

IMDb Website IA Strategy Document

Group 5: 6 minus 1

Jennifer Do, Matthew Herradura, Jinwoo Kim, Precious Stowers, Christine Tang

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Client Overview

The Internet Movie Database, otherwise known as IMDb, is an online database aimed towards helping people find new information about movies, television shows, actors, directors, and other film and television show related content. One can look up movies and shows by different categories, rankings, titles to view more information about the film, which can include their ratings and reviews. Through IMDb, users can also find local movie theaters and their current showtimes, as well as the films and television shows that are available through different streaming services. Since March 2022, the website boasts a database of about 10.1 million different shows and TV episodes along with around 83 million registered users (Wikimedia Foundation, 2022).

Overview of Information Environment

Typical Content

To provide various information about movies, television shows, and celebrities, IMDb organizes content into different categories. One type of typical content on IMDb's website is the homepage with different lists of information. On the homepage, there are carousels displaying trailers and behind-the-scenes videos for upcoming movies as well as several photos and editorial lists that are featured for the day. Users can also create their own watchlist after they sign in to the website, which the list will also show on the homepage. Additionally, there are multiple categorized lists of movies and television shows as well as celebrities and entertainment news listed on the homepage. The variety of information on the homepage allows users to have more exploration.

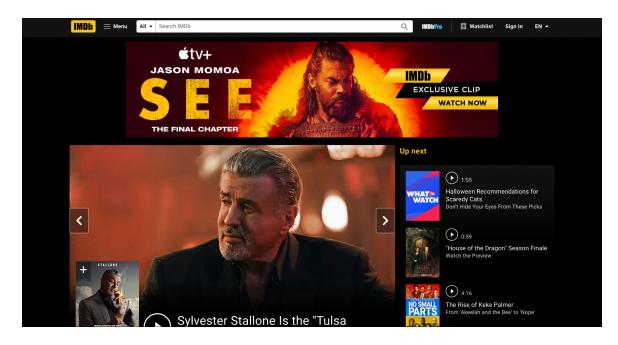


Figure 1. Top of IMDB's Current Homepage and the Navigation Bar

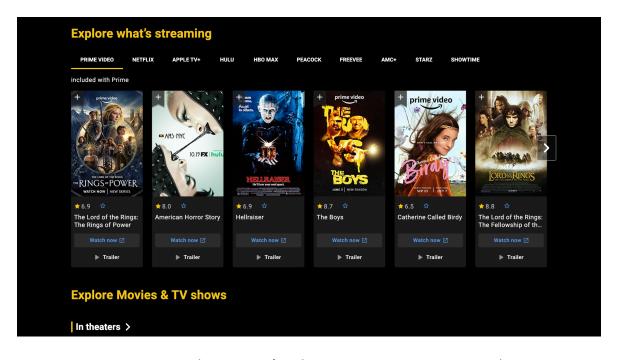


Figure 2. Another Section of IMDb's Homepage Featuring a Carousel

Another type of typical content is the detailed information about movies and shows. Each movie or show has a page that lists information such as descriptions, directors, cast members, ratings, and reviews, as well as some photos, videos, and news of the movies or shows. Based on our user interview, most people use IMDb to look for ratings, reviews and information about movies and tv shows (see Appendix C). Therefore, having that information shown clearly on the page is especially important. There are also additional features on this page that enables users to rate, write reviews, and even contribute to the page.

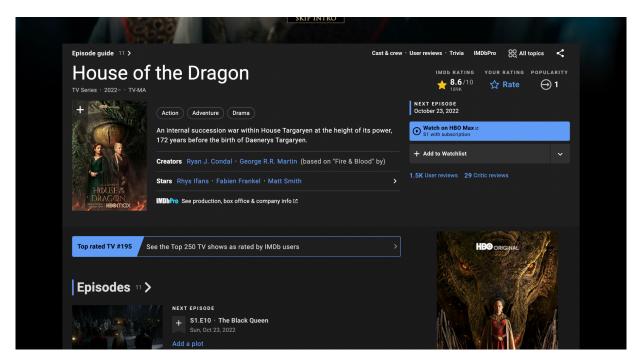


Figure 3. Movie Information Screen on IMDb

A final type of typical content is the celebrity and director pages that show information about a specific person. The page gives detailed information that includes the bio, photos, and videos of the person, and a list of the person's past filmography. This page also allows users to look for movies based on the celebrity or director.

