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# Does your **website** need a **home** **button?**

A research study into UX design  
practices for websites



## Summary

**Easy navigation of a website can improve conversion rates and create a positive experience for users. After a logo, the main navigation menu is the second most viewed element on a website.**

These factors make deciding which links feature on a main navigation menu, a hotly contested debate both in businesses and the UX Design field.

One such debate is whether websites need to have a home link in their main menu. Removal of this link increases space on the main navigation to give priority to more valued links and pages.

Our research highlights that 95% of users

know that clicking on a logo will return them to the homepage of a website.

But does this figure mean it is ok to remove the home link on a main menu? Not necessarily.

Because whilst 95% of users know clicking on a logo will return them to the homepage of a website, only 58% actually use the logo to complete this action.

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## Why is this?

We decided to find out.

### What is the purpose of a homepage?

**To begin, let's define what a homepage is.**

A website homepage could be thought of as the primary hub, a means to find other content on a website. Traditionally it was the page in which you welcomed visitors onto your website.

This is not necessarily true anymore.

Previously, a homepage would have been the first page a website visitor would land on. But, as a result of modern search engines, this does not always happen. Instead, visitors are increasingly likely to find themselves entering via an alternative

page that is more relevant to their initial search enquiry.

As a result, the purpose of a homepage has evolved. No longer can it be seen as just a welcome or entry point to a website.

Modern homepages now act more as an orientation tool. In other words, a homepage is used to understand the best route to take to get to a specific piece of information, rather than purely as the first port of call.

### Why we did this research

**User Experience (UX) design is implemented on every website produced at Epix Media. This means for every website we create, the way users interact and engage is considered deeply, so we can offer them a pleasant and positive experience. This in turn increases conversions.**

In many cases, the UX considerations taken into account, debated and utilised, are based on research, studies and findings.

For example, when it comes to navigation tools, we follow the principles set forth by the Nielsen Norman Group. For homepage links, these principles state:

- Logos need to be clickable and return a user to the homepage
- If 'home' is featured on the main menu, it must be positioned first
- If 'home' is not featured on the main menu, it must be featured on a breadcrumb
- When a breadcrumb is used, it must not be visible on the homepage
- A breadcrumb should not feature a link to the homepage if 'home' features in the main menu

*Note: A breadcrumb is a design and navigation feature used on inner pages of a website. Typically located above the main content but below the main menu. It lays out the backwards path of the page heirarchy to help orientate the user.*

At Epix Media, many of our websites utilise breadcrumbs. This is because they help users understand where they are on the website, but it also provides a means to get back to previous section.

As a consequence of this, we typically do not have 'home' in the main menu.

An additional reason for not featuring 'home' in the main menu is that it reduces the number of items in that menu. Based

on Miller's Law (read more about that here), we want to keep the maximum number of items on a main menu to 7 links. Being able to remove the 'home' link therefore opens up the possibility to include a more valuable page in the main menu.

### The debate

**Despite the principles set forth by the Nielsen Norman Group, there is a debate within the UX community about whether main navigation menus need to contain a home link regardless.**

The main argument behind this is that, whilst most users are aware that the logo acts as a link to the homepage, there is a minority that do not know this.

This is a fair argument. It may be the case that not every web user is aware that a logo acts as a homepage link, and with UX philosophy in mind – the intention to improve the user experience on a website – you could say that this is enough of an argument to make sure it is included in the main menu.

However, this argument also overinflates the importance of a home page.

As mentioned previously, the homepage has evolved. No longer is it the vital landing page it once was in the early web. Instead, it serves as an orientation and navigation tool.

And metrics back this up. Homepages regularly get a low average ‘time on page’ compared to a website’s total average ‘time on site’. In some cases, this can be as low as 30%.

This then begs the question, why should valuable space be taken up to include the word ‘home’ on the main menu if;

- The majority of users who know the logo links to the homepage outweighs those that don’t, and;
- The homepage’s value and importance to the user is low

This piece of research therefore aims to understand how important including a homepage link in the main menu navigation is, and allows us to ask ourselves - are we missing a trick by not including it as standard?

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### **Our hypothesis**

**We approached this piece of research with the hypothesis that a homepage link on a main navigation is not a valuable design feature for users, providing there are alternative means to reach that page.**

## Methodology

**To discover the value of a homepage link when on the main navigation, event tracking was added to three sites and monitored over the first quarter of 2021.**

Each website was chosen because they feature a mixture of a logo, a home link in the navigation or in a breadcrumb.

The method of event tracking was chosen over other methods such as

user interviews as it was deemed to get the most amount of data on real user behaviour with no influencing biases.

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### Event tracking

**To get the data needed, we employed event tracking using Google Tag Manager. Tracking codes were attached to the homepage link (be it in the main menu or a breadcrumb) and the logo. Each tracked click would then be recorded within Google Analytics.**

This method also allows for further breakdown of data such as device type being used.

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### Websites chosen

**Three websites were tracked. They were decided upon for their high visitor counts and for the fact that a large percentage of users land on the website on pages that are not the homepage.**

This was an important factor because if most users originally visit the site through the homepage, they may be less inclined to visit the homepage a second time. As a result, it would not be possible to gather the data needed.

