

# Web Usability Report

## Airline Websites

Booking a flight from Barcelona  
Customer Service and Information

Date: 10 January 2008

# Introduction

A large majority of airline bookings are now made online, whether with budget airlines or the traditional national carriers.

This web usability report takes a look at two important areas of any airline website:

- Online Bookings
- Customer Service and Information

The websites of seven airlines were checked, including the leading budget airlines and some of the major national carriers.

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## Test conditions

Date: 10 January 2008

Browsers Used: Internet Explorer 7 (Windows Vista) and Safari 3 (Mac OS X)

## Not included in this report

The following elements of the Online Booking process were not included in this report, as they are not normally accessible until a flight booking is confirmed:

- Payment process
- Adding additional services to the booking - such as extra-large seat, priority boarding etc.
- Booking confirmation
- Booking amendment process

## Scenarios tested

Nr	Description	Page #
1	Online Booking <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>User wants to book a flight from Barcelona Airport to a European Airport.</li> </ul>	4 - 9
2	Customer Service and Information - Baggage Information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>With the mountain sports season underway across Europe, the user wants to find information on bringing their skis onto a flight</li> <li>They also want to know if there will be any charge for this.</li> </ul>	9
3	Customer Service and Information - Contacting Customer Service <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The user wants to contact Customer Services to ask a question. They would rather ask the question via email, to avoid paying phone costs.</li> </ul>	9

## Guidelines tested

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## Airlines tested

Airline	Website URL Used
Vueling	www.vueling.com
clickair	www.clickair.com
Spanair	www.spanair.com
Ryanair	www.ryanair.com
easyJet	www.easyjet.com
Iberia	www.iberia.com
British Airways	www.ba.com

## Guideline 1 - Make it easy to change the website language

Most airlines now offer flights to and from destinations all over Europe. Therefore, allowing the website to be viewed in many languages is vital, as is including a simple to use and easy to find language change facility for the website.

### Additional Check - Catalan language available ?

As the flight is from Barcelona and the official language of Barcelona is Catalan, an additional check was made to see if Catalan was an available option.

## Results

- In most cases, a simple language change drop-down list was used, positioned in the top right corner of the Homepage. Full marks to clickair, Spanair, Ryanair and easyJet for passing with flying colours.
- Vueling almost passed fully, except their language change option is placed in the bottom-left corner, so not immediately obvious.
- Iberia's website does have a visible language change facility, but this is done through the combination of a drop-down list of the user's country and then a clickable link to change to an alternative language. This is a little confusing, but does work when you figure it out.
- British Airway's website features a similar facility to the one on the Iberia website, in that you click a link to swap languages relevant to the country you have selected. Again, this isn't entirely clear the first time you use it and is also a bit restricting, in that you can't immediately change to a totally different language to those used depending on the country you've selected.

### Additional Check - Catalan language available ?

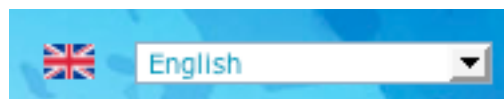
All the websites passed this check, except for the two major airlines in the test - British Airways and Iberia, the Spanish national carrier.

In Iberia's favour, if you try to select Catalan from the very initial page of their site you do get a message telling you they are working to add Catalan language content to their website.

## Conclusion

Overall, the ability to change the website language was implemented in a very usable way on most of the websites tested, with slightly lower usability marks for Iberia and British Airways on this guideline.

clickair's easy to use language change  
drop-down list also shows a national flag



## Guideline 2 - Route map should be easily available

A route map is a vital element of an airline website, as it will allow the user to see all the possible routes available. It could easily be the user's first time considering a particular airline, so they may have no idea of what routes are available. Also with some airlines, routes can be seasonal and there is also the possibility that routes may be dropped or altered.

Ideally, the route map should be easily available from the Homepage and simple to use.

