



# Salon Elan Usability Report

Enhancing the user experience of a local business' website

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Alex Piwtoratsky



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## Executive Summary

Salon Elan is an independently owned and operated hair salon located in Hillsborough, New Jersey. This business specializes in female styling, waxing services, and skincare. While the salon's website is simplistic and easy to understand, it falls short in key areas including aesthetics, content, function, and ease of usability. The following is a proposal for a website redesign that will improve customer experience and increase revenue.

## Methods of Evaluation

To help make the case for Salon Elan's redesign, a diverse array of methods were explored. These methods helped the team identify Salon Elan's target audience and observe where the business needed to make improvements throughout their digital experience. Listed below are the methods that were utilized:

- Competitive Analysis
- Personas & Scenarios
- Interviews
- Surveys
- Diary Studies
- Card Sorting
- Heuristic Evaluation
- Usability Testing

## The Findings & Analysis

After concluding all of the tests, it was found that the Salon Elan website could not retain an interested consumer because there was a distinct lack of connection and usefulness.

Rather than being a place where clients could go to make appointments and learn more about the salon and its services, the website acted more as an online repository.

Information was clearly not updated and key pieces of information - like the business hours - were not included.

It was also evident that the website did not contribute to any business or marketing requirements. There was a lack of promotion or seasonal offerings and the website lacked informative sections that catered to high-revenue driving customers like brides.

Lastly, it was discovered that the current information architecture needed to be improved - especially if there is a desire to update content and add more features to the website.

During the usability tests and card sorting exercise, users felt that the home page, about page, and services page were underutilized with the current content did not live up to expectations. Moving forward, the salon should pay attention to detail and user's needs.

## Solutions & Recommendations

With help from the web development team, and a redefined brand, Salon Elan can drastically improve their business. The following are recommended solves for some of the key issues that the salon is experiencing.

- Move the website to a hosting platform like WordPress or SquareSpace. This will allow for the business to easily update and customize features without needing to rely on an external development team to maintain it. This will also help to modernize the look and feel of their UI/UX.
- Include more photography to better represent the current and future clientele. There is minimal photography on the website and it is clearly stock imagery. To feel more authentic, Salon Elan should look to feature more of their own work to entice people into their space and showcase their expertise.
- Use the website pages more intentionally. The home page could be used to feature seasonal offerings, showcase pieces of recent work, or announcements. Consider adding prices, and examples of work to the services page. Remove the inquiries page and instead focus on the contact page as the primary location for people to get in touch with the business. These adjustments will clarify to users what each section is used for.
- Remove hyperlinks from the website if they lead to other internal pages. This is a redundant and bad practice. All information should be placed in a logical way so they don't need to be led to it from one place on the website to another.
- Improve recognition, recall, flexibility, and efficiency by conducting additional testing. These areas will require even more attention as the Salon Elan website develops and adopts more modern features like online appointment booking and purchases of gift certificates.



## The Methods

Salon Elan is a small business located in the central New Jersey area. Specializing in female styling, waxing services, and skincare, their target audience consists of women ages 25 - 65+ who are local to the area, looking for expert care and quality service.

### Competitive Analysis

The purpose of the competitive analysis was to gain additional insight and perspective on the expected standard for salon websites. To provide Salon Elan with the most useful takeaways, three other local salons in New Jersey were analyzed. In this analysis, each salon website was evaluated for strengths and weaknesses in their overall website design, features offered, and brand consistency.

### Personas & Scenarios

The purpose of the personas and scenarios was to obtain a deeper understanding and connection to the people who frequent Salon Elan and use their website. The personas act as representations of diverse customer archetypes, and the scenarios paint a picture about their possible experience with the current website. This provides the business with a layout of who they are (or should be) talking to and why their audience might be having issues connecting with or using the website.

### Interviews

The purpose of the interview sessions was to gain additional insight about the wants and needs of Salon Elan's website users. By posing three focused research questions, interviews allow for the unfiltered collection of data from real users. This in-person interaction also allows for additional probing that could provide even more value to the development team and the business.

### Surveys

The purpose of the survey was to consolidate data about real website users. This includes demographics, psychographics, online browsing habits/likes/dislikes, and overall website satisfaction. Surveys are an easily distributable method to gain insight from a variety of people in an anonymous, user-friendly manner. In this document, we utilize a 20-question survey with both multiple choice and open-ended questions.

## Diary Study

The purpose of a diary study is to get up close and personal to users in order to learn more about the habits, practices, and pain points. This form of user research requires participants to self-report data about their activities, attitudes and expectations. In this document random sampling is employed across a two-week exercise to achieve well-round and inclusive results.

## Card Sorting

The purpose of a card sorting exercise is to focus on organization, structuring and labeling of content on a website. By investigating a website's current information architecture, the development team can produce solutions that help users find information and complete tasks in an effective and sustainable way. To complete the exercises featured in this document, online tool OptimalSort was used.

## Heuristic Evaluation

The purpose of a heuristic evaluation is to identify usability problems within a user interface design. Heuristics themselves are considered broad rules of thumb that should be considered for any project that requires human interaction and usability, not just those concerning websites. In this document, the 10 general principles for interaction design developed by Jakob Nielsen were used to test the current Salon Elan website.

## Usability Testing

The purpose of a usability test is to understand how users will interact with an app, website or other product while attempting to complete assigned tasks. The goal is to identify any usability issues, and collect qualitative and quantitative data from each interaction. In this document, participants were asked to complete four tasks that were considered critical for a successful interaction with the Salon Elan website.

