



MANDY
DiMartino

Information Architect

91 Sawmill Road Brick, NJ 08724
Mandy.DiMartino@gmail.com
732.682.8434

April 1, 2009

Michele VanHecke
Sacred Earth Jewelry
PO Box 86
El Verano, CA
95433

Subject: Analysis and Recommendation Report for Sacred Earth Jewelry

Dear Ms. VanHecke:

I am delighted to present you with the attached analysis with recommendations for your website www.handmade-beaded-gemstone-jewelry.com. With the information contained in the report, we can make Sacred Earth Jewelry's shopping bag abandonment percentage drop dramatically. We can also build a base of loyal customers who will return to your site to make additional purchases and even recommend you to their friends.

Thank you for the opportunity to work with the wonderful staff at Sacred Earth Jewelry. If you need additional information or have any questions, please feel free to call or email.

Sincerely,

Mandy DiMartino
Information Architect

/md

Enclosure: Information Architecture Report for Sacred Earth Jewelry

Information Architecture Report for

Sacred Earth Jewelry



May 1, 2008

Prepared for
Michele Van Hecke

Prepared by
Mandy DiMartino





Executive Summary

This report for Sacred Earth Jewelry at www.handmade-beaded-gemstone-jewelry.com details changes and improvements we can make to the site structure and organization that will retain customers, attract new customers, reduce shopping bag abandonment, and ultimately increase sales.

A competitive analysis with Z Creations found that their site features a search box on all the pages while Sacred Earth Jewelry has no search at all. By adding a search box, as well as creating a more intuitive navigation, customers will enjoy visiting Sacred Earth Jewelry and buy the products. With a few tweaks with search engine optimization, Sacred Earth Jewelry's ranking in a search engine will go up, and more visitors will come to the site.

With improved information architecture, Sacred Earth Jewelry will be up to par with its competitors and will enjoy more customers and increased sales.

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Introduction

You contacted me because you saw many customers abandoning their shopping bags on your Web site, Sacred Earth Jewelry. The information contained within this analysis and recommendation report will help you not only cut the number of abandoned shopping bags, but also increase sales and returning customers.

With the recommended changes we seek to create a Web site that's enjoyable for the customer to browse. An enjoyable Web site includes logical labeling, a search feature, intuitive navigation, and plans for "page not found" and server errors.

By optimizing your site for search engines with metadata and a Sitemap, you will see an increase in traffic and ultimately, more sales. The goal of the search engine optimization is to get your Web site to appear on the first page of a jewelry key word search. Once on the site, customers will browse because the labeling and navigation makes it easy to find products.

Through all these changes and tweaks, Sacred Earth Jewelry will get customers that return to the site and even tell their friends about the site.

Site Assessment

You have stunning jewelry on your site but some of the architecture may hinder customers from finding products. The current navigation could be improved to help customers to find specific items. When the customer can't find a certain item, they usually will input a term into a search box, which Sacred Earth Jewelry currently lacks. Improved labels, a search feature, and better navigation will help users easily find a piece of jewelry they'll love. With these changes, your business will also look more trustworthy and professional.

Organize

Information Architecture experts Morville and Rosenfeld say that a Web site's organizational system should work best for the user (p. 58). Currently your Web site is organized by topic. This is a very good approach to organizing products. This organization system is what a customer will expect from a jewelry Web site. However, we could improve it by moving topics that don't relate to items for sale. For instance, you may need take out "Jewelry Care" out of the items for sale, but we can relocate it in the utility navigation. However, you could add an additional way to organize such as by color.

Label Wisely

Your customers must appreciate your sound advice on jewelry care. However, with improved labeling the customer would be able to find a section that relates to them. Labels can give an overview of a chunk of information. For instance, in your jewelry care article, you could add the labels storage, cleaning, and precautions. Baehr says, "Effective labeling often outlines content and functions available in the site, helping users understand both the structure and navigation choices on the site" (p. 92).

For each of your jewelry pieces could use more descriptive labels than the types of beads used. With names, you can use your creative license. People who buy your jewelry may not understand the significance of red Carnelian or Hill Tribe Silver. Your lovely jewelry deserves labels just as unique as each piece you create. For instance, your Hill Tribe Silver and Red Jade necklace could be labeled as "Aloha at Sunset." This label evokes emotion and will intrigue your customer.

Help Users Navigate

When users enter Sacred Earth Jewelry the first thing they decide is where to go. The first item in your current navigation is "home." However, the user is already on the homepage. To prevent confusion, we will remove the home button from the homepage.

The buttons in the navigation should be linear. Currently the first three after "home" go together – necklaces, bracelets, and earrings. We can also group your jewelry by color, as a user may be looking for jewelry to go with a particular outfit.

The policies, shipping, and contact information belong in the utility navigation to the

top right of your page near to the shopping cart link. Wodtke says, "When designing utility navigation, it's important that you separate it from the global navigation with both visual cues and physical location on the page" (pp. 210-211). The links in the utility navigation help your user with your site. By placing these topics out of the main global navigation, your customer will be able to browse your jewelry easily. If they would like to contact you, they will know to look in the utility navigation.

Help Users Search

There is no search tool that allows your customer to type in a search term such as "jade" or "anklet" and if your customer doesn't see what they want, they may just visit a competitor. By adding a search box, your user will not only find what they're looking for more easily, but they will have a better experience on your site which makes them more likely to return to buy something again.

Nix Pop-up Windows

Currently, when a user clicks on a product to see more information, it pops up in a new window. This practice hinders usability and may frustrate the customer. Your customer may try to use the back button within the new window and find they can't return to the previous page. I recommend that when a customer wants to view an item closer, you just send them to the page within the existing window.

