(1) A SOBERING ANALYSIS: REDESIGNING THE WEBSITE FOR OHIO'S DEPARTMENT OF LIQUOR CONTROL

(2) Website Overview (Context Analysis): In Ohio, the state controls the distribution of liquor and alcoholic beverages, including beer and wine. To aid in this matter, the Department of Liquor Control (DOLC) has a website at http://www.com.ohio.gov/liqr/. The purpose of the website is to provide the retailers, distributors, manufacturers and other stakeholders how to apply for permits to dispense and/or manufacture alcoholic products. The website offers a portal for easy access of government forms and publicizes relevant regulations. It also allows consumers to locate stores that sell certain brands.

The DOLC is a division within the state of Ohio's Department of Commerce. The mission of the DOLC is to regulate the manufacture, distribution, and merchandising of alcoholic beverages in Ohio. The DOLC fulfills this mission through a permit process. Granting permits (also known as licenses) to manufacturers, suppliers, and retailers is one of the main services of the DOLC. Another main service is the purchase, pricing and distribution of spiritous liquor—an intoxicating liquor of more than 21% alcohol by volume—to permitted agencies, or licensed liquor stores. As the sole purchaser of spiritous liquor products for all of Ohio, the DOLC provides liquor products to authorized stores at no charge; the store contracts with the state of Ohio to sell the products for a sales-based commission.

(3) Project Objective: The objective of this project is the redesign of the DOLC website in order to allow users to find information and relevant forms more quickly and efficiently. Therefore, this redesign will include the following objectives:

- To re-categorize the content of the site into more cohesive and intuitive groupings
- To present well-organized information such that it will guide users towards their needs.
- To increase findability in the face of abundant and often technical information.
- by providing an easily searchable, navigable and therefore more helpful website.
- To consistent brand the pages of the DOLC so that users will know when they are on a DOLC page or an external page
- To invoke confidence in the Division of Liquor Control, and the state-wide government,

I am proposing this redesign because the problems with this website are common deficiencies in government websites that intend to provide services to businesses and the public. Namely, the site is not geared toward optimal use by its target audience.

(4) Target Audience: The target audience comprises business people that span the entirety of the liquor industry. However, spirit enthusiasts in the public are likely visit the page every now and then. The primary demographic is mostly professional adults with some sort of equity in the alcohol industry. Both small and large businesses will use the services of this website. Because the range of businesses and people that the site serves is so wide, the education level and computer experience of site visitors varies. Geographically speaking, most of the site's users will be located in Ohio. Businesses looking to break into the Ohio market will also use the site.

Site usage is probably heaviest during white-collar working hours, but may also be frequented by small business owners who work into the evening. Moreover, night managers for bars and restaurants will consult the site. Users are not likely to frequent the site using mobile devices. Rather, many will be at their desk or in their place of business and so likely close to a desktop computer, or having their laptop trail them.

(5) Competition/Comparison: The Ohio DOLC has no direct competitors because it has, by definition, a monopoly on the control of liquor in the state. However, as a government entity we may view similar departments in other states as a "peer" group. One such entity worth contrasting with the Ohio DOLC is the Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board (LCB). The

Pennsylvania LCB site is found at http://www.lcb.state.pa.us/PLCB/index.htm. The two liquor control authorities may be compared by miniature case studies based on hypotheticals that suppose I needed information to open a bar and that I needed information about purchasing one bottle of Stolichnaya vodka.