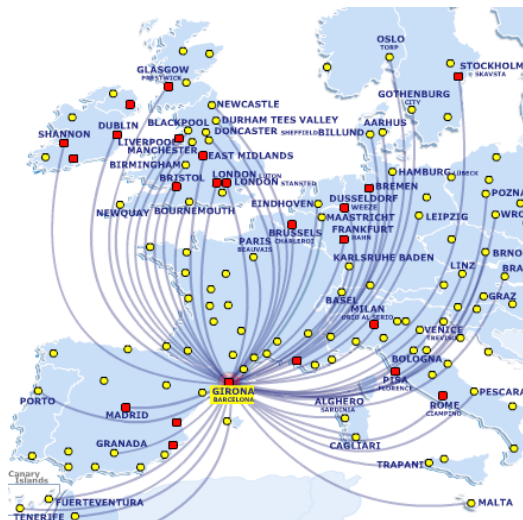
## Results

- Again, in most cases, an easily found and easy to use route map was available. The most popular choice of Navigation wording was "Destinations", used in 3 of the 7 websites.
- Best-performing for this guideline were Ryanair and clickair, both having simple route maps available from an obvious Homepage option - "Destinations" in both cases.
- Vueling again almost passed fully, but were let down slightly by using the text "Vueling Cities" which is not immediately obvious as leading to a route map. And once inside the "Vueling Cities" page, the use of graphical elements rather than a simple map detracts slightly from the usefulness of the page.
- Spanair also slightly missed out on passing fully, as their map - although well-presented - is a little awkward to use, especially once you have selected the departure city. If you want to check other Spanish departure city routes, you have to use a "Clear" button. Also some of the departure airport icons are very close to each other, such as Barcelona and Girona, which could easily lead to frustration with selecting the wrong one and having to use the "Clear" button.
- easyJet also just slightly miss out on a full pass, as the route map option is not immediately obvious, being a small link called "Where we fly" and located on the 2nd line of navigation. In addition, although the route map used is very clear, because its on a separate page you have to manually page back to the Booking page via the browser controls.
- Iberia's site requires much searching to find any Destinations information at all and, after several minutes, a list of European destinations was found, but only in text format. No route map could be found.
- British Airways just slightly miss out on a full pass, as their well presented route map is hidden away under several layers of options - Information then Route Maps then View Route Maps then select Europe.

### Ryanair's easy to find route map

## Conclusion

Ryanair and clickair scored top usability marks for this guideline. All the other airlines, except Iberia, performed well apart from some minor niggles. Iberia's lack of a route map means they fail this guideline.



## Guideline 3 - Obvious start to Booking process

The main reason these websites exist is to sell flights over the Internet. Therefore, a clear and obvious start to the Booking process is vital.

### Results

- Unsurprisingly, all the websites passed this test well.
- Almost all of the websites start the Booking process in the top left corner of the Homepage. Only easyJet differed from this norm, by placing it a little off centre, closer to the right side of the page.

### Conclusion

- An all round pass for this guideline.

Vueling's site provides an obvious start to the Booking process in the top left corner

The screenshot displays the Vueling.com homepage. On the left, a yellow sidebar contains the 'vueling.com' logo and navigation links for 'FLIGHTS', 'HOTELS', and 'CARS'. The 'FLIGHTS' section is active, showing options for 'Round Trip' and 'One Way'. The flight search form includes dropdown menus for 'Barcelona (BCN)' and 'Amsterdam (AMS)', date pickers for 'Departing' (11 Jan 2008) and 'Returning' (13 Jan 2008), and a 'Nº Passengers' section with dropdowns for '1 Adult', '0 Children' (2 to 13 years), and '0 Infants' (1 to 23 months). A 'Search' button is at the bottom of the form, along with a checkbox for 'Resident / Large Family'. To the right of the sidebar, a blue banner features the text 'flying hoy means vueling' and a large offer: '100.000 SEATS AT 25€ ALL INCLUSIVE.' Below the banner, a grid of links includes 'Check-in Online', 'Vueling Cities', 'Conditions of Carriage', 'Changes and Itinerary', 'FAQs', and 'Punto'. On the far right, a vertical column of icons and text links includes 'Find the lowest fare', 'Group Reservations', 'Hotel Deals' (with a 'from 20€' tag), and 'Vueling gift voucher'.

## Guideline 4 - Clear and simple calendar to select flight dates

Providing a simple but effective calendar for selecting the flight dates enhances the booking process for the user, by allowing them to visually select the date ranges they require. This saves them having to double-check the dates they have used e.g. looking in their diary.

### Results

- In all cases, an effective calendar system was used, although some websites achieved this better than others.
- Vueling slightly under-performed the majority, as their calendar uses a pop-up window, rather than a floating window. This could lead to problems if JavaScript is switched off in the browser options.
- clickair and Iberia gained extra marks for showing the day of the week once the dates had been selected from the calendar.

### Conclusions

Another all round pass for this guideline.

British Airway's site provides a clear and simple calendar for date selection

The screenshot shows a flight booking form with a calendar pop-up. The form includes fields for 'Depart' (11/01/08), 'Return', 'Class' (Economy), 'Ticket type' (Lowest price), 'Adults' (1), and 'Children' (0). The calendar is for January 2008, with the 11th highlighted. The calendar is a standard grid with days of the week as headers.

