

**ANALYSES**



**BRAIDS**

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

**To:** Arlan Riehl, BRAIDS Webmaster  
**From:** Maryann Riehl Yoder, Design Consultant  
**Subject:** Braidsrugs.com  
**Date:** April 2014

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## Introduction

As you know, the BRAIDS business has a new owner, Ms. Howard. She has engaged me to analyze Braidsrugs.com and make recommendations, but because I am a design consultant and you are the webmaster, implementing those changes will require both of us. In a recent strategizing session with Ms. Howard, it was determined that you and I would collaborate to improve the effectiveness of Braidsrugs.com. This report summarizes the results of my analysis for the design, content, readability, usability, and accessibility elements of the site leaving the responsiveness and sustainability aspects of the site to your expertise. Her primary concern is that the website appears disorganized, neglected, and no longer has the best possible search engine optimization

Ms. Howard assures me that she wants to keep the original purpose of the website: to inform the general public of the availability of hand-braided rugs. Like the former owner, she wants the site to be for informational purposes only. As long as it includes sufficient information about her product, contact information, examples of her work, and stirs the imagination of users, she feels that less is more. She prefers custom-designed products instead of mass-market production, and feels that a direct connection with prospective clients is essential because she offers each of them the opportunity to custom design their own rug in colors to match and/or complement existing décor.

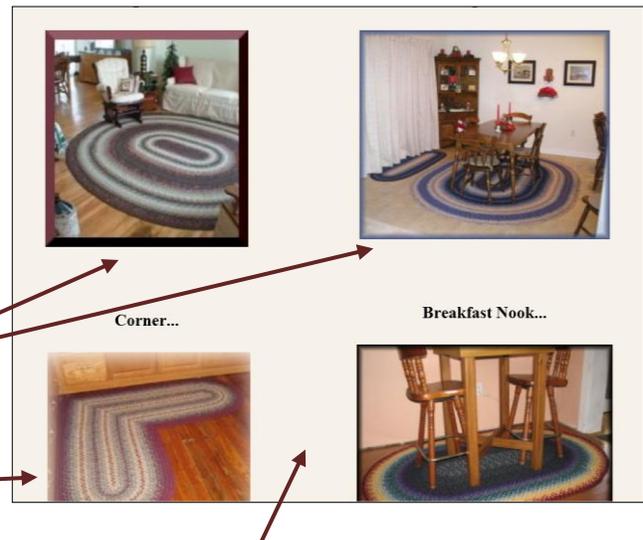
Her intended audience is the minority of the population who realizes that area rugs were once popular floor coverings thereby appealing to the nostalgic simplicity of a by-gone era. She also wants to attract anyone with an interest in hand-crafted products as well as fiber artists and interior designers.

## Design Analysis

Ms. Howard wants to keep the same simple design of the site. Because of its many colorful images it has visual appeal; it is attractive and catches the eye. The design of the site reinforces the hand-crafted quality of the product and complements, rather than competes with, the ethos of the site's purpose and its nostalgic appeal. The site, however, has an amateurish quality in both the images and overall design and Ms. Howard would like to increase the professional appearance while maintaining and perhaps enhancing its nostalgic quality.

The general layout of each page can be maintained, but many of the individual images would benefit from cropping and other photo editing. The intent may have been to demonstrate how the rugs complement furnishings, but the background items distract from the rugs in some of the shots.

Perhaps a combination of both is required; some shots are better as whole-room shots while others would emphasize individual rugs if the background were solid, as this screen shot illustrates.



This screen shot also highlights another distraction: inconsistent borders. Consistency in the borders of the images will emphasize the product rather than compete for the user's attention. As this screen shot shows, each of the four images in this grouping are framed differently creating a confusing disunity.

Another area of inconsistency is the font styles and sizes, some of which give the impression they were chosen at random. As a general rule, sans serif fonts, such as the Calibri-font used for this report, are best for websites with no more than two font families used throughout. The Process-page, in particular, is an example of this; while the font on that page may be from the same family, it is inconsistent in size and that inconsistency detracts from the content (see screen shot in next section.)

Additionally, there is an indiscriminate use of bold, italicized, and capitalized fonts. All caps are best left for headings, bold font is used for emphasis but overuse has the opposite effect. Italicized font is best used sparingly because it is more difficult to read. With so much variety and each of the different fonts drawing attention, the eye doesn't know where to look first and consequently, sees very little.

With the exception of the collage images, there is good use of white space with great contrast between the background, images, and text. Some of the text, however, would benefit from a two-column arrangement instead of running all the way across the page (see Readability section.)

Another problematic aspect of the site is the inconsistent margins; they seem to vary widely depending on which browser is used. Keeping margins the same on all pages brings a sense of unity to the overall site.

