Heuristic Analysis Report
of
Verizon Central

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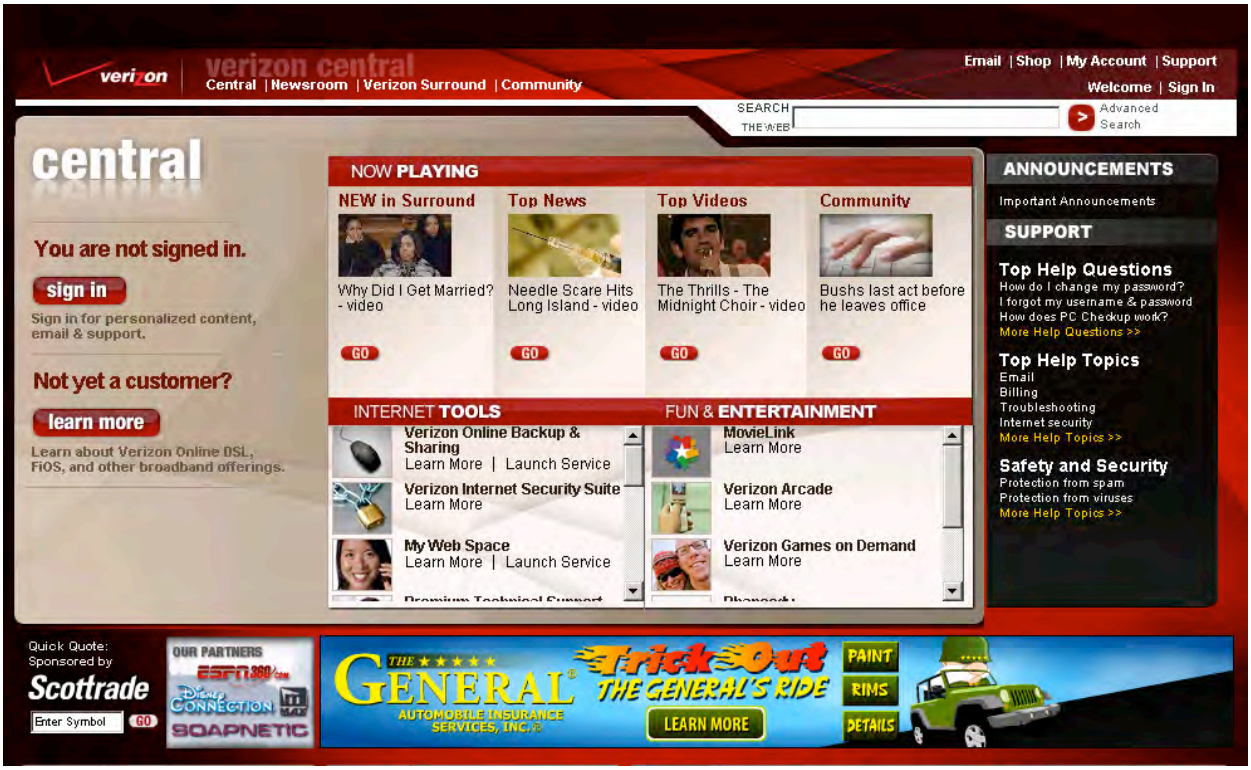
Verizon User Experience Design

Heuristic Analysis seeks to determine the baseline usability of an existing site or system according to established usability metrics. Opportunities for both immediate and long-range improvement are identified. Clearly presented site organization. Accessibility of navigation to information areas with logically categorized content. Consistency in page layout, location and appearance of navigation elements. Appropriate technical knowledge expectations of the user. Assistance to the user if they need help. Heuristics with a rating of Fair or lower are discussed below.

Summary: It is hard to understand the business goal for this site. The only genuine offering for the customer would seem to be web-based email and "My Account" - where there is nothing new. There is also a stereotypically designed, "me-too" Newsroom. Without clearly defined goals (is trying to appear hip a goal?), every area of the site from Surround to Community to Shop is disorienting: a little multimedia here, a little sales there, hey, you can join a forum, too. Information Architecture becomes a dice roll. Consistently confusing navigation, a frequent practice of linking the user away to other sites, experiments in Flash technology and video… produces a confusing pastiche of UI taxonomies, navigational conceits and page architectures.

First impression: "Nice, but eccentric graphic design" and "What is going on here?" No explanation or rationale for the site is offered.
Second impression: This site never went through QA or usability testing.
Final impression :"Won't be back except to manage my email" and "I wonder what Verizon is trying to do?"

