

# IKEA Heuristic Evaluation

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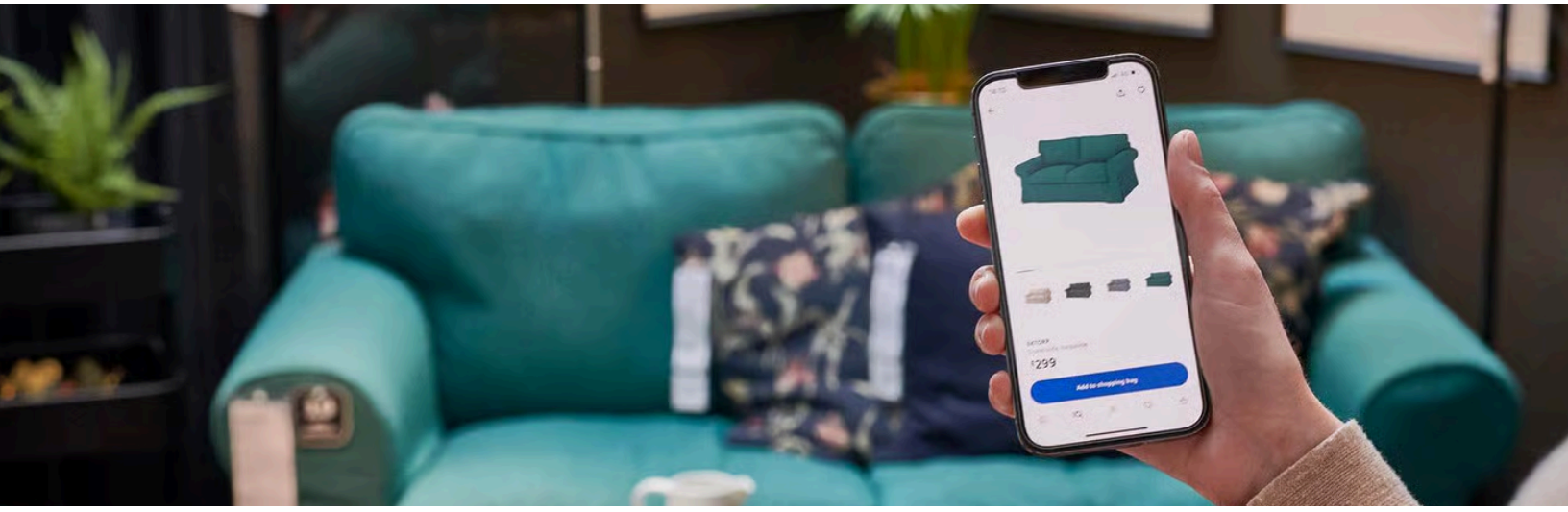
# Executive Summary

This report presents the findings and recommendations from a heuristic evaluation of the IKEA U.S. website. Ten usability experts evaluated the site using Nielsen's 10 Usability Heuristics for Interface Design (Nielsen, n.d.). The goal of this evaluation was to examine the usability of IKEA's online shopping and checkout experience. The evaluation focused on a realistic scenario in which a student attempted to purchase and schedule same-day pickup for a dinnerware set while preparing to move into a new apartment.

Based on these findings, three primary recommendations were developed addressing the identified issues:

- **Recommendation 1**: Prioritize Clarity Through Differentiating IKEA Fulfilment Terminology and Icons
- **Recommendation 2**: Improving Information Transparency and Unified Interaction
- **Recommendation 3**: Harmonizing the Cart-as-Checklist Experience

These recommendations prioritize fixing the most pressing usability issues in the checkout process. Through making these changes, IKEA can reduce confusion, alleviate frustration, help customers feel more confident, and make checkout easier to complete.



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# Introduction

IKEA stands as the undoubted global leader in the home furnishing industry, renowned for its revolutionary approach to design and product marketing. By pioneering the “flat-pack” [1] concept and immersive showroom experiences, IKEA has historically redefined how consumers interact with their living spaces.

In recent years, the company has undergone a massive digital transformation, evolving from a traditional brick-and-mortar “big blue box” [2] into a sophisticated omnichannel [3] retailer. This shift has allowed IKEA to thrive in the modern market, successfully blending its physical legacy with innovative online services to reach the many people wherever they choose to shop.

The success of this digital journey is evident in the numbers. In the United States, IKEA’s e-commerce performance has become a cornerstone of its business. In Fiscal Year 2025, IKEA US reported $5.3 billion in total sales, with $1.9 billion (approximately 36%) generated through e-commerce alone (IKEA U.S., 2026). Despite this robust online growth, 457 Million+ online visits, and a conversion rate that remains competitive within the furniture sector, significant usability hurdles persist.




[1] “Flat-pack” (also called ready-to-assemble furniture) refers to furniture that is sold in flat, compact boxes and assembled by the customer at home.
[2] “Big blue box” refers to IKEA’s large, warehouse-style stores.
[3] Omnichannel: A strategy of providing a seamless, integrated shopping experience across all “channels”, including the website, the mobile app, and the physical warehouse store.

While the digital infrastructure is expansive, a critical “understanding gap” often occurs for new users or those unfamiliar with IKEA’s unique internal logic. This friction frequently leads to user frustration and journey abandonment. When the system's logic is not transparent, users perceive errors where there is intended functionality.

To address these barriers, our team conducted a Heuristic Evaluation (HE) of the IKEA US website. By testing specific user scenarios, we aimed to pinpoint exactly where the digital experience fails to align with user mental models, ultimately identifying the usability “leakage” that causes potential customers to abandon their journey before completion.

# Methodology

This study conducted a Heuristic Evaluation to systematically identify usability problems within the user interface. This method involves experts independently evaluating an interface according to principles to measure its usability (Nielsen, n.d.). The principles used are the "10 Usability Heuristics for Interface Design," which serve as broad rules of thumb rather than specific guidelines (Nielsen, n.d.). These 10 heuristics can be found in the following section. The process of a heuristic evaluation involves usability experts using a digital product. According to a list of tasks, experts will try to discover any usability issues within the interface while completing tasks, and note them down based on the 10 heuristics.

The evaluation process follows a structured walkthrough to see how it performs against these standard criteria. According to Sauro (2012), using such a heuristic approach is highly effective because it provides a reliable way to uncover a wide range of usability issues that might be missed.

