



BRINGING
ENGAGEMENT
TO LIFE

MICROSOFT
Experience Strategy Report
July 24, 2015

Bringing it all together

Gage took a close look at Visual Studio and its competitors to determine the best way to reach, connect with, and continue a relationship with customers through the website *visualstudio.com*.

We performed three research activities:

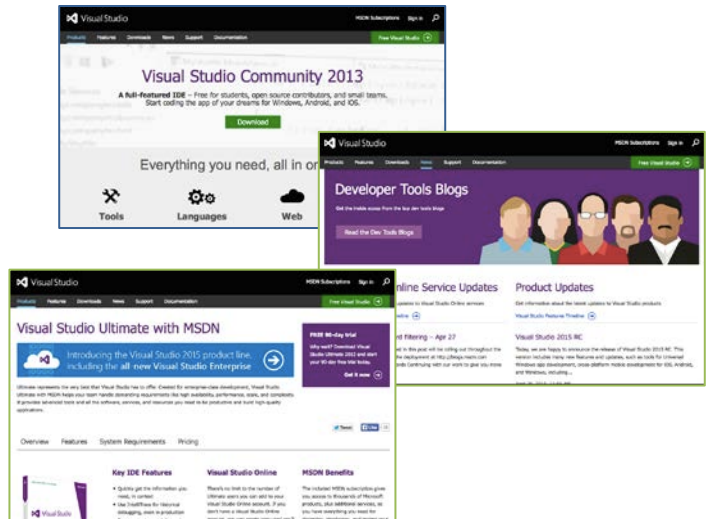
- A content audit,
- a comparative-competitive analysis, and
- a card sort.

Each piece of this puzzle brought its unique insights, and a closer examination of the report on each of these is important to fully understand the context and background of each section, as well as how it contributes to a better understanding of Visual Studio and its place in the market.

CONTENT AUDIT

Using questions from Microsoft's own team as well as Best Practices assumptions and criteria, Gage conducted a content audit of key representative pages of visualstudio.com, seeking to answer, among other questions:

- Can users find value quickly?
- Does the site speak in user language rather than internal MS language?
- Is content immediately engaging and complete?
- Do product pages fall in line with new brand standards?



The answers to these questions were mixed. Some pages did a great job of sticking to key messages, using clear language, and presenting value quickly to the user.

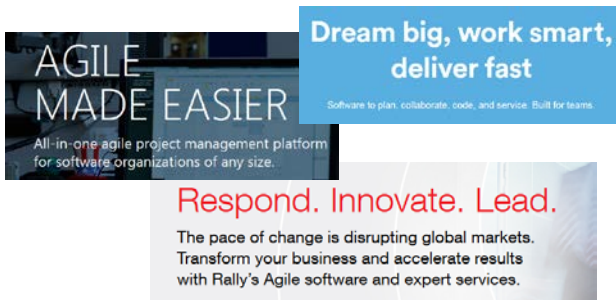
Some used a large number of acronyms, confusing language, and were unclear as to their benefit to the consumer.

Overall, the impression of the site was that although it hangs together and looks like a family of pages, a close rewrite and redesign of these pages would bring them up to industry standards – especially with an eye toward focusing on product pages that emphasize feelings and stories over features (falling in line with new brand standards) and emphasizing solutions over features.

Additionally, only one of these pages was built responsively. This is a serious problem, as nonresponsive sites give the impression of pages that are not updated regularly and a company that does not understand current cutting-edge technology.

Our suggestion: a site-wide revision of copy, with one person in charge of all pages so that the experience is consistently that of quality, high value, and relevancy to the consumer.

COMPARATIVE/COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS



The competitive assessment reviewed the Microsoft Visual Studio website and four of its competitors to gain insight into Visual Studio website redesign project.

Gage compared visual studio.com to its competitors Atlassian, Version One, Rally (Dev) and Telerik. Each site received a score on five criteria: audience focus, site value, marketing and advertising, usability, and brand.

Overall, the websites reviewed provided a capable online experience. There were a few clear themes, however: the majority of the sites focused on products and solutions rather than emotional content. Most of the sites focused well on audience with the exception of Rally Dev, and the sites were more or less organized: Visual Studio has a lot of room to grow in this area in comparison with its competitors.

Areas that would help a site stand out would be simplicity (Atlassian does an excellent job with this), transparency (Atlassian and Version One stand out in this area), and a strong brand promise.