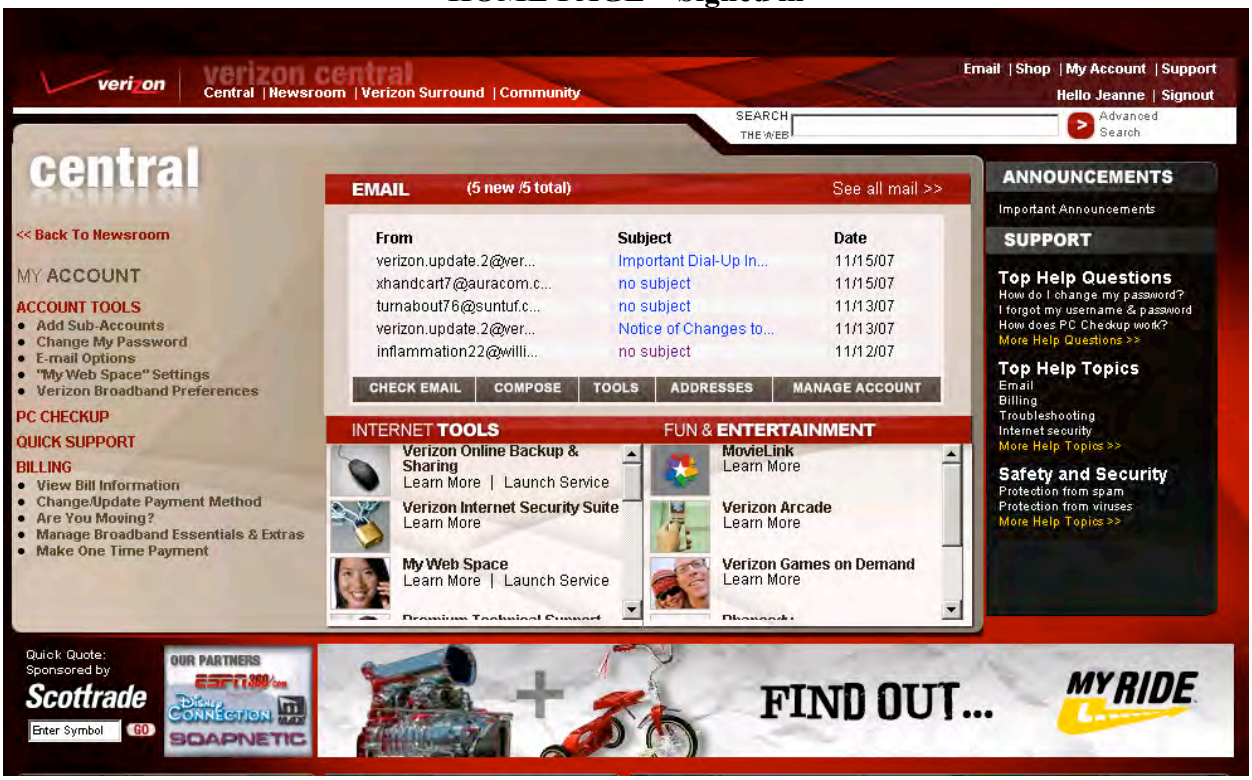
HOME PAGE - Guest



This page doesn't offer context. This is ostensibly the home page of www.verizon.net even thought the URL confusingly and automatically forwards to www.verizon.net/central. What is more disorienting is that the large "home page" type Verizon logo at top left is linked to www.verizon.com, which provides no way back to VZ central.

Guests are able to access all of the links that a signed in user can, except E-mail and My Account. The central module has a preview of 4 items in Surround:
NEW in Surround | Top News | Top Videos | Community

HOME PAGE – Signed in



After sign in, there is no further reference to NEW in Surround | Top News | Top Videos | Community except the latter. Instead the central module now shows an email preview pane. Below it is an area that uses I-frames, for 2 columns oddly categorized for what is in them. The use if the I-frames, with scrollbars, suggest that a user resolution above 1020 x 728 is predominant (which is highly arguable).

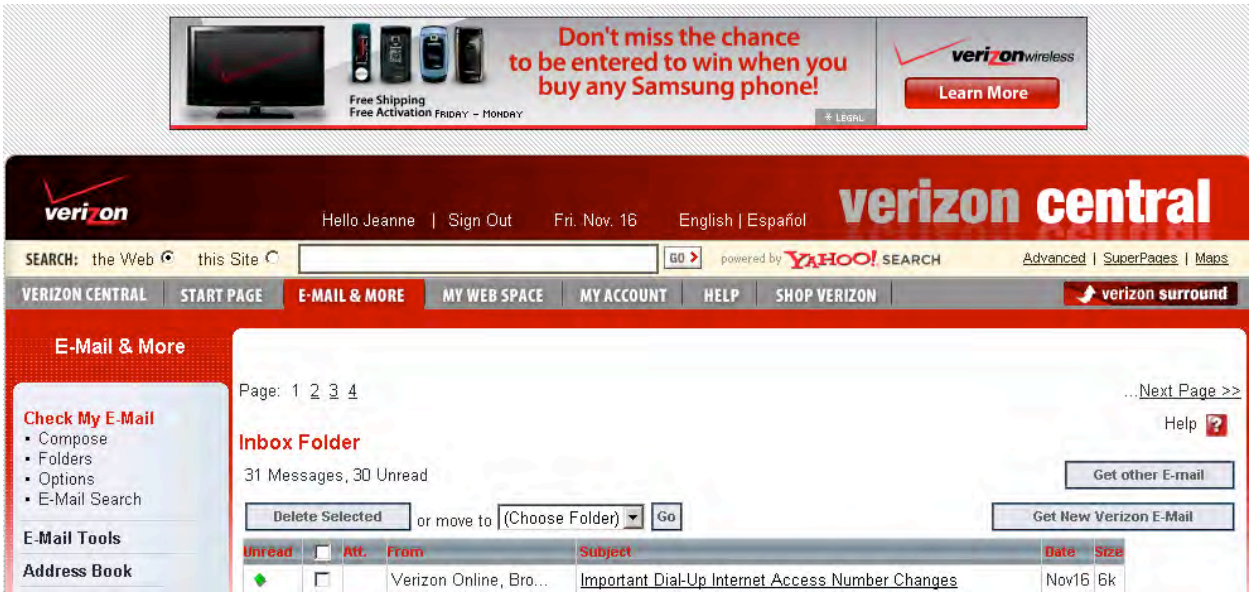
Around this central area, in two sidebars and upper right and upper left nav areas, the user is provided an odd assortment of links with little idea of what will happen after clicking them.