# Site Choice, Personas & Competitive Analysis

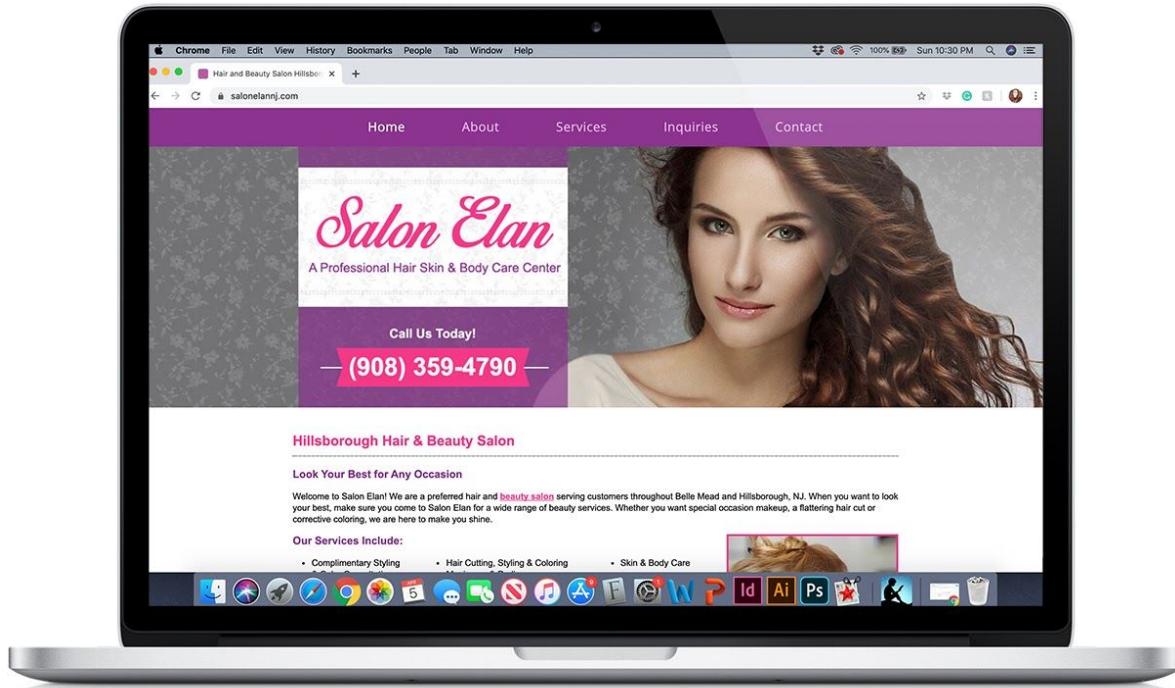


Fig. 1: Salon Elan website home page

## About the Website

### Company Description:

Salon Elan is an independently owned and operated hair salon located in Hillsborough, New Jersey. This business specializes in female styling, waxing services, and skincare.

**URL:** <https://www.salonelannj.com/>

### Website + Audience Descriptions:

The Salon Elan website is very simplistic. Formatted almost like a Word document, each page displays the same banner image and is organized with bolded headers, dividers, and color-coded sub-headers.

Throughout, plain text is the prioritized content. Descriptive paragraphs, bulleted lists, and the occasional hyperlink are used. There is a distinct lack of imagery or visual content, which for many, could be dismaying.

The website seems to favor exclusively a female audience. There aren't any descriptions of male services or visuals of men on the site. This audience seems to be a more mature woman, of at least her mid-20s, who appreciates conventional feminine beauty. Salon Elan's clients are also driven by the need to pamper themselves and indulge in "luxury-like" experiences on a budget. Individuals who support locally-owned businesses, like the salon, make for loyal repeat customers.

### **The Need for a Redesign:**

The Salon Elan website, while clean and functional, could benefit from a redesign to make it appealing to the modern client. The current site is outdated and lacks critical visual appeal. As a part of the beauty industry, Salon Elan should understand that the aesthetic of their website is paramount. Salon Elan should take this opportunity to update its branding and strive for a consistent, engaging presence.

A redesign will also allow Salon Elan to take a look at how they create content. Currently, the majority of information provided is fluff. Filled with buzz-words and lacking purpose, the website's content is bland and neglects to include key features like pricing, products and technique used.

### **Business/Marketing Requirements vs User Requirements:**

**Business Requirements:** Features & suggestions to purchase gift certificates and products from the salon, shopping cart, user accounts

**Marketing Requirements:** Refreshed branding, area on the homepage for promotional materials: new or seasonal offerings, presentation of salon services (hair, makeup, etc.), dedicated areas of the website for salon and spa, user accounts, blog page

**User Requirements:** Ability to book services online, locate service information without hangups, navigate through the pages easily, ability to contact the salon directly from the website (phone, social media, email)

For Salon Elan to be successful, they must balance user and business/marketing requirements. Because the salon does not directly make money off of the website, they must be sure that any marketing or sales features they implement do not hinder the user from completing priority tasks. A priority task could be finding information for services or booking an appointment.

The salon's website should strategically contribute to user needs while still performing for business/marketing. One such example would be a seasonal landing page, sharing important information about offerings to the potential client. This makes the user feel secure that the business is current on styles and trends while still allowing the business to effectively sell and market their services.

## Competitive Website Analysis

	<u>Salon Elan</u>	<u>The Day Spa at Hair Plus</u>	<u>Salon Envy</u>	<u>Renaissance Salon and Spa</u>
Unique Features	N/A, as mentioned this site is really plain	What's New tab, Birthday Gift for clients	Easy to navigate, single-scroll site	Bridal tab, Employee bio page - complete with their Instagram handles
Design Strengths	Simple and structured content	Meticulous organization of services	Clean and inviting layout, good scaling for mobile	The homepage is a gallery featuring their work
Design Weaknesses	All of the pages look the same. The viewer gets fatigued easily	So many pages on the website can lead to outdated content	No consistent logo or branding. Very mundane look and feel	Can be hard to navigate around the site due to so many elements
<b>Core Features</b>				
Hours of Operation		x	x	x
Contact Info	x	x	x	x
About Us	x	x	x	x
Gallery		x	x	x
Book a Service		x		x
Service Prices		x	x	x
Social Media Integration		x		x
Blog/Promotions Area		x		x
User Accounts/Newsletter Sign-Up		x		x
Responsive Web Design		x	x	x

Table 1: Competitive website analysis of Salon Elan and local competitors

## Competitive Website Analysis Summary:

When compared to the competition in the immediate area, Salon Elan's website lacks key features. While the current site is simplistic, its lack of modern convenience features can deter users. Rather than coding their site from scratch, it appears that independent salons are favoring templated CMS providers, like SquareSpace, to integrate sales and marketing-focused components. With a more modern platform, competitors also benefit from helpful widgets and responsible web templates that can cater to desktop and mobile viewing situations easily.

The competitors provide key information up-front, like hours of operation, service prices, and their personal story. Out of the bunch, Salon Elan currently has an "About Us" page but it doesn't say anything about the people behind the business. Instead, it's used as another area to jigsaw SEO keywords together in an attempt to up its position on the search page.

What Salon Elan truly lacks is authenticity. Without connected social media profiles or usage of real (not stock) imagery, their website falls flat and feels almost sketchy. There is a definite lack of human touch and a distinct perspective. Competitors, like Renaissance Salon & Spa, have a whole page on their website dedicated to their staff. It's evident they know the value of their people and how human connections can equate to revenue. Salon Elan should start cultivating authenticity by photographing their facilities and examples of their work to make potential clientele feel more confident and at ease with their decisions.

