

Tabbed Navigation

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Problem

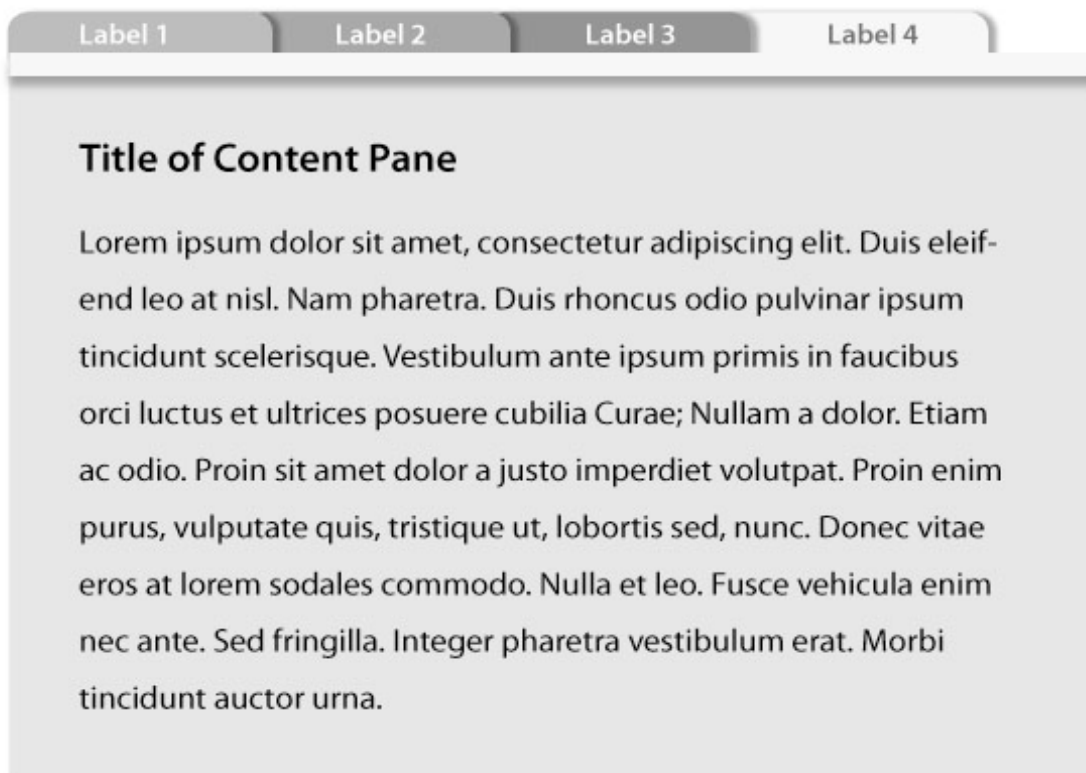
The user needs to navigate through a site to locate content and features and have clear indication of their current location in the site.

Use When

- There are 3 - 10 category titles.
- The category titles are relatively short and will fit across the width of the current page.
- There is more than one category, but not more categories than can fit within a single row of the current page (2-7 categories).
- The number of categories is not likely to change often.
- The entire width of the page is needed for content (An alternative approach is to use a left bar navigation).
- The categories belong to a single site.
- You need to represent the highest level navigation options on a site.
- You need to indicate the user's current location in the set of available options.
- You need to change the entire page and not a sub-section of content within the page.
- You need a way to control the highest level of navigation.

Solution

- Break up information on each tab into coherent chunks so that a user can access one chunk of information at a time. Each tab should hold related information, especially in terms of completing one or more related tasks: A user should be able to accomplish a specific task in one tab, without having to go back and forth between multiple tabs.
- Keep the titles/wording on the tabs short (limited to one or two words).
- The tabs must be a single-line row of links immediately above the content panes that the navigation will control. Do not stack, or “double-row” the tabs.



