TAPinto Final Report

TAPinto
UX Research

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TAPinto

Company Description: TAPinto.net is a network of more than 95 independently owned and operated local news and digital marketing platforms in New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and Florida. Each site is franchised to a local owner/publisher providing original, objective, daily news reporting at the town/city level.

For this report, it will be focused on the Summit, NJ franchise of TAPinto

Website: https://www.tapinto.net/towns/summit

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Executive Summary

Executive Summary

The following report contains user experience research and analysis on the website design of TAPinto, a local news and digital marketing platform. Through a variety of methodologies, different aspects of the website's design we investigated to help inform future design changes.

While the current design is aligned with the company's values and business goals, users can struggle at times with their navigation throughout the website due to the large amount of options and information displayed at all times.

Methodologies

1. Competitor Analysis
2. Personas and Scenarios
3. Interview Study (Proposal)
4. Survey Study (Proposal)
5. Card Sorting Study
6. Diary Study (Proposal)
7. Heuristic Evaluation
8. Usability Testing Sessions and Analysis

TAPinto
Your Neighborhood News Online

Competitor Analysis

Competitor Analysis

	NJ.com	NY Post	The Patch	TAPinto
Unique Features	Weather advisory	Consistent formatting	Lists how many site visitors there have been in the last month at the top of the home page: 61,000	'Marketing', 'franchise', and 'submit content' sit at the top of the home page
Design Strength	Largest volume of articles on the home page and they include a 'latest' section that displays how long ago the article was published	4 articles and two advertisements are visible on the home page. Sleek, minimalistic, clear design	Individual articles are enclosed as a part of a simple design. Multiple font sizes are used to help properly move the reader's eye over each article	Distinctly categorized article. Large thumbnails
Design Weakness	Too many article selections at once, hard to tell what is most important	All of the article categories are hidden behind a tab that expands	Small thumbnails and the most prominent element on the homepage is an advertisement	Outdated & boring design. Formatting is inconsistent and the text is hard to read at times. Color selection clashes

Competitor Analysis

Core Features	NJ.com	NY Post	The Patch	TAPinto
Banner	yes	yes	yes	yes
Article Sections	yes	yes	yes	yes
Advertisement space	yes	yes	yes	yes
Cover Image & Thumbnail	yes	yes	yes	yes
Create account/ login	yes	yes	yes	yes
Paid Subscription	yes	yes	yes	no

Personas & Scenarios

Name: Mark
Role: Local Policeman

Demographics:
　　Gender: Male
　　Age: 38
　　Income: <100,000
Interests: Sports, politics, podcasts

Scenario: Mark has been a policeman for 10+ years and dreams of becoming the Chief of Police one day. All of his police work has driven him to be fascinated by local government. He grew up locally, has a lot of pride for the area, and wants to create a better future. Mark lives alone in a studio apartment in the same building as other officers on the force.

Name: Manny
Role: The High Schooler

Demographics:
    Gender: Male
    Age: 16
    Income: N/A
Interests: Hanging out with friends, video games, and finding ways to engage with his community outside of school

Scenario: Manny is focussed on getting into a good college through maintaining high grads and being engaged with extracurricular activities. He does not enjoy play sports, so finding ways to spend time outside of school and make new friends can be a challenge

Name: Mary
Role: Entrepreneur/Mother

Demographics:
 Gender: Female
 Age: 46
 Income: >100,000
Interests: Spending time with family, gardening, and working out

Scenario: Mary's primary goal is to raise a happy and healthy family. Outside of that, she wants to grow her local business, engage with her community, and pursue physical challenges such as marathons, hiking, and swimming. She lives in a townhouse with her husband, two children, and dog.

User Interview

Intro

My name is _____ and I am with _____. I appreciate you taking the time to share your experience with TAPInto.

Today, I will walk you through some questions about the TAPInto website. As a current user, we value your insight and personal experiences with our product. Our ultimate goal is to better understand our users' experiences through this interview and make improvements to the TAPInto website. Your honesty, whether positive or negative, is what is most valuable to us.

If you have any questions throughout the session, please ask them. If you no longer wish to participate, you can leave at any time.

Warm Up

Thank you again for joining us! Let's get to know you a little more before we dive into more specific questions:

Where are you from? And what experiences did you have with local news growing up?

Great! Do you have any questions before we move into the bulk of the interview?

Body

1. Think about your favorite news websites. What do you like about them?
    a. What features are most valuable to you?
    b. Are there any challenges you face?

