

Interface Redesign

acelawncare.com

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Executive Summary

Using both interface design and Gestalt principles as criteria, the interface for acelawncare.com was evaluated to identify areas for improvement. Once these areas were identified, the home page and a sample subpage were redesigned to integrate these principles and improve the interface.

Recommended improvements for the redesigned interface include:

- Global navigation buttons are made smaller to refocus the user's attention to the banner/logo area. A new company identity including logo redesign is also recommended.
- The three services the company provides (Landscape Design, Lawn Care, and Snow Removal) are added to the global navigation via a JavaScript drop-down menu from the "Services" button and are also presented in a logical grouping in the content area of the home page.
- A layout grid is used on all pages for better organization of information.

Additional details about the findings and recommendations are provided in the following sections:

Analysis of Current Interface (page 4)

The current interface is evaluated concerning established design principles.

Redesigned Interface Wireframes (page 7)

Wireframe layouts of the redesigned interface for the home page and one sample subpage are provided.

Analysis of Redesigned Interface (page 9)

Improvements to the interface are listed.

Implementation Options (page 12)

Three approaches to implementing the new design at code-level are described and the recommended approach is identified.

Appendix A (page 13)

Screenshots of the current home page and a sample subpage are provided for reference.

Analysis of Current Interface

Refer to the *Appendix*, Figures 1–2 (pages 13–14), for screenshots of the home page and sample subpage. The current interface was evaluated for the presence (or lack) of interface design and Gestalt principles. These findings are listed below:

Interface Design Principles

Strengths

Consistency

- Website uses same blue color throughout.
- Consistent style treatment is used on global navigation buttons.
- The blue banner background and global navigation appear throughout the website.

Simplicity, Negative Space

- Overall, web pages appear uncluttered and adequate white space is provided.

Alignment

- Global navigation buttons are aligned in a horizontal row.

Repetition

- Banner area maintains the same blue background throughout the website.
- Global navigation uses the same style treatment.

Areas for Improvement

Consistency

- Banner head on home page contains logo, whereas on subpages logo is omitted and page title appears instead.
- Subpages do not have a consistent layout structure.

Contrast

- Effort was made to contrast the global navigation from the subnavigation through the use of rounded rectangles (global navigation) and oblong oval shapes (subnavigation). This approach does not provide needed style continuity for navigational elements and is ineffective in establishing hierarchy between the primary and secondary navigation.
- On the banner background, page titles replace the logo on all subpages to differentiate subpages from the home page. Continuity is lacking since this prevents the logo from being displayed on subsequent pages. Users need to know what website they are visiting, particularly if they enter the website from a subpage.

Simplicity, Negative Space

- White space on the sample subpage shown in Figure 2 is wasted and most of the content appears below the fold.
- The fixed-width, left-aligned layout structure leaves a large amount of dead space to the right of the interface, particularly when viewed at higher screen resolutions.

Alignment

- Global navigation labels contained within the button graphics are off-center and appear misaligned.
- Placement of visual elements throughout the website appear haphazard.

Focus

- Much effort was spent styling the navigation buttons, and not the logo. The grouping of the global navigation buttons creates a “critical mass” effect that visually overpowers the logo. Users tend to focus on the buttons more than the company’s identity.

Balance

- The left-aligned layout leaves too much dead space to the right of the interface making it appear off-balance.

Aesthetics

- The overall look of the website indicates that uninformed decisions were made concerning the visual elements of the website, and aesthetics are lacking. Greater attention to interface design and Gestalt principles in the redesign will provide a more aesthetically pleasing look.

Gestalt Principles

Strengths

Proximity

- The global navigation buttons are located in logical proximity so users identify them as a grouping.

Similarity

- The same style treatment is used throughout for the global navigation and the blue banner background.

Continuity

- Global navigation buttons are horizontally aligned and appear as a group.

Connection

- The banner background behind the navigation buttons helps to further connect them as a grouping.

Areas for Improvement

Closure, Enclosure

- No examples of these principles were found in the current interface, but may be applied where appropriate in the redesign.

Additional Comments

Layout

- Web pages are designed for optimal display at 800 x 600. This resolution accommodates most users.

Color and Graphics

- Graphics are minimal, and pages load quickly.
- The logo does not provide a strong visual presence in the current interface. More attention was spent on developing a distinctive style treatment for the global navigation. As a result, the global navigation appears as the prominent focus.
- The video commercial provided on the home page is superfluous. Its presence does not add value to the website since users tend to avoid commercials whether on TV or the Internet. It occupies valuable screen real-estate that would be better served by other content. Instead, marketing copy from the video can be integrated to appropriate sections throughout the website.
- The square, button-like graphic style treatment for the bulleted lists fools users into thinking they are clickable links.
- The blue color used throughout the website lends a cold impersonal look to the site.

