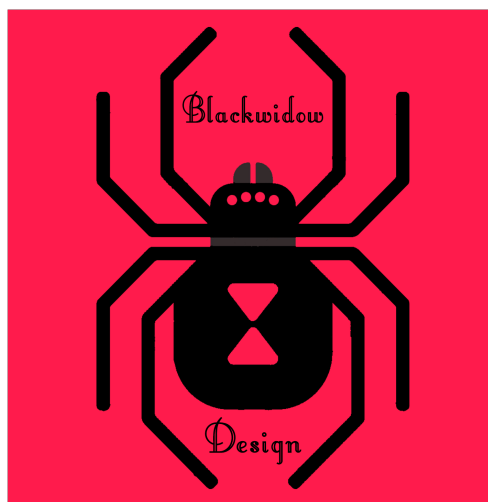


An Evaluation of Amusement Park Websites: A Proposal for their Effects on Park Admissions

Prepared for:
DownThrill Amusement Parks

Prepared by:
Connor McGowan, Victoria Shirey, and Stephen Hartman

October 20, 2019



DownThrill Amusement Parks

Publicity Department
123 Excitement Ave.
Coaster, VA 12345

October 14, 2019

Zach Adams
Vice-President of Consulting
Blackwidow Design
789 Graphics Road

Dear Mr. Adams:

Subject: Analysis of Amusement Park web page

In the last five years, there has been a strong correlation between an amusement park's ability to draw in visitors and online presence. Due to a more modernized and more technologically advanced state, amusement parks can more easily draw in guest just based off of their website. We, at DownThrill Amusement Park, would like a revamped website to help bring in more guests to our park.

DownThrill.com has not been updated since our opening in 2016. Our lack of a strong online presence hurts our park attendance, we believe. We wish to commission your team to deliver a report on how to improve DownThrill.com with the goal being to make our website more modernized to help bring more visitors to our park. We wish to see the report no later than February 1, 2020.

We look forward to seeing your report and will gladly provide you with any additional information that you may need. Feel free to contact me at my office at 475-689-0432.

Yours sincerely,

Patricia Smith

Patricia Smith
Director of Publicity

Blackwidow Design

789 Graphics Road
Whatever, VA 23232

December 20, 2019

Patricia Smith
Director of Publicity
DownThrill Amusement Parks
123 Excitement Avenue
Coaster, VA 12345

Dear Mrs. Smith:

Subject: Amusement Park website proposal completion

I have attached the report evaluating the Amusement Park websites appeal that you requested in your letter on October 14, 2019.

There are three websites that I recommend that either exemplify great usability and accessibility and have an overall great aesthetic design or they exemplify what makes a bad website design.

1. King's Dominion
2. Six Flags
3. Busch Gardens

We have plenty of confidence that a great website can be designed based off of the recommendations we have made based off of the three websites we researched.

We have thoroughly enjoyed the research we have done. We appreciate you allowing us to help DownThrill Amusement Parks in updating its current site. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about the report, do not hesitate to reach out to us at 333-456-9876.

Your Sincerely,

Zach Adams

Zach Adams
Vice-President of Consulting

Enclosure: Report on amusement park websites

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Executive Summary

Recently, DownThrill Amusement Park has experienced a decline in park attendance, as well as ticket sales. This has led DownThrill to seek professional help in improving their website and overall online presence. Their website was last updated in 2016 and the lack of updates has most likely contributed to the decrease in desired ticket sales and park attendance.

With only a few amusement parks in Virginia, DownThrill knows the importance of maintaining a successful and fun park environment, but in this day and age, maintaining a quality online presence is as crucial. Most ticket sales are made online, and without a functional and aesthetically pleasing website, park attendance is certainly going to take a toll. DownThrill's publicity department hired Blackwidow Designs to recommend three well-known and successful amusement park websites that provide ideal exhibitions of user satisfaction.

Blackwidow Designs' task was to find websites with pleasing and well-displayed information that possible park attendees can see and utilize when navigating the park website. As part of the analysis, overall aesthetic design, ease of accessibility, and ability to showcase the park attractions were all evaluated with the end goal of improving the DownThrill website in a manner that hopefully increase park admissions.