## Nielsen’s 10 Usability Heuristics for Interface Design

Nielsen’s 10 Usability Heuristics for Interface Design help teams evaluate the usability of a product. They are broad rules of thumb rather than less-specific usability guidelines (Nielsen, n.d.).

| Heuristic | Description |
|---|---|
| (H1) Visibility of system status | The system should always keep users informed about what’s happening through clear and timely feedback. |
| (H2) Match between the system and the real world | The design should use familiar language and real-world conventions so it feels natural and intuitive. |
| (H3) User control and freedom | Users should be able to easily undo, cancel, or exit actions if they make mistakes. |
| (H4) Consistency and standards | The design should follow established conventions so users don’t have to relearn common patterns. |
| (H5) Error prevention | Design should prevent problems before they happen instead of just showing error messages afterward. |
| (H6) Recognition rather than recall | Make options and information visible so users don’t have to rely on memory. |
| (H7) Flexibility and efficiency of use | Provide shortcuts and customization so both beginners and experts can use the system efficiently. |
| (H8) Aesthetic and minimalist design | Show only what’s necessary so users can focus on what truly matters. |
| (H9) Help users recognize, diagnose, and recover from errors | Error messages should clearly explain the problem and guide users toward a solution. |
| (H10) Help and documentation | Provide concise and easy-to-find support that helps users complete their tasks when needed. |

## Severity Ranking

Expert reviewers assign a severity ranking while evaluating usability on a scale from 0 to 4 (Moran, 2023).

| Number | Severity Ranking |
|---|---|
| 0 | Not a Problem |
| 1 | Cosmetic Problem |
| 2 | Minor Problem |
| 3 | Major Problem |
| 4 | Catastrophe |

## Scenario and Task

| Scenario | |
|---|---|
| You are a student starting school and moving into a new apartment. Your move-in date/time is ***Feb 24***. You want to set up your kitchen first, and pick up a dinnerware set the same day you move in. Your Home Zipcode: ***10011***<br><br>Using the ***IKEA US*** website, walk through the following tasks: | |
| **A** | Find the “GLADELIG 18-piece dinnerware set” and add it to your cart. |
| **B** | Check the product information whether the set is microwave and dishwasher-safe. |
| **C** | Schedule a pickup date on February 24th after 1 PM at IKEA Brooklyn. |
| **D** | How much will this order cost you? |

## Procedure

This evaluation is led, designed, and conducted by three UX experts. With another seven usability experts, independently performed a cognitive walkthrough using their preferred desktop web browsers. As they navigated the tasks, each expert documented their observations using a standardized "Problem Description" form, which captured:

- **Problem Description**: A clear and detailed explanation of the issue.
- **Location**: The specific page or interface element where the problem occurred.
- **Heuristic Violation**: The specific usability principle(s) breached.
- **Severity Rating:** An assessment of the impact of the issue on the user experience.

The lead evaluator subsequently compiled these individual findings into a master list, which is available in the Appendix of this document.

Based on the findings, we analyze and conclude four major issues that follow with the recommendation. Each problem description and solution can be found in the next section.



# Recommendations

## Recommendation 1: Prioritize Clarity Through Differentiating IKEA Fulfilment Terminology and Icons

### Problem: IKEA Fulfilment Option Confusion

The current IKEA ordering experience lacks differentiation between the current delivery and pickup (fulfilment) options. The multiple fulfillment methods offered include:

- Delivery to [zip code]
- Click & collect at [IKEA store location]
- Collect Near You

The *overlapping language and icon use* make the distinctions between the options confusing. Users may interpret “Click & collect” and “Collect near you” as describing the same action (reasonably so). These could both be understood as picking up an item at a store, without understanding what actually differentiates them.

On top of that, there seems to be a separate fulfillment option below these options:

- Pick up yourself at [IKEA store location]

This language further blurs the lines by introducing yet another pick-up-related term without clarifying how it relates to the options above.

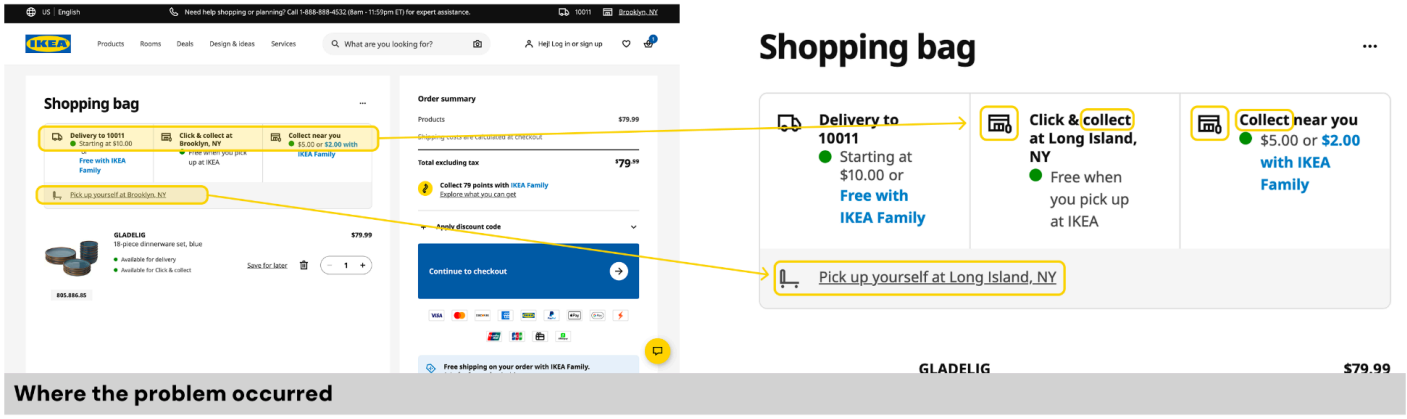



Figure 1-1. Same language and icon used in different fulfillment options at checkout.

Due to this lack of differentiation, users, especially ones navigating the IKEA ordering experience for the first time, struggle to understand the difference between the options they have.

Without additional context, overlapping language and icons force users to interpret subtle wording differences and what distinguishes one from the other, or whether the choice even matters. This ambiguity can lead to:

- Customer dissatisfaction
- Decision paralysis at checkout
- Cart abandonment
- Increased customer support inquires
- Selection errors (choosing the wrong fulfillment method)

The website assumes prior knowledge of how the fulfillment options work. The difference between them isn't made clear to someone unfamiliar with the process. Checkout should be a moment of clarity and confidence, not uncertainty. At this stage in the user journey friction can have a disproportionately high impact on conversion rates and overall perception of the IKEA brand experience.