Sidebars: Links on both sidebars lead to netservices.verizon.com, an entirely different site? The prominent Announcements link at top of the right sidebar has no announcements except "Important Announcements". This is followed by a list of links to popular Help topics, like how to change your password (Oddly, these same links are available to a guest.) After signing in and checking "remember me," one can find no place where to tell it to not "remember me", sonow

after clicking any link to netservices.verizon.net, there is no way to explore what happens if a guest clicks these links. Contrary to the FRD, My Web Space link, leads to calendar.

Top Nav: link grouping seems random.
At top left: *Central* | *Newsroom* | *Verizon Surround* | *Community*.
At top right: *Email* | *Shop* | *My Account* | *Support* | *Sign Out*
Top nav and page content links can lead anywhere (netservices, surround, verizon.net) with no clear way back, unless the user happens to land at a Surround site with the same top nav. There is also an unlinked item in the top right group of links, *Welcome* that is replaced with an unlinked "Hi [username]" item after the user signs in.

Email links: Apparently, Web-based email seems to be the most important part of the site with a preview at top and center. Clicking an email *Subject* link unexpectedly brings up the old VZ Email site and is an overall view of the Inbox instead of the content of the email that one would expect. Contrary to the FRD, this and every other link and button in the Home page Email area (e.g. *Compose, View All, Address*…) lead to the exact same Inbox view of E-mail and More (http://webmail.verizon.net/signin/SSOAuthorize.jsp), in a completely different UI and IA.

