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Competitor Analysis

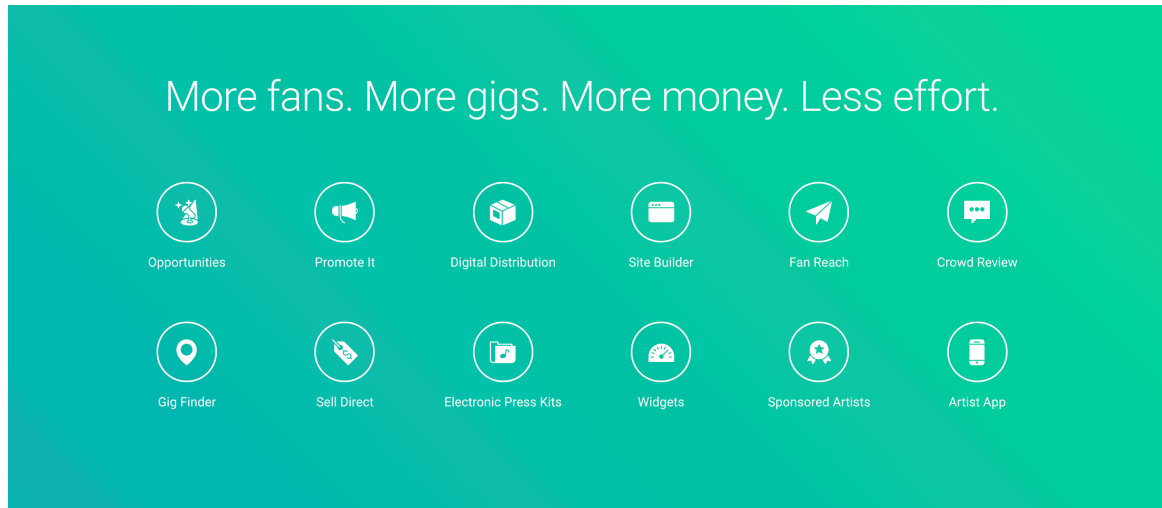
ReverbNation

Launched in 2006, ReverbNation is an independent music-focused website that “aims to provide a central site for musicians, producers, and venues to collaborate and communicate” (Wikipedia, 2020). I logged into ReverbNation with a free account for musicians and its navigation bar shows me the following features: Dashboard, Profile, Content, Tools, Promote and Opportunities. Clearly, there are a lot of features that ReverbNation offers and on first impression I find it a little overwhelming. Focusing on the functions for a musician user, the profile page has three key features: Upload a Song, Add a Profile Picture and Sync Social Networks. From this we can tell that ReverbNation addresses directly, the key User Needs of an up-and-coming musician- showcase music, have a musician profile and networking in the industry. Below these features, there is a dashboard-style page where you can upload music, add upcoming shows and add media such as photos and videos. There is a gig finder function under the Tools in nav-bar which you can look for venues in different cities and message them directly through ReverbNation. This addresses the needs that musicians have to escape their own locality. While ReverbNation seems to want to meet as many needs of a musician and venue as possible, I feel that on first review, there are too many functions, and personas that it tries to reach out to, finally seeming disparate in its focus. I also found it frustrating that it was difficult to browse profiles as it was hidden on the homepage that was a star (ReverbNation logo) on the nav-bar that I did not realise was the homepage button. Perhaps, this web-app would be more successful if it condenses its features more on the key target users, making it simpler to use.