In summation, Salon Elan could benefit from: a rebrand, a different, more modern CMS, showcasing authenticity, being up-front with user-sought information, and being more strategic with how they can build leads and a dedicated fan base.

## Personas and Scenarios

Please view the Personas and Scenarios [here](#).

The hyperlinked document contains persona and scenario information for Salon Elan. Three personas were created to portray the potential archetypes that would be interested in the salon's services. To accompany each persona, a detailed scenario was written to demonstrate how they might go about completing a task and the challenges they could encounter along the way.

Created to encompass the diverse group of women that live in Somerset County, these personas vary in age, ethnicity, income, and comfort with technology.



## Website Interview Script & Questions

In order to obtain deeper insights into users' wants and requirements, Salon Elan should conduct interviews. The below interview contains a proposed script and corresponding interview questions. For these interviews, it is recommended that current users of the Salon Elan website be questioned to gain insight into the following research questions:

- 1. Which features are essential to the Salon Elan website?**
- 2. What pieces of information are important to a salon website?**
- 3. How do aesthetics impact a website's chance for conversion?**

### Introduction

Hi, thank you for coming in today to share your insights with us. My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I work with \_\_\_\_\_. For the next hour, I will walk you through some questions about the Salon Elan website. Your feedback is crucial in helping us improve the website to meet client needs. If you have questions, please feel free to ask at any point.

Joining us in today's session are members of the website development team. We encourage your thoughts and suggestions - don't be afraid to speak up. With your permission, I'd like to record our session. This will allow us to focus on continuing meaningful dialogue instead of taking notes.

This session is designed to ensure the creation of an intuitive website with a clear aesthetic point of view. I'm not a developer or an employee of the business, so nothing said in this meeting will make me uncomfortable or upset. I'm here to gather information, so please be honest with your answers.

Before we begin, please read and sign the consent agreement. This will familiarize you with how this information will be used.

If you feel the need to leave the session, please let us know and we can arrange for your departure. Again, if you have questions, please ask them at any time.

Let's get started!

## Warm-Up

Before diving into the bulk of the interview about your experiences using the Salon Elan website, I'd like to learn more about you.

When was the last time you visited Salon Elan? How long have you been a client there?

*(If no answer could be provided)* What do you enjoy about independently owned salons? How do they differ from chains?

Thanks for discussing this with me. Alright, let's talk about the Salon Elan website now.

## Body

1. Think about the websites you frequent. What do you like about them?
  - a. Which features or tools are valuable to you?
  - b. Why do you find those features to be important?
2. Why do you go to the Salon Elan Website?
  - a. How often do you go to the website?
3. Tell me about your experience using the Salon Elan website.
  - a. *(Prompt if necessary)* What was positive/negative?
  - b. Did this impact your want to make an appointment?
4. Are you able to locate the information you need on the Salon Elan website?
  - a. *(If yes)* How easy was it to do so?
  - b. *(If no)* Where else do you go to find information about Salon Elan?
5. What kind of information should you be able to find on the salon website?
  - a. How should it be organized?
6. Would you like a feature to book appointments online?
  - a. *(If yes)* How do you think that feature should function?
  - b. *(If no)* Why wouldn't you use the online booking feature?
7. Would it be useful for you to see a list of services on the Salon Elan website with their corresponding prices?
  - a. How do you think it would help you?
  - b. How would you organize the various services?
8. Would you like a gallery feature that allowed you to see pictures from the salon?
  - a. *(If yes)* Do you think real pictures of the salon and its work are important?
  - b. *(If no)* Do you prefer to look on social media for those images?

9. How do you feel about the current appearance of the Salon Elan Website?
  - a. What would you change? What currently works well?
  - b. Does the current appearance entice you to make an appointment?
  
10. What features would make you visit the salon website more often?
  - a. Is there something missing that you would like to see?

## Cooling Off

I think we made a lot of great discoveries today. We appreciate your thoughts. To conclude our discussion, what is the most important topic we talked about today? Are there any additional questions I should ask you?

## Wrap-Up

Now that we're at the end of our interview, I'm going to end the recording of this session. Do you have any last questions for me before we wrap up?

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me. Your participation was extremely helpful.



## Website Survey

Welcome to the Salon Elan website survey. With this survey, we are hoping to learn more about the people who use the website and their needs. The information provided will contribute to an updated site, designed to serve you and meet key expectations. Your answers are completely anonymous. Thank you for your participation.

1. Which of the below best describes you when visiting the Salon Elan website
  - a. First-time customer
  - b. Returning customer
  - c. Curious visitor
  - d. An employee of Salon Elan
  - e. Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. How do you identify?
  - a. Female
  - b. Male
  - c. Transgender/Non-binary/Fluid
  - d. Prefer not to answer
  - e. Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. Which most closely describes your ethnic identity?
  - a. African American/Black
  - b. Asian
  - c. Bi-racial
  - d. Caucasian
  - e. Hispanic/Latino
  
4. How old are you?
  - a. Under 18 years
  - b. 18-29 years
  - c. 30-49 years
  - d. 50-65 years
  - e. Over 65 years

5. Which of the following best describes your current employment status?
  - a. Employed Full-time (40 hrs + per week)
  - b. Employed Part-time (1-34 hrs per week)
  - c. Searching for work
  - d. Not employed/Unable to work
  - e. Retired
6. What is your yearly personal income?
  - a. \$0 - \$19,999
  - b. \$20,000 - \$49,999
  - c. \$50,000 - \$79,999
  - d. \$80,000 - \$100,000 or more
  - e. Prefer not to answer
7. Choose which option best describes where you live
  - a. Hillsborough, NJ
  - b. Close to Hillsborough, NJ
  - c. Somerset County
  - d. Central Jersey
  - e. Other \_\_\_\_\_
8. Which devices do you use to browse/search the internet? Select all that apply
  - a. Desktop
  - b. Laptop
  - c. Mobile phone
  - d. Tablet
  - e. Voice Assistant (Amazon Alexa/Google Home)
9. How often do you visit the Salon Elan website?
  - a. Once a year
  - b. Four times a year
  - c. Monthly
  - d. Never visited the website
10. How often do you go to the salon in a year?
  - a. Once a year
  - b. Twice a year
  - c. Four times a year
  - d. Monthly
  - e. Other \_\_\_\_\_

11. Which services do you visit Salon Elan for?

- a. Haircutting/styling/coloring
- b. Skincare treatments
- c. Manicure & Pedicures
- d. Bridal services
- e. Other \_\_\_\_\_

