Custom UI Audit

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Shipping date: June 8, 2017
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Introduction

WELCOME TO THE UI AUDIT

Thank you for presenting your web application for this UI audit. It definitely takes a lot of courage. It also means that you care about UI/UX and believe that great design can make a difference for your business. It absolutely can!

Disclaimer: please take anything you read further with a grain of salt. These are mere recommendations/considerations based on best design practices and my consulting experience. In any case, you are the owner of the product, and you definitely have much better understanding of your product and your audience. Also, any important changes deserve user testing whenever possible.
PRODUCT STRATEGY

Ideal user:

- Content creators within marketing agencies
- Content creators and managers within publishing companies
- Social media teams

User’s big goal:

Make informed decisions for their content marketing and social media

User’s daily tasks:

- Research content ideas
- See what’s trending and understand what direction they should take with their content
- Find influencers for their marketing campaigns
- Monitor the state of their brand and competitors

Objects:

- Articles (content items)
- Influencers
- Brands (in Monitoring)
VISUAL STYLE

**Colors.** The dark blue color scheme is very appropriate. Ideally, the accent color (currently bright blue) for primary calls-to-action should be more contrasting, like orange or green. But this color is historically relevant to the brand — and bright enough to stand out — so it’s fine as-is.

The rule of thumb is to include only one bright-blue primary CTA button per screen, denoting the most important activity. A few others should be dark-blue (secondary).

Generally speaking, the app serves as a backdrop for multiple bright elements: social media icons, various color coding, and images in the content. So the color scheme should be conservative and even slightly “dull” to provide a comfortable eye experience.

**Text colors.** I’m suggesting to use two primary tones for the text (darker muted blue and lighter muted blue), while underlining links to distinguish them. This will eliminate the “rainbow” of various text styles in one card/item — currently it’s blue for links, green for domains, gray for captions, and black for text fragments. See layouts in the key screen section for examples.

**Icons.** I’m suggesting Black Tie icon font by Dave Gandy from Symbolset. It works exactly like Font Awesome, yet is way more refined (and less popular, since it’s paid). It’s already purchased and I’m including the font files in the audit package.

**Fonts.** Current version of the app uses Open Sans as the primary font — extremely common (and not the best) choice for bootstrapped apps. Its glyphs are a bit too relaxed and informal for such information-heavy application. I’m suggesting to swap it for Roboto, which is free yet extremely high quality. There’s a complementary slab serif font (Roboto Slab) which I’m using for headlines to achieve a polished “magazine” feel.

In the process I also considered a font from Typekit called Acumin Pro which is very similar to Roboto, but between them Roboto has more accurate letter spacing, comes free, and has a complementary slab serif, so the ultimate choice was obvious.

**Capitalization.** You’re doing a great job with consistent capitalization in links and buttons. Picking a single strategy (in your case — everything capitalized) and sticking to it is key.
DASHBOARD

Not including a dashboard is a great choice for such application (too often I find opposite examples). Users can immediately proceed to their main task — search. You’re not impeding that, and there’s no need to invent some “stats” to impress the user.

NAVIGATION

Current navigation is nice and clean, and clearly relates to the main object types. So no major updates required here.

Here’s the suggested layout.

I’m adding a bit more whitespace to the navigation bar, introducing new icons, and creating some contrast in height and font size between the primary and secondary lines.

The logo image needs to be optimized for retina displays.

In the secondary navigation, always think strategically about the order of the tabs. Always put the most popular tools first. For example, if you’re betting high on Facebook Analyzer, then the following order of items could make sense: Most Shared, Trending Now, Facebook Analyzer, etc. Saved Content can either stay in the beginning of the list (nothing bad about it), or go to the very end.
Key Screens

MOST SHARED

Main task for the screen: first, search (obvious call-to-action button), then review the search results and take some of the available actions with them (no clear leader because use cases vary dramatically).
Generally speaking, the screen is very functional and also “signature” for your product. So all the changes are merely improvements.

One of the problems across the entire application is the abundance of inconsistently placed hints and controls (which have been probably added gradually to improve the experience). As a result, the layout seems overwhelming and busy with the details — making the most important things harder to find and comprehend.

To improve it, let's rely on classic, trustworthy patterns and gracefully collapse some of these controls into menus, and rely on a single help link instead of multiple hints. The product targets the audience of professionals, so maybe some things don’t need that much explanation. If they want to read up on your search methods, they can head over “About Most Shared” and learn everything there.

Sometimes, support requests produce a different impression, and we want to enrich the UI with hints to explain everything to everyone. But good intentions produce the opposite effect — busy, unclear work area.
Here’s the suggested layout.

