

Executive Summary

This report documents the findings of a usability test of Topsy carried out in June 2007 by the Magnet team. The main purpose of the test was to assess the usability of the proposed Topsy website for Self Magazine.

Positive aspects:

- **Navigational ease of use.** Test participants considered the navigation easy to use.
- **Log rollover bubbles.** All test participants commented positively on the fact that they could rollover the headers and see some of the details of the tip.

Improvement areas:

- **Mini-Log.** All of the participants had difficulty understanding what the log represented. Test participants commented that enlarging the graphic and adding some more effective labels may improve the confusion.
- **Self brand.** Three of the six test participants felt that the site felt too text heavy and that it lacked the images of “pretty jumping girls” associated with Self’s brand. Test participants wanted to see images on the list page.
- **Removing favorites.** Five of the six test participants after searching various pages throughout the site gave up on removing a favorited tip. Some of the test participants commented that they expected to see something that said explicitly said “remove from favorites.”
- **Saving log and ratings data.** Four of the six test participants had concerns as to whether their rating and/or log data was being saved. The participants felt they needed some type of confirmation that their data was being stored.

Our recommendations:

- Consider labeling the mini-log more effectively. Remove the mini-log from the top of the log page to avoid the confusion as to why it is not updating as you interact with the log.
- Consider adding images to the list page to help make it feel less “wordy.”
- Add a more intuitive way for users to remove favorites.
- Consider changing the colors of the rating stars and log checks so that it is more apparent to user that their actions are being captured and saved by the system.
- Consider eliminating one or more colors used throughout the site.
- Consider reducing the size of the core pieces of functionality (rating, favorite, e-mail to friend).

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Approach

The Magnet team carried out a usability test of the proposed Topsy website in June 2007. The test was conducted using a prototype of the website. All pieces of functionality that were tested functioned according to the initial business requirements.

Purpose

The primary purpose of the test was to assess the usability of Topsy. The secondary purpose was to test the user's ability to complete crucial tasks directly associated to the success of this application.

Method

The tests were conducted using six participants, four of which were selected by the client (Self Magazine). The remaining two were selected by the test facilitator. Test participants were interviewed on a face-to-face basis and their screen activities and feedback were captured with the use of a web cam and Morae's Usability Management Software.

Kim Krolewski, a functional analyst / information architect (AARF) acted as the test facilitator and Lance Love (MagNet) and Meredith Blumenstock (AARF) acted as the note takers. All tests were conducted in the 14th floor small conference room at located at 1166 Avenue of the Americas. Each test took between 30 and 45 minutes.

The usability test consisted of three (4) phases: Introduction, Initial interview, solving test tasks, and a debriefing. These phases were defined as follows:

Introduction	Test participants were informed that the process was neutral and that there was no right or wrong answers. They were encouraged to ask questions but were told that the facilitator might not be able to answer them. They were also encouraged to think aloud.
Interview	Test participants were asked some basic questions about themselves and their online habits. They were then asked to use 5 words to describe their initial reactions to selected pages.
Solving test tasks	Test participants were asked to carry out nine (9) tasks using the Topsy prototype. Test participants were often encouraged to think aloud and to comment on the website while they were carrying out their tasks.
Debriefing	Test participants were asked seven (7) debriefed questions about their general impression of the website. In addition they were asked to give two pieces of advice on how to improve the site.

Equipment

The equipment used for this test was a laptop with the monitor set to a resolution of 1440 x 900. Microsoft Internet Explorer 7.0 was used. Morae version 2.0 was used to record the user's interaction with the site (desktop activity, audio, camera video and a complete chronicle of system events).

Test Participant Profiles

The tests were carried out with test participants who fulfilled the following requirements:

- Between 20 and 40 years old.
- Somewhat experienced to experienced Internet users.