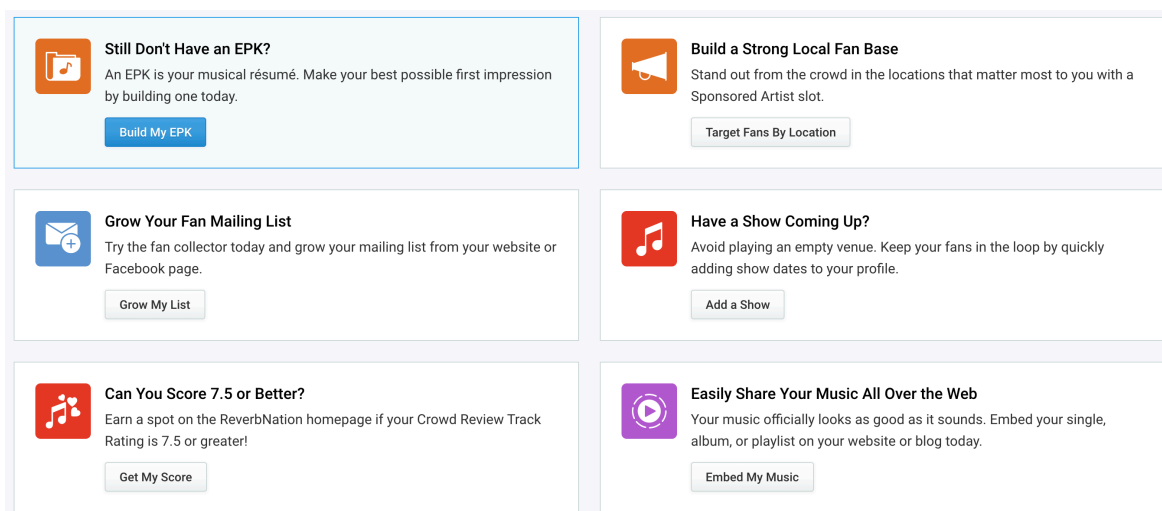
The design on this web-app is generally quite plain, using a grey background and white sections, which is low in contrast. It also uses a lot of scrolling down through a page, with many icons that makes it hard to focus and read. The homepage uses large divisions or sections with block colours and cover images. As mentioned earlier about scrolling down long pages, the website seems to have an F-reading pattern. ReverbNation relies heavily on icons for its buttons for users to navigate. While icons are often useful and directive, in this website it tends to lose its meaning due to the large volume of features that the site offers, therefore having too many icons, some which look similar, especially ones that use music notes. ReverbNation appears to quite uniformly use basic fonts such as Helvetica, even for its headers. Perhaps a bolder header font or a fancier font could break up the reading monotony and also increase brand identity. I don't see many but there is some use of simple animation such text-crawlers.

Tech-wise, ReverbNation operates as an interactive web-app and also has a native mobile-app version. On a browser, the site is very responsive for both mobile phone and tablet. As a music platform, the site is light to load and the embedded music player functions well and without lag. Much like Soundcloud, the music tracks also have a waveform which is a good-looking feature. ReverbNation primarily uses server-side javascript which I tested by refreshing the page after disabling JS on my browser. Using a free Chrome extension, I can see that ReverbNation uses a mix of Javascript Frameworks

including: Modernizr, Prototype and JQuery which are supported by Ruby on Rails. Using ChromeDev Lighthouse, ReverbNation scores average on performance, showing that it is heavy to load and suggesting to remove unused JavaScript. It however scores well on SEO suggesting a good integration of other social media platforms that meets the needs of musicians to have their digital press kit easily accessible.



The many features that ReverbNation offers. (<https://www.reverbnation.com/>)



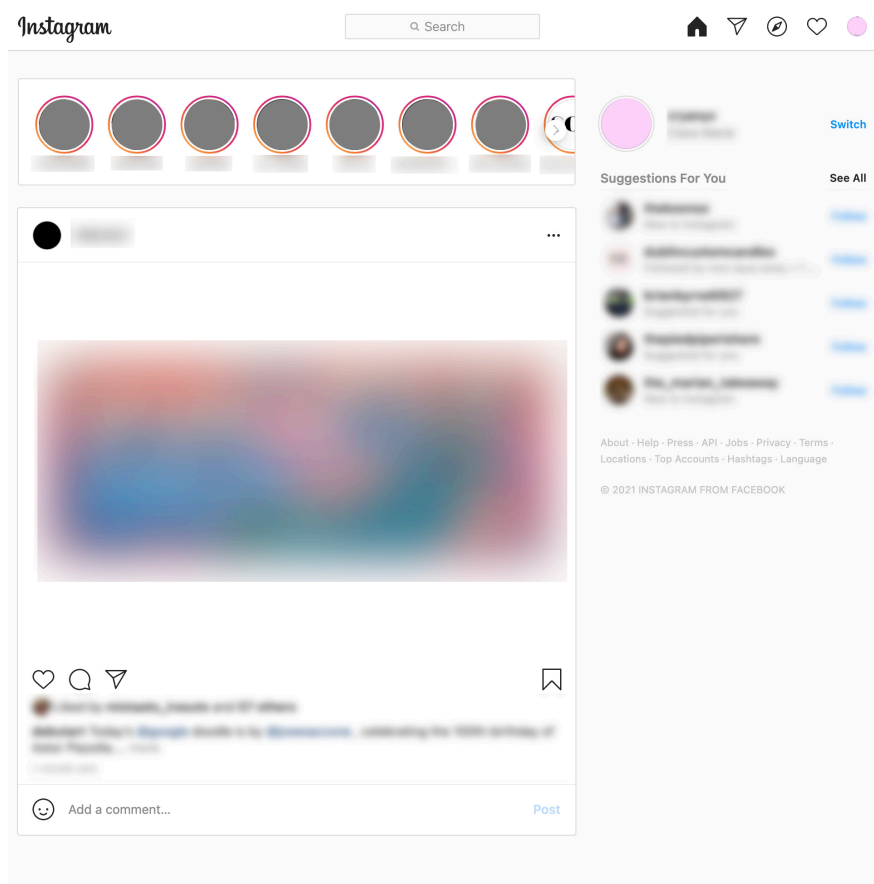
There are 3 icons here that have music notes. (<https://www.reverbnation.com/>)