Create a Tagline

Currently at the top of all of the pages of your Web site it says "Handmade gemstone jewelry, handmade beaded jewelry, handcrafted semi-precious jewelry, handmade necklaces, bracelets and earrings." Although this is good because it lists what you sell, perhaps we could condense it into a shorter and more interesting tagline. Krug says, "A tagline is pithy phrase that characterizes the whole enterprise, summing up what it is and what makes it great" (p. 103). A tagline should succinctly and interestingly state the purpose of your Web site and be placed at the top of each page. A possible tagline could be "Unique jewelry made from earth's beautiful treasures."

Competitive Analysis

The following competitive analysis compares your site with a competing site: www.zcreationsjewelry.com. Z Creations is also a small business run by a single jewelry artist named Valerie Z. Holstead. Much like you, Valerie hand beads all of her one of a kind necklaces, bracelets, and earrings using silver and gemstones.

To better your site, we will look at this competitor to identify aspects of your site that you've done effectively, and those that could use improvement. Through this evaluation, you may be able to gain insight into getting an edge over your competitor.

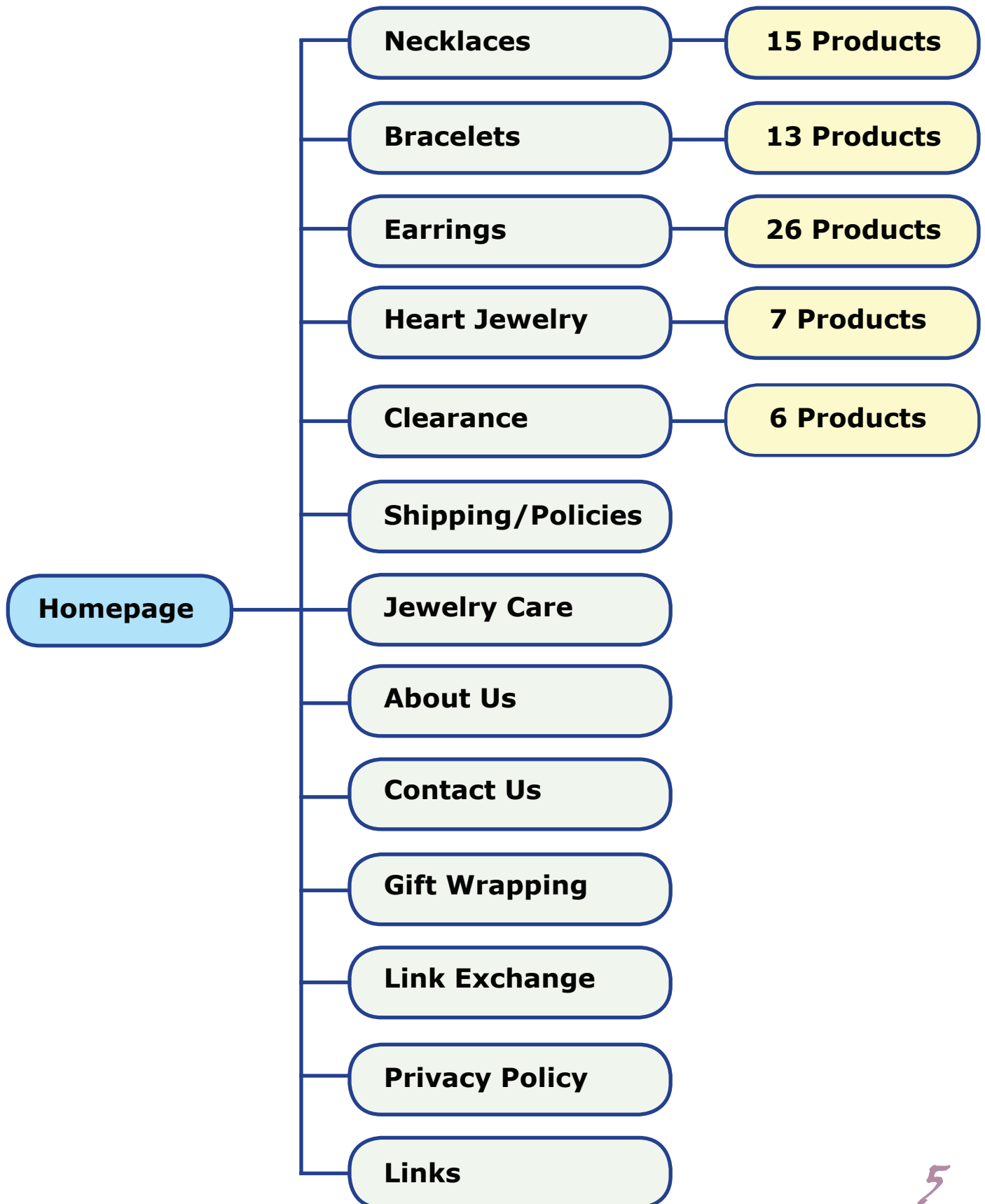
Sacred Earth Jewelry compared to Z Creations	Z Creations	Sacred Earth Jewelry
Homepage Organized, loads quickly, and provides valuable content	5	3
Ease of navigation Consistent navigation throughout	5	4
Site organization Organized logically and flows easily	5	4
Links and labels Self-explanatory and displays true content	5	5
Search engine Easily delivers relevant content	5	1
Readability Content is grouped clearly with consistent, professional, and easy to read text	4	3
Performance Pages load easily	5	5
Content Site gives true, relevant information	5	5

