

First impressions



“It’s very welcoming”

Internet research suggests that a visitor’s first impressions of a website will predict whether they stay or leave. Having completed a 20 minute (approx) exploration of burstingthebubble.com (either individually or in pairs using a laptop computer) participants were asked to offer their initial thoughts about the site. Responses from all focus groups were overwhelmingly very positive, with no noticeable gender differences in the opinions offered by males and females. Aspects of burstingthebubble.com that created a definite first impression included the website’s navigation, design, ‘easy to understand’ information, and colour.

“If you are having problems, it’s the easiest site to get facts from. Some other sites are just too complicated.”

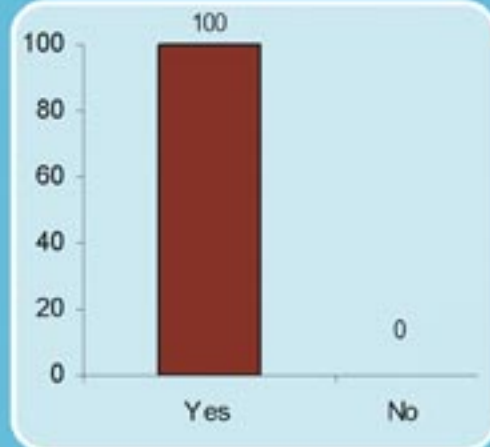
“I thought it was easy to get around the site.”

“It was very welcoming. People would use it without feeling they were doing something wrong.”

“It’s kind of colourful, there’s drawings there, it’s not too scary looking or anything.”

“It looks cool and its got surveys and quizzes and they’re fun.”

“It had different topics... topics you could chose for your problem...where you get information and good advice.”



▷ 100% of participants said that they believed young people would use burstingthebubble.com



Graphic design

Colour is important



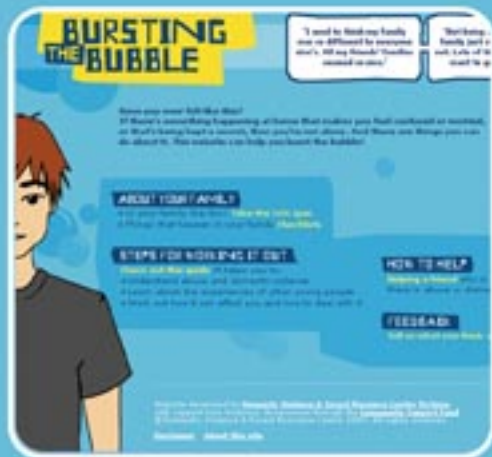
Beyond creating a strong first impression on respondents, colour was also a feature of burstingthebubble.com that was frequently discussed in detail within most focus groups. Burstingthebubble.com uses highlights of yellow with a predominant background of blues, and multicoloured illustrations. This attracted the attention of a considerable number of young people who indicated that the colours used in the website were bright and appealing while also serving an important purpose of being 'reassuring'. Several participants suggested that a greater variety of background colours could be used on the website.

"The colour is calm, peaceful and serene, because I think people when they suffer from this they feel a bit nervous.

But when they go on the website the colour makes them relax."



"The colours that were used were good I thought, and they all worked together, they were eye-catching."



"Maybe some different colours on the different pages and stuff, because it's mainly one colour."



Take home messages:

- Young people see color as important
- Young people believe that colour sets the tone of a website - and can influence how they respond to a website
- Young people like a mix of bright and neutral colours.



Graphic design

Use appropriate illustrations



Opinion surrounding the use and style of pictures and illustrations featured on burstingthebubble.com was in the main very positive. Moreover, there was a general consensus that websites aimed at young people strongly benefit from using appropriate illustrations – and ‘lots of them’ - although respondents warned against an exaggerated or self-conscious use of graphics. Participants felt that the graphics on burstingthebubble.com were appealing, ‘cool’ and helped counter balance the use of text. Some participants proposed that even more pictures could be used on burstingthebubble.com (see also: p.22).

“I like these cartoons, they’re cool!”



‘When my parents treat sh# I thought it was me, stupid and not good eno- nothing. But it isn’t my f- parents have got no right you that bad, they’re su- care for you.’