#	Gender	Age	Title	Persona type*
1	F	23	User experience associate	Hard-core
2	F	36	Information architect	Grazer
3	F	21	Web intern	Realist
4	F	48	Contributing editor	Grazer
5	F	25	Reader services associate / web helper	Realist
6	M	36	Web copy chief	Hard-core

* Based on the three personas established at the beginning of the project.

Users Expectations

Before the test participants saw the website and started to carry out the tasks they were interviewed about their expectations. The test participants expected the following of a tip based website:

- Archived tips, multimedia expanding upon the tips; Read them; Listen to them; see images and hear corresponding tracks or narrative.
- “I’d like to see something that would allow me to see improvement – metrics or something around progress”
- “Probably a lot of different options, just as far as the layout goes, and directly able to ask a question.” Expert associated with the site.
- “The first thing I’d hope for is that it would be personalized in some way. The second is that it would be easy to use. I want something fun”
- The tip would be visible for you everyday. There would be an email component to prompt you to log in. It would include something personalized toward you such as, welcome [insert name], you are on day whatever of your program. Ability to see progress chart of some sort. Ability to read the tips and say that you have done it, maybe comment on the tip, log on a journal of how the tip worked for you.
- “I am familiar with Jump Start Diet... so e-mail functionality (reminders); allowing a user to choose whether to come to the site or receive e-mail tips.”

Initial Reactions

Before the test participants started to carry out the tasks they were interviewed about their initial reactions to the 3 main pages of the site. The test participants commented as follows:

Content inside of the [] is comments that were added by the note taker to clarify the context of the comments.

List Page

- “Wordy, my tip log is cool; internal book-marking is great; ratings don’t mean much to me – favorites mean more to me than a rating”
- “Colors are appealing to me. Soft. I am overwhelmed by the left rail; it is clear that I am in jumpstart diet; it took me a moment to understand the left rail. I assumed that the intro paragraph was the tip – it took me a while to understand the tip”
- “Interesting, technical, consumer-ish, colorful, and organized.”
- “A little anemic; I am not sure where to start; It looks like a lot is going on; It isn’t clear what is going on; I need a promise...I don’t quite know where I would start”
- “Looks like Self’s website. The tip of the day is highlighted in pink, it makes me look there. Are all the tips that you’ve done displayed somewhere? I would want to see the tips other than 15 and 16. I like that you can see how many people used the tip. I like how you can email – I would use that. Nice to see the favorites”
- “Pastels; I feel like it is a little busy; the type for the actual tip is small in relation to the headline type; a lot of colors... I think that goes back to busy. I like the calendar icon with checkmarks in it.”





Detail Page

- “I like the visual – seeing your progress is great; the image doesn’t mean much – it isn’t that compelling – it is kind of boring; I am curious about how jump start diet works”
- Colors again; I can rate it; I want jumpstart diet to be in another place; I think the progress chart is important – your progress so far is misleading. I didn’t even see the comments...”
- “Organized, user-friendly, typical, clean, and colorful...”
- “It looks pretty; I’d like to see more happening; I’d like it to be more exciting; I want to see more happening.... I like that you get a lot right away; I like all of this stuff [comments]”
- “I like the calendar at the top – it is nice to see where the holes are, where you’ve done your job. It looks good, I think it looks great. I like the image, it’s nice. Again, I like the favorites part, rate it, and send it to a friend. The left navigation is kind of confusing—I don’t know if it is the color. It is difficult to tell where to click from here”
- “The colors – having so many colors... not as busy as the other page since you only have rating and favorites for one tip.”

Log Page

- "Organized...pop-ups are good. I didn't know they were there at first"
- "The progress chart seems less important now – I don't like that it changed. I think that since I see [tips] 14-18 I wish I could see all of the tips – since I can see view all tips, I know I can see all of them"
- "Very interesting (in a positive way, interesting), user-friendly, organized, clean."
- "I don't really have a clue what I am supposed to do here. I don't know what I am doing here."
- "I'm just wondering what you would do on this tips thing. This is just sort of confusing to me at first look. I like the bubbles"
- "I like how the tip pops up when you mouse over it, I like the recent and the all [options] – but if you click on all tips what happens? I am just now noticing it [Left hand navigation] in the x-rail – if you want it to be more prominent you may want to think about it..."

