

# Individual Assignment #1: UI Critique



## Good Interface #1: Windows Live SkyDrive

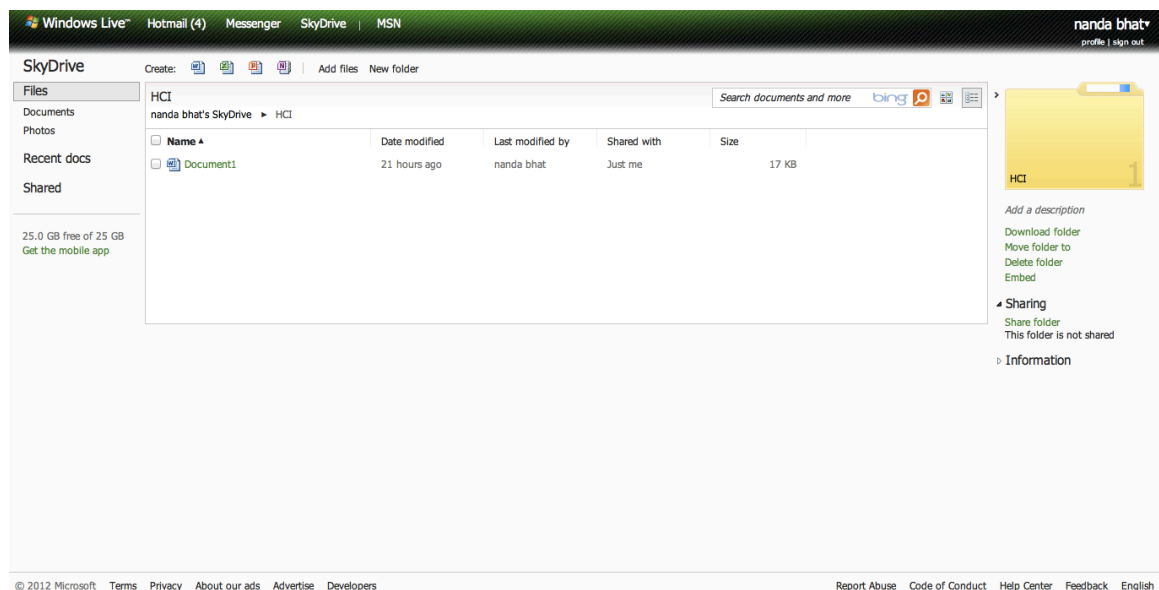


Fig 1: Home screen

SkyDrive is a web application that supports cloud storage of data for Windows Live users. The main purpose behind this is to have one common portal, to access all the data, be it documents, photos, videos and other compressed folders. To satisfy this purpose and to be in consistent with the idea, that it resembles a typical personal workstation, SkyDrive follows the metaphor of Desktop.

Following a Desktop metaphor for cloud data storage has its advantages. Some of them are,

- By following a typical, everyday workstation interface, the potential users who are comfortably very high than coming with entirely new interface.

- Users are more likely to invest time on using the application, than spending time learning the interface of the application and then deciding, whether it is suitable for them or not.
- By making the users feel more at “home” when using the application, it creates a routine like experience, which leads them to think of this as necessary application, like the notepad.., rather than an extension of their daily routine, like using photo-editor application.
- From the above screenshot, we can see that it is seamlessly integrated with their mail server, i.e. Hotmail, It gives a complete control over all your data on the internet.

