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ABSTRACT

We now live in an era where magazines are more than a print entity: they are brands that are supported by a wide array of platforms. Websites are amongst the most common platforms as they are easy to create and they help magazines reach a wider audience, which often results in an increase in advertising sales. These websites, however, are in constant competition for readers' attention. For that reason, it is important for a magazine's website to offer a high-quality branded user-experience to their current and future readers.

This report explores the *Western Living*’s brand and analyses their website based on user experience (UX) and user interface (UI) principles. It then gives some suggestions that would ultimately improve the overall usability of the site.

**Key words:** branding, user experience, magazine, user interface, UX, UI
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INTRODUCTION

From Print to Digital

The first publication, which would later be known as a magazine, was published in Germany 1663. It was called Erbauliche Monaths Unterredungen. The term “magazine,” however, was only used in 1731 by Edward Cave, the editor of the first British magazine titled The Gentleman’s Magazine. Since then, the world has gone through several significant technological advancements such as the invention of electricity, leading to the creation of the light bulb; the radio; the television; and, of course, the Internet. Throughout those years, the look and feel of the print magazine evolved and adapted to consumer demand. But it is with the rise of the Internet, the easy access to global information, and a decrease in print advertisers that magazines have had to make a decision: whether or not to translate their brand and content into digital platforms.

As Barbara Rowlands explained in her online article for The Guardian, in this day and age, the magazine industry shouldn’t “fixate on modes of distribution (print, online)” but instead, they should put their energy towards “finding new ways to enrich the lives of their readers.” After all, the etymology of the word “magazine” comes from the Arabic term makzin or makzan, meaning “storehouse.” And whether it is a storehouse of ideas, values, or common interests, this way of interpreting today’s magazines opens doors for storing great content across an array of media.

Nowadays, print magazines take the plunge and go digital, or partly-digital, for different reasons. First, content digitization allows for a certain freedom denied by print. A print magazine has physical and technical constraints such as the format, the number of pages a budget allows for (which has been in decline since the 2008 depression) and the minimum size that typefaces and images must be maintained to remain readable to the targeted consumer. The digital world fixes such limitations. Readers can indefinitely scroll down pages or click on hyperlinks for new content. Computers, tablets, and mobile phones are now equipped to increase or decrease the size of both fonts and images on a given screen. Furthermore, digital content can take any creative form. Whether it is with

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5 Ibid.
an article, an image (or a gallery of images), an audio, a gif, or a video, a digital publication can present its content using multiple features to make the reader's experience more enjoyable, more special. Such freedom allows publishers to spend more time on research for better content, to be more creative in their presentation of content, and to save money on paper and physical modes of transportations, production, and distribution.

Second, the move to digitization gives access to a larger readership, which helps to generate advertising sales—or subscription sales, since it is now increasingly difficult for publishers to allow ads on their site, while making sure that those ads will not discourage a visitor to read the site content. Through digital magazines and websites, content becomes easily accessible to anyone who has Internet, which, according to reports, totals to 3,885,567,619 people worldwide, as of June 30th, 2017. Furthermore, according to a 2016 IAB Canada report, there has been a decrease in the number of people reading print magazines on a weekly basis. 73% of the respondents said they read print magazines on a weekly basis in 2001, compared to 53% in 2016. And amongst these readers, their time spent reading magazines has also diminished. In 2001, readers spent 77 minutes reading magazines, which decreased to 20 minutes in 2016.

Meanwhile an opposite trend is observed with the Internet, which confirms that people's attention is now online. While 52% of people spent a weekly average of 311 minutes online in 2001, it increased to 84% of people spending 1,153 minutes online in 2016 (Appendix 1). In other words, although print isn't dead and probably never will be, people's attention has shifted significantly from physical to digital content. Therefore, it is only logical that advertisers now spend more money on digital ads instead of focusing on print.

Online advertising is also cost-effective and measurable. With tools like Google Analytics, Google AdWord, and Clicky, it is now easier for companies to target specific consumers and find out the number of readers visiting their website, along with

their location. Although such information is extremely valuable for a publisher in terms of content and product feedback, it is also a great measuring tool for possible advertisers. Advertisers want to reach targeted consumers who will likely generate sales. The more targeted consumers an ad can reach, the better. For magazines whose business model relies on advertising, an increased targeted, measurable digital outreach will help attract advertisers and increase sales revenue. This is especially important now that they are competing with the champions of targeted advertising (Facebook, Google, and Twitter) for advertisers’ attention.

**Success and Research**

Because going digital allows for a larger readership and for a possible increase in sales and subscription revenue, multiple publications have taken the plunge. Many of them, like Canadian Living and The Economist, were successful with their transition from print only to print and digital. Canadian Living calls themselves “a truly multiplatform brand,” with 1,897,258 online users and over 2,600,000 visits to their website every month. Their site is user-friendly, mobile-friendly, and allows readers to subscribe to either (or both) of their print and digital publications.

As for The Economist, they reported a “continued climb in digital sales” in their January-through-June 2016 report (Appendix 2). Their Chief Marketing Officer and Managing Director of Circulation, Michael Brunt, said: “A 15% growth in paid digital subscriptions has enabled us to cut 100 thousand free bulk print copies from our circulation. Now, every copy of The Economist we sell is profitable, ensuring our editorial independence is secured for the future.” The magazine now has a digital circulation of 402,085 and 11,372,596 monthly unique website browsers (Appendix 3).

But having a website isn’t enough in 2017. At least, not if it doesn’t conform to today’s high standards of users’ expectations. Practices like UX (user experience) and UI (user interface) are of utmost importance now that the competition for an audience’s attention is happening mainly online and that the way people measure the attention on the web is shifting from clicks to seconds and pixels.

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16 Ibid.
According to a study by Chao Liu and colleagues from Microsoft Research, most Internet users spend less than 20 seconds on a web page. The research, which analysed page-visit durations for 205,873 web pages for a total of 10,000 visits, compares the phenomenon to the engineering concept of the Weibull Hazard Function of Negative Aging (Figure 1). While Weibull analyses “the time-to-failure component,” the Negative Aging Effect concludes that the longer a user has been on a site, the less likely they are to leave. Results show that the first 10 to 20 seconds are critical because users have become skeptical towards websites. Whether the content is not what they were promised by the hyperlink or the page is poorly designed, users refuse to waste their time and move on quickly until they find what they are looking for. Once that initial stage has passed (after about 30 seconds) and the user’s needs and requirements are met, the curve becomes flatter, meaning that the user is most likely to remain on a web page for a longer period of time.

The main points that magazines should take from this research are to keep readers interested in the content of the website—and for some, to make users read the actual content instead of looking elsewhere right away—a magazine’s website must clearly communicate the publisher’s value proposition. And this is mainly accomplished through a succinct, beautiful, and user-friendly design.

This project report will focus on branding as well as UX and UI concepts that are important when designing a website for a magazine, showcasing Western Living (WL) as a case study. As WL was redesigned in 2015, the first part of this report will examine the new design of the print magazine and break down the main components, as well as the reasons behind the changes. This will include notes from former Art Director Paul Roelofs, who was in charge of the redesign in 2015. Then, the second part of the report will explain UX and UI concepts and strategies applicable to digital magazines. It will include theories for both desktop and mobile screens. Finally, the third part will consider Part One and Two to analyze the usability of the Western Living website (westernliving.ca), and how successful it is by looking at their online statistics.

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Fig. 1. Weibull Hazard Function of Negative Aging. (A larger version of this figure is included in the Appendix 4.)
PART ONE: REDESIGN

Western Living Magazine

Before dissecting the magazine’s redesign that took place in 2015, it is important to recognize where Western Living comes from and appreciate its multiple achievements through years of development and transformation, as well as look at its current mission statement, readership, and more. Such information will help better understand the brand as a whole.

History

In the 1950s, a small, paid-circulation publication called Western Homes and Living was developed in Vancouver and circulated mainly in the cities of Vancouver and Victoria. Although its focus was architecture and design, featuring great architectural spaces through beautiful images, the magazine also contained some lifestyle content such as recipes, style sections, and travel features. In the mid-1960s, however, Western Homes and Living (Figure 2) lost its appeal and folded, only to be picked up again in 1971, to become Western Living.21

Western Living maintained its predecessor’s focus on architectural design but started off as a small controlled circulation magazine. By the 1980s, the staff grew and changed significantly, and the focus of the magazine evolved from architecture-centric to a more lifestyle appeal. Meanwhile, a publication called Martha Stewart Magazine started to publish articles on domestic arts and crafts, creating a trend. The MSM’s success increased the number of “shelter” magazine (with an editorial focus on interior design, architecture, and home furnishings) on the newsstand.

In 1999, Western Living’s parent company, Telemedia West, was acquired by Transcontinental Media. But it wasn’t until Jim Sutherland became the new editor…

Fig. 2 Western Homes and Living cover. (A larger version of this figure is included in the Appendix 5.)

in 2000 that the focus of the magazine unified to “reflect the lifestyle and aesthetic of Western Canada, while appealing to a wider audience through service pieces dealing with cuisine, fashion, and travel.”

In the early 2000s, *Western Living* published six editions dedicated to different cities in Western Canada, but in May 2009, they cut down to three regions (British Columbia, Alberta, and Saskatchewan/Manitoba). This made more sense as it appealed to regional advertisers instead of focusing on cities. Later on, *WL* decided to keep only two editions (British Columbia and Alberta) for similar reasons.