Findings

-  **Good.** Task was completed with ease
-  **Good idea.** A nice suggestion that could lead to significant improvements with the interface.
-  **Concern.** Task caused the test participants to hesitate for a few seconds or express concern.
-  **Critical problem.** Task caused frequent catastrophes. A catastrophe is a situation where the website "wins" over the test participant (i.e. a situation where the test participant cannot solve a reasonable task or which causes the test participant distress).

Non-Registered User - List Page

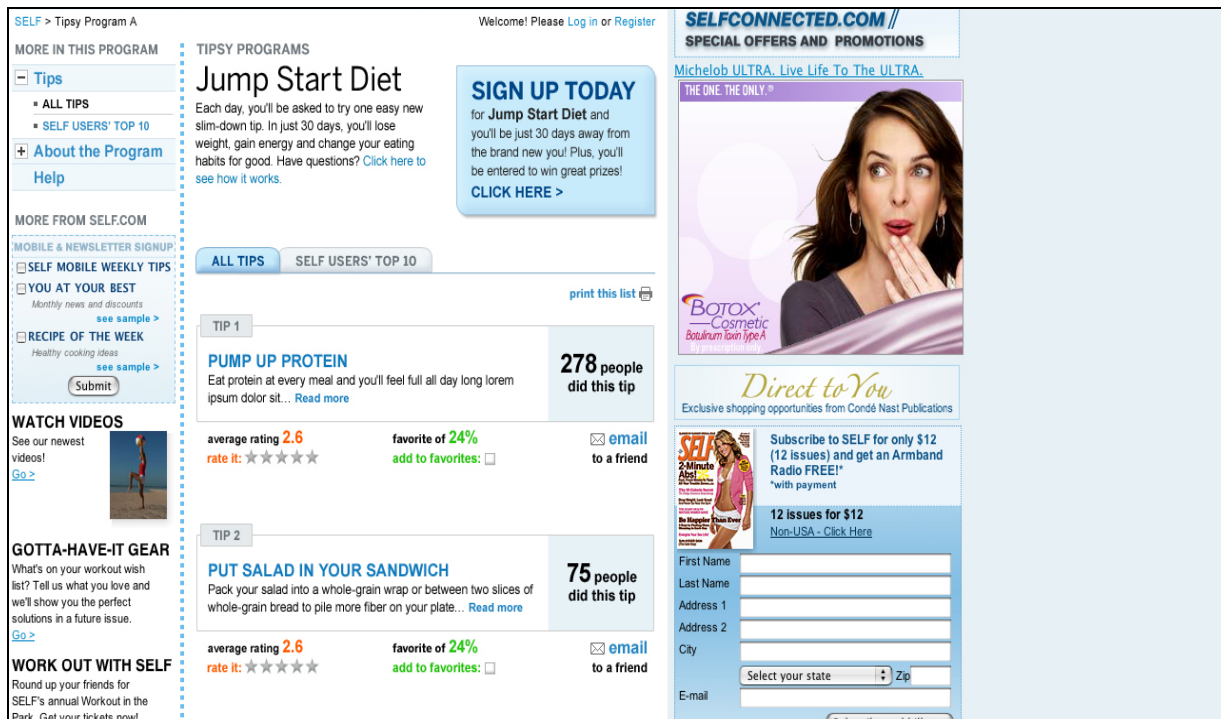





Figure 1: List page for non-registered users

-  All test participants easily figured out how to register for the application. When asked to register 3 of the participants used the register link and 2 used the sign-up graphic. 1 went to the log-in page.
-  All test participants easily figured out how to view the "Top 10." 4 of the participants used the tab to navigate while two used the left hand navigation.
-  All test participants easily figured out how to view more details on a tip. 4 of the participants used the read more link while 1 clicked on the header. 1 participant click on unrelated intro copy in the header section.