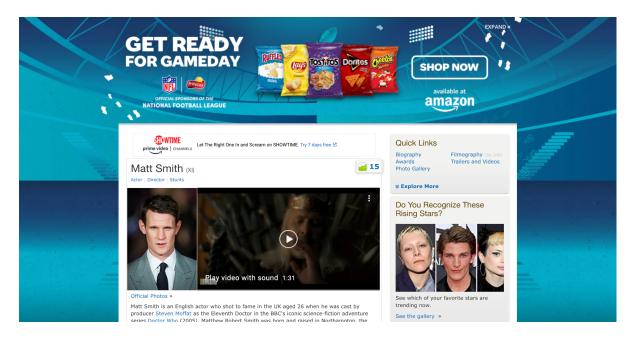


Figure 4. Celebrity Information Screen on IMDb

Current Approach to IA

IMDb currently approaches its website information architecture with a co-existing hierarchy model in which sub-pages are accessible from multiple higher-level pages. This model enables users to access content in various ways where they can easily navigate from one niche topic to another (Bellingham, 2020). While IMDb provides users with more mobility in terms of website navigation, it also aims to guide users through certain paths so they can take expected actions. An example of this interconnected structure and interaction is when a user views information about a particular title and clicks on a contextual link like "Awards". The user is redirected to that respective page and can further navigate to another related sub-page, such as the director's profile page, without needing to return to the higher-level main page. Below are example screens of this particular navigation experience.

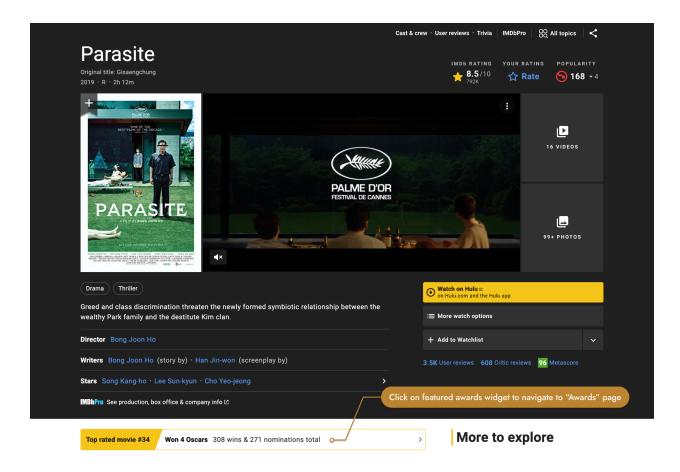


Figure 5. Movie Information Page

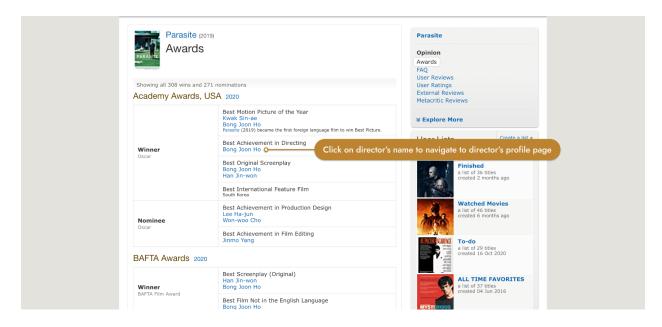


Figure 6. Movie Awards Page

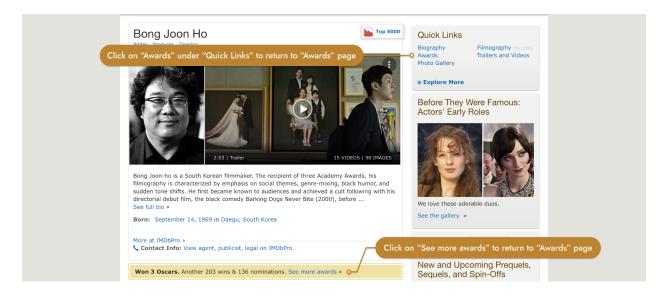


Figure 7. Director Information Page

Although a co-existing hierarchy model offers IMDb a reasonable strategy to organize overlapping information and encourage users to explore different areas of its site, content can easily become buried and overly cluttered. This is especially apparent on the homepage which is tightly packed with pieces of content and sub-features pushing for the user's attention (illustrated in the figure below). The lack of content hierarchy further contributes to IMDb's overwhelming information architecture as nearly all content blocks look identical—headings are the same font size and color, cards share a uniform structure, and these sections each occupy an equivalent amount of space on the homepage. As the user scrolls down the page, it is relatively unclear what immediate actions IMDb wants its target audience to take as well. Moreover, hiding the site's global navigation in a drop-down menu at the top of the page further complicates the process of finding information. Not prioritizing core features on the homepage and inconveniencing the user can subsequently hinder IMDb's ability to attract new users and retain its existing user base over time. Upon examining all these conflicts of user interests, IMDb's current approach to its website's information architecture is insufficient and clearly leaves a satisfactory user experience much to be desired.



