

7-1 Final Project Submission: Virtual User Solution

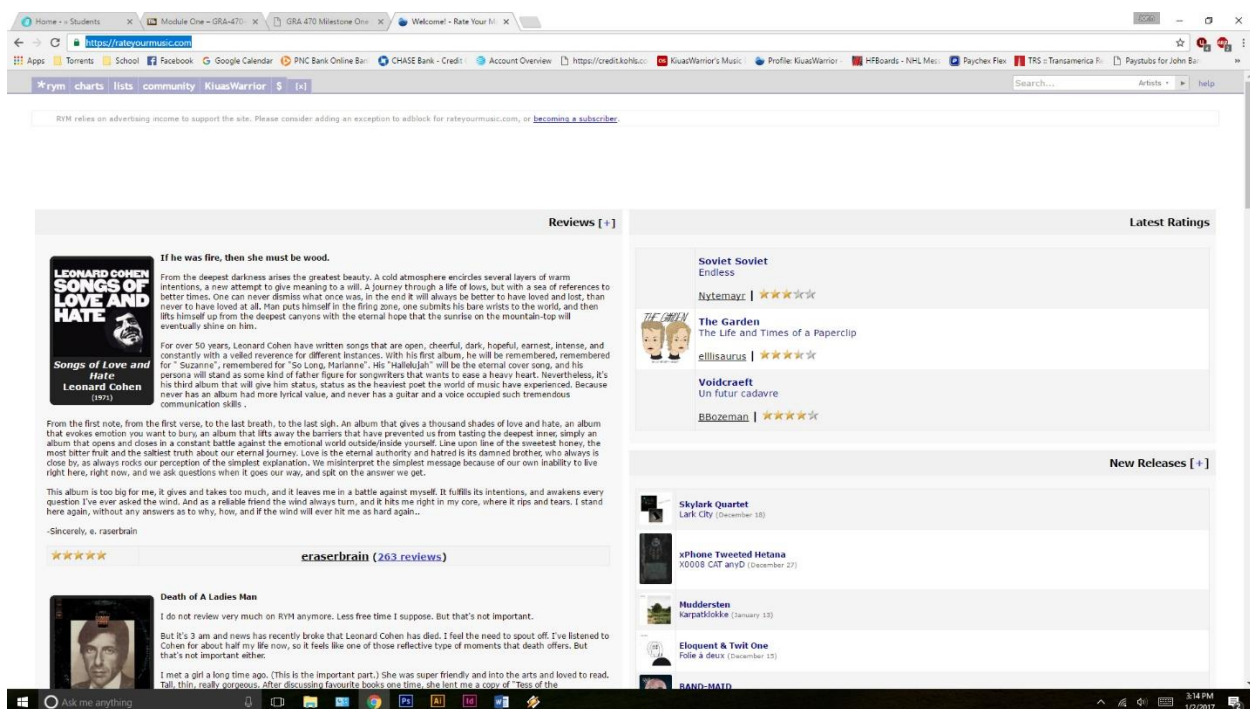
GRA-470-Q3703 User Interface and Experience 17EW3

February 15th, 2017

By: John Barca

Website selection

Rate Your Music, also known simply as “RYM”, is a website where users can rate, review and make charts of albums from their favorite artists. Personally, this is a website that I have been a user of for the past few years. Throughout the years I’ve been visiting RYM, I’ve always had some issues directly relating to the lack of user usability and experience – in my opinion. Below is a screen shot of the main page as it stands today:



User Experience (Qualitative)

I don't find Rate Your Music to be a user friendly website, even after a few years visiting the site. One of the main reasons I keep coming back is because of the large user database, and the accuracy of the album ratings. It's a great source to keep track of music and create “album of the year” lists. The biggest issue lies within the establishment of the site's identity. Just by looking at the main page, there is no trademark logo or name present. If you were to visit the site for the first

time via Google search, you'd likely fail to remember the site, as there's no impression to be received. The color scheme is boring and the site has no personality and very little imagery.

Another area of the site that struggles immensely is the direction it gives the user. For first time visitors, you're likely asking yourself "What do I do now?" and there are three logical answers. Either you explore via the latest reviews and ratings shown, you do a search for your intended artist, or you simply leave the site. Thankfully, it's not too hard to find the search box located in the top right corner, but there's a percentage of users who likely have decided to leave. There's really no engagement for the user in the site's present state.

Even though the site is largely based on user input, I haven't found many examples of unprofessional content or typos. The site has a pretty good moderator review system to filter all of the user input. So in that area, the site excels. When conducting a search for your favorite artist, you will be taken to a page that looks similar to the screenshot below:

The screenshot shows the Rate Your Music (RYM) website page for the band Metallica. The page layout includes a header with navigation links, a main content area with a band photo and biography, and a sidebar with a discography table. The biography section contains a quote from RYM and a section titled "RYM Rough Guide for Metallica". The discography table lists several albums with their release dates, review counts, ratings, and average scores.

Metallica (Artist)

Formed October 28, 1981, Los Angeles, CA, United States
Currently San Rafael, CA, United States

Members: **Lars Ulrich** (drums), **James Hetfield** (guitar, vocals), **Hugh Tanner** (guitar, 1981), **Lloyd Grant** (guitar, 1981), **Ron McGovney** (bass, 1981-82), **Dave Mustaine** (guitar, 1982-83), **Cliff Burton** (bass, 1982-86), **Kirk Hammett** (guitar, 1983-present), **Jason Newsted** (bass, 1986-2001), **Robert Trujillo** (bass, 2003-present)

Related Artists: Leather Charm, Phantom Lord, Spazk Children
Related: Founder of Blackened; co-founder of The Metallica Club

Also Known As: The Four Horsemen [1985], Frayed Ends [1988], The Lemmy's [1995], Spun [2002], Dehaan [2013]

Genres: Thrash Metal, Heavy Metal, Hard Rock, Alternative Metal, Symphonic Metal, Speed Metal

Discography 733 Credits 15 music film Filmography 11

filter discography


Album	Showing all (14)			
Title / Release Date	Reviews	Rating	Average	Issues
Kill 'Em All 1983	380	13,179	3.80	Rate +47
Ride the Lightning 1984	403	15,791	4.07	Rate +48
Master of Puppets 1986	391	16,118	4.05	Rate +43
...And Justice for All 1988	542	15,779	3.85	Rate +36
Metallica 1991	610	15,887	3.54	Rate +38
Fan Can #1 1996	16		2.40	Rate -

Granted, this is an example of a band that has many releases, live albums, singles, demos, etc. The page for Metallica is a little overwhelming and could use some changes to improve usability and user experience. I would need to screenshot 5+ images to capture the entire page, so here is a live link to the site: <https://rateyourmusic.com/artist/metallica>. The largest concern with how the site is structured lies directly in the example above. The user likely is going to feel overwhelmed, frustrated, and irritated based entirely on the overflow of content. There needs to be a sub menu bar implemented to ease the flow of each section of the discography instead of a huge ongoing list. This small change could help the site immensely.

Heuristics Evaluation (Quantitative)

For the heuristics evaluation of Rate Your Music, I will explore certain areas of the website that follow the guidelines Nielson's 10 usability heuristics standards and some areas that unfortunately fall short regarding the website's compliance with usability principles.

User Control and Freedom



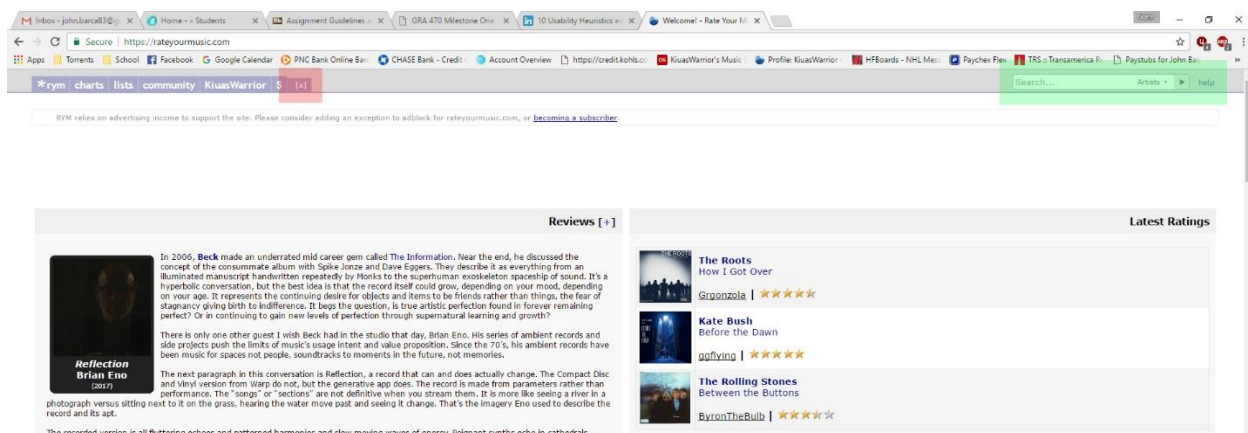
The screenshot shows the top navigation bar of the Rate Your Music website. It includes a search bar with the text "Search KitasWarrior's music for" and a dropdown menu set to "Artist". Below the search bar are navigation tabs: "recent", "ratings [83]", "collection [3]", "reviews [0]", "wishlist [3]", and "tags". The main content area displays a list of albums with their release dates, star ratings, and titles. The albums listed are:

Date	Rating	Album Title
Dec 16 2016	★★★★☆	Far Beyond - A Frozen Flame of Ice (2016)
Dec 15 2016	★★★★☆	Hemina - Venus (2016)
Dec 15 2016	★★★★☆	Machinae Supremacy - Into the Night World (2016)
Dec 06 2016	★★★★☆	Metallica - Hardwired...to Self-Destruct (2016)
Nov 08 2016	★★★★☆	Insomnium - Winter's Gate (2016)

A "more..." link is visible at the bottom left of the album list.