### Good Features:

#### 1. Main screen

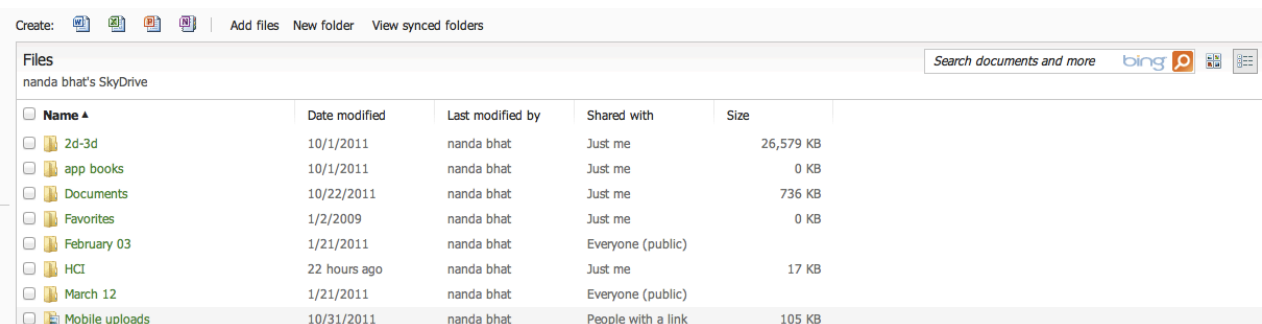


Fig 2: Folder-layout

Above is screenshot of the general layout of SkyDrive.

- On the top, there are series of icons after the text “Create:”. These icons have explicit notations on them, like the letters ‘W’ for Word Document, ‘P’ for PowerPoint and so on.
- These are consistent with their desktop application, and we can see the same notations and icons whilst creating similar documents.
- This entire procedural consistency over multiple platforms, make the intended functionalities very obvious, thus eliminating the use of instructions and side notes.
- Along with this, other functionalities like “Add files”, “New folder” are also present after the “create: “ text making it seemingly obvious about its purpose.

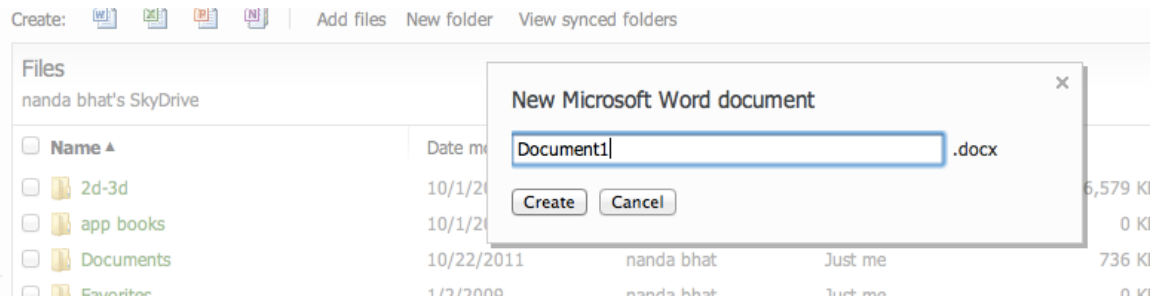


Fig 3: Feedback for create: on Word.

Moreover clicking on any of these icons creates a pop-up dialog box over the existing screen (which now is inactive) with necessary information to fulfill the given task. This feedback makes it more agile, than say if it were to go to a new page or window.

- By limiting the user interaction with the system, it avoids the possibility of making errors like creating two documents with same name in two different pages or windows.
- From the Fig 2: we also notice the arrangement of files and folders resembles the typical Windows OS workstations where in the search bar is intriguingly replaced with Microsoft's own search engine, i.e. Bing.
- From the Fig:1 Main Screen, We also other statistical options like the Disk space on the left hand side and a link to a mobile application. This may not say much to layman, making these features readily available along with “view synced folders” on the top, tells a new user subliminally that he can use the cloud storage system anywhere and anytime and in any device.

## 2. Document screen

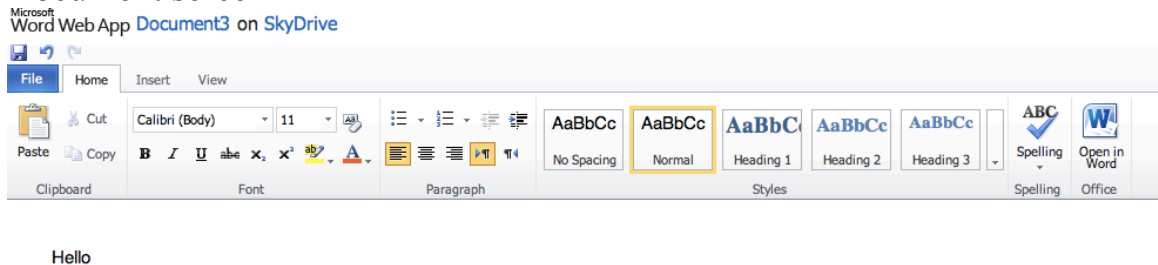


Fig 4: Word Document

Above is the screenshot for a Word Document.