Figure 1

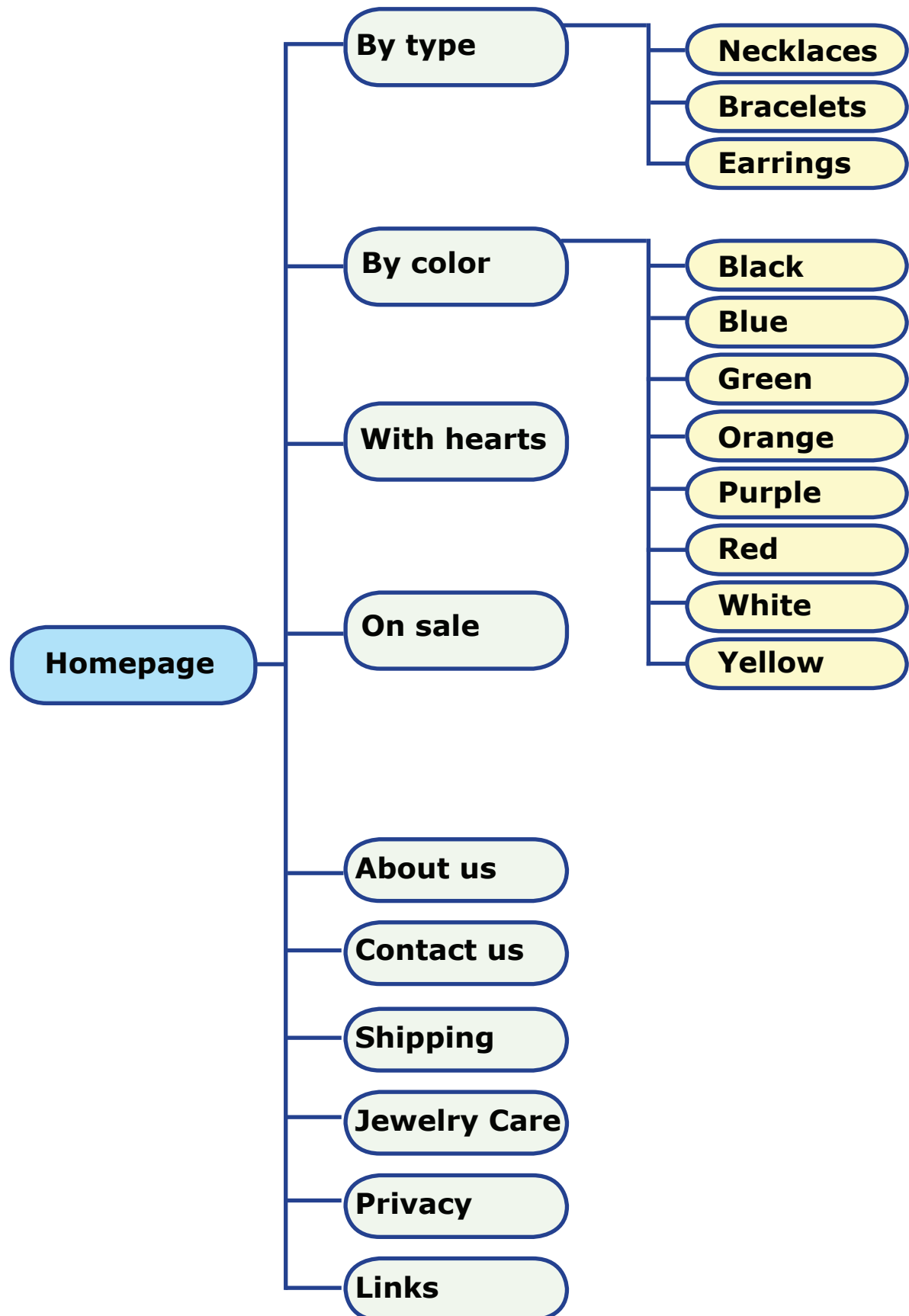
rating: 5 – excellent 4 – good 3 – average 2 – fair 1 – poor

Figure 1 compares Sacred Earth Jewelry to Z Creations in eight categories. The only category where Z creations did not score perfectly is readability because, like on Sacred Earth Jewelry, some text isn't broken into paragraphs with headings. Overall, Z Creations is a big competitor for Sacred Earth Jewelry. To keep up with this competitor, we will have to add a search box, redesign the homepage, break up text with headings, and improve navigation and organization.

Current Site Structure



Revised Site Structure



Persona *Paige Stevens*

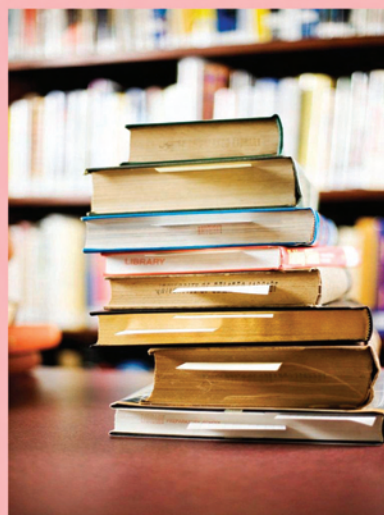


Age	22
Location	Philadelphia, PA
Status	Engaged
Occupation	Graduate student, part time tennis instructor
Education	BA, Sociology
TV	House, CSI, Medium, & A Wedding Story
Internet	Paige is very busy with planning her wedding and finishing up her degree. She spends a great deal of her time online researching her papers. She also visits theknot.com to keep up with other brides in the Philadelphia area. She is very proficient on the computer and knows how to find what she wants quickly. If the first site doesn't meet her needs, she moves on to the next.