12. What would make booking an appointment easier? Select all that apply

- a. Online booking portal
- b. Easy to find contact information
- c. Email appointment confirmations
- d. Scheduled repeat services
- e. Other \_\_\_\_\_

13. What was your last experience at Salon Elan like? (Open-ended)

- a. \_\_\_\_\_

14. How much did your last experience at Salon Elan cost?

- a. \$0 - \$20
- b. \$20 - \$40
- c. \$40 - \$60
- d. \$60 - \$80
- e. More than \$80

15. How important are service prices on a salon's website?

- a. Very important
- b. Somewhat important
- c. Neither important or unimportant
- d. Somewhat unimportant
- e. Very unimportant

16. How important are photos on a salon's website?

- a. Very important
- b. Somewhat important
- c. Neither important or unimportant
- d. Somewhat unimportant
- e. Very unimportant

17. Before booking a service at a new salon do you look at their social media?

- a. Always
- b. Sometimes
- c. It depends
- d. Never

18. Would you like to be informed of Salon Elan's new offerings?

- a. I would like to be informed
- b. I do not wish to be informed

19. Overall, how satisfied are you with the current Salon Elan website?

- a. Very satisfied
- b. Somewhat satisfied
- c. Neutral
- d. Somewhat dissatisfied
- e. Very dissatisfied

20. How could we improve your online experience of Salon Elan (Open-ended)

- a. \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for participating in Salon Elan's website survey!



## Diary Study

To learn more about the habits, practices, and pain points of Salon Elan clients, a diary study should be considered. This form of user research requires participants to self-report data about their activities, attitudes and expectations. Below is a proposal for conducting such a study.

### The Goal

The purpose of this diary study is to get closer to the people who would frequent Salon Elan. This includes current and potential clients. Because clients infrequently use the salon's website, this study will be used to answer these 3 research questions:

- 1. What is a typical hair care routine?**
- 2. How much money is spent on hair care products and maintenance?**
- 3. When is help sought from a professional stylist?**

### Diary Study Format:

The diary study will gather data from participants through text messages (SMS + MMS). A phone is ubiquitous technology that will easily allow for quick notes and in-depth feedback. Text messages also will allow the participant to submit pictures of their preferred hair products, styles, and other pieces of important data. In case there is a concern with cost, this study can easily be performed on WhatsApp, a free IM app.

- **Method Pros:** Messages are transcribed and can easily be run through a software, quick and easy documentation and asset transfers, sending texts is an intuitive practice - no learning curve.
- **Method Cons:** Some participants might need to be lent a phone or reimbursed for their submissions (although highly unlikely in today's world), lengthy submissions might be deprioritized, autocorrect and abbreviations might make submissions difficult to interpret

## **Participants:**

For this study, a group of 10 people will be recruited. It would be optimal to have a mix of current Salon Elan customers and those who have never heard of this business. This would allow for a unique blend of perspectives that could ultimately inform other design and content decisions.

Participants should be at least 20 years of age and be located in the central New Jersey area. The majority of participants will be female as Salon Elan currently does not specialize in services for men. Participants should also be a range of ethnicities. Different hair textures and types require different amounts of care, and their perspective can impact how Salon Elan advertises its services and offerings.

## **Sampling Frequency:**

To obtain the most honest and authentic samples, random/experiential sampling will be employed. Developed by Reed Larson and Mihaly Csikzentmihalyi, experience sampling methodology focuses on sampling participants about their experiences at that moment in time. This will allow participants to share their personal information about their hair, routine, and self care habits throughout the day without forgetting crucial information.

## **Preparations for the Study:**

To understand the behaviors of the participants, this study will be conducted over a two week period. This will allow for documentation of hair washing schedules (afro hair is usually washed once a week or every other week), styling during the week, and any splurging on care during the weekends.

Before conducting the study, it is important to understand where roadblocks may disrupt data collection. To ensure high compliance, participants will only be prompted once a day to submit data. Submission time will randomly shift throughout the week to get more diverse perspectives in order to fit with the selected sampling frequency.

It is also necessary to understand which questions might be difficult for participants to answer. Although the research questions above are quite general and harmless, some might feel embarrassed to report personal conditions, like dandruff or alopecia, that can have a considerable impact on their hair care routine.

Finally, incentives will be prepared. To encourage participants to maintain a regular submission cadence, \$25 will be added on for each week all prompts are met with complete, valuable entries.

## **Conducting the Study:**

Please jump to page 16 to view the diary study template. This document will guide the study process including the introductory sessions and outlining study questions, activities, and expectations. As previously mentioned they will be prompted to submit once a day for two weeks, totalling 14 entries.

After the introductory session, participants will undergo a light training process. This will outline expectations and instructions clearly. For maximum compliance, participants will be sent a video and a PDF document that outlines the process and FAQs.

Photography is encouraged throughout this study. Participants will be walked through how to take and submit quality photos that add context and visual proof to their written samples. Photos will not be shared to non-essential or third-party personnel.

Prior to the official study, participants will have the opportunity to practice the diary entry process. This will assist in creating the habit, quality assuring the method of collection, and allow for any questions to be answered.

During the study period, data collection will be monitored. This will allow abnormalities and missed submissions to be documented and evaluated. If needed or warranted, positive or constructive feedback will be administered to participants.

## **Data Analysis:**

After the diary study concludes, data analysis will begin. Unusable pieces of data, like incomplete/inappropriate responses or submissions that include personal information, will be filtered and discarded. Participants who also dropped out early in the study will also have their submissions removed.

Following the data clean up process, it will be assessed quantitatively and qualitatively. For qualitative analysis a software like Coding Analysis Toolkit (CAT) could be used. For quantitative analysis a software like IBM's SPSS could be used. This analysis will allow for the easy interpretation of patterns, outliers, and information that could lead to insights about a certain subset of users.

## **Communicating the Findings:**

To best communicate the findings from the diary study, Salon Elan's team should create a digital artifact notebook. This method of presenting data will allow statistics and information to be shown alongside media that participants have shared throughout the week like photos, videos, and other helpful tidbits like links.

This digital hub will allow for stakeholders to easily sift through data and pull the information they need with ease.

## Diary Study Template

The template below is an example of one Salon Elan might use for their user research.

### Introduction Session:

Hello, and welcome to our diary study exercise for Salon Elan. My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I will be leading this orientation. For the next two weeks, we want to get to know you a little better by documenting your hair care routine. We want to know what it takes to maintain your perfect coif, the products and budget it takes to do so, and when you look to a professional stylist to get your desired outcome.

