Comparative Analysis

BDMTW Group for the Idea Index

Introduction

For this analysis, we compared the Idea Index site with three other websites that operate to some extent in the same space – showcasing innovation in the fields of sustainable development or design (broadly defined) in ways that connect people with ideas and, potentially, each other. Those sites were *Kiva* (www.kiva.org), *Changemakers* (www.changemakers.org) and the *Open Architecture Challenge* (openarchitecturenetwork.org/competitions/challenge/).

Kiva is social networking site oriented toward connecting microentrepreneurs with social investors, particularly what might be called "microinvestors." The site has been hailed for being very engaging to potential investors who might not have expertise in the fields in which the entrepreneurs work.

Changemakers is a website recently re-launched by Ashoka, a leader in the field of supporting social innovators. Changemakers incorporates some social features by showcasing Ashoka Fellows and other "changemakers."

The Open Architecture Challenge was chosen because it, like Kiva and Changemakers, operates in somewhat of the same space as the Idea Index; the site showcases ideas to build a better, more sustainable world, and collects those ideas through a competition mechanism like the Buckminster Fuller Challenge.

In addition we looked at a fourth website, the business/employment-oriented social network *LinkedIn* (www.linkedin.com). LinkedIn.com was chosen based on the assumption that such a popular site (with over 80 million registered users from almost every country in the world) is likely to contain features and mental models that potential users will be familiar with and that will be useful in linking social innovators with social investors.
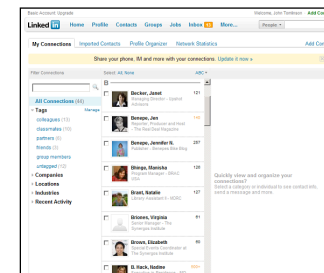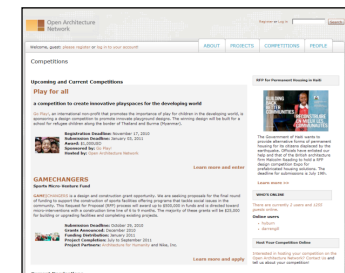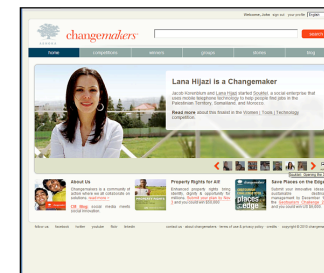
Clockwise from top left: Idea Index, Kiva, Open Architecture Challenge, LinkedIn, Changemakers

Criteria

We compared the design and functions of the Idea Index and the four other sites in several basic areas including features offered, interaction design, search functions and navigation. In addition we assessed the emotion or feelings that each site seemed to convey, or attempted to convey, as well as overall design aesthetic and use of color.

Conclusions

Strengths

As expected, all of the four comparative sites included features and design elements that should be considered in the re-design of the Idea Index. For example, LinkedIn includes many features encouraging interaction, such as news feeds from people users have connected with and suggestions of other connections. Kiva used very active terminology to encourage site users to get involved with each other. The Open Architecture Network and Changemakers use very clear labels and site structure to enable users to rapidly find, and even re-find, what they want. Kiva included explicit visual and text elements to encourage potential investors to get involved.

Search, combined with facets to enable filtering or drilling down into results, was well done on Kiva and even more so on the Open Architecture Network's site.

Weaknesses

The design aesthetic of both Kiva and Changemakers pointed out possible dangers to avoid in the Idea Index redesign, through in different ways. Kiva seems almost too playful and amateurish in the use of colors, and contained friendly but often blurry photography, even on pages that were not user generated. In contrast, certain elements of Changemakers seemed too corporate and over-designed, particularly the gallery page that listed upcoming competitions and felt like bad advertising.

Opportunities

Our hope is that in redesigning the Idea Index we can incorporate positive elements of those sites – such as the friendliness of Kiva and the structural clarity of the Open Architecture Challenge and Changemakers – without losing the feeling of occasional glimpses of complexity that seem essential to the "brand" of the Idea Index (and BFI as a whole) and to the content itself.

Threats

If we do not incorporate social networking features that encourage interaction, the site may be at a disadvantage, as people have come to expect those features. Search will also be critical to the site redesign and if not done well, will cause users to become frustrated and not want to return to the site. Subsequently, it is not only a well-designed search interface that is important, but clear labeling and a consistent and easily understandable site structure that is needed.

