

# UX Design I: Case Study 1

MercadoLibre Mexico

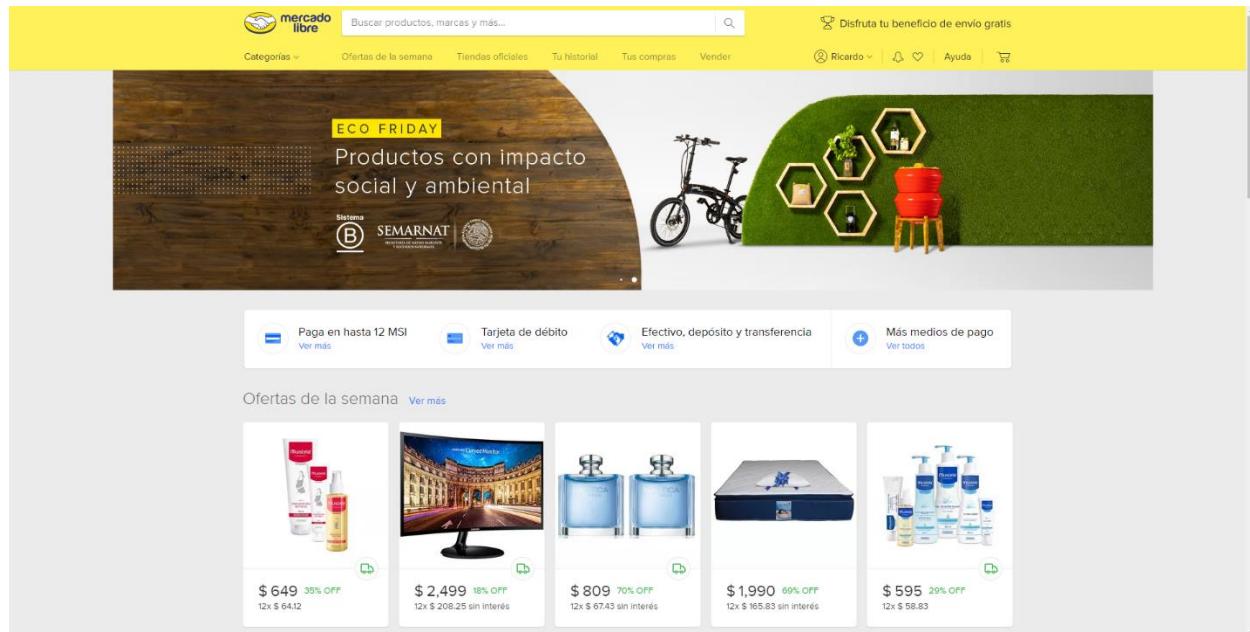
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## Overview

MercadoLibre is a Latin American e-commerce site similar to eBay. This online marketplace is localized to each country. In Mexico, it was one of the pioneers regarding e-commerce. Nowadays, it is one of the first and better options to buy online, probably second only to Amazon.



At first glance, product publications of the site seem to provide all the information needed to buy a product without worries. However, if you, as a new or occasional user, require more information on terms, concepts, or actions that are exclusive to the site (like MercadoLider, Mercado Pago, Mercado Envios, etcetera), you will need to use the online customer support (or help page) to find such information. The need to use the help page intensifies if you are a prospect seller and want to know all the inherent costs and policies before committing to doing business through the site.

## Purpose

The purpose of the site is to function as a marketplace that connects buyers and sellers from a given country, in this case Mexico. The help page should solve any questions or issues related to both buying and selling products as quickly and seamlessly as possible to ensure that most of the time a user spends on the site is on either buying or selling.

This case study focuses on improving the usability of the help page.

## Problem 1: Help search

Once you are on the help page, you will notice that you have either to navigate through the provided help menu or use the search engine. For now, we will focus on the search engine.

Regardless of what term or information you are looking for, the search engine provides more results than the input for the search merits. For example, doing a search of 'mercadolider' provided five pages of results or 47 search results to be exact. Upon further inspection, only the first search result seems to be directly related to the query in question.

## Resultado de búsqueda

 mercadolider



### Cómo ser MercadoLíder

Conoce cómo hacer para estar entre los mejores vendedores del sitio.



