

Global Navigation Mega Drop-Down - Or Flyout Menus

(Navigation Menu)

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Author(s): Sharon Orienza

Problem

The user needs to navigate through a large site with many features, but there is limited space to show the user the entire sub-navigation.

The user needs to compare their options for selection in the sub-navigation, but a large scrolling menu prevents this.

Concepts in the wording of the navigation are hard for the user to grasp or visualize, and icons or pictures would help while navigating through their options.

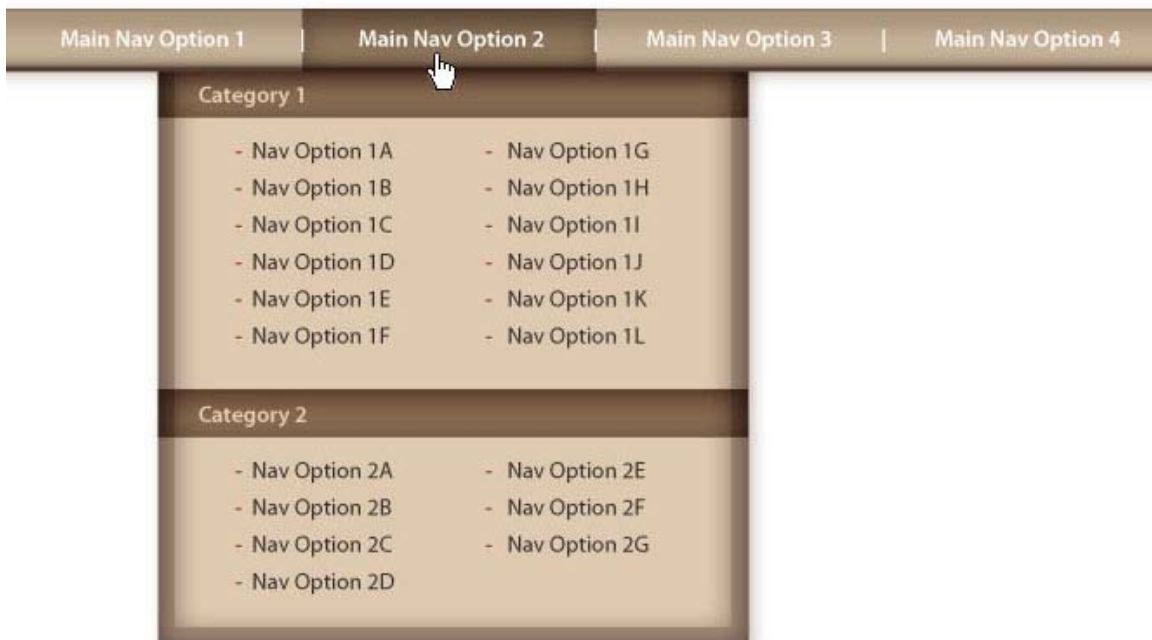
Use When

- The user needs quick access to a large amount of menu items.
- There are too many categories for the dropdowns, and the user would have to scroll beyond the fold to see all the options available to them.
- The user needs to visually compare their choices available in the entire navigation.
- Grouping or visually emphasizing relationships of different categories would aid the user in understanding their choices

- Inserting Images, or tooltips (optional) would aid users in making a quicker/better decision in selecting their options.

Solution

- Create a large two-dimensional drop-down panel that groups navigation options to eliminate scrolling.



(Mega Fly-Out Not Illustrated)

How

- Chunk, or Group like items together into **related sets** to visually emphasize relationships among the categories.
- Use concise, descriptive labels for each group.
- Order the groups: by order of importance, or those with similar features.
- Show each choice only once – avoid redundancy and do not duplicate options.
- Use a combination of typography, icons and tooltips (optional) when appropriate to further structure the user's choices.
- Everything should be visible above "the fold". The user should not have to scroll in order to see any of the options.
- The drop-down should be temporary and disappear when the user moves their pointer to another area of the menu, or another part of the screen.

Dropdown:

- Vertical or horizontal "form" appears when activated from the top (horizontal) navigation bar
-

For Fly-Out:

- Vertical or horizontal form appears when activated from the left-hand (or right-hand) navigation.

Animation:

- Speed is essential in making an interface feel responsive to the user. It is suggested that it should render within .1 second to make users feel like a displays' changes are a direct result of their actions.
- Don't make the response time too fast – the mouse should remain stationary for .5 seconds before you display anything that's hover-dependent (like a tooltip). This should avoid any timing issues where a user has gone diagonal from the main nav (and likely over a part of the nav, or outside of the navigational hotspot) to the options provided in the drop-down.

Thus, the timing should be:

Wait 0.5 seconds.

If the pointer is still hovering over a navbar item, display its mega drop-down within 0.1 seconds.

Keep showing it until the pointer has been outside both the navbar item and the drop-down for 0.5 seconds. Then, remove it in less than 0.1 seconds.

One exception to item 3: The very best implementations can sense when a user is moving the pointer from the navbar item to a destination within the drop-down. When the pointer is on such a path, the drop-down should remain visible. This supplementary guideline addresses the diagonal problem, which happens when the path temporarily takes the pointer outside the active area. The drop-down shouldn't disappear when the user is on the way to point to something within it.

Rationale

- Navigation helps the user find whatever it is they are looking for.
- Navigation reveals the hierarchy to the user and tells them what the site contains.
- Breadcrumbs also provide a way to navigate up the site hierarchy.

Accessibility

- Dynamic screen elements always pose the problem of accessibility, so it's important to code them with screen readers and other assistive technology in mind.