Analysis of each site follows.

	Idea Index	LinkedIn	Kiva	Open Architecture Challenge	Changemakers
URL	challenge.bfi.org	www.linkedin.com	www.kiva.org	openarchitecturenetwork.org/ competitions/challenge/	www.changemakers.org
Homepage Design	Majority of homepage dedicated to actual Idea profiles. Navigation bar provides all necessary information about the competition not provided in the brief explanation. Navigation on the right side includes a log-in, click to donate, and various avenues for looking up ideas.	Emphasis on action; Network activity, recommended jobs, reading list, connections. Top boxes are for recruitment. Small ad box, tidy main page, not too much or too little material.	Contains text, image, and video. Featured Entrepreneurs prioritized, Registration on left hand of page also prominent, Lenders are below the fold. Featured Entrepreneurs, Lenders, News, and Stories are dynamic; text (ads, info) primarily static.	The tab "Overview" is the homepage, and the label sums up what the homepage does. There is a lot of material here, a bit of info pulled from each of the key areas of the site, along with graphics/images/videos. There is a lot of scrolling to get to the bottom of the page. The material on homepage duplicates material offered by the links shown in the vertical navigation.	Focus of homepage is large, rotating examples of social innovators and single large news item. Secondary focus is navigation to major sections of site. There are also minor elements such as news, but the overall path through site is directed via central rotating image/link.
Interior Page Design	Each Idea includes many thumbnails of elements of the project with a brief project description at the top.	Focus on interaction and activity by actively engaging the user through recommendations to participate in the site.	Contains text, image, and video. Some duplication with About & Help as well as Login & Register links. Google maps.	Challenge entry pages each have the following tab navigation: Overview (description of entry), Team (list of team members), Updates, Workspace (easy file viewing/slideshow), Calendar (listing of events that are past due/coming up/completed), Files (storage - can upload and download files). Other pages on site are a simple mix of text, images, and videos. Sometimes pages are very long and require a lot of scrolling.	Various gallery pages (for competitions, groups, issues, etc.) are simple and designed to allow quick drilling down. Content pages are text-heavy to impart information and elicit comments. At lower levels of the site discussions and groups encourage communication among users.
Search Function-ality	Poor. While they can be browsed by either tag or entry status, it is not possible to search the idea index.	Excellent. Search bar is placed at the top of the page. Basic search returns a breakdown of categories for results. Advanced search includes many search options.	Good. To find content, users must enter relevant search terms from within the Lend and Community Primary Navigation links. There is a "Pick For Me" option similar to Google's	Excellent. However, user must discover the correct location on the site to run a search. One can only run a search through the entire OAN website, under the main navigation tab "Projects," and cannot run a search within the Challenge portion of the site.	Very good. Search bar exists on all pages of site and results include title, very brief text excerpt, type of content (profile, competition entry, etc.), and date created

	Idea Index	LinkedIn	Kiva	Open Architecture Challenge	Changemakers
			"Feeling Lucky" button. Search results can be sorted. There is a faceted search for projects by country, gender, sector, lender type (Group or individual), and status (funding level achieved).	Within the Challenge portion of the site, the only option is to use step/paging navigation. Within the OAN site, however, one can do a keyword search as well as narrow results by the following facets: Building Types, Competition Keywords, Themes, and Country.	
Features Offered	Tags are listed, but users cannot add their own. Users with a log-in can comment on projects.	Features primarily exist to connect with other people, for references, to network and/or share ideas. Job listings are also posted. Group, reading list and other professional development functions are offered.	Users can register/log-in easily via Facebook and can subscribe to RSS feeds for profile updates. Gift store sells swag.	Users can create an account and then will be able to comment on the site's webpages and Challenge entries. Users can also submit a project that others will see on the website and can create a profile for themselves that can be viewed by others. Additionally, one can only register to participate in a competition if one is a registered OAN user. While you can comment on, or "discuss," a project on the site, there is no messaging feature available to be able to contact other users through the site. If users post email addresses or links to their own personal websites, that is the only way to get in contact with them other than through commenting on their project(s) (which they may or not have).	Individual profiles and groups, various competitions offered by Ashoka and other partners with specific focuses. Users can create groups and comment on most other types of content including 'stories' and blog posts created by Ashoka or other site managers (mechanism is unclear). There is thus user-generated content via Groups and Profiles, and curated content, by the site managers, with hooks for user participation.
Navigation	Primary Navigation: Home, About, How to Enter, Jury, Prize, Media, Partners, Resources, Idea Index 1.0, BFI Secondary Navigation (vertical): Log-in Box,	Primary Navigation: Home, Profile, Contacts, Groups, Jobs, Inbox, More. Secondary Navigation (More): Companies, Answers, Direct Ads, Learning Center,	Primary Navigation (tabs) includes (in order): Lender (Investor) Search, About, Community (Team Lending Search), Entrepreneur Journals (Innovator Profiles), My Portfolio (Account Management).	Primary Navigation (tabs): Overview [home], Categories, School... [Building Partners], Entries, Guidelines, Juries. Vertical Navigation: Challenge Overview, About the Challenge, School Building Partners, Traveling Exhibition, Conversations btw	Very good at highest levels of site but become problematic as users drill down into content. Administrative Navigation: Log-in/profile and search . Primary Navigation: Navigation to major areas of site such as Home,