In 2015, Transcontinental Media sold Media Group, which included *Western Living* and *Vancouver Magazine* (VM), to Yellow Pages. In an interview for *BCBusiness*, Julien Billot, CEO of Yellow Pages (YP), admitted buying the two magazines mainly for their content. As YP was becoming more and more digital, they required more content to populate their website and apps. According to Billot, British Columbia is much more digitalized and “sensitive to digital solutions” than anywhere else in the country. In BC, almost 60% of YP revenue is digital, whereas the rest of Canada is only close to 50%. By acquiring local, lifestyle content from both *Western Living* and *Vancouver Magazine*, YP is now able to further engage with the Western Canadian community. The 2015 transaction was not only beneficial for YP, but also gave *Western Living* more digital opportunities. While the magazine had already made plans to rebrand their website at the time of the acquisition, YP helped and continues to participate in the development of the *WL* site to this day.

**Present**

The *WL* magazine now not only publishes 10 print issues a year, but also has a digital edition for tablets through platforms like ISSUU, Libre, Press Reader, and Zinio. Their new website hosts more than 52,000 unique visitors, and has over 63,000 page views annually. Their e-newsletter reaches over 9,000 subscribers, and they are active on social media such as Instagram (16,200+ followers), Facebook (15,600+ followers), Twitter (9,300+ followers), and Pinterest (4,100+ followers). Furthermore, the magazine holds several contests throughout the year, partnering with featured companies such as Le Creuset, Whole Foods Market, the Vancouver Craft Fair, and many more. They

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publish their special issue CONDO four times a year (print and digital), with a circulation of 35,000, and host signature events to celebrate the best of the industry. In short, the *Western Living* brand has indeed become “a truly multi-platform brand.”

**The Magazine**

To better understand the company and the readership it publishes for, it is important to highlight the magazine’s many accomplishments over the years. From its mission statement, it is clear that *Western Living* is now an authority in the Western Canadian design industry: “*Western Living* informs and entertains a sophisticated, active and engaged urban reader. Our distinct Western Canadian focus is centered on three pillars: home design and décor, food and wine, and travel. Stunning photography and curated content captivates our readers as they relax and enjoy the authority and inspiration of the West’s design source.”

According to their 2018 Media Kit, *Western Living* has a total readership of 264,000, composed of 51% female and 49% male, with an average age of 24–54 years old. Their readers are 66% more likely to have a post-secondary education; 74% more likely to own their own home (which is 31% above average); 51% more likely to have improved their home in the last two years; 77% more likely to go to bars or restaurants every month; and 43% more likely to spend more than the average person on alcoholic beverages. In other words, the magazine’s readership is educated and has a higher than average disposable income.

Although in constant search for improvement, *WL* found its editorial stability in recurrent feature themes such as “*Great Spaces*”: restaurants, offices, and beautiful commercial spaces; “*WL Design*”: fascinating people, products and places of the West; “*Stuff We Love*”: a curated selection of furniture; “*Bites*”: food from the West from restaurant openings to cookbooks from local authors; and “*Trade Secrets*”: Western Canadian designers sharing tips to create magazine-worthy rooms at home. The magazine’s CONDO issue includes “*Inspiring Small Spaces*”: a peek inside interesting condos, penthouses, laneway homes, and townhouses in Vancouver; “*Essentials*”: great furniture ideas for small spaces; “*Entertaining*”: recipes and drinks to try as a party host; “*Pros & Condos*”: real estate, renovation, and DIY projects; and “*My Neighbourhood*”: Vancouver’s favourite hot spots from its best tastemakers.

Further, every year, the *Western Living* team chooses a focus for each issue, helping possible advertisers to find the right fit for their ads. The 2018 editorial calendar, which determines the content, tone and feel of the magazine for the next year, goes as follows: January/February has homes in sun-drenched cities like Palm Springs and Hawaii to help survive our winter; March has more than 20 renovations in one issue;

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April has nice homes made gorgeous by renovating; May has beautiful bathrooms; June is all about the Okanagan; July/August is Foodies of the Year with amazing indoors and outdoors design; September is Designer of the Year (DOTY): the 11th annual celebrations of the best Western designers; October has the best furniture, lighting, and accessories for 2019; November has stunning homes decorated for the holidays; and December is “Trends 2019,” which includes dos, don’ts, and what homes will look like in 2019.

**Distribution**

*Western Living* has a total distribution of 60,000 copies. 75% of their BC distribution goes directly to hand-selected consumers’ homes, based on the postal code of desirable neighbourhoods with high household income. *WL* circulation is audited by CCAB and their audience is measured by VIVADATA, a third-party company that carefully measures the readership numbers and provides specific psychographic data on their readers.

According to the 2017 report, most of their distribution is concentrated in B.C (55,000 in Vancouver and Victoria), while the remaining 5,000 goes to Calgary, Edmonton, and Winnipeg. Their extra distribution is done through carefully selected in-store placement and participation at events and home shows.

As for *CONDO*, the four issues have a distribution of 23,000 copies in English and, for the first time, the *WL* editorial team is publishing a Simple Chinese version (a hybrid of Mandarin and Cantonese) of *CONDO* with a distribution of 12,000 copies across the Lower Mainland in high traffic businesses, shops, malls, etc.

**Competition**

Before the redesign of 2015, *Western Living* started experiencing considerable competition in the marketplace and they realized that other companies offered a product with a higher production value, which included larger formats, more white space on pages, and heavier, whiter paper stock. Although the advertising community was loyal to the *WL* brand, the company came to recognize that the competition offered a product that symbolized luxury more strongly than they were. It was time for *Western Living* to make adjustments.

**Branding**

Branding is of upmost importance when it comes to creating a loyal community of readers. A brand is the source of a promise you make to the consumer. And if the consumer does not understand and identify with it, then they will walk away.

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Western Living, for example, is a luxury brand. As discussed previously, the magazine targets an audience with a higher-than-average household income and publishes high-end content on sophisticated, luxurious, and contemporary interior design, travels, fashion, foods, and wine. They are an authority in their niche, which attracts popular advertising brands such as Rolex, Scotiabank, Subaru, and many more.

A brand, however, is about more than publishing niche content. A brand is also visual. It is the look and feel of a product, which for a magazine includes a logo, a recurrent layout and image style, and specific elements throughout issues that will make the publication unique and recognizable to its readers.

Three important elements were modified in the 2015 magazine redesign: the logo, the trim size, and the signposts throughout the print magazine that guide readers to online features. The next section will examine the before and after and include comments from former Art Director Paul Roelofs on how the changes affected the magazine's success.

Logo

A well-branded logo tells the story of a brand and can be recognized among the competition. It is the face of the company’s core identity. Some logos are words or sentences, while some are images or letters. According to Sagi Haviv, a partner at New York graphic design firm Chermayeff & Geism & Haviv (CGH), a logo must be appropriate to the business, memorable, and uncomplicated in form.

The Western Living logo prior to the redesign was a bold, sans-serif font, all lower-caps, kerned tightly, and non-abbreviated (Figure 3). It floated on the top third of the magazine’s cover and took the entire width space. Its colour varied between bright colours such as magenta, cyan, yellow, and red, depending on the cover image.

During the 2015 redesign, the editorial team was inspired by brands like CC (Coco Chanel) and LV (Louis Vuitton) when they shortened the logo to its acronym, WL (Figure 3). According to Roelofs, shortening to the symbol and having it bleed off the top of covers offered “a tremendous amount of space along the top 1/3 of the page composition” and allowed for “an asymmetrical design.

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approach, which works so much better with architectural photography.” A shorter logo felt more refined, with an upscale sensibility, sophisticated, and contemporary. And although the team usually goes for a classic black, white, or gold logo, extra bright colours such as 100 magenta or 100 cyan do not appear overwhelming because it now uses a smaller space on the page.

The WL logo also went from a sans-serif all lower-case to a ligature serif, all-caps font, with an added italic treatment. This move was an excellent choice, reflecting the brand’s identity. After all, sans-serifs are seen as friendly, direct, clean and minimal, while serif fonts inspire adjectives such as classic, elegant, and established, which describes the WL brand perfectly.

Size

The size of a magazine can vary, depending on the country it is from, its type of publication, and the size of its competitors. Some magazines will prefer to stand out with an unusual size. For instance, Interview is a famously large format magazine with a 10 x 13 inches size. And it was even larger before their recent redesign (Appendix 7). There are, however, two main reasons why most magazines follow standardization. First, newsstand magazines need to fit on newsstand racks. If it doesn’t, or if it stands out too much, the publication might be put in the back or be removed altogether. Second, it is also easier for a magazine to sell ads when following a standard size. When a publication is of similar size to its competitors, advertisers can use the same ad multiple times, instead of redesigning it for each publication. Further, companies following printer standards will maximize space on each paper roll.

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and thus avoid paper waste.

A common North-American size ranges around 8 x 10 inches, or more commonly 8¼ x 10¾ inches. But because *Western Living* is not a newsstand magazine (under 25% of the total circulation happens in selected stores such as Indigo Chapters), the editorial team felt confident to increase their previous width by an inch. It is now 9 x 10.75 inches (Figure 4).

According to former Art Director Paul Roelofs, the additional width gave the magazine more breathing room to “increase the productive white space in the layouts and display larger photographs in the composition,” which added to the overall luxurious, contemporary look and feel of the magazine.

