

Competitive Analysis

Carnation City Mall

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Summary

This analysis examines web site best practices and conventions in order to make recommendations for the Carnation City Mall web site. Carnation City Mall will use these key findings in an upcoming site redesign. The entities/web sites chosen to be analyzed follow.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| » Belden Village | Enclosed shopping mall, Canton, OH |
| » Summit Mall | Enclosed shopping mall, Fairlawn, OH |
| » Easton Town Center | Outdoor lifestyle center, Columbus, OH |
| » Chapel Hill Mall | Enclosed shopping mall, Akron, OH |
| » Prime Outlets | Open-air outlet mall, Grove City, PA |
| » Grinders | Local restaurant chain, Alliance, OH |
| » Master Cuts | Hair style chain, Alliance, OH |
| » The Cleveland Museum of Art | Museum, Cleveland, OH |

A wide range of competitors were analyzed based on standard criteria.

When selecting competitors, the goal was to include a wide selection of shopping malls, including outlets, low-end and high-end malls and open-air lifestyle centers. Additionally, **destination locations** were included that might have similar navigational needs to a mall. These specific features were analyzed:

- » Business Environment
- » Client Demographics
- » Organization Systems and Size
- » Labeling
- » Navigation
- » Search systems

Following the analysis, these recommendations were made.

- » **Reduce** the number of pages, whether the organization is small or large.
- » **Organize by topic.** Stay consistent in labels and do not combine unlike labels.
- » **Display the most popular brands** on the site's home page to promote retailers.
- » **Include separate pages for each retailer** with a photo, hours and specials.
- » **Allow browsing the mall directory** by both category and in alphabetical order.
- » **Make labels consistent**, whether on the navigation, heading or title bar label. Creative labels are fine.
- » **Expand the search features** to be as accurate and inclusive as possible.
- » **Allow users to download a PDF map** of the mall.
- » **Include links to Social Networking** pages or, better yet, embed a live feed.
- » **Include a logo** in the top left corner. Be sure it links to the site home page.

The key findings were separated by category.

Category	Finding
Business Environment	Premium retailer's sales have declined, while mid-priced stores are flourishing. Retail rent has dropped, providing more opportunities for regional and local tenants in malls. Source: Wall Street Journal, 04 September 2009.
Client Demographics	Carnation City Mall attracts patrons with an average income, similar to Chapel Hill Mall, while Belden Village and Easton Town Center focus on high-end products. Their audiences care about value vs. luxury.
Site Organization	Most mall sites are organized by topic and include store directories organized by category and in alphabetical order.
Labeling	Common labels were Home, Stores, Events, Gift Cards and Guest Services. Consistent labels are important in maintaining flow and organization.
Navigation	Single level, horizontal navigation was most commonly used, and a static PDF was used for mall map navigation.
Search systems	Search systems across the sites appeared to be inaccurate. Advanced search systems included products and graphics in the search results.

Organization Systems and Size

Organization schemes, structures and sizes were compared.

	Carnation City	Belden Village	Summit Mall	Easton	Chapel Hill	Prime Outlets	Grinders	Master Cuts	Cleveland Museum
Scheme	Topic	Alphabetical, Category, Task	Audience, Category, Alphabetical	Topic, Category	Topic, Alphabetical, Category	Topic, Category	Topic, Category	Topic	Task, topic
Structure	Hypertext	Hierarchical	Hypertext	Hypertext, Database	Hierarchical and Hypertext	Hypertext	Hierarchical and Hypertext	Hypertext	Hierarchical, Database
Size	Small	Medium	Medium	Large	Medium	Small	Small	Small	Large

Generally, the web sites were organized by topic, with store directories organized by category or in alphabetical order.