- Extending the above discussion, we see again a familiar layout to the already existing interface of the Word application for the desktop.
- Apart from the obvious features which remain the same along with their intended functionalities, we also a new “button” with the name “Open in Word”. Giving the user to extend the flexibility to edit their documents using their own desktop Word application and then having an option of Synchronizing that with SkyDrive.

Conclusion:

The combination of all these clever interface modules, integrated together with their mail server, makes it less of a standalone application that user has a luxury to use, than makes it more of an essential extension to their already existing mail server.



## Good Interface #2: iWeb

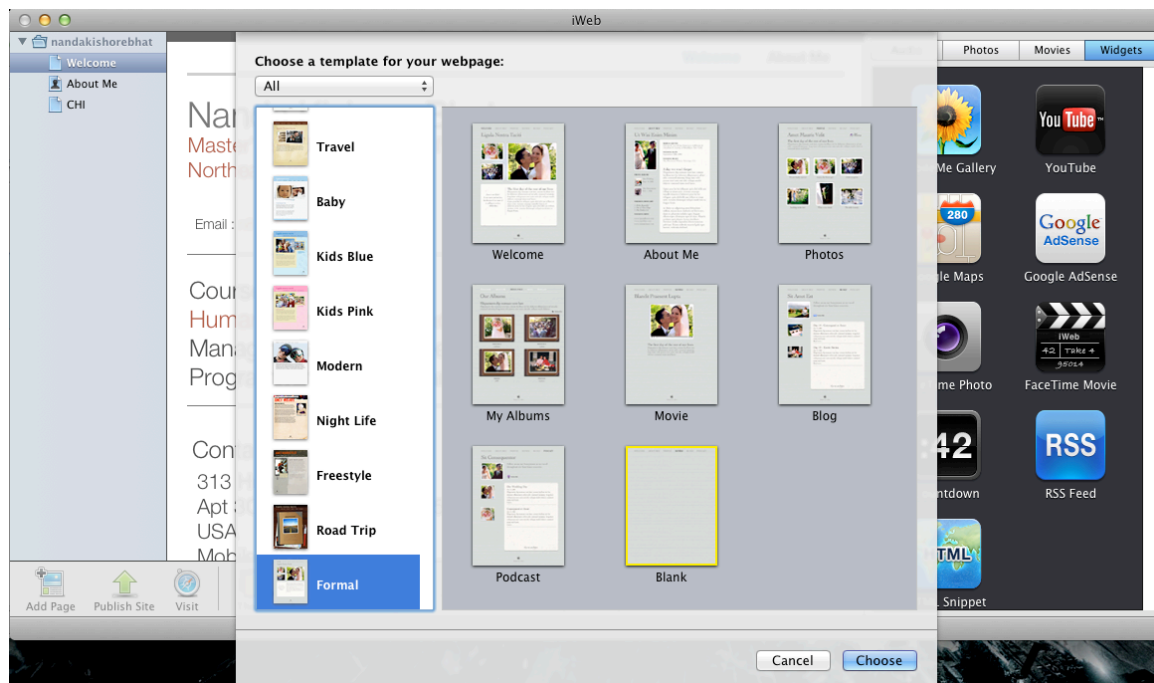


Fig 5: iWeb Home Screen-1

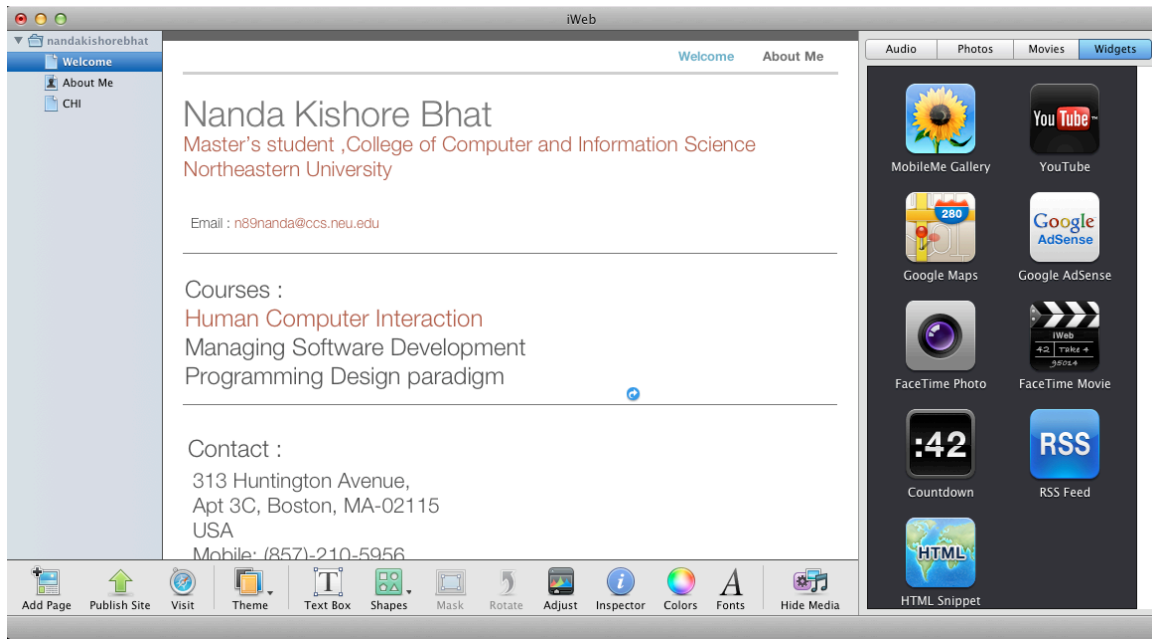


Fig 6: iWeb Home Screen-2

iWeb is another application of Apple Corporation packaged as an iLife product. It is an Website creating, Editing and publishing tool.

Unlike any other web site building tool like MS Visual Studio and Adobe Dreamweaver, this application is completely different apart from the end result.

I came across this only, when asked to build a simple web page for this course. Initially hesitant to choose this over the above mentioned alternatives, later found out the it is the best software for its intended purpose.