Your entries will be used to help Salon Elan identify areas of opportunity for their business. In the next couple of months, they will be updating their website to help give clients the ultimate experience.

The study officially starts on [\(insert date\)](#) at [\(insert time\)](#). The day before will be used as a practice day to help you acclimate to the process. Please keep an eye out for additional details.

Throughout the two weeks, you will be randomly pinged once a day to enter your responses via text message. Feel free to include pictures of your hair, the products you use, the salon you currently frequent, and anything additional you feel would help bolster your entry. Each entry should keep in mind a few questions. You will be supplied a document with these prompt questions later in this meeting.

Those who complete all responses at the end of each week will receive a bonus \$25 for their great work.

If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out to me at [\(insert contact information\)](#). Thank you for being a part of this process!

### Diary Questions:

- When did you last wash your hair? How often do you wash it?
- What products do you use?
- Do you style your hair yourself, if so, how often?
- How is your hair making you feel right now?
- Could you submit a picture of your hair?
- When did you go to the salon last?
- How much maintenance goes into your hair?
- What would make your hair care routine easier?
- How much money do you dedicate to your hair?
- Do you have any hair concerns?
- What would you like to know from a hair care and styling expert?



## Card Sorting Exercise

A website's backbone is its information architecture (IA). Focusing on organizing, structuring and labeling content, a good information architecture helps users find information and complete tasks in an effective and sustainable way.

To help develop a strong IA for the Salon Elan website, a hybrid card sorting exercise can be conducted. The below exercise documents and evaluates the topic sorting and labeling of 4 participants who have not visited the current Salon Elan website. Participants did not view the website beforehand as their initial reactions to sorting the information will be the most useful, as a salon site is rather small. If visited previously, participants might have a sense of bias.

For this exercise, the online tool OptimalSort was used. Participants answered three pre-exercise questions that aligned to the original research questions. From there, participants placed 30 cards into 4 pre-determined categories, with the option to write in their own if they felt something did not quite fit.

The following outlines the card sorting exercise and its resulting data. You may view the live card sorting exercise [here](#).

### Exercise Introduction

Thank you for logging on to help us with the Salon Elan website. My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm a part of the website redesign team. In this card sorting exercise, you will be given a set of 30 topic cards and 4 predetermined categories. The 30 topic cards outline subjects and features that can or will be featured on the Salon Elan website. It is your goal to sort these topics into the predetermined categories in a way that makes sense to you. If there are topics that don't seem to fit the categories, you have the option to create your own.

This process should only take around 10 minutes of your time. Before starting the card sorting, please answer the 3 pre-exercise questions. This will give us additional insight to your process and preferred website experience.

All information acquired throughout this process will remain confidential. If you have any questions, please consult the OptimalSort FAQ and help features, or contact me here \_\_\_\_\_. Thank you for your participation!

## Participant Instructions

*(Pulled from the OptimalSort website)*

Take a look at the list of items on the left. We'd like you to sort those items into groups that make sense to you.

Use the groups provided or create your own by dragging and dropping an item from the left into the space on the right.

There is no right or wrong answer. Just do what comes naturally. When you're done click "Finished" at the top right.

## Wrap Up

*(Pulled from the OptimalSort website)*

All done, awesome! Thanks again for your participation. Your feedback is incredibly useful in helping to determine how content should be organized on the Salon Elan website, so we can make it easier to use.

You may now close this window or navigate to another web page.

## Card Sorting Data Analysis

This analysis was based on a hybrid card sorting activity conducted on April 19, 2020 using the OptimalSort website.

### **Exercise Summary:**

After conducting the card sorting exercise, it was very obvious where there was consensus between the four participants. They largely agreed on which topics would live under the category of "Services." This is fairly intuitive as everyone is familiar with the typical offerings of a salon.

The area that had the most debate was the Homepage. Participants rarely agreed which topics or features should live there. The one topic they all agreed on having there were salon hours. They also seemed to favor user-centric features on the Homepage as well, like the account portal, special offers, and the ability to book an appointment online.

Topics that were a little more ambiguous like the photo gallery, gift card purchasing, and Google Map integration were a bit harder to place. This is likely due to these topic's ability to fit into a couple of locations.

The most interesting piece of feedback from this exercise was that none of the four participants created a new category to help organize the topics. This means that with the initial IA redesign, potential clients are satisfied with this simple navigation and are not looking for something more extensive.

## Participant 1

- Male
- 25 years old
- Full-time student
- Part-time Bank Teller

For Participant 1 a salon website needs to have online appointment booking, a gallery and a contact page. His most sought after pieces of information are hours of operation, contact information, and a location with a map. While social media can be helpful in learning more about the business, he does not consider a salon without a social media presence a dealbreaker. As the son of a hairdresser, he has intimate knowledge of this industry.

Participant 1 Raw Data	
Category	Topic Cards
Homepage	Tagline Salon Elan Logo Social Media Handles Special Offers Google Map Integration Email Salon Hours Phone Number Location
About	Mission Statement Staff Member Profiles Products Used
Contact	User Account Gift Card Purchasing Book Appointment Contact Form Inquiries Email Newsletter Sign Up
Services	Smoothing Treatments Hair Color Skincare Photo Gallery Makeup Manicures & Pedicures Facial & Body Waxing Pricing/Prices Hair Cuts Men's Services Bridal Consultations Perms

## Participant 2

- Female
- 23 years old
- Bachelor's Degree
- High School History Teacher

For Participant 2, a salon website needs to have a comprehensive gallery featuring the salon facilities and examples of their work. It must also be easy to navigate. Her most sought after pieces of information are services and prices. Not having a social media page is a dealbreaker. If there aren't engaged fans, she will take her business elsewhere.

Participant 2 Raw Data	
Category	Topic Cards
Homepage	User Account Salon Hours Inquiries Book Appointment Special Offers Gift Card Purchasing Photo Gallery
About	Mission Statement Staff Member Profiles Tagline Salon Elan Logo
Contact	Contact Form Social Media Handles Phone Number Email Google Map Integration Location Email Newsletter Sign Up
Services	Pricing/Prices Men's Services Smoothing Treatments Skincare Hair Cuts Manicures & Pedicures Products Used Facial & Body Waxing Hair Color Bridal Consultations Perms Makeup

### Participant 3

- Female
- 27 years old
- Ph.D Student
- Special Needs Teacher

For Participant 3 a salon website needs to have a good visual aesthetic and must be easy to navigate. Her most sought after pieces of information are service listings, prices, and the credentials of the service providers. While social media can be helpful in learning more about the business, she does not consider it a dealbreaker.