Moodboard *Paige Stevens*



the knot

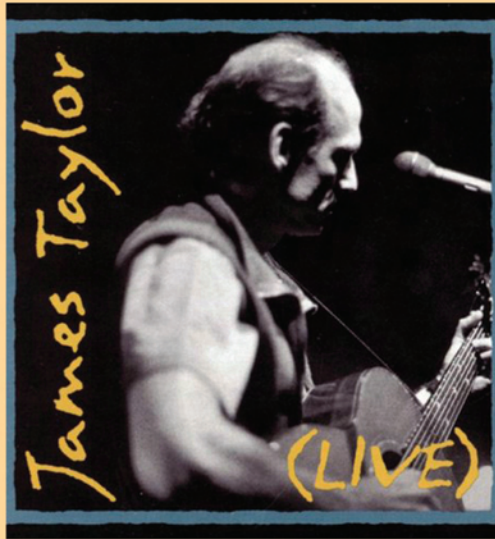


Persona Patricia Thomas

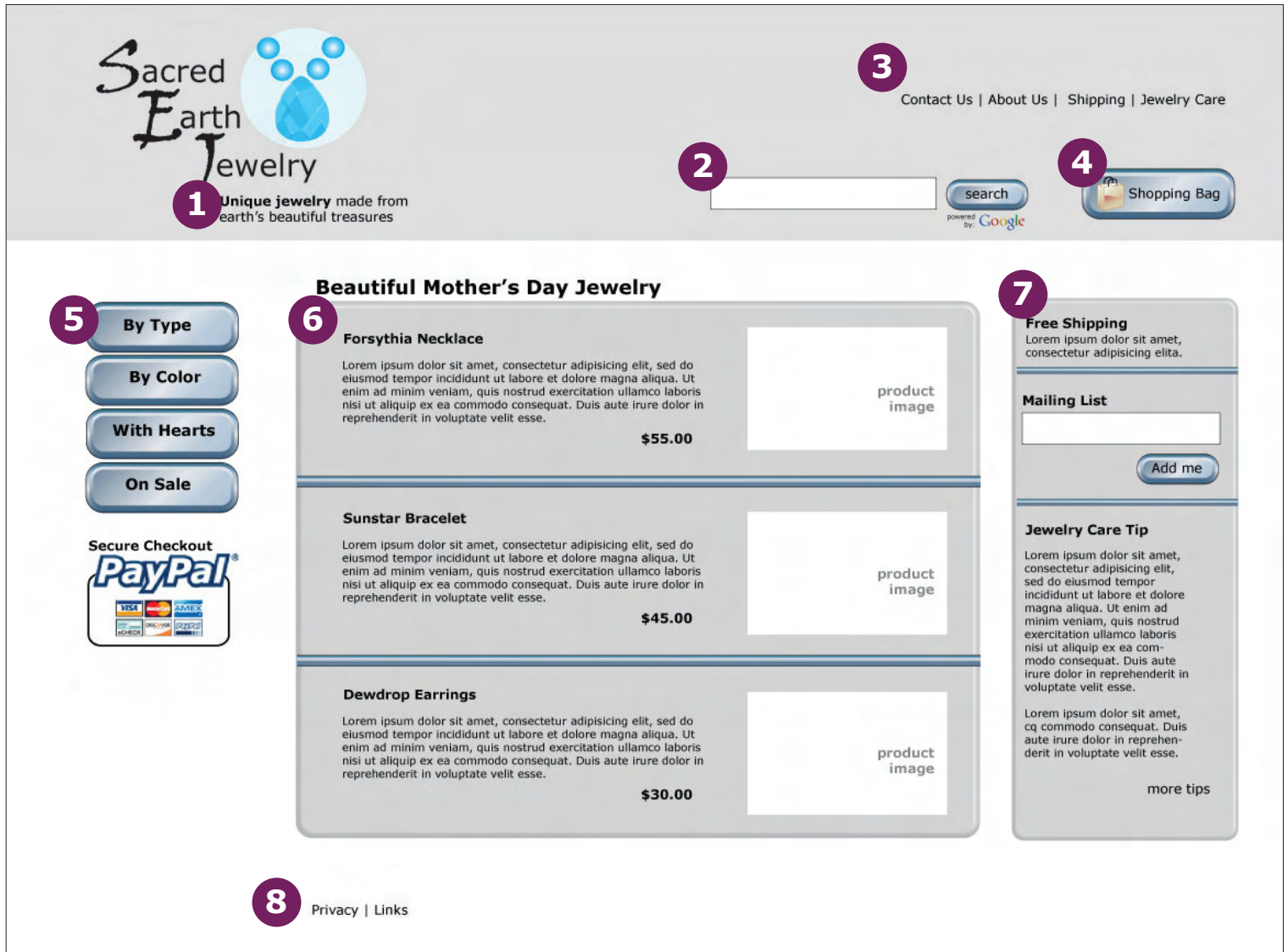


Age	52
Location	St John's, Newfoundland, CA
Status	Married
Occupation	Pediatric Nurse
Education	Bachelor of Science in Nursing
TV	Dancing ^{with the} Stars, Desperate Housewives, & Monk
Internet	Patricia loves the convenience of the computer, but doesn't understand how to do many things while online. She has an AOL account where she checks her email and browses Web sites. She likes to look up recipies and information about plants in her garden, but has never purchased anything online before.

Moodboard Patricia Thomas



Wireframe | Homepage



1 With a single glance, this tagline lets your user know what your site does.

2 The search box, powered by Google, is accessible from all your Web pages and helps the user find what they need quickly.