Registered User – List Page

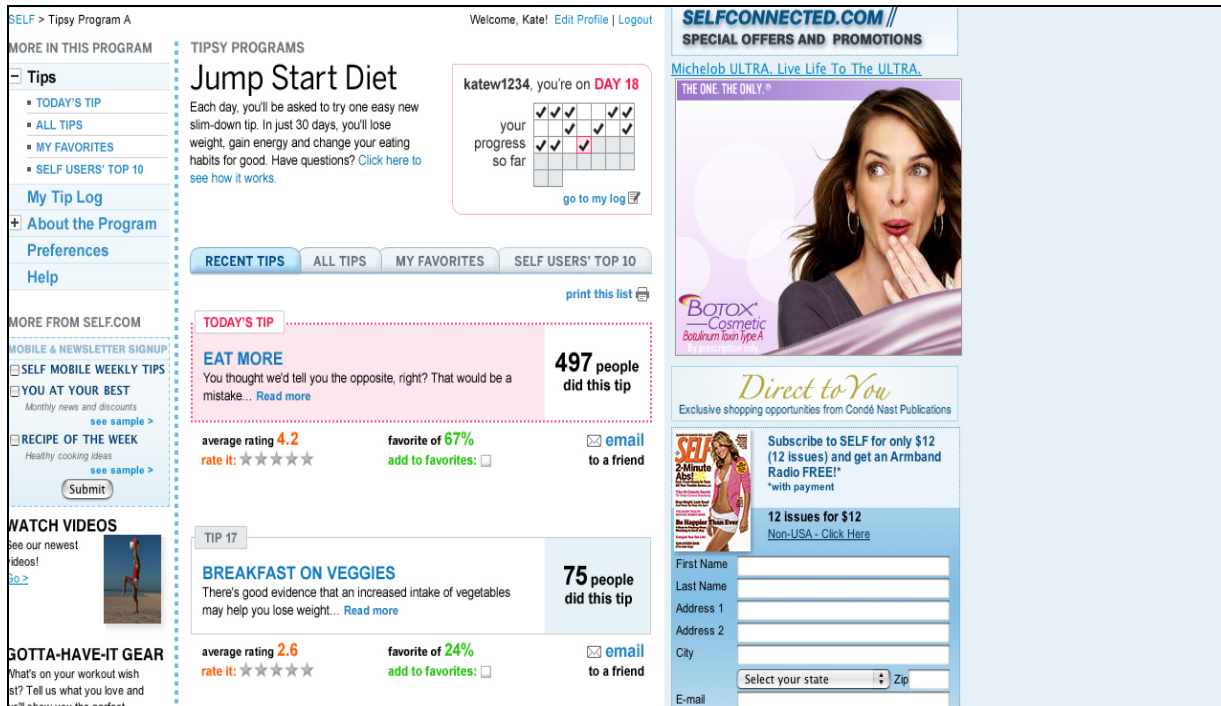


Figure 2: List page for registered users



All test participants easily figured out how to email a friend. 3 participants commented that it would be nice if you could email it to multiple friends.



3 participants were completely confused as to exactly what the mini-log was displaying. One participant commented: “I am assuming that each column is a day... I am not sure if this a cropped graph... I guess I would assume it is. I guess I can’t click on it...I would assume something would pop up – something more than this”



5 of the participants had no idea how to remove a previously favorited item from the list. All 5 participants hunted around the site till they became so frustrated that they gave up on the task. Participants commented “I don’t see where I’d take it out, I don’t know what I do,” “I am looking for some box that would save remove this and I’m not really seeing it - is this a trick question?”



All participants successfully rated a tip. 2 participants had concerns as the whether their ratings were being saved. 1 of those participants commented “do I have to click something else that registers it or is clicking that enough...I feel like I didn’t finish?” The other participant commented “does it automatically go through, do I have to save it somewhere, do I feel like if I navigate off the page my opinion will not be counted for because I didn’t scroll down to see the click to save button.”