Figure 8. Complete Homepage Overview

Typical Users

IMDb's users can include a broad range of cultural backgrounds and age groups, however, we chose our typical users to be college students between the ages of 18-23 years old. Typical user needs include being able to easily find the information they are looking for, having an intuitive navigation/search experience, and having the information shown in a clear structure. Another important need is having an inclusive set of movies and television shows that are non-european centric.

The overall user experience should be intuitive, free of frustration, and inclusive.

[See Appendix A and B for user personas]

Supported Tasks

In addition to providing various information about movies, TV and box office information, IMDb offers users a multitude of supported tasks on its website. These supported tasks include ticketing for live theater screenings, rating movies and shows, sharing reviews, creating a watchlist, voting in polls, and even submitting information to be displayed on the IMDb website (IMDb Help Center, n.d.). With the exception of ticketing, all supported tasks are exclusive to registered IMDb users who are signed in on the website.

Strengths of Current Approach

The homepage has an attractive color scheme that is accessible for many users. Its information architecture is structured well for recommending various films in a chronological order (White, 2015). IMDb prioritizes delivering the most recent and most popular movies and TV shows by placing them at the top of the page, which enables the user to see these movies and TV shows first. Many advertisements throughout IMDb also promote new and upcoming films. These qualities are beneficial for users of the website who are interested in finding out any information about new films. This can range from determining which new titles are available and are popular in the market.

In specific cases, IMDb could serve as a benefit to someone whose sole interest is to know about new movies and see how that certain movie is perceived by the public. Aside from the homepage, another strength is the search page, which enables the user to search and pinpoint necessary results. When the user searches a particular term, the database will

bring up multiple results that match based on the current state of the film industry. These results are also presented in a relatively simple and straightforward manner to the user as the page only displays a concise list of the most relevant film/series titles and actors along with introducing a set amount of filter options the user can select from to further narrow down their search.

Weaknesses of Current Approach

There are several weak areas of IMDb's site, which includes the homepage, drop-down menu and search results page.

Advertisements

When the user first arrives on the IMDB homepage, they are greeted with a large ad that takes up a fourth to a half of the screen. In order to move away from the advertisement, the user has to scroll down, and then they continue to see smaller advertisements surrounding the content they are looking for. This is a weakness because the advertisements are distracting and take away from the user's search and viewing goals. This weakness can also be seen in the usability test, where our user encountered an advertisement within the first minute of navigating on IMDb and repeatedly encountered advertisements throughout her experience (See Appendix C).

Content Organization

IMDb's homepage content primarily focuses on chronological-based schemas, and includes other organization schemas such as topical and geographical (White, 2015). Chronological-based and geographical organization schemas are presented on IMDb through carousels that feature recent movies in theaters and streaming services. Topical-based organization schemas are also presented through carousels that present other various IMDb-related and/or movie-related information. Currently, these schemas do not advertise popular movies in non-European countries or indie films. This would inhibit a user, such as Julia, from quickly viewing a diverse set of popular movies (see Appendix B). The current homepage also does not have a clear hierarchy from a top-down perspective, as it includes many other design features, such as carousels with multiple types of content, a section with its own buttons, and a news carousel with related pill buttons below it (White, 2015). The variety of design features are spread across IMDb's homepage making the

overall appearance of IMDb's homepage appear cluttered and unorganized, which can be seen in figure seven and eight.

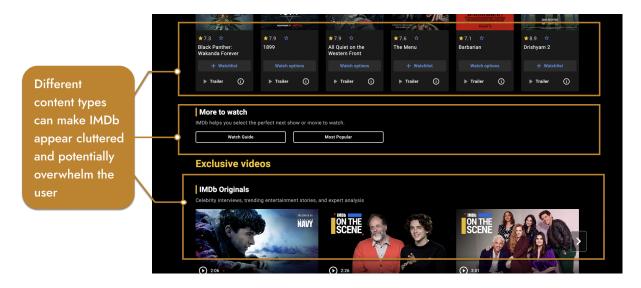


Figure 9. "More to Watch" Section on the Homepage

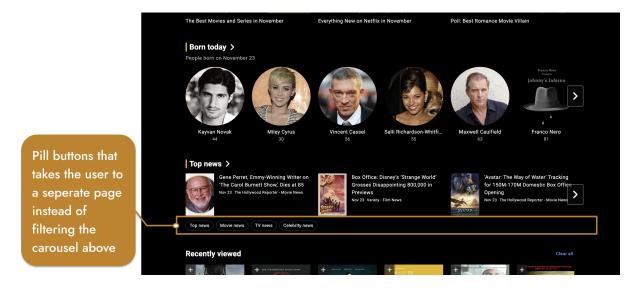


Figure 10. "Top News" Section at the Bottom of the Homepage

Drop-Down Menu

The drop-down menu currently has a variety of topical labels that are both headings and navigation system choices (Rosenfeld et al., 2015). The current IMDb menu has some navigation choices that are redundant and others that lack consistent syntax (Rosenfeld et al., 2015). The overall menu also lacks a formal presentation with its inconsistent vertical spacing between heading sections (Rosenfeld et al., 2015). From these weaknesses, this menu decreases usability due to its lack of predictability and overall presentation (Rosenfeld et al., 2015).