Instagram

Instagram in my opinion is a plainly, highly effective social media (SM) platform focusing on art and design, photos and video. Firstly, the content of instagram remains focused on images and images only. While users have to log in and each have a profile page, unlike Facebook and twitter, you cannot make posts without an image, keeping the content focused on pictures. The 5 key features of Instagram are as follow: Home (your feed), Messages, Discover, Notifications and Profile. A bonus feature of instagram is its Stories. I feel that this type of architectural simplicity can be applied to my music app. I find the Discover feature useful and apt for an application marketed for creatives. On the Discover page, public profiles are recommended to you on a feed based on your previous

posts and hashtags therefore anticipating the User's interests and preferences. This is a great way for discovering and following artists or profiles with similar interests and content. I feel that the music app could also integrate a feature similar to Instagram Stories where users can browse new content of profiles you follow in reels and tap or swipe to the next reel. The last feature that I feel is essential for my user and business needs on my proposed web-app is messaging. On Instagram it is private and unfussy albeit a little too casual. The messaging function on my proposed app can perhaps resemble emails more.

Design and layout of Instagram is simple with white and grey backgrounds which act as a good backdrop for imagery. Instagram adopts a tile layout where pictures are featured in medium-sized square tiles that you can click on to read and comment. A lot of simplicity in design is due to its dependence on visual content uploaded by the users. Instagram uses icons that are minimal line graphics which I find modern and effective. Interactions on Instagram are graphically simplified to a heart-like button, speech bubble for comments and a paper plane graphic for comments. As Instagram is most often used on phones, the app applies a compression to the images that you upload and re-size it to an appropriate viewing size for mobile phone and tablets. For a music-based app I think that it is important to consider having similar compressions to uploads for easy streaming.



The clean, minimal layout & design of Instagram
([instagram.com](https://www.instagram.com))

Instagram can be viewed on your browser or installed on your device as a native mobile app. Instagram uses server-side technology and is one of the prominent apps that

use Django, a Python-based, free and open-sourced web framework. While Instagram can be slow to load and heavy on data consumption, it is due to its high media content and is probably optimised as best as it can be. Instagram depends highly on scrolling, and pictures load as you scroll down.