How:

- The content should be visually connected to the tab it is associated with and be visually bounded (usually by a box.)
- Separate the tabs, or links, graphically so that each tab is apparent to the end-user. It is important to communicate which content pane is currently being viewed!
- Indicate the selected tab by graphically “highlighting” and bringing it to the attention of the user. This may include changing its color, bringing it to the “front”, making it larger, etc. See examples below for reference.
- There should always be one tab selected/active with its content visible.
- Only one content area may be visible at a time.
- A Tab navigation (titles) should be consistent throughout that particular navigation. If no content is available for a tab’s content pane, the tab’s title should be “greyed” out and not made available for selection.

Don’ts

- Tabs should NOT move as the user clicks from one tab to another.
- The entire page should NOT refresh upon selection of a new tab.
- Selecting a tab should NOT affect other parts of the page.
- **Don’t** navigate to a different page or perform an action (beyond switching the visible content) when a user selects a tab.
- **Don’t omit a tab:** Tab navigation title must be consistent throughout that particular block of navigation. If no content is available for a particular section (say specs are not available for a particular product), Don’t omit the tab! Rather, grey out the title and do not make it available for selection.
- **Don’t nest tabs or combine horizontal tabs with vertical tabs.** Instead, reduce the number of tabs, use only vertical tabs, or use another control such as a drop-down list.

Rationale

- Tabs provide context. They give visual indication of a user's location within a body of information. They help a user answer many essential questions without thinking: *Where am I? Where else can I go? How much other stuff is there?*
- Tabs build on a real world metaphor. The tab control is analogous to a divider in a file cabinet or notebook.
- Tabs provide navigation. They provide the ability to navigate alternate content views.

Accessibility

- Allow the user to navigate across the tabs in a logical order with the Tab key.
- A focused tab can be selected with the Enter key.
- Indicate the active tab (pane) by one of these alternative means (in addition to visual indication):
 - Include a TITLE attribute with the word "active" into the link that was just activated.
 - Include an invisible graphic with an ALT attribute and a word "active" into the link.

Examples

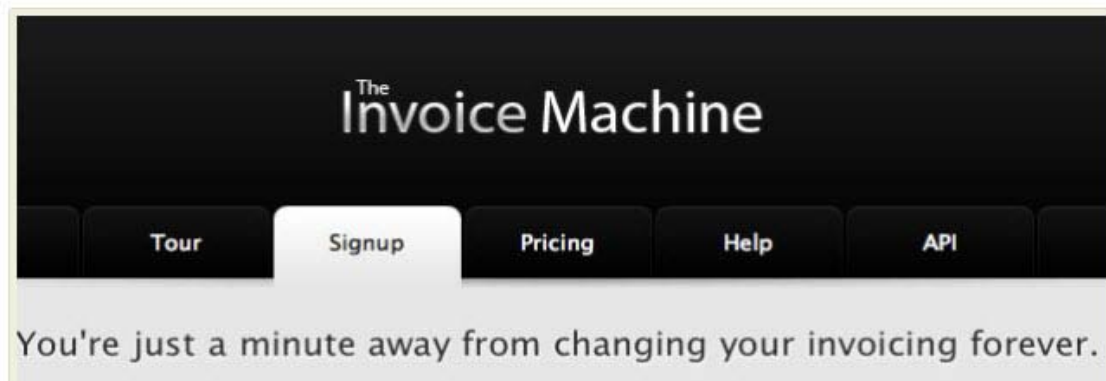
<http://www.veer.com/>



Infragistics Community: <http://forums.infragistics.com/forums/252.aspx>



The Invoice Machine: <http://invoicemachine.com/home>



<http://www.gyminee.com/public/indexb>



Resources

Jennifer Tidwell, [Card Stack](#)

Yahoo Design Pattern Library, [Navigation Tabs](#)

Useit.Com, [Tabs](#), [Used Right](#), [Useit.com](#)