## Solution: Differentiate Fulfillment Option Through Distinct, Descriptive Terminology and Unique, Meaningful Icons

To reduce confusion for users and increase confidence at checkout, fulfillment option language and icons used should be differentiated. The recommended labeling and icons (see below) for each separate fulfillment option aim to make each self-explanatory by using plain language that communicates the key difference: where the order ships and how the user retrieves it.

| Current Terminology | Recommended Terminology | Current Icon Use | Recommended Icon Use |
|---|---|---|---|
| Delivery to [*zip code*] | Delivery |  |  |
| Click & collect at [*IKEA store location*] | Click & Collect |  |  |
| Collect Near You | Ship to Store |  |  |
| Pick up yourself at [*IKEA store location*] | Find item(s) yourself in [*IKEA store location*] |  |  |

This update aligns with H2 [4] by replacing internal logistics terminology with clear, action-based language that mirrors how users naturally think about delivery and pickup.

Replace overlapping language with explicit user-centered language so customers can immediately understand what happens after purchase. Visually distinct icons that reinforce the action and support comprehension. H4 [5] is addressed by introducing

[4] H2: Match Between System and the Real World
[5] H4: Consistency and Standards

distinct labels and differentiated icons, ensuring similar actions are represented consistently while different actions are clearly distinguished.

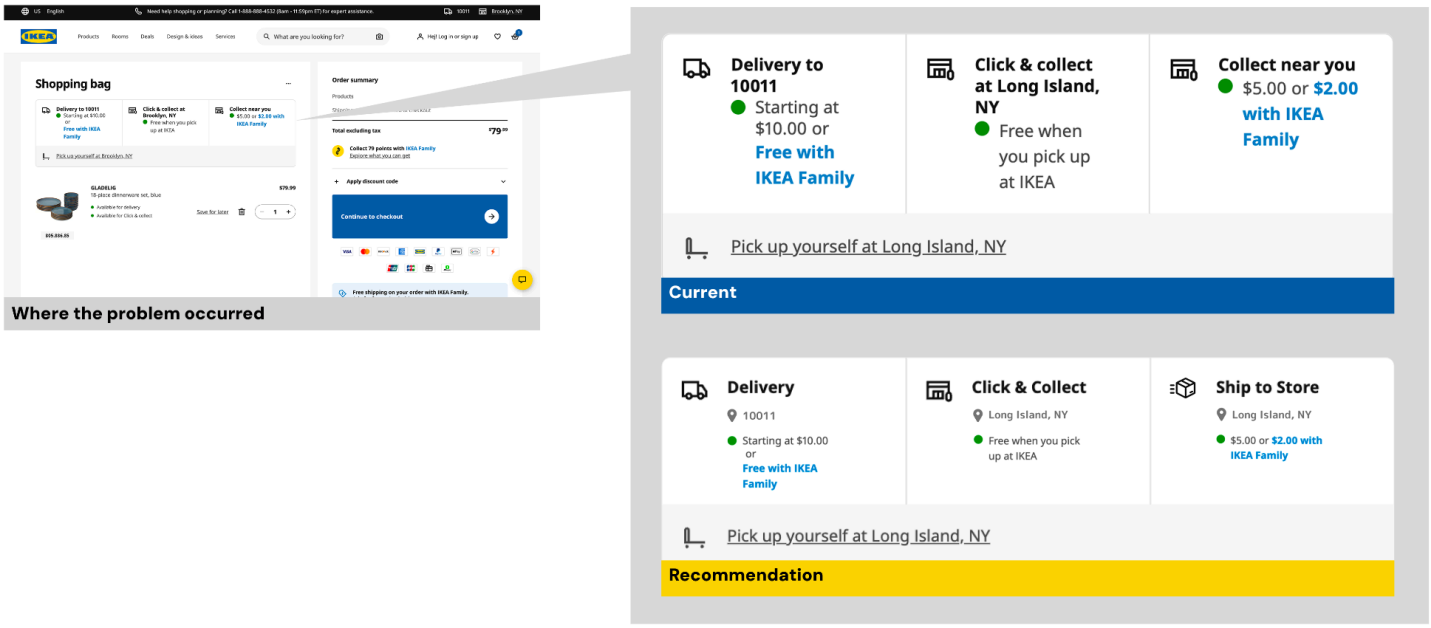



Figure 1-2. Mapping the gap between IKEA's internal fulfillment terminology and icon use versus users' mental model of delivery and pickup options.

The "Pick up yourself-" link should also be updated to "Find item(s) yourself-." The current phrasing adds onto the confusion by echoing the pick up language used in the fulfillment options above, making it sound like another variation of in-store pickup rather than what it actually is.

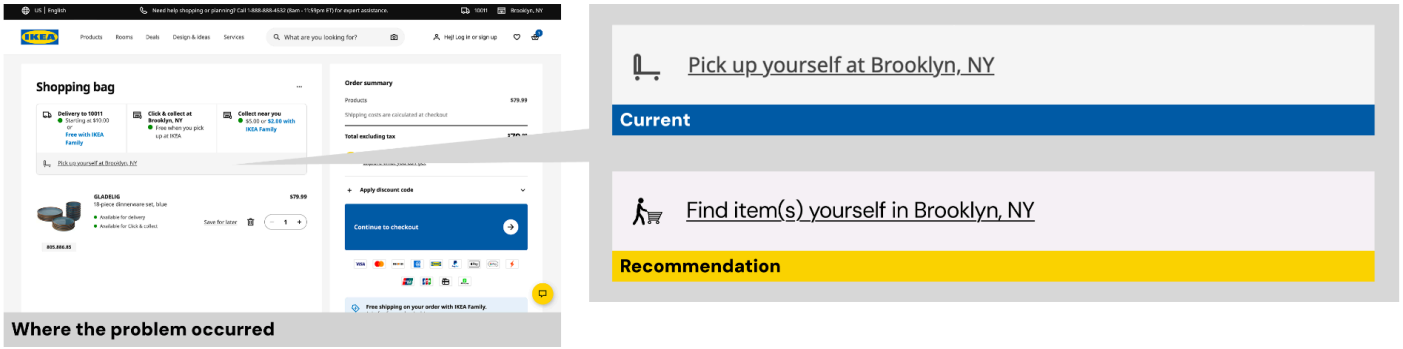



Figure 1-3. Mapping the gap between IKEA's internal fulfillment terminology and icon use versus users' mental model of pickup options.