The main purpose of this application is to build web-sites as quickly as possible with as many latest features as possible and for the least experienced user, possible.

#### Good Features:

1. From Fig5: Main Screen-1, the user, immediately after opening the application, is “forced” to choose an template for his project.
2. With the various options available (notice that there are very limited options) on the left side, and clicking on any would show the associated pages on the right side along with “predefined” names for these.

3. Also we can notice that if the user does not “choose” any of this and hits “cancel” the entire application closes. This makes the entire purpose very apparent, that it is only targeted to specific type of users.
4. All the names associated with templates are consistent over the list, so now user can only “focus” on the design format of it.
5. From Fig: 6, we again get a clue, how different this application is, from its rivals. Once the template is chosen, they are again listed on the left side of the window in a “directory-list” fashion. With the web-page again following the previous interface on the center and editing options on the right.
6. To add new features, the application presents the familiar icons used in their OS’s, like mac OS and iOS.
- 7.

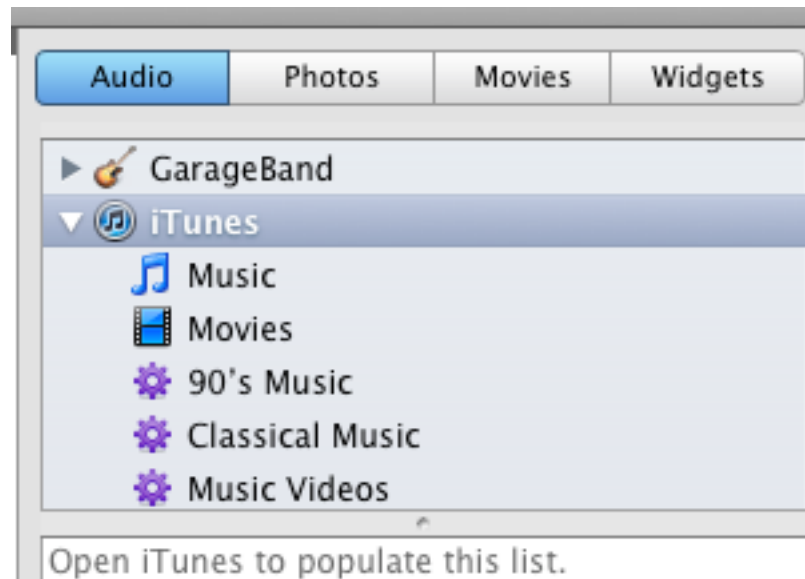


Fig 7: Audio feature

Again from the above screenshot, the iWeb audio embedding is seamlessly integrated with their iTunes, again maintain the same interface design as the iTunes to embed the music.

