

Mother Jones Interactive User Profiles

Three distinct types of users have emerged from analysis of survey responses and the focus group. For the purposes of the profiles, I'll refer to these user types as "Fluffy", "Marge", and "Deep Thought".

Fluffy

Fluffy is a casual user of the Internet -- generally uncritical, still a bit in awe of the web. She uses the Internet, on average, about an hour a day, seeking general information, news, travel, and entertainment. She uses email a lot and enjoys shopping online. She sometimes uses the 'net for activism. She learns about interesting web sites primarily from email alerts, print ads, and links, though sometimes her friends send her tips on cool sites. Her response to ads is all over the map - she may like, not mind, or ignore them, depending on how intrusive they are and whether the product advertised is relevant to her. She is appreciative of ads for socially conscious companies/products.

Fluffy visits www.motherjones.com occasionally, primarily to read our top stories. She is extremely positive about our content, citing our reputation for integrity, and the fact that we uncover stories not found elsewhere. Our news stories are the most useful aspect of the site to her, although she also appreciates our search functions.

Our interface is clear and easy for Fluffy -- she has no questions about our navigation and feels comfortable on the site. However, her answers to focus group and survey questions such as "Which sections do you most often use" reveal that she doesn't actually understand the way the site is organized. She doesn't know how many ads are on a page. She uses her browser's "forward" and "back" buttons rather than our navbar. None of this seems to bother her. Overall, Fluffy's positive response to our layout may be a reflection of the fact that she never goes deep enough into the site to become confused by it.

Fluffy likes our color scheme and finds the site bright and readable. After having explored it thoroughly in the focus group, she is likely to use the site more often than she had previously.

Fluffy represents about 32% of our users.

Marge

Underwhelmed by the Internet's possibilities, Marge only goes online once or twice a month, generally for less than two hours. She doesn't shop online or use email, but she does use the web for occasional travel information, news, or general research. She finds out about interesting sites through friends and family, links, or radio. She strongly dislikes ads on web sites.

Marge visits our site infrequently. She loves Must Reads, but doesn't seem to know that the links lead off of our site. In general, she sees the site as an online version of the magazine. She's generally positive about our content without being specific about why she likes it.

Marge finds our interface easy to understand and navigate. She's clear about the purpose of our navbar and has no trouble getting around, although (like Fluffy) she uses her browser's "back" and "forward" buttons rather than our navigational elements.

Marge's responses were sharply divided on our design: everything from "straightforward" and "attractive" to "hate it!"

Marge represents about 18% of our users.

Deep Thought

By far our largest user group, Deep Thought is also our most critical. Deep Thought uses the Internet daily for at least half an hour, often for several hours. Sometimes she's online all day for work, and she's very familiar and comfortable with the Internet. Deep Thought has some very well-articulated ideas about how to improve web sites, including ours, and she's not shy about sharing her ideas. She's an occasional online shopper, but prefers to use the web for email (heavy use), work, research, news, entertainment, and activism. She's an information junkie who finds out about cool sites from a wide variety of sources: promotional email, friends, radio, TV, print ads, links, and search engines. Deep Thought says she generally ignores ads, though she can be quite critical of them if they're "annoying" or if there are too many on a page. She doesn't mind ads if they're for socially conscious companies/products, but she is concerned about cookies and privacy issues.

Our site is a frequent destination for Deep Thought, who generally visits every time she gets the MoJournal (weekly), and sometimes more often. She comes looking for current articles -- usually those highlighted in the MoJournal -- and sometimes stays to read other things, such as Must Reads, or to browse through the magazine archives. She is not always thrilled with our content or our perspective: of all three groups, she is most likely to be dissatisfied with the depth of our reporting, and she's just as skeptical of our politics/agenda as she is of those of any other news source.

While Deep Thought appreciates our search functions, she finds many problems with the site's navigation and interface. She finds it confusing, inconsistent, cluttered. Unlike other users, she is aware of our various sections (News Wire, Reality Check, etc.), but can't figure out what they represent or how to get them. She has seen mention of MoJo World, but she doesn't know what it is. Aside from the home page links, she finds it challenging to get to specific content she's interested in. She often feels that the most eye-catching elements of a page are not the most interesting ones to her.

Deep Thought was also critical of our look and feel. In general, she finds it clear and readable, likes the color scheme, and feels its mood is appropriate to the content. However, she feels it could be "snazzier" or more professional, and she's not crazy about the color scheme. Some typefaces were too small for her

Deep Thought represents about 50% of our users.

Following are some areas in which all of our users agreed, or in which there weren't significant differences in responses based on user type.

Computer use

All three user types overwhelmingly use PCs. As far as browser use, there is an even split between Netscape and Internet Explorer, and many use both. About half (generally the "Deep Thought" user types) are aware of their browser's version; most have the most recent version of the software.

More than half of our users have Internet access both at home and at work -- these tend to be the "Deep Thought" folks. Interestingly, reported use of laptops or other small-screen systems was insignificant.

The majority of our users connect to the Internet with a 56K modem. We need to be aware of the fact that most people have slower connections than the one we enjoy in the office.

Users are divided on using plug-in technologies like Flash, video, and audio. Roughly half expressed a willingness to do so.

Understanding Us

Users don't know who the Foundation for National Progress is, or what they had to do with us. Some were surprised to learn we're a nonprofit. They enjoy the Photo Fund's gallery without understanding the fund's relationship to Mother Jones or the MoJo Wire, or, indeed, to the photos themselves. Overwhelmingly they associate the web site with the magazine, calling the Wire "an online version of the magazine" even as they admit that the site's content is somewhat different from the printed version.

Content

There is an outcry for more international coverage, and more breaking news.

Graphics

Absolutely everybody hates the Wire's current logo, specifically the turquoise background color. Users are split on the overall look and feel -- some responses are extremely negative, others moderately positive.

Interface/Navigation

Lack of awareness of the site's various sections is the general rule. Many users indicate that search or archive sections sorted by topic -- environmental, political, etc., would be much more useful to them.

New Features

Overwhelmingly, users want more interactivity. Many specifically request "more ways to get involved" -- features for sending letters to representatives, for example, or links to activist organizations where they could volunteer. Several suggest message boards. Some want job listings, and a few want socially conscious online shopping. Everyone wants more links.