Interface Elements

Some but not all interface elements will be brought forward in modified form for the redesign. These are listed below. Modifications are described in detail in the *Analysis of Redesigned Interface* section (page 9):

- Graphics
 - Logo (redesign is recommended)
 - Sample images will be selected with appropriate placement to match context of text
 - Global and subnavigation links
- Request for free quote (form)
- The three service categories (Landscape Design, Lawn Care, and Snow Removal) will be integrated into the global navigation
- Footer containing HTML global navigation links, contact, and copyright information

Redesigned Interface Wireframes

Home Page

Logo Tagline background image area					Search <input type="text"/> Go	
Services Support Our Company Contact Us Request a Free Quote Customer Testimonials					248-548-5570 acelawncareales@gmail.com 1415 Wordsworth, Farmdale, MI 48220	
Landscape Design Image		Lawn Care Image		Snow Removal Image		
<u>Landscape Design</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal consultation and design • Computer design and layout • Residential and industrial • Professional design staff with over 20 years experience • Brick pavers, retaining walls, patios, and more • Grading 		<u>Lawn Care</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site analysis • Aeration • Silt Seeding • Hydroseeding • Fertilization 		<u>Snow Removal</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By the season • By the job • Fast, efficient, and professional 		
Home Services Support Our Company Contact Us Request a Free Quote Testimonials Ace Landscaping, Lawn Care & Snow Removal • 248-548-5570 • 1415 Wordsworth, Farmdale, MI 48220 • acelawncareales@gmail.com © Copyright Ace Landscaping, Lawn Care & Snow Removal. All rights reserved.						

1 A JavaScript drop-down menu appears on mouseover that provides links to the "Landscape Design," "Lawn Care," and "Snow Removal" subpages.

Sample Subpage

Logo Tagline background image area						Search <input type="text"/> <input type="button" value="Go"/>
1 Services Support Our Company Contact Us Request a Free Quote Customer Testimonials						248-548-5570 acelawncaresales@gmail.com 1415 Wordsworth, Ferndale, MI 48220
Landscape Design Image				Landscape Design <small>return to Home</small> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal consultation and design • Computer design and layout • Residential and industrial • Professional design staff with over 20 years experience • Brick pavers, retaining walls, patios, and more • Grading 2		
Click here to see additional sample photos						
Sample text Sample text						
"Sample testimonial excerpt text pertaining to Landscape Design. Sample testimonial excerpt text pertaining to Landscape Design." —Name of satisfied customer "Sample testimonial excerpt text pertaining to Landscape Design. Sample testimonial excerpt text pertaining to Landscape Design." —Name of satisfied customer						
Home Services Support Our Company Contact Us Request a Free Quote Testimonials Ace Landscaping, Lawn Care & Snow Removal • 248-548-5570 • 1415 Wordsworth, Ferndale, MI 48220 • acelawncaresales@gmail.com © Copyright Ace Landscaping, Lawn Care & Snow Removal. All rights reserved.						

- 1 A JavaScript drop-down menu appears on mouseover that provides links to the "Landscape Design," "Lawn Care," and "Snow Removal" subpages. Note that a contrasting style treatment is applied to the global navigation section that the user is visiting.
- 2 These subnavigation links lead to anchored text on the same subpage.

Analysis of Redesigned Interface

Refer to the *Redesigned Interface Wireframes* section (pages 7–8) for wireframes of the home page and a sample subpage. The problems vis-à-vis established interface design and Gestalt principles listed under “Areas for Improvement” (pages 4, and 5–6) have been addressed and described below, followed by additional recommendations.

Interface Design and Gestalt Principles

Consistency, Similarity

- Use of a layout grid now provides all subpages with a consistent structure.
- The banner head and all its elements appear consistently on all pages to provide better continuity throughout the website.
- Consistent style treatments are used for global navigation, subnavigation, and images.

Continuity

- Global navigation buttons appear grouped through use of horizontal alignment. The three services featured in the content area of the home page are also aligned and appear as a group.

Simplicity, Negative Space

- By providing a more ordered layout, the website maintains its simplicity. A better use of negative space provides the most important content above the fold (defined here as a 390-pixel depth). Center alignment of the 800 x 600 interface minimizes excess white space when viewed at higher resolutions.

Focus

- Global navigation buttons have been made smaller so users focus more readily on the logo.
- More attention to hierarchy of information in the redesign ensures that users focus on the intended content.