## Design Recommendations

1. I am recommending that Ms. Howard increase her budget to include the price of photo editing software or have the images done by a professional photographer for all future photography, but because of limited resources, I will edit and/or crop some of the existing images so as to eliminate detracting details as much as possible.

2. As mentioned above, the images need to have consistent borders or frames so as not to compete with or detract from the images themselves. Because the goal is to enhance the nostalgic appeal, I am recommending that all individual images be formatted with a soft edge and that all collages be reformatted to give the appearance of looking through multi-paned, sash window with a wood-look frame.

3. The collage-images on the Gallery-page are especially problematic, because there are no frames to separate one image from another it is unclear where one starts the other stops. →

If each of the images were inserted into a multi-paned window, the sashes of the window frame would give the individual images clearly aligned boundaries, while still giving potential clients some idea of the broad range of rug shapes, colors, and sizes that are possible with hand braiding. Maintain the clickable-images feature of the collage so the enlarged version of the image can be opened in its own window.



4. Check all margins throughout the site and realign images, headings, and text for consistency.

## Content Analysis

In general, the combination of words and images provides appropriate content; the product is explained, described, and illustrated with words and images. Although some users may initially expect to see rugs for sale, it soon becomes clear that the purpose of the site is not to sell a mass-produced product that is consumed and disposed of within a short period of time. It is, instead, offering a reminder of a simpler way of life and a product that is both artistically beautiful and durable enough to become an heirloom.

Because the content of the site contains a satisfying amount of images to catch the eye and generate initial interest in the product, there is little need for a lot of words. The key themes and purpose of the site are clear on the Home-page with further information on additional pages. The Rug Gallery-page that highlights the finished products of satisfied clients is particularly appropriate for any prospective user because it establishes credibility and helps them to imagine what a similar product might look like in their home.

## Content Recommendations

Overall, I have only a few recommendations regarding content.

1. Both paragraphs of text on the Home-page could be condensed or moved to the Process-page for those users who want to know more.

a. The first paragraph might be condensed to:

BRAIDS, an affordable source for hand braided rugs that revive memories of the wool rugs our grandmothers made.  
They complement furnishings.  
Satisfy a desire for beauty.  
Provide a durable product.

b. The second paragraph would be adequate like this:

BRAIDS uses tough, durable cotton twill fabric in a rainbow of colors.

2. There are a few punctuation errors. Two headings on the Home-page are better written as follows: no ending punctuation is needed, the word *as* is eliminated, and the ellipsis is properly formed by using periods with a space between them and the letters.

a.

**Hand braided rugs.....as a finishing touch!**

becomes: **Hand braided rugs . . . a finishing touch**

b.

**A timeless tradition.... revived and revised!**

**A timeless tradition . . . revived and revised**

c. Ellipses are best used sparingly so some, such as the one in the phrase above, could be deleted. Change all remaining ellipses on the site to reflect the format shown above.

## Readability Analysis

For some reason, the heading “Hand braided rugs . . . a finishing touch” is italicized when using the browsers Safari and Google Chrome but not with Internet Explorer. Because scripted and italicized font is more difficult to decipher, it’s best to avoid it. Regardless of the content or website, few users do more than scan or skim a web page until they see something they’re interested in reading so cut words wherever possible and use large bold font for headings.

Although the text on the BRAIDS’s site provides the optimal contrast of black-on-light, there are a few problems with line-width. Because most users will read short columns of text before they’ll read a wall of words, it is best to keep all text in short, easily scanned chunks. Recommended line-width is 50 – 80 characters.

The Process-page is probably the page that is most difficult to read; there is a problem with both line-width and visual hierarchy. The reader’s eyes are apt to dart all over the page at the various bits of text all demanding attention and will settle on none. Because we read from top-to-bottom and left-to-right, left-aligned text chunks also aid in reading, center-aligned lines make it more difficult to know where to pick up the next line.

## Readability Recommendations

1. With the exception of the font on the BRAIDS logo, reformat all text on the site.
  - a. Eliminate italicized text.
  - b. Use bold and/or colored font for headings.
  - c. Contrast the BRAIDS logo font with a sans serif font for the body-text.

2. Reposition text on Process-page to reflect the order of relevance and importance.

**The Process...from strips of fabric to handcrafted beauty!**

Each hand braided rug is individually crafted with cotton and poly-cotton twill fabric.

a. Use as captions.

b. Left-align.

Your hand braided rug is durable, reversible and machine washable. Lay flat to dry. Can also be spot cleaned or scrubbed with mild detergent, garden hose, brush, and elbow grease (may be available at your local hardware store!)

c. This information is important, emphasize and 'anchor' it. Maybe an Image of a rug with underlay?