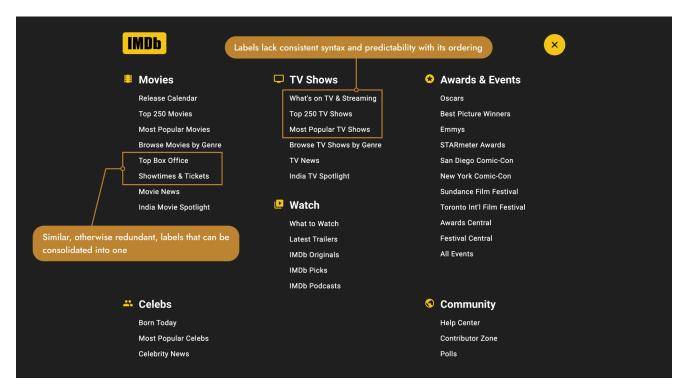


Figure 11. IMDb's Original Drop-Down Menu

Search Results Page

When a user searches for a keyword, such as "Christmas" in the search bar with the default drop-down menu "All", the results page will list "Titles", "Names", "Keywords", "Companies". On the search results page, the user has the ability to further refine their search using "Advanced Search" or "Category Search". The current weakness is that the "Advanced Search" and "Category Search" options are moved to the side of the page where the user may not notice them at first glance. This decreases usability by making the user search further into the page to filter and/or refine their results.

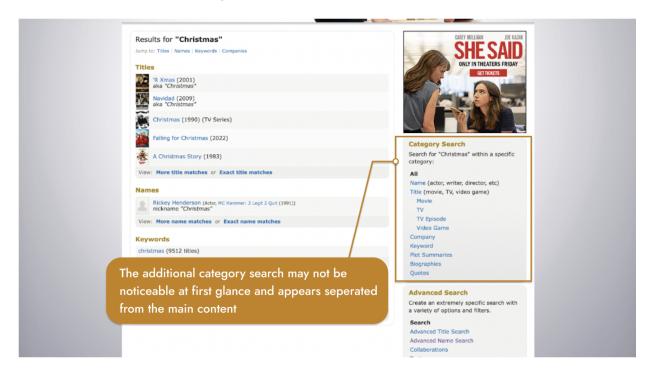


Figure 12. IMDb's Search Results Page

Recommendations for Improvement

Summary of Recommendations

We took into account a variety of IMDb's issues to create our recommendations. The primary aim of our recommendations is to improve the inclusivity and diversity of the site by highlighting films and series outside of mainstream media and beyond North America. As a result, we will recommend organization strategies for the homepage, search results page and an alternative global navigation menu to create a more intuitive, inclusive and accessible experience.

Organization System

Throughout IMDb's homepage, we recommend rearranging the current organization schemas to enable a more concise homepage and a clear content hierarchy (White, 2015). This would include moving chronological-based and topical-based schemas to the top of the page to allow users to receive the most recent and popular movies first, as well as allowing other topics such as "Independent Movies" to be seen by more users (Krupar, 2021). We also recommend reducing the amount of information on the homepage and simplifying design patterns into specific components to avoid overwhelming the user (White, 2015). This includes removing the "Featured Today" section that is below a carousel that already showcases the latest news, removing advertisements, and removing subheadings by replacing them with more descriptive headings (Rosenfeld et al., 2015). In order to increase diversity, we recommended including popular movies from other countries in existing carousel sections to increase inclusivity without stereotyping. Our recommended homepage with the new organization system can be seen in the figure below.



Figure 13. Recommended IMDb Homepage

Labeling System

IMDb's current labeling system can be improved to better present information quickly and effectively for users, especially regarding the contextual links in the global navigation and the headings describing content on the homepage. Not only are these labels repetitive and inconsistent, they also "[take] up too much of a page's physical space [and] the user's cognitive space" (Rosenfeld et al., 2015). As such, our recommendations for IMDb's labeling system pertain to simplifying labels and implementing an organization criteria based on the user needs we have identified from our user interview and usability testing.