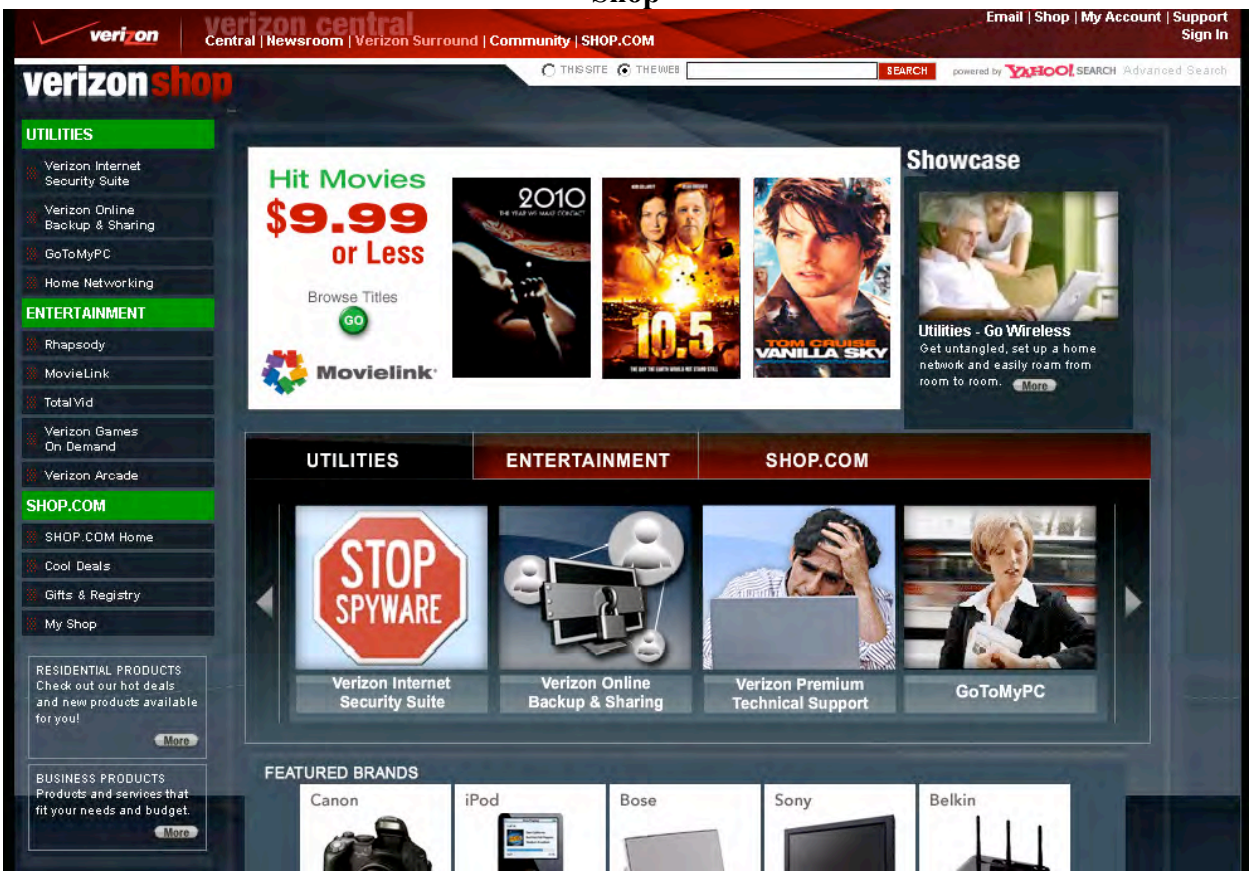


Confusing sense of location as the navigational design is for the old VZ Central, the new VZ Central Top NavlLinks are missing altogether, and suddenly a huge add at the top of the page where the navigation should be. Moreover, because SSO is being invoked behind the scenes, the browser back-button returns the user to the page they are on.

Newsroom

Newsroom link leads to the old VZ Central Newsroom.

Shop



The *Shop* link leads to http://surround.verizon.net/Shop/, a Surround site, but there is suddenly a new top nav link, *Shop.com*. Coming to Shop as a guest and then clicking the sign-in link unexpectedly leads back to the Verizon Central home page.

Sidebar and in-page links lead the user to a bewildering array of different sites, including Surround Shop pages, Shop.com, Movielink, listen.com, totalvid.com, gamesondemand.verizon.net, arcade.verizon.net, www2.verizon.net/micro, gotomypc.com, essentialsandextras.verizon.com and www22.verizon.com/forhomedsl/ sites. All links but those that lead to essentialsandextras.verizon.com and Surround pages open new browser instances and take the user off to another site with no way back.

Shop.com

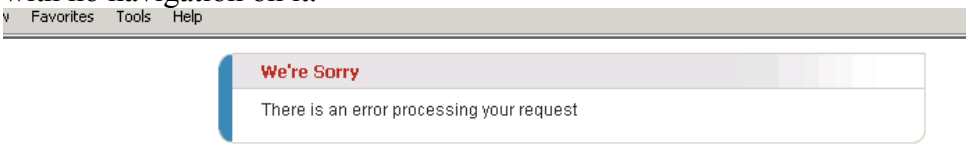
The link pops us a new window to a VZ co-branded shop.com site. The only top nav links are: *VERIZON SURROUND (GO) | Verizon Central | Email*. Only *VERIZON SURROUND* has a *Go* button that serves, as the link while the name, *VERIZON SURROUND,* itself, is unlinked. Clicking the Go button, the user now has two browser windows with the VZ central site!

Community

Clicking *Community* link on the VZ Central Home page, takes the user to the Community home page.

Oddly, upon arriving at Community the test user is no longer signed in.

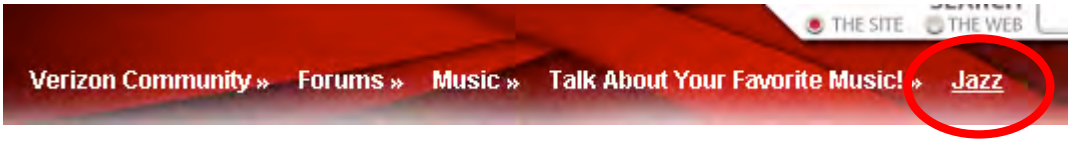
Clicking on the *Community Login* link leads to an error message and an otherwise blank screen, with no navigation on it.



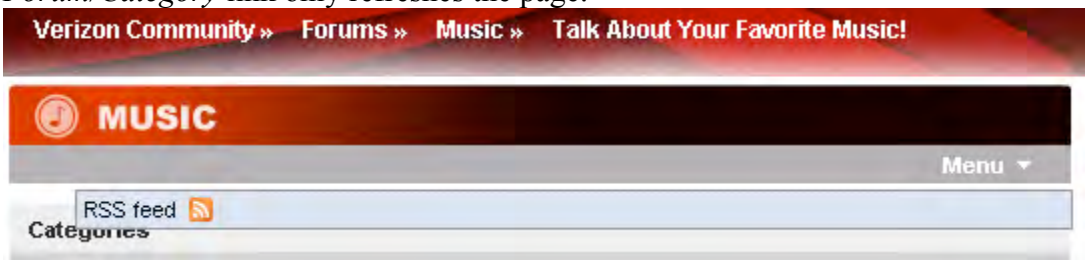
Community Home Page

On the community home page there is a huge Flash menu, which, unfortunately, pushes the more useful dynamic content area, "Recent Topics", below the fold.