**Non-skid underlay must be used on all smooth surface floors.**

**IN THE PAST**

hand braided rugs were created to recycle used clothing and leftover fabric scraps.

**BRAIDS uses all new fabric; your new rug will last a long time.**

d. Reposition and reformat these lines; they belong together. Use same font too.

Finished size will be approximate... these rugs are an art form not a math equation!

## Usability Analysis

Ms. Howard likes the simple, easy-to-use features of the original site and prefers to keep it ranking high in usability and functionality. In spite of a large amount of images, it loads quickly with several popular browsers (at least for anyone with hi-speed internet) and little thought is required to move from one page to another; it has clearly denoted 3-D click-on buttons. It is only six pages long; its simplicity and ease of usability reflects the simplicity of a by-gone era in which its product was popular. I only have one suggestion for this category.

## Usability Recommendation

A “Click on image to enlarge.” caption under the first image on the site would alert users who might not know that when their mouse pointer changes to a hand, it means there is the option of viewing an enlarged image. Many of the images on the site have this feature and include further details about that particular product but a small minority of users might be unaware of those features. In particular, such a caption might be included with each of the collages.

Including captions is also an advantage for any user utilizing a screen reader.

## Accessibility Analysis

As previously stated, I will bow to your expertise when it comes to assessing whether braidsrugs.com is designed to respond equally well across a wide variety of variously sized technological devices. I will mention this, though, when using the Safari browser on a PC, only the text on the Home-page opened; there were no images, no logo, and no navigation buttons. Oddly enough, Safari opened it perfectly on a Mac.

Also, I took the liberty of having WAVE, a Web Accessibility Evaluation Tool evaluate the site according to accessibility guidelines and discovered that while the overall site scored well, there were a few errors. While private sites are not required to conform to these standards, it is nevertheless recommended because an inaccessible site will of course be less effective. I've listed the results of the WAVE evaluation below.

## Accessibility Recommendations

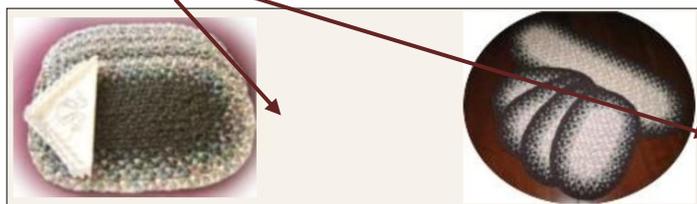
If the following errors were corrected, screen readers could give blind users a more accurate reading of the objects on the pages.

1. An error icon at the top of each page indicates, "Document language missing."
2. On the Gallery-page, there are seven additional errors.
  - a. Under each of the three collage shapes, WAVE states, "Image map area missing alternative text."

b. WAVE indicates that both the living-room- and dining-room-headings are "empty headings."



c. To the right of the small placemat images at the bottom of the page, WAVE states, "Linked images missing alternative text."



## Sustainability Analysis

Because the site does not contain information that needs frequent updating, it is easily sustained with minimal expense. Ms. Howard is, however, concerned that it not become “stale.” In addition to the occasional updates for price, color chart, images, and contact information, she is adding a “spruce-up-website-line” to her budget and suggests that you and I confer annually to keep the site fresh as well as maintain search engine optimization.

In the meantime, because this is your area of expertise, I offer no recommendations.

## Conclusion

Although this analysis is not comprehensive, it is intended to assist you in polishing the original BRAIDS site in order to increase its professional appearance and effectiveness. For your convenience, I’ve added a summary of the recommended changes.

Ms. Howard and I expect you to post a beta site so it can be tested for responsiveness through various browsers using screen sizes from phones to I-pads to large monitors. We have compiled a list of family and friends who have agreed to be our test users. Please contact me as soon as the beta site is posted. I will then connect with Ms. Howard to determine whether my recommendations meet her expectations, and whether the results of our informal test results indicate further changes are required.

By that time, as previously discussed, I will have edited the images with distracting backgrounds and will get them to you as soon as possible.

If you have any questions, I can be reached at [mry5034@psu.edu](mailto:mry5034@psu.edu) or 814-470-2323.

## Summary of Changes

### 1. Design

- Edit photos
- Borders of images are either wood-look frames or soft edges
- Reformat collages
- Check margins for consistency (page 5).

### 2. Content

- Condense paragraphs on Home page
- Correct punctuation errors (pages 6 & 7).

### 3. Readability

- Reformat font style throughout site (page 8)
- Reposition and left-align text chunks (page 9).

### 4. Usability

- Add captions (page 10).

### 5. Accessibility

- Correct WAVE evaluation errors (page 11).