“The graphics are good and the drawings. And it’s not meant to have awesome stuff, because it’s about family problems and stuff.”

“I think you should break it up with more pictures to make it more fascinating to read.”



“I wouldn’t try to be too cool. If you look at a lot of government websites they’re trying too hard. They have bad cartoons and stuff.”



Take home messages:

- Websites for young people need a lot of illustrations
- Care needs to be taken to ensure young people identify with illustrations and find them appealing
- Test website illustrations with young people.



Navigation

Navigation should be easy



Navigation was identified by participants as being a 'make-or-break' feature of websites. The young people stressed that website navigation should be clear, simple and offer a straightforward way of locating information. Participants felt that the (side) navigation bar featured throughout most of burstingthebubble.com was effective and offered a familiar and easy way of accessing all information on the website. However, there were mixed opinions on the use of thematic labels to identify the different sections of the website. While some respondents felt these were easily understood - others suggested the links should provide a clearer indication of what the topic was about. Young people also indicated that a navigation bar needed to be included on the front page of burstingthebubble.com.

"I like how all the little subtitles (links) are on a sidebar, so you can sort of get straight to what you are looking for."

"Everything is there and you can see how to get to everything. You don't have to keep looking around for the information you want."

"If you get on a website and it's really complicated you won't even look at. You just go 'oh, I'm going back to the search engine.'"

"I didn't really know what some of these links were until I actually got into them. The 'tip of the iceberg' link was one. Make it clearer I suppose."

"You should also have the navigation bar on the front page so it's the sort of template that is on the other pages. The same side bar."



Take home messages:

- Keep navigation simple, clear and consistent
- Use navigation bars
- Have a standard navigation bar on every page
- Use unambiguous labels for links.



Domain names

Take care when identifying websites

There were mixed opinions on the website name 'burstingthebubble.com' and the lack of a direct reference to domestic violence on the site's front page. The DVIRC made a conscious decision to avoid using terms such as 'violence and abuse' as past experience and website testing had shown that many young people may not identify their situation as abuse. Furthermore, there were concerns that some young people might be 'scared off' by being immediately confronted by terms such as abuse. This approach caused debate among focus group participants. Here's a summary of the debate:

"It wasn't clear from the title and front page what the website was about."

"I didn't think it was an abuse website or whatever, you have to go and start reading."

"It could have like a little subtitle, underneath it so you know you are dealing with abuse or something."

"They're not going to like want people knowing that they're going to these websites. So they want to do it in secret and if someone just happens to see what's on their screen and there's this big heading saying▶

"It might be difficult to locate the website when using a search engine."

"No, but then people are going to get scared off."

" (cont.) 'abuse and stuff', they are not going to want to go on it because then they might think people will know what they're doing."

Take home messages:

- Gain feedback from young people about website titles
- Rigorously test website identification.



Layout



Avoid blocks of text!

All focus groups were fiercely critical of websites that are largely composed of text. Many young people felt that hitting 'huge lumps of information' was 'boring', 'hard to read' and could cause them to leave a website. Respondents complimented burstingthebubble.com for providing text in easily consumed bite size pieces and using images and quotes in bubbles to break up text. Participants also suggested that small blocks of text would be attractive to young people with low literacy skills. A number additionally suggested that using 'Q and A' (question and answer) formats aided readability and helped to maintain the interest of young people.

"I just thought it was really easy to understand the information. It was sort of short paragraphs that go straight to the point really."

"If it's one big page of writing kids are going to get bored. But if you break it up you don't know you are reading as much."

"Yeah and it's not too cluttered and the text is set up well and I like the pictures on it."

"If you can say it in two or three sentences you will listen. And that's good information because you take it in."

"It may be a bit too long, I don't have that much patience, kids who are hard at reading and they won't read through."

"It just needs more of sort of question and answer stuff like that because it's just easier to read. Questions and Answers are good."



Take home messages:

- Use short paragraphs on websites
- Break blocks of text up using a combination of quotes, images and text
- Where possible present information as bullet points
- Consider mixing text with a question and answer format.



Content design

Be careful with language



The young people were very positive with the feedback they provided on the style of language used for the website. Burstingthebubble.com uses conversational and personal language that directly addresses the reader (e.g. 'If you are experiencing this...'). The website also uses actual quotes from young people to provide examples of situations and to explain ideas. Participants contrasted this with the language used on some government websites aimed at young people. These were described as "talking to adults" or "trying too hard" to achieve a style and tone that might appeal to young people.