When a user accesses a RYM user's personal profile, you have the ability to do an advanced search that only complies with that particular user's music ratings and lists. The screenshot above has a search bar (highlighted in green) that gives many options for the search starting with the "artist" and even gives options to change to "release", "review", and more. This bonus feature gives more control and freedom to the user which is clearly an area where RYM succeeds.

Consistency and Standards



This part of Nielson's usability heuristics standards is imperative for any user. Having the user feel comfortable in being familiar with the website, even if it is their first visit – the importance here cannot be stressed enough. On the top right corner of the page is the search bar, a location that is optimal when following consistency and standards as this is likely the first place a user will look for that option. However, within the same screenshot (highlighted in red) a small "x" is located near the user's profile name. This button is actually there as a "logout" option. Typically, a "logout" or "sign out" link is displayed. This option does not follow consistency and standards of a website.

Aesthetic and Minimalist Design

Metallica (AKA The Black Album) - but it was called a "self-out" by many thrash fans and they continue to provoke hate and love in the same degree. I don't care if St. Anger wasn't that good, or that they cut their hair, or that they sued Napster. They are still a heavy metal machine, they are still playing great music, they are still the band of the people. Metal up yer asses!!!!

sergegrone

RYM Rough Guide for Metallica

Biography

In 1981, Metallica was formed by **Lars Ulrich** and **James Hetfield**. Lars was fascinated by the British heavy metal invasion, and Metallica spent its early days touring as a support band for bands like **Diamond Head**.

Their first song "Hit the Lights", performed by original members Hetfield, **Dave Mustaine**, **Ron McGovney**, and Ulrich appeared on the compilation album *Metal Massacre*. Ron McGovney was soon replaced by **Cliff Burton**, then Dave Mustaine was fired and replaced by **Kirk Hammett**.

In July of 1983 *Kill 'Em All* was released. It only made it to #120 on the charts, but was what first got them noticed in the world of 1980s metal. Then in early 1984 they toured as a support band for **Venom** in Europe, widening their fan base.

In August 1984, *Ride the Lightning* was released, and did slightly better than their debut, reaching #100 on the charts. This album was seen as an improvement on their first album, furthering their rise to fame. In 1985, Metallica appeared at the Monsters of Rock festival, appearing fourth on the bill.

In March of 1986 *Master of Puppets* was released and was their first bona fide hit album, reaching #29 on the charts - a huge success for a thrash metal band. However, on tour in Sweden that year, a horrific accident occurred. While the band was sleeping, the tour bus driver lost control of the vehicle. Cliff Burton was killed instantly, the other three walked away.

Metallica was left without a bass player, and after much soul searching, the band elected to continue on. They held auditions for a new bass player and **Jason Newsted** of **Flotsam and Jetsam** was selected.

In August 1987 Metallica released their first post-Burton project, an EP titled *The \$5.98 E.P.: Garage Days Re-Revisited*, followed by their second appearance at the Monsters of Rock festival.

In August 1988, Metallica came back with its first full album since Burton's death, *...And Justice for All*. The album was notable for the obvious toned down bass. The single, *One*, off of this album, would become their first breakthrough to the mainstream, largely thanks to an impactful music video which received heavy airplay on MTV. Featuring clips from the anti-war film *"Johnny Got His Gun"*, the video was hailed as one of the year's best. Among die-hard fans, there was somewhat of a backlash, however, as the band had previously stated that they would never make a music video, and charges of the band "selling out" began.

These charges would only get louder upon the August 1991 release of *Metallica*, more often referred to as *"The Black Album"*. Five singles and

filter discography

Album Showing all (14)

Title / Release Date	Reviews	Rating	Average	Issues
Kill 'Em All 1983	583	13,186	3.80	Rate +47
Ride the Lightning 1984	653	15,793	4.07	Rate +49
Master of Puppets 1986	891	18,120	4.05	Rate +47
...And Justice for All 1988	642	13,788	3.86	Rate +96
Metallica 1991	610	13,880	3.54	Rate +36
Fan Can #1 1996	16		2.40	Rate
Load 1996	347	7,500	2.75	Rate +17
Reload 1997	256	6,882	2.47	Rate +18
Fan Can #3 1998	19		1.74	Rate
Garage Inc. 1998	160	4,983	3.24	Rate +14
St. Anger 2003	903	8,881	1.87	Rate +25
Death Magnetic 2008	456	7,563	3.02	Rate +20
Lulu 2011 • Lou Reed & Metallica	247	3,160	1.74	Rate +7
Hardwired...to Self-Destruct 2016	69	1,792	3.13	Rate 3.0 +17

Live Album Showing 13 of 27 show all

Title / Release Date	Reviews	Rating	Average	Issues
Live Shit: Binge & Purge 1993	105	2,276	4.00	Rate +10
Fan Can #2 1997	7		3.16	Rate
S&M 1999	236	4,685	3.24	Rate +17
Gelsenkirchen, Germany, Arena auf Schalke, June 10, 2004 2010	18		1.89	Rate

This is one area in which the website struggles immensely. Even though the website is focused on user input and content, there needs to be more aesthetic and minimalist design incorporated. This can start with an artist's homepage, specifically with the example above, again Metallica. Any user will be overwhelmed by the long slab of text on the left hand side (band biography), while up against the section on the right (band discography). Like mentioned above, this screenshot can't even capture the amount of running text there is on this artist's page. The designer should take a moment and establish tabs or sub-menu for many of these sections to help alleviate the stress of the overwhelming content, which will truly be a good start to having better user usability and experience.

Persona 1

Name	Joe Jacobsen
Age	45
Location	Indiana, USA
Technical Comfort	Experienced
Job Title	IT

Back Story

Joe himself is in a band that started in his parents' garage back in the 1980's. They have actually released albums in their history, some of which are still being sold online via their website. His passion for music combined with his knowledge in IT established the idea of searching for a website where he can rate and keep his favorite albums, artists and songs listed in his own website profile as well as create a page for his own band. He likes the website so much that he plans on pursuing a moderator role on Rate Your Music.

Motivations

Joe wants to put out the word even further by using Rate Your Music to promote his own music. By creating a page for his band, users will be able to rate, review and even list their songs and albums onto their own profile. Joe also has his own personal interest in the website, not related to his own band.

Frustrations

Having a career in IT, Joe is mainly focused on the effectiveness of the site and the collection of artists, etc. into this own profile. This part of the site works extremely well. He is not too concerned with the website having a lack of identity regarding the design presence, logo and a color scheme.

Ideal Experience

As the site stands now, Joe is happy with the website and how each page is set up. However, he is open to improvements that others have been asking for. While the site does a great job considering the large artist database and information, there are other areas that still need improved that will create the ultimate usability and user experience for all users.

Persona 2

Name	Betsy Raff
Age	55
Location	Michigan, USA
Technical Comfort	Beginner
Job Title	Nurse

Back Story

Betsy Raff is a first time user to Rate Your Music, she doesn't have a profile and isn't so sure how much she will return to the website. Currently she is using RYM one time only purely for the information an artist's discography.

Motivations

Betsy had an argument with a coworker regarding the year of a certain artist's album release and stumbled upon Rate Your Music to check the legitimacy of her argument.

Frustrations

She is a moderate user to the internet as a whole, and the lack of direction and initial usability of RYM almost turned her away until she was able to locate the search bar on the main page. While she was able to locate the information needed, she left the website without even knowing RYM's purpose of a user based rating and review site. She is likely never to return as the initial impression was a negative experience.

Ideal Experience

Since Betsy is a moderate to the user to the internet in general, having some a better established identity for RYM would be a great start to leaving an impression. A site logo or banner on the main page is a must, and perhaps a slogan to give the first time visiting user an idea of what RYM's purpose is.

Persona 3

Name	Kevin Billings
Age	23
Location	Florida, USA
Technical Comfort	Advanced
Job Title	Student

Back Story

Kevin Billings is a student who is incredibly into underground music, specifically in the metal scene. In his spare time outside of school work, Kevin uses his RYM profile to discover new bands and gets excited to share his new music with his close friends. He has been a user of the website going on 5 years now.

Motivations

Kevin discovered the site 5 years ago when there was still some buzz going around from the opening of the site. He uses RYM almost exclusively for discovering new music, as well as rating his new findings. RYM does a good job of identifying smaller bands that are related to bands who are more in the mainstream.

Frustrations

Even though Kevin has been a user for quite some time, he still has some frustrations with the site – a little more-so on the technical difficulties side. When Kevin creates his lists for his favorite albums of each year, the artwork doesn't always appear. While a minor infraction, it takes away from the look and feel of his list when he links people to it from his favorite social media sites.

Ideal Experience

Small infractions like artwork bug keep the site from being optimal in Kevin's mind, even though it is currently the best ratings and reviews music site on the internet. The large database of artists and users keeps him coming back for more.

Scenario 1

User Task Profile Targeted	Site to User/Moderator
Subject Persona	Joe Jacobsen
Scenario Description	User registering to become “moderator”

Background

Joe is an avid user of Rate Your Music and has aspirations of becoming a site moderator. While Joe hasn't even been a user over a year yet, his experience in the IT field and his love of the site has to be beneficial in him being accepted as a site moderator, a role that currently pays no additional salary to his 9-5 IT position.