### Ventas > Resolver un problema con una publicación



### Ventas > Resolver un problema con una venta, cobro o envío

However, if we assume that all 47 search results contain relevant information regarding 'mercadolider,' the way the search results are currently displayed makes it impossible to tell how most of the search results relate to the query from only the title of the help topic that each result is linked to. In addition, the search results are presented in an inconsistent way. Some search results include a short abstract of the help topic, but most of them do not. The abstract may not provide further hints on how the search result is related to our query.

### Why is this a problem?

A search engine that is not able to provide relevant search results to the user queries in a quick and efficient way contravenes the purpose of having search feature.

### Solution

If we assume that the search engine is optimized to only provide search results relevant to the search at hand and the search results are displayed in order of relevance. The search results should provide a way for the user to determine how relevant each result really is, based on what the user is looking for. To this end, the search results should take advantage of their current design of including the title and an abstract of a help topic and replace the abstract with a snippet of text. The snippet of text from the help topic should include in bold the key words included in the search. If such key words are not available in the text, the abstract should be included instead. All help topics should have an abstract available.



Help topic title

Snippet of text - key words in **bold**

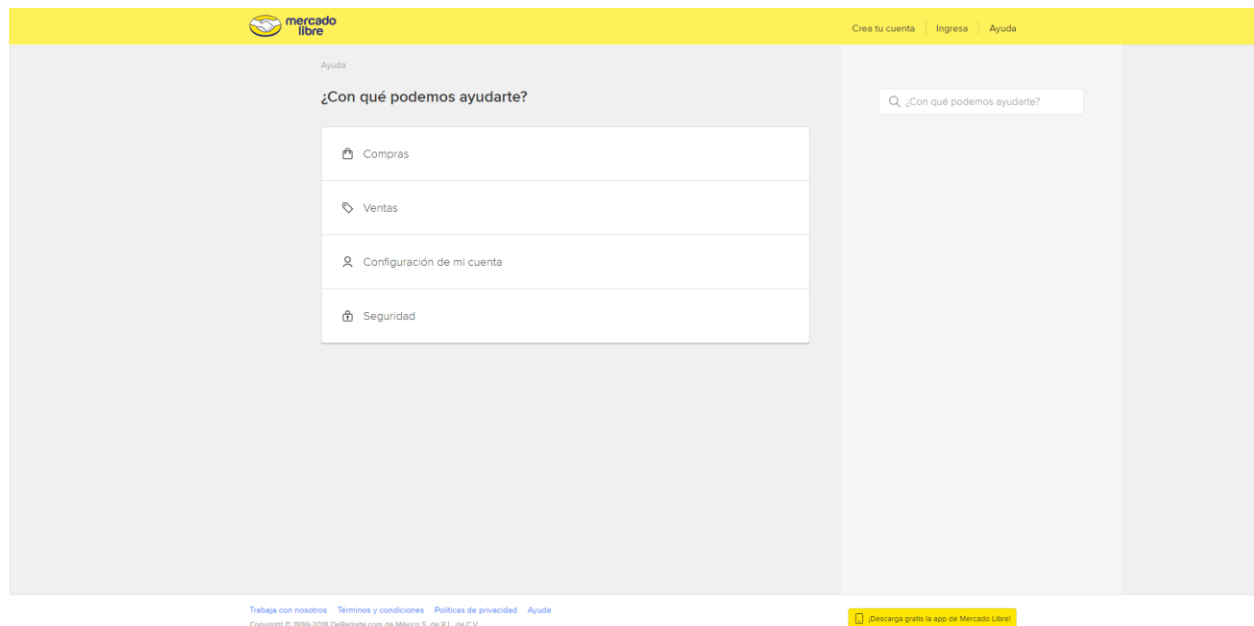
## Justification

Ensuring that every help topic has an abstract when displayed as search result ensures that the user gets a better idea of the contents of the help topic beyond of what information the tile can provide. When possible, replacing the abstract with a snippet of text with the key words used in the query in **bold** provides the user with context of how the help topic relates with the query. This subtle change should enable the user to expedite significantly the solving of the questions or issues that they may have.