An example of how we would simplify labels is consolidating similar or overlapping contextual links like "Top Box Office" and "Showtimes & Tickets" into one called "Top Box Offices". This new label now refers to a comprehensive page of movie showtimes, ticket listings, and global top box offices, which "works as a shortcut that triggers the right association [to movies and ticketing] without presenting all that stuff prominently" (Rosenfeld et al., 2015). Streamlining contextual links, such as the aforementioned example, along with streamlining navigation system choices and headings will make it easier for users to find information. In fact, doing so enables IMDb to "[achieve] more obvious and effective representation" of all its various content (Rosenfeld et al., 2015).

As for our recommended organization criteria, we propose sorting labels based on the prioritized interests of IMDb users. Through our user interview and usability testing, we discovered that users are most interested in finding current and popular titles when visiting IMDb's website (see Appendix C). Accessing such titles should be done fairly easily and relatively quickly as a result, so in turn, we suggest organizing contextual links for recent and trending titles to be towards the top of the navigation drop-down menu and then having a "View All" label towards the bottom. Making these changes will also help clarify to users that the main purpose of IMDb is to "help fans explore the world of movies and shows and decide what to watch" (IMDb Help Center, n.d.).

Navigation System

We recommend adding a global navigation bar that remains at the top of the screen, with the main IMDb categories as headers, and showcases a dropdown menu with subcategories when a user hovers over the headers. While there is a search bar at the top, having a more constant global navigation feature would increase usability on the site as users can reach destinations faster in fewer clicks. While in the original navigation bar, having one large drop-down menu covering the entire page with various contextual links inconveniences the users as they can no longer view any content on the homepage. Instead, we designed a new navbar that would display each category. Our recommended navigation bar would allow more components on the page to be seen by the user while also enabling them to view all options for navigating IMDb's website. The recommended navigation bar can be seen below.



Figure 14. Recommended IMDb Navigation Bar and Drop-Down

Search System

Our first recommendation for the overall search system is matching the color scheme of the search page to the homepage in order to improve site consistency and visual appearance.

As for the "Advanced Search" feature, we decided to consolidate the section into its own link that is placed on the top left of the page. This will reduce redundancy as the explanation of this feature is already indicated on both the search results page and its own "Advanced Search" page.

Additionally, we recommend moving the "Category Search" feature to the center of the page in a tab-like layout to improve the feature's usability and accessibility. This particular layout can be seen on Nordstrom's item page, where they present a horizontal list of similar items that fit under the same category of the user's search term (see Figure 15). Through this tab functionality, the user is able to filter through various categories related to their search term quickly and easily.

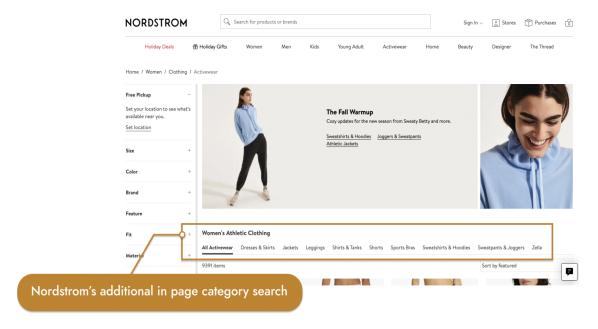


Figure 15. Nordstrom's Item Page

Lastly, we recommend featuring a list of the user's most recent searches, which enables the user to easily view their search history and refer back to these pages during the search journey. See figure below for the entire recommended search page.