"Yeah, I thought it was pretty good. Like they obviously know what their target is, they are not putting in quotes for five year old kids."

"I thought the way that it was written was good because it's telling me what's, like it's informative but it's not really patronizing."

"Yeah, and it's not being casual buddy buddy, and like trying to use slang and stuff, which can get really annoying."

"Yes, it's not making any try hard jokes or anything it kind of tells you stuff like, 'you are not alone' or 'you can get help' without actually saying they know what you are going through. It's good, it's not too obvious or patronizing."

"Some people might not understand more advanced language and different words that you have never heard before but this is easy to understand."

"The language is good, it's not formal. It's like written by a teenager."



Take home messages:

- Use simple and informal language (avoid terminology)
- Make the language personal and address the visitor, but avoid a tone of over familiarity
- Be sure to test language style and especially uses of humor with young people.



Content design

Interactivity works



Burstingthebubble.com takes an inventive approach to domestic violence information by providing quizzes and checklists that enable visitors to assess if there are forms of abuse happening in their family, and to simply express feelings. Indeed, an important aim for the site is to assist young people to understand what is 'ok in a family and what isn't'. The young people clearly indicated they liked the website's interactives, which were described as engaging, not burdensome to complete, and as personalizing the website experience by provided information specific to the user. Respondents also commented that the interactives helped users to "analyse a situation".

Respondents offered insightful feedback on how the interactives might be improved. Participants suggested the SOS quiz needed to provide a more gradual continuum of response options rather than a limited 'Always / Sometimes / Never'. They also commented on the 'alert symbols' (a yellow exclamation mark) that appear if visitors selected certain responses on this quiz – several felt these were too confronting, and suggested that 'smiley faces' (or similar icons) would be less alarming.

Visit: www.burstingthebubble.com/sos.shtml
www.burstingthebubble.com/thelaw.shtml

"Like instead of just sitting there reading it and stuff, you have actually click on stuff and it says things about you."

"They weren't too long, you don't want to be doing it for hours."

"It sort of specified to the person that is looking at the page. So they get a real view of what is sort of specific to their life. Not just general information and stuff."

"It's really interesting, it's not hard to understand at all, it really clicks in."

"Yeah, because if you are aiming it at our age group, it's better than just writing."

Take home messages:

- Quizzes and checklists provide young people with opportunities to interact with content
- Provide interactives so that site visitors can relate information to their own lives.



Content design

Use real stories



The website's use of authentic descriptions of young people's experiences of family violence attracted a great deal of positive feedback and support. Young people felt these descriptions - provided to users as complete stories or quotes - succeeded in making the issue of domestic violence more 'real', would help young people to feel 'they are not alone' while also offering hope that difficult situations can be solved. It is important to note that the DVIRC's decision to include 'real stories' was motivated by research that indicates people are interested in hearing from others who have personal experiences of family violence as this normalises their own experiences.

"They're good because you maybe find it more realistic."

"If you were someone that was abused, or didn't have a good time at home or whatever and you read the stories, by reading it you can see kids that have had the same thoughts or you know and you feel less alone. You're not abnormal."

"Because obviously that shows that it's not just you that's in that problem, you can hear from other people how it has happened to them."

TRUE STORIES

'I hated to see mum get hurt...'

My mum met my step-dad when I was five. After he came into our lives, things changed. At times he could be ok, take us out as a family and stuff, but at other times he'd get into these nasty moods.

When he was in a mood and going at mum, I used to get between them, even though they both would yell at me to go to my room. Sometimes I got hit for him if I got in the way, but I hated to see mum get hurt.

One night I got home late and my little step-brother was crying, and my step-dad was screaming at my mum, she had a bruise on her arm, he was really angry and I saw him throw an ash-tray at her head. He far me to take my brother and go next door, she looked so scared. The night he let us in and told me to call the police. I rang them and told them what was happening.

After about 10 minutes I heard the police drive up, and I could hear my step-dad yelling at them. One of the policemen came next door and told me that they he warned my step-dad that if it happened again he could get charged. They also me that mum could go to the court for a protection order to stop him from coming near our house.