Each website was from a different sector. They were:

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**Layout A:** Legal sector

**Layout B:** Ecommerce

**Layout C:** Training

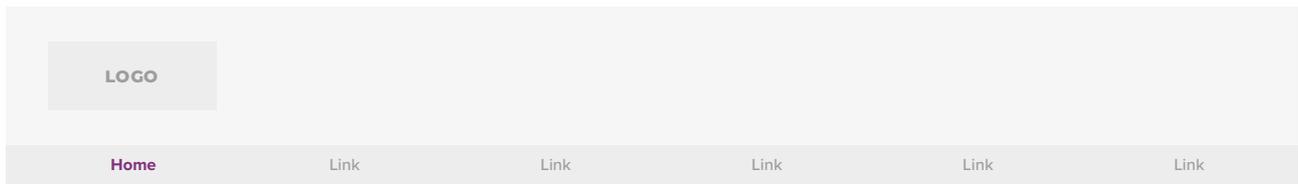
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## White-label mock-ups of the navigation structure

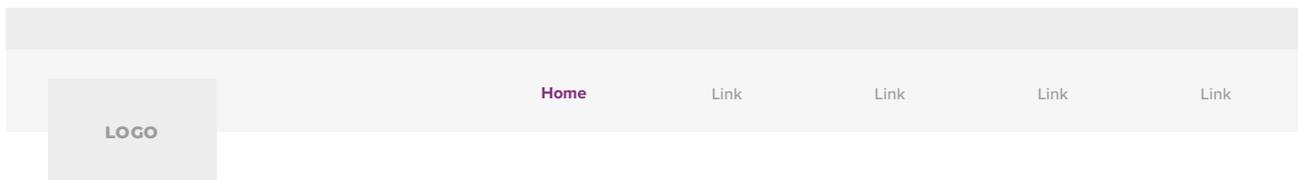
Whilst each website that was monitored features a home link (either in the main menu or a breadcrumb) and a logo link, the layout of each varied across them.

Below shows white-label mock-ups of how each site's navigation structure varied.

### Layout A



### Layout B



### Layout C



## Overall figures across all devices

Across all devices, there was not much difference between whether a logo was clicked over a home link, regardless of whether this was within the main navigation or breadcrumb:

Type of link	Total Actions	Percentage (%)
Logo Clicks	838	58
Menu/Breadcrumb Clicks	606	42

Whilst logo clicks do get a higher number of clicks, the difference is only 16 percent. Not an overwhelming amount.

## Breakdown between devices

Despite this, the difference is more noticeable across different devices.

Device	Logo (%)	Menu/breadcrumb (%)
Desktop	62	38
Mobile	53	47
Tablet	43	57

Here, the preferred type of navigation method to return to the homepage differs based on device.

On desktop, the logo gets 24 percent more interaction than the navigation links. Meanwhile, on mobile & tablet devices, this is split is more evenly.

## Breakdown across navigation structure (i.e. how different structures impacted results)

Another factor to consider is whether the layout of the navigation structure impacts which link element was engaged with.

Device	Logo (%)	Menu/breadcrumb (%)	Layout A
Desktop	95	5	
Mobile	95	5	
Tablet	92	8	

Device	Logo (%)	Menu/breadcrumb (%)	Layout B
Desktop	16	84	
Mobile	20	80	
Tablet	40	60	

Device	Logo (%)	Menu/breadcrumb (%)	Layout C
Desktop	66	34	
Mobile	48	52	
Tablet	24	76	

Here we see a massive difference on preferred engagement method depending on the layout.

Layout A, for instance, has far more logo engagement than homepage menu link engagement compared to Layout B in which the homepage menu link is preferred.

One reason for this could be that the menu link for the homepage on layout A sits below the logo, so they are in very close proximity. Whereas Layout B has the link in a different location.

Meanwhile, whilst Layout C shows a strong preference for logo engagement on desktop devices, this dramatically reduces for mobile devices.

**We expected this research to show that logo clicks would be the preferred way for users to navigate to the homepage over using a 'home' link in the main menu, and that breadcrumb links are rarely utilised as a navigation method.**

Whilst the evidence shows there is this preference to click on the logo, it is not as strong as we had anticipated.

Instead, what we saw was that the design of the navigation structure impacted the choices a user made more.

This can be evidenced strongly in the case of Layout A. Here, 95% of engagements back to the homepage occurred through clicking onto the logo.

A rate of 95% is a clear indicator that users are aware that a logo click will navigate them to the homepage.

So, why do the majority of users on Layout B use the navigation link?

For ease. The 'home' menu link is far more visible and clear for a user to interact with on Layout B.

Layout C, on the other hand, features the navigation link in a breadcrumb rather than the main menu. Here we see an interesting split. The majority of users on desktop devices are happy to use the logo as their navigation tool. Yet this changes for mobile devices. Why? Because the breadcrumb becomes an easier way to navigate rather than reaching for the logo.

Similarly on desktop, in Layout A, the logo is the easiest navigation method to the homepage, despite 'home' featuring in the main menu. This is because the 'home' menu item is featured very close to the logo, just below it. Engaging with the logo is therefore a bigger target in the same location, therefore making it the easiest selection.

### **Should navigation bars include a home label?**

**During the course of this research, the meaning of this question changed. Originally our intended aim was to prove that having ‘home’ in the main menu was not required.**

The research does show that it is not always necessary, as users will navigate a website comfortably without ‘home’ being featured in the main menu.

However, that is not to say it is not needed at all.

Home links, whether on the main menu or in a breadcrumb, can be beneficial for mobile devices and in scenarios where a logo is not in a standard position (i.e. when it does not feature in the top left-hand corner).

Our results ultimately support the home navigation principles put forth by Nielsen Norman Group mentioned earlier. Adding a home link to the main navigation is not a priority.

But it is important to offer users two options for navigating to the homepage, be that via a logo and home link in the main menu, or a logo and home link in the breadcrumb. Through this, users will be able to navigate based on what they find easiest for them.

The decision on whether to use a home label needs to come down to: “what is the easiest navigation method for the user?”. And, at the end of the day, considering ease for the user should be the predominant focus in UX design.