Signposts

The increased width of the print magazine also permitted the editorial team to include signposts throughout the print book that guide the reader to their newly redesigned website and newsletter. Indeed, the team upgraded their website around the same time as they did the print publication and added responsive elements to it so that it would look as great on a mobile phone as it does on a desktop. And what better way to promote new rebranded digital features than to advertise them in print.

While the print magazine pre-redesign already featured the website and newsletter in the folio as well as in 2/3 page to full-page advertisements, it did not direct readers to specific online pages and articles. And when the website or e-newsletter was mentioned, it was designed as an ad that got lost in a page full of ads from other companies, instead of being integrated into the *WL* content. Now, every issue includes an entire page

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devoted to digital highlights such as tweets, messages, Instagram comments, and emails from readers. Moreover, several print articles include signposts composed of a computer mouse icon, followed by a short description of an added feature that can be found only online, and the web address. This new strategy is a constant reminder to readers that the website is full of additional information, tips, recipes, and special features, such as full interviews and house tours that do not fit on paper (Figure 5). It further strengthens the bridge between the two different but complementary media, and thus, strengthens the WL brand as a whole.

Honorable Mentions

Other features in the print Western Living were redesigned, but do not attract as much attention as the previous three. Because this report studies the magazine’s brand through its new look and feel, the lesser noticeable changes are also important to understand.

In the previous version of WL, the colour palette included a large array of options that were used profusely across every issue. There were different shades of blues, pinks, reds, and oranges, plus some purple and mustard yellow (Appendix 10). The 2015 redesign, however, went for a cleaner look that better communicated refinement and luxury. Paul Roelofs explained that there is now very little use of colour in any display copy, apart from the WL symbol on section leads. And support colour usage “is restricted to either rich jewel tones or soft pastel colours.” By simplifying the colour palette and reducing its use in the print magazine, the team left more space for beautiful, lush photography to stand out in its architectural glory.

Another important element that was improved in the 2015 redesign is the look of section lead titles. Magazines are often divided into sections that are recurrent, issue after issue. They represent bigger subject categories that encompass one or more articles of the same genre and are often listed in the table of content. For example, “Due West,” “Food,” and “Travel” were three of the most popular section lead titles in the previous version of Western Living. Now, titles vary among “Style,” “Homes,” “Travel,” “Design,” and “Food.”

Before the redesign, the main font used for section lead titles was a modern, rounded, bold, serif typeface that was used in italic title case (Figure 6). Modern typefaces have a high contrast between thick and thin lines and are usually harder to read, which is why they are mostly used for titles and subtitles. That same font was later adopted to create the shortened, refined WL logo.

In 2015, the team went for a thinner typographic choice with all upper-case letters for the section lead titles (Figure 6). The typeface was used in its roman form, for the exception of the bold italic WL logo that precedes it. The switch from a thick to a thin font gives

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more breathing space to the upper-section of each section lead page, adding to the increase in white space accomplished through the overall magazine redesign. Further, the addition of the logo beside the main section title is an elegant and consistent brand strategy. After all, a boost in brand exposure is an excellent way to build and expand brand recognition. The more often readers see the logo, the easier it will be for them to recognize it at events and in their day-to-day life, and associate it with the content they respect and love.

Finally, developing brand loyalty and building relationships with readers takes trust. And “customers and leads are more likely to trust [a] business if they know that real life people work there.” Putting a face on the brand is one way of accomplishing trust. Before the 2015 redesign, Anicka Quin, Editor in Chief, only appeared on the Editor’s Note page. Now she also makes an appearance in the shopping section under a new element called “Anicka’s Pick.” This practice started in December 2015 with the official launch of the redesigned magazine; the

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Designers of the Year (DOTY) issue. And it is still a practice to this day. Anicka also occasionally appears on the Letters, Etc. page, under “Around Town,” alongside one or more additional staff members (Figure 7).

The team also incorporated the face of another staff member in the food section. Travel editor Neal McLennan has presented the “Neal’s Wine Pick” in three consecutive issues so far (as of December 2017), sharing his personal knowledge and insight on wine and wine tasting (Figure 7).

Feedback and Results

After the WL team put time and effort into rebranding multiple magazine elements, they decided to launch the first redesigned product in conjunction with the September Designer of the Year issue because it had been the biggest, most important issue of the year since its conception.

*Western Living* is a reflection of Western Canada’s design community that has achieved a global status. It celebrates and honours the design community in every issue by publishing its glowing stars and inspirations. Therefore, it was relevant to launch the new, more sophisticated, elevated look with an anticipated issue that honours the best of the Western design community.

In an interview with WL former Art Director Paul Roelofs, he said that the team received overwhelming positive and supportive feedback from the readership and advertisers. “The ad sales continue to be stable given the industry trajectory, leading us to believe that this move was well-timed and correct.” The design community strongly felt that the magazine was “reflective of the global status of [their] people and region.” Overall, the magazine redesign was a success in both keeping the design and advertising communities happy, and in reinforcing the WL brand by reflecting the best of what a print magazine can do.

Since the redesign, the Western Living team prides itself for having been a finalist and won several magazine awards, for both print and digital publications. The following highlights some of their achievements in 2017. They won gold at the 2017 Canadian Magazine Awards for Best Home Design and Décor Magazine, at the 2017 Alberta Magazine Awards for Best Feature Writing (“True North Strong”), at the 2017 Canadian Online Publishing Awards for Best in Canada: Digital Solution (westernliving.ca), and at the 2017 Canadian Online Publishing Awards for Best Niche Website (westernliving.ca). The full list of awards can be found in Appendix 13.


PART TWO: UX / UI

Usability Matters

Nowadays, creating a content website can be easy and can require a minimal investment. Website builders like Wix, Weebly and Squarespace offer an array of tools and fast generated layouts to content creators, which helps them start anything between a personal diary to an online magazine without having to know the difference between HTML and CSS.

For that reason, the web is filled with a fast-growing number of websites. As of 2017, there are 1.24 billion websites in the world. With 3.74 billion Internet users, it means that approximately 33% of the people who use the Internet also have a website of their own. And in this case, in order to stay on top of the competition, an increase in supply has created a demand for websites of higher quality.

According to studies published in 2017,

- 94% of a website user's first impressions are design-related (Stanford University Study)
- 75% of users admit to making judgments about a company’s credibility based on their website’s design (Stanford University Study)
- 38% of people will stop engaging with a website if the content/layout is unattractive (Adobe)

Therefore, websites have had to step up their game in order to satisfy their online customers. Whether or not a publishing company has the capital to invest in a UX/UI designer, some main design principles should be followed in order to focus the design component of a website on usability and user experience.

UX Design

Although the history of UX Design is traced back to before the Renaissance, the term “user experience (UX)” was invented in 1995 by Don Norman while he was the vice president of the Advanced Technology Group at Apple. “I invented the term,” he said, “because I thought human interface and usability were too narrow. I wanted to cover all aspects of the person's experience with the system including industrial

design, graphics, the interface, the physical interaction, and the manual.”49 When he joined Apple, Norman asked, for the first time in history, to receive the job title of “User Experience Architect.” Don Norman is also the writer of the classic design book, The Design of Everyday Things, which promotes design for its usability instead of its aesthetics alone. Norman moved on from his position at Apple in 1996.50

In 2007, Steve Jobs launched the iPhone with the promise that the new product was much easier to use than any other smartphone on the market. Indeed, the iPhone “changed the landscape of mobile devices forever, catapulting Apple into its current position as one of the world’s most successful companies.”51 And as other companies aimed to become as successful as Apple, the main focus of great mobile devices became user experience.

Since then, user experience design has expanded to multiple disciplines such as architecture, industrial design, computer science, and communication design. It is part of our everyday life in the majority of products we come in contact with and UX designer is the third highest job in demand in the technology industry, seeing an 18% job growth in the last 10 years, an average salary of $87,883, and over 30 thousand job openings as of 2017.52

But what exactly is UX Design? Multiple different definitions of the term “user experience” exist. Some have tried to define it by what it isn’t: “It is not a trendy new name for, or in any way synonymous with web design, user-centered design, graphic design, human factors engineering, user interface design (UI), information architecture, interaction design, usability testing, customer satisfaction, or marketing.”53 Meanwhile, others have defined the term by what it accomplished: “User experience design is the process of creating products that provide meaningful and personally relevant experiences. This involves the careful design of both a product’s usability and the pleasure consumers will derive from using it. It is also concerned with the entire process of acquiring and integrating the product, including aspects of branding, design, usability, and function.”54 But according to Don Norman, the creator of the term, and Jakob Nielsen, who holds a Ph.D. in human-computer interaction, and is a co-founder of the Nielsen Norman Group,

51 Ibid.
“user experience” can be summarized as “[encompassing] all aspects of the end-user’s interaction with the company, its services, and its products.”

According to Jim Nieters, Chief User Experience Strategist at Experience Outcomes, there are five measurement factors that define whether a website or product meets users’ needs.

- **Discoverability** happens when users discover how to accomplish their tasks the first time they look at a product.
- **Learnability** is when users easily learn a product’s interaction models and can predict how to move from point A to point B.
- **Efficiency** is when users can accomplish repetitive tasks quickly and easily after only a few visits.
- **System performance** is how quickly the user interface responds when users click a button or interact with the product.
- **Delight** is when the product appeals and instills an emotional connection in users.