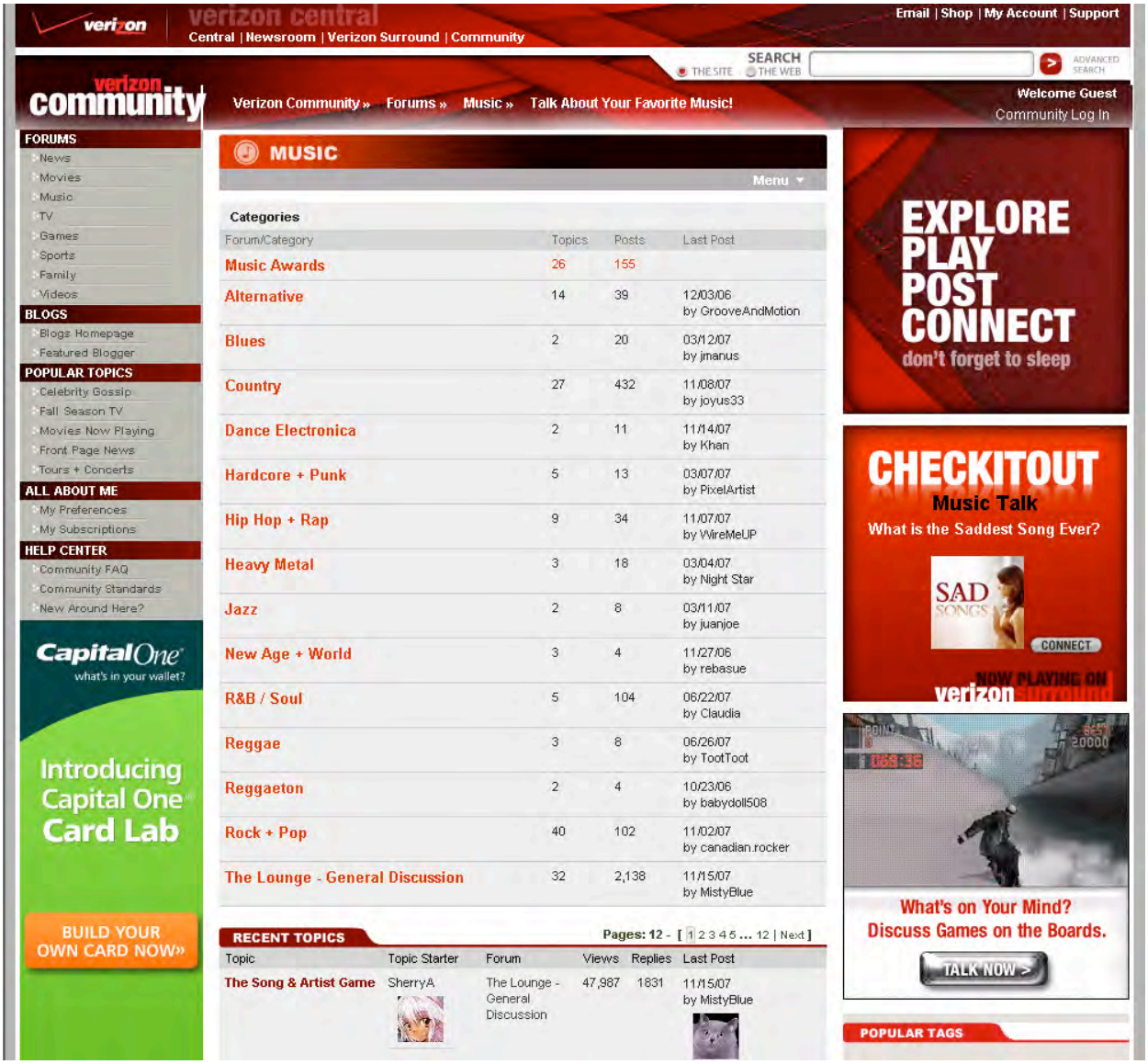
Community Categories:
No matter at what depth one is in the forums, the breadcrumb in the header for the current page is always an active link. It should be static text, instead, indicating the user's current location.



At the top of topics list, a *Menu* dropdown hides but a single *RS Feeds* link. Clicking the *Forum/Category* link only refreshes the page.