Objective

Joe needs to send in an application on why he feels he will be good as a site moderator with RYM. He has to email the site administrator for approval. If approved, he will be given a 30-day probation period to monitor his performance and effectiveness. Joe will be responsible for fixing content on artist's page, monitoring reviews posted by users and deleting old accounts that are no longer in use.

Narrative

Joe is finally accepted as a moderator after a two-week review of the application and is removed from probation 30 days after his start date. His dedication and knowledge within the field benefit the website even more which ultimately creates better user experience for the website.

Scenario 2

User Task Profile Targeted	Site to Visitor
Subject Persona	Betsy Raff
Scenario Description	One time visitor looking for information

Background

Betsy Raff is a first time visitor to Rate Your Music. This is an instance where a new visitor can be captivated by the site and become a user. Betsy did not have a good user experience, as the site lacked identity and usability in her opinion which left her with no impression, even though she was able to obtain the information she was looking for.

Objective

By using the search bar located on the top left hand corner of the main page, Betsy was able to find what she was looking for. However, this was a missed chance to have the visitor become a regular visitor and user. Even though the potential was low for Betsy to become a user for this type of website, there's still reason to take this situation and look for areas of improvement.

Narrative

Betsy locates her information and instantly leaves. With the website's brand or purpose not being well established, the visitor leaves with no memory of the site's name.

Scenario 3

User Task Profile Targeted	Site to User
Subject Persona	Kevin Billings
Scenario Description	Long time user having technical difficulties

Background

Kevin Billings is a student who has been visiting Rate Your Music just after the site's launch back in 2011. He is an avid music fan, especially in the underground scene. Kevin is pretty much fine with the site's look and feel as long as he is able to continually rate and review his favorite releases. However, that doesn't mean he doesn't run into an issue occasionally and has recently been frustrated some technical aspects of the site, especially with artist album covers not appearing on his lists.

Objective

The objective for this issue to be fixed is for Kevin to put in a request to a moderator, either via email or the site forum to have the issue looked into. This can be something involved with the coding having errors pulling the artwork from the artist's profile page.

Narrative

A forum request from Kevin is noticed by Joe, the newly acquired moderator who is familiar with Kevin's RYM username (and also shares similar music tastes). Joe puts priority looking into this issue and utilizes his IT experience and skills to fix the error. Within 48 hours an email is received by Kevin stating the issue has been corrected.

Proposal

Background

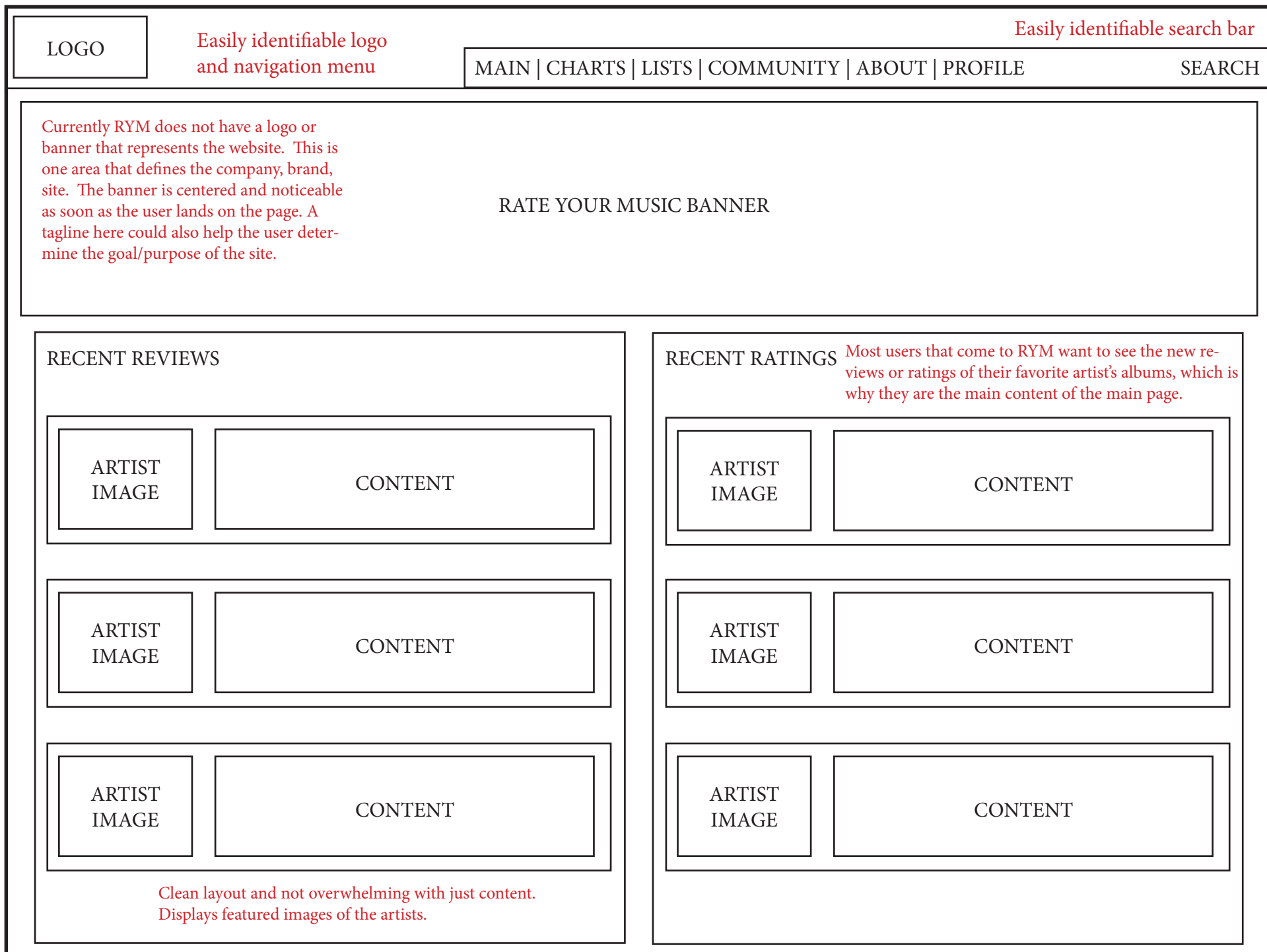
Rate Your Music was established in 2011 with an ever-growing user database with an astounding amount of artist content like biography and discography information, reviews, ratings and more. While the site was created from the United States, the site boasts users ranging across all continents and artists that cover almost every country. While Rate Your Music is focused on the content it delivers with the ratings and reviews, the site seems to struggle with its identity, which will obstruct some visitors and user's usability and user experience.