**UI Design**

User Interface (UI) design is the “visual part of computer application or operating system through which a user interacts with a computer or a software.” It is sometimes considered as the aesthetic component of an overall user experience.

In the early days of computers, when they were big scary machines, UI design was not considered necessary because companies’ main focus was to utilize the processor to the maximum and figure out how to load information faster. Even during the Command-Line Interfaces (today known as coding) phase, where people had to command an interaction by coding a series of digits or words, the look of the user interface was not yet a priority.

In 1963, however, when the smallest computers were still as big as an entire room, Douglas Engelbart decided to invent one of the first important UI design: the computer mouse. Engelbart wanted to find a way for users and technicians to move a cursor on a display without having to code. His first prototype was presented in 1968. It enabled people to have their first “dialogue” with a computer screen.

Shortly after that, Xerox, a leading print and paper manufacturer, joined the computer research frenzy. In 1973, their scientists designed their first product, the Xerox Alto, which was also the first Graphical User Interface (GUI). GUI allowed “users to interact
with a computer through secondary interactions, such as icons and input fields.”

The Alto used the mouse technology and offered a product that was easier to understand, which offered access to computers to a larger population. It also allowed users to print exactly what they saw on the computer screen. On top of that, the Alto offered brand-new features such as removable data storage and email, which sent the industry in a race to see who could make a faster, smaller, easier-to-use machine. At this point, however, a single computer still cost about $2200 ($12,000 in today’s inflated price) to manufacture.60

Steve Jobs saw an opportunity in the GUI Xerox Alto invention and made a deal with Xerox where they exchanged $1 million of stock in the Apple company for Xerox’s GUI prototype technology. In 1984, Apple introduced their first Macintosh with their product slogan, “For the rest of us,” thus creating a new connotation for the computer, a sense that anyone could have one. The slogan, combined with a UI design that was much less intimidating and much easier to understand for the average buyer, created an air of reliability and trust within the consumer.61

From then, UI elements such as colours, start buttons, higher resolution displays, overlapping windows, and many more features were introduced and continued to evolve over the years.62 But it is towards the end of the 2000s, with the rise of the smartphone’s popularity, that UI designers had to take a step back and rethink everything. In 2007, Apple found the solution for smaller screens: “a sophisticated touch screen GUI with multi-touch functionality and significantly feature functionality distributed as apps.”63 In July 2008, Apple launched the App Store, which was followed, three months later, by Google’s version of it, the Google Android market (better known today as Google Play Store). This marked the beginning of the “App Revolution,”64 which influenced the UI design of desktops and mobile phones alike.

**UX and UI Principles**

In order to accomplish UX benchmarks while keeping the user interface beautiful and easy to understand, a company must have specific, branded standards or guidelines for both UX and UI elements.65 But to create clear standards, one must first recognize and follow set principles: simplicity, clarity, consistency, flexibility, and accessibility.

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61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
Simplicity, by definition, is the “quality or condition of being easy to understand or do.” In UX and UI design, this means that the user’s needs must be easy to satisfy. Whatever the consumer comes on a website for, they must be able to accomplish it in as little time as possible. The best UX and UI designs are often invisible to the users. They go unnoticed because they are successful in focussing on the user’s goals instead of trying to show off design elements. They only show what is necessary on each page and progressively disclose information throughout the user’s journey.

Ironically, achieving simplicity in UX and UI isn’t always simple. For that reason, designers have found rules to follow in order to produce better, simpler results.

For one, each page on a website should focus on only one key content. Whether it is on the home page or an article page, it is better to have one focused idea with multiple links to different, related content, than trying to put everything together. The same applies for visual elements such as colours and buttons. The home page of a digital magazine, for example, should not try to display its weekly or monthly content all at once, blinding the reader with too much information. Instead, they should consider the way people interact with online content and aim at keeping the reader focused and interested.

In 1997, The Nielsen Norman Group proved that people don’t read online; they scan. Today, this phenomenon is known as the F-Shaped Pattern (Figure 8). The F-Shaped Pattern basically proves that online readers will scan headings and subheadings, and then spend only a few seconds on the first lines and the first few words on the left side of each paragraph. If online companies

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want readers to actually read the full content, these key elements on the page ought to be clear and focused.

On top of that, websites should avoid any distractions, whether it is a longer-than-usual loading page time or poorly organized features. Firstly, the loading page is a “major contributing factor of page abandonment.” According to a 2016 research by a Google-owned company, Doubleclick, 53% of mobile site visits are abandoned if a page takes more than 3 seconds to load, while desktop sites that load within 5 second—compared to 19 seconds—score 25% higher in ad viewability, have 70% longer average sessions, and get 35% lower bounce rates (a single-page session on a site). Also, mobile bounce rates are 40% higher than on desktop. Therefore, improving the load-time of a mobile-version is as—if not more—important as improving that of a desktop's.

Multiple website speed tests are available for free on the web. They assist a website owner in providing elements that should be modified in order to improve the loading speed. Some recurring elements include: minimizing HTTP requests (which can be summarized as simplifying the design), reducing server response to less than 200 milliseconds, enabling compression using third-party tools such as Gzip, enabling browser caching, minifying the site's resources like HTML, CSS, and JavaScript by using third-party compressors, optimizing images and CSS delivery, prioritizing above-the-fold (top of the page) content, reducing the number of plugins, and reducing redirects.

Secondly, distractions on the page itself, such as popups that are difficult to get rid of, overly designed or eye-catching elements like flashing ads, or cluttered screens, are a sign of a poor UX and UI design. Tobias Komischke, now Director User Experience at Honeywell, published an article on the impact of an “unorganized, overloaded and busy” screen based on research papers that focused on two concepts: the human factor and the aesthetic. According to his sources, people need structure on a user interface. Humans consider randomly placed items or items that don’t align with clear symmetry.

axes on a screen to be distasteful. Further, visual clutter “limits the brain’s ability to process information and restricts the ability of [a person] to focus.” In short, in order for a website to please customers’ brain and eyes, which will then encourage them to stay on the page longer and even, perhaps, come back for more content, a page must include white space and be devoid of unnecessary distractions.

Finally, UX and UI designers have come up with a solution that would help conceive future websites with greater simplicity. They found that by designing the mobile version of a site before the desktop version forced them to create a simpler, more focused product. Since a mobile screen is small (usually around 1080 x 1920 pixels to 1440 x 2560 pixels), one has to prioritize features and “create an experience focused on the key tasks a user wants to accomplish.” A mobile phone allows for fewer elements on each screen and every feature has to earn its place to remain on a page. By designing for a mobile device first, designers are better able to organize, hide, displace, or completely remove unnecessary features and clutter that add no value to the product, and therefore, establish a stronger impact on future consumers.

The second UX and UI element is clarity. In this context, clarity is the art of presenting a clear, concise website to instill confidence in the user to make well-informed decisions. Throughout their journey, a user should always know exactly where they are, what they can do from being there, what will happen if they trigger something, and what just happened once they’ve triggered it. Further, the preferred action or trigger should always be obvious to the user on each and every page. If any of the above actions is unclear, then the UX or UI designer should look into the problem and fix it.

One of the best ways to create a clear design is to construct a strong visual hierarchy on each page, using UI elements such as typography, font sizes, colours, textures, buttons, etc. A clear visual hierarchy gives the reader clues as to where to rest their gaze. It clearly displays the most important information first, then moves on to the second most important, etc. It allows the reader to feel relaxed while navigating the site and feel confident about each action they take.

The complexity of a website’s elements and stimuli (symbols like icons and imagery; codes like colours, sizes, marks, or other graphic elements; units of measurement like a

numeric attribute; data formats in the form of text; etc.) also determine its clarity. Icons, for instance, should only be used without their supporting text for simple tasks or when they represent perfectly what they trigger. Clear, understandable icons such as an envelope that opens emails, a phone that triggers a call, a pen that opens a writing input, are universal and will not make the user think twice about their use. Certain stimuli, however, should avoid the use of icons. A subscription button on a magazine website, for example, should not try to be clever. Because a subscription page is often where a digital magazine wants to ultimately direct their users, and because the action of subscribing is difficult to represent in a simple icon, UI designers often choose to use the word “Subscription” instead of trying to illustrate it. When in doubt, it is always preferable for a website to use words instead of icons because, while users will avoid and often ignore elements they do not understand, “clarity inspires confidence and leads to further use.”

Consistency, similar to clarity, is when “an interaction with a user interface (UI) element matches a user’s expectations.” In other words, a design is consistent when users know that doing X action will take them from point A to point B. For example, if a user clicks on a button of a certain shape and colour, which brings them to a new page, they will expect every other button with the same shape and colour to take them to new pages too. If, however, the next button with the same shape and colour brings up a popup or an unwanted ad, then the user will be confused and possibly unhappy about this unexpected result. As Michael Zuschlag said in his UX article for uxmatters.com, in user interaction, “the unexpected is pretty much the same as the unwanted.” The unexpected, in UX and UI design, is also called an inconsistency.

An inconsistency is achieved when the meaning of stimuli varies, much like the previous button example. The two kinds of inconsistency are irregularity and contradiction.