Additionally, including an autocomplete feature based on help topics and/or top searches should improve the quality of queries and the relevance of the search results.

## Problem 2: Help layout

Recent [studies](#) show that 11% to 30% of users will start with a search instead browsing a website depending of the task and the site design. That means that 70% to 89% of users will attempt to use the navigation options first. Therefore, if an optimized search engine is important to improve the user's experience, a good layout is even more so.



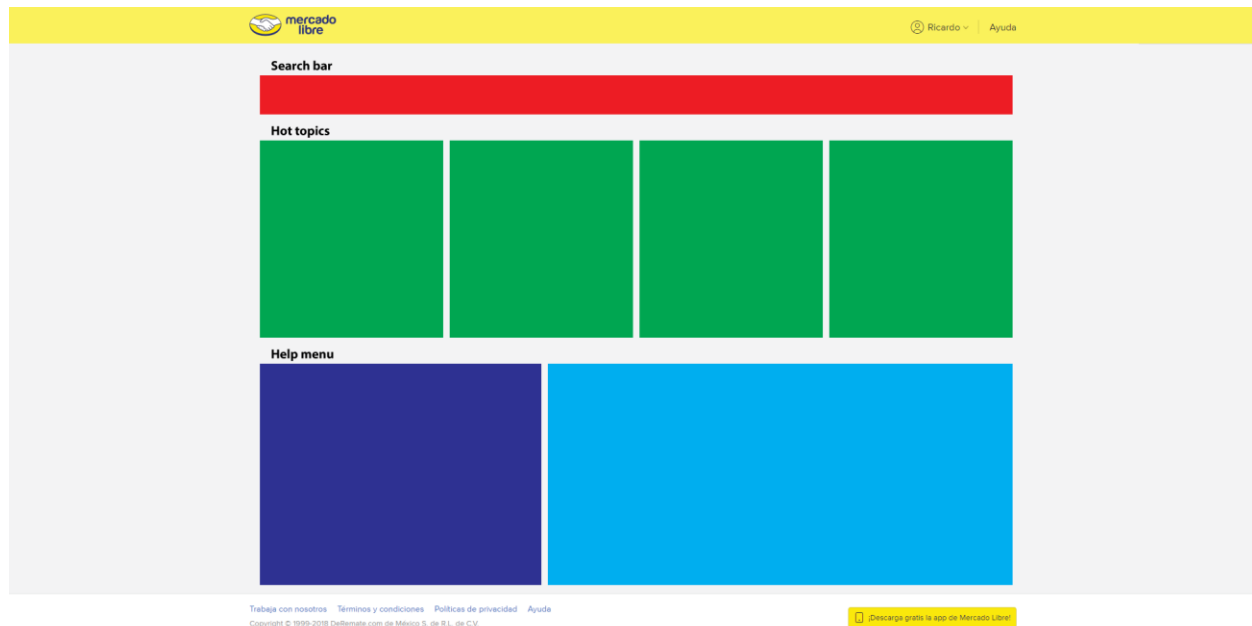
After doing a small task analysis in which we required three users to find information on mercadolibre, publication costs, and credit card fees while using the help menu only, we found that the help page might be in need of some rework. Even though all users were able to complete the assigned tasks, they were encouraged to continue browsing afterwards and none was without feedback. One user commented that he was surprised on how close ended the process was. He didn't appreciate having to back track every time he selected the wrong category. Another user asked on the point of having categories with a subcategory that used the exact same heading or categories with only one subcategory or help topic inside (she is a technical communicator, so no surprise there). When asked how the help page could be improved, they suggested a collapsible menu, a FAQ, and better information architecture.

## Why is this a problem?

A bad layout for a web site reflects directly on the brand and its credibility. In e-commerce, where trust is everything, the user should find comfort in a serviceable online customer support if they are to trust the site with their money, information, and business.

## Solution

Considering the comments received during the task analysis and by taking a leaf out of prestigious e-commerce sites like eBay and Amazon, we propose the following change of layout.