3 The utility navigation helps users accomplish tasks on your site.

4 A shopping bag button allows the user to view the contents of their shopping bag.

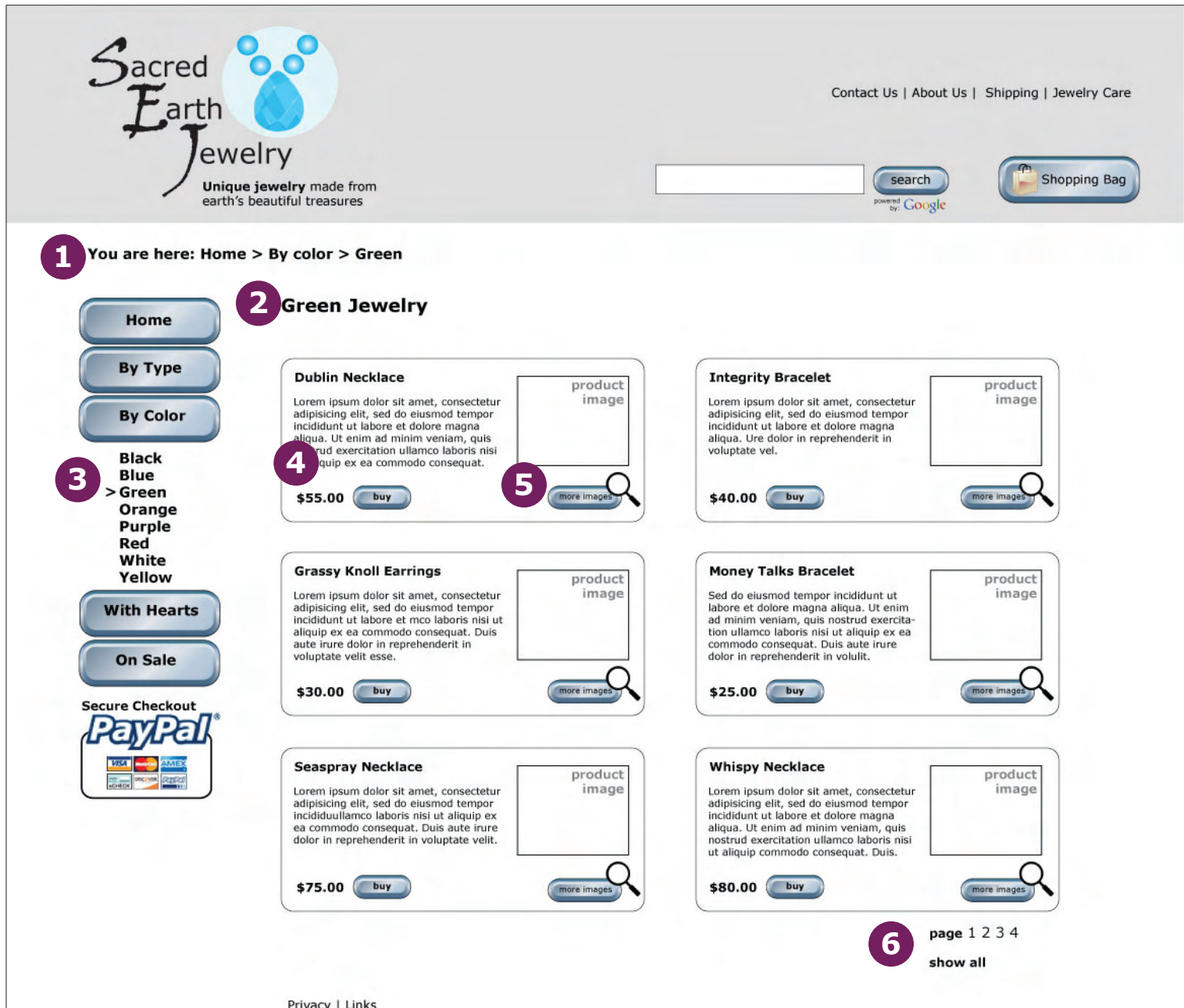
5 The global navigation allows users to browse by type or color or go straight to the heart or sale sections.

6 The homepage is a great place to highlight special items. You can use best-sellers, holiday-themed, or new items.

7 A mailing list sign-up promotions, and a tip of the day can also be featured on the homepage.

8 The privacy policy and links to other sites are found at the foot of the page.

Wireframe | Product Page



1 Breadcrumbs allow the user to see where they've been and where they are currently.

2 The title of the section precedes the product listings.

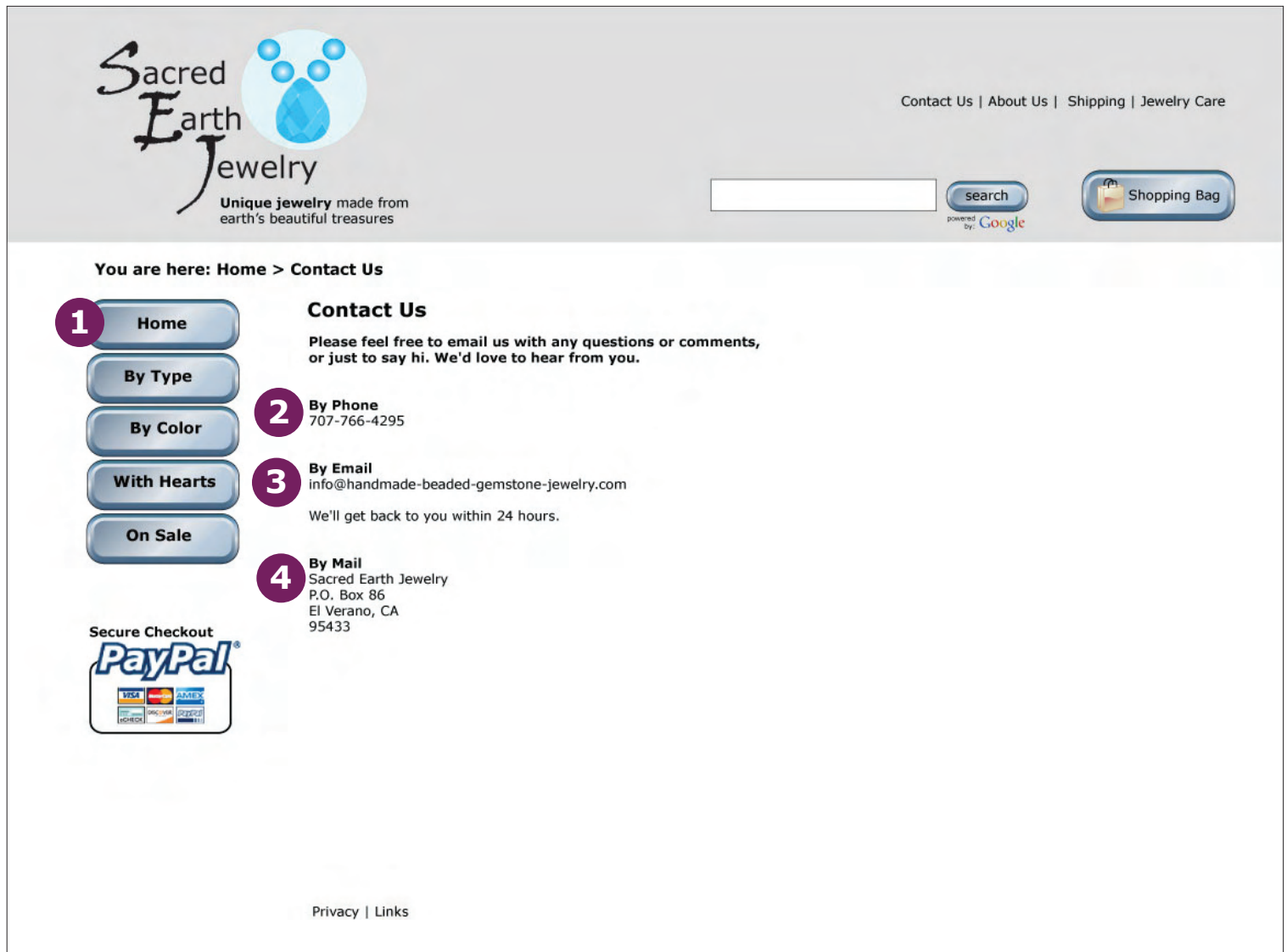
3 The local navigation lists all the product types in the section. Here, it's by color. The arrow indicates which section the user is in.