Registered User - Detail page

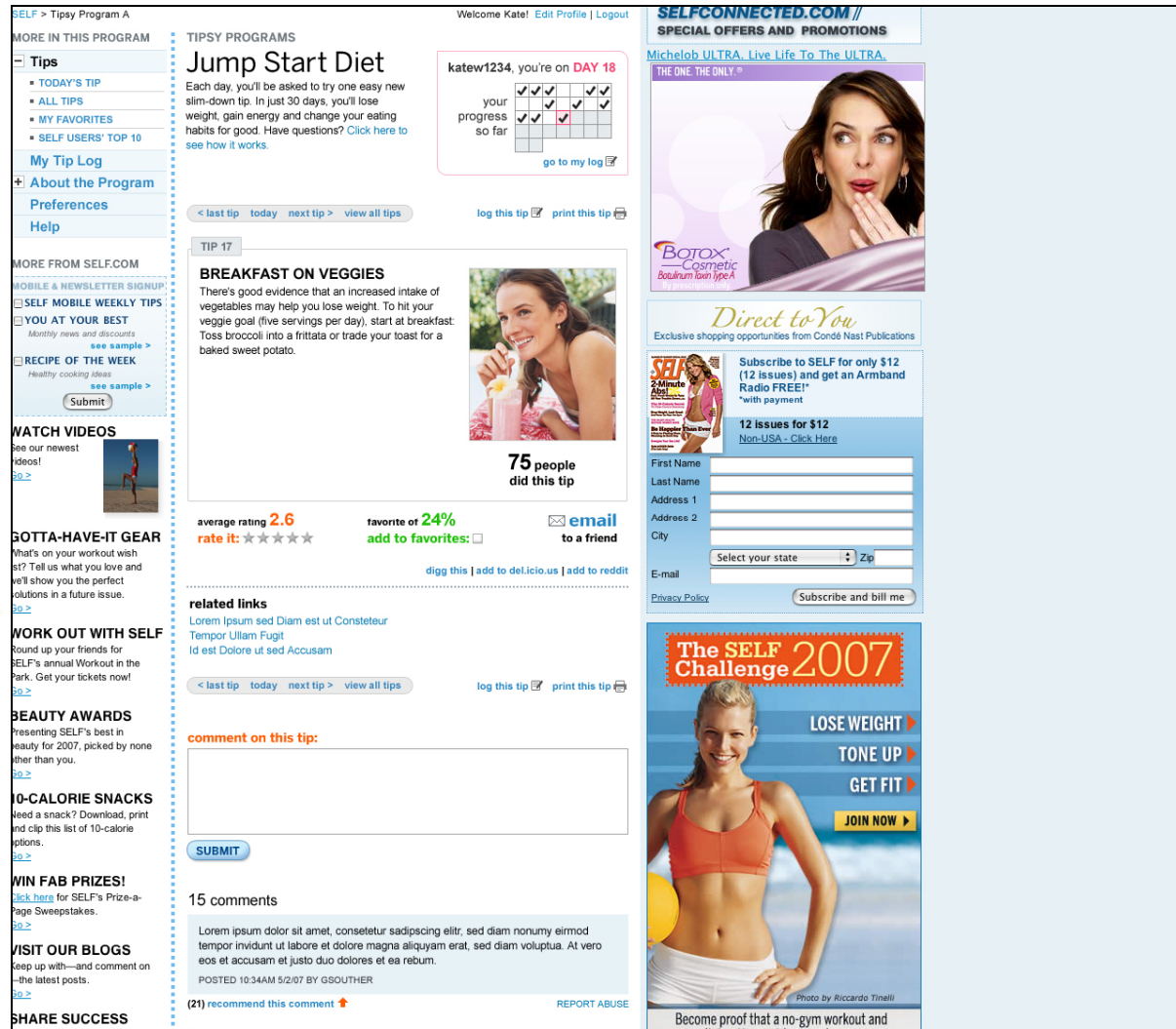


Figure 2: Detail page for registered users

- ✔ All test participants easily figured out how to navigate to this page

- ! Two participants didn't realize that the page contained comments. One commented "Oh I didn't even see there were comments down here. I wasn't even going to scroll"