2. Do you subscribe to any news services?
    a. If yes, what publishers

3. Why do you visit TAPInto?
    a. What reason is most important to you?

Body

4. How do advertisements impact your experience?
    a.   How would you like to see advertisements used in the future?

5. What have your past experiences on TAPInto been like?
    b.   What was positive?
    c.   What was negative?

6. Are you able to find all of the information you need when you visit TAPInto?
    d.   If yes, what information did you find?
    e.   If no, what information did you wish you found?

Body

7. Are the topics of the articles/content meaningful to you
   a. If yes, why?
   b. If no, why not?

8. What would incentivize you to use TAPInto more often?

9. Would you consider submitting news tips through the website
   a. If yes, why?
      If no, why not?

10. What is the most memorable article you read on TAPInto?
    a. How did it impact you?
    b. How could it have had a stronger impact on you?

Cool-off

That covers all of the questions we have for today. Is there anything you would like to share that you haven't yet had a chance to say? Do you have any questions about what we've covered so far?

Wrap up

Thank you again for taking the time to share your experience with us. It is extremely valuable to us and we look forward to improving your experience in the future!

User Survey

Survey

1. How old are you?
   A.   Under 18 years
   B.   18-29 years
   C.   30-49 years
   D.   50-65 years
   E.   Over 65 years

The age of users is important to all design qualities and the context of their use

2. What is the highest degree or level of school that you've completed?
   A.   Less than a high school diploma
   B.   High School graduate
   C.   Associate degree
   D.   College degree (or beyond)

Background education is an important piece of demographic information that can help us understand more about our users

3. Did you vote in the last election?
   A.   Yes
   B.   No

This question will help us understand the political motivations of our users

4. Which devices do you consume news on? Choose all that apply.
   A.   Computer
   B.   Mobile phone
   C.   Tablet
   D.   Other_____

How users access the webpage has a major impact on their experience. For example the mobile version is inferior to the web version, so some data may be skewed

Survey

5. What is the primary way you access our TapInto?
   A.   Desktop
   B.   Tablet
   C.   Mobile

This is a follow up to the last question, but more specific to the website I am collecting data on

6. How satisfied are you with the mobile version of our website?
   A.   Very satisfied
   B.   Somewhat satisfied
   C.   Neutral
   D.   Somewhat dissatisfied
   E.   Very dissatisfied
   F.   N/A

Question will help us get a better understanding of how the experience can change depending on the platform/device

7. What social media platforms do you use?
   A.   Facebook
   B.   Twitter/X
   C.   Instagram
   D.   TikTok
   E.   LinkedIn
   F.   I don't follow on social media

A potential way to drive more interest/website traffic is to promote articles on social media, this will help us get a better understanding of what our users use the most.

8. On a scale of 1 to 5, select the option that best describes the importance of local news:
   A.   Not at all important
   B.   Not a priority
   C.   Neutral
   D.   Somewhat important
   E.   Very important

9. Which of the following best describes why you visit the TAPInto website?
   A.   Visit the site as a part of your routine
   B.   Read an article via shared link
   C.   To check road/traffic updates
   D.   To check community event dates
   E.   Never
   F.   Other:_____

The goal here is to gain more insight to why users navigate to our website in the first place

10. On a scale of 1 to 5, rate the trustworthiness of TapInto
   A.   Not trustworthy at all
   B.   Slightly trustworthy
   C.   Moderately trustworthy
   D.   Mostly trustworthy
   E.   Very trustworthy

Collect data on how the current design of the website impacts credibility

11. Select the options that you come to TAPInto for
   A.   Breaking news
   B.   Local events
   C.   Crime and public safety
   D.   Sports
   E.   Politics
   F.   Business
   G.   Weather
   H.   Opinion pieces
   I.   Other:_____

Collect data on what topics our most important to the userbase

12. How easy is it to navigate the website and find the information you need?
   A.   Very easy
   B.   Somewhat easy
   C.   Neutral
   D.   Somewhat difficult
   E.   Very difficult

Survey

13. Select all of the following options you think would improve
   A. Personalized news recommendations
   B. Improved mobile experience
   C. More interactive elements (e.g., polls, comment sections)
   D. A daily or weekly newsletter
   E. Video news content
   F. Podcasts

List of potential changes/additions to the website and gauge user interest

14. How visually appealing do you find our website's design?
   A. Very appealing
   B. Somewhat appealing
   C. Neutral
   D. Not very appealing
   E. Not appealing at all

Discover the attitudes that our current design creates

15. Do you prefer any local news services over TAPInto
   A. Yes
   B. No
If yes, what service? _____

Create a list of competitors that we can take design inspiration from

16. Would you be willing to pay for a subscription or membership for exclusive content and an ad-free experience?
   A. Yes, I already subscribe
   B. Yes, if the price is reasonable
   C. Maybe, but I'm undecided
   D. No, I wouldn't pay

Help us learn more about how ads are impacting user experience and how important the overall service is to users

17. Would you ever consider writing for TAPInto?
  A.   Yes
  B.   No
  C.   Maybe

Does the design invite/inspire new creators

18. Is access to the news of cities/towns other than your own important?
  A.   Yes
  B.   No

One of the central design features is the ability to navigate the homepages of other cities and towns.