If I were an entrepreneur interested in opening a bar in Ohio I could click on the "Select a Category" drop-down menu bar in the "Find Forms & Publications" box. I would then choose the "Retailer (New)" option and choose "New Business Applications and Publications" from the menu bar that just appeared. Then I would have to select—from another drop-down menu bar that just appeared—"Apply For A License To Sell Alcoholic Beverages For A Bar, Restaurant, Carryout, Grocery Or Drugstore (Packet)" and then click on the "Get Documents" button that appeared. The result would be a PDF application packet for a new alcoholic beverage permit. Other ways of going about the same task include clicking on the "Apply For A New Liquor Permit (PDF)" in the "How Do I" box on the homepage or go to LICENSING in the global navigation bar, click the "RETAILER (NEW)" arrow and then click on "A License (Beer, Wine & Mixed Beverages C&D) (Packet)." All three of these options will take the user to the same 18-paged PDF application. However, only the first option confirms for the entrepreneur that he or she has chosen the proper application—an application for a new bar.
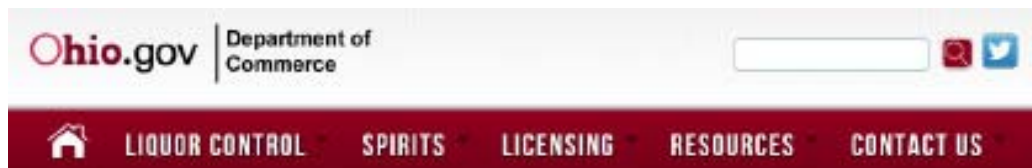

This is what I refer to as the global navigation bar.

If I were an entrepreneur interested in opening a bar in Pennsylvania, I would of course visit the Pennsylvania LCB website. Once on the homepage, I would rollover the LICENSEES label and scroll down to LICENSING INFORMATION. After clicking on the "General Info" label and finding nothing helpful, I would then click the label "Pamphlets and Booklets," scroll to the bottom, then click on LCB-19: Information Booklet for Retail Licenses, which would open a 39-paged PDF document. Alternatively, I could rollover LICENSEES and click on FAQs. The top part of the FAQ page is unhelpful but after scrolling down a little I would see the question, "HOW CAN I OBTAIN A LICENSE FOR A BAR, TAVERN, NIGHTCLUB OR BEER/SIX (6)-PACK STORE?" Both the PDF document and the FAQ would be enough information to help me start the application process.

In these hypothetical cases, the entrepreneur in Ohio may have to deal with some discomfiture as he navigates the website, unsure if he is on the right path to fulfill his task of accessing the appropriate permit application. However, the entrepreneur in Pennsylvania will readily identify his appropriate category and be guided through the proper steps towards the correct application.

Now suppose that I am a consumer and I would like to purchase one bottle of Stolichnaya brand vodka. Using the Ohio DOLC site, if I tried the Look It Up box on the homepage—instead of the ambiguously labeled global navigation bar—I would click on "Select a category,"

I would chose "Brands." Then a "Select an item" drop-down menu would appear and I would choose "Spiritous Liquor." After that, another drop-down menu would appear with the options: "Lookup Liquor Agency (Store) Information" or "Lookup Spiritous Liquor Brand" or "New Spiritous Liquor Items." So, despite having chosen to search "Brands" initially, I redundantly have to choose "Lookup Spiritous Liquor Brand," at which point a "Get Documents" button appears.
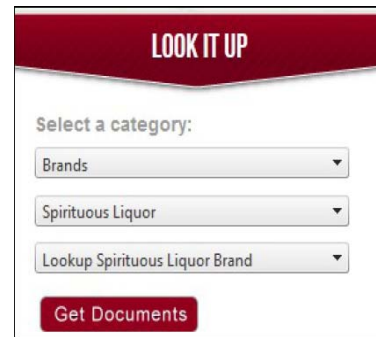
When I click the "Get Documents" button I am taken to a new web page, the Web Database Search page, wherein I must reenter the relevant brand information and additionally

From the Ohio DOLC site.

Now I would have to fill in the same information again.

my location information. I am rewarded with a customizable results list with 12 results in my area. I could just enter "Stolichnaya" in the Search bar in the Look It Up box, but I would receive a message that my search received not results. Alternatively, I could click on the "Liquor Control" link, go to the "Look It Up" heading, choose "Find a Spiritous Liquor Brand" and be taken to the Web Database Search page. At least I wouldn't have to enter the same information twice.