**Search field & surrounding area.** A rule of thumb is to include one hint (comment or link) per area. Here we see three things below the search field (sample search, Advanced Search Options, Save Search) and two things to the right (Export and Create Alert). Suggesting to collapse search-related controls into a single dropdown button named “Options”: Save Search, Export Results, Create Alert.

“Advanced Search Options” are in fact not option controls, but a legend (readable material). It deserves are more obvious name to reflect that (e.g. “How to run advanced search” or something like that).
You have great hints as placeholders inside search fields; maybe then you can omit duplicating them outside the search field.

**Headlines.** Each screen deserves a good large headline which would instantly add more context to what’s being searched or what’s happening.

**Hints.** Hints with links — e.g. “Results not relevant enough? Click here to search for “ux design” in the article’s title only” — can be deceptive. They provide an instant link, but instead the user doesn’t know how to do this on their own — this control should be probably present in the Filters menu on the left. And the hint could say “Results not relevant enough? Try searching in titles only by adjusting the filters on the left.”

Also, try to not include more than one hint in a screen. You can find a good example of a subtle hint in the new Facebook Analyzer layout.

**Filters area.** Doesn’t need any critical improvements. Consider collapsing the time filter into a dropdown menu (I’m doing this later on in Trending). However, don’t do that if it’s the most popular activity (then it will be two clicks against just one).

Style-wise, pale blue background for this area looks just fine, but white background looks downright delightful — all these neat controls look so crisp and clean. Try this as a style update.

Also, possibly replace the “Show” links with simple arrows (a trusted classic pattern).

**Articles list.** Suggesting “magazine-like” styling for the article headlines, so that the browsing experience resembles a publication. As for the links and controls, they’re streamlined and less busy:

1. Headline links to the actual article.
2. Author name links to other articles by this author.
3. “Save” is now located in the actions icons, and doesn’t need a text comment.
4. Source name is located in the last position, “signing” the entry, and clicking it leads to more articles from this resource (very organic solution). You can also include a hover tooltip about it.
5. All actions are combined into a single area with four icons: Save, View Backlinks, View Sharers, Share (with tooltips like now). Alternatively, this can be a dropdown menu, but I'm assuming these controls are very widely used and preferably need one-click access (as opposed to two clicks for a dropdown).

6. Area with circles and stats has a minor style update, with a different font, slightly larger circles (doesn't affect information density though), and an updated shape for total shares.

7. Numbers don't include decimal spaces for numbers larger than 10K (same should be applied across the app, to make the comprehension easier).

**Trending Now.** It’s great to highlight these article among others, but I don’t see an obvious reason why such article would be deprived of controls (in favor of a screenshot). The screenshot also looks a bit crammed. Suggesting a more subtle treatment for such articles.

**Hints below the search results.** Among all the hints, just one is truly critical: “Is your site not appearing in results? See a list of potential reasons why here.” It can solve an important problem the user’s struggling with. Others are purely informational and can be condensed in a single help link leading to an article, something like “Learn how we calculate the shared numbers.” If they can’t be omitted (I suppose that’s the case with Majestic), try combining them all in a smooth continuous paragraph, instead of scattered individual hints.
Since it’s a search app, blank slate appears way more often than in regular web apps. I recommend to include an illustration to make it more attractive and friendly. I’m including a piece of stock illustration (re-colored to fit your style). It might be a good idea to source custom illustration, also for the website — think Dropbox or Intercom.
Here's the suggested layout.

Suggesting to rename “Show me how it works!” button into something that conveys the expectations more obviously — e.g. “Take a Quick Tour.” Also, positioning it after the articles in a linear sequence — previously it seemed to be “floating” in space too randomly.

Generally speaking, try to avoid “floating” elements — things should be typically either left-aligned, or anchored to a right-hand side of a headline.
**Main task for the screen:** learn what’s trending on specific topics, view the articles and possibly save them.

Our goal here is to make the experience closer to browsing actual articles — more aesthetically pleasing, trendy, with the focus on content. We need to improve readability and make the layout less “busy,” while maintaining the same information density.
Here’s the suggested layout.
Suggested improvements:

1. Use some of the image space to display the source and publication size (over a subtle gradient). It’s a common pattern in publications and information-heavy layouts.

2. Use a contrasting headline font (Roboto Slab Bold).

3. Maintain the same location for elements while removing some of the text captions (e.g. Save).

4. Trending score probably doesn’t need a question mark on every single card, you can safely rely on a single “about” article in the top right corner of the screen.

5. Try replacing the array of social media icons (very bright and distracting) with similar color blocks, which form a stylish pattern with numbers. There shouldn’t be any problem with comprehension, since the same colors (without icons) are used in Most Shared.