This option is for browsing the store to find and purchase the item on your own without placing an online order. By reframing the language around the action the user will take (“find item(s)”) rather than the fulfillment-oriented “pick up.” The updated label distinguishes this option as a self-serve and in-store experience separate from the online ordering flow in checkout.

By replacing overlapping terminology with explicit, user-centered language and reinforcing distinctions visually through the use of icons:

- Users immediately understand what happens after purchase
- First-time shoppers require less prior knowledge
- Decision-making becomes faster and more confident
- Checkout friction is reduced
- Conversion and brand trust improve

This differentiation addresses H5 [6] by making the distinction between fulfillment methods explicit, reducing the likelihood that users select an option that does not meet their needs.

This recommendation closes the gap between IKEA’s internal fulfillment terminology and users’ mental models of delivery and pickup options available to them.

[6] H5: Error Prevention

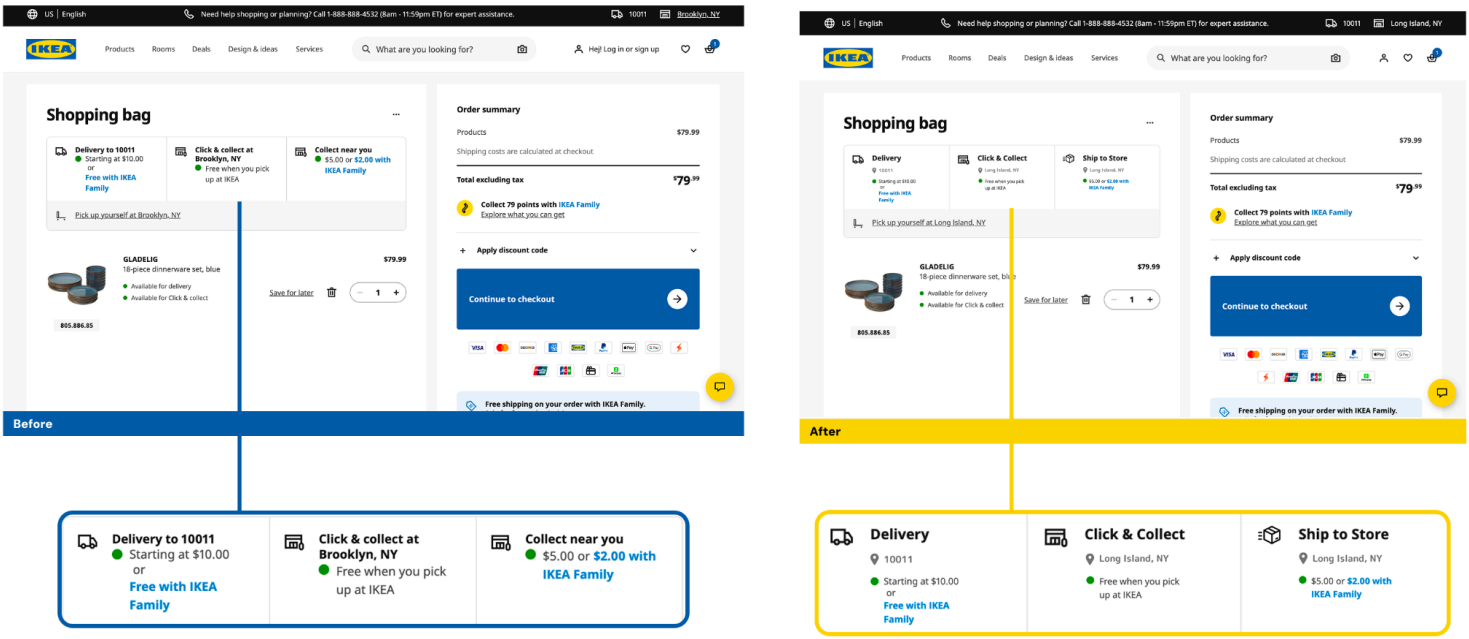



Figure 1-4. Before and after: “Pick up yourself-” relabeled to “Find item(s) yourself-”

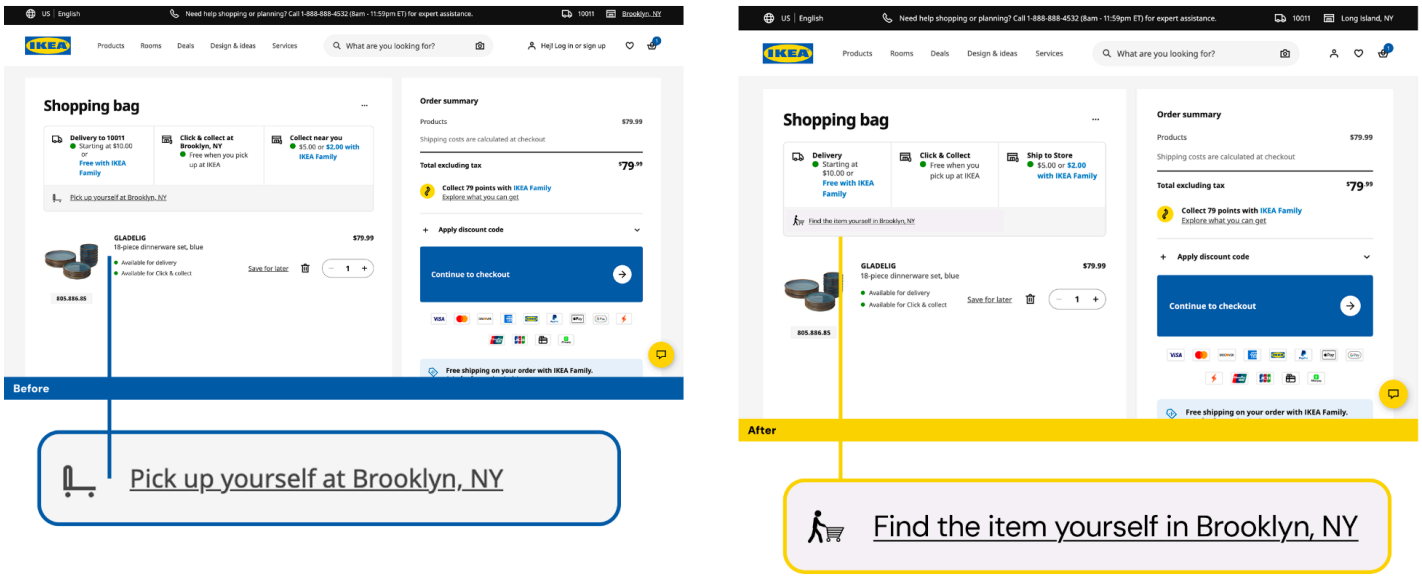



Figure 1-5. Before and after, updated fulfillment option terminology and icon use.