- » Most sites are **organized by topic**, such as Stores, Dining and Directions
- » **Store directories** are commonly organized by both store category and alphabetical order
- » Most directories include a **separate page** with a photo, hours and specials for each tenant
- » Most organization structures are **hypertext based** and do not go more than one level. Mall sites with hierarchical structures and many separate pages were difficult to navigate.
- » Summit Mall was the only site to organize by audience, including **Shoppers and Businesses**. This strategy may be helpful in eliminating extraneous information for each audience.

Labeling

These are the most common top-level navigation labels and variations.

Main Meaning	Variations
Home	Mall Home, Logo
Stores	Our Stores, Shopping, Store Directory
Jobs	Employment, Careers
Gift Cards	Gift Cards & Gift Accounts
Events	Offers & Events, Mall Events & Programs, Sales & Events
Guest Services	Services, Guest Services & Contact Us, Contact Us, Visitor Services
Offers	Coupons & Offers, Savings & Rewards, Offers & Events, Specials

The sites home pages had some common labels.

- » Join our e-mail list/newsletter
- » Browse our store directory
- » Mall contact information and hours
- » Mall News and Events

Service-based menus were also used.

- » Leasing information
- » Tourism
- » Contact Us
- » Get Directions

Labels should remain consistent and promote the brand.

- » **Navigation labels, headings and title bar labels were inconsistent** on the majority of sites
- » Easton Town Center used **creative heading labels** such as Shop Till You...Well, You Know. The consistency of the creative labels, combined with Easton's brand made this work
- » Prime Outlets used **Our Top 10 Brands** in the footer to promote its most popular stores
- » A few malls promoted **links to their Twitter and Facebook pages**, using the logo of each. The Cleveland Museum of Art linked to its WordPress blog.

Navigation Types and Structures

Main navigation systems were compared across each site.

	Carnation City	Belden Village	Summit Mall	Easton	Chapel Hill	Prime Outlets	Grinders	Master Cuts	Cleveland Museum
Global	Vertical	Horizontal	Horizontal	Horizontal	Horizontal with drop down menus	Vertical (left)	Vertical (left)	Horizontal	Vertical (left) with rollover
Persistent	-	Parent Company Services (top right)	Parent Company Services (top right)	Parent Company Services (top right)	Parent Company Services (bottom)	Parent Company Services (top)	Services (top)	-	-
Local	-	Inverted L	Contextual	Contextual	-	Contextual	Tree-based (left)	Contextual	Tree-based
Supplementary	Site map	Site map	-	-	Store listing (left side)	Store listing (bottom)	-	-	-
Footer	-	Terms of Use	Site Map	Site Map	Terms of Use	Terms of Use	Site Map	Terms of Use	Terms of Use
Other	-	Social Networking	Breadcrumbs, Tabs, Social Networking	Pull down menus, breadcrumbs, flash-based map	-	Find an Outlet (pull down menu)	Social Networking	-	Social Networking (as icons)

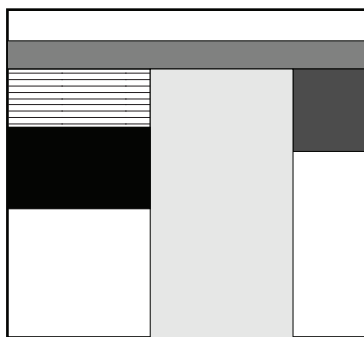
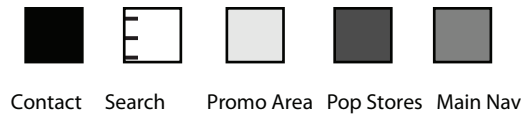
Generally, single-level navigation systems with links to popular retailers work best.

- » **Horizontal global navigation** was the most popular method. If there was more than one level or hierarchy, drop down menus were used.
- » Most malls owned by a parent company included a **persistent navigation element** on the top right of the web page with links specific to the company
- » **Footer navigation** showed a top level view of the global navigation
- » Most sites **did not use bread crumb navigation** due to their simple structures
- » **Supplementary and contextual navigation** were included in the Chapel Hill and Summit Mall sites, providing quick links to the most popular retailers. Summit Mall allows users to navigate by retailer logo.
- » Display of mall maps varied. **Static PDF files** of the maps were the most common. Easton Town Center used an interactive, Flash-based map. It did not give an alternative for users who did not have the Flash plugin installed.