Balance, Alignment, Balance

- A layout grid was used for the home page and subpages. The grid’s structure provides alignment and balance to create a more ordered appearance and a more aesthetically pleasing look to the website.
- The layout grid separates the page structure into three equal-width columns. Groupings of odd-numbered elements provide more visual interest than even-numbered groups and lend a balanced look to the layout.

Enclosure

- All global navigation is located in one grouping with the banner head.
- Excerpts from testimonials are enclosed within a box that separates this content from the primary content area while visually grouping together the testimonial content within.

Similarity, Proximity

- In the content area of the home page, the three service areas (landscape design, lawn care, and snow removal) are grouped together using proximity and a consistent style treatment.
- The global navigation buttons are located in logical proximity so users identify them as a grouping. The list style for the subnavigation ensures that these links also appear visually grouped.

Contrast

- A unique image for each service category on the home page provides contrast to each individual service category.
- Subnavigation uses standard HTML underlined text to indicate links. This minimal approach contrasts the subnavigation from the global navigation to better establish hierarchy between the global and subnavigation while using a standard link style that most users easily recognize as clickable text.
- The button-like graphical bullets used in the content area on the home page has been replaced with a standard HTML bulleted list style. This eliminates any user confusion regarding “clickability” of the text.

Additional Recommendations

- A new logo design is recommended that provides the company with a more prominent visual identity. The logo area should maintain more visual weight than the buttons. This logo should appear on all subpages.
- Color selection should be changed from blue to a palette of colors derived from nature. A palette of earth-tones and greens would better complement the type of business and provide a warmer feel to the site. Replacing the white background color with a warm off-white tone will be easier on the eyes thereby enhancing readability.
- The three service categories (landscape design, lawn care, and snow removal) have been integrated into the global navigation via a JavaScript drop-down menu that appears when users mouse over the “Services” global navigation button.
- In the existing interface, the three service categories are labeled (in this order):
 - Lawn Services
 - Landscape Design Services
 - Snow RemovalSince “Services” currently appears only in two of the three labels, it tends to confuse users by not having a consistent labeling scheme. In the redesign, the word “Services” has been dropped and the categories have been relabeled and reordered to match the business name.
- The global navigation label, “Testimonials,” has been clarified by relabeling “Customer Testimonials.”
- Since word-of-mouth is typically the primary way this type of business obtains new customers, excerpts from the testimonials section are integrated throughout the site.

- The video commercial was eliminated, since users tend to avoid commercials whether it is on TV or the Internet. Instead, the marketing text from the video can be integrated into the appropriate sections of the website.
- Hierarchy of information was more carefully considered in the redesign. Having a clear structure of information helps orient users so they can access information more efficiently.
- Improvements to the redesigned interface have eliminated the need for a breadcrumb trail. The shallow site structure does not require it.

Implementation Options

Approach 1: Fixed-Width, Left-Aligned

- The entire 800 x 600 layout is coded using fixed widths with three equal-width columns. Each service category occupies one of three equal-width columns.
- Maintaining an overall 800 x 600 layout with important content appearing above 390 pixels ensures that entire content can be viewed with minimal or no scrolling.
- The 800 x 600 overall width limits line lengths in the primary content area for enhanced readability.
- This approach provides exact control so all the elements remain balanced and aligned.
- The fixed-width approach does not accommodate users who do not maximize their browser window, so scrolling may still be necessary.
- The left-aligned approach leaves dead space to the right for viewing at higher resolutions.

Approach 2: Fixed-Width, Center-Aligned

- Coding remains the same as for Approach 1, but the interface is center-aligned so excess space falls to the left and right.
- This approach retains all of the advantages of Approach 1, and appears more balanced by centering the interface.
- Scrolling may still be necessary if the browser window is not maximized.

Approach 3: Fixed-Width and Variable-Width Columns

- This approach combines the use of fixed-width and variable-width elements.
- One or more columns are fixed-width with a variable width for the remaining column(s).
- This approach accommodates different screen resolutions as well as viewing from browser windows that have not been maximized.
- Elements can become misaligned when browser windows are narrower than 800 x 600.

Recommended Implementation

- Approach 2 is recommended since 800 x 600 accommodates most users. All global navigation and primary content are positioned so they are viewable even when users do not have their browser windows maximized. For users with larger screen resolutions the interface is centered with excess space falling to the left and right, providing a more balanced look.
- A JavaScript drop-down menu appears on mouseover that provides links to the “Landscape Design,” “Lawn Care,” and “Snow Removal” subpages.
- Subnavigation links on subpages lead to anchored text on the same subpage.

Appendix

Figure 1. Existing Home Page

(1162 x 864 resolution, 21-inch monitor, window maximized)



Figure 2. Existing Sample Subpage
(1162 x 864 resolution, 21-inch monitor, window maximized)