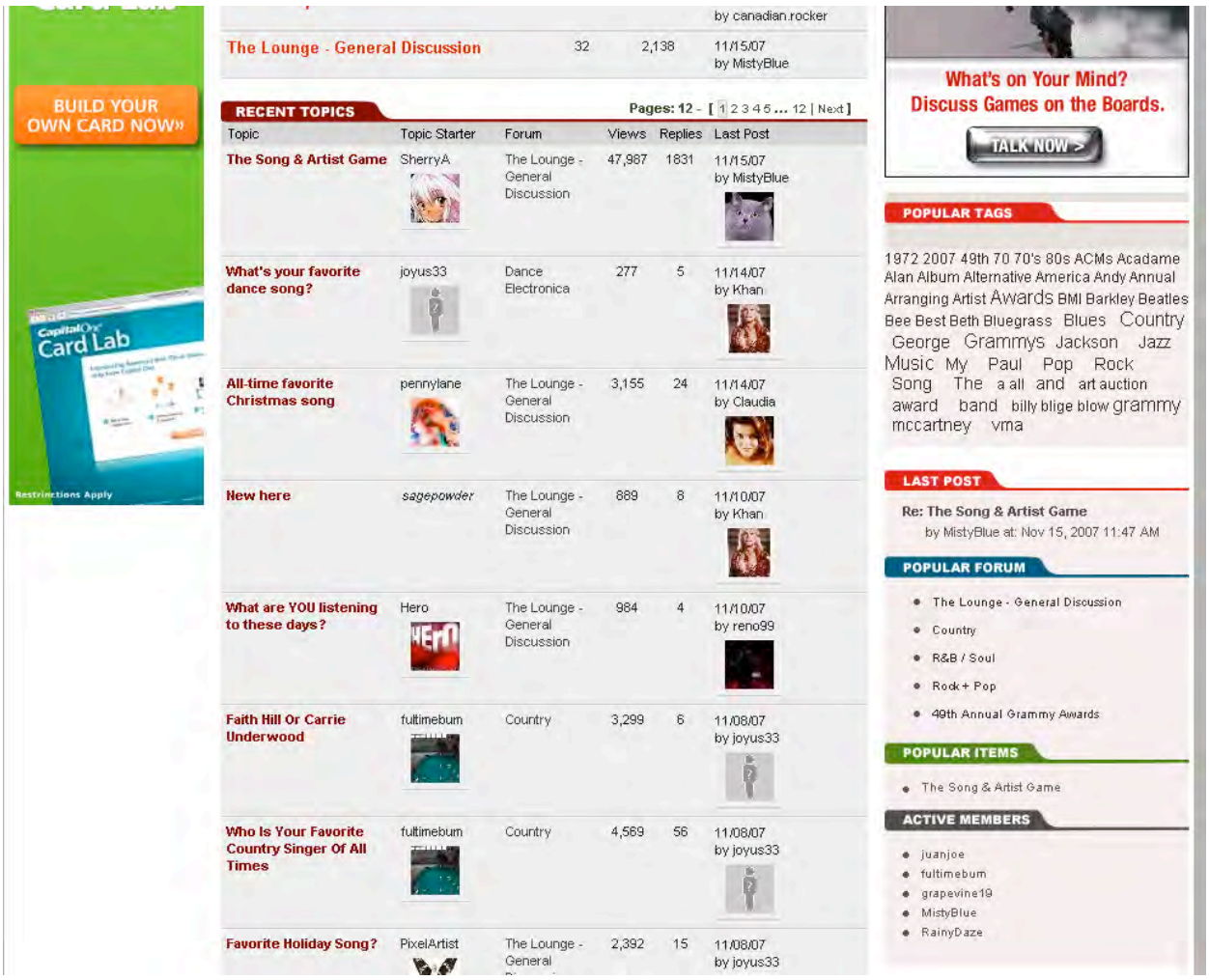


Example Forum: Community > Music > Favorite Music



Sidebar "Ads": As in other forums, sub-category pages and topic pages display a huge graphic link at right "*Explore Play Post Connect*" (looks like an ad) that inexplicably leads back to the Community home page. Under that, another huge link, "What's On Your Mind" leads back to Music.