- 💡 Add a reference to how many comments there are at the top in the detail area

Log Page

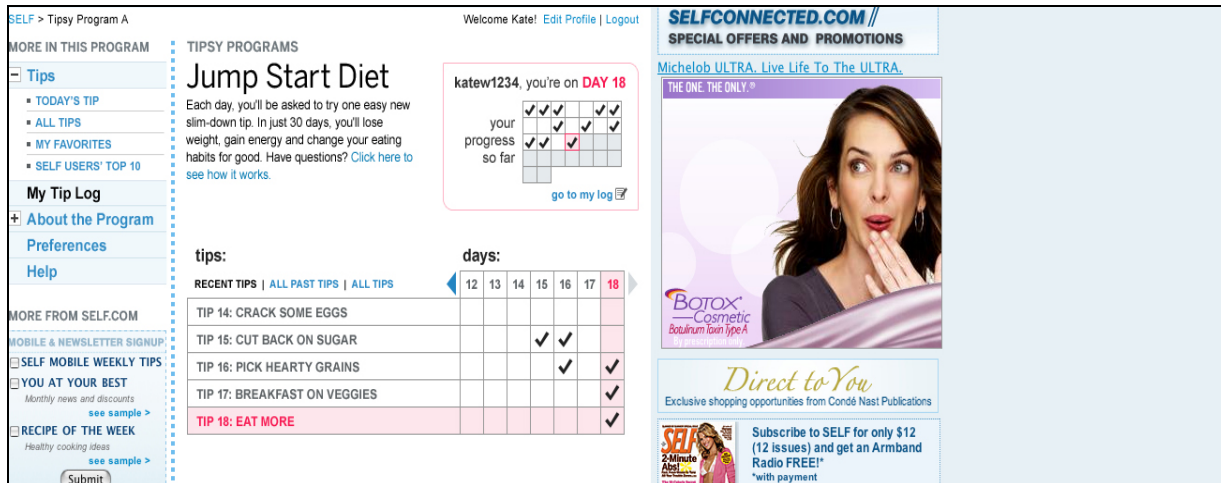






Figure 2: Log page displaying recent tips


-  All six participants successfully logged recent and past tips.


-  2 of the participants were confused as to why the mini-log was not dynamically updating as they logged their tips. One participant commented: “I have some confusion about tips and dates...I’d like to see this reflected in my progress chart.”

-  2 of the participants expressed concerns over whether their logging activity was being saved. Both were looking for more traditional ways of saving information. “I guess here I would be looking for some sort of submit button. Does it just log it after you...I think it is logging it, but I am used to seeing a submit button. Do I need to save it?” The second participant commented “I would expect that I’d need to save it but, it doesn’t seem to want me to.”

-  One test participant commented that it would be nice to see your rating on the log page

Navigation

-  All test participants used the left menus and entries at one point or another and none of them had any problems using them.

-  One test participant suggested that there should be an easy way to contact the magazine directly.

Appendix A - Usability Test Script

Test Facilitator Introduction

Test facilitators are neutral – Even though we have participated in the development of this prototype we want you to provide as many comments as you possibly can.

This is not an examination – You can do nothing wrong during this test. Everything you say or do is valuable to us.

I may not be able to answer your questions – Sorry! But please ask questions anyway. The questions will give us important clues.

I may ask and encourage you to think aloud during the test - This will enable us to follow your thought process. We are interested in any and all comments. Positive as well as negative.

