

I viewed the photo slideshow with audio, “The Forgotten People” from The Mercury News (<http://www.mercurynewsphoto.com/hmong/main.html>). The slideshow featured a series of pictures about Hmong families from a refugee camp in Thailand coming to America for the first time.

When you first go to the site, it loads and then goes into a touching intro with haunting music and up-close photographs. There is a skip intro button at the bottom, which allows the reader to skip past pictures that they will later see in the slideshow and also gets them out of having to look at The Mercury News Flash logo for several wasted seconds. The main page gives a good overall description of the story and photo package and allows the viewer to have an idea what he or she is in for.

From the main page, the viewer can either click on the photo slideshow or the photographer’s journal. Going to either one of these brings you to an html page where you cannot use the back button to get back to the page you just came from. Selecting the slideshow, the reader is taken through a series of photographs with audio playing to describe the pictures. The slideshow is broken down into segments, with a slider bar running across the bottom of the screen to show you how much time has elapsed during each segment. There is also a play and pause button allowing viewer control. Each segment ends and automatically begins the next one. What I liked most about the setup of the slideshow was the “show and hide caption” option. This allowed

the viewer to either choose to read the caption while the audio is playing (which may bother some people), or choose to simply let the audio tell the story.

As far as setup goes, I found several things to be confusing about this site. To begin with, I thought the menu options were unclear. Since the video is broken into segments, the menu list is labeled to correspond to those segments. The problem is, the segments aren't labeled in the actual slideshow, so the viewer is left to rely on their own memory to guess which segment the title corresponds to and hope they remembered the order right. I also didn't like that there was no link to get back to the opening page where you were offered the option of slideshow or journal. Although there is a journal option on the menu, it isn't clear if this is the same one they were offering at the start of the package.

I realized that a site without a *linkable* home or intro page is very unnerving. Halfway through the slideshow I found myself wanting to get back to the first page where I was given the option between the two media clips. I found it frustrating and poorly planned to not give readers a way to get back to the first page they see, and what they are often most familiar with.

When you get to the end of the photo slideshow, the screen just goes blank. I understand that this is how the viewer will know it is over, however, the viewer then has to go to the menu and select different navigation to go to

another part of the site. I didn't like this. As a viewer, I felt like I wanted to be led or prompted to the next thing by providing a link appearing at the close of the slideshow. Forcing the viewer to choose something else from the menu to see and hoping they haven't already seen it, may force the viewer to not care enough to search and just give up.

When the viewer gets to the photographer's journal video, there are some nice features. I really liked that the length of the video was listed at the top of it. I think this helps orient viewers to know how long they will be spending if they watch this video. The time slider also allows the viewer to slide forward or backward to a specific part of the audio. However, I found a link to another journal slideshow from the photographer's journal page. Coming across this link really threw me off. I hadn't seen this link offered on the menu or on any other page. It felt like I was stumbling across links accidentally instead of following a clear order of navigation.

The color scheme for the site was really nice. Although it was simple with black, gray and white, the background and the colors did not distract from the pictures that were being shown, and I think that's the most important part. I thought showing the photographer's journal in black and white was a nice touch.

All in all, I like the photos very much. I thought the audio was interesting and the material was good. The only thing that really caught me up was the lack of clarity as to where readers should go and what they should

do. Viewer control is good, but you also have to lead or direct a viewer through the site or they won't spend their time exploring, they'll just move on to a different site.

Story linked from: <http://www.mercurynewsphoto.com/>

University of Florida / February 2006 / 884 words