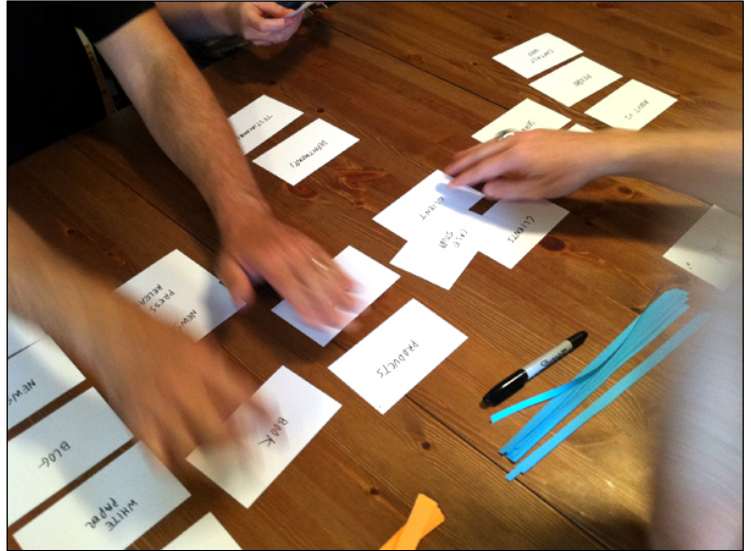
One area that all of the sites save Telerik seem to be neglecting is a strong use of development tools in the creation of their own sites, thereby showcasing what their platforms can do.

CARD SORT

The **Card Sort**, intended to be a guide in determining a new menu structure for the revised Visual Studio web site, was a limited one.

Six developers familiar with both Visual Studio and the web site to varying degrees sorted menu items and phrases to come up with logical groupings and their titles.

A few common themes emerged:



- Nearly all developers were overwhelmed by the offerings and found them repetitive.
- Many of the developers added the same menu titles:
 - Tools
 - How-to's

Almost without exception, the developers believed existing sections for 'popular downloads' and 'popular products' were not useful to them, as well as commonly-asked questions, etc. Nearly all suggested instead an alphabetical list and/or a robust search feature.

Our recommendation is to conduct a much larger, more formal card sort to determine if these results are duplicated and to collect more data, as well as to understand how different developers from other areas would view this information.

NEXT STEPS - NAVIGATION

These steps are broad recommendations; specifics can be found in the more detailed reports of each of our areas of research.

Based on the findings of these research documents, we have the following recommendations for revising visualstudio.com:

After conducting a full card sort, restructure the menu of visualstudio.com to better reflect what developers expect to find when visiting a site such as Visual Studio, and simplify the overall navigation structure.

Examples:

Participants remarked how challenging it was to organize the content; they expressed many different opinions on content organization, but the theme of redundant information was consistent.

Developers rejected several labels outright as being ambiguous and irrelevant: Top Downloads, Top Products, Top Questions. We recommend keeping the purpose or spirit of these labels, but altering their use to act as contextual filtering on the page level.

Universally understood and user friendly labels like Blog should be used in place of News. News should be placed into its own section of the site. Developers are interested in what they can learn from other Developers, and in some cases they are fans of the people creating these articles. This information should be more visible within the site.

Recommendations:

Conduct broader card sort activity

In conducting a small card sort activity with our internal development team, we noticed several themes and heard consistent feedback; however, we recommend facilitating a sort that is more targeted and larger-scale. A larger pool of participants will help us to differentiate the outliers from the core, and to build a stronger case for whole-sale change.

Conduct a tree test to gauge usability

Once a revised information architecture is in place, we recommend conducting a tree test to assess the effectiveness of the navigation. A tree test is a simple activity with the purpose of examining the findability of specific information, or testing how a user can execute on a task or request using the primary/secondary/tertiary navigation. A tree test is the final piece to ensure that our navigation structure and labeling are usable and understood by our audience.

Note: The navigation of the current Visual Studio site has been updated recently. An additional recommendation would be to conduct a tree test on the modified navigation structure today.

NEXT STEPS - CONTENT

Revise and significantly cut back the copy in each of the pages as well as reviewing all pages for adherence to updated brand guidelines. Currently, each page is heavily influenced by the division responsible for it, which takes away from a cohesive, clear voice. Pages should focus on pain points, solutions to problems, or emotional content.

Microsoft's new brand guidelines require:

- A warm and relaxed tone
- Crisp, clear, and to-the-point language, using short words and sentences – eliminating nonessentials
- A willingness to lend a hand – anticipation of real needs and information just as the user needs it
- Audience focus top-of-mind, free from jargon and using instead everyday word
- Always choose the more human verb—like go and get instead of navigate and obtain.