4 The "buy" button places the item in the user's shopping bag.

5 To see the product closer or to see additional images, the user can click "more images."

6 The user can continue on browsing to the next page, or choose to view all the items on one page.

Wireframe | Contact Us



- 1** The home button has been added to the navigation so when the user is away from the homepage, they can quickly get back.
- 2** The phone number for orders or questions.
- 3** The email for questions, states that you'll get back to them within 24 hours.
- 4** Mailing address for those who prefer sending a check.

Client Error

When a user tries to access a Web page that is not on your server, they get a code 404. This may happen when a user bookmarks a page that was deleted or moved or when they simply misspell the web address. Currently, Sacred Earth Jewelry gives "No such URL at this domain" and offers a button to the homepage. Although this is good handling of a client error, it could be improved by offering a search box in addition to a link to your homepage, shown in figure 2. Also note the header of the 404 page matches the rest of your site so the user knows they haven't left. The message is given in large enough font that the user won't overlook the key message and knows that something is wrong.

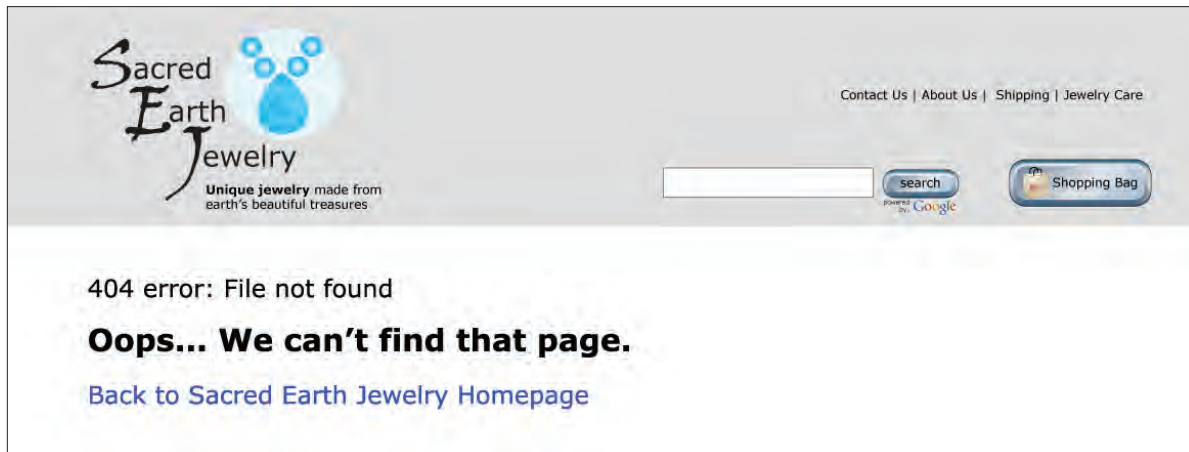


Figure 2. Sacred Earth Jewelry 404 error page

Server Error

Sometimes your server may be too busy and the user will get a server side 500 error. This may happen when too many people are making a purchase out at once. Like the 404 error, a server error page should show the same heading as the rest of your site but should also offer the user an alternate method of contacting you via phone or email regarding their order, as shown in figure 2. This ensures that they not only complete the transaction, but leave with a more positive opinion of your company.