Each website was analyzed and rated using the following criteria:

- **Overall Aesthetic Design:** fresh style and layout, exciting colors, and minimal layout
- **Ease of Accessibility:** informative home page, easy to navigate, useful toolbar/features
- **Showcasing of Attractions:** information regarding rides, rollercoasters, shows, events, dining options, etc.

DownThrill park attendees were given two surveys. Based on the results of those surveys, the following three amusement park websites were chosen on which to base our analysis:

- Kings Dominion
- Busch Gardens
- Six Flags

The focus on this report is to provide DownThrill with quality, useful, and informative suggestions on how to improve their current website. We at Blackwidow Designs are quite certain that our analyses and overall report will grant DownThrill new perspectives on how to improve their site, and in turn, how to increase the success of their amusement park.

Introduction

Like all businesses, it's vital that amusement parks have a professional and accessible website. Websites act as the means through which many customers interact with a business, so it's paramount that they can access the information they need in an easy and aesthetically pleasing way, while still feeling that the company is professional.

Built in 2016, the DownThrill amusement park is located in Coaster, Virginia. DownThrill believes in providing a safe and fun environment for the whole family, while still catering to the daring with exhilarating attractions. Since its founding, the park has provided unforgettable theme park experiences to many families, and many more to come.

The park has hosted a total of near 2 million guests since its opening. The website for the park has not been updated since said opening back in 2016 and has experienced a 2.5% decline in visitors to its website each month since its creation on the park's founding.

A sample size of 15,000 surveys were sent out DownThrill website users, asking what they considered to be the most important steps to improving the site's design. Out of the 4,000 surveys returned, it was found that most people said the overall aesthetic, ease of accessibility, and visibility of park rides were the area's most in need of improvement.

Blackwidow Design has been contracted by DownThrill due to a record of visible improvement in commercial website usage. Many of Blackwidow Design's staff have backgrounds as web designers for the Google LLC. Employment under the company requires an extensive history in web design, as well as a history of outstanding performance within past companies.

The following report details some of the successes and shortcomings of competing amusement parks, with the purpose of providing an example of what works for this type of company. This report will detail a multitude of suggestions to improve web design in categories considered the most important by DownThrill's attendees, with the end of improving traffic to the website.

To accomplish this, we have selected the websites of Kings Dominion, Busch Gardens, and Six Flags to be analyzed for the three criteria guests of DownThrill's website cited as needing the most improvement. These criteria are as follows:

- Overall Aesthetic Design
- Ease of Accessibility
- Showcasing of Attractions

Visitors to DownThrill's website also received a survey asking their overall satisfaction with both the site itself, and the competing sites of Kings Dominion, Busch Gardens, and Six Flags. The results showed a 40% approval rating of DownThrill's website, with a high of a 97% approval rating for Six Flags and a low of 27% for Kings Dominion.

Analysis of Kings Dominion

<https://www.kingsdominion.com/>

Overall Aesthetic Design

Kings Dominion's website contains some strong aesthetic elements, but on the whole suffers from some overdone ideas. Colorful design helps to draw in an audience member's attention, but in the case of Kings Dominion it is overdone. The bright oranges and blues are put directly next to each other, and the colored rectangles used as a background switch between two radically different, vibrant colors often. This technique can help to make a website look varied and to capture the viewer's attention but can easily be overdone. Colors utilized in the website like orange and blue are complementary, but the shades are far too bright and colors like green mixed in do not match with the overall design.

The site has a very modern looking style, making it appear both professional and new. Many of the positives of a "modern" site design are absent due to the aforementioned color issues but could be easily remedied with a more appealing palette. The link for the "Winterfest" event in the website's navigation bar is in a different font, fitting with the theme of the event and also drawing attention to it as well as making it stand out as a unique aspect of the park.

The potential gains of this modern style are shown in the tabs located within the navigation bar, as some of them still have a white and blue color scheme, but it's inverted to be a white background with blue text. This still accomplishes the goal of color variety and attracting audience attention, without being distracting. Many of the tabs are divided into columns with a panel on the left providing either an ad or extra information on the topic discussed, accompanied with an image. This structure makes the information very neatly formatted, while still having an image to provide visual aid.

Ease of Accessibility

The overly contrasting colors cause readability problems as well as the aesthetic issues mentioned earlier. Sections like the "One Pass. Four Seasons of Fun!" area have such a bright background that it's hard to read the white text without hurting the eyes. The color issues manifest in other areas as well, like with a line of dots acting as navigation for a set of informational panels. The currently selected dot is a bright green color very similar to the background, making it blend in and be hard to tell which dot is selected, if any.