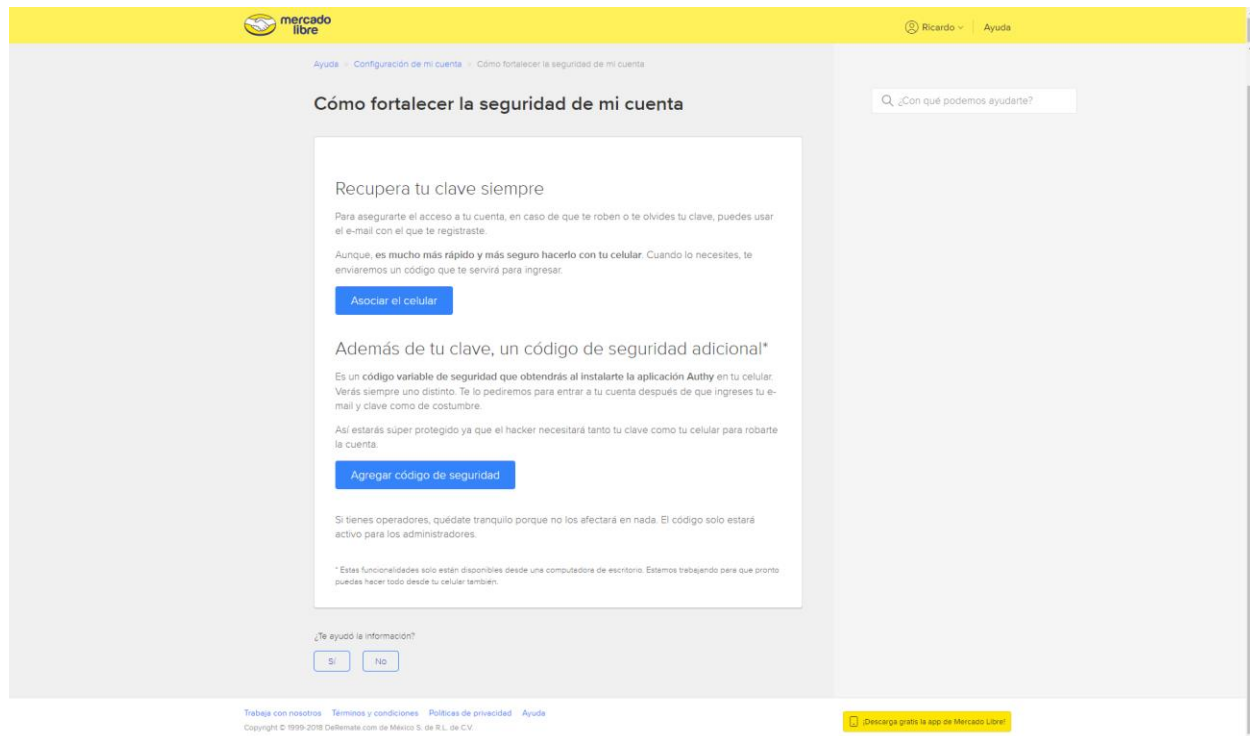
- **Red** represents the search bar.
- **Green** represents a new section for 'hot topics' where the help topics with more hits are to be displayed.
- **Dark blue** and **light blue** represent a dynamic help menu. The top categories will be available in the **dark blue** section and hovering over any of the categories listed there should update the **light blue** section with all the help topics that belong to that category. This will require that all help topics are reorganized to at most a three-level categorization.

## Justification

By moving the search bar to the top instead of a top-right position, the layout gives more visibility to the search bar and increases the real state available for other sections. Including a 'hot topics' section should reduce the need of either using the search or browsing the help menu, since it should display the help topics that are of major interest to users. Finally, a dynamic help menu with a clear hierarchical structure gives the user a clear idea of the help topics available without having to go through several pages to find what they are looking for.

## Problem 3: Help topics

As mentioned in the task analysis of [Problem 2](#), once you access a help topic through either the help menu or a search result, regardless of its relevance, you hit a dead end. The help topic provides no venues to pursue further information related to the help topic or your query.