JANUARY 2008						
M	T	W	T	F	S	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

## Guideline 5 - Simple and clear flight search results

To help the user select the flight which best fits with their plans and spending budget, a clear and easily-readable list of flights and prices should be shown, ideally with the following attributes:-

- results are easy to read
- full prices are shown, with no hidden charges to be added later in the booking process
- where dates are shown, day of week should also be shown, as this is helpful extra information
- allow easy viewing/access to flights on alternative dates

## Results

- Iberia and British Airways passed this test very well, topping this guideline
- Spanair passed most of the guidelines, but were let down by the confusing table they use to allow selection of the outbound and return flights. This table requires you to stop your browsing and actually figure out how it works, so many users may not want to spend this time. Once past this screen, the rest of the process is easy to use and follows the above guidelines.
- Vueling, clickair, Ryanair and easyJet all provided very clear flight details but all failed in one area - they all added extra charges to the flight cost shown, once the required flight was chosen:
  - Vueling added a suitcase fee and also auto-selected the insurance option.
  - clickair auto-selected the insurance option
  - Ryanair do make it clear on their flight selection page that extra costs will be added, but there are so many of them that it becomes confusing. Possible extra charges are for Handling Fees (Card processing fees), Airport Check-In fee, Baggage Fee, Priority Boarding Fee and auto-selected insurance option
  - easyJet add a baggage fee

## Conclusions

The traditional national carriers British Airways and Iberia win this guideline. Spanair almost joined them, but were just let down by the strange table used to show the flight results.

The budget airlines were all marked down due to the confusing array of charges they add onto their flight costs, although it can also be argued that those people that don't need to pay these extra costs will not be affected.

Suggested Improvement: Instead of auto-selecting the insurance option, clearly show it as an available option, but not pre-selected.

### The confusing table used on the Spanair website

Return: Frankfurt - Barcelona		Thu Jan 24	Fri Jan 25	Sat Jan 26	Sun Jan 27	Mon Jan 28	Tue Jan 29	Wed Jan 30
Outbound: Barcelona - Frankfurt	Mon Jan 21	from €957	from €409	from €409	from €409	from €409	from €409	from €409
	Tue Jan 22	from €957	from €957	from €409	from €409	from €409	from €409	from €409
	Wed Jan 23	from €957	from €957	from €696	from €409	from €409	from €409	from €409
	Thu Jan 24	from €490	from €490	from €490	from €339	from €339	from €339	from €339
	Fri Jan 25	-	from €490	from €490	from €339	from €339	from €339	from €339
	Sat Jan 26	-	-	from €490	from €339	from €180	from €339	from €339
	Sun Jan 27	-	-	-	from €490	from €490	from €490	from €490

Legend:  = Requested date,  = Actual date,  = Other rates,  = The best rate, € = Euro



## Guideline 6 - Printer-friendly pages should be used

When searching for flights many users may want to print the results of their searches and then use these printed results for later comparisons. Most users would not want a direct print of what they see on screen, as this would mean printing graphic/logo-rich pages, thus using up too much ink/toner etc.

Having a different layout for the web page and the printed page will allow the user to print their results, with the minimum usage of ink/toner. This can be achieved when using Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) by using a separate print style sheet.

### Results

- All airlines passed this guideline completely

### Conclusions

A good result for printer owners, bad result for ink/toner salesmen!

## Guideline 7 - Make it easy to find customer information

Customers and potential customers all have their own needs and sometimes will need to search for some particular information. In our example, we have chosen the scenario of a user wanting to know if they can bring their skis onto a flight and how much this will cost them

### Results

- All airlines passed this guideline completely, although the information was easier to find on some sites than others.
- Vueling for example have the answer two clicks away from the Homepage, under the FAQs option.
- Iberia at the other extreme, have the answer hidden under the following links "Travel with Us"/"Before travelling"/"Baggages"/"Special baggages"/"Skiing equipment"

### Conclusions

All websites made good use of allowing users to easily find customer information, with some performing better than others.

## Guideline 8 - Contacting company to ask a question should be easy

Following on from Guideline 7, if the user cannot find the information they need to know via the website, they will want to contact the company directly to ask them. Most users would rather do this for free and not pay for a premium rate phone number.

### Results

- Vueling, clickair and British Airways easily won this guideline, all offering either email or phone contacts and without using premium rate phone numbers.
- Spanair almost joined them, but charge a fee for their "Spanair.com help" telephone number.
- Ryanair, easyJet and Iberia all charge a fee for using their contact telephone number and no email alternative could be found.

### Conclusions

A mixed set of results, with only 3 of the 7 airlines offering both email and non premium rate phone access.

# Report Conclusions

Overall, the websites performed very well, meeting and sometimes exceeding most of the guidelines checked. This is probably to be expected of companies who have a large reliance on their websites for generating cost-effective sales.

As a whole, the budget airlines excelled in the areas of:

- Flexibility of the website - e.g. language change facility
- Provision of easy to use route maps

However, the budget airlines did all fail in one area, by adding on one or more extra costs to the total price when the flight was chosen from the search results.

The national carriers were better in the following area:

- Simple and clear flight search results with full pricing details

In some cases, the guidelines were not met and these are shown below, as reminders.

Airline(s)	Reminder
Iberia, British Airways	Improve the language selection facility and add Catalan language option
Iberia	Add a route map facility
Spanair	Improve the table used for selection of flights
Vueling, clickair, Ryanair	Don't auto-select the insurance option
Ryanair, easyJet, Iberia	Allow customers to use email contact option

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