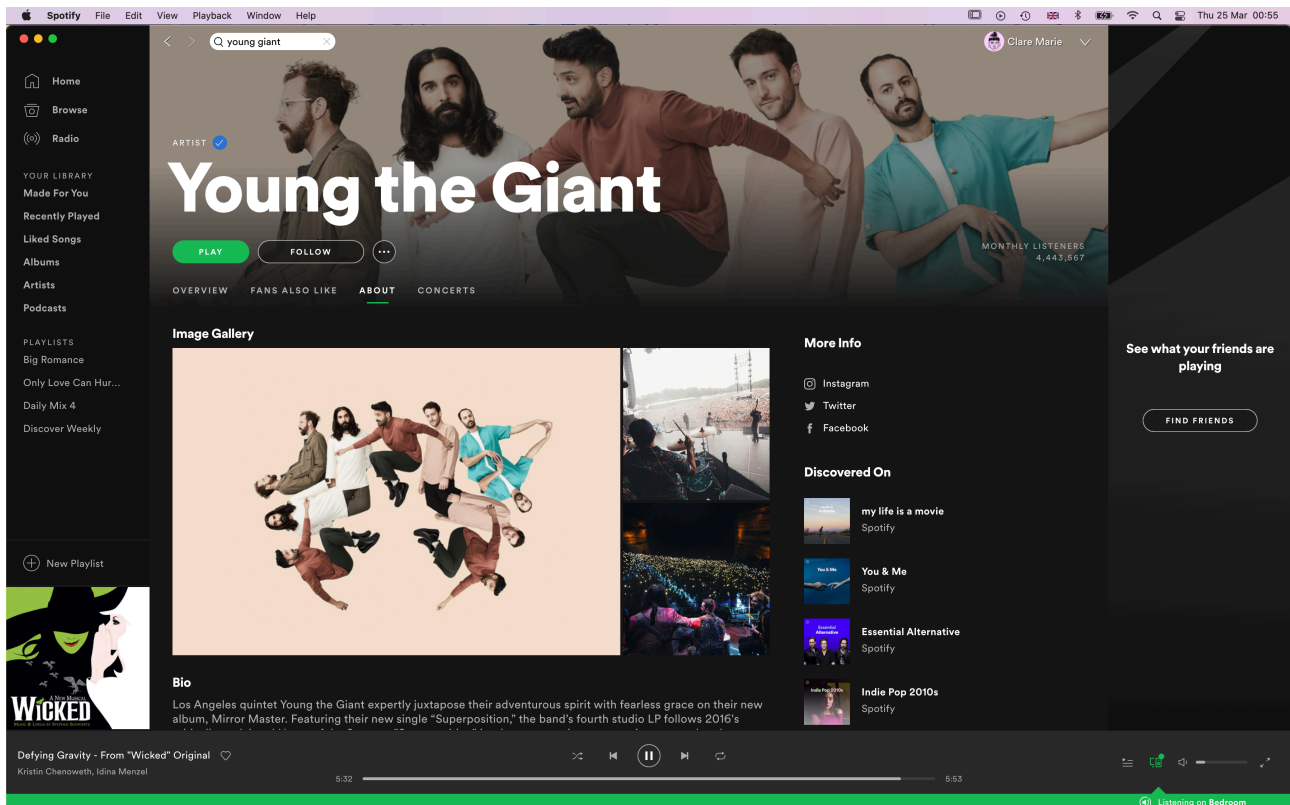
Spotify

Lastly, I would like to analyse the most popular music streaming app, Spotify. Spotify functions as a comprehensive library of music that the user pays subscription for, to listen to at high quality streaming. For the music lover, Spotify has novel features such as automatically organising the tracks that you have listened to, into playlists such as “Your Summer Rewind” and “Time Capsule”, categorised in your library as “Made For You” visible on the side navigation bar. Having playlists generated based on the user’s listening habits adheres to Nielson’s 10 Heuristics, number 6 (recognition rather than recall) and 7 (flexibility and efficiency of use), firstly “minimising the user’s memory load by making elements, actions and options visible”, and secondly “providing personalisation by tailoring content and functionality for individual users.” (Nielson Norman Group, 2020) A common user persona that my product would share with Spotify is the musician. If you are a signed artist or you have a distributor at any level, you can be verified by Spotify to have access to uploading your own tracks on a platform to the largest music audience. An artist page has four main sections - Overview, Fans Also Like, About and Concerts. I am interested in the presentation of information on About and Concerts, where About has the artist’s biography, social media links, and Concerts show the Artist’s calendar of gigs and upcoming events. This is essentially an artist’s press kit, organised and presented to its fans. Access to an artist’s electronic press kit is a core feature and user need of my web-app. Listeners can also follow an artist and add tracks to personalised playlists, keeping in tune with new releases and upcoming concerts.

I am most interested in the design and layout of Spotify as I find it directive, clean and effective for a media playing app. I firstly, appreciate the dark-mode it adopts, opting light text on black and greys background, accented by the Spotify brand green. As a music player, this is appropriate as your device can be playing from the app in the background without illuminating too much light. On an artist’s page, there is a faded “cover image” (landscape orientation) with the artist’s name in large bold text. It can be noted here that Spotify is designed and developed at high production cost as it has its own font - Spotify Circular. Spotify uses tiles to present track singles and albums and adopts an editorial style of layout, utilising sections and columns for its image gallery, biography text, navigation bars etc. Music lists are presented in an effective consumable way sectioned with the most popular tracks on top followed by albums, with a heart icon on the left of each track for the user to easily “favourite” a track. Like Spotify, I like the monochromatic, minimal wireframe graphic icons Spotify uses, achieving clarity on its controls. The player and controls also ‘stick’ at the bottom of the screen utilising position: fixed.

Spotify has a web player and also has a mobile and desktop app that you can download and install. It is fully responsive on mobile devices but I personally feel that it is best experienced on your desktop app as lengthier information (such as biography) is collapsed and can be easily missed or overlooked while scrolling on a phone screen. As the aforementioned sections of an artist page is instead a downward stack on the mobile app, it can be difficult to find information about an artist. For an app with such a large library of media that is constantly being streamed, I am not surprised that Spotify

primarily uses server-side technology for sturdy back-end support. Like Instagram, Spotify utilises Python for its back-end services and crucially, data analysis which,



Spotify Artist Page Interface. (Spotify desktop app <https://www.spotify.com/ie>)

coupled with propriety algorithms, sort and prioritise content for a superior user experience. Regarding Spotify's use of complex technologies and AI tools to increase user experience multiple personas, Iglehart encapsulates:

“This type of recommendation engine creates value for artists who get more exposure to new users and makes customers stickier through increased satisfaction with the service. The recommendation will only become smarter over time as more and more data is fed into the ecosystem.” (Iglehart, 2020)

Bibliography

Nielson Norman Group, 2020. *10 Usability Heuristics for User Interface Design* [online]. Available from <https://www.nngroup.com/articles/ten-usability-heuristics/> [25 March 2021]

Iglehart, A (2020) *How Well Does Spotify Know You?* Available at: <https://digital.hbs.edu/platform-digit/submission/how-well-does-spotify-know-you/#> [25 March 2021]