19. Is the weather feature important to your experience on the website?
  A.   Yes
  B.   No

This is another central design feature and users have so much access to weather information that it may be redundant.

20. How could we improve your overall experience with our local news website?
Open ended:_____

Evaluations

1. **Card Sorting**
2. **Diary Study (Proposal)**
3. **Heuristic Evaluation**
4. **Usability Report**

Card Sorting

What is Card Sorting

Card sorting is a powerful technique for learning how users perceive and categorize information while using your product. In this study for TAPinto, participants will be given labeled cards and asked to group them in ways that make sense to them. The results will provide valuable insights into users' natural thought patterns when interacting with our product

Card sorting results will inform how we organize content, create accurate labels, and design intuitive pathways for users to navigate. Effective information architecture improves website usability by enhancing labeling, navigation, and visual structure, ultimately making it easier for users to complete tasks.

This research method is a quick and efficient method for uncovering user mental models and aligning a website's structure with their expectations.
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Participant Instructions

The card sorting will be conducted on kardsort.com. There are 30 cards in total, each labeled with a different elements of the TAPinto website. Once you start, your task is to organize and categorize the cards into meaningful groups.

Once you're ready, navigate to the start page of the experiment. The first thing you'll do is analyze the cards and then use the 'create category' button in the top right. After you've created categories, you can drag and drop the cards into the category that best aligns with the card.

Feel free to rearrange cards as needed. While we encourage you to sort all cards, if a card doesn't fit anywhere or is unclear, you may create a new category labelled 'unclear'.

Take as much time as you need.

All responses are anonymous, and feedback will be recorded only by participant number. If you have any questions during the activity, feel free to ask. When you're finished, please notify us so we may begin analyzing your results.

Example Cards

Cards

Category: Games

Company Logo

Login

Home Button ⋮

Editor Name/Headshot

Participant data will be collected, recorded, and analyzed using https://kardsort.com/

Raw Data & Similarity Matrix

Due to Kardsort.com, we were unable to put the collected data into a proper similarity matrix. The required operating system to run their software is Windows and we are using MAC. Link to data and matrix below.

Data/Matrix: here

Conclusion

We found that the website's design is too broad to support a clean and intuitive design. With the range of goals that each user has, it is clear that the current design does cater to the whole range of users.

The volume of article categories is either confusing to the average user or unimportant to their experience on the platform. Minimizing or condensing the existing categories and navigation elements could lead to a cleaner and more intuitive design

Diary Study Proposal

What questions does the study aim to answer?

As a local online news source, TAPinto relies on ad sales, freelance writers, and content submissions to generate revenue. This study will aim to determine how the current user interface on the TAPinto website impacts the overall user experience and help inform design changes that incentivize more consistent use to drive revenue from ad sales.

For 6 months, at the end of every two weeks, participants will complete an entry. Each entry will be made up by series of predetermined questions and space to include any other notable experiences.

This will help us uncover specific pain points that can inform our design changes.

Number of participants

15 participants of relatively diverse backgrounds are needed for this study. Considering this study is for a specific city, the diversity may be limited by who lives in the city.

Participant Sample

Participants will be selected through the TAPinto homepage. Users will receive a pop-up on their screen after navigating to the website. The design will prominently display the incentives for participants and direct them to the rest of the details of the study

Survey Method & Formatting

Entries will be sent out and collected via google form, due every 2 weeks.

Potential Benefits and Drawbacks

The benefit of this study is gaining quality data on our users over a large span of time and hopefully expose the strengths and weaknesses of our website design.

The potential drawbacks are surveyor fatigue and the self selection method to participate in the study. Likely those who would engage in this study are more active than your typical users.

Incentives

Participants will receive coupons to local shops for every three submissions. At the end of the study they will receive $75 gift card

Analysis

After each round of submissions data will be analyzed with the help of an affinity diagram. Categorizing the qualitative data will help researchers recognize trends and patterns that make the overall user experience on TAPinto more clear.