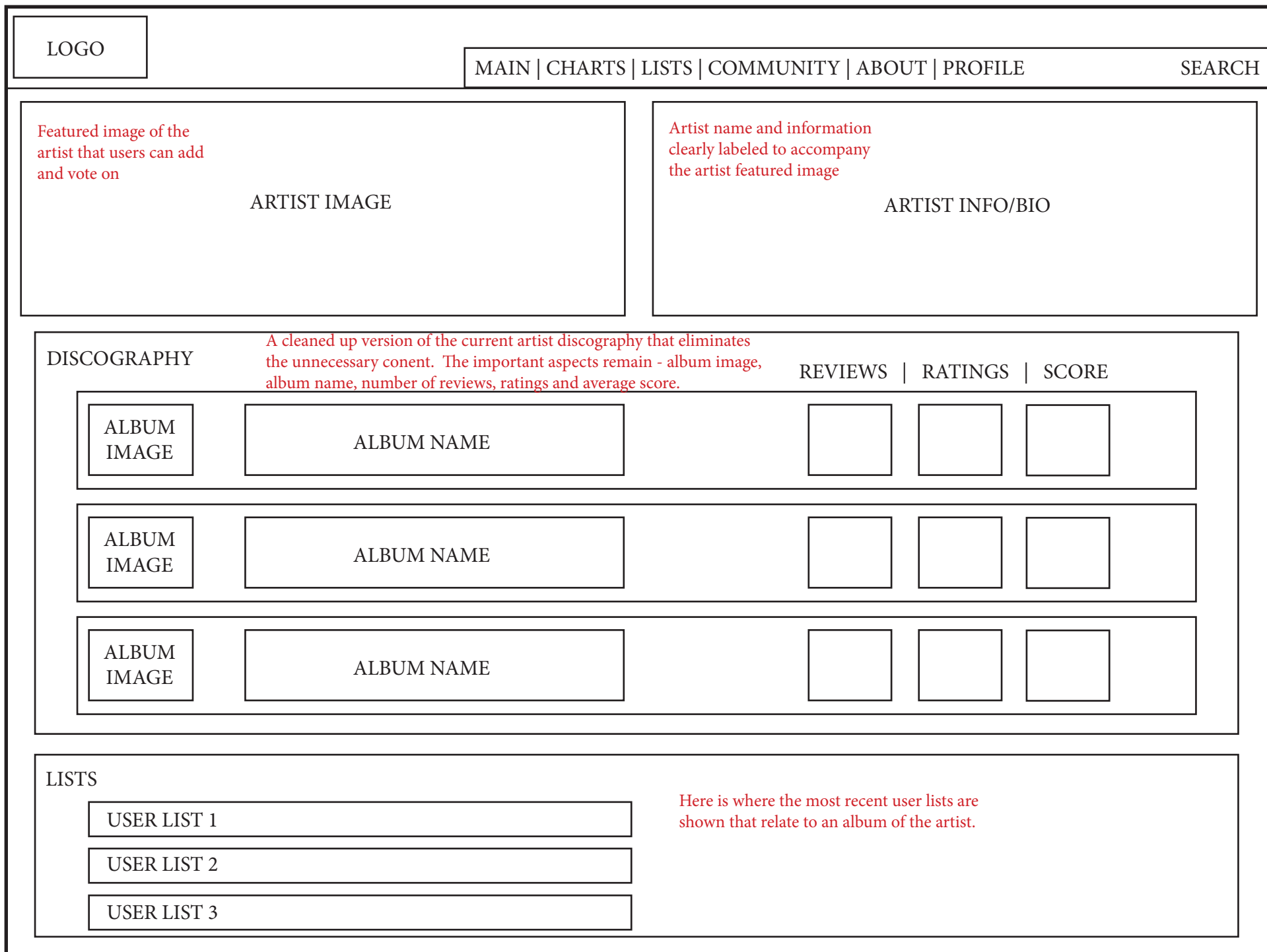
Personas and Scenarios

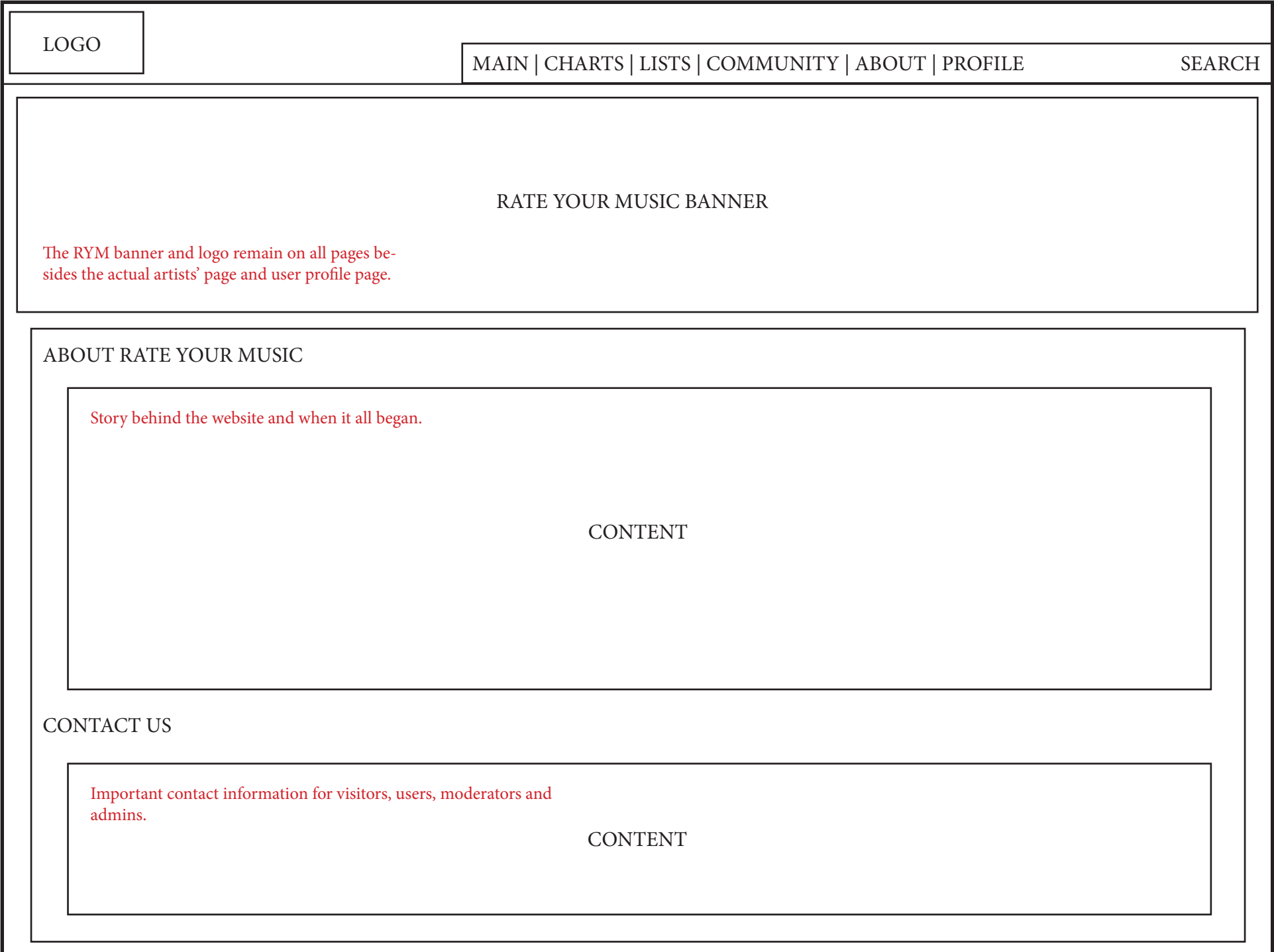
From the three personas and scenarios examples from each person above, some insight was received in how Rate Your Music applies to several different audiences regarding gender, age, experience, and their job title. An experienced user and now moderator like Joe Jacobsen had no issues with Rate Your Music's appearance and was focused completely on the content it provides. He was able to look past any drawbacks from the design, because the usability and user experience was optimal for him. Kevin Billings was in the same boat as Joe, but still had some small run-ins with the technical side of the site. Through their communication this issue was resolved and will allow all present and future users to never have that issue. The biggest flaw of Rate Your Music is the design and lack of brand identity. First time visitors like Betsy Raff (while not necessarily in the target audience), while only looking for a small amount of information, could have experienced a better time with RYM that may have create a return and even further becoming a user.

Design

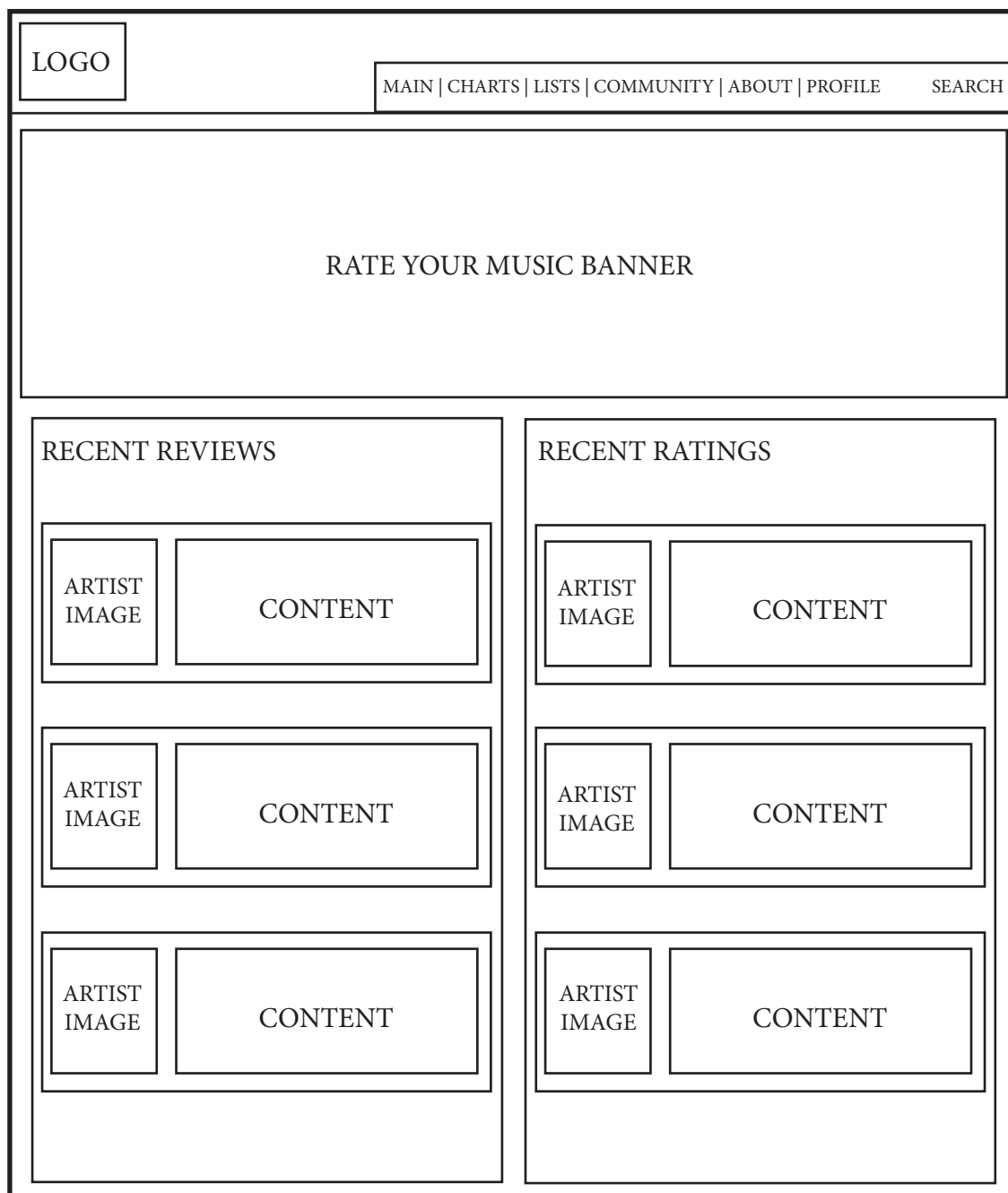
The design and site layout of Rate Your Music is an area that will need changed to create a better user experience for any and all users. A simple logo and color scheme creation will give the site more of an identity. Giving the user a little guidance into the features of the website through a better site menu is also an area that will need changed. Situations like Betsy Raff's can't go unnoticed. This was one of many situations that could have led to a larger user database and more site notoriety.