An irregularity occurs when different stimuli have the same behavior or usage. For example, if a button on a digital magazine website says, “Join Us!” and another says, “Subscribe,” but both redirect the reader to the digital subscription page, readers might get confused. A contradiction is the opposite of the irregularity. It is when the same set of stimuli have different usage or behavior. For instance, if a magazine website had the same “Subscribe” button for magazine subscription and newsletter subscription, the reader would get the two confused and might subscribe to the wrong platform. To make this consistent, one could design a button with a different

88 Ibid.
shape and colour for the magazine subscription and have the button say, “Join Us!”, while the newsletter subscription button could remain, “Subscribe.”

As a rule of thumb, identical stimuli should always lead to the same result to ensure that the customer knows exactly what to expect if they trigger one of the stimuli. The more consistent the website, the less hesitant a customer will be to freely and confidently navigate through the different pages without fear of triggering an unexpected, unwanted action.

User research and usability testing are two effective ways of creating a consistent website. Before designing anything, a UX designer will conduct interviews and gather quantitative and qualitative data on what users expect of a particular user interface. This way, the designer will identify possible inconsistencies and pain points and fix them before the product launches. Then, when the product is ready to be shown to a few people, usability testing will allow the UX designer to directly observe where and how users are surprised by a user interface and where the website design thwarts their goals.90

When two elements of a user interface conflict or are unclear, however, UX and UI designers follow the principle of least astonishment (POLA), which states that “the behavior should be that which will least surprise the human user.” After all, “users want the response to a given action to be what they expect; otherwise, they would have done something else.” For example, the two proximities for inconsistency are: internal and external. Internal inconsistency occurs when a product is inconsistent with itself, while the external inconsistency is when the product is inconsistent with a reference product (e.g. two smart phones from different companies). In this case, if a UX designer absolutely had to pick between the two inconsistencies, they would choose the external inconsistency because it is better that the product remains consistent with itself, throughout, but presents new elements, such as new types of interaction, that are inconsistent with existing products.92 Users might be slightly surprised on their first visit, but as they come across the new, consistent element over and over, they would associate it with the new product and brand, and eventually accept it. This new element would then become a consistency.

In other words, it is simpler and easier for a customer to navigate a user interface that


is consistent and follows the principle of least astonishment. Such interface reuses components, behaviours, colours, and aesthetic that are already familiar to the user, which reduces the need for users to rethink their actions and confuse the result of stimuli.

In order for users to feel comfortable on a site, some components should always be familiar to them: icons, navigation, calls to action, colour codes, and payment processing.\(^93\) After all, people consider what is familiar to be more beautiful and less complex.\(^94\) Therefore, complying with patterns, layouts, and designs that already exist on the web will make the site clearer, which will result in happier users who are more likely to return for more.

**Flexibility**, in UX design, is when a product has the ability to adapt to different users and devices. Users should be allowed to interact with a product in their own term, using whichever device they want, whether it is a desktop, a tablet, or a mobile phone.\(^95\) One of the most common flexibility challenges companies face nowadays is to make a site mobile-friendly, while offering the same simplicity of design, content, and interaction as on a desktop version.

From a publishing point of view, however, certain questions arise when part of the company’s budget is to be used on a website’s flexibility. Do people really read on their mobile devices? Will the investment be worth it? To help answer these questions, the following section reflects on pros and cons statistics.

On the one hand, mobile traffic is responsible for 52.21\% of internet traffic\(^96\) and a growing number of people now read their news on mobile phones.\(^97\) Also, 80\% of internet users own a smartphone and will spend about 69\% of their media time on their smartphone.\(^98\) 70\% of all digital readership is done on a mobile device.\(^99\) And 71\%
of marketers believe that mobile marketing is core to their business. Moreover, a website that loads in 5 seconds on a mobile sees 25% more ad visibility and 70% longer session duration. Finally, 57% of users won’t recommend a business with a poorly designed mobile site.

On the other hand, 90% of internet mobile traffic is spent in apps and engagement is up to four times better on mobile apps than on mobile websites. Also, over 70% of users dislike mobile ads, leading about 400 million of these users to use ad blockers on their mobile devices. Finally, mobile users prefer watching videos.

On top of these statistics, people dislike reading online, where too many distractions such as popping ads and sidebars beside articles, restrict content visibility. Therefore, to maximize a publishing company’s investment, the key focus should be to remove the clutter and noise surrounding the content on smaller screens so that the user can fully enjoy their experience. A designer should consider that each page will be read on different devices and make typographic and visual choices that looks good and translate across all sizes and resolutions.

**Accessibility** “enables people with disabilities to perceive, understand, navigate, interact with, and contribute to” a website. It allows “the user, not the computer, to initiate and control actions.” It is a principle that must be planned in advance and that requires a thorough user research and user testing that will include people with disabilities. This includes people who use screen readers, ZoomText, and other assistive technologies. 15% of the world population identifies as having a disability, which includes more than 5.3 million Canadians. In British Columbia alone, over

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101 Ibid.
102 Ibid.
104 Ibid.
105 Ibid.
64,000 people have vision loss or partial sight.

The main step to produce an accessible design is understanding the company’s audience and predict the kind and degree of disability that this audience is likely to have. The Interaction Design Foundation (IDF) found five categories of disabilities: visual (long-sightedness, blindness, colour blindness, etc.); motor and mobility (problems with the use of hands and arms and other muscular or skeletal conditions); auditory (from a low hearing problem to total deafness); seizures, including photosensitive epilepsy (triggered by elements on a screen like light, motion, flickering, etc.); and learning (a cognitive disability instead of a physical one).

After learning the kind of problem an audience might encounter, a UX designer will have a better idea of the type of special features the site requires. The IDF identified a long list of tips for designers to follow to ensure that their site can be accessed by people with different disabilities. Here are just a few examples:

- If using a CMS (content management system), a company should choose one that supports accessibility standards.
- Use header tags to create headings in the text and make sure that the CSS is consistent throughout. Skipping from one heading level to the next will confuse the screen reader software.
- Use alt text (one or multiple words inserted as an attribute as part of the HTML code that describe the nature or contents of an image) on each image so that a screen reader can explain what the image is. To avoid user confusion, this should only apply to images that add value to the content.
- Build a link strategy by having a description before each link and a unique name for the link itself. Also, underlining each link will help colour-blind users to differentiate link from text.
- Test the colour scheme for the user interface with colour-blind people. The most common colour-blind form, deuteranomaly, affects 6% of males and 0.4% of females alone.
- Use shapes and forms to distinguish buttons from each other rather than relying on colour alone.
- Avoid tables when possible. Screen readers explain how many columns and rows to the users, which can be distracting. Tables for data presentation can be exceptions.

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if needed.
- Try the website using only a keyboard and see how easy it is to skip through sections of content.
- Familiarize yourself with ARIA (Accessible Rich Internet Applications) standards and use them if needed.
- Avoid Flash.
- Keep the language of the content easy to read.

In addition, designing an accessible website not only means giving a chance for more people to have access to a website’s content, but also helping a “fully-able bodied” user to navigate a simpler, cleaner site.\textsuperscript{14}

PART THREE: APPLICATION TO WESTERN LIVING WEBSITE

Website Redesign

In 2015, as the print version of the Western Living was going through a redesign, the company also created a new, rebranded website: westernliving.ca. They outsourced a third-party company to build and host the site on WordPress.org. In the end, the team was happy with the overall look and feel as well as the functionality of the final result.

The two main goals for the new website were to drive more traffic to their articles in order to reach more readers, sell more online advertisements, and to support and expand the WL brand.

First, their online ad sales—in 2017—represented about 7% of their total advertisement revenue. And according to Editorial Director Anicka Quin, the team wished to increase that number to 10% in the next year. In order to accomplish this, the magazine needed to prove to potential advertising companies that they can increase the number of unique users and page views by attracting more eyeballs to their site. Second, the Western Living brand is known across multiple platforms. Along with events, newsletters, and partnerships, the website helped to grow the WL brand recognition as well as their authority in the Western Canada design community.

Because the usability and design of a website plays a significant part in decreasing bounce rates and increasing a user’s satisfaction, the third part of this report will analyse the WL website based on the previous five UX and UI principles discussed in Part Two. While keeping in mind the new branding components seen in Part One, Part Three will look at specific elements on the website that follow the UX and UI principles and determine what could be improved. The report will give advice on how to modify the elements that can be improved to make the website more user-friendly.

Let’s examine elements that follow the previous UX and UI principles, as well as some suggestions to improve the website further.

Simplicity

The overall WL website is simple to navigate. Much like its print sister, the design of the website aligns on a grid and contains a good amount of breathing space. For example, the overall background remains white or pale gray throughout the entire website and the use of a secondary colour is rare and is mostly to highlight the logo or information that will help the reader to easily navigate through the site, such as sidebars, a Twitter update, category names in article sneak peek, and a sign-up button to the e-newsletter (Figure 9).

Several elements like the “Category page”, the “Current Issue” sidebar, and the “Recipe Finder” page are clean and simple. The “Category” pages (Homes & Design, Food &
Wine, Travel, Shopping, Designers of the Year, CONDO) are not only clean but also focused. They each offer one main category of information that can also be further divided into sub-categories (Bathrooms, Homes, Kitchens, etc.). The “Current Issue” sidebar only displays a few links to additional information and the cover of the current issue attracts the eyes and is just big enough to make readers want to see and read more (Figure 10).