Participant Introduction & Instructions

Thank you for participating in this study. The purpose of this project is to better understand how readers engage with TapInto, a local news service, and to identify areas for improvement. We encourage you to share your experiences—whether positive, negative, or neutral—while using TapInto. Your insights will help shape how the platform serves its readers and enhances the local news experience.

We estimate that each diary entry should take approximately 5–20 minutes, depending on how much detail you choose to provide. We encourage you to elaborate on your thoughts, feelings, and overall satisfaction with the platform. Please reflect on how well TapInto meets your needs and any challenges or successes you encounter while engaging with its content.

Every two weeks, you will receive an email reminder to complete your online diary entry. The entry form will include a short list of questions about your experiences using TapInto.

Diary Questions

1. Did you visit TAPinto over the last two weeks?
   a. Yes
   b. no

2. If so, why did you?

3. Were you able to find the information you were looking for?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. other____

4. Describe your process of finding this information

5. Did you navigate around the website to see what other content is available?
   If yes, what content and why?

6. How did the advertisements impact your overall experience on the website and were the ads relevant to you?

Heuristic Evaluation

Heuristic Evaluation

Hueristic	Severity	Comments
1. Visibility of System Status	0 1 2 3 **4**	There is not a current system that indicates to the user the current status of their actions. However, this would be a reletively uncommon feature for a news source.
2. Match between system and the real world	0 **1** 2 3 4	The current language and icons used to support user navigation. However, some features are too small to easily read
3. User control and freedom	0 **1** 2 3 4	There is a high amount of user control because users are able to easily return to the homepage from anywhere within the website
4. Consistency and standards	**0** 1 2 3 4	The consistancy throughout the website is high and they meet the expectations for journalistic standards. The search bar could offer more relevant results
5. Error prevention	**0** 1 2 3 4	There were no noticable errors.
6. Recognition rather than recall	0 1 2 **3** 4	Most of the navigation features aren't directly visible, so it requires higher levels of recall to navigate the website
7. Flexibility and efficiency of use	0 1 2 3 **4**	There is no tailored use within the website to enhance the experience for more active users. They do offer a newletter and other products, but nothing design wise
8. Aesthetic and minimalist design	0 1 2 3 **4**	The overall design has too many elements to support a minimalist design. The volume of irrelevant information diminishes the prominence of the top news on the website
9. Help users recognize, diagnose, and recover from errors	0 **1** 2 3 4	There are no current errors from a functional perspective.
10. Help and documentation	0 1 2 3 4	There are no FAQs or documentation to help users with error. However, there is a 'contact us' page that can potentially provide resources to users

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Usability Report

Why Usability Testing?

Usability testing is an efficient methodology in helping better understand user experience. This research method enables designers to evaluate a product's functionality by observing real users interact with it. This method helps identify usability issues, uncover pain points, and ensure that the product aligns with user needs and expectations.

Through integrating usability testing into the design process, designers can proactively address challenges with the current product. This helps establish the product as user-centric and ensures the product is intuitive, accessible, and optimized for real-world use, ultimately leading to a better experience for users.

Purpose & Testing Sessions

- The purpose of this study is to test the TAPinto website design

- The usability tasks test the website, not the participants, so there is no pressure on participants to correctly complete tasks

- The sessions are recorded and to be analyzed, resulting in recommendations for improving the TAPinto website

The testing sessions are administered remotely through Zoom lasting approximately 30 minutes. The sessions are recorded.

Participant Information

Participant 1– Mark

- 26 years old
- Police Officer
- College Graduate
- Avid internet user
- Most visited websites: ESPN, FanDuel, and YouTube
- Hometown: Caldwell

Participant 2– Joan

- 48 years old
- Realtor
- College Graduate
- Avid Internet User
- Most visited websites: Zillow, NY Post, and Amazon
- Hometown: Summit

Participant 3– Thomas

- 22 years old
- Pickleball Instructor
- Undergrad
- Avid Internet User
- Most visited websites: YouTube, Twitter, and Selkirk
- Hometown: Summit

Study Introduction & Warm Up

Hello (participant name), thank you for joining us today. My name is Drew Sokolowski and I will be guiding you through this study today. You have already been briefed on what we are going to do today, but I will walk you through everything step by step to make it as easy as possible.

Today, we are taking a look at the TAPinto website to test how well it works. We seriously value your feedback on what works and what doesn't, so honesty is essential. The session will take approximately 30 mins. It is very important that I emphasize that we are testing the website and not you. Any failures will be attributed to the design of the website an not your own actions. While completing the test, feel free to ask any questions as they may come up. Do you have any questions before we begin?