Even though things quietened down for a while, my step-dad didn't change his much. There would still be major blow-ups. He used to hurt our cat, kick it or



"They all kind of get sorted out and then you can see, if you were in like that kind of situation but you weren't quite sure what to do and you see the story, and you see what they did and what ▶

"(cont.) happened with them, and you could kind of take the next couple of steps or talk to someone."

"Yeah, it's good to know there are like happy endings."



Visit: www.burstingthebubble.com/stories.shtml

Take home messages:

- Stories allow young people to learn about other people's experiences. They normalize issues and allow young people to feel less alone
- Quotes offer authenticity and stories can demonstrate how situations can be resolved
- Stories about young people should be written by young people.



Content design

Providing service contact details



Young people were divided on how contact details for support services had been made available on the website. While some participants felt that providing details of selected services in a section titled 'What Services Can Help Me' was appropriate, others felt information about services needed to be featured throughout the site. Some also commented that websites should include information on how to talk to counsellors, tell young people about their rights when dealing with support services, and provide coverage of any confidentiality issues associated with contacting services.

"If you are looking in this website and you want help it should (stand out)."

"Yeah, I mean maybe you should have it on every page, a bit down the bottom saying were you can get counseling."

"It might be useful to have specialized links to services like with sexual abuse. In the 'what is abuse' you could have like a specialized link for those sorts of services."

"I'd like to know whether counsellors are allowed to contact police or welfare services."

"Maybe a whole page on what happens when Police come and all that...So you know what will happen... sometimes people will be worried about ringing them because they don't know what's going to happen at the other end."

"I don't know if it's possible to do it but I just think when I look at all those places, that they are all so far away from me. Could you write in your suburb maybe, in a thing, you press 'search' or it has a website were you can go ▶"

" (cont.) and find the place closer to you. You look for places and they are either like right in the middle of the city or rural ones out ages away."



Visit: www.burstingthebubble.com/faqs.shtml

Take home messages:

- Address young people's fears associated with contacting support services
- Provide information on how support services work
- Make contact numbers very easy to find.



More suggestions

Reflect Australia's cultural diversity

While participants acknowledged that burstingthebubble.com features illustrations of people from different cultural backgrounds, some young people felt that even more could be done to reflect Australia's cultural and linguistic diversity. One young person suggested burstingthebubble.com should represent a larger number of cultures than those depicted by the website's illustrations. Another young person commented that the website should not be limited to English.

"This is just in English, but Australians are from all different countries, so you need to translate it into other languages."



More suggestions

Use cartoons to depict issues



This resource has already noted that young people responded very positively to the use of illustrations, especially the use of characters with speech bubbles. However, this point needs to be emphasized further. Participant comments indicate that many young people perceive illustrations and visual sequences as a legitimate way of exploring issues and providing information. Respondents suggested that cartoons, clips, animations and pictures could be used more fully on websites such as burstingthebubble.com to identify problem situations and to propose possible actions.

“I like the pictures of people with speech bubbles. Because it’s like, kind of a little story. It kind of personalizes it.”

I used to think every one else at school had families that probably looked like this...

IS YOUR FAMILY LIKE THESE 50S QUIZ

Not everyone's family looks or acts like the Brady Bunch, or like the rock families of neighbours. In fact, most families have stresses and arguments. But even though things in families can get stressful at times, there are some things that should never change.

What families should be like - always
Your parents and other family members should

- care about you
- look after you
- try to help you with any problems
- listen to you
- never hurt you

“You should have pictures of situations, and ‘does this look similar to you? Does this look right’ or ‘can you tell the difference between this and this picture?’ Because little kids can’t kind of read to well, and they get messages better messages through pictures.”

“Maybe like a little cartoon, and video clips.....if you are not that clear on it (abuse) you can click on it and it might pop up with a little cartoon showing you what it is.”

My dad abused my mom. Maybe this is what's going on at your place. Or maybe a family member is hurting you, or your brothers or sisters. If this is happening, I want you to know - YOU AREN'T at fault - there's lots of other people out there who have been through this too, and you can get through it.

WHAT IS ABUSE?

Abuse is when one person tries to hurt or bully another person, or does things to them that make them feel bad.