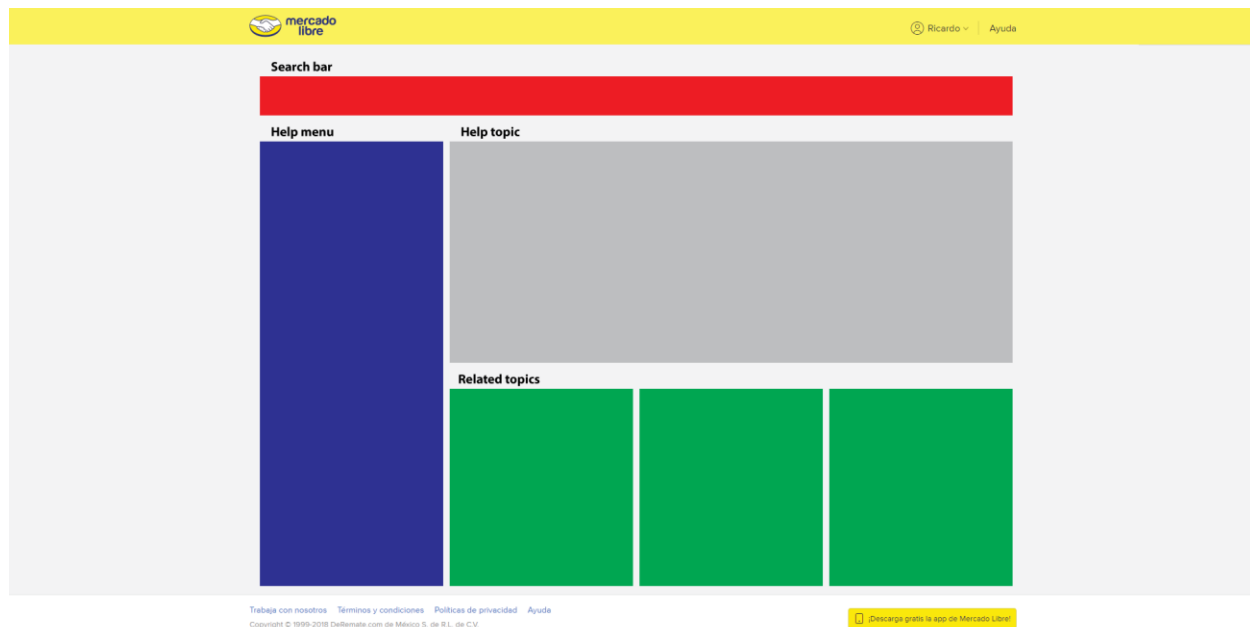


## Why is this a problem?

When your only recourse to continue your search for information is to go back or start over that is a clear example of a poor design in a knowledge base solution. Nowadays, almost all knowledge base solutions offer at least a navigation menu for upper level categories and parallel items.

## Solution

To improve the navigation ability once the user reaches a help topic, we propose the following change of layout.



- **Red**, once again, represents the search bar.
- **Dark blue** represents a collapsible help menu that should at least include all the subcategories and help topics within the top-level category of current help topic.
- **Grey** represents the help topic.
- **Green** represents a set of help topics related to the help topic. If there are no related help topics available, then it should include a set of hot topics.

In addition, each help topic should provide means to further the information provided beyond the scope of the help topic itself. To this end, relevant terms, concepts, or actions that may need further clarification or that may not be common knowledge should include cross-references to help topics that cover such. The site scarcely does this already, but most links within help topics are for redirecting the user toward the section of the site where they can perform the action described in the help topic and not to act as means to clarify terms, concepts, or actions that are properly described in different help topics.

### Justification

By moving the search bar to the top instead of a top-right position, the layout gives more visibility to the search bar, increases the real state available for other sections, and keeps the design consistent with the landing page for help. Once again, having a help menu with a clear hierarchical structure gives the user a clear idea of the help topics available (at the very least for the top-level category associated with current help topic) without having to go through several pages to find what they are looking for. Including a 'related topics' section at the bottom allows for complementing the help topic with information that is out of the scope but nonetheless related to the information provided within the current help topic.

### Conclusion

A clear and comprehensible navigation system is a key component to providing users with a usable interface, one that keeps them engaged until they have achieved their purpose. By improving the searching and browsing capabilities of the online customer support, the site assists the user in solving their questions and issues promptly and efficiently, so they can go back to buying or selling products within the site.