Participant 3 Raw Data	
Category	Topic Cards
Homepage	Location Google Map Integration Salon Elan Logo Salon Hours User Account Contact Form Book Appointment Mission Statement
About	Tagline Pricing/Prices Staff Member Profiles Gift Card Purchasing Photo Gallery Bridal Consultations Special Offers Products Used
Contact	Email Newsletter Sign Up Social Media Handles Inquiries Phone Number Email
Services	Perms Facial & Body Waxing Makeup Hair Color Hair Cuts Men's Services Skincare Manicures & Pedicures Smoothing Treatments

## Participant 4

- Male
- 28 years old
- Master of Arts in Teaching
- High School Math Teacher

For Participant 4, a salon website needs to have a good visual aesthetic and reviews from real customers. His most sought after pieces of information are hours of operation, contact information, prices, and a location with a map. While social media can be helpful in learning more about the business, he does not consider it a dealbreaker.

Participant 3 Raw Data	
Category	Topic Cards
Homepage	Salon Hours Email Newsletter Sign Up Salon Elan Logo Book Appointment Social Media Handles User Account Location Special Offers Tagline Gift Card Purchasing Photo Gallery
About	Mission Statement Google Map Integration Staff Member Profiles
Contact	Phone Number Email Contact Form Inquiries
Services	Smoothing Treatments Bridal Consultations Perms Men's Services Pricing/Prices Facial & Body Waxing Makeup Skincare Hair Color Manicures & Pedicures Products Used Hair Cuts

## Card Sorting Similarity Matrix

### Similarity matrix [?](#)

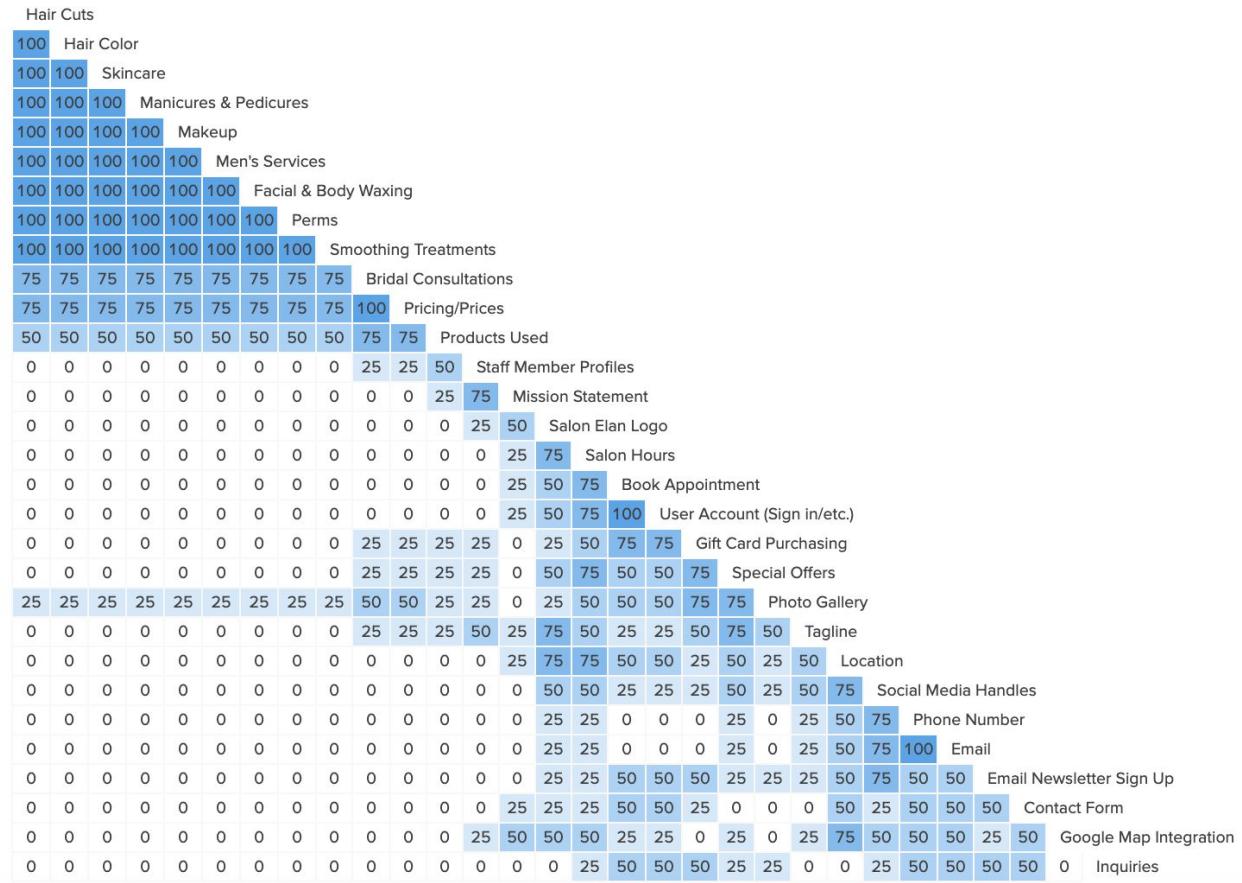


Figure 1: Screenshot from the OptimalSort data analysis. This graphic depicts where participants agreed and disagreed about the relationship of topics.



## Heuristic Evaluation

A heuristic evaluation is a method for identifying usability problems within a user interface design. By identifying issues within a heuristic evaluation, a design team can work to solve them as a part of their iterative design process.

Heuristics themselves are considered broad rules of thumb that should be considered for any project that requires human interaction and usability, not just those concerning websites. While there are many different sets of heuristics for user interface design, the most popular and accurate are the 10 general principles for interaction design developed by Jakob Nielsen.

To understand how successfully the Salon Elan website met usability needs, the below heuristic evaluation was completed by Shanteya Hudson in April 2020. It is crucial to conduct a heuristic evaluation with “fresh eyes” as one can become biased or blind to the usability issues plaguing the website.

### **The Findings:**

Through Shanteya’s evaluation, it was concluded that the Salon Elan website needed to improve in a couple key areas.

The first being its content. Shanteya found it confusing how information was repeated on different pages of the website. It was difficult to understand which page she should be referring to and what the purpose of the page was. This could be seen with the duplication of the “Contact” and “Inquiries” pages.