	Idea Index	LinkedIn	Kiva	Open Architecture Challenge	Changemakers
	Donate, ideas by tag, ideas by selection status, videos, previous winners (by year), contact info, Facebook fans.	Reading List, Events, Application Directory	Secondary Navigation includes: Gifts, Help, Login, Register, My Basket.	architects and students, Stories from participants, Videos of student participation, Guidelines, Press Room, Jury, Timeline, FAQ, Awards, Partners & Sponsors, Teacher & Student Resources, Discussion Forums, School Building Resources Some links are duplicative, others are not. I find the navigation generally good, but I think it would be helpful to have the navigation ordered better and probably put into some sort of hierarchical structure.	Competitions, Groups, etc. Secondary Navigation: Specific variations in each major section of site - typically allowing filtering down by issues, location or other criteria, typically laid out with tabs for alternative filters. Gallery Pages: Allow browsing of content pages. Footer Navigation: Links to social networking site plus Contact and About info. Navigation breaks down a little at the gallery level when there are too many choices and browsing is done by page number and not by groupings of content or first letter of section names.
Interaction Design	Minimal. It is possible to create a log-in, but that does not allow a greatly improved experience.	High. The user is encouraged to improve their profile, and participate in many functions on the site. Discussions, user-generated news feeds and other features encourage communication among users.	Lenders can register, join existing groups or form their own. No one cannot submit loan requests/projects directly to site, must be chosen by a non-profit in the field. Lenders cannot interact with entrepreneurs or offer feedback easily to them or Kiva org. Lenders can apply to become "Kiva Fellows."	Medium. Commenting and creating a profile/project is fairly easy, but it is a bit more difficult to register for a competition. One must submit money to the OAN, and only then will they have access to create/edit an entry page.	Medium. Creating profile or group is fairly easy. Commenting is easy. Creating prominent content is curated by site owners
Emotion/ Feeling	Serious, innovative and committed. Feels like a site for caring intellectuals and inventors.	Professional, functional. The site is for professional networking and the design scheme gives off that	Educational and functional. Calm and boring.	Educational and functional. The site feels more serious than fun.	Education and functional. Site feels informal but wants to make users feel important and connected to important ideas. All users are asked how they are

	Idea Index	LinkedIn	Kiva	Open Architecture Challenge	Changemakers
	impression.				changemakers, which may be daunting but is also flattering
Colors/ Aesthetic Sense	Warm and light. Lots of white, warm yellows and shades of rust.	Cool. Blues and greys.	White background. Green icon, border, text. Blue accent. Third World feel.	Grey and white are main background colors. Black text, brown links.	Neutral and light with splashes of bright color. Images at higher levels of the site very polished.
Conclusion	Aesthetically satisfying, with great content but poor layout and disappointing/ lacking interaction features.	High level of interactivity, great features and functions.	Faceted searching, loan payback/investment indicators, and group investing options are great features to utilize. Low interactivity with Kiva staff and entrepreneurs are downsides. Aesthetically unexciting.	There are two particularly great aspects of OAN's site, which should be worked into the Idea Index in one way or another: 1) Challenge entry pages, which are detailed above under "Interior Page Design"; and 2) Search options within the entire OAN site (not just the Challenge entries), which are detailed above under search functionality. Labeling is also clear and could be used as a good model.	Clear organization, which encourages user movement through site, whether looking for certain content or simply browsing. Visual design is almost too polished.