

/makeover read.lewro.com

Web designer and developer Roman Leinwather wants to improve the way he promotes his location-based RSS reader Read Plus. We asked US web design studio **45royale** for help

The brief

Site read.lewro.com

Site owner Roman Leinwather

Brief RSS application Read Plus needs a design update that explains the app better and encourages user registrations.



The designers



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Company 45royale Inc

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Areas of expertise Designing usable websites and apps

When we first visited the Read Plus website, we were immediately drawn to the concept of the application. Read Plus is an RSS and Google Maps mash-up that enables you to geotag articles from RSS feeds by placing them on an interactive Google map. At first glance, the site appeared to have everything you'd look for in a homepage for this type of program. There's a product description, callouts for key features, a how-to video that demos the application and a large interactive Google Map. We felt the design could use a fresh coat of paint, but most of the layout was solid.

After closer inspection of the content, we realised that the copy used to describe the app was confusing. The description states that Read Plus "is just opposit [sic]" of Google Reader and "allow you to quickly scan through all of your RSS feeds in sexy interface [sic]." Looks alone might not be enough to persuade a user to switch, especially since the functionality seems identical to Google's. So we needed to define – and then promote – what makes Read Plus different. In our opinion, the site's community aspect, as well as the global

nature of the RSS content, should be addressed. Adding further confusion to the site, the featured callouts on the left-hand side are dominated by large, generic icons. Only one of these – indicating that the product is free – is any help. The other two aren't immediately recognisable and don't convey the message of the callout text.

Missed opportunities

Admittedly, a demo clip does have a prominent position on the page, and you might think that a video presentation can make up for a lack of clear copy, but it doesn't. Once you click to play it, it's clear that it wasn't scaled properly for the content area and, as a result, is too small to view at the default size. Watching it in full screen doesn't help either, because it becomes too blurry to see. Plus, to make matters worse, there's no audio – which leads to an even more frustrating user experience.

Another key element above the fold is a large Google Map, which shows pins around the world representing the locations of registered users. After clicking on a couple of the pins, we found ourselves asking, "Where are the articles?" We felt

simple description, which gives potential users the gist of the application in just a few sentences.

Because we kept the description short and concise, we were able to bump up the size of the text itself to make it easier to read. Then, to the right of the tagline, we placed a big call to action, encouraging new users. The large blue button stands out on the page because of its contrasting colour, and also enables us to mention that signing up for Read Plus is free.

Since Read Plus is all about putting articles on the map, we wanted it to shine. Although it's the largest item on the homepage, to make the map more interesting, we elected to remove the pins indicating registered user locations and instead highlight the articles themselves. With either JavaScript or Flash, we imagine geotagged articles popping into view at regular intervals on the map. Having them appear periodically on the world map gives the user the sense that the app is alive and rich with content. We haven't forgotten about the registered users though, since one of our main goals with this redesign was to include more obvious community interaction. To that end, we've

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that a main draw of the application was the fact that you could see RSS articles pop up in real time on the map. However, while it's visually interesting and interactive, the current feature doesn't show article locations whatsoever. There's a box containing the 100 most recent articles, which are pulled in and displayed on the homepage. However, they're shown below the fold and contain no information that would relate them back to a location on the main map.

To address these problems, we began by designing a fresh page layout, with a focus on making the application easier to understand, as well as encouraging new users to sign up. First, we created a replacement logo incorporating the name of the application, to give the app a brand identity that we felt the original site was lacking.

Once we had a colour scheme that played nicely with the logo, we turned our attention to making the purpose of Read Plus clear to the user. We accomplished this by adding a new tagline and

included the name and profile picture of the user who posted the article, along with a clickable title, which will encourage more exploration.

Finishing touches

Finally, we decided to drive home the purpose and benefits of the application even more, by placing three key callouts beneath the world map. The first simply explains the purpose of Read Plus, and the latter two describe some of the benefits of using the application. Each callout contains a small icon on the left, which directly correlates to the descriptive text to its right. These icons perform a second important duty, because they give us additional graphical elements that add visual interest to the entire page.

This new layout offers potential users a better understanding of the product and what it does, and should therefore encourage more registrations for Read Plus. This is, after all, the most important function of such a homepage. ●



1 New branding
The original design had a consistent colour scheme, but lacked anything truly brandable. After choosing the images for the callouts at the bottom of the page, we decided that an orangey-red look with gold accents worked best with the colours in each image. Because this app is centred around the Google Maps interaction, the new logo was inspired by the Google icons used to indicate locations. The logo now represents the Read Plus identity and can be used everywhere inside the app and elsewhere on the web.



2 Simplified copy
The copy on the old site was the biggest source of confusion for potential users. None of it explained the advantage of using Read Plus over traditional RSS readers. What sets Read Plus apart is the Google Maps integration and the ability to see where articles originate, both in your area and around the world. The new design features large, more concise type, making it easier for the user. Since people are now able to understand the purpose and benefits of Read Plus quickly, they're more likely to sign up.



3 Promote sign-up
Building an application is pointless if you can't get people to use it, so you need to make it easy for people to sign up. The original site gave the user three entry points into the registration process, but lacked consistent verbiage and treatment of the calls to action. To make things ridiculously easy, we created a big, contrasting blue sign-up button at the top right of the content area. The large size gives the user a huge clicking area and enables us to explain that signing up for Read Plus is free.



4 Revamped map
Since Read Plus is tightly integrated with Google Maps, it made the most sense for us to feature the map prominently. The old map lacked visible activity and, more importantly, didn't represent the article locations. While the technical complexity for the developer increases by doing it our way, the re-imagined version of the map is more engaging. Seeing articles and user profile pictures pop up around the world breathes much-needed life into the application and reflects a sense of community.



5 The benefits
While the original site contained a fair amount of information, it failed to explain the purpose and benefits of the application. We decided to fix that by using three equally-sized callouts beneath the large map. Our thinking was that as users explore the activity on the map, the three callouts would enable them to learn more about what the application can do for them personally. The icons give the information visual appeal, while their relation to the descriptions makes them more easily understood by the user.

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