As for the “Recipe Finder” page, it is well-branded, and simple to navigate. It does not try to include too much information all at once, and images are complementary to the content, instead of competing with it. Images focus on one element, one part of a dish (Figure 14; bottom).

Finally, a large portion of the WL articles have sub-headings, which incites readers and “scanning readers” to scroll further down. Articles that don’t have sub-headings should follow the others’ example.

Although a good portion of the WL website’s design and navigation elements are already simple, they could still use some improvement. For instance, because the images on the website are so beautiful, intricate, and busy, when they are shrunken to a thumbnail version on the “Home Page” and “Category” pages, they end up competing with the black, bold headlines for users’ attention. And because there are several article sneak peeks on a page, one’s eyes become overwhelmed and blurs...
most of the information (Figure 11). To simplify the look of these pages, either the images or headlines would need to be toned down to create a clearer hierarchy. This could be accomplished by decreasing the opacity of either element and only increasing it back when hovered over; or, by choosing between simplifying the images or decreasing the weight or thickness of headlines. The content information on pages like “Subscribe” and “Newsletter Signup” could be simplified in a few bullet points. The “Newsletter Signup” page, for instance, displays three paragraphs of text and a collage of small images before allowing readers to sign up with their email address. If the option to subscribe was the first element on the page, followed by a few bullet points explaining what the subscriber gets, and then a few large images to incite the user to click on them to read the content—or simply to show the user the type of content they will receive—the page would feel much more focused and clear. In short, the user should not have to scroll down to find the sign-up input when they click on specific sign-up pages.

Much like the previous point, the information on the “Events” page could be simplified and designed in bullet points, which would catch the reader’s interest more than a big paragraph. As for the events themselves, the images combined with the large black rectangles scream for the reader’s attention all at once, making the page cluttered and loud (Figure 11). Based on Western Living’s brand, events could be shown in a clear, clean list on a white background, which could be surrounded by beautiful images on a grid layout. (Both the list and the photography already link to a different page explaining the event in more details. This concept would also work on a new layout.)

Also, the resources page is probably the least branded page on the magazine’s website: some links are designed as new, gray buttons with a dashed underline, some have a thin, black outline, and others are simply made of a bold font with no underline or outline. Links with the same title are displayed twice on a very small amount of space, leaving very little white, breathing space for the user’s eyes to relax on (Figure
While this page gathers a lot of information, it is possible to create a simpler, cleaner layout for it. The links in boxes below the header could be deleted entirely since they are also displayed on the left sidebar. And while that sidebar should be rebranded with WL UI design elements such as warm-blue upper-case titles, lower-case sub-titles, the double arrow-head at the beginning of titles on the “Latest/Popular” sidebar, etc., it could also display the main resource title when the page is first opened (Auto, Events, Food & Wine, Furniture, Health/Beauty, Homes – Exterior, Homes – Interior, Jewellery/Fashion, Real Estate, Renovators/Builders, Tech, Travel) without the sub-titles. Then, only when the user hovers over—or clicks on—one of the titles would the sub-titles show up under it as a sub-menu. Lastly, if the search bar works properly, they could get rid of the “Resources by Name” element as well (Figure 12).

Links in the Twitter update on the “Home Page” could also be simplified to an underlined word which, when triggered, would redirect the reader to the Twitter post. Having a long http address distracts the reader’s attention from the actual content of the post (Figure 9; Twitter update).

While the newsletter signup bar on category and sub-category pages is a great idea to remind the user about the free content, the design of it could be improved. The large black bar is almost invisible because it is placed below the header, which is already very busy (Figure 13). To fix this, the image could be less busy, or the bar could be moved to the right sidebar and redesigned accordingly. It could, for instance, use the strawberry-red colour of the sign-up button for the entire background instead of black, and
link the “Sign Up for Our Newsletter” title to the “Newsletter Signup” page, or to a quick signup popup. This way, the element would stand out more, without feeling like a heavy weight on the page, and it could be added to article pages as well, to incite newcomers coming from a Google search to explore more content and maybe sign-up as well.

Finally, the headers on category and sub-category pages are a distraction from the overall clean look and feel of the WL site. The title of the categories or sub-categories feel out of place (they are dark gray and take up most of the length in the middle of the image) because the images used for headers are already busy. The dark gray background of the title goes against the new branding of the magazine, which has a lot of breathing white space and doesn’t use colour without a good reason (Figure 13). A quick fix would be to make the title background white and smaller so that the title, which would also be smaller, could be read on a quick glance. Further, placing the title on the upper-left corner of the large image would allow the image to breathe instead of being cut in half.

Clarity

The WL website is mostly clear and concise in showing the reader to more articles. For example, each article sneak peek on the “Home Page” and category pages have a strong visual hierarchy: the sub-genre in a red, bold, all-caps font, the title of the article is black and bold, and two to three lines of text in black roman (Figure 9; Article Sneak Peek). Also on the “Home Page,” below each category section, users have the option to click on a link that directs them to more articles of the same category. Instead of trying to create an icon that could have potentially confused readers, WL used an all-caps, gray font for words that describe exactly where the user is going if they click on the link (Figure 14). In fact, the only icons used on the Western Living website are the social media icons, an email icon, a print icon, and a search icon—all of which are already familiar to most users. The website mostly uses words instead of trying to introduce new icons that could potentially be confusing to their readers.

Category names on the website (Homes & Design, Food & Wine, Travel, Shopping, Designers of the Year, CONDO) are also a clear and
concise representation of the main topics addressed in both the print and digital magazine. It is thus easy for a reader to navigate to the topic they are looking for. Also, hovering over the second navigation header—the category header—brings up an entire menu that includes sub-categories as well as a few recent articles. This type of menu gives the reader a clear, substantial overview of what type of information they can optain for each category (Figure 14).

Finally, the recipe finder is, by far, the best branded page with the best UI design on the entire site. It has a clean, white background, it re-uses the WL branded double arrow-head for big section dividers, and it even uses circle-shaped images, an element found in the print magazine (Figure 14). Further, the search bar allows users to quickly find a recipe they will enjoy. In short, a user who opens the recipe finder page will be clear about the brand it is from and will understand how to find exactly what they are looking for.

While the majority of the elements on the website indicate a clear and concise purpose, others could be improved. For one, because a portion of the Western Living revenue comes from advertising sales, the link to the “Advertise with Western Living” page should be more prominent. Right now, it is on the footer with 47 other similar links (Appendix 21). The only element differentiating it is that it is in bold. A company who has never been on the site but who could be a potential advertiser would not know where to look for contact information or for information on how to advertise. To simplify their life, the link could be moved to the header, alongside other actions users perform on the site like subscribe, sign up to the newsletter, submit a project, etc. Because people read from top to bottom, the top of a website should include the most important links.

The hierarchy on the “Current Issue” page is also problematic and could be improved by removing the header image entirely, which would focus the user’s attention on the cover of the current issue only. The size of the cover image could be reduced to allow the reader to view the full length without having to scroll down. And the “Get the digital edition here!” button could be placed alongside the cover so that, once again, the user would not have to scroll down to see the two most important elements of the page (Appendix 22). In short, by removing the header image and pulling the cover image and the link to the digital edition up, the user will not have to scroll down at all, unless they require additional information.

Further, the “Subscribe” link on the top navigation menu does not take the user to a page where they can subscribe to the website. Instead, it takes them to a page with links to a digital subscription company. While the page itself is clear, the link could read “Subscription Options” to better represent the user’s journey. Another option would be to keep the link as it is but to redirect the user to the digital subscription company right away. Also, on a first glance, the “Contest” page is not clear about which contest is closed
and which is still open (Figure 15). Because the added word “CLOSED” in the title is of the same font, colour, and size as the rest of the title, users who scan pages quickly might not realize that they will be unable to enter the contest. And once they’ve clicked on the link, there is a higher chance that they will be disappointed because they expected a different outcome. Two quick fixes would be to add a UI element such as the word “CLOSED” on the image itself once the contest has closed, or to create a separate section further down on the page with closed contests. That separate section would have to be clearly labeled as displaying the closed contests only. Either way, users would still have access to previous contests, but there would be a clear sign differentiating contest that are still available to enter from those that are not.

Finally, the “Sources” link on the footer leads to a page with information dating back to May 2016 and older. Since the information does not seem important enough to be updated regularly, it might be better to delete the page and the link entirely.

**Consistency**

Several elements on the WL website are consistent. For example, all article sneak peeks look the same. Therefore, the user quickly learns that if they click on the image or the article title, they will go to the article itself, while if they click on the red category or sub-category name, they will be redirected to the category or sub-category page (Figure 9; Article Sneak Peek). Social
media icons and links on article pages are also consistent. The round social media icons at the upper-right corner of the top navigation menu directs the readers to the Western Living social media page, while the rectangle ones at the bottom of each article shares the content to the user’s own account (Figure 16). And links on article pages are of the same font and size as the main text but can be distinguished by their warm-blue colour. Also, they are underlined when hovered over, which is a consistent way to let the user know that the cursor is aligned with the proper element to turn the word into a stimulus (Figure 16).

Because WL is building a brand on multiple platforms, they have put in place a system where all the images on the website can be shared on Pinterest. The user only has to hover over the image, select the red Pinterest “save” button, and choose the board which they want the image to be part of (Figure 16).

Finally, the website consistently offers the user a choice of three “Related Posts” at the bottom of each article page. This way, readers know that they will easily and quickly find more interesting content as soon as they finish reading a post (Appendix 25).

