

/makeover

www.vodkaemporium.com

Specialist shop Vodka Emporium's site no longer measures up to the demands being made on it. We asked Joe Branton from Virginia-based agency Grow Interactive for some advice

The brief

Site www.vodkaemporium.com

Site owner Andrew Pirie

Brief Improve the process of browsing, picking and buying products. Andrew mentioned that he'd like the site to perform better on mobile devices.



The designer

Name Joe Branton

Company Grow Interactive

URL thisisgrow.com

Areas of expertise

Art direction specialising in interactive design

The Vodka Emporium is a specialist vodka shop that prides itself on searching the world for and selling the best vodka. It ships worldwide and promises fast delivery. The site is selling great products, but needs some visual and usability assistance.

On the homepage you'll find a list of brands, including 'Featured Products', 'Top 5 Products' and 'New Products'. The site shows great potential for becoming a popular shop for vodka lovers.

The current site does several things well that are important for a site such as this. The product section lists as mentioned above are great. However, the presentation falls short on aesthetics and usability. The site is visually lacking the sophistication of its products and seems a bit dated. Elements on the homepage run into each other because of an overall lack of structure and organisation. There also doesn't seem to be a strong establishment of the Vodka Emporium brand, which is important for consumers when developing trust in a business.

When I started this makeover, I decided the starting point was establishing the Vodka

Emporium brand. I researched vodka brands and felt drawn to the idea of using a script font for the logo design. This would match the stylish nature of the product, while also being approachable and friendly. I wanted to make sure I didn't create anything that was over the top, unmemorable or unapproachable.

Once the logo was designed and my vodka brand research was complete, I moved on to picking colours and fonts. I selected a very simple colour palette because I wanted the bottles to be the main focus. The current site colour isn't bad, but I felt it could use a new direction. I believed a clean and sophisticated design would best showcase the products.

After settling on colours and style, I started sketching rough layout thumbnails on my sketchpad. I always do this to explore any possibilities for layouts before I open Photoshop. Once I had a couple of different options sketched, I started setting up my grid. Based on my sketches, I knew I was going to have the two rows of six products across the bottom of the page, so I set up my grid for six columns. The current site seems to

Each individual product page could potentially have the consumer comments and ratings to help in choosing which product to buy. It could also have recommendations like, 'Customers who bought this vodka also bought ...' or 'If you enjoy this vodka you may also like ...' I also wanted to mention that the 'Staff Pick' section would be a great way to associate faces with the company, rather than it appearing as just another soulless internet shop in cyberspace. A drink recipe section would also help get people excited about the site, and it would showcase the products that were used, so that customers could purchase them.

From a social networking standpoint, Twitter could be a great way to share recommendations for drink recipes and other things such as new arrivals. Having active Twitter, Facebook and other social networking accounts is a great way to pick up some extra site traffic and increase the site's reach. Even having a Flickr and Vimeo account set up for the Vodka Emporium's 'behind the scenes' culture could help create added interest and brand loyalty. I was happy to see that the Vodka Emporium already has a Facebook page

“Having active social networking accounts is a great way to pick up extra traffic and increase the site's reach”

Joe Branton

use a grid for the products on the homepage but appears to disregard the grid for the other copy and elements on the page.

Armed with a new logo, colours, style direction and grid, I was almost ready to dig in. I still needed to make an outline of the elements I wanted to use from the current site and anything new I wanted to bring to it, while being sure to address the requests of the site owner.