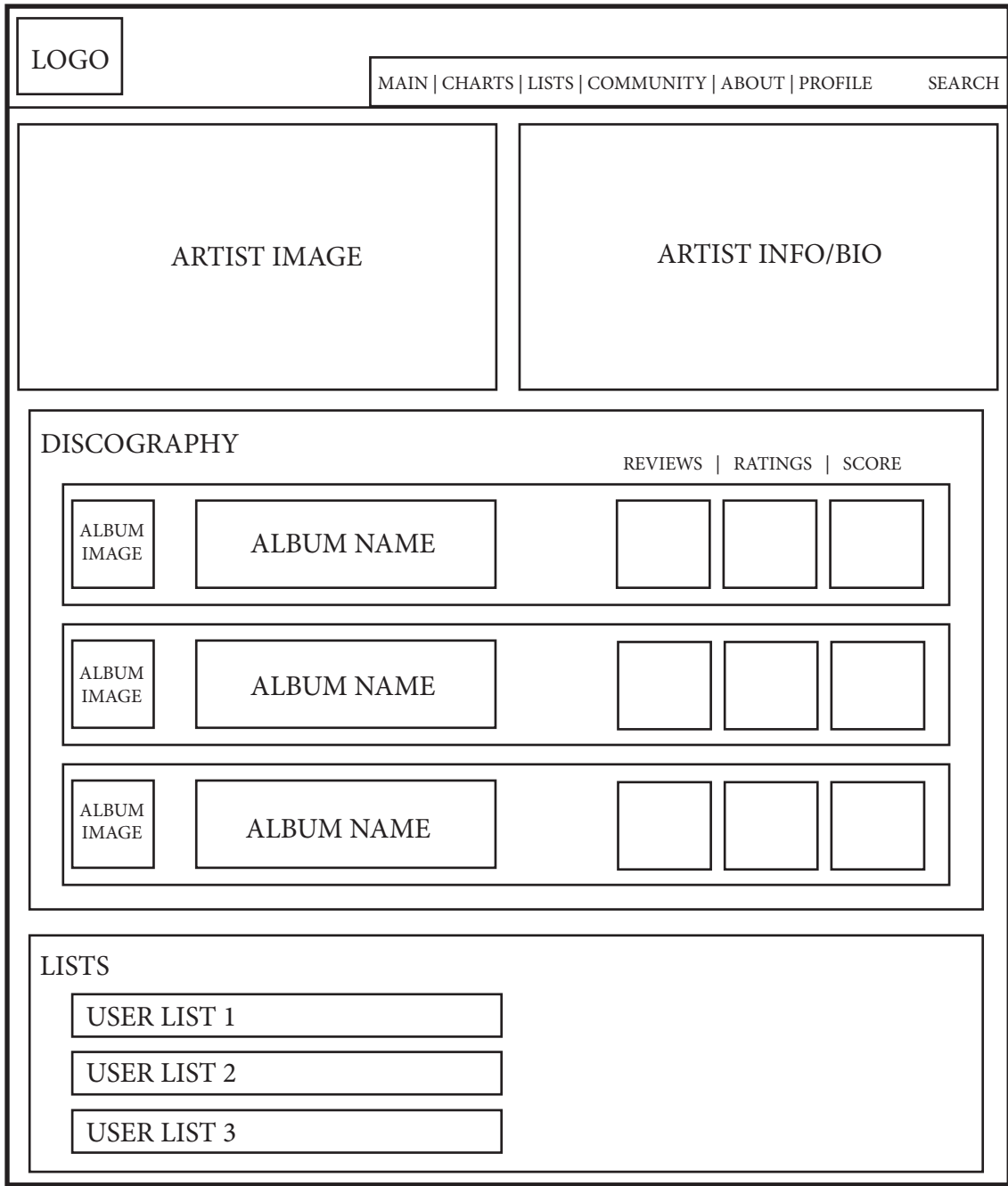


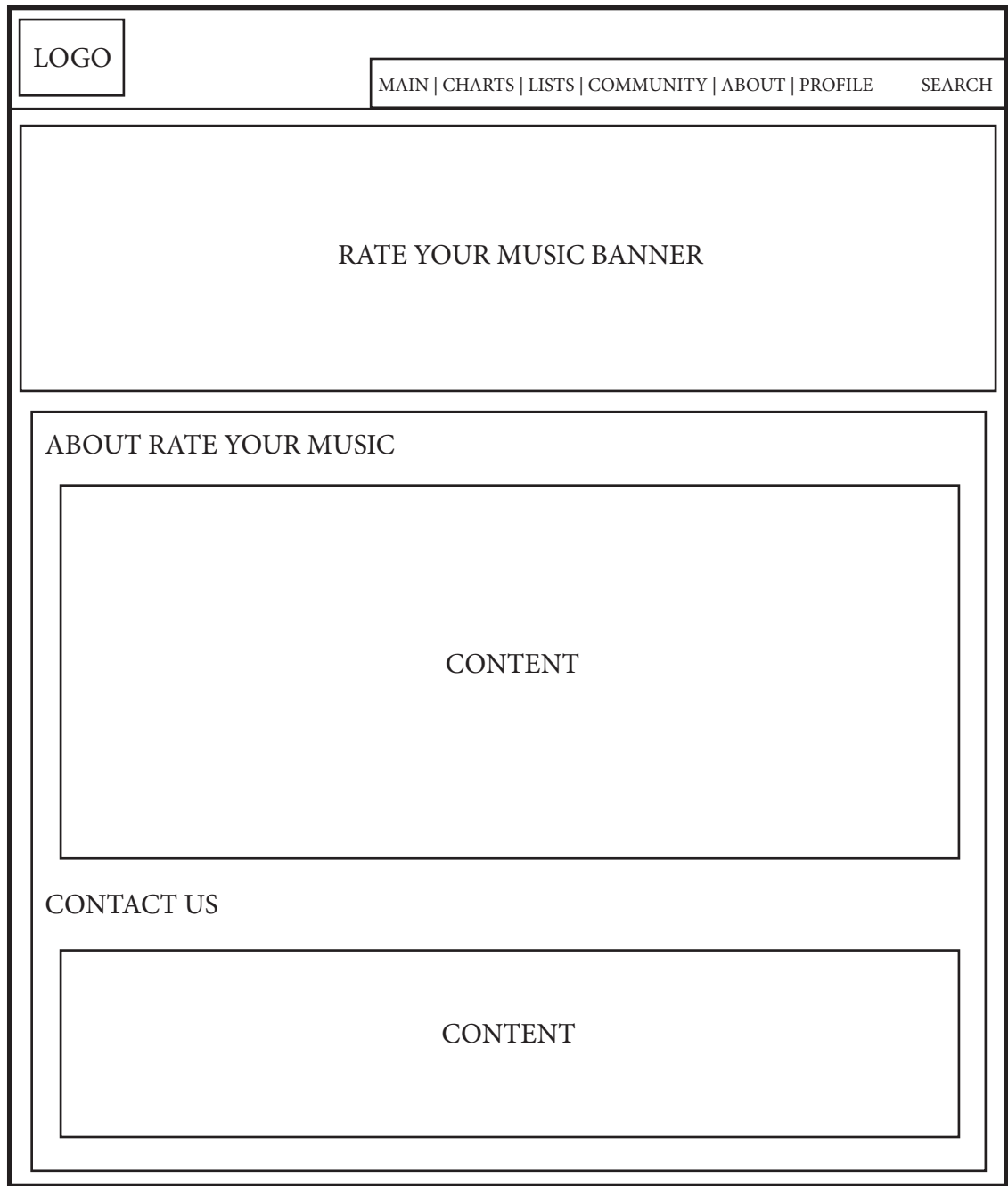




A condensed/smaller scaled version of the desktop site that still displays the same via tablet.