The second area was the website’s lack of efficiency. There was little to no flexibility offered to the user to personalize or accelerate their experience. It seemed more like an information hub (a really lack-luster one) versus a place you would go to in order to connect with the company.

The third area where the website struggled was aesthetic, it looked and felt like a paper flyer. Although there were some signals that helped the user understand where they were on the website, each page looked largely the same, making it more difficult to navigate.

To improve the website, Shanteya recommended for Salon Elan to condense their website into a single-scroll layout. This would allow for simplification and allow the content to sing a bit better. She also felt like the website needed more features, like an online booking portal, to make the experience more valuable to potential customers.

Heuristic	Severity*	Comments
Visibility of System Status	0 1 2 3 4	There are two features that keep the user informed and provides the system status. The website has a favicon that displays when a page is loading. The menu also highlights the page you are visiting in white. Both features are efficient and provide the user with needed guidance as each page looks nearly identical.
Match between System & Real World	0 1 2 3 4	There is a large room for improvement in the way information is formatted. The "Contact" and "Inquiries" sections of the website are divided into separate pages, but are essentially the same. The menu order is logical and follows conventional website standards. One significant design flaw is that there are hyperlinks included in paragraphs to other pages on the website. It is redundant.
User Control & Freedom	0 1 2 3 4	There is user control and the ability to navigate efficiently throughout the website, however this process isn't aesthetically pleasing. When navigating to different pages, the header picture enlarges, and then recedes back to the original size. This could be fixed through optimization.
Consistency & Standards	0 1 2 3 4	The colors, typefaces, and style are all consistent on the website. The mapbox and social media icons are familiar to users. One improvement that could be made is the Facebook Like widget, it appears to be linked to a 24-Hour locksmith company.
Error Prevention	0 1 2 3 4	The simplicity of the website does not create a lot of room for the users to make an error. The page that does include a form offers error prevention. The user is alerted if they put an incorrectly-formatted address on the form.
Recognition & Recall	0 1 2 3 4	The website offers opportunities to recall information. It does not present logical opportunities to explore new information or options. You have the ability to submit an inquiry form for information. There are no clear instructions on how to book an appointment other than a phone number.
Flexibility & Efficiency	0 1 2 3 4	There are no accelerators available to provide flexibility on the site. With the understanding that this is a small company, they could still benefit from an online booking system.

Aesthetic & Minimalist Design	0 1 <b>2</b> 3 4	The overall aesthetic of the website is minimalistic and very simple, nearly resembling a flyer. It would benefit from a one page website versus its current design.
Help Users Recognize, Diagnose, & Recover from Error	0 1 <b>2</b> 3 4	The site offers no error codes, but could benefit from them.
Help & Documentation	<b>0</b> 1 2 3 4	The website design does not require any documentation to navigate

**\*Severity:** 0 - No issue, 1 - Cosmetic, 2 - Minor, 3 - Major, 4 - Catastrophic

## Usability Testing

Usability testing is all about collecting real data from real people. In a typical usability test, participants will interact with an app, website or other product while attempting to complete assigned tasks. The goal of these tests is to identify any usability issues, and collect qualitative and quantitative data. Ultimately, this data will help a team determine user satisfaction with the product and what needs to be improved or refined.

To assess the quality of their current website, Salon Elan should conduct usability testing as the primary method to collect data for an optimal redesigned product.

### Introduction

Hi! Welcome, and thank you for coming in today. My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am a part of the website redesign team. Today, I'm going to be walking you through this usability testing session.

Before we commence, let's cover why you're here and the goal of this exercise. Over the next hour, you complete tasks on a website we are currently working on. This will allow us to see if the current solution is the best solution. It's our mission to find flaws, document them, and solve them.

With your permission, we would like to record audio and video of the sessions so that we may refer back to each interaction. This will allow us to stay present in the exercise and eliminate the need to take pages of notes. The recordings will only be used internally, and will not be distributed to anyone outside of the website development team. If you are okay with being recorded, we will provide you with a consent form to fill out, just so we have a record of your compliance.

During the session, I encourage you to think out loud. Say what you're looking at, describe what task you are trying to fulfill and how. Any verbal information you can provide will be a great help to us. Please be as honest as possible, we cannot improve the website if we don't have genuine reactions to guide us.

If you have any questions as we commence the exercise, feel free to ask them. Before we start, please sign the consent form. We're so excited to learn from you!

### Recording Consent Form

Thank you for participating in our usability research for Salon Elan.

To provide accessible raw data and visual documentation to our development team, we will be recording your session.

Please read the statement below and sign where indicated.

---

I understand that my usability session will be recorded.

I grant permission for the recording to be used for internal use only, with the purpose of improving the designs being tested.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Starter Questions

Before we take a look at the website, I'd like to get to know you a bit better. Can I ask you a few quick questions?

First, how comfortable are you with online browsing/research and technology?

What kinds of websites are you frequenting? Are they for work purposes or for entertainment?

In your opinion, which features are crucial to creating a good user experience?

How do you determine if a website is useful or successful?

## Home Page Introduction

Thanks for answering our questions. Let's start looking at the website.

On the screen, you can see the Salon Elan home page. Take a look at this page and tell me what you think about it. Is it what you expected? What actions can you take on this page? How does it act as a front door to the business? What do or don't you like about it?

Scroll up and down to get the full effect of the page, but please don't click on anything until we move on to the next step.

## The Tasks

Your feedback on the home page was very helpful. Now we can begin the task portion of the test. Here is a printed copy of what we would like you to try and achieve on this website. I will read each one aloud to help guide the process.

Again, try to think out loud as much as possible. It will allow us to get closer to your way of thinking and understand your journey as you go along. Let's begin.

### **Task 1:**

You hear of Salon Elan from a friend in town. They seem to have enjoyed their experience and you've been looking for someplace new. Curious, you go to check them out online. You're interested in getting a perm. Find the list of services offered at Salon Elan.

### **Task 2:**

Your wedding is coming up. In six months, you will be married to the love of your life. Looking good on your big day is important. Hoping to find a place that will do both hair and makeup, you research local salons. Find out if Salon Elan does bridal consultations.

### **Task 3:**

You're new in town and need to find a place for a haircut. A colleague at work suggested Salon Elan as a place to go. They said the building is right off of 206, but you're unsure where. Find the address and directions to the salon.

### **Task 4:**

On the way home from work, you pass Salon Elan and throw around the idea of booking an appointment. You pull over only to find that the salon is closed. Interested in learning more, you go to their website to get contact information. Find Salon Elan's email form.

