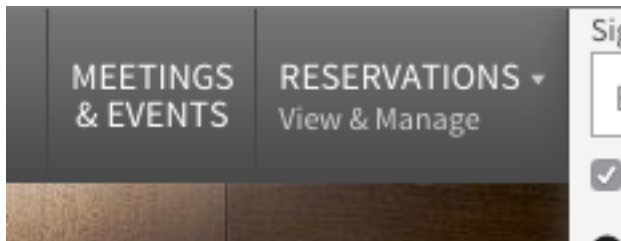## Introduction

User research utilizes many methods for discovering user needs and wants beyond perceived ideas. Gaining understanding of the audience and their needs can be done with a short assessment of tasks and doesn't always need to include a large population of test participants to find helpful information for usability, design and functionality. A nano usability test is a short test with just one or two tasks to complete, with just a few participants and will quickly reveal user needs and design flaws in an interface, product or service.

Testing the website Marriot.com, three participants were asked to think of their next vacation and to find a room that would suit their needs.
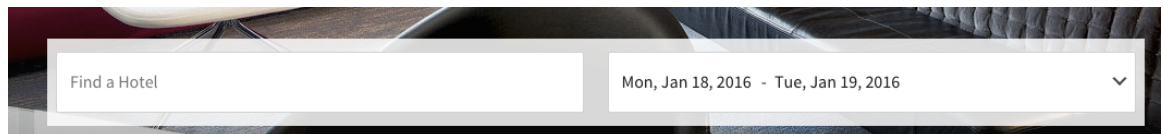
Findings

This nano usability test was completed using three people between the ages of 18 and 62, included two women and one man. 100% of the participants were able to complete the task within fifteen minutes. All participants successfully chose a hotel room and went through all steps up to booking the room. Each participant completed the task differently and began their search with:

1. Upper level navigation "Reservations" drop down menu:

2. Center search box:

3. Lower navigation hotel deals highlight:

Participant #1:

Time taken to complete task: 7 minutes

The first participant was flexible with both travel dates and travel location so she chose to search hotels by deals offered by Marriot.com. She was able to click on a city and a hotel that fit her needs, but when searching for a specific date she was unable to see prices for each night. Based on her needs, price was the most important factor when selecting dates for her stay. After clicking several filters and attempting to create a user account with the website the prices for each night popped up on the date calendar. This participant had some difficulty moving towards booking the room as the check in date is clearly label, but the check out date seems a bit less intuitive when utilizing the calendaring function.

Participant #2:

Time taken to complete task: 15 minutes

The second participant wanted a specific vacation location with specific travel dates as her plane tickets had already been purchased. She is planning to visit Universal Orlando and would like to be near the park with a reasonable price per night stay. This participant went directly to the central search bar and looked for the location and travel dates. Once in the search results she wanted to filter the hotels by amenities (specifically free wifi and free breakfast) and also wanted to organize the results with the lowest price first. She was not pleased the filters were so low down on the page and required scrolling to find the free amenities she was seeking. The participant wanted a hotel near the park, but had to Google the address of the park and the hotel to find the hotel with the least amount of travel time to and from the park. The participant commented she would have liked to be able to search by distance to near by attractions in the city of her choice.

Participant #3:

Time taken to complete task: 5 minutes

The third participant was planning his twenty first birthday and wanted to rent a large suite for friends for one night. He had a specific date in mind for his birthday weekend. Using the top level navigation labeled "Reservations" he selected the city and dates of choice. After looking through the results he was not happy with the options and the lack of information about each room. He scrolled through and found a hotel, then had to click through two pages to see if the hotel had a suite available. He liked the pictures of the offered hotel and chose the hotel, but wanted more information such as how many rooms and bathrooms the suite had since he was bringing lots of friends to stay in the suite and party. The participant mentioned he

would have liked to be able to filter by room type, size and then sort the results by price as he would like the largest suite for the lowest price.

While each participant was able to complete the task, none were completely satisfied with their chosen hotel for various reasons. The website requires many clicks to find simple information such as price, size or distance. None of the participants were familiar with the website and each chose a different way to start their search depending on which search function they happened to notice first. The search functions are limited because the user cannot search for specific amenities or locations, but rather they must browse through a list of offerings and click each one for more details.

Research Questions

After completing the nano usability study I would like to explore the following research questions:

- What is the motivation behind choosing a travel accommodation?
- Where do people start looking for travel accommodations?
- What are the top three amenities a user is looking for in travel accommodations?
- Who typically books travel accommodations through Marriot.com?
- What users is Marriot.com overlooking?

Purpose and Rationale

Seeking more information on users and their needs will help evolve services and designs at Marriot.com. This nano usability test quickly revealed quite a few issues with the intuitiveness of the design and the success of booking travel that makes the user happy. Designers can overlook many aspects of service or even overlook a customer base without conducting user research. Information provided by user testing is invaluable to designers and can show things staff never thought of before. User research should be built into the process of creating products and services because it provides the opportunity to discover needs that were never thought of or to ensure the needs are being met with the service or product.

User research can answer many questions including:

- Did the user do what you expected?
- Did the user make mistakes?
- Did the user understand how to complete the task?
- Did the interface/service/product work? Or not?

By answering these questions designers can find ways to enhance their products or services and meet the needs of the user while also meeting the business goals of producing repeat customers and ensuring sales goals are exceeded.