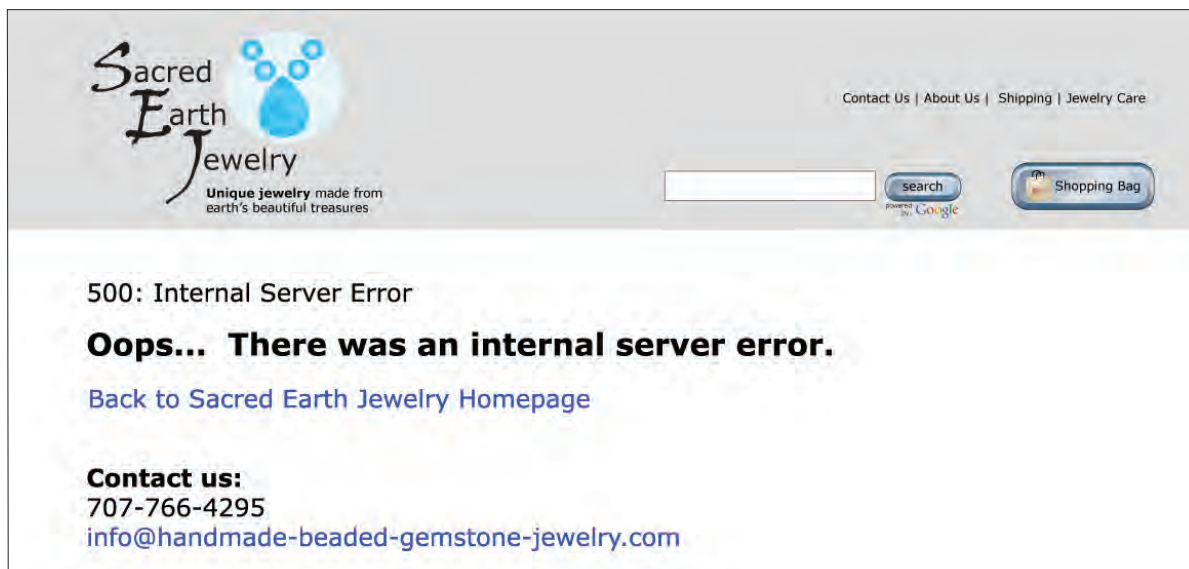


Figure 3. Sacred Earth Jewelry 500 error page

Google Analytics

To help better understand Sacred Earth Jewelry customers' thinking, sign up for Google Analytics (GA) at analytics.google.com. This service shows graphs and statistics about the Web site's visitors, as shown in figure 4. Through GA, we'll be able to identify pages that need tweaking or overhauling. We'll also be able to uncover the most visited pages, which may show that people view the Moroccan Flair bracelet is more than

the Seaside Bliss bracelet. From these statistics, we can determine which products to feature on your main page. Through GA we can also see which pages people are linking and bookmarking. When users click on a link in Sacred Earth Jewelry's email advertisement or newsletter, we'll be able to track how many visitors the email generated. GA's enlightening information enables you to create a Web site users want to visit over and over.

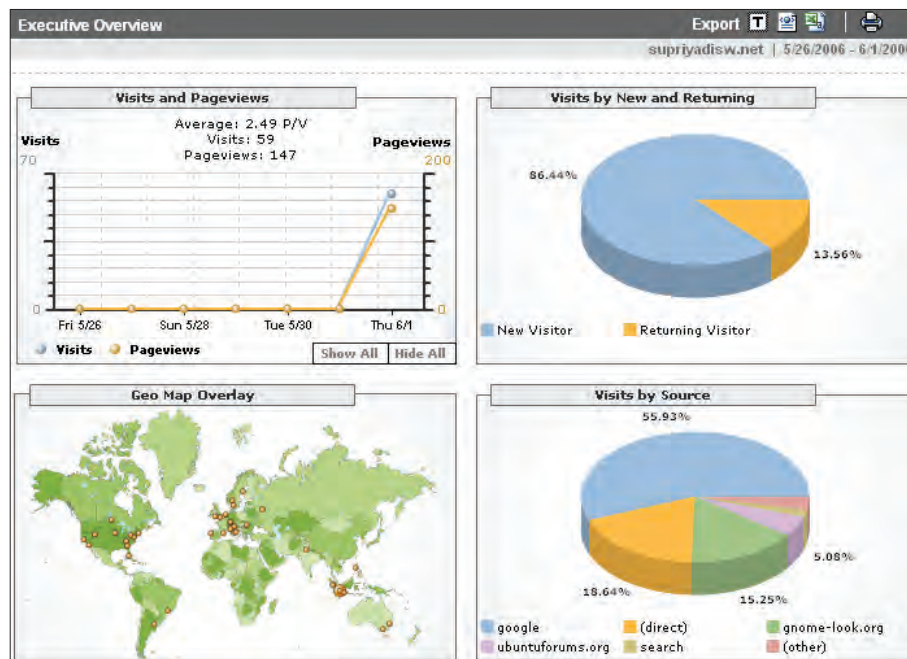


Figure 4. Google Analytics

Search Engine Optimization

When a customer types "beaded jewelry" into Google, they get over a million and a half entries, but they usually only visit the links on the first page. To get Sacred Earth Jewelry at the top of the results, we should do some search engine optimization. If your site even lands on the first page of "beaded jewelry" search results, you will see a noticeable increase in users as well as sales.

Sitemaps and Metadata

Search engines have "bots" that crawl the web collecting information about Web sites. With the information collected, the search engine can put search results in an order that is most helpful to the person searching. To help these bots rank your page, we should add a Sitemap and metadata to all your Web pages. A Sitemap, a one-page file that's only visible to bots, lists all the pages in a site and also includes additional information about each page such as when it was last updated, how often it changes, and its relationship to other pages in the site. Metadata is information within HTML tags of Web pages that lists any search words your customers use to find you. Metadata is also only seen by bots, not users. Some words you might want to include in your metadata are: beaded, bracelet, necklace, earrings, silver, and types of stones such as turquoise, jade, opal, amazonite, and malachite. By including a Sitemap and metadata, your ranking in a search will go up.

Databases

A database can help a business quickly update information. However, since your store is small-scale, you don't need one right now. If in the future you find yourself inundated with new products, it may be practical for you to have a database.

Usability Testing

Customers come to your site to find the perfect piece of jewelry. However, if they have a particular style in mind, like a turquoise necklace with bali beads, they may do everything to find it on your site. Some people search and browse patiently, while others who are more hotheaded may give up sooner and go elsewhere. To help you anticipate the ways your users will search for something on your site, you can perform usability testing. Usability testing helps you meet your user's needs and expectations of your site. Krug says, "Testing reminds you that not everyone thinks the way you do, knows what you know, uses the Web the way you do" (p. 134).

Although usability testing may sound expensive and too involved for your purposes, small business can get users' opinions without spending a lot of money. The findings of the testing can be enlightening and ultimately help your bottom line. The first step in conducting a usability test is to find participants. We would prefer the participant to be potential customers, but if we can't find any, any internet user would do.

In a card sort usability test, we'll write heading, categories, and sub-categories on numbered index cards. For example cards some card topics would be jewelry care, turquoise, bracelets, shopping bag, gift wrapping, and so on. We would then give the cards to a participant to sort into categories that they will label with a post-it note. This type of usability testing helps us shape Sacred Earth Jewelry's architecture to help the user find products and tools.

