern via heuristic evaluation and cognitive walkthrough, including:
 - A pre-filled form assumes too much.
 - The navigation to add friends to a trip is unclear.
 - It is unclear what to do after setting up a trip.
- We verified via Usability Testing that tweaking the navigation when adding friends to a trip would benefit the *Flights With Friends* website.