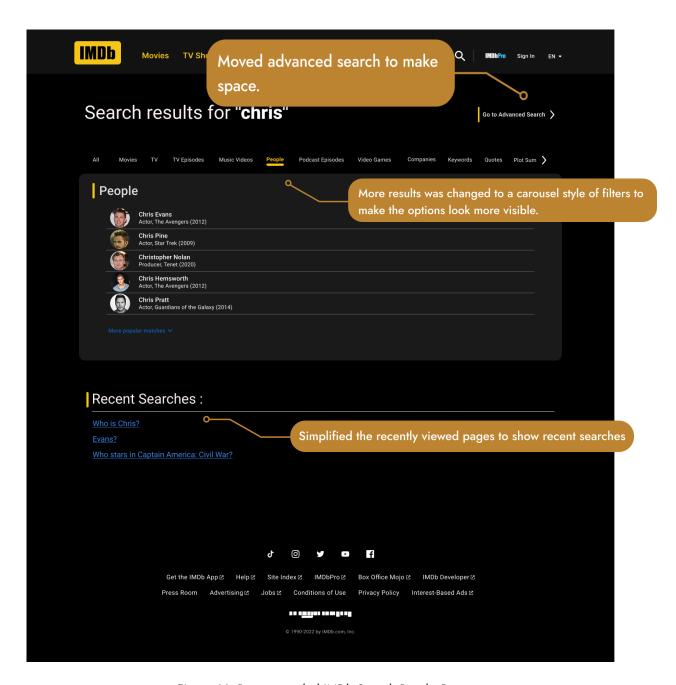


Figure 16. Recommended IMDb Search Results Page

Controlled Vocabulary

The words and phrases used for subject indexing schemes throughout the platform are repetitive and relatively unintuitive. For example, in the movie categories within the navigation drop-down menu, there is a contextual link for "Top 250 Movies" as well as another for "Most Popular Movies". If users want to find popular movies, they may get confused about which link to click. The terms "Top" and "Most Popular" are both synonymous and the phrasing differences between these two contextual links are subtle, if not at all apparent.

To minimize confusion with IMDb's subject indexing taxonomy, our recommendation is to consolidate terms labeling the contextual links on the drop-down menu. This can be done by creating a controlled vocabulary in the form of synonym rings (Rosenfeld et al., 2015). Therefore, when users click on the drop-down menu category, the result that is shown will include all information related to the corresponding synonyms. Using a synonym ring will make the drop-down menu more intuitive and easier to use for finding relevant information (Rosenfeld et al., 2015). The table below is an example of our recommended synonym ring for the drop-down menu.

Recommended Drop-Down Synonym Ring

| Drop-Down Menu | Synonyms |
|---------------------|--|
| "View All Movies" | Titles, Films, Short Films, Videos |
| "Top Foreign Films" | K-dramas, C-dramas, Spanish Films, Bollywood |
| "Top Box Offices" | Theater, Cinema, Movie Tickets |

Sitemaps

As previously mentioned in IMDb's current approach to information architecture, IMDb's website presents an overabundant amount of content on nearly all of its pages. This, coupled with the site's underlying co-existing hierarchy model, leads to an unwieldy user experience in which navigation to enshrouded content is inexpedient and troublesome. Our recommendations for an improved site structure and navigational flow therefore involves streamlining page and content organization.

To accomplish these objectives, we suggest the homepage only contains four core components—"Featured Today", "Top Box Office Across the Globe", "Independent Films", and "Popular Streaming Movies & Shows"—to clearly inform the user that IMDb primarily serves to "help fans explore the world of movies and shows and decide what to watch" (IMDb Help Center, n.d.). This is perhaps the most important aspect to users, especially as our user persona, Sam Mishra, has an information need to "explore new movies that he hasn't heard of before" (see Appendix A).

Another suggestion we propose is incorporating distinctive pages and sections for diverse content to reach users from all over the world. Examples of this include featuring global top box office hits on the homepage (e.g., "Top Box Office Across the Globe"), and creating separate pages for "Top Indie Movies" and "Top Foreign Movies". Again, we considered one of our user personas, Julia Kim, for this suggestion as there are users who seek out titles that are either dubbed or subbed in different languages and are popular in regions beyond the U.S. and Canada (see Appendix B). Designating individual areas of the site to promote non-mainstream movies, TV shows and entertainment programs will ensure IMDb consistently caters to these users.

By streamlining IMDb's page and content organization, users will ultimately find it easier to access information matching their needs. Below is the sitemap we have devised to illustrate our recommendations.

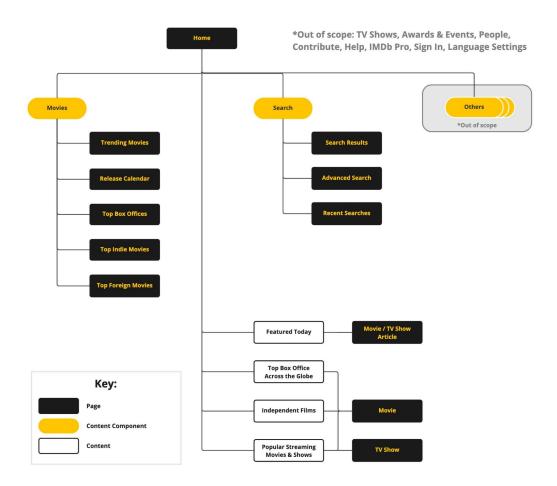


Figure 17. Recommended IMDb Sitemap

Content Models

Our content model focuses on the interactions between the homepage to the individual movie information pages, and the homepage to the search results pages.

Homepage to the Individual Movie Information

Starting from an individual movie page, a user can return back to the homepage by clicking on the IMDb icon on the navigation bar. If the user wants to view a movie from the homepage, they can do so by clicking on a movie in the carousels or selecting a different movie page in the movie dropdown list under the "Movie" tab in the navigation bar. On the homescreen, a user can also view a trailer of a movie or find a popular box office who is screening that movie. If the user is on the trailer or the box office page, they have the option to view the related movie page by clicking on the title.