## **Probing**

Your insight has been very helpful. We enjoy seeing how you think!

Before we wrap up, let me regroup with the team to see if there are any additional follow-up questions we'd like to ask you.

(Regroup with the team and continue probing on areas that require more follow up.)

## **Wrap Up**

Now that we've completed all of the tasks, do you have any questions for me?

(If Yes)

That's great! We'd love to hear your questions. I'll do my best to answer them for you.

(If No)

Awesome! Thank you so much for taking the time out to be with us today. As a reminder, for your generous participation you'll be receiving your travel stipend and \$50 bonus in the mail next week.

I think we are all finished here, let me show you out!

## The Usability Testing Sessions

The participants of the Salon Elan usability sessions were immediate family members. Due to COVID-19 conditions, it was not possible to conduct testing with a more accurate representation of the salon's clientele. Each participant currently lives in Hillsborough, NJ and have heard of Salon Elan. Although they have not frequented there for any service, this was their first time visiting the website. During recruitment, the family was briefed on the project and was informed their computer screen activity would be recorded. Due to personal sensitivities, no audio was captured.

At the beginning of each session, the introduction script and instructions above were delivered to the participants, as well as the consent form. It was communicated that each task would begin from the Salon Elan website in order to truly demonstrate how easy or difficult it was to navigate the website as a new user.

It was reiterated to participants that they were not being tested, but rather they were there to help test whether the website was functioning as intended.

Each session lasted an average of half an hour.

## The Participants

The three participants were members of the same family. While they do share common ties (besides being related), there are distinct differences in their personal needs and how they prefer to use computers and the internet.

During every session, each participant was guided through the above task list.

Participant	Age	Occupation	Computer Skill Level	Individual Needs
Father	58	QA Software Engineer	9/10	Content must correlate to page names/location
Mother	56	Assistant Branch Manager	5/10	List of services must be easy to find & thorough
Daughter	23	High School History Teacher	10/10	Aesthetic and navigation must be flawless

## Usability Testing Analysis

The below is a breakdown, per task, about what was discovered about the Salon Elan website.

### Task 1:

You hear of Salon Elan from a friend in town. They seem to have enjoyed their experience and you've been looking for someplace new. Curious, you go to check them out online. You're interested in getting a perm. Find the list of services offered at Salon Elan.

#### Results:

All participants were able to cleanly navigate from the homepage to the services tab to find the full list of services and the "permanent waving" bullet.

### Task 2:

Your wedding is coming up. In six months, you will be married to the love of your life. Looking good on your big day is important. Hoping to find a place that will do both hair and makeup, you research local salons. Find out if Salon Elan does bridal consultations.

#### Results:

Participants had varied results here. Two returned to the services list, while the third went to the "About" page. On the "About" page, they saw the "wedding hair" hyperlink and clicked it leading back to the "Services" page. From these findings, we can see that there is a break in how participants thought information should be organized.

There also was a consensus that there was not enough information about the bridal offerings. Just saying "wedding hair and makeup" in different areas of the site gave the user enough information about what is included and why they should go to Salon Elan for their supposed specialized services.

### Task 3:

You're new in town and need to find a place for a haircut. A colleague at work suggested Salon Elan as a place to go. They said the building is right off of 206, but you're unsure where. Find the address and directions to the salon.

#### Results:

This task was interesting as it definitely showed the differences in how age and experience with websites comes into play. The daughter scrolled immediately down from the homepage to find the information in the website footer, while both the father and mother went to the "About" page.

It is commonplace for most retail websites to have a sticky footer that has key pieces of information like the address, etc. The daughter, experienced with online retail/service websites, had the instinct that the task could be completed in that simple way. The parents, on the other hand, used their more logical approach to find the same information.

#### **Task 4:**

On the way home from work, you pass Salon Elan and throw around the idea of booking an appointment. You pull over only to find that the salon is closed. Interested in learning more, you go to their website to contact them. Find Salon Elan's email form.

#### **Results:**

For this task, each participant went directly to the "Contact" page. Upon initial confusion, one participant thought the hyperlink in the footer that said "Email" would link to the email form. Upon finding that it did not, they got frustrated.

After discovering the "Contact" page did not contain the form, they eventually navigated to the "Inquiries" tab to find the form. All participants felt that the information on the two similar pages could be condensed into one "Contact" page as "Inquiries" was a confusing term to find on a salon website.

### **Problem Areas & Recommendations for Improvement**

After conducting testing with three participants, it became very apparent that there were key issues in the site's usability, but in the site's offered functions and content as well. Each participant agreed that this website did not excite or entice them to learn more about Salon Elan's services. This is crucial feedback as if the website doesn't house the information people are looking for, regardless of usability, a company could be losing more leads than they might even understand.

#### **The Problem Areas:**

- There was no certain way to find special offers like bridal hair and makeup. These instances could be found on various places of the website and did not include any information besides that they offer it (no pricing, what it includes, etc.)
- Duplication on the website that was unnecessary, to participants, the information on the homepage and the "About" page seemed extremely similar, this also goes for the "Inquiries" and "Contact" pages.
- Pages of the website looked too similar to one another. Aesthetically, participants felt that the website looked old and not cared for.
- Site lacked modern efficiency features, like the ability to book an appointment online, buying gift certificates, or a photo gallery.
- Design of the footer was clunky. The Google Maps widget did not need to be included at the bottom of every page.

- Content was largely repetitive with little to no hierarchy. The website was formatted like a Microsoft Word file.
- Hyperlinks sprinkled throughout the website drove to other areas of the website. This is not a best practice and confused users about where they should go on the website to find information.

### **Recommendations for Improvement:**

- Conduct a content audit. Identify where user needs are not being met in their hierarchy, organization, and display of website content. In many areas, the content - and pages - could be simplified to give users what they need without schlepping through paragraphs of buzzwords and similar phrases
- Use a website hosting platform like Wordpress or SquareSpace to add in features that the typical customer expects from a digital experience like booking appointments online, photo galleries, and even shopping features. They also have templates for a single-scroll format if that is desired.
- Remove hyperlinks from the website if they lead to other internal pages. This is a redundant and bad practice. All information should be placed in a logical way so they don't need to be led to it from one place on the website to another.
- Update the aesthetic to appeal to modern users and mobile devices. Also consider revamping the imagery used to reflect the diversity of the clientele.
- Make special offers and packages easier to find, whether that be somewhere on the homepage or "Services" page. These need to be more prominent and built out so that users understand that those are featured pieces of information.