

## Critiquing the Information Architecture of bedbathandbeyond.com

Bedbathandbeyond.com is the online storefront for the company Bed Bath & Beyond Inc. Using Garrett’s “strategy plane” methodology, we can assume that some of the company’s goals for its website include selling products, attracting new customers, and retaining existing customers. However, when we take a look at the site’s information architecture in light of the typical user’s needs, we can see how the website may cause the company to fall short of its business goals.

### Brand Identity Versus User Perception

One of the main problems with bedbathandbeyond.com’s website is the sheer breadth of products that are offered. Speaking as a frequent customer of the brick-and-mortar store, I think of Bed Bath & Beyond when it comes to things like towels, sheets, curtains, pillows, and bath rugs. I do not relate products such as web cams, thermostats, and toys to the company, and yet, these types of items are for sale on their website. The breadth of products presents a challenge to the information architect, and it clearly shows in the site’s organization. When the company is perceived by users to offer products for the bathroom, bedroom, kitchen, and general home decor, users can quickly become confused by the multitude of seemingly unrelated products available on the website.

### Organization and Labeling system

As you can see from Figure 1, the company has organized its website into categories related to home and lifestyle goods. Some of these terms are concrete and descriptive, such as “Storage & Cleaning.” Others are more nebulous, including “Baby & Kids” and “Seasonal.”



Figure 1 Organization and Labeling System

There are a number of issues with this categorization system: Would I look for serving platters in the “Dining” category or the “Kitchen” category? Would I look for a wreath for my front door in “Seasonal” or “Home Decor”? And just what exactly does the label “More” mean?

When we hover over “More,” we can see that it includes everything from luggage to watches to pet care (Figure 2). In other words, all of the products that the company could not easily group into other categories are grouped into this generic “More” category. This presents a number of problems for users. For example, why is there a category called “Food & Drink” under “More”? Why do these types of products not fit

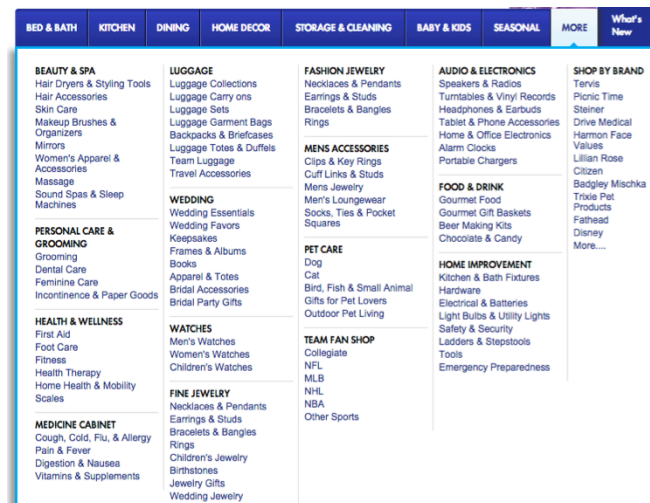


Figure 2 The “More” Category

under “Kitchen” or “Dining”? Under “Wedding,” we can see “Frames & Albums.” Why are these not listed under “Home Decor” instead? This approach is akin to sweeping crumbs under a rug, and it makes finding products very difficult for users who do not think the same way the company thinks.

### Search System

The good news is that bedbathandbeyond.com’s search system is robust. The bad news is that it is overwhelming. When I searched for “bath towel,” the site displayed 1,403 results in seven categories, including the inexplicable “More” category (Figure 3). There are even videos, guides, and “Other Results” to look through. As a user, I wonder how useful a video about towels can possibly be. I also wonder what in the world can possibly be in “Other Results” that is not already listed in one of the seven categories on the left side of the page. To find out would require me to waste time clicking on links with unclear terminology, when all I was searching for was a simple bath towel. Finally, I wonder why there are categories listed other than “Bed & Bath.” My search specified “bath,” so the fact that the results include kitchen towels does not make sense.

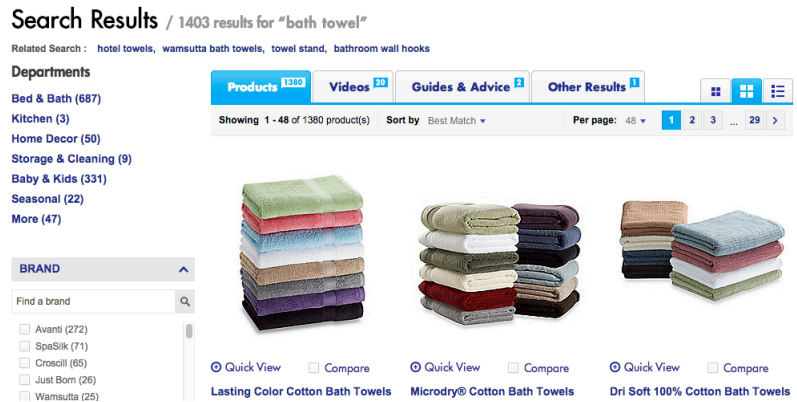


Figure 3 Searching for “bath towel”

### Knowing Your User

In the middle of bedbathandbeyond.com’s home page, the company features a section called “Just For You” (Figure 4). This area is confusing because it clearly demonstrates that the company knows nothing about me as a user. I searched for “bath towel,” and yet when I returned to the home page, the “Just For You” section includes Keurig coffee pods, a Crock Pot, and a food storage set — none of which is related to bath towels. By including this section in a prominent location on the home page, the company clearly demonstrates that their knowledge of the user is lacking.

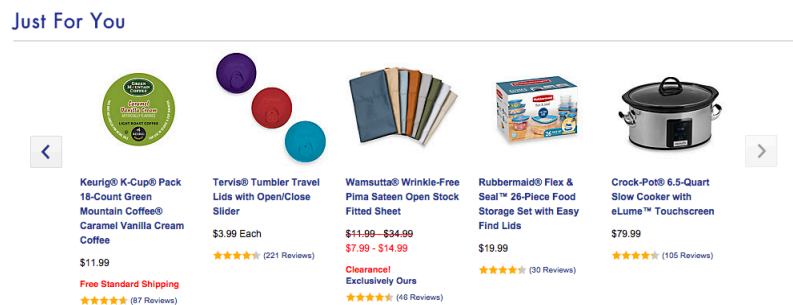


Figure 4 “Just For You” Section

### Conclusion

The breadth of available products, when combined with a poor organization system and a lack of fundamental knowledge about users, creates a poor information architecture that could lead to unrealized business goals.