

### **Overview**

Car-Part.com works as an online liaison for vehicle part recyclers. The site has thousands of listed recyclers and boasts over 120 million different parts. While this website has enormous potential, it lacks several important tools required to optimize the usefulness of its data base. To determine the average experience for users, three basic tasks were identified; finding a part, buying a part, finding a distributor. Users are met with major issues on all three tasks.

Upon visiting Car-Part.com, the user finds a shrunken version of the website that only takes 1/3 of the available space. This wasted space detracts from the potency of the information and squishes the graphics. This squashed view forces the user to read unnecessarily small font and makes navigation somewhat tedious. Small font also makes the site difficult to use for users with vision deficiencies (Zaphiris, Ghiawadwala & Mughal, 2005). This problem persists across the majority of the website.

Car-Part.com claims having over 120 million different parts. This vast inventory requires an effective and efficient method of search (Bevan, 1999). Unfortunately this website uses extremely long lists containing every different part and every available vehicle. These lists are likely to scare away users immediately, due to their magnitude and lack of organization.

Upon finding the desired vehicle part, users face a list of items along with prices and links to more information about the providers. Links are often unhelpful as they either navigate the user to the homepage of the provider or simply to a page with contact information. The results page offers no method for directly purchasing an item. If no items are found, the font directing the user is not large enough to catch the user's attention and a "quote request" form is presented. Proper feedback is necessary for users to navigate the website effectively (Agarwal & Venkatesh, 2002).

If users successfully locate a distributor through searching for a part, they may find information useful for locating them. However, if users use the "search by map" choice they face a map of the United

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States with star shaped buttons. The buttons are difficult to distinguish and simply open up “regional maps” with no information other than which states are included in the selected region. This method of search could be transformed into a simple pictorial tool for locating distributors.

### **Proposed Changes**

The graphics on the homepage and many subsequent pages need expanded to fill the entire space and the font size should be increased to allow for easier reading. These simple fixes will allow users to more successfully navigate the website, especially those with visual deficiencies. Links to the homepage should be provided via the website’s masthead from any subsequent page.

Allowing users to narrow their search by category would considerably cut down the presented information. Input boxes for year and make would allow users to narrow the search and provide specifications without navigating tiresome lists. A dropdown box for the model of the vehicle would be filled with choices that adjust upon each entry. If multiple choices for a selected vehicle are available, a dropdown box with the new choices would appear below the model input box. The alternative search method of typing in a vehicle identification number should be kept as it allows immediate identification of the specified vehicle. After the vehicle is specified, the website navigates the user to the “search by image” page. An alternative search engine will also be available if the user knows the exact part they are searching for.

When search results are presented, they should be automatically sorted by relevance. The user will be able to adjust the sorting by clicking on a heading. A column showing the date the item entry was made should be added. This allows users to know which items are up to date on price and inventory. A shopping cart system would enable users to make purchases on site. “Add to Cart” buttons should be placed next to item prices. The links to information about the distributors will navigate the user to on-site pages with contact information as well as links to their websites.

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If search results are not found, the user should be redirected to the search page with an obvious message at the top-center of the page clarifying that the search failed.

If users decide to use the map tool to find distributors, the map needs to have links to distributors in the area specified by the user. Input boxes for State, City, and Zip Code need to be provided along with the map as an alternative search method. After searching, a zoomed-in view of the map should show locations of the distributors along with links to the respective information pages. An alternative to having an onsite map would be linking the input to MapQuest or Google Maps and redirecting the user.

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