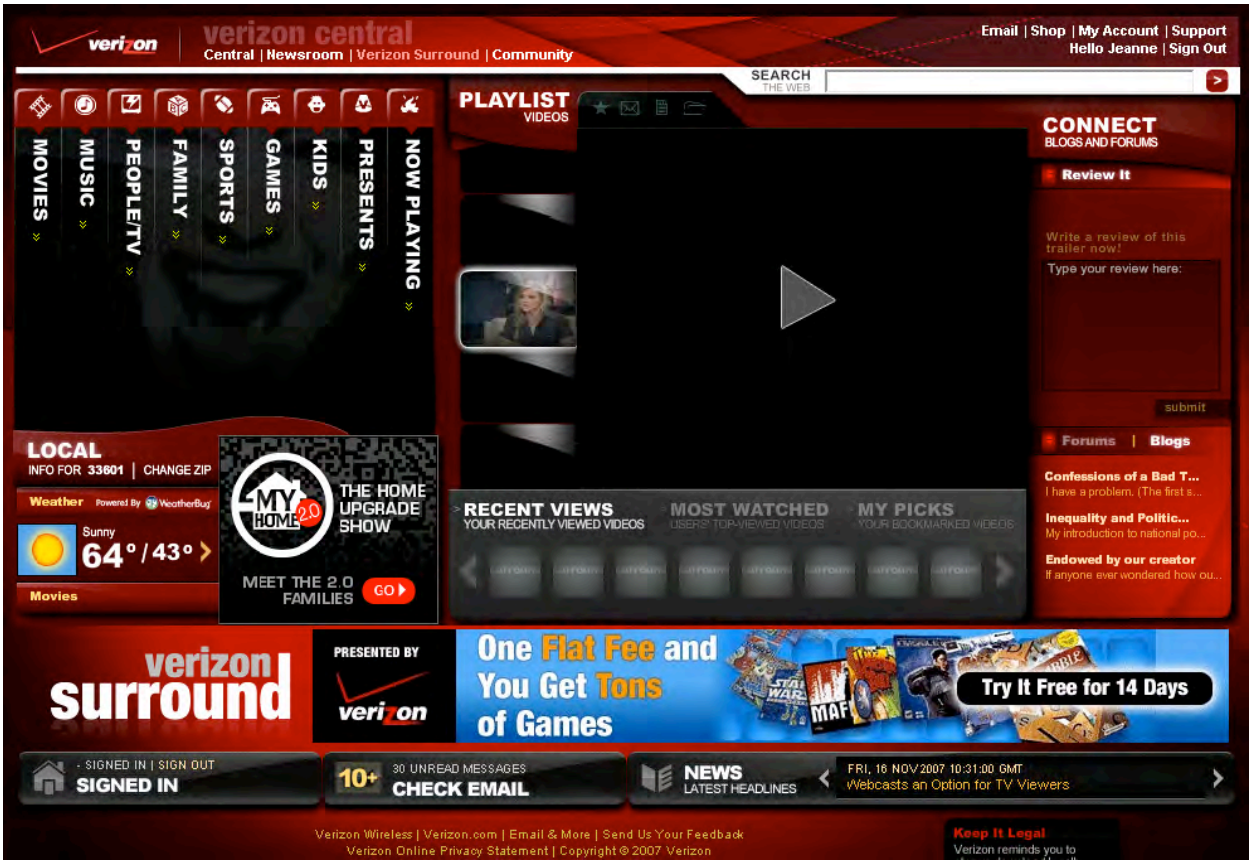
Dynamic Links: At some distance below these two links, far below the fold are the potentially useful section of links assembled under the headings, "Popular Tags", "Forums" and "Last Posts". Recent topics is also hidden below the "fold", and scrolls endlessly down the page because of the insertion of user avatar graphics in the row.



Available Categories: In Favorite Music, the actual music categories are limited to a handful (compare with the dozens of categories on XM radio). To work around this, a scan of topics under any one of the music genres finds participants mixing sub-categories and specific artists as topics. Same with sports. Very limited. What if a user wants to talk about Fencing or Bocci ball? They'd go to a site dedicated to it. This is a truism even for football and baseball fans. The success of social networking on the Internet is that it brings together people with extremely focused or fringe interests, not general interests.

Clicking *Central* in the top nav of Community, one arrives back at the VZ Central Home page, but now in the sidebar is a prominent, new and inexplicable link, *Back to Newsroom*, whether the user has recently been to Newsroom or not.

Surround



The main content of the Surround site is frames based. So, only in this section of VZ Central the browser back/next/refresh buttons may not be used to navigate. There is no way to bookmark pages. And as these pages are available to guests (as marketing?), the inability of search engines to find this content can be another issue.

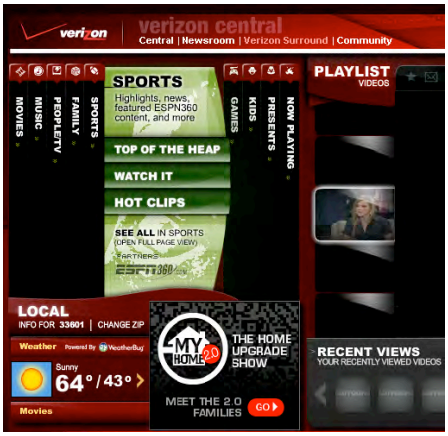
At one point, I got a half-page sized super-imposed layer on the page showing "** started launchDebugViewer()", with each click of the mouse it began to log line after line of SWF codes.

Surround > Main page: Too hip for it's own good? The Surround main page video or (something else that was loading?) repeatedly froze IE. There is what looks to be a video pane, but no preview frame, just a dark blank and a play button. No suggestion to click and nothing about what might happen if one does.

Again, the question what's going on here? No explanation or rationale for the site is given on this page.

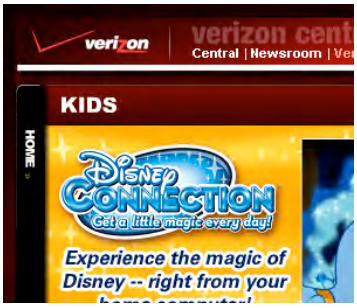
Category navigation: the sideways labels you could define as "unique", if not bizarre. Clicking *Presents, Kids and Games* leads directly to those pages. But clicking or rolling over any other

category link displays a large rollover area (quirky, too as it may or may not appear) that "compresses" the other category labels.

