

## Usability Analysis of Blockbuster.com

I switched to Blockbuster Online from Netflix about 8 months ago to get better bang for the buck. The service switch has saved me money; however, as a budding Web designer with a strong interest in usability, I have noticed more usability bugs with Blockbuster's site as compared to Netflix. Blockbuster had also announced "new and improved features" were coming to the site this January, which sparked me to seek out the new features and create this write-up. Upon the arrival of the new features in mid-February, I have not noticed any big differences. The biggest additions were expandable boxes within the "My Blockbuster" section, and a more sleek navigation bar. I will not touch on these additions in my report as I feel they were good changes and I also do not have any older screenshots featuring the older styles. This site does not need any major help, but I have laid out a few relatively easy fixes that would improve the site's user-friendliness.

The first issue is an inconsistency with movie sorting options while browsing for DVDs under any of the genre categories. I also think it would be beneficial if Blockbuster adds descriptions to the subgenres. See Exhibit 1a, 1b

The second issue focuses on a few quick fixes (both cosmetic and interactive) on any movie's generated page. See Exhibit 2

# Exhibit 1a: Genre Browsing/Sorting:

The image displays three different views of a movie browsing interface for the Comedy genre.

**Comedy "BLOCK"**  
This view shows five movie thumbnails in a row. Each thumbnail includes the movie title, a poster image, an 'ADD TO QUEUE' button, and a star rating. The movies shown are: Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle, Working Girl, The Importance of Being Earnest, Defending Your Life, and The Green Butchers. Navigation and display options are visible at the top.

**Comedy "LIST"**  
This view shows a table of the same five movies. The columns are: MOVIE TITLE, RELEASE DATE, MPAA, and **AVG. RATING** (circled in red). Each row has an 'ADD' button and a star rating. The data is as follows:

MOVIE TITLE	RELEASE DATE	MPAA	AVG. RATING
Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle	2004	R	4.5
Working Girl	1988	R	4.5
The Importance of Being Earnest	2002	PG	4.5
Defending Your Life	1991	PG	4.5
The Green Butchers	2000	R	4.5

**Comedy "DESCRIPTION"**  
This view shows a detailed description for the movie 'A Prairie Home Companion'. It includes a smaller thumbnail, the title, release date (2006), and MPAA rating (PG13). The description text reads: 'Acclaimed filmmaker Robert Altman (Short Cuts, Nashville) brings National Public Radio stalwart Garrison Keillor's long-running radio program to vivid life on the big screen in an intricately woven backstage fable centering on the final performance of a fictionalized version of his variety show. As if the result of some strange mass-media fluke, the popular radio program A Prairie Home Companion somehow managed to survive the Read more.' Below the description is an 'ADD' button and a list of cast members: Garrison Keillor, Meryl Streep, Lily Tomlin, (more).

Note: I will use "Block" to describe the large thumbnail, block-style viewing option at the top of this graphic, "list" for the style in the middle, and "description" for the style shown on the bottom with the smaller thumbnail and movie summary.

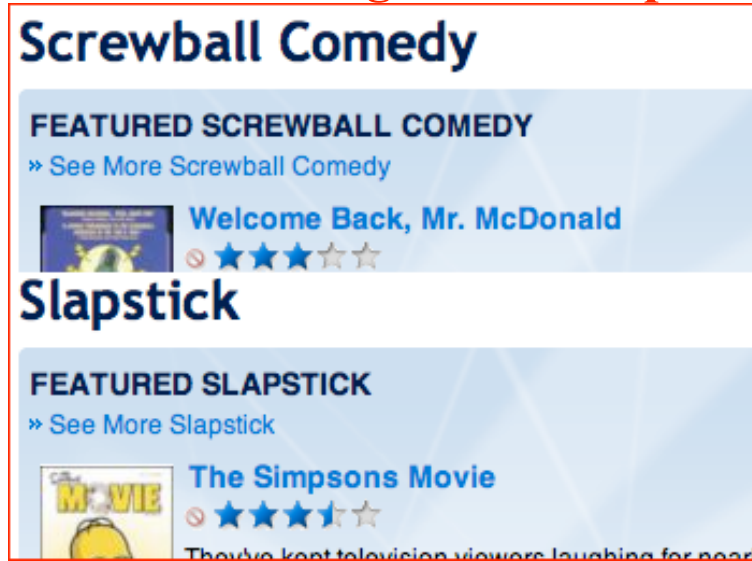
## Issue:

There is an inconsistency between sorting options while browsing. The list style is the only style that allows a user to sort the list by average star rating. The block style has no sorting options.

## Suggestion:

Add all sorting options to all styles. Since the movie information for 'block' style would not line up like it does for the description and list styles, a bar labeled 'sorting options' could be placed above the thumbnails.

## Exhibit 1b: Subgenre descriptions:



### Issue:

Some users may not know the difference between subgenres such as the above example of “Slapstick” versus “Screwball Comedy”.

### Suggestion:

They should add a sentence or two describing each subgenre. There are also no breadcrumbs pointing back to the main genre—Comedy in this case.

## Exhibit 2: Typical movie page layout:

The screenshot shows a movie page for "Without a Paddle (2004)". On the left is a movie poster featuring Seth Green, Matthew Lillard, and Dax Shepard in a canoe. To the right of the poster are several elements: a "Watch Trailer" button, a star rating (4.5 stars), a truncated synopsis, a "Read more" link, a "Starring" list with links to the actors, a "Director" link, a "Rated: PG13" label, and a "Category: Comedy" link. At the bottom left of the poster area is an "IN QUEUE" button. Red arrows with numbers 1, 2, and 3 point to the truncated synopsis, the "IN QUEUE" button, and the actor/director/category links, respectively.

### Issue 1:

Summary text box is cut-off at the bottom of the description. The CSS 'over-flow' property of the "summary" <div> has been set to hidden and this is causing the last line of text to be partially cut off.

### Suggestion:

Add a script that will cut off the description after a certain number of characters and concatenate "...". Another option is to switch the over-flow property from 'hidden' to either 'scroll' or 'auto' in order to add scroll bars to the "summary" <div>.

### Issue 2:

The "In Queue" button could be more effective.

### Suggestion:

Add a "Move to top of my queue" button. Also, it may be helpful to have this "In Queue" button link to the queue page.

### Issue 3:

The links shown above have no hover state.

### Suggestion:

Add 'hover' state such as change in text color.