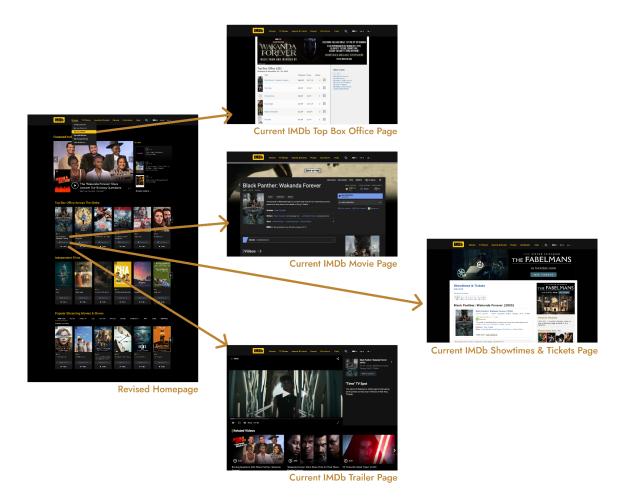


Figure 18. Recommended IMDb Content Model from Movie to Homepage

Homepage to the Search Results page

If the user searches for a topic, such as a celebrity in the search bar, they will be directed to the search results page where the user can click on any of the result options to be taken to that page. If the user wants to return back to the homescreen from a search results page, they can do so by clicking the IMDb icon on the navigation bar.

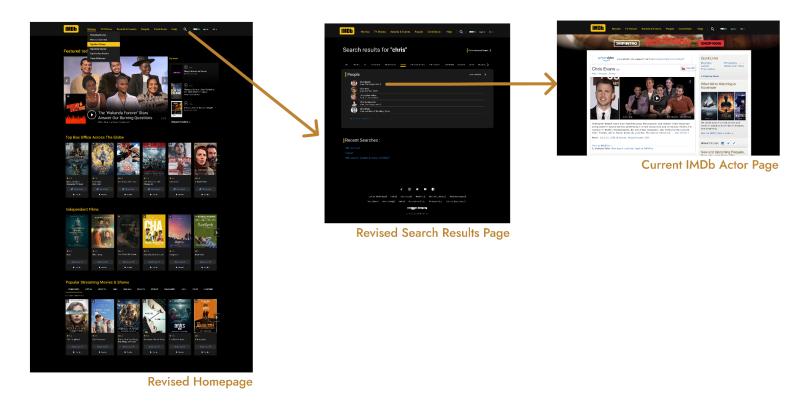


Figure 19. Recommended IMDb Content Model from Search Results Page to Homepage

Limitations

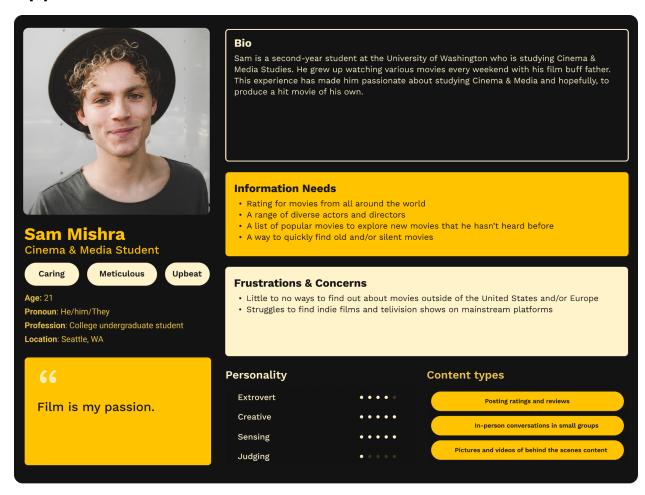
Our main focus is increasing inclusivity through improving the search experience, improving the homepage, and the search results page on IMDb's desktop website. IMDb has many categories and subcategories, as well as pages and nested subpages which make it incredibly difficult to fully analyze the entire site in the given time constraint of this project. Some areas we will not address in our information architecture strategy proposal as a result are the overall site UI, and pages for individual movies, television shows, actors, directors, and other film related content. We also are not evaluating additional sections like the ranking feature, the genre/categorization of its titles, IMDb original pages, or the awards and events sections. Although we are attempting to redesign the way certain titles like foreign and indie films are promoted, we do not know how IMDb's algorithm operates and how it may affect how titles are chosen or how search results are generated.