Pre-Test Interview

- A. How old are you?
- B. What is your job title and description?
- C. Have you ever used any online help-applications before? If so, which?
- D. Which of the below statements best describes your online behavior in regards to interactive website (sites with forums, ratings, comments, etc.)?
 - a. I see the value, find the information helpful but, I just don't partake
 - b. When I can find the time, I try and participate.
 - c. When I'm passionate and driven about the program/website, I interact with these types of functionality frequently.
- E. What are your expectations for a self-help based website which is centered on daily tips?
- F. *The test facilitator opens the “tips list” page and observes the test participant for 1 minute... What 5 words come to mind when you look at this page?*
- G. *The test facilitator opens the “tip detail” page and observes the test participant for 1 minute. What 5 words come to mind when you look at this page?*
- H. *The test facilitator opens the “tips log” page and observes the test participant for 1 minute. What 5 words come to mind when you look at this page?*

Test Tasks

1. Ask participant to load “list page (guest view)” from index page.
You are thinking of registering for the application but you first want to check out what it has to offer. Use your mouse to point out these (4) things: where you would click to sign up, Find out information about the program, Self user's top 10, see more information about today's tip.
[navigational system's ease of use]

Usability Report | Self “Topsy”




2. Please return to the index page and load “tips list” from index page.
You found “tip 17 - Breakfast on Veggies” to be somewhat helpful and you’d like to share your opinion with other users'. Can you show me what you might do to share this information?
[rating functionality]
3. From “tips list”
“Today’s Tip – Eat More” is one of your most favorite tips. Show me how you might add this to your favorites list.
[adding favorites]
4. From “tips list”
Last week you favorited a tip about “Eat more” and have since religiously incorporated it into your daily routine. However, you’re been feeling sick the last few morning and decide this tip just isn’t working for you. Show me how you might remove the tip from your favorites.
[removing favorites]
5. From “tips list”
While scrolling through the list you come across “Tip 16 - Pick Hearty Grains” and realize that this is something your friend Jennie could really benefit from. Show me how you might pass this information on to her.
[email tip to a friend]
6. From “tips list”
18 days ago you registered for Self’s magazines “Jump Start Diet.” Since then you have tried to incorporate each of the tips into your daily life but it’s been with varied success. Find and log that on Day 6 you did “Tip 15 – Cut back on Sugar” and “Tip 2 – Put Salad in Your Sandwich.”
[log navigational elements and functionality]
7. You’re really focused on eating healthier and have been fairly successful at logging the days you’ve incorporated the tips into your lifestyle. You realize that you’re on day 18 and that the program is almost over. You want to quickly scan your progress so far. How might you be able to do this?
[user’s understanding of the mini-log]
8. Ask participant to load “tips log” from index page. Instruct user to view “all tips”
While viewing your log you notice that “Tip 21- Brown Bag Your Lunch” seems like something that you might already be incorporating into your life. Can you demonstrate how you would find out more?
[log roll-over/click functionality]
9. While on the log page instruct user to get the full details of tip “14 – crack some eggs”
After reading this tip you realize it would be beneficial to lots of different people who might not be registered for this program. How could you share the content with a broader group of internet users?
[social book-marking]




















































Debriefing

- I. Do you feel there is anything missing?
- J. Is there anything you think should be presented differently?
- K. Do you think that the website is engaging & entertaining? Explain.
- L. Do you have any comments on the ratings functionality?
- M. Do you have any comments regarding the visual representation on the website?
- N. Do you have any comments about the language used on the website? Is there anything you found confusing? Explain.
- O. If you could give us two pieces of advice what would they be?

Appendix B - Test Task Results

The chart below lists all test tasks and all test participants. Each entry indicates how successful the test participant was in solving that particular task.

	Solved without problems.
	User confused
	The test participant could not solve the task or reached a result which was significantly different from the desired result.
N/A	User chose an alternate path

	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5	Participant 6
Navigation						
Ratings	N/A		N/A			N/A
Add Favorites						
Remove Favorites						
Email to Friend						
Log						
Mini-log						
Future Tips						
Social book-marking						

* The full task descriptions appear in [Appendix A](#).

* The full participant profiles appear in [Test Participant Profiles](#).