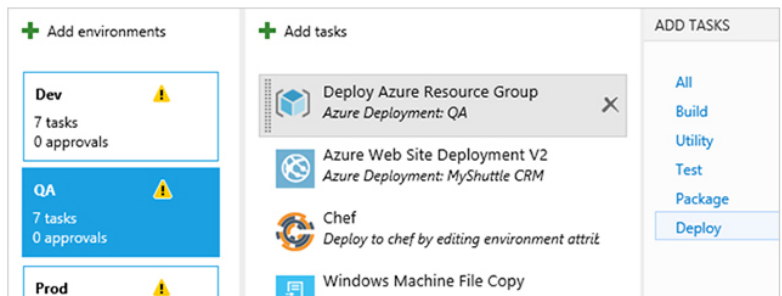
All content should be examined to cut down on jargon, acronyms, and marketing speak. It should also adhere to the guidelines above (from the Microsoft Writing Style Guide). **A**

Enterprise DevOps

Ship better software, more frequently

Streamline and automate the workflow between development and IT operations and deploy applications faster. The Release Management capabilities in Visual Studio 2015 enable you to deploy continuously and define release stages, acceptance criteria, and approval workflows to automate the release process. After deployment is complete, close the loop between production and development and fix bugs faster with real insights and data captured directly in production.

[Learn more](#)



A Example of too much text that emphasizes features rather than solutions to pain points on the current Visual Studio site

NEXT STEPS – CONTENT cont.

Recommendations:

Eliminate content redundancy

Reconsider the total amount of pages and content the site needs. Where there is content overlap (or feature overlap), consider using interactivity or a new design approach to highlight these features. Look for places where content can be used more efficiently or effectively to answer user questions without forcing them to jump around the site.

Examples:

Moving between properties is not a seamless experience. For instance, if a user is on Visual Studio and then selects something for integrating with other systems, the user is dumped into an entirely different menu completely, with no clear way to return outside of the 'back' button.

The Feature menu drop down from the primary navigation does a good job of speaking the user's language; this should be carried forward into other areas of the site and used to crosslink where appropriate.

Refine tone and simplify messaging

Realign the tone of the content using the brand guidelines as the foundation for all content and messaging. This recommendation is less a total overhaul and more a refining of the current content.

Establish new work-flow process

Reconsider the work flow process content goes through as it makes its way to the site. A well-designed workflow will help perform tasks in an efficient, effective and repeatable manner. It will save time, reduce potential errors, and maintain consistency of message. We should work toward helping the product owners align more closely with brand guidelines by ensuring a 'content czar' steeped in voice is involved from the start. Gage can facilitate this change in process by conducting a workshop centered on content strategy and work-flow.

NEXT STEPS - DESIGN

We recommend adding small amounts of visual interest to the pages in order to reflect the level of sophistication the Visual Studio tools offer, similar to the Mac developer focused site - anydevanyapp.com. Visual Studio has the best tools in the industry; the site should reflect this from a design/interactivity standpoint as well as a messaging perspective.

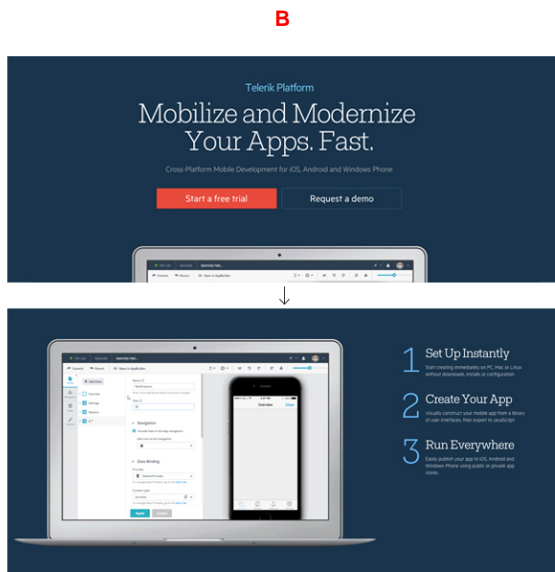
In addition, we recommend conducting a more complete visual and structural overhaul of the site. This recommendation would necessitate the need for establishing a new code foundation for visualstudio.com.

Examples:

Using small amounts of motion within CTAs or graphics can gather a user's focus and attention, giving compelling visual interest when applied appropriately. **A**

Consistent use of subtle parallax gives the user a welcome expectation of delight and fun (when used to help carry them down the page to more detailed information). **B**

Using visuals to communicate ideas in the place of text. **C**



Using parallax and animation to communicate an idea, along with the user, down the page and into deeper information



Showing vs. telling: Telerik highlights their device agnostic benefits

NEXT STEPS – DESIGN cont.

Recommendations:

Full site redesign

Revise the visual presentation of the Visual Studio site from the ground up with modern web design sensibilities in mind. We would begin by identifying the core user goals and tasks and move to build a structure that supports those goals in a more compelling and efficient manner.

Create easy-to-use design elements that support the business, users, and content creators

Break down the Visual Studio redesign into packaged, flexible commodities that are easily reusable site-wide. Identify templates, components, and elements that satisfy business goals, user goals and allow for the ongoing maintenance and upkeep of the site.

Update or overhaul the code of visualstudio.com

Rebuild or extend the code base of visualstudio.com in order to give content creators and product owners a more malleable tool kit to work with, working to create a mobile friendly (responsive) site.