- In some families, there is **abuse by one parent towards another**
- In other families, there is **abuse towards young people**
- In some families, there's both.

Abuse by one parent towards another
Parents should always show each other respect. Both parents have a right to express their opinions and beliefs, and to see their

You should feel you can speak up and stand up!

“Pictures of what actions can be taken – so if people don’t understand what goes on. Like a cartoon of what happens in the family.”



Visit: www.burstingthebubble.com/whatisabuse.shtml

Take home messages:

→ Where possible also use visual means to present information.



More suggestions



Provide online support

Although not a feature of burstingthebubble.com, there were many recommendations offered by participants suggesting that websites for young people should, where possible, provide an online advice or counselling service. Respondents explained that young people place a high value on personal interactions and advice specific to their situation. Participants added that some young people can find the prospect of contacting services by phone or face-to-face intimidating but perceive the Internet as being less confronting.

“It would be good if you could ask questions to people and they answer them, people that it’s happened to.”

“(Online help) can be easier to do than ring someone. Some people feel nervous if a person is talking to them, so they are safe just through text.”

“Like I know I have seen other ones where you can get advice from someone who has like a doctor icon, and you can trust them. A lot of forum systems have private message systems as well hooked into them.”

“Maybe just like an hour a day or something. Or someone could send an email in and say ‘can you come and talk to me at two o’clock.’”

“That would be good (to have online advice) because they would probably feel like they are not just by themselves.”

“It needs to give feedback. Yeah, you email and they’ll email you back and give you suggestions of what to do about it.”



Take home messages:

- Young people value opportunities to gain advice
- Some find online or email based counselling less confrontational than phone or face-to-face services



More suggestions



Involve young people in website development

Finally, in many of the focus groups participants reminded us, either explicitly or through their strong connection with the stories and quotes featured on the site, that young people have an important role to play in creating websites. As the following quote illustrates, the young people clearly believed that websites are more effective if the people they are designed for are involved in their development:

“You should get young people who have experienced these problems, people who have been abused, involved in designing the website. That will help people relate to it.”



There are many different ways of involving young people in website development, and all have resource implications. For example, sites can be based on a peer education model (written by young people for young people); young people can be involved in designing the content through consultations (as the DVIRC did in developing *burstingthebubble*); or young people could be offered the opportunity to send in their personal stories which would then be published on the site.



The last of these options is one that should be deliberated before being pursued. To assist readers who may be considering developing a website that supports the submission of personal stories the following explanation outlines why the DVIRC does not provide this facility:

“Ideally, websites could allow visitors to submit their own stories for publication and indeed the DVIRC is sometimes asked “How do I give my experiences and stories so I can help others?”. However, the DVIRC has currently chosen not to add this facility. Most of the site’s visitors are young people, some of whom may be in situations of immediate danger, and there is the potential for duty of care and confidentiality issues to arise. This needs careful consideration and the availability of immediate support to respond to any protective and safety issues. Instead, DVIRC does not request stories to be sent, but screens, edits and de-identifies stories that it has access to through its other work, and then publishes them on the site.”

About the evaluation

Methodology

The evaluation of burstingthebubble.com was carried by the CPE, Centre for Program Evaluation, of The University of Melbourne, with assistance from the DVIRC in 2004. The evaluation consisted of two components. The first component used an online survey of 87 young people experiencing family violence, or seeking to help a family member or friend experiencing domestic violence, to establish the effectiveness of the website's content.

Results from the online survey can be found at: www.burstingthebubble.com.au.