# Recommendation 2: Improving Information Transparency and Unified Interaction

## Problem: Inconsistency in Fulfillment Option Guidance and Information Scarcity

As mentioned in the previous section, IKEA provides multiple delivery and pickup methods. While we provide a clear fulfillment terminology and icon, detailed information is still lacking, and first-time users may find it difficult to differentiate between IKEA's various delivery and pickup options.

Currently, the system behavior is inconsistent. When a user clicks "Delivery to [zip code]," a side panel appears with clear descriptions explaining that users should "Enter ZIP code" to check service availability. However, this consistency breaks down with other options:

- Click & collect at [IKEA store location]: The side panel only displays "Select a preferred store" without explanation about the service details.
- Collect Near You: This option is not clickable. Users have no way to find a description of this service on the shopping bag page.

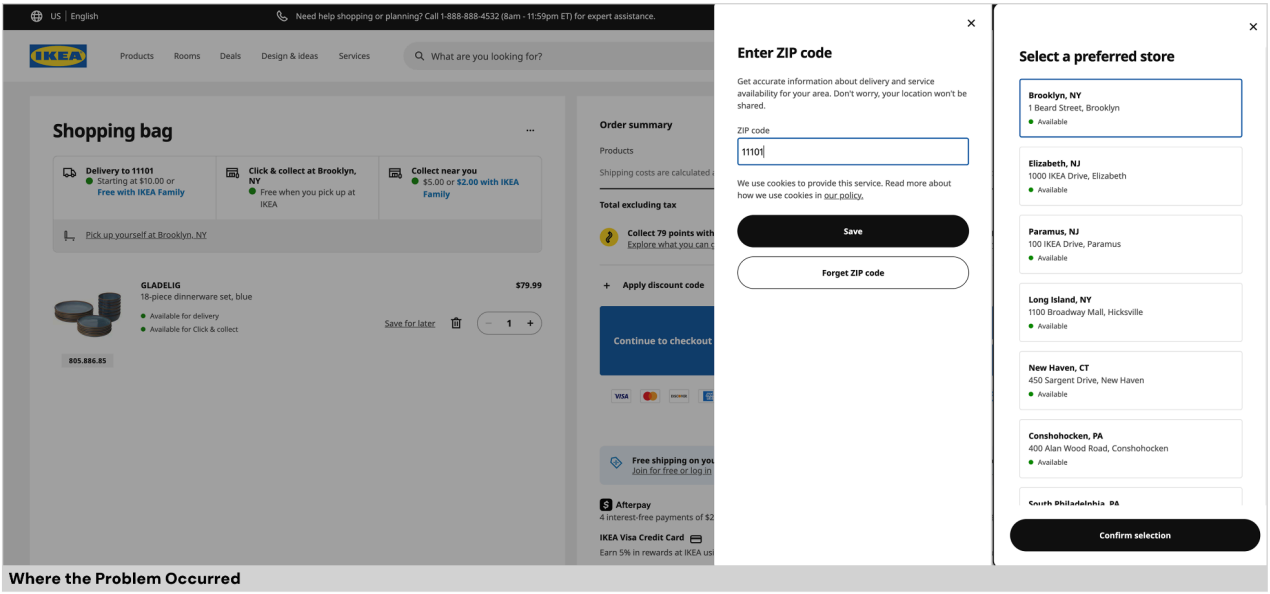



Figure 2-1. The current fulfillment interface is showing inconsistent interactions and missing descriptions.

This creates a Gulf of Evaluation (Norman, 2013). Users see these options, but they can't evaluate what they mean or which one is best for them. Although descriptions exist in the Customer Service page, forcing users to leave the shopping bag to find definitions increases Cognitive Load and interrupts the shopping journey. This inconsistency violates H4 [7] as the interaction patterns are not uniform. Also, forcing users to leave the shopping bag to find descriptions in "Customer Service" increases Cognitive Load, which violates H10 [8] by not providing necessary information during the user's current task.

## Solution: Improve Information Access through consistent Interaction and Tooltips.

To help first-time users distinguish between fulfillment methods without interrupting their flow, IKEA should ensure a consistent interaction pattern and add detailed descriptions on the shopping bag page.