When hovering over the "Tickets" section in the navigation bar, it is very clear what types of tickets are available. The left side lists every different type of ticket that a consumer can purchase, while the right side lists every form of upgrade available. This is all presented in neat columns in black text on a white background, making it very easy to both read and understand all information presented

Showcasing of Attractions

Kings Dominion showcases its attractions through its own separate tab within the navigation bar, labeled by the word “Play”. Rides are divided into categories such as “Roller Coasters”, “Thrill Rides”, or “Family Rides”. This way of distinguishing the rides makes it potentially difficult for guests to find what they’re looking for, as for example the “Great Pumpkin Coaster” is listed under “Roller Coasters”, alongside rides such as the aptly named 305-foot-tall “Intimidator 305”, as opposed to residing within the “Family” section. Within each category customers are provided a wealth of information at a glance, as in front of the picture of each ride the minimum height, “Thrill Level”, and eligibility for Kings Dominion’s “Fast Lane” program is shown. On a ride’s individual page, guests can also see a variety of pictures taken for the specific ride on top of promotional text, as well as a full video showing the ride in action for its full duration. At the bottom of each page, safety information is displayed which can warn about features such as strobe lighting, the presence of metal detectors, or other potential concerns. It is also possible to filter rides within a section by “Thrill Level”, minimum height requirement, and its eligibility for “Fast Lane”. A button at the top of the section also gives users the ability to pull up a map of the park which highlights the location of all rides in the currently selected category, though there is no way to use this feature on an individual ride’s nor choose to go to a specific ride on the map.

Analysis of Busch Gardens

<https://www.buschgardens.com/williamsburg/>

Overall Aesthetic Design

At first glance, Busch Gardens' website aesthetic may come off a little strong to the average consumer. This is attributed to the oversaturation of green on the home page. Although, once the website is navigated further, it is likely the green will become less of an issue as the consumer realizes the current website design is heavily constructed towards the promotion of the Christmas Town event(s).

Green is a major part of Busch Gardens' aesthetic as a whole, so overall it makes a lot of sense that it would be very prevalent throughout the whole website. The main tab(s) part at the top of the page, the boxes enclosing each of the website's featured sections, and the overall border and layout of the entire page fits the same color scheme of Busch Gardens' logo: mostly green with touches of blue and orange. As long as the consumer can handle the mostly monochromatic color scheme, it seems that the website's design goes well with the Busch Gardens' brand and current, seasonal attractions.

Another positive aspect of the website's aesthetic is the use of large, well-framed, and professionally photographed pictures across the entire site. All of these pictures are quite tasteful and do a great job at displaying the park's events, attractions, and physical appearance. Although there is a downside to some of these photographs, and it is linked to the somewhat consistent slideshow on the top of the homepage. The pictures in this slideshow are great, and are very pleasing to the eye, but the auto-scrolling is buggy, and doesn't move consistently or for a very long time. After a while, the slideshow stops completely, and some consumers may find this as a negative if they were hoping for the site to show its attractions on its own.

Ease of Accessibility

When it comes to the accessibility of Busch Gardens' site, this is one of the things they do best. The site is organized wonderfully; with all of the important information being displayed on the home page, and any other slightly less crucial info being just a click or two away. The toolbar at the time is very helpful, with tabs like, "Hours & Info" and "Things to Do." Each of these tabs bring down an extension of the toolbar with loads of links to take you to another page full of important information. We will say that sometimes the site has a bit of an overbearing overload of information. It can feel like you were being hit with too much all at once at times, but we believe the site is just trying to make sure there isn't anything you're looking for that isn't there, so overall, it's most likely a good thing.

Another part of the site's accessibility is the strategic placement of two very crucial website components. The first component is one that is specific to an amusement park website: tickets. Not only is there a large orange button in the top middle of the home page that says "Buy Tickets," but there is also another part that says "Buy Tickets" in the toolbar spoken of earlier, in case a consumer wanted to transition into buying tickets after exploring the other parts of the toolbar. The second component is the availability and place of a "Search" feature on the website. It may seem simple but having a search feature is a big deal when it comes to a website with this much information, and the average place a search feature will appear on a website is in the top right corner of the site. Having that option available and in its most expected place will go a long way with customer satisfaction.