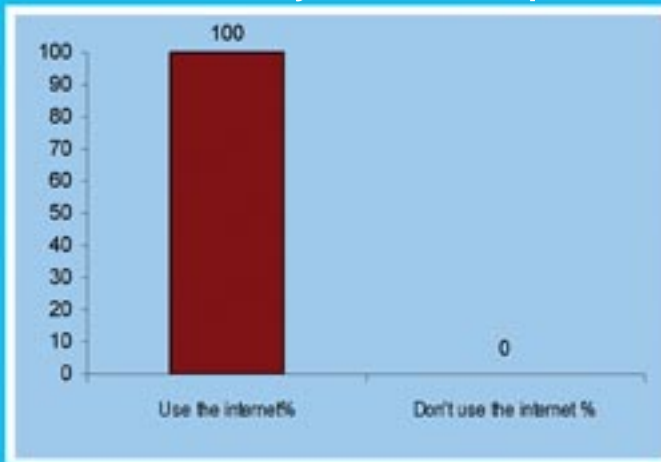
For the second component of the evaluation a consultation was undertaken involving 70 Victorian secondary school students in 12 (gender balanced) focus groups held at 4 government sector schools. Permission from the Department of Education and training was obtained in order to do this. The purpose of this consultation was to discover if young people found burstingthebubble.com to be a user friendly and engaging website. This aspect of the evaluation was to focus on the design of the website including: ease of navigation; appropriateness of graphics; readability of information; usability of quizzes and checklists; and suggestions for improvement. An additional but important aspect of this second component of the evaluation was to clarify if young people feel that websites are in fact a useful medium for communicating information on issues of health, safety and wellbeing.

Focus group participants were invited to explore burstingthebubble.com on a laptop computer for approximately 20 minutes after which they were asked to consider a range of questions on the efficacy of using websites to provide information to young people.

About the participants

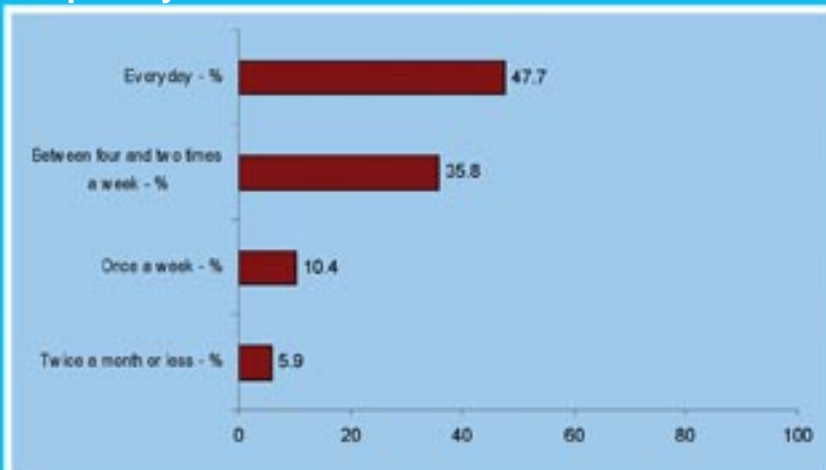
- ▶ Recent research by the Department of Communications, Information and Technology (2004) shows that the highest users of the Internet are young people aged 14-17 (86%). All of the young people in this study reported that they used the Internet.

Use of the Internet by Focus Group Participants



- ▶ Nearly half of the young people in this study said they used the Internet everyday. Over a third used the Internet more than twice a week and only 6% said they accessed the Internet two or fewer times a month.

Frequency of Internet Use



► Most commonly visited websites

In rank order, young people said that they most commonly used the Internet for:

- Electronic mail such as Hotmail
- MSN messenger and other chat utilities
- Searching for information
- Playing games
- Music websites and/or downloading music
- Humour/animation websites
- Websites focusing on motion pictures and popular actors
- Sports related websites

► School Focus Groups

School	Focus Group	Date of Data Collection
Brunswick Secondary College	Focus Group 1 - Year 8 Focus Group 2 - Year 10 Focus Group 3 - Year 9	September 1st 2004
Fitzroy Secondary College	Focus Group 4 - Year 7 Focus Group 5 - Year 7 Focus Group 6 - Year 8	September 13th 2004
Princess Hill Secondary College	Focus Group 7 - Year 9 Focus Group 8 - Year 10 Focus Group 9 - Year 8	September 16th 2004
Collingwood College	Focus Group 10 - Year 8 Focus Group 11 - Year 9 Focus Group 12 - Year 10	October 15th 2004

▷ Focus groups were gender balanced
▷ Approx. 40% of participants were from non-English speaking backgrounds
▷ Rural schools were unfortunately not included due to resource constraints

References

- ▶ Department of Communications, Information and Technology 2004, THE CURRENT STATE OF PLAY, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

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**For more information on family violence contact the
Domestic Violence & Incest Resource Centre**

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