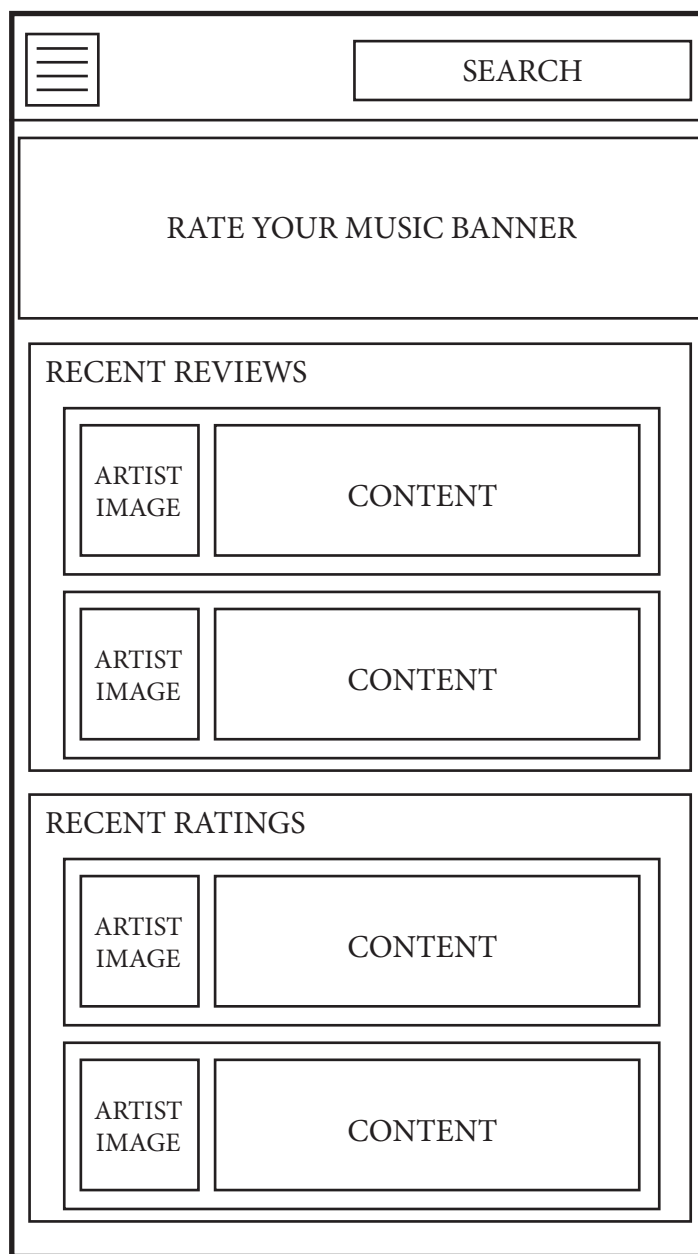




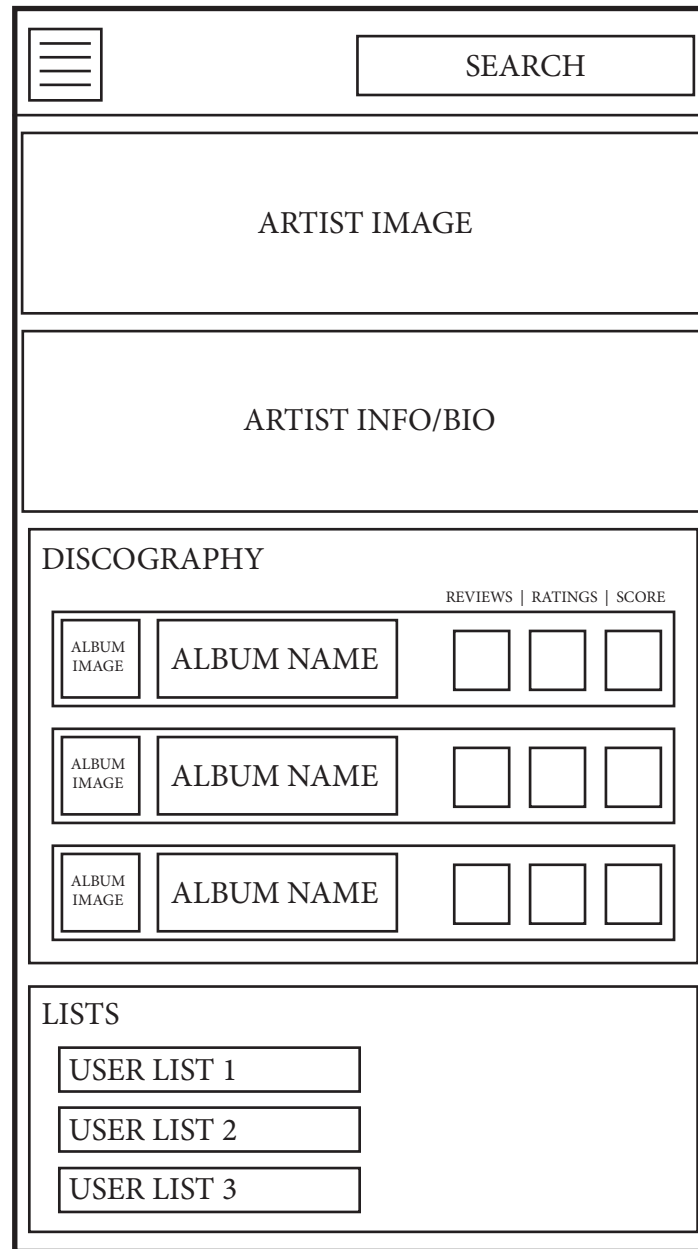
This is where the layout of the website begin to change - when viewed on mobile devices.

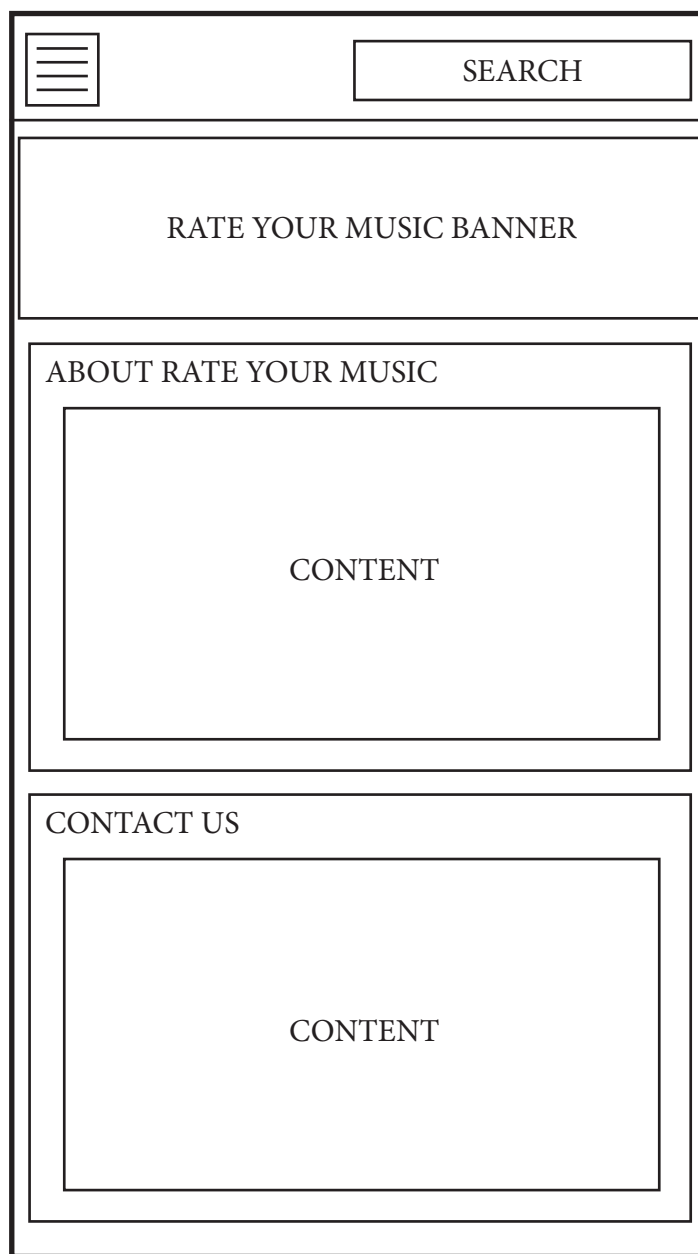
The menu has been removed and placed into a drop down/slide over menu to keep the layout less crowded and to keep the links from being too small. The search bar still remains in view.

This layout features the responsiveness of the layout to mobile devices. The ratings sections has shifted down below the reviews, acting as a better source to be viewed - scrolling up and down rather than side to side.



Again, we see how the layout of the artist page is shifted a bit to prevent any scrolling from side to side. Users on mobile devices should only be scrolling up and down.





For the 2nd layout, things are very similar to layout 1, and that goes for desktop, tablet and mobile views. With this layout, the main changes are having the banner featured across the top of the page with the menu within. The search bar still remains in a place where any user would easily locate.

RATE YOUR MUSIC BANNER

MAIN | CHARTS | LISTS | COMMUNITY | ABOUT | PROFILE

SEARCH

SITE NEWS

The addition of a news or site announcements section was added for the 2nd layout. This can engage visitors further with updates to the site, artists news, etc.

CONTENT

RECENT REVIEWS

ARTIST
IMAGE

CONTENT

ARTIST
IMAGE

CONTENT

RECENT RATINGS

ARTIST
IMAGE

CONTENT

Layout 2's artist page has the Lists section moved to the top to align with the artist image and info/bio section. The focus still remains on the discography section - reviews, ratings and score.