On the other side of the spectrum, the UI design for buttons is not always consistent. Buttons on the top navigation menu are a white, upper-case, sans-serif Roboto Condensed font, separated only by space (Figure 17; A). Buttons on the second navigation menu are a black, upper-case, serif Domine font, separated by the WL branded double slash symbol (Figure 17; B). And when hovering over these last buttons, the vertical list of sub-categories shows black, regular, serif Domine buttons (Figure 17; C). The sub-category buttons on the category pages are a black, regular, sans-serif Roboto Condensed font divided by a vertical bar (Figure 17; D). Buttons for the food categories on the home page of the recipe finder are a strawberry-red, upper-case, sans-serif Roboto Condensed font, contained in individual boxes (Figure 17; E). Buttons for the resources categories on the “Resources” page are a black, upper-case, sans-serif Roboto Condensed font, contained in individual boxes (Figure 17; F).
Condensed font, contained in individual boxes (Figure 17; F). Finally, the button list on the recipe finder’s left sidebar is a gray, regular, sans-serif Roboto font, bordered with a dotted underline (Figure 17; G), while the button list on the left sidebar of the “Resources” page is a gray, upper-case, sans-serif Roboto Condensed font, bordered with a top-dashed line (Figure 17; H).

In order to make the buttons more consistent and branded, the website should have a maximum of two types of buttons with a consistent font, and style (upper or lower case): one for horizontal and one for vertical menus. The only flexibilities should be the colour of the button, which could match a specific category or element, and its size, which would help keep a good hierarchy. Horizontal buttons could all look like the category navigation menu, with the black, upper-case, serif Domine font, separated by the WL branded double slash symbol (Figure 17; B). And vertical buttons could be simpler with a gray, regular, sans-serif Roboto font without any border or box as delimitation. Both types of buttons would be underlined once hovered over, to keep a certain consistency with other links.

The “Privacy policy” link at the bottom right of the footer is a contradiction inconsistency. While all the other links with the same UI design on the footer lead to a specific page on the Western Living website, this one leads the user to a corporate Yellow Pages page. Two ways of fixing the problem would be to either change the stimulus, to design the link differently, in order to let the user know that this particular stimulus will trigger a different result than the other links on the footer. The second option would be to keep the stimulus as it is but to copy and paste the Yellow Pages content to a new Western Living page dedicated to explaining the privacy policies.

Further, the top left of the website presents an irregularity consistency. The top navigation menu has a “Western Living Magazine” button leading to the “Home Page” and the second navigation menu—which is just below the top one—has the WL logo that leads the user to the “Home Page” as well (Figure 18). In order to keep it consistent, the “Western Living Magazine” button could be deleted.
for the pages that show the two menus, and only come back on pages that don’t have the second navigation menu like “Recipe Finder,” “Resources,” etc.

Finally, the fact that the second navigation menu disappears on certain pages is also an inconsistency. It forces the user to go back to the “Home Page” before being able to access the magazine’s content. “Recipe Finder” and “Resources” are the two pages that could use a second menu to remain consistent.

Flexibility

Most elements and pages on the Western Living website are flexible. The navigation menu is responsive and mobile-friendly (Appendix 28). It is simple to navigate and its UI design elements, such as the transparent background and the double slash symbol, were taken directly from the print magazine design, which reinforces the WL brand.

Further, the article pages on the mobile version are clean and uncluttered. The typeface and font size choices make the content easy to read on a small screen and the pages are distraction-free (Figure 19).

Finally, the layout of the “Category” and “Sub-category” pages is also responsive. On a mobile phone, each article sneak peek is displayed across almost the entire width of the screen, making the beautiful images wide and appealing. This layout also allows each article sneak peek to be seen and considered by the user one at a time, helping the user to digest the information before moving on—scrolling down—for more choices (Figure 19).

The headers on “Category” and “Sub-Category” pages, however, are not responsive: the image only zooms in as the screen shrinks. But since the title of the category/sub-category is part of the image, the text also gets zoomed...
in, obstructing more than half of the title. On a mobile screen, only the WL logo as well as the beginning—sometimes just a few letters—of the title are visible (Figure 18; Unresponsive Category Header).

The recipe finder element on the “Home Page” also reacts awkwardly to smaller screens. The normal desktop version (at least 1300 pixels wide) displays the new WL logo with the title “Recipe Finder,” a search bar, and a large “Search” button (Figure 20). At 1000 pixels wide, the logo and title have disappeared completely and only the search bar and button remain (Figure 20). Down to 990 pixels wide, a large version of the old Western Living logo appears, pushing the two other elements lower. At this point, the search button comes out of the recipe finder background image (Figure 20). At 768 pixels, the old logo shrinks down to a size that allows the search button back on the image (Figure 20). From there, down to a mobile screen size, all the elements adjust, until the old logo, the search bar, and the search button are centered. To improve the flexibility of the site, the new logo as well as the title “Recipe Finder” should be visible at all times, especially on the mobile version, in order to promote the brand properly and keep the user well-informed.

Further, certain elements that are mobile-friendly do not adapt well when the screen width is smaller than its full size. For example, when a user has two or more tasks open on the same computer screen, the width of each task will be reduced. Therefore, it is important for the website to have fully-responsive pages. The responsiveness of elements such as the sidebars (Figure 21), the category titles on the home page (Figure 21), and the footer could be improved (Figure 21).

Accessibility

The WL website is, overall, accessible to people with disabilities. On the one hand, the CMS (content management system) used for westernliving.ca is WordPress.org. It has
high accessibility standards. The website also uses header tags: h1 for page and article titles, h2 for sub-headings, h3 for closing sentences at the end of articles, h4 for page and article decks, and p for the main text.

All the images in the article sneak peeks have a descriptive alt text. The description is usually the title of the article. And links of the WL website have unique names (Figure 16; Links). They are embedded as part of the text. For instance, in the sentence “Designer Paul Lavoie brings some California cool to a Calgary home with views for miles,” the words “Paul Lavoie” link to the Mr. Lavoie’s website. The name of the link is a perfect representation of the link itself; on a screen reader, it will tell a disabled person exactly where the link leads.

Further, the WL website has no table that could confuse a screen reader and, according to an SEO automated checkup, westernliving.ca does not include Flash objects.

Finally, according to a readability test tool, the website content was written for an eighth grader of about 13 to 14 years old.

On the other hand, images on article pages do not have alt text. A screen reader would thus be unable to describe the beautiful images to a person with sight disability.

Also, links on the website are not underlined (Figure 16; Links). A colour-blind user would not differentiate the warm blue links from the black normal text. They would not be able to differentiate the colour schemes either, as they do not have a high enough contrast.

Finally, after navigating through the website using only a keyboard, tests confirmed that the top navigation menu is easy to navigate but that most other links do not underline when the tab cursor selects them. And without knowing where the cursor is, it is impossible to select specific links and buttons.

To conclude, the Western Living website is already well-designed, simple and clear enough for its readers to navigate from point A to point B. As seen in Part One of this project report, the magazine won two Canadian Online Publishing Awards gold medals for “Best in Canada: Digital Solution” and “Best Niche Website,” so the improvements mentioned in Part Three would not only further distinguish westernliving.ca from its competitors, which could help increase ad sales revenue, but also offer the magazine’s readers a better, more personalized experience.

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CONCLUSION

Over the past decade, customer’s attention shifted from print to digital. As mentioned in the introduction, while people are reading less print magazines, they spend more time on their computer, tablet, and mobile phone. Because of this, and because of the colossal number of websites available online nowadays, readers have become picky and will leave a website after less than 20 seconds if it is not user-friendly and well-designed. Therefore, in order to attract more readers and thus, more advertisers, magazines should follow important UX and UI principles such as simplicity, clarity, consistency, flexibility, and accessibility.

As mentioned in Part Three of this project report, the *Western Living* magazine is already doing so. The new website is clear as well as simple to navigate, and overall user-friendly. Most of the elements are also mobile-friendly and accessible to readers with disabilities.

*WL* also incorporated some elements from the 2015 print magazine’s redesign, such as their revamped logo, more white space, and a better hierarchy to the website, thus elevating and strengthening the *Western Living* brand to reflect its community. The magazine spent time, money, and effort to better portray luxurious, high-end, and sophisticated designers on both print and online platform. It was rewarded by a lot of positive responses from its community and their advertisers, as well as by being finalists and winning several national and regional magazine awards.

But following some main UX and UI principles and having a well-branded website is not enough. According to their 2017 Google Analytics, the 2015 redesign of the digital platform increased the number of unique visitors. On the one hand, the number of page views per month increased from 47,021 (2015) to 74,409 (2017), a 58.25% growth. On the other hand, the bounce rate went from 75.47% (2015) to 77.73% (2017). These statistics show that while more users are visiting the website, they do not feel compelled to explore more content once they are done with the initial entry page.

Making the website more responsive and mobile friendly would really benefit the brand. According to their 2017 Google Analytics, 52.80% of their online users read the website content on their mobile, compared to 73.17% on desktop, and 13.94% on tablets. And the bounce rate is 15.23% higher on mobiles and 8.15% higher on tablets than on desktops.

Another improvement would be to fully understand, through Google Analytics segments, where users come from and create a clear path for them to follow once they are on the site, irrespective of where they come from. This could be done through

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design and website story telling and would decrease the bounce rate and increase the page views.