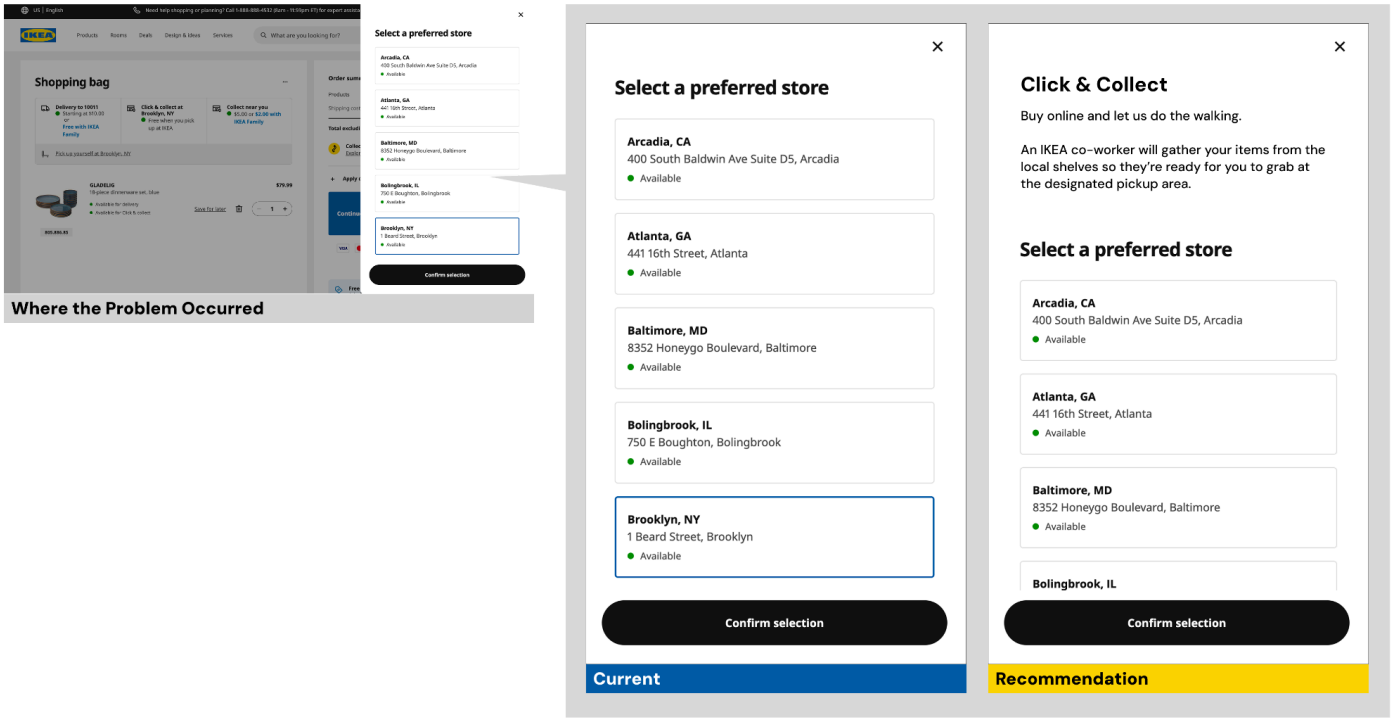



Figure 2-2. The recommendation for a side panel with detailed service descriptions.

[7] H 4: Consistency and Standards
[8] H 10: Help and Documentation

First, all options, including Delivery to zip code, Click and Collect, and Collect Near You, should be clickable and trigger a consistent side panel. Each side panel should provide a detailed description of that service at the top before asking for the user's input, such as a store selection or ZIP code.

Furthermore, an (i) icon should be placed next to each fulfillment option to provide a Tooltip short hover description. This adjustment does not affect experienced users who are already familiar with the system. For users who need a quick reminder, they can simply hover to see a brief description. For those who are completely unfamiliar, more detailed information is also easily accessible if needed.

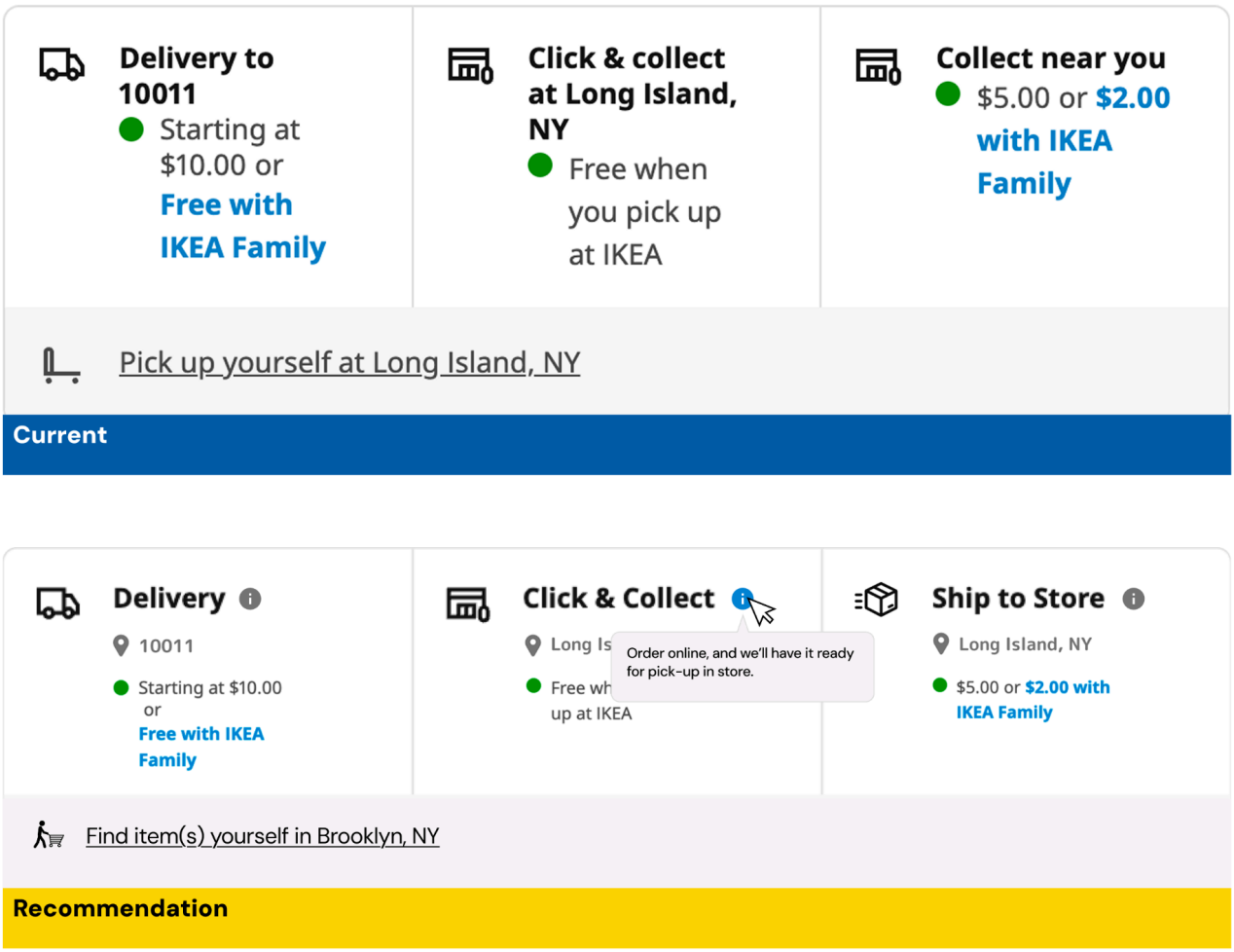



Figure 2-3. The recommendation for using an (i) icon for quick hover information.