If I were in Pennsylvania, I would go to the homepage, click on CONSUMERS in the global navigation bar and then click on "Product Search."

On the "Product Search" page I would enter Stolichnaya and be rewarded with a list of Stolichnaya products by type and by price according to volume. However, I would not be any wiser about where to purchase a bottle of the vodka. I could however, click on the Wine & Spirit Stores hyperlink, and then search for stores in my area and call for inventory confirmation.

In short, although the DOLC page requests that I enter redundant information, my search results will direct me to a specific store that should have the product I seek in stock. The LCB does not have that feature.

(6) User Analysis: The primary purpose of the website itself is to connect industry professionals to the appropriate forms they will need to complete and file with the DOLC in order to receive the necessary permits for their activity. Forms are available in a portable document format for download. Industry professionals may also obtain regulatory information from the site. A secondary purpose, albeit a highly-used feature, is to browse the inventory for purchasing options, confirming which brands are sold in the state and where to buy them. The general public is most interested in this feature of the site. Finally, the DOLC's website offers contact information for reporting problems and for problem resolution.

(7) Content Analysis:

[content map]

The organization system, search system, labeling system, and navigation system are not coordinated and certainly do not reinforce each other. The current overarching content categories

of the website are unclear, to the point of seeming arbitrary. The categories represented in the global navigation panel overlap, as in the case of LICENSING and RESOURCES. The website has little to no hierarchical structure. As expected then, there is no site map, index, or search bar, although a *semi*-functional search bar is featured in Look It Up.

Despite the fact that "[t]he Division of Liquor Control regulatory function is based in [a] permitting process," the hyperlink portals specifically for retailers, distributors or manufacturers allowing them to access permit applications actually takes a few clicks to find. In other words, one of the most important functions of the DOLC, and one which the website is supposed to aid, viz. the issuing of permits, is not adequately presented to users upon reaching the homepage.

Moreover, because the organization of the website is poor, the labeling system can be confusing. The portals for specific information relating to retailers, distributors or manufacturers reside under LICENSING. However, a retailer may access the site to find out regulatory information, as opposed to licensing information, and thus be sway away from the appropriate section of the website by its label. Another labeling problem also relates here. The term *licensing* is used in labeling, but the term *permit* is often employed in the prose of the website. One obscure section of the website explains that the DOLC uses these terms interchangeably. This term variance is a largely unexplained yet prominent inconsistency that can cause confusion among users. It may even prime users to notice other problems with the website.

Allowing for multiple ways to access the same information is a virtue in the world of IA. The DOLC seems to do this, but really the site is full of redundancy. Paths to the same information are featured in the different global navigation categories. However, paths are presented in the same way. To explain this further, the hyperlink "Find a Liquor Store" is presented in the "Look It Up" label under LICENSING, in "Agency Operations" under SPIRITS and again on the homepage. Although this technically means that there are multiple paths of accessing the same information, there is actually no accommodation for diverse mindsets and therefor diverse browsing activity. In other words, the multiple paths are actually the same link presented the same way over and over. This is paradigmatic for many of the hyperlinks on the site. Unfortunately, the one type of hyperlink that should always both look the same and be similarly positioned on each page is non-existent: on no page is there a hot key to return users to the homepage.

And finally, as it stands the homepage and many of the roll-over menus are cluttered. The information provided in the roll-over menus is difficult to access simply because the movement required of the mouse is very precise, and users will often lose their place. Also, the spatial layout within the menus creates overlapping text, which gives the site an overall unprofessional look.

The DOLC website is unique because it is a government page for both businesses *and* consumers. This allows for the website of DOLC to have high visibility by a large and diverse swathe of Ohio's population. The state government of Ohio is represented and characterized through its various entities' web pages. Thus, the need for a clean, intuitive and helpful website will benefit Ohio far beyond just the activities of the DOLC.