According to Anicka Quin, WL’s Editor in Chief, the team has built a strong online strategy for 2018 that will help reach their digital ad sales goal for the next year (7% to 10%). They seem, however, to be focussing mainly on the content of the site, rather than on the overall usability. And while creating great content is obviously important for a publishing company, it is also crucial to keep in mind that readers will only get to read the content if the interface is well-designed and user-friendly, and if the website displays a clear goal.

APPENDIX 1. WEEKLY POSITIONING

The positioning of TV, radio, newspaper, magazine, and internet media by weekly reach and time.
APPENDIX 2. THE ECONOMIST DIGITAL SALES

The Economist’s January-June 2016 Report shows a climb in digital sales.
### Appendix 3. The Economist Audience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AUDIENCE</th>
<th>PRINT CIRC*</th>
<th>DIGITAL CIRC*</th>
<th>ONLINE* (unique visitors)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Global</td>
<td>1,042,851</td>
<td>402,085</td>
<td>11,372,596</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global Ex-NA</td>
<td>417,299</td>
<td>203,659</td>
<td>6,184,510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td>625,552</td>
<td>198,426</td>
<td>5,188,086</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>7,014</td>
<td>11,657</td>
<td>468,313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe, Middle-East, Africa</td>
<td>322,375</td>
<td>141,090</td>
<td>3,923,710</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>162,431</td>
<td>85,765</td>
<td>1,341,579</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Economist’s digital audience in their January–June 2016 Report shows.
APPENDIX 4. POSITIVE AGING

Weibull Hazard Function of Positive Aging
Appendix 5. Western Homes Cover

July 1959 Western Homes and Living cover.
Appendix 6. Western Living Logo

The Western Living logo before 2015 redesign (top) and the Western Living logo after redesign (bottom).
Interview Magazine cover width before the newest redesign and after (10" X 13").
Appendix 8. Western Living Covers

Western Living Magazine cover width before the 2015 redesign and after (9" X 10.75).
Appendix 9. Signposts

A full page website ad before redesign (top left), a full page online content after redesign (top right), a signpost full page (bottom left), and a signpost zoomed-in (bottom right).
Appendix 10. Opening Titles

An Openings title before redesign (top left), a table of contents before redesign (top right), an Openings title after redesign (bottom left), and a table of contents after redesign (bottom right).
APPENDIX 11. SECTION LEADS

A section lead before redesign (top) and a section lead after redesign (bottom)
APPENDIX 12. STAFF MENTIONS

Anicka’s Pick (left), Around Town (top right) and Neal’s Pick (bottom right)
APPENDIX 13. AWARDS

- Gold: 2017 Canadian Magazine Awards for Best Home Design and Décor Magazine
- Gold: 2017 Alberta Magazine Awards for Best Feature Writing (“True North Strong”)
- Gold: 2017 Canadian Online Publishing Awards for Best in Canada: Digital Solution (westernliving.ca)
- Gold: 2017 Canadian Online Publishing Awards for Best Niche Website (westernliving.ca)
- Finalist: 2017 Alberta Magazine Awards for Best Editorial Package (Foodies of the Year and Trends 2017)
- Finalist: 2017 Alberta Magazine Awards for Best Service and Lifestyle (“Bird is the Word”)
- Finalist: 2017 Alberta Magazine Awards for Best Art Direction for a Single Issue (September Issue)
- Finalist: 2017 Alberta Magazine Awards for Best Feature Design (“Photo Finish”)
- Finalist: 2017 Alberta Magazine Awards for Best Photography: Essay or Series (“This Side of Paradise”)
- Finalist: 2017 Alberta Magazine Awards for Best Cover (June Issue)
- Finalist: 2017 Canadian Society of Magazine Editors 2017 Editors’ Choice Awards for Best Web Editorial (westernliving.ca)
- Finalist: 2017 Canadian Online Publishing Awards for Best Email Newsletter (“The WL Daily”)
APPENDIX 14. F-SHAPED PATTERN

The F-Shaped Pattern on three different web pages. Found on nngroup.com.
APPENDIX 15. WELL-DESIGNED ITEMS

TREND REPORT // We did some serious design homework to bring you a sneak peek at the key looks you’re going to love…
https://t.co/er6YRFUTZ

SIGN UP FOR OUR NEWSLETTER
Get your Western Living fix delivered straight to your inbox three times a week, packed with editors’ picks, designer tips, and inspiring recipes.

LATEST

RECIPIES
Your 15 Favourite Recipes of the Year!
These are the dishes our readers loved most in 2017—get ready to feast.

FURNITURE
Behind the Scenes with a Pro Upholsterer
A local furniture upholsterer shares her expert tips for recovering a fave piece.

WINE
These Tips Will Turn You Into a Champagne Pro
Cheers to mastering the fine art of sipping bubbly.

POPULAR

HOMES
Editors’ Picks: Our Favourite Homes for 2017
We love all the homes we feature in the pages of Western Living, of course—but reflecting back on the past year, it’s clear we’ve all got our own favourites.

The Twitter update (top 1), the newsletter signup bar (top 2), a sidebar (left), and an article sneak peek (right)
Appendix 16. Sidebar

Current Issue sidebar:

- Table of Contents
- Digital Edition
- Distributors
- Archives

Current issue sidebar:
APPENDIX 17. BUSY PAGE

Your New Fave Ski Destination: Kimberley, B.C.
Because the local community character is just as good as the mountain terrain.

Discovering Our Powder Legs on Park City’s Epic Slopes
Plus where to stay, where to sleep and what to buy in the resort mountain town.

Partner Events

A busy-looking page (top) and the “Events” page (bottom).
APPENDIX 18. LINKS AND BUTTONS

RESOURCES BY NAME

A/B/C/D/E/F/G/H/I/J/K/L/M/N/O/P/Q/R/S/T/U/V/W/X/Y/Z

STONE / FOCUS
Adera Natural Stone Supply

KITCHEN & BATH DESIGNERS
Renovators
Mert Kitchens

INDOOR
Rove Concepts

FILTER BY:

AUTO
EVENTS
FOOD & WINE
FURNITURE
HEALTH/BEAUTY
HOMES - EXTERIOR
HOMES - INTERIOR
JEWELLERY / FASHION
REAL ESTATE
RENOVATORS/BUILDERS
TECH
TRAVEL

LATEST SPONSORED POSTS

SPONSORED / RESTAURANTS
Elevated and Energized: CF Pacific Centre’s Urban Eatery Opens Its Doors
Who says all food courts have to be the same?

Links on the Resources page (top) and Resources by name (bottom).
APPENDIX 19. BUSY HEADER

A busy sub-category header (top) with a heavy newsletter subscription bar (bottom)
A link to more articles (top), the second navigation menu when hovered over (middle), and the arrow head divider with circle-shaped images in the recipe finder (bottom).
Advertise with Western Living link on the website footer.
Appendix 22. Hierarchy

December 2017 Table of Contents

Winter Warmth

The hierarchy on the “Current Issue” page.
Closed contests

CONTESTS
CLOSED: Win 2 VIP Tickets to Kurios by Cirque du Soleil!
Why not celebrate the holidays under the big top?

CONTESTS
CLOSED: Win This Chic Rose Gold Watch from Tense
Is it your time to win this made-in-Vancouver watch?

CONTESTS
CLOSED: Check Out the Homes

CONTESTS
CLOSED: Win 2 Tickets to Circle
APPENDIX 24. ICONS

Designer Paul Lavoie brings some California cool to a Calgary home with views for miles.

The social media icons (top), links without and with hovering (middle), and the Pinterest icon on an image (bottom).
APPENDIX 25. RELATED POSTS

Related posts

The Home Tour: A Pretty, Feminine Condo in Vancouver’s West End

5 Reasons to Escape to Point Roberts

The Results Are In! Meet the Winners of LAMP’s 2015 Lighting Design Competition

Related Posts at the end of each article.
APPENDIX 26. TYPES OF BUTTONS

Different types of buttons: top navigation (A), second navigation (B), vertical sub-categories (C), sub-categories on category pages (D), food categories on the “Recipe Finder” page (E), resources categories on the “Resources” page (F), vertical list on the “Recipe Finder” page (G), and vertical list on the “Resources” page (H).
Two menus leading to the homepage (top) and an unresponsive category header (bottom).
Appendix 28. Navigation Menu

Western Living Magazine

Homes & Design // Food & Wine // Travel // Shopping // Designers of the Year // Condo

Screenshot of the responsive and mobile-friendly navigation menu.
The Home Tour: A Pretty, Feminine Condo in Vancouver’s West End

A modern glass apartment on the waterfront becomes a showcase for a globetrotter’s keepsakes.

By Julia Dilworth // May 20, 2016

What do you do when a home’s biggest feature is also its

Editors’ Picks: Our Favourite Homes for 2017

We love all the homes we feature in the pages of Western Living, of course—but reflecting back on the past...

A mobile article page (left) and a mobile category page (right).
APPENDIX 30. RECIPE FINDER

(From top to bottom) The Recipe Finder element at 1300 pixels, the RF element at 1000 pixels, the RF element at 990 pixels, and the RF element at 768 pixels.
Appendix 31. Not Mobile-Friendly

Three different sidebar widths (top), a category title at 1200 pixels (middle), and the footer at 760 pixels (bottom).