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# Competitor Analysis: Library Digital Signs

## Introduction

To better understand the needs of users and identify areas of improvement for the MSU Libraries digital signs, our group conducted an analogous competitive analysis with the digital signs at Eli Broad College of Business, Woodland Mall in Grand Rapids, and an alternate library sign-in the Digital Scholarship Lab. We took a look at several features and pages; specifically, Home, Map/Location Services, and Search (Find a Book).

## Findings

### Home page

A recurring theme in our analysis of digital signs is that the "home" page of each sign does not host as much content as the main library signs, or do not have home pages at all. Instead, signs at Broad College and Woodland Mall displayed a default screen of the map of the building. The only other sign to display a dedicated home page was the alternate library sign in the Digital Scholarship Lab, but that sign also had some key differences that set it apart from our client's signs. The Digital Scholarship Lab's

home page only had three widgets, simplifying the user experience significantly. However, all three competitor signs lacked a dedicated "help" button/link.

**Map/Location Services**

All three competitors automatically display the map when the map/search function is accessed, unlike the main library sign. However, only one of the three signs (Broad) had a "ping" function like the main library sign. The Broad map also had a number of useful features to help users identify locations within the building, such as a wheelchair accessibility setting (moved the buttons down), moving the map if the location is off-screen, and providing a "filtering" option for users to narrow their search. Broad was the only map without a clear color key. It used colors for certain areas, but their definitive meaning is unclear.

**Search/"Find a Book"**

Broad was the only competitor sign with a dedicated search function, while the other two maps relied on the sign's color legends to guide users to their desired location, much like a physical map.

While the Digital Scholarship Lab did not demonstrate an identical search function, it did have a "Rooms" button which indicated what rooms were available/reserved and at what times they would be occupied. However, there did not appear to be an option to book a room on the sign.

**Recommendations and Closing Thoughts**

Overall, we found that the following details will help improve the library signs:

1. Increase touchscreen responsiveness
   a. Users can get confused if screens don't immediately respond to their touch or end up doing an unexpected action. To better the user experience for the library digital signs, tackling this issue can resolve a lot of emotions.
2. Being intentional with design choices

a. The placement of elements, colors we chose, and vocabulary choices can completely alter a user's experience. For example, what if one user can understand a specific word, but another cannot? The signs must be as user-friendly as possible and easily understood; that starts by reflecting on our design choices and being intentional with them.

3. Provide accessibility/help statements

a. Despite designing things to be the most user-friendly as possible, it is inevitable for a user to get lost along the way of using a service. Additionally, users may encounter accessibility issues that render them unable to use the sign. Thus, it is ever more significant to make sure we display that help is offered for any circumstances–this will allow the user to feel more comfortable and welcome in these spaces.

4. Incorporate a search bar rather than use a static search system

a. The current static search system the library signs are using has rendered many users confused. Not many would know their call numbers, and some may prefer to complete their tasks themselves than contact a librarian. A rework is clearly needed. Ideally, it would allow it to be more intuitive and much more fulfilling of a process rather than frustrating.

5. Display of current user status

a. From personal experiences, we found that the "pinging" of the user's current location is extremely beneficial to clear up any confusion they may have when interpreting the map. For example, maybe they're trying to find the bathroom on a floor, but don't know where they currently stand in the view of a map. The pinging removes the few extra seconds they would have to take to find where they currently are and analyze their surroundings, allowing them to get to where they need faster.