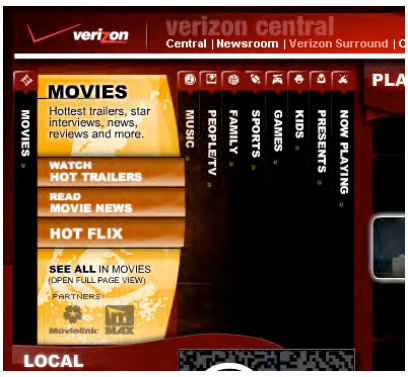


The rollovers, themselves, offer several links within them. In the case of *Movies* there is even an icon for a link-away to Movielink, which opens in a new window.

Weirdly, after visiting one of these sections and clicking the barely perceptible, sideways "Home" link at the left of the screen

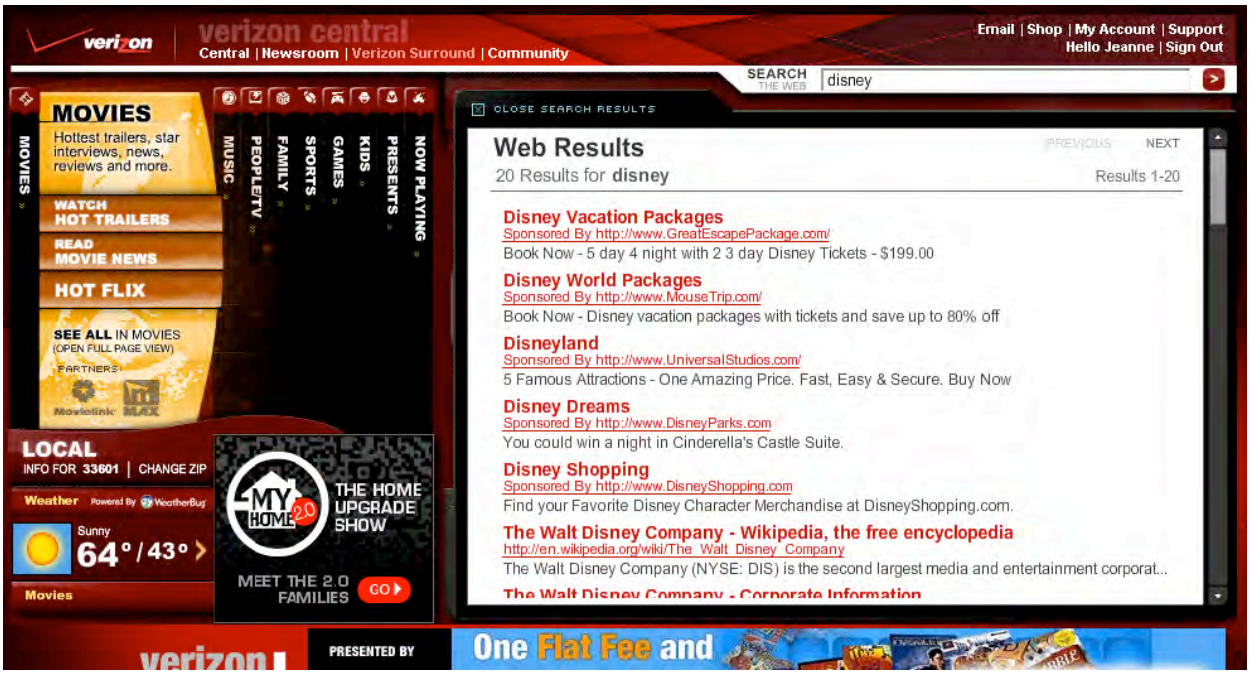


the mouse ended up over Movies so the Movie rollover was open after the Surround home page loaded.



All the categories weren't reviewed, but some seem to have site-based video content, while others, like Kids, may also take the user off to another site, like Disney connection.

Search bar



A text box for searching the Web brings up generic web search results whose links open a new browser window. (This directs the user away from Surround which seems counter-productive for site where one could assume a basic goal to encourage user "stickiness".)

The **Advertising banner** at the bottom of the page (not just in Surround) has a huge VZ Surround logo abutted to another logo labeled, "Presented by Verizon" followed by a bright blue ad that totally overwhelms the actual content in contrast to the dark tones of the rest of the page.

Bottom Nav: There is a *Check email link* in the bottom nav, but a *Signed In* item before it and a *News* (not *Newsroom*) item after it, both complete with logo, are not links.

Heuristic Ratings

Excellent – Good – Fair – Poor

User Interface Element	Rating
Overall	Fair
Usability / User Centered	Poor
Information Architecture	Poor
Navigation	Poor
Page Layout / Print	Poor
Style Sheets	None
Visual Design	Fair
Branding / Identity	?
Consistency	Good
Ordering / Forms	Poor
Customer Service	Fair
Security	Poor
Dynamic Content	Needed
FAQ	Poor
Contact	Fair
Search	None
Search Engines Ranking	Poor
Privacy Policy	Excellent
Online Support	N/A
"Push Email Communications"	None
Technical: Server Organization	Poor
Technical: HTML	Poor
Technical: Graphics	Good
Execution of Goal	Fair