RATE YOUR MUSIC BANNER

MAIN | CHARTS | LISTS | COMMUNITY | ABOUT | PROFILE

SEARCH

ARTIST IMAGE

ARTIST INFO/BIO

LISTS

USER LIST 1

USER LIST 2

USER LIST 3

DISCOGRAPHY

REVIEWS | RATINGS | SCORE

ALBUM
IMAGE

ALBUM NAME

ALBUM
IMAGE

ALBUM NAME

ALBUM
IMAGE

ALBUM NAME

RATE YOUR MUSIC BANNER

MAIN | CHARTS | LISTS | COMMUNITY | ABOUT | PROFILE

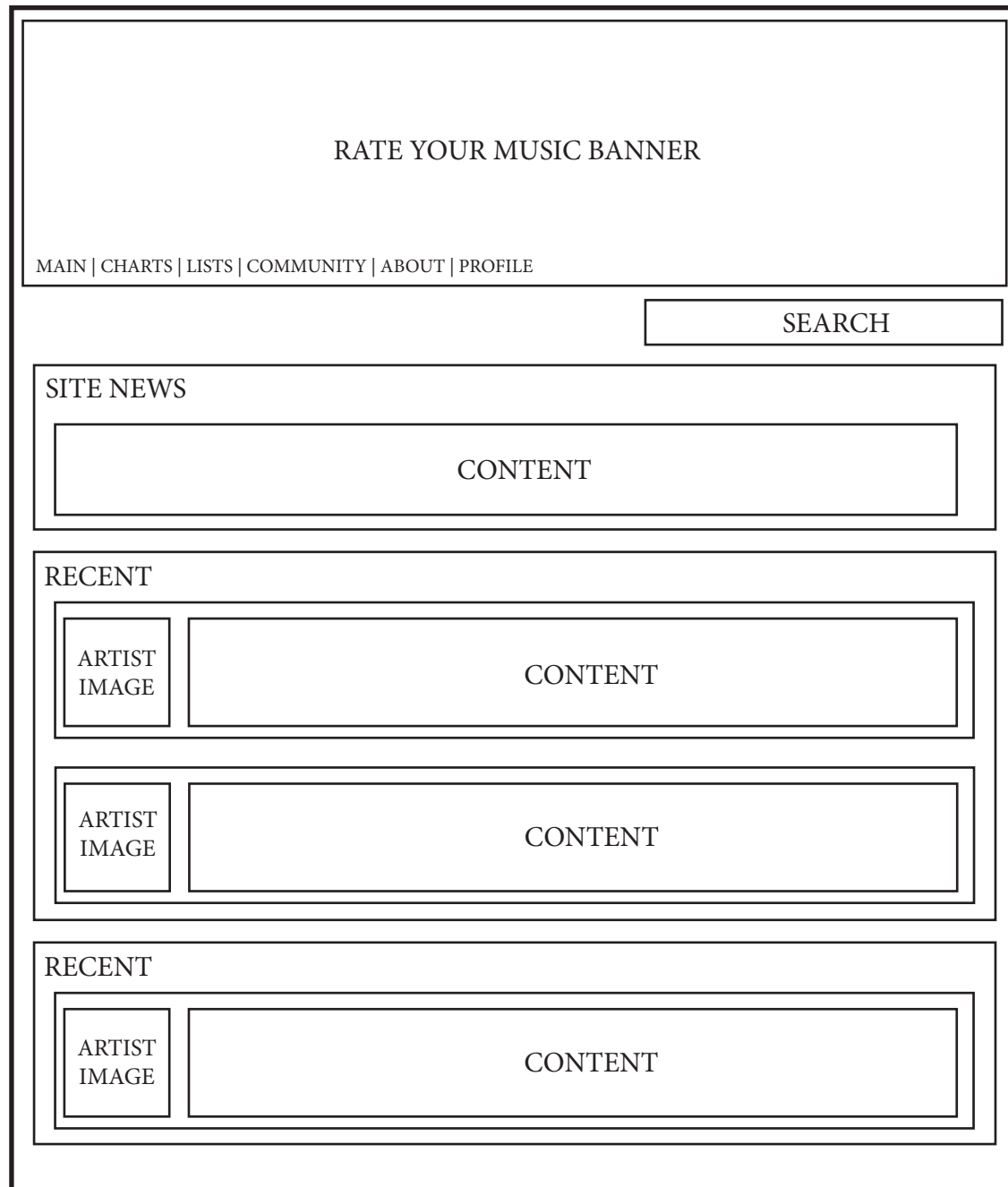
SEARCH

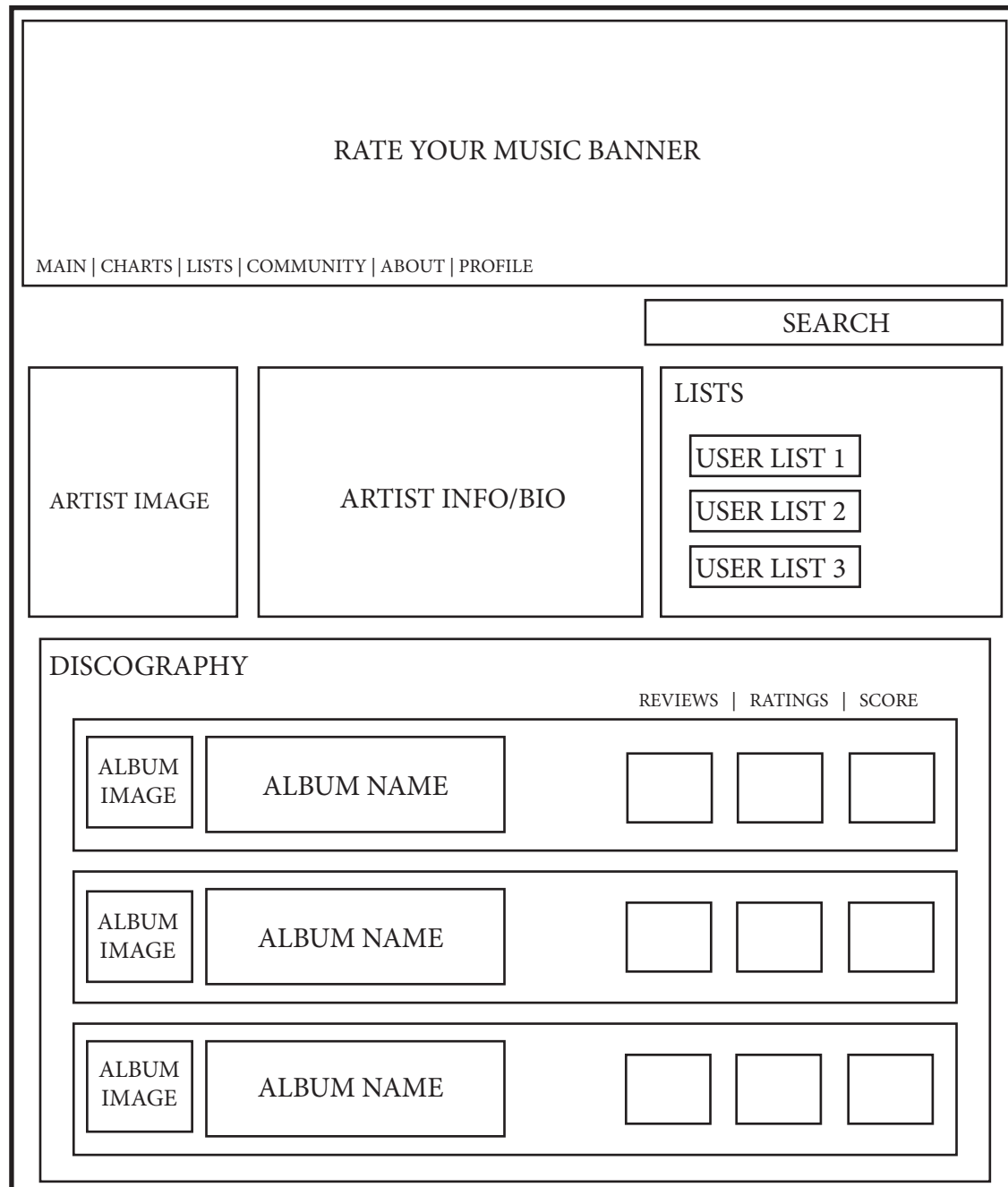
ABOUT RATE YOUR MUSIC

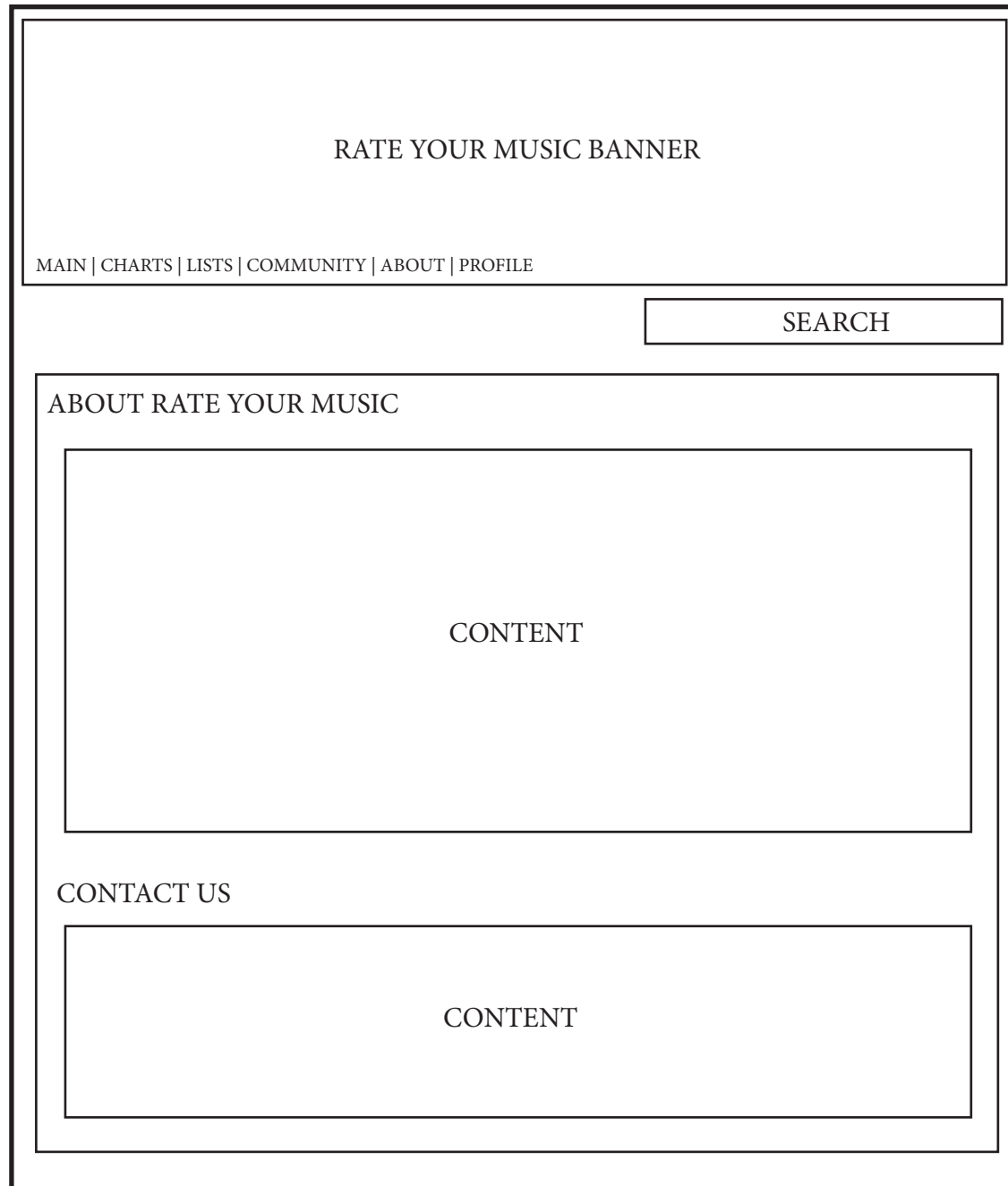
CONTENT

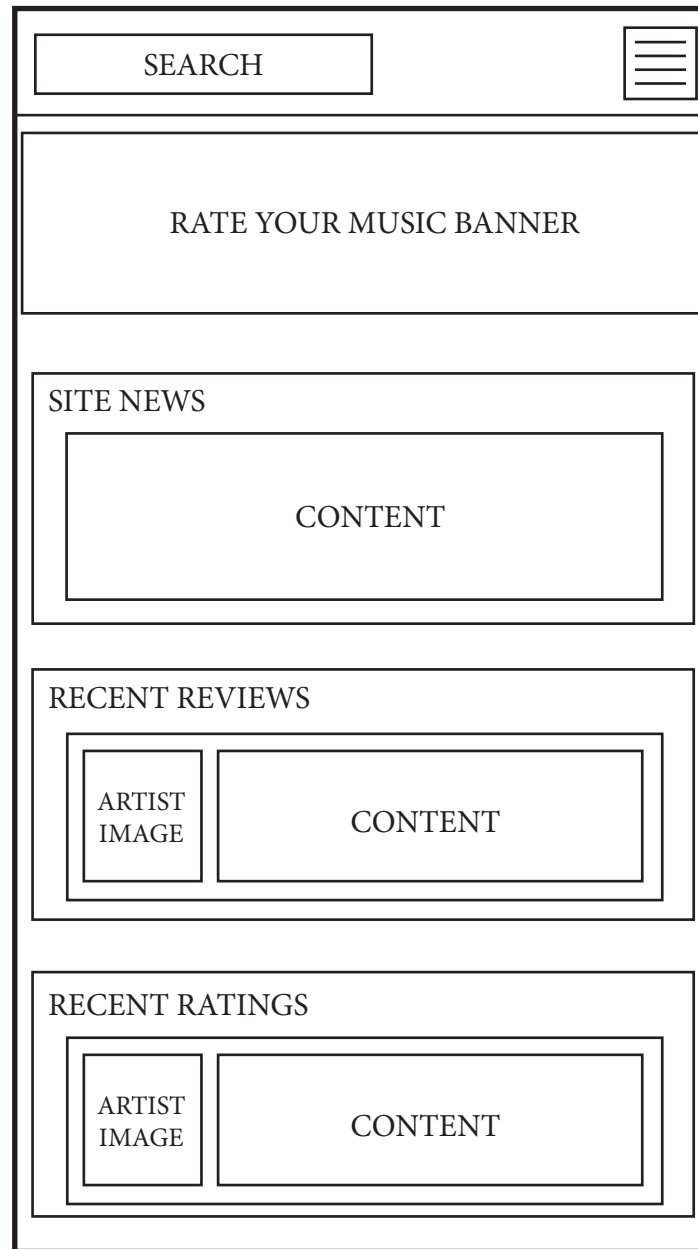