The revised terminology and the detailed descriptions based on different user flows can be found below:

| Terminology / Scenario | Delivery | Click & Collect | Ship to Store | Self-Serve In-Store |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| For the Tooltip | We pack and deliver your order to your door. | Order online and pick it up at your store. | If it's not in stock, we'll ship it to your store for pickup. | Check availability and take it home today. |
| Full Description in the Side Panel | Skip the heavy lifting.<br><br>We'll prepare and pack your order, delivering it directly to your home or preferred address. | Buy online and let us do the walking.<br><br>An IKEA co-worker will gather your items from the local shelves so they're ready for you to grab at the designated pickup area. | Not in stock at your local IKEA?<br><br>No problem. We'll ship the item from our central warehouse to your preferred store for you to pick up at a later date. | Couldn't find the items?<br><br>Check availability in store, use our digital map to find your items in the warehouse aisles, and take them home today. |

This improvement aligns with H4 [9] by replacing inconsistent system behaviors with clear, conversational language and a uniform interaction pattern. Also, it addresses H7 [10] by catering to both novice and expert users, ensuring that the additional guidance is available but non-intrusive. Eventually, this change bridges the Gulf of Evaluation by making IKEA's complex delivery logic transparent and intuitive, allowing users to make informed choices without interruption.

[9] H4: Consistency and Standards
[10] H7: Flexibility and efficiency of use

# Recommendation 3: Harmonizing the Cart-as-Checklist Experience

## Problem: The Mental Model Mismatch between Cart and Checklist

On the current IKEA website, users are confused when clicking the “Pick up” check box in the “Where to find” section, since the system prompts them to remove items from their cart. This creates a Gulf of Evaluation (Norman, 2013), the user cannot understand why the system wants them to delete items they intend to buy.

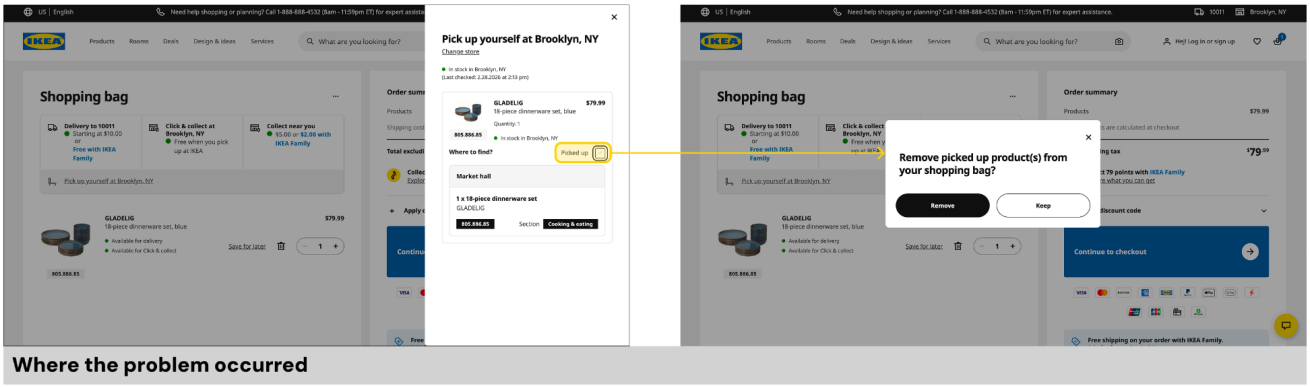



Figure 3-1. The friction between IKEA’s internal logic and the user's mental model.

The internal logic in IKEA is that it intends for the digital cart to function as a dual-purpose Shopping List. The goal is for users to:

- Add items online.
- Use the cart to find those items physically in-store.
- Manually remove items from the digital cart once they are placed in the physical trolley.
- Keep only the “unfound” items in the digital cart to purchase later via delivery or warehouse shipping.

This logic is not communicated to the user, creating a Mental Model Mismatch (Norman, 2013). In the real world, users don’t empty their cart to find where an item is located. Users expect a “Cart” to be for checkout, not a “Checklist” for navigation. Hence, IKEA breaks the standard e-commerce rule where “Cart = Final Purchase.” Because this “System Knowledge” is hidden, users feel the system is forcing them to abandon their shopping journey rather than helping them complete it.

## Solution: Aligning System Logic with User Intent by Humanizing the Prompt

Instead of the current technical prompt *“Remove picked up product(s) from your shopping bag?”*, the system should use conversational language, like *“It looks like you’ve found this item in-store! Would you like to remove it from your digital cart to keep your list updated?”*, that acknowledges the user's physical progress in the store.

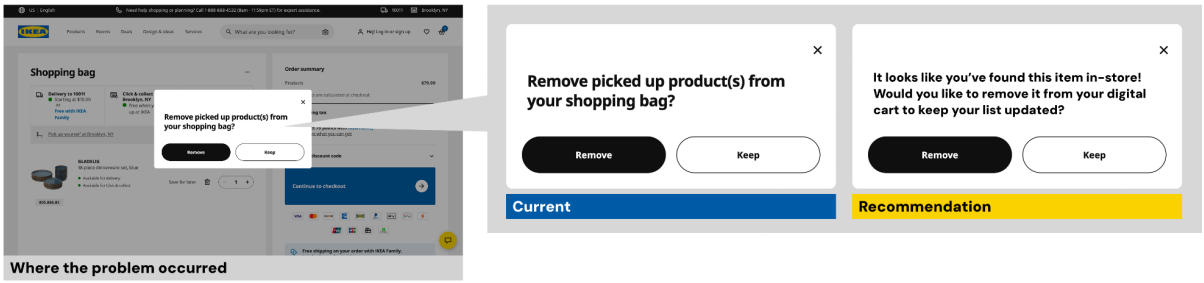



Figure 3-2. The recommendation for using conversational language.

By reframing the prompt from a system command to a contextual question, this solution successfully bridges the Gulf of Evaluation by providing the system knowledge exactly when the user needs it (Norman, 2013). This shift aligns with H2 [11] by replacing technical jargon with conversational language that mirrors the physical act of shopping.

Furthermore, it addresses H5 [12] by turning a forced deletion into a conscious choice, preventing the “slips” that occur when users feel the system is working against their intentions (Nielsen, n.d.; Norman, 2013).

Eventually, this change reconciles the Mental Model Mismatch between IKEA’s “cart-as-checklist” logic and the user’s expectation of a stable shopping bag, creating a more intuitive and transparent user experience.