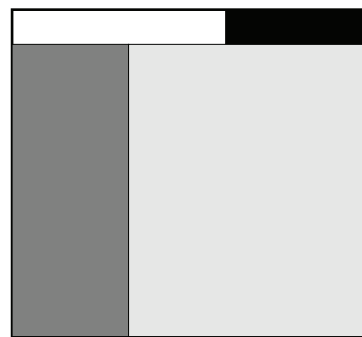
Small Multiples

Small multiples show a thumbnail comparison of each mall site.

The renderings below show the location of the Main Navigation, Promo Area, Popular Stores, Search, and Mall Contact Information.



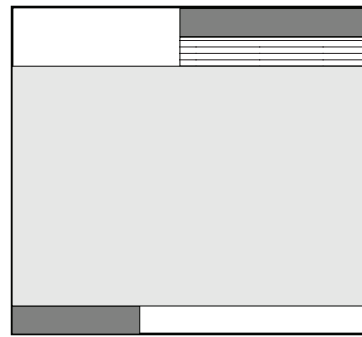
Belden Village



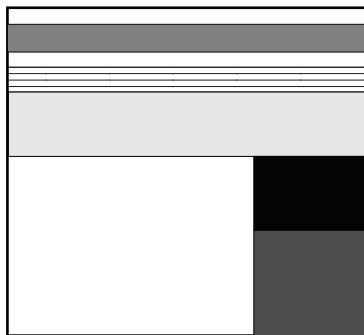
Carnation City



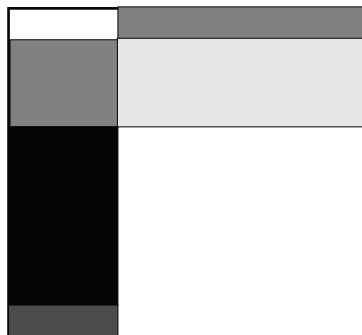
Chapel Hill



Easton Town Center



Summit Mall



Prime Outlets

Search Features

Systems were compared using industry search standards.

	Carnation City	Belden Village	Summit Mall	Easton	Chapel Hill	Prime Outlets	Grinders	Master Cuts	Cleveland Museum
Optimized “no results” page	N/A	YES	YES	NO	NO	N/A	N/A	N/A	YES
Clustered Search	N/A	YES	NO	NO	NO	N/A	N/A	N/A	NO
Query term highlighted	N/A	NO	NO	NO	NO	N/A	N/A	N/A	NO
Query term restated	N/A	YES	NO	YES	YES	N/A	N/A	N/A	YES
Visible	N/A	YES	YES	YES	NO	N/A	N/A	N/A	YES
Accurate	N/A	YES	NO	NO	NO	N/A	N/A	N/A	YES
Advanced Search	N/A	YES	YES	YES	NO	N/A	N/A	N/A	YES

Create an innovative and accurate search system.

- » Search systems across all the sites compared were **not optimal**. A few did not include search.
- » **Auto Suggest** features as soon as the user begins typing was helpful
- » Most search systems **did not correct spelling mistakes**
- » Easton Town Center included **store logos and descriptions on the results page**.
- » Belden Village included the most advanced search system. It searched the **inventories of every retailer** when searching for a product.
- » The most prominent search fields appeared **underneath the main navigation** and included the word Search
- » These sites may have **eliminated search** because of their small size

Conclusion

The competitive analysis provides **best practice** conventions to follow, as well as potential **pitfalls** to avoid. These recommendations, combined with additional blueprints and wireframes, will become the basis of a strategy document for the Carnation City Mall web site redesign.