Showcasing of Attractions

Busch Gardens' website has every bit of information about what it's attendees can expect to find within the park, and it is all organized and neatly packed into one place. On the toolbar there is a tab titled "Things to Do," and when you click on it, there isn't a single piece missing. Since Busch Gardens is a theme park, there is more than just roller coasters. The website has links for things like Shows, Animals, Dining, Shopping, Kid Friendly attractions, Events, and even a link for what is expected to come in the next year. This is one of our favorite features of the site because we couldn't think of a single thing the park could possibly offer that wasn't showcased in this section of the website.

Let's be clear though, when someone visits an amusement park or even a theme park like Busch Gardens, it is rare that they wouldn't be looking forward to the rides and coasters. This is another place the website does exactly right. When exploring the "Rides & Coasters" link in the toolbar, the consumer is taken to a page with every single possible ride or roller coaster listed in alphabetical order and organized with certain tags like, "Family Ride" or "High Thrill." The customer can even use a filter option to select the specific tags they are looking for and all other irrelevant attractions based off that filter will disappear. Also, when clicking on each attraction, the customer is given information about each ride like the height requirement, thrill level, ride type, history of the ride, and even sometimes a video of the ride to get an idea of what to expect. We can't think of a better way to both inform customers about the rides, while also getting them excited to hit as many attractions as possible upon their visit.

Analysis of Six Flags

<https://www.sixflags.com/america>

Overall Aesthetic Expression

The website design of Six Flags is very aesthetically pleasing. The colors it uses on its website are a combination of red, orange, and yellow. This makes for a very good look because these three colors blend together well. These colors also work well because they are not overbearing; they are bright and attractive. Being that this website is for an amusement park, the brighter colors work well because they promote a fun atmosphere.

The fonts used throughout the website are mostly consistent. The font changes in some places, but it only changes to add an emphasis on certain tabs, such as the “tickets”, “season pass”, and “membership” tabs. Although the font is slightly different on these three tabs than the rest, it is the same font on all of the three. The font type used is a professional font and is easy to read. It is not harsh on the eyes, so it makes for a good font for a website.

Overall, the website has good aesthetic expression. The design is easy on the eyes and it fits the theme of the amusement park. It has a good color scheme, style, and font size/style that works really well for a website.

Ease of Accessibility

This website is very accessible due to the organization of it. All of the tabs are very organized. Each item is under the appropriate tab, for the most part. They have tabs for everything: things to do, planning your visit, events, park hours, information for groups, tickets, season passes, and membership information. Finding all of the rides is very easy. There is a tab that says “things to do,” and everything that the park has to do can be found under that tab. The subcategories of things to do are also very organized. The website categorizes all of the rides by ride type, which is very convenient.

Along with the convenient tabs, it is not difficult to actually click on things. There are not any pop-ups that would cause the user to accidentally click on things that they do not mean to click on.

There is one thing we found that is not easily accessible. Under the “plan visit” tab, there is a section for Spanish-speaking people. This is not a good location for this because a person who speaks Spanish would probably not know where to find the translation. The translation should be more easily accessible for these people so that they can quickly find the information that they need.

Showcasing of Attractions

The Six Flags website does a great job showcasing all of the attractions. It displays every roller coaster that they have along with the height and speed of the roller coasters. It also displays all of the dining options that Six Flags offers. In addition, it also displays the different live shows that they offer to visitors.

The website displays a video on the homepage that displays the parks attractions. This is a very good addition to the website because it gives visitors an overview of the amusement park. It does a great job showcasing the attractions, and the video also gets updated as the season changes.

One negative thing about the way that showcase attractions is dealing with the live shows they offer. On their website, they display the live shows that are not running yet. They have what times the shows run, but they do not have the date in which the show begins. The website only states that the live show is “coming soon.” This makes it difficult for people who are trying to plan a trip because they do not know when these shows are going to start.

Conclusions

Since its last update upon the park's founding in 2016, DownThrill's website has seen a decrease in its users by 2.5% each month. DownThrill has faith in its product, and wants its customers to be able to see what it has to offer online, both to increase potential ticket sales and to create wider recognition coupled with better PR.