8.



Fig 8: Photo feature

We again notice that, the same interface has been used from their iPhoto application, thus maintaining the obvious intend behind the module and avoiding the need of explaining the use.

9.

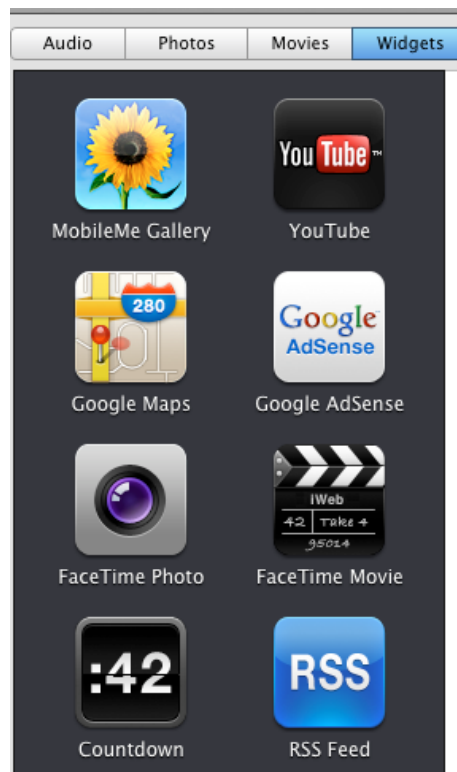


Fig 9: Widget feature

Using the already existing logo on the icons makes it possible for the users to realize the functionalities behind those icons.

10. The publish button, down below beside the add-page button, both of these makes user finish the project at same time save and publish on the server.

### Conclusion:

The entire purpose was to build a website without having much to think about, and this application completely sticks to it. By using the familiar icons and by staying consistent with these, over all of their applications and other platforms, the application manages to do, supposedly a big task, wrap it in matter of few minutes. Restricting users to do any other operations than intended prevents all sorts of errors.

Bad Interface #1: [www.msn.com](http://www.msn.com) 