There are two main approaches to improving the accessibility of mega drop-down menus:

Simple: Don't bother making the drop-down itself accessible. Instead, make each top-level menu choice clickable, leading to a regular Web page where you present all drop-down options in plain, fully accessible HTML.

Advanced: Emulate the "keytips" approach designed to add accessibility to Microsoft's ribbon controls. Keytips are an alternative to access keys and are easier to understand. The keytips interaction sequence is:

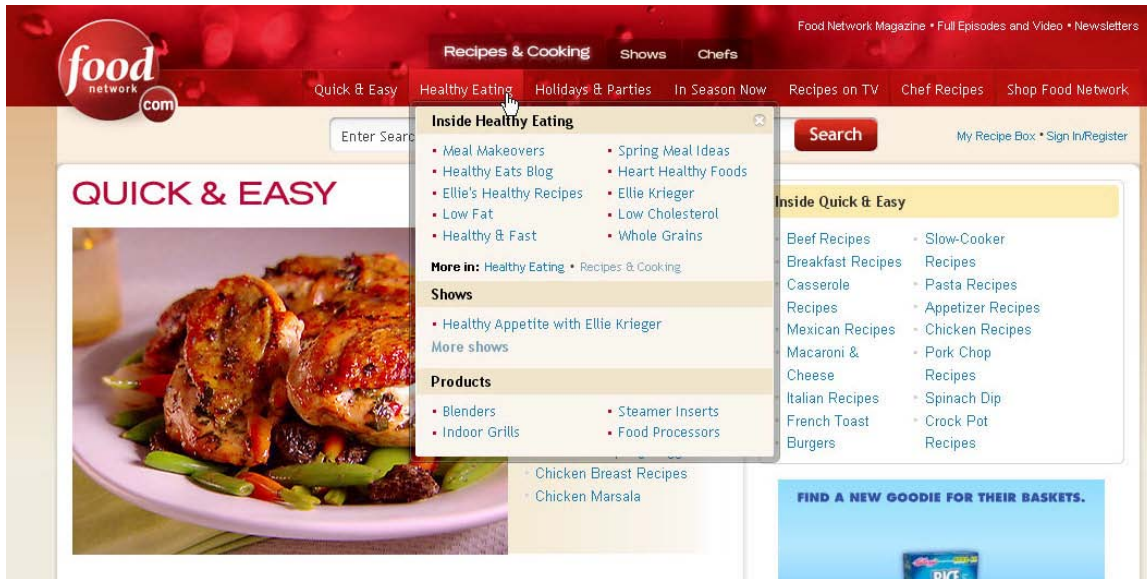
1. Press "Alt" to enter keytip mode.
2. Press a character to choose one of the top-level navbar items and display its mega drop-down. In the drop-down, show the access key next to each menu option.

Examples

Mega Drop-Down:

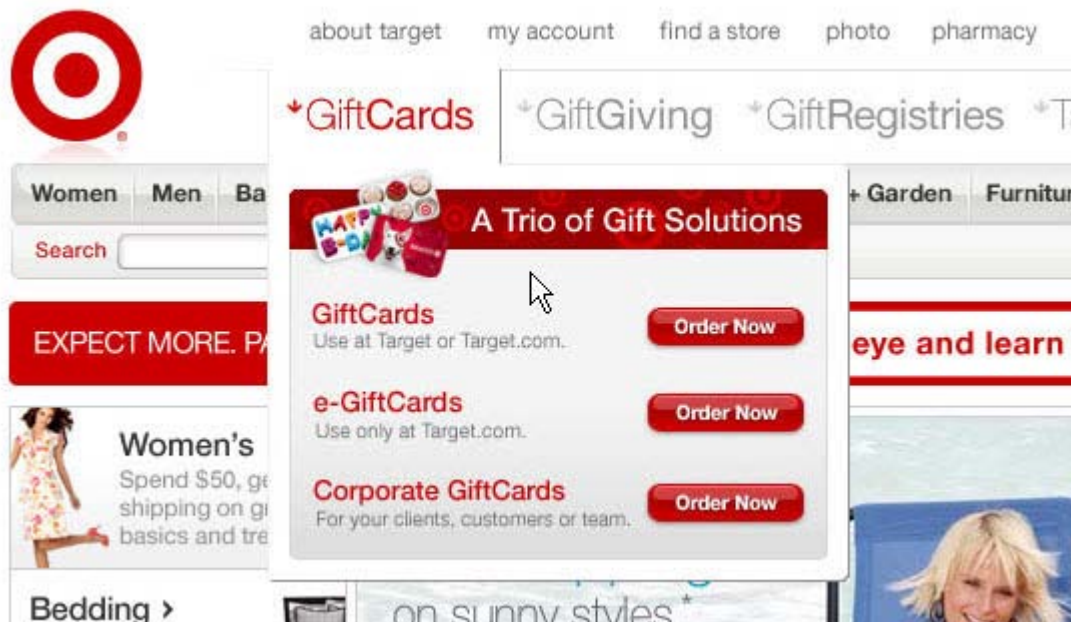
The food network

<http://www.foodnetwork.com/quick-and-easy/index.html>



Target.com

<http://www.target.com/>





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Shorts
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Shoes
Sandals
Undewear
Socks
Ties
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Belts
See All
Watches
Dress Watches
Leather Watches
Sports Watches
See All
Young Men
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Shorts
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Mega Fly-Out

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Invitrogen Life Science > Products & Services > Applications



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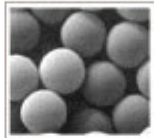
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Resources

Useit.com, [Mega Drop-Down Navigation Menus Work Well](#)