6. The pattern where user clicks those labels and shares the article isn’t obvious. However, if users know it, it shouldn’t be a problem. Alternatively, you can add a text link (I did so on the first card as an example).

7. Remove rounded corners on “cards” and introduce very subtle drop shadows.

8. Apply new icons to the categories list on the left.

9. Highlight Add Trending Feed as an important call-to-action (make it bright blue, harder to miss).

10. In the top area, condense hourly filter into a dropdown menu, and place it next to the sorting option (now sorting stands in a row with call-to-action buttons while being not an action by itself).
FACEBOOK ANALYZER

It’s good that this layout follows the same pattern as other screens (filters on the left, same search, etc.). Some major improvements can be made in information architecture within the cards.
Here's the suggested layout.
General improvements:

1. Replace the top tabs (Search by Keyword, Search by Page) with a radio button group. Same effect, less confusion — save tabs for massive amounts of content, like below in the results.

2. All previous improvements are applied to the search area (consolidate actions into a menu, add a headline).

3. Sorting menu is moved under the Results tab, since no sorting is applicable in Analysis.

4. Results and Analysis tabs work well here, distinguishing individual items from data. Good take!

5. Use the same footer area as in Trending Now screen.

Card improvements:

1. The profile picture looks better if there’s a bit of whitespace around it.

2. The header area of each card looks overloaded with content and icons, suggesting to streamline it and display the same data in two subtle lines without the icons (the meaning should be rather obvious anyways).

3. Suggesting to redesign the bottom area similar to the Trending Now cards; only now it’s icons instead of color blocks. Such footer is way more delicate and compact, while representing all the same information.

4. Card styling is similar to Trending Now cards.
Suggested improvements:

1. Consider re-using the same pattern for collapsing/expanding sections as in the Filters (arrows instead of +/- icons).
2. It’s not super-obvious that there’s a whole content list underneath the metrics (it’s not a good practice to combine analytics with a big content list). Maybe introduce the tabs, like in Facebook Analyzer — tabs could be named Overview, Mentions.

REMAINING SCREENS

The remaining screens mostly follow the same layout pattern as the above screens, so most of the improvements apply there as well.

Dedicated design work can be done with each individual screen to improve the layout of actual content lists (e.g. Influencers, Monitoring). What you’re doing around the lists (search controls, filters, etc) is great and absolutely usable.

Friendly blank slates are required for Saved Content and Outreach Lists. You can apply the same recommendations as for the Most Shared blank slate.

These areas are similar, so consider a commonality between their names and a bookmark symbol (something like Saved Content and Saved People). This way a user will know that the first item on the left comes with a bookmark and represents their saved things.
Onboarding

SIGN-UP FLOW

A few brief notes regarding the sign-up flow:

1. Is it really necessary for the user to pick a plan before they start a trial? With a simple signup form you can get the user up and running much faster. However, the current setup might serve as a good “reality check” filter to eliminate tire-kickers.

2. The pricing page should have “no credit card required” somewhere close to the signup buttons. It's available on the next page, but not here.

3. General practice: the signup form shouldn't require to confirm the password — if anything, the user can reset it using their email.

ONBOARDING

As for onboarding itself, your tool has so many use cases, that it's hard to apply a single onboarding checklist to all people. Potentially, you can ask people about their use cases during the sign-up (a simple checklist of what they do and what they want to achieve with the app), and compile a custom onboarding checklist for each user.

Here's a great article by Samuel Hulick that sums up a lot of these things and can be useful for you. I also recommend his book on onboarding, but it's theoretical and long, while this article represents his best practical take.

Onboarding tooltips for each tool can be replaced by more permanent legends (and you have them almost everywhere already). Generally speaking, consider cutting down the number of onboarding tips — some of them are obvious and should be achieved by natural exploration of the UI elements.
Closing Thoughts

OVERVIEW

BuzzSumo is a great, functional, complex application that's mostly focused on search. The search functionality and filters are implemented well and only require some style improvements and a bit of “clean-up” (less hints and more accurate structure).

The content area of the app, however, can be improved with more accurate layouts for cards and lists. The main principle is to avoid multiple font styles inside one item, and combine data into simple lines or blocks. Your goal here is a clean, magazine-like browsing experience, enriched with amazing analytics that you provide.

THE NEXT STEPS

Here’s a brief plan for the recommended improvements:

1. Apply overall style improvements (new fonts and icons, new filter sidebar).
2. Apply the new layout to cards and content lists in Most Shared, Trending Now, Facebook Analyzer.
3. Gradually rework other content lists, following the same design principles.