In a different kind of usability test, we'll ask each participant to sit down at a computer. With a small camcorder running, we'll ask the user to complete a task on your site, like check their order status. The way the user goes about completing the task may be surprising. You only have to test four users like this to get the results you need. After the first round of tests, we'll analyze the results and make the appropriate changes to the site. If necessary, we can test the Web site again.

By making it easy for users to find what they're looking for, they'll enjoy browsing Sacred Earth Jewelry and want to return. When you're ready to understand how your users think, there's no better way than usability testing.

Search

To serve customers better, we'll add a search box. A search box allows users to type in key words if they can't find what they're looking for within the global navigation. Since Sacred Earth Jewelry lacks a search box, the site isn't up to par with its competitor Z Creations. A search box can use the power of a large search engines to help your users find items just on your site. Google offers a good solution with Google Site Search. They charge \$100 per year for this service. Google also offers a free search box called Google Custom Search Engine. However, Google will display ads because this service is free. If you choose to pay for Google Site Search, no ads will display.

With either Google Search product, we can add a search box to the top right corner of every page in your website. This search box is shown in figure 5. Once the user inputs a search term, Google will display the matching results from your website, as shown in figure 6.



Figure 5. Google Site Search box on Sacred Earth Jewelry

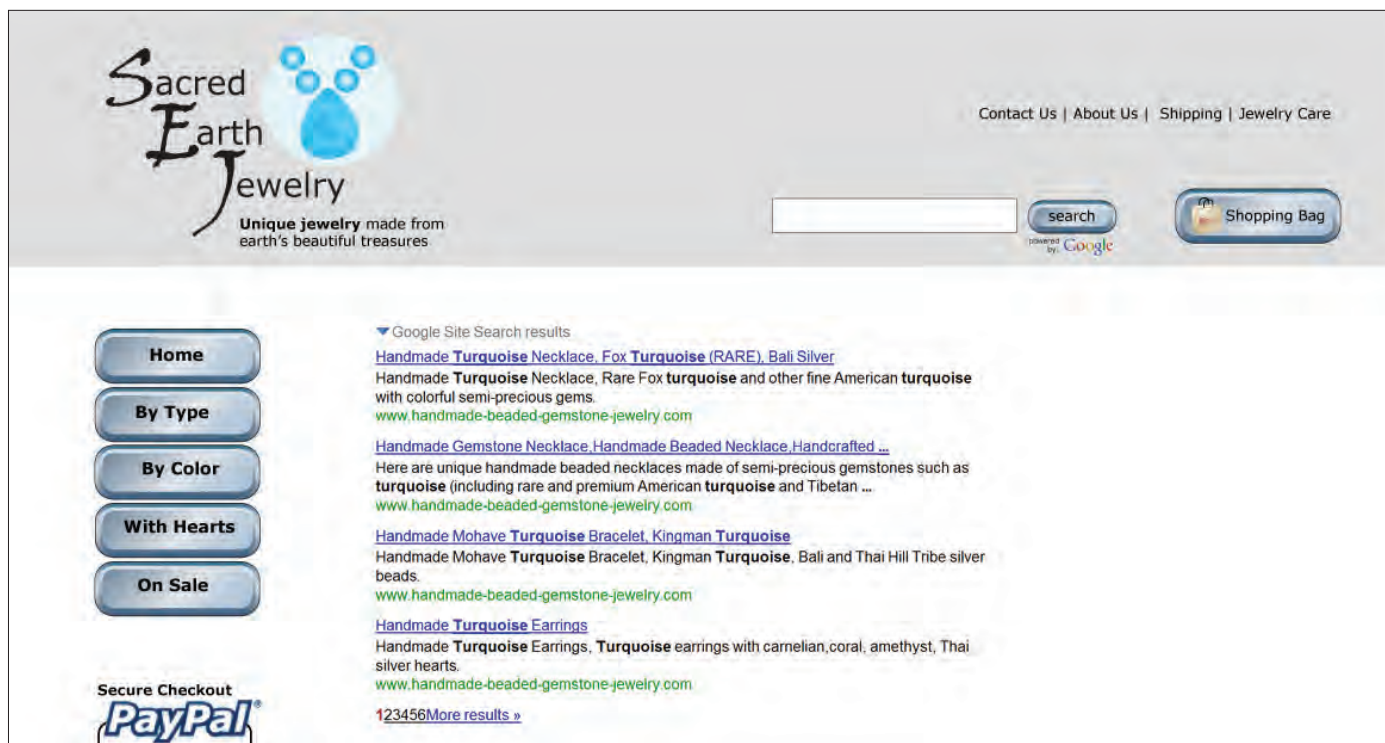


Figure 6. Google Site Search "turquoise" results

Navigation

One of the most important and valuable features of a good website is an effective navigation system. It helps users find things they are searching for. Good navigation allows users to quickly and easily identify the buttons and links that will take them to their desired destination. The links and buttons within your navigation should be consistent throughout your website. Also, the users should be able to clearly distinguish between elements of the website and parts of the navigation.

In figure 7, you can see the local navigation for the color section that breaks the jewelry into eight color categories. The customer will be able to quickly find all the jewelry that matches the dress they bought for that upcoming wedding. Or if the customer would like a bracelet, they can browse by type. This navigation allows the user to find a product easily without having to think too much.



Figure 7. Sacred Earth Jewelry navigation



Conclusion

I hope this report gave you great insight into Sacred Earth Jewelry's navigation, search, error handling, and even your customers. By implementing these information architecture recommendations to your Web site you will find fewer customers abandoning their shopping bags and more customers returning to buy your amazing jewelry.

Please contact me when you'd like to begin usability testing. I know where we can find helpful participants that are also online jewelry customers. A card sort usability test would be an insightful way to begin improving your site.



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