



## Rapid Review From Brian Wold

### Prepared for Award-a-Choice

<http://www.award-a-choice.com>

Request Date: 3/29/2005

Report Date: 3/31/2005

Notes: Please review the site as it pertains to usability. Also, are the benefits and features clearly stated? What can be improved on the site to communicate its message more clearly? Recommendations on the marketing communications aspect would be helpful. This client targets mostly human resource professionals looking to use the catalogs for award programs within their organizations. Need recommendation on how to make interface easier to purchase catalogs online.



snapshot screen sizes: 1024x768

## Review

### Overall/First Impressions

My eye goes immediately to the green Award-a-Choice logo - that's good. I then moved to the adjacent text - a nice tagline. (On subsequent views, my eye still goes to the green logo, but is also distracted by the heavy yellow box at the bottom of the page.) Then my eye moved upwards to the photo images and got confused - I clicked on the stereo image, expecting to get to a stereo product page, so I was surprised at the general page I landed on. Went back, tried a different image - again expecting to get to a product page - before I figured out that those images were decorative.

It took a while to realize what's being sold here. People naturally assume they're buying an *item*, so "order a catalog" sounds like request a catalog (translation: you can't order online).

The second-level pages don't help much: there are many visuals that draw the eye away from the key content, and I was hoping to see a succinct sentence or two that summarized the concept. (I generally like benefit statements - and there are plenty on these pages - **but first, I need to know what it is...**)

It also took a while to realize that there are two main products on the Home Page: "Award-a-Choice" is one, and "Give-a-Choice" is another.

The heavy yellow discount box - besides being visually distracting - is confusing. Even after several reads, I still don't know if this means "order off this Web site and receive 25% off your order" or something else - and if it's that, is the price I see on the payment page the full price or the discount price?

I also found the Children's Hospital plug confusing - is a portion of my order donated? The plug appears on several pages but looks different each time.

I liked the testimonial and sample catalogs pages once I found them. If you dig deep enough, there's a lot of information here.

**Overall**, I'd be concerned that you'll lose people to confusion before they really get to find out what the program's really about (see below for suggestions on this).

Also, due to the problems I was having with the site, I found myself concerned that the quality of the gift items would be poor. I'm not being mean here: many users reflect their impressions of a Web site onto their impressions of the company and its products.

## Design/Navigation

I notice that this is really two separate Web sites with a unifying splash page - once you leave the Home Page to either Award-a-Choice or Give-a-Choice, the other selection disappears from the navigation (which might be intentional).

Clearly, the design is dated, so I won't make many design comments here. However, in redesigning, I'd look to visually separating the two main product lines on the Home Page, possibly in boxes or page halves with a strong divider. Also, because the green and red logo colors are so bold, any other strong colors clash, and the effect gets garish.

Interesting effect of the current design: where there are both text hyperlinks and image links on the page, the text hyperlinks are more noticeable, although I think you want the image links

to be the main navigation. Perhaps a redesign will remedy that, but be aware that many users immediately look for the underlined, alternate-colored text links and ignore images of any sort.

The lost audience: people who received a catalog and wish to choose their reward. Their navigation is at the bottom, and not on the Home Page at all. Do they have to type in the full URL to the redemption page? Does the catalog send them directly to GiftHQ? (if so, wouldn't you rather get your branding in while they redeem their gift?)

## Recommendations

### Top Recommendations

- I'm assuming a full graphic redesign is in the works. If not, I'd recommend it.
- Add clear product statements to the home page and two sub-home pages, like "Award-a-Choice lets you give the perfect award - the recipient chooses her own from a catalog of prepaid items." Even if you basically repeat the same text for Give-a-Choice, it'd be fine.
- Visually separate the two product lines on the Home Page. Minimize other elements to keep the central navigation clear.
- On the main subpages, repeat the product statement from the Home Page. (These act as mini-Home Pages, so I'd treat them as such.)
- Clarify the navigation scheme - will it be graphic elements or text hyperlinks? Avoid duplicating the navigation in both ways.
- Be sure the primary task of each page (order a catalog, perhaps?) is prominent. On every page, users want to immediately know "Where am I and what can I do here?" If you close your eyes and open them on a page and you don't immediately see 1) the logo and 2) the primary task, there might be a problem.
- If you're using product photos as graphic elements, don't make them clickable - or make it clear what clicking will provide.

### Suggestions

- Bring customer quotes to the Home page and/or main subpages. Keep the letter intact, but right now it's buried too deep.
- If you have a lot of repeat customers, consider adding "Buy Now" links right on the Home Page for both product lines. It'll save them some clicks.
- Consider adding a link in the footer to the other main product line, in case someone gets lost or comes straight in from a search engine page (perhaps like "See also: [Give-a-Choice](#) gift-giving program" so it's clear that it's an alternative).

- Develop a consistent treatment for the Children’s Hospital promo, and use it consistently.
- Be consistent with body text hyperlinks. They should contrast with the surrounding text, be underlined by default, and all body text links on the site should be the same color. (Footer links or links clearly part of a navigational scheme can be treated differently, although be careful with this)

### Follow Up Ideas

- There’s a lot to do here, and major changes can create or reveal additional issues. I’d implement these suggestions, either alone or as part of a graphic redesign, then retest the new site or draft designs.
- Consider doing a brief usability test with a sample group of human resource professionals (possibly during a redesign process). Six to eight evaluators should give you excellent feedback on site usage specific to your core audience.

### Thank You

Thanks for the opportunity to review your site. Please note that this review is intended to be a quick overview – focusing on first impressions much like a first-time visitor will do when they visit your site. In-depth reviews, user analysis and testing is available; however, in keeping with the “no sales pitches” promise, you’ll need to contact me if you’d like to discuss additional services.

Your opinions are important to me: if you have feedback or suggestions about this service, please send me an e-mail message at [info@brianwold.com](mailto:info@brianwold.com).



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brian Wold', is centered on the page. The signature is stylized and cursive.