CONTACT US

CONTENT





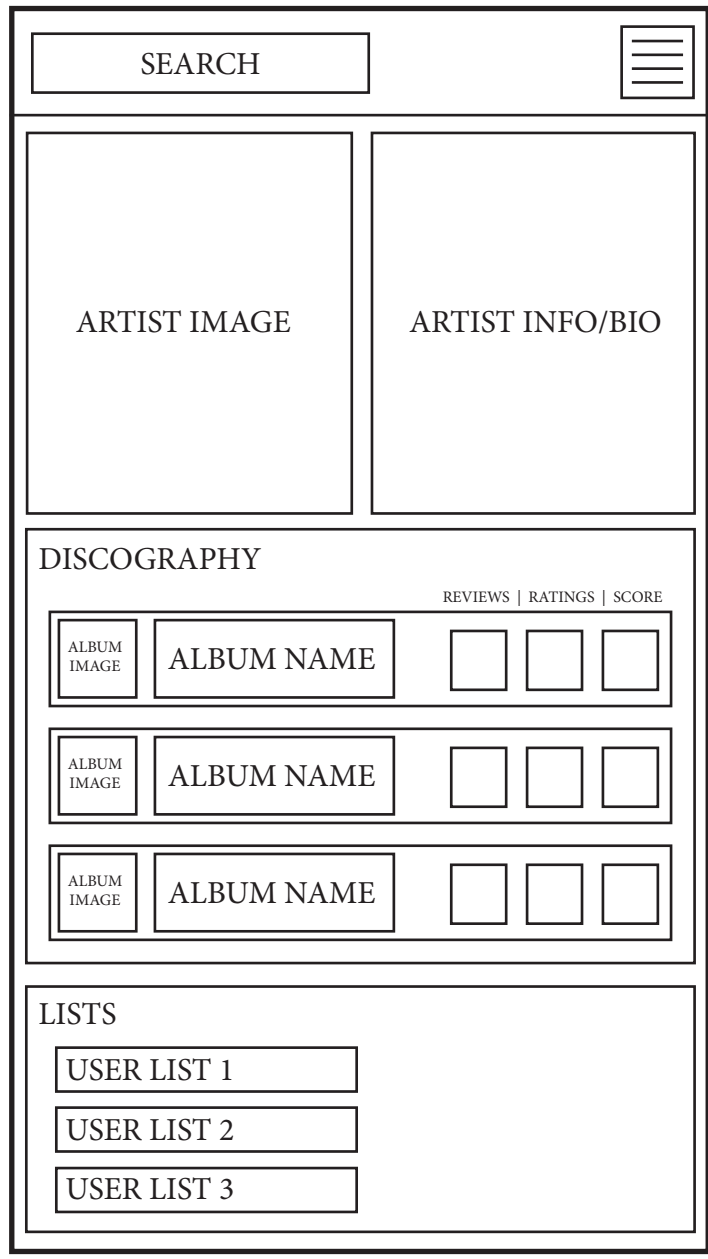


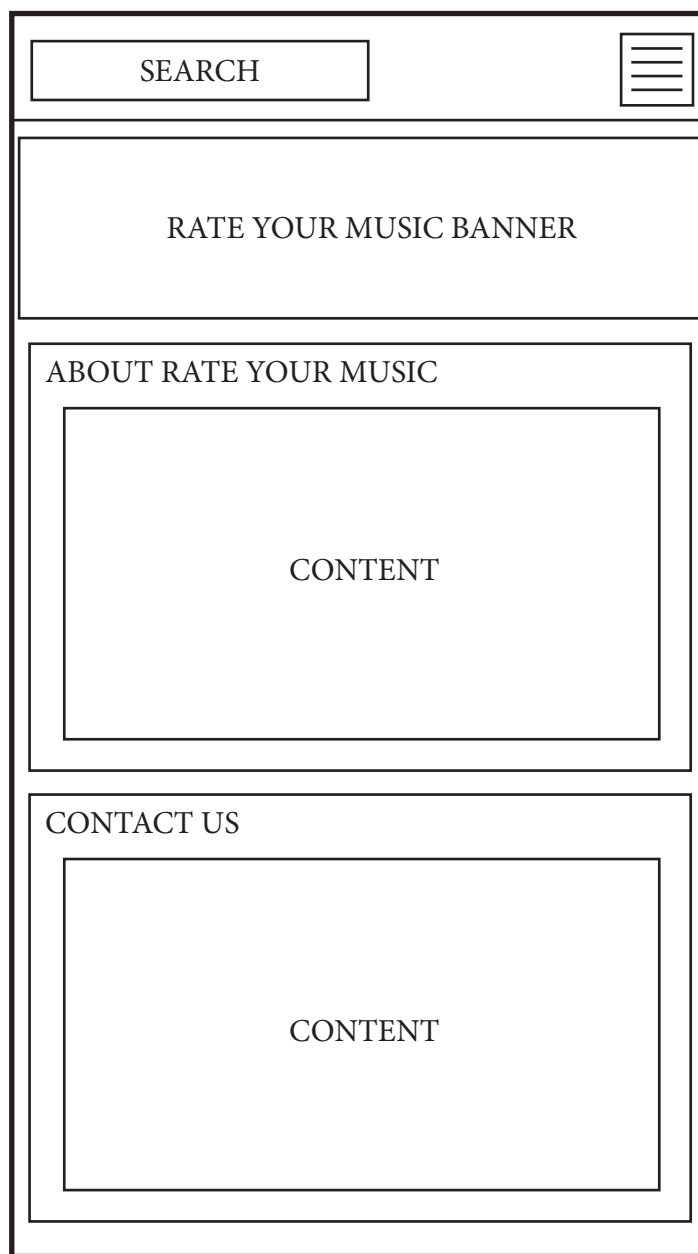


Layout 2's mobile view still maintains the site news section, with the reviews and ratings sections following.

The menu button was moved from the left side to the right side, with the search bar being one of the first areas that a mobile viewer will notice (besides the site logo/banner).

The search option is key for a website like RYM that features 10,000's artists.





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