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Fig 10: MSN home page



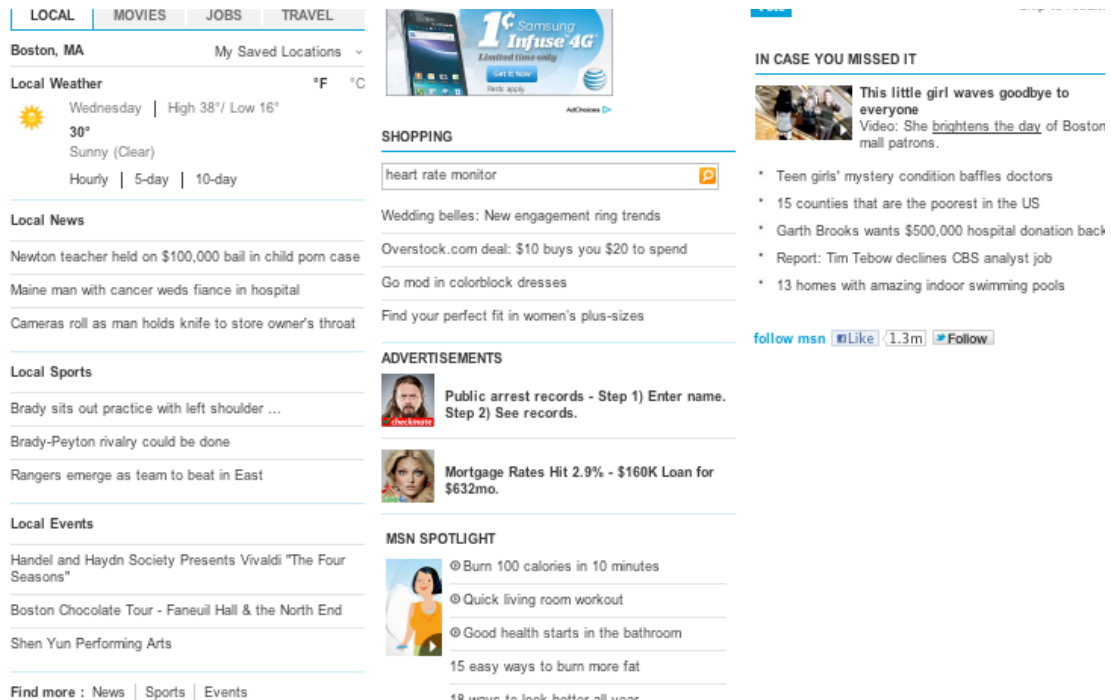


Fig 11: MSN home page

MSN stands for Microsoft Network, is the home page designed web site. The goal and purpose of this web site is very clear and apparent. It is to put all the information a user could possibly need in one center portal.

#### Bad Aspects:

Some of the bad aspects of this particular interface, in my opinion are listed below.

- The type or the category this web site belongs to is called as a “portal”. It is only natural that this page will contain lots of hyper-links to other pages or sites. But a novel user would be overwhelmed by the options he has been given in the form of various links, as these are arranged in a “listed-format” with no clear sub-divisions and pictures depicting their intend.
- Other portal web sites like Yahoo, have clear sub-divisions and are formatted in the form of picture hyper-links, so a user does not have to spend time reading about the links, rather quickly scan through these and select the link(s) in need.
- I presume, that MSN, has chosen this design to make an user spend more time in this page than the pages he intends and wishes to visit. In terms of market visitors, who spends time more than any other portal, It can be understood why this type of interface could satisfy the purpose.

- It is also very apparent that the weather application, which shows the weather forecast for the week, is cleverly put in the beginning of the second page.
- An user, if he chooses this page as his home-page, has more often than not must always scroll down, revealing the entire web-page, if he wants to access the application.
- Again the reason behind this is very apparent, to make user glance at all that is available to him.

#### Suggestions:

- The network of all possible links can be arranged in multiple pages or clearly distinct sections.
- A user mustn't have to go through an entire page just access some basic application like weather forecast.
- Picture hyper-links, I feel is the best way to describe the content or the information laying over a hyper-link.
- A user must not be overwhelmed by all the links, instead he must be able to successfully browse through all the options in a short period of time, else the pages has to sub-divided.

#### Bad Interface #2: SCG (Scientific Community Game)

This is a web-based application for generating optimal solutions for a “claim” proposed in a mathematical domain. It is important to know that the students, including me, designed part of the interface and the application under Prof Karl Lieberherr for the course MSD CS 5500. It is now being used by the Undergraduate for the course Algorithm CS 4800.



Fig 12 Admin Control Panel

- From the above figure, this is where the administrator sets up the application for running the “game”. Under the heading “Add a tournament”, the sections name and run-time does not describe its entire purpose. It is also the starting page of the application. Moreover the runtime text field, it is not clear whether it accepts number or characters.
- Again this field does not mention the unit system it uses for the time.
- I know for a fact, that “Playground config” is a java file, that the administrator has to pull from his home directory, but when this is presented to a fresh user, he would have no clue what this means.
- Moreover, this section only accepts java code and nothing else. If there exists any other element, the “game” would not execute, Yet there is no mention of it.

Fig 13: result page

- If undergraduates use this application, who I should say did not participate in designing the application, they would be overwhelmed by this page.
- This page shows how they have performed and this is a snapshot of 1<sup>st</sup> page, and usually they extend up to 10 pages. The page from a distance would just be a random generation of characters.
- This page could have specific sub-section or could have been designed in a tabular form or in the form of links, so a user can choose to view it.

#### Conclusion:

The reason it has been designed this way is because a lot of time was spent in designing the back-end of this web application. Moreover, the goal of the course absolutely was not focused on the interface, So it made very much sense to make the interface “workable” and more time could be spent on learning the “game-mechanics”.