[11] H2: Match between system and real world
[12] H5: Error Prevention

# Conclusion

Overall, IKEA provides a highly functional digital platform that is both user-friendly and visually engaging which  successfully translates its unique physical shopping experience into an online environment. The seven usability experts in this evaluation identified a total of 16 problems during the cognitive walkthrough. Among these findings, 12 issues were rated as either Level 1 Cosmetic Problems or Level 2 Minor Problems. Only 3 issues were identified as Major Problems, and only one was rated as a Catastrophe. These results indicate that IKEA offers a smooth user experience with minimal friction. To further optimize the usability, our recommendations will make the process from searching to purchasing products more seamless and efficient. Eventually, create a more pleasant journey for the user.

The four major issues identified in this evaluation involved violations of several heuristics. These included fulfillment terms that are difficult to understand, a lack of explanation between different pickup services ,insufficient guidance for first-time users and system failures to clearly distinguish between Cart and Checklist functions.

While Issue 1 focused on terminology and Issue 2 focused on differentiating options, the core of both issues was that labels failed to accurately explain what the services actually offer. Therefore, to provide a consistent user experience, we consolidated these two issues into "Fulfillment Option Confusion" for discussion. Instead of simply optimizing the terminology, our recommendation ensures that visual icons accurately support text descriptions which may improve the smoothness of the checkout process.

From analyzing the primary problems identified by the experts, we developed three recommendations:

- Recommendation 1: Prioritize Clarity Through Differentiating IKEA Fulfillment Terminology and Icons.
- Recommendation 2: Improving Information Transparency and Consistent Interaction.

- Recommendation 3: Harmonizing the Cart-as-Checklist Experience.

The implementation and utilization of these recommendations will enhance the usability of IKEA’s website. By bridging the gap between IKEA's internal logic and users' mental models, and ensuring consistent interaction, IKEA can make the user experience clearer and more straightforward, helping customers feel confident about their decisions.



# Appendix: Heuristic Evaluation Analysis

The following table consolidates the problem descriptions, associated Nielsen's Ten Usability Heuristics, and severity rankings identified by the seven expert evaluators.

| Problem Description | Nielsen's Heuristic | Evaluators | | | | | | | Final Rating |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | |
| Although the product detail page is easy to access, most of the important information is hidden under dropdown sections. I have to keep clicking, which makes the interaction complex. | H6, H8 | 1 | / | / | / | / | / | / | *1* |
| Before clicking "Continue to Checkout," there is a button that says "Pick up yourself in Brooklyn, NY." When I click it, a side drawer slides out from the right side. The interaction feels unnecessary because it adds an extra step. | H7 | 2 | / | / | / | / | / | / | *2* |
| In the checkout page, the total price displayed in the order summary is more visually prominent than the payment section on the left. This creates a slight inconsistency in visual hierarchy. | H4, H8 | 1 | / | / | / | / | / | / | *1* |
| No instructions for first-time pickup users. The website assumes prior knowledge of the pickup process at IKEA, which can confuse students. | H10 | / | 3 | / | / | / | / | / | *3* |
| "Click and Collect" wording is unclear. Some may be unfamiliar with IKEA's terminology. The terminology "Click & Collect" isn't standard and might not be clear to users that it's for in-store pickup. It's difficult to understand the meaning of click and collect. | H2, H4, H5 | / | 2 | 2 | / | / | / | 4 | *4* |
| "Click and Collect" isn't clearly distinguished from "Collect near you" and the additional link listed, "Pick up yourself at Brooklyn, NY". In the shopping bag, it seems like the "Click and collect" option is the same as the "Pick it up yourself" option, which is listed at the bottom in grey. This is redundant and could confuse users if they are looking to pick up. 'Click and collect' and 'pick up yourself at Brooklyn, NY' is a little confusing - at first glance it seems that both of these would do the same thing but upon further investigation, 'click and collect' means you schedule a pick up time and the staff sets the item aside for you, whereas 'pick up yourself' simply shows you where in the IKEA store the item is located if you | H2, H4, H5 | / | / | 2 | 2 | / | 2 | / | *3* |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| were to go browse for it at the store. | | | | | | | | | |
| Certain days and months are unavailable for the user to select for pickup. When trying to select dates that are not available for pickup, there is a horizontal line over the date number and an unavailable symbol on hover. Could include a key or have a copy to explain that users cannot select this date. | H1, H5, H6 | / | 2 | / | 1 | / | / | / | *2* |
| The item number is displayed boldly in multiple places without a clear understanding for the user as to why it appears to be so important. | H10 | / | / | 1 | / | / | / | / | *1* |
| When going to schedule a date and time for pickup, it isn't immediately clear that the user can edit the date and time. The segmentation of the location and time through blocks, different colors within the "Pick up at IKEA" section, can make it seem like there are two options to choose from instead of one related section. This could confuse users who might miss the scheduling section and have to edit it on the following page. | H5 | / | / | 2 | / | / | / | / | *2* |
| When clicking on the delivery widget on the product description page, it only shows if the product is "Available" to ship to the zip code. This could have been an opportunity to display price information, as a user may seek it out here, but they would have to navigate to the cart to check. | H2, H4 | / | / | / | 1 | / | / | / | *1* |
| Task 3: I had a really hard time finding where to schedule a pickup time. While looking in my cart, there is an option to "Pick Up Yourself...", but that just lets me select a store, not a time or date. | H2, H4, H7 | / | / | / | / | 2 | / | / | *2* |
| Task 3: Once I got to the delivery or pickup option, there was a "pick up at Ikea" option that was free, or a "pick up at a location near you" option, and I wasn't sure what the difference was. | H2, H3, H5, H7 | / | / | / | / | 2 | / | / | *2* |
| It is slightly unclear whether microwave/ dishwasher safe information would fall under 'good to know' or 'materials and care'. | H2, H4 | / | / | / | / | / | 1 | / | *1* |
| When going through the 'click and collect' options, I am asked to select and confirm the store to pick up from. On the next page, both the store to pick up from and the option to schedule pick up time are listed in the same area with the same hierarchy, suggesting that I may want to edit both sequentially, even though I have already selected the store and don't need to do that anymore. | H5, H8 | / | / | / | / | / | 1 | / | *1* |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| On the product detail page, it's really hard to change the pickup address when you enter the preset zip code. | H10 | / | / | / | / | / | / | 3 | *2* |
| I didn't understand the options "picked up" next to "Where to find", and why it removed the products I put in the shopping cart. | H2, H5, H9 | / | / | / | / | / | / | 4 | *3* |

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