Despite the tremendous size of some theme parks, many have elements that could function better and room for improvement, leading to decreases in website traffic or even the potential loss of customers. Providing customers, the level of aesthetic design, accessibility, and ability to view park attractions they expect from a high-class theme park acts not only a good impression upon users but could attract more customers than otherwise possible. Modifying DownThrill's website to incorporate these aspects would net it a liberal estimate of 14% increase in traffic, or conservatively an estimate of 7% increase in traffic.

As a method to see what works for other companies in the field, Blackwidow Design assessed the websites of three different theme park companies for the design elements found most lacking in DownThrill's website. The three websites evaluated were:

Kingsdominion.com, buschgardens.com, sixflags.com.

While each website signifies a major theme park, sixflags.com was found to have the most effective combination of the three criteria. This coincides with the satisfaction survey sent to all visitors of the DownThrill website, where participants gave sixflags.com a satisfaction rating of 97%. Sixflags.com features the best overall aesthetic, with a usage of many complementary colors that avoid being overbearing while still drawing attention and fitting the park's theme. Buschgardens.com was found to have the best overall organization and usage of tabs within its central toolbar. Buschgardens.com also demonstrated the ability to view videos of all its rides on the site itself, a feature that greatly enhances its showcasing of attractions. Kingsdominion.com had good ease of accessibility, through showcasing all available ticket options under one tab, divided into columns presenting both tickets and ticket upgrades.

Recommendations

As a conglomeration of the noteworthy design elements of the three websites analyzed, we suggest that DownThrill implement these aspects in their website. The most effective design elements are as follows:

- Display extraneous park information, such as available dining options, live show times, opening dates of coming attractions, and other activities around the park
- Provide a video of each ride being operated on its page within the site as well as any extra details about the ride necessary for a prospective guest
- Classify each ride by multiple criteria, including intensity and length of the ride, who the ride is intended for, and the height requirement/limit
- Show a video on the homepage highlighting seasonal offerings or featured rides and attractions
- Usage of complementary and bright colors, with care that the colors of text and backgrounds remain comfortable and easy to read and that colors transition between each other smoothly
- Listing of the park's opening and closing hours at top of site
- Presence of a search feature for rides and other attractions present on the site
- Means of drawing attention to ticket purchasing button, by means of a brightly colored background or strategic placement

Appendix A: Amusement Park Attendees Survey on Website Improvement Options

This survey was authorized by DownThrill Amusement Park’s Office of Publicity. This survey was given to all of the attendees of DownThrill Amusement Park in the past month. It was used to determine what aspects of a website most users found critically important when navigating an amusement park’s website. Attendees were allowed to answer in the affirmative and/or the negative for more than one criterion.

1. I believe that Overall Aesthetic is one of the most important aspects of website design.

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

2. I believe website Content is one of the most important aspects of website design.

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

3. I believe showcasing all amusement park rides is one of the most important aspects of website design.

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

4. I believe showcasing all food options is one of the most important aspects of website design.

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

5. I believe showcasing all of the other attractions is one of the most important aspects of website design.

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

6. I believe the Ease of Access is one of the most important aspects of website design.

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Appendix B: Amusement Park Attendees Survey on Website Improvement Options Results

Out of the 15,000 surveys sent, 4,000 were returned. The following table showcases the results:

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Overall Aesthetic	2,560	980	460
Content	427	2,903	670
Park Rides	1,989	1,245	766
Food Options	783	1,087	2,130
Other Attractions	950	2,465	585
Ease of Access	3,109	510	381

Appendix C: User satisfaction when visiting site survey

DownThrill Amusement Park's Publicity department authorized the distribution of this survey to park attendees that attended on the week of December 4th. They were encouraged to fill it out and return it within one week. They were asked to rank each website they visited on a scale from 1-10 on overall aesthetic appeal. This included DownThrill.com.

1. DownThrill.com

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. Kingsdominion.com

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. Sixflags.com

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. Buschgardens.com

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Appendix D: User satisfaction when visiting site survey results

Out of the 15,000 surveys sent out 1,200 were returned within the time frame allotted. The following tables show the average of the results expressed as a percentage out of 100.

Amusement Park	Visitors who approved of the website design
DownThrill.com	40%
Kingsdominion.com	27%
Sixflags.com	97%
Buschgardens.com	92%