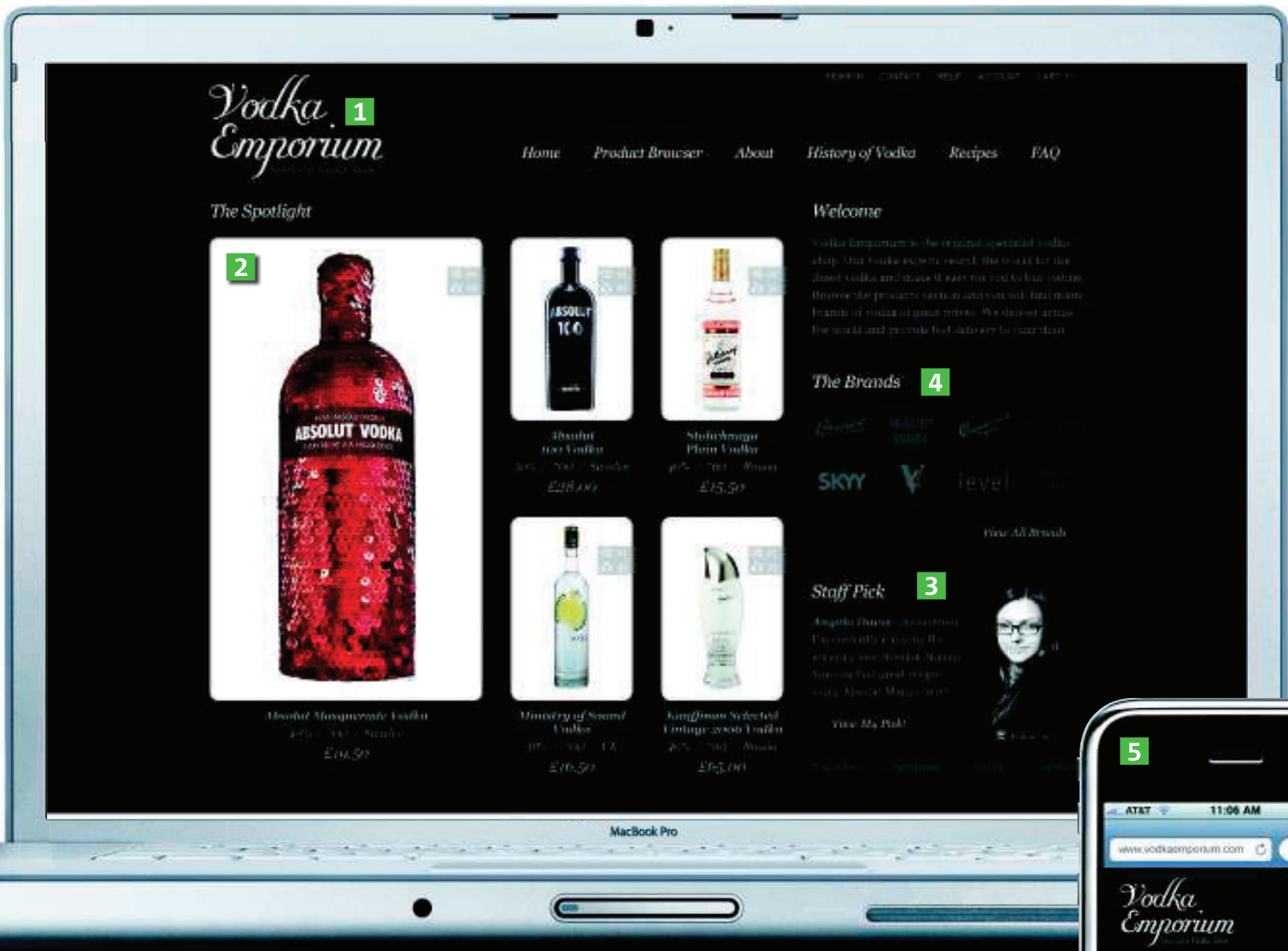
Vodka Emporium's owner wanted to improve the process of browsing, selecting and buying products. In my redesign, browsing starts on the homepage with 'The Spotlight', 'Staff Pick', 'Top Selling' and 'Newest Arrivals'. These sections serve as callouts, with the purpose of drawing visitors into viewing a product they may not have looked at otherwise. Clicking 'Product Browser' in the main navigation takes you to a browsing page that enables you to view the product selection and narrow your search by things like brand, flavour, alcohol percentage, bottle size, country and price.

and an active Twitter account, which shows they understand how these tools can be used.

The owner of Vodka Emporium also requested the site be designed to work on mobile devices. These days, it's essential to design a mobile-friendly version of your site that pulls in all the same content as the main version. We recently did this for our company's website (www.thisisgrow.com), enabling you to access the site's information in a way that's easily viewable on mobile devices.

Overall, the new makeover has very similar content on the homepage as the current site, but the difference is in the way it's presented and in the hierarchy of the content. Beyond the design and structure changes in the makeover, the new site will need to be constantly updated with new Spotlight, Staff Pick, Top Selling and New Arrival items to keep visitors returning.

This was a really fun project and I have to say that, after finishing the makeover for this site, I would really love a shot of vodka. ●



1 New branding
The original Vodka Emporium site had a very limited amount of branding. Proper branding is one of the most important things for a website such as this: you want customers to trust and connect with the company. I went with a brand and style that fits better with the products on sale. The combination of a stylised logo, colours, type and layout forms a more put-together look for Vodka Emporium. Carrying branding elements over to their packaging and shipping labels could help to fortify the connection with the customers beyond the website.



2 The products
The current website does a pretty good job on the homepage by having things like 'Featured Products', 'Top 5 Products' and 'New Products', but the way these things are presented is very lacklustre and uninviting. In the redesign, I focused on bringing the vodka products to the forefront with a structured hierarchy. The 'Spotlight', 'Staff Pick', 'Top Selling' and 'Newest Arrivals' sections all aid in grabbing the user's attention straight away.



3 Staff Pick
The site lacks a personal touch, which is a problem common to many websites. Having a 'Staff Pick' section would put faces to the Vodka Emporium brand and provide a great way to promote certain products and share recipes. It could also serve as a gateway to more social interactions on the web through Twitter or Facebook. Staff members can post happenings, new arrivals and drink recipes on both sites. These would all help bring more traffic to the website.



4 The brands
The current site does well by showing some of the brands they carry on the homepage. People are drawn to things they're familiar with, so seeing those brands gives users immediate assurance. People identify even more quickly with the logos of brands than they do with just plain type. So, in the redesign I've made a section for 'The Brands' on the homepage that would slowly cycle through some of the brand logos the site carries. The section also includes a 'View All Brands' button, which takes you to the full list.



5 Mobile
Having a website that works well on mobile devices was important to the Vodka Emporium owner, and rightly so. This is becoming increasingly necessary, with so many consumers visiting a site through mobile devices rather than a computer. I've mocked up an interface for the mobile version of the site that would show fewer images upfront, with more of the focus on the navigation and text. This allows for a lighter load upfront to keep the user's attention. Users can quickly find what they are looking for and explore the site using the main navigation.



Pimp my site!
Does your site lack lustre? Could it benefit from a few tweaks? To get an expert opinion, email your URL to netmag@futurenet.com