References

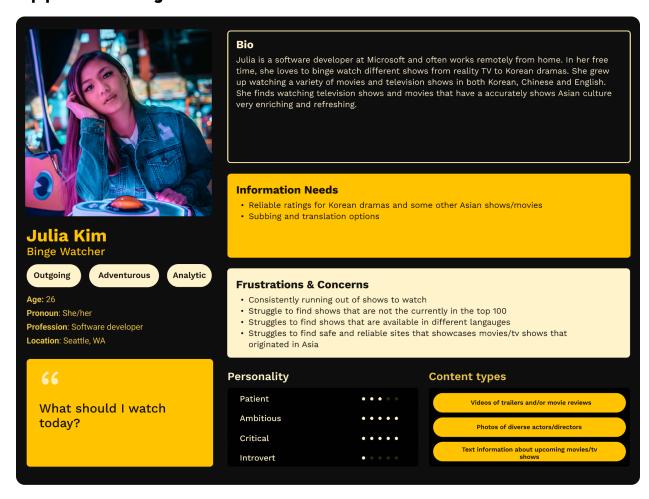
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Appendices

Appendix A - Sam Mirisha User Persona #1



Appendix B - Julia Kim User Persona #2



Appendix C - Emma's User Interview and Usability test

Interviewee Name: Emma (3rd Year UW Computer Science student)

Date: Tuesday, October 25th 2022 @ 7pm

Interview Questions & Usability Testing

General Topic Questions:

Do you watch movies/tv shows? How often on average do you watch tv/movies?

- Yes, every day
 - Ex. an episode of a tv show

How often do you look up the cast members/directors in the movies/tv shows you have watched?

- Not super often
- Must be interested in the movie/show to look up this information

How do you find movies/tv shows? What are some of the popular platforms you use to find out about movies/tv shows?

- Social media, word of mouth, Twitter, Instagram
- Doesn't watch anything that no one has already recommended

IMDb Questions:

Do you know what IMDb is?

Heard of it, yes

When was the last time you used IMDb?

• Can't recall the last time she has used it

How often do you use IMDb? (in a month/year)

Never

Why haven't you used IMDb?

Doesn't see a usage for it (uses social media instead)

Are you more likely to see movies in person or on a streaming platform?

- No preference
- Based on popularity
- Prefers to see movies sooner rather than later

IMDb Usability Tasks:

Can you open up IMDb and explore (for ~1 minute)? Write down what they are clicking on/how they're searching.

- Saw a trailer for the new Black Panther movie, searched it up on IMDb
- Checks for showtimes and tickets
 - Scrolls to see different theater options
- Returns to movie page and scrolls to Top Cast to see who's in the movie
 - Clicks on favorite actor's profile (Martin Freeman) and look at his filmography
- Sees that Freeman has been in The Office (UK edition)
- Encounters an ad

- Curious about the the UK version of The Office
 - Clicks on show's page
- Searches for another movie (Everything Everywhere All At Once)
 - O Wants to see bad reviews but couldn't find them based on the interface
- More annoying ads

What are your first impressions?

- Pages were cluttered
- A lot of ads
 - Thought that the ads were related to the actors but they're not

Can you take a minute to look through the homepage?

- Goes through top main carousel
- Curious about how IMDb determines which popular shows and movies to promote
- Doesn't have streaming service of choice (Disney+) in the explore section
- Curious about the carousels
- Homepage is super long
 - So much scrolling involved
- Thought Born Today section was interesting

What are your first impressions of the homepage? Do you like the organization?

- Decently organized
- Headings help divide sections clearly
- Scrolling was a lot

- Page is really long
- Some sections don't need to be on the homepage

What section of the homepage do you like the most?

- Top Picks/Fan Favorites
- Recently Viewed is good but should be higher up on page

We want to be able to promote more diversity (different languages/subbed/dubbed movies) throughout the website, would you prefer it to be stated as an independent category, within the "popular" movies genre, or both?

Would be really cool and interesting to see these options for both

Would you prefer to see the popular movies in theaters, streaming services, or an integration of both in one category?

- Different categories is preferred
 - Combining them would make the categories too cluttered

Would you prefer to search movies by time or by genre first?

Probably by genre first

What do you like about the navigation?

- Focus on movies and tv shows
- Celebs is not necessary

Other notes:

- Would only go to IMDb if they have a specific movie in mind
 - Presents more unbiased titles
 - e.g., Netflix only promotes titles that exist on its platform
- Do you consider using the menu button?
 - o No, it's faster to just search
- If there was a bar showing popular movies and other lists, do you think you would use it?
 - o Yes, more likely to click it if it shows on the homepage

Appendix D - Figma High-Fidelity Wireframes

IMDb High-Fidelity Wireframes