We are going to start with a few warm up questions before we begin with the tasks.
1) What do you do for a living?
2) How often do you consume news?
3) What kinds of websites and apps are you normally using while using the internet?
4) Do you have a favorite website or app?
5) Do you value local news?

Participant Tasks

Task 1: Without using the search bar, find an article that directly relates to your life based on the title and thumbnail.

Task 2: Navigate to the 'Government' section of articles and select the story that seems most intriguing

Task 3: You are a tourist who plans on visiting Summit, NJ. Find three pieces of information that would be helpful to you on your trip.

Task 4: Find out more details about the current weather in Summit, NJ.

Task 5: Navigate throughout the website to find a local business or community event that you have an interest in

Task Results

	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task 4	Task 5
Participant 1 Mark	0:30	0:36	1:36	0:05	0:29
Participant 2 Joan	0:11	1:11	0:57	1:16	0:18
Participant 3 Tom	0:22	0:45	1:08	0:13	0:53
Total Time	63 seconds	152 seconds	221 seconds	94 seconds	110 seconds
Mean Time	21 seconds	51 seconds	72 seconds	31 seconds	34 seconds

Task 1

Issue Identified	Proposed Change	Severity
Thumbnail images- The thumbnail does not always relate to the title of the article.	An increased focus on selecting exciting an relevant cover photos for articles	Medium
Article Topics	Curate the homepage articles to support a broader range of user interests	Low

Findings: This first task was designed to uncover the relevancy of homepage articles. Participants 2 & 3 very quickly found articles that relate to their lives. While participant one didn't run into any problems, he took much longer due to his personal interests not being immediately available on the homepage.

Task 2

Issue Identified	Proposed Change	Severity
Thumbnail Images- The thumbnails under this category were all the same making it hard for users to differentiate articles	Find thumbnail/cover images that directly relate to the topic of the article or town hall meeting. Using a photo of the town hall for every 'government' post is not sufficient in generating user interest	High
'Read More Article' button *Barely visible*	Redesign the button, center it on the screen, and use a background color that will make it more visible	Medium

Findings: Participant 2 logged a significantly longer time for this task than the others. She was unable to locate the category for 'Government' due to the 21 other categories offered. All 3 participants, once on the 'Government' page were indecisive with what article they chose because each option seemed so similar.

Task 3

Issue Identified	Proposed Change	Severity
Organization of 'Events" page Low readability	Increase the size of and enclose individual events on the webpage. This includes thumbnail image, dates, and location	high

Findings: Each participant had a similar experience with this task. However, they all acquired their information through different means. All three navigated to the 'Events' page, but then quickly left because of how little they could understand from event posting. They then navigated different categories such a 'Food & Drink' and 'Summit Downtown' and were able to find relevant information for a travel experience.

Task 4

Issue Identified	Proposed Change	Severity
Visibility of weather icon	Change the location and design of the icon to make it more visible	low

Findings: Participant 1 & 3 were able to complete this task with near immediacy. Participant 2, was unable to recognize the weather icon within the banner at the top of the website. Instead, she navigated through several article categories and thoroughly examined the homepage before realizing that she had been overlooking the weather icon the whole time.

Task 5

Issue Identified	Proposed Change	Severity
Article Relevancy	Curate the homepage articles to support a broader range of user interests	medium
Volume of Topics	Reduce the article categories	medium

Findings: Similar to task 1, this task involved an element of subjectivity, being what is important to the participants' lives. This task made two things clear. Firstly, is that the homepage did not provide relevant article to a broad range of users. Secondly, is that the large volume of article categories make it challenging for users to decipher which would be most relevant to their interests.

Overall Recommendations & Conclusion

The most significant design flaw that this study reveal is that the large volume of topics combined with the monotony of thumbnails/cover photos makes it challenging for users to decisively navigate the website. Due to this, our primary recommendation to improve TAPinto is to reduce the amount of article categories (from 22 categories to ~10) and increase attention to detail on curating the homepage with relevant articles with meaningful thumbnails.

Secondly, the 'Read More Articles' button on the bottom of the page is barely visible. Multiple users reported that it was hard to find and it added a significant amount of time to their attempts to complete tasks on the website.

Finally, the 'Events' page needs redesigning. Not only did users report that the readability on this page was low, but they were unable to tell what the events actually were based on the date, time, location, and title of each individual event. Additionally, the thumbnails relied on stock images which increased the lack of clarity on what the specific event is.