

UX Design 1 Case Study 1: Improving the Recipe Search Experience on FoodNetwork.com

Overview

Many people these days turn to the internet when they are trying to figure out what to cook, whether that be for a weeknight dinner, a special occasion, or a seasonal treat. Online recipe databases provide users with thousands of free, easily accessible recipes. Popular recipe databases include AllRecipes.com, Epicurious.com, Food.com, and FoodNetwork.com.

FoodNetwork.com is unique from its competitors in that it is a hybrid site – both a popular television network site and an extensive recipe database. Although the website is impressive in that it houses a significant amount of content, it is somewhat lacking in its organization of this content. The menu system is somewhat confusing and the recipe search function could be improved.

FoodNetwork.com is a popular site, ranking 7th in terms of website traffic compared to other sites in the Cooking and Recipes category. However, overall traffic on the site has decreased over the past five months from 37.2 million users per month to 28.9 million users per month.¹

The purpose of this redesign is to retain users and attract new users to the site and to enhance the overall user experience of searching for recipes on the site, primarily through improving the site navigation system and overall organization.

¹ "FoodNetwork.com Traffic Statistics." *SimilarWeb*, www.similarweb.com/website/foodnetwork.com.

Problems

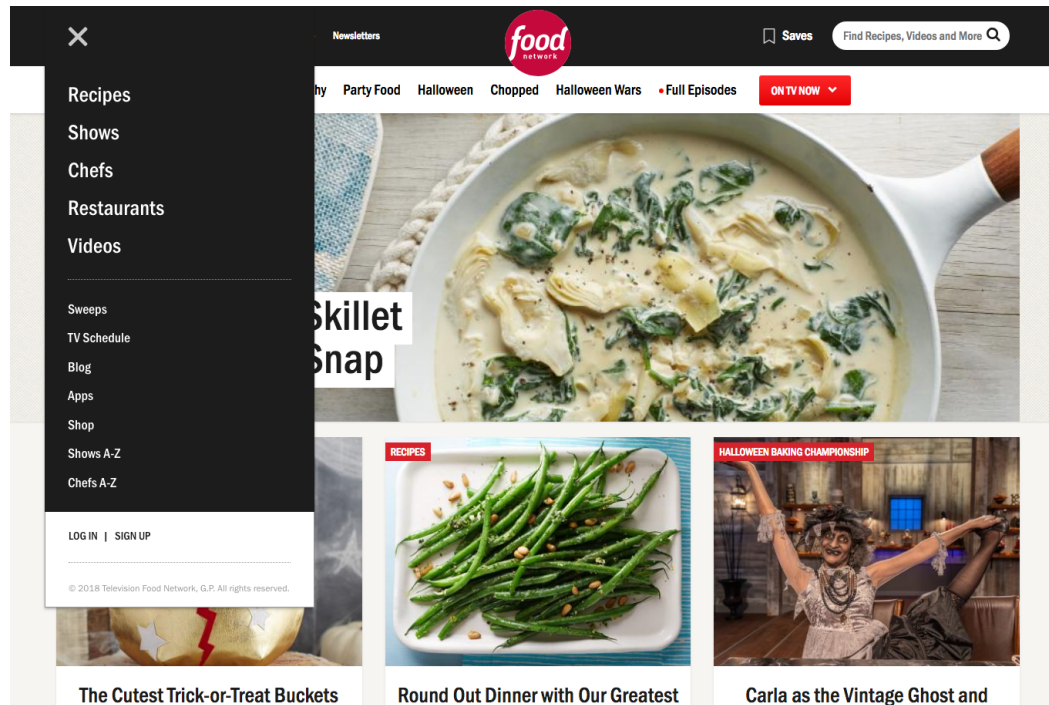
Through online data, user testing, and my own observations, I have discovered several key design issues within Food Network's website:

- 1. The menu system at the top of the page is disorganized and can be a bit overwhelming for users to navigate.**

There is both a dropdown/hamburger menu in the top left corner and a tab menu across the top. There are also links to all of Food Network's social media pages.

The menu options don't seem to be grouped together in an intuitive way. In the tab bar, there is a "Recipes" option, options for different categories of recipes ("Healthy," "Party Food," and "Halloween"), options for specific Food Network shows ("Chopped" and "Halloween Wars"), and a "Full Episodes" option. Some menu options could easily be grouped within other menu options (for example, "Healthy" within "Recipes" or "Chopped" within "Shows," which is in the hamburger/dropdown menu).





Although users were able to navigate through the menu system fairly easily during a task analysis, they were a bit confused by all the options included in the menu. They mostly relied on the tab bar menu and did not fully utilize the menu system as they were navigating through the site. One user noted that the menu system appeared “cluttered and disorganized” and joked that the website had included “everything but the kitchen sink” in the menu system.

The menu system needs to be reorganized. Some of the menu options can be categorized as sub-options within other menu options. For example, “Party Food” and “Healthy” do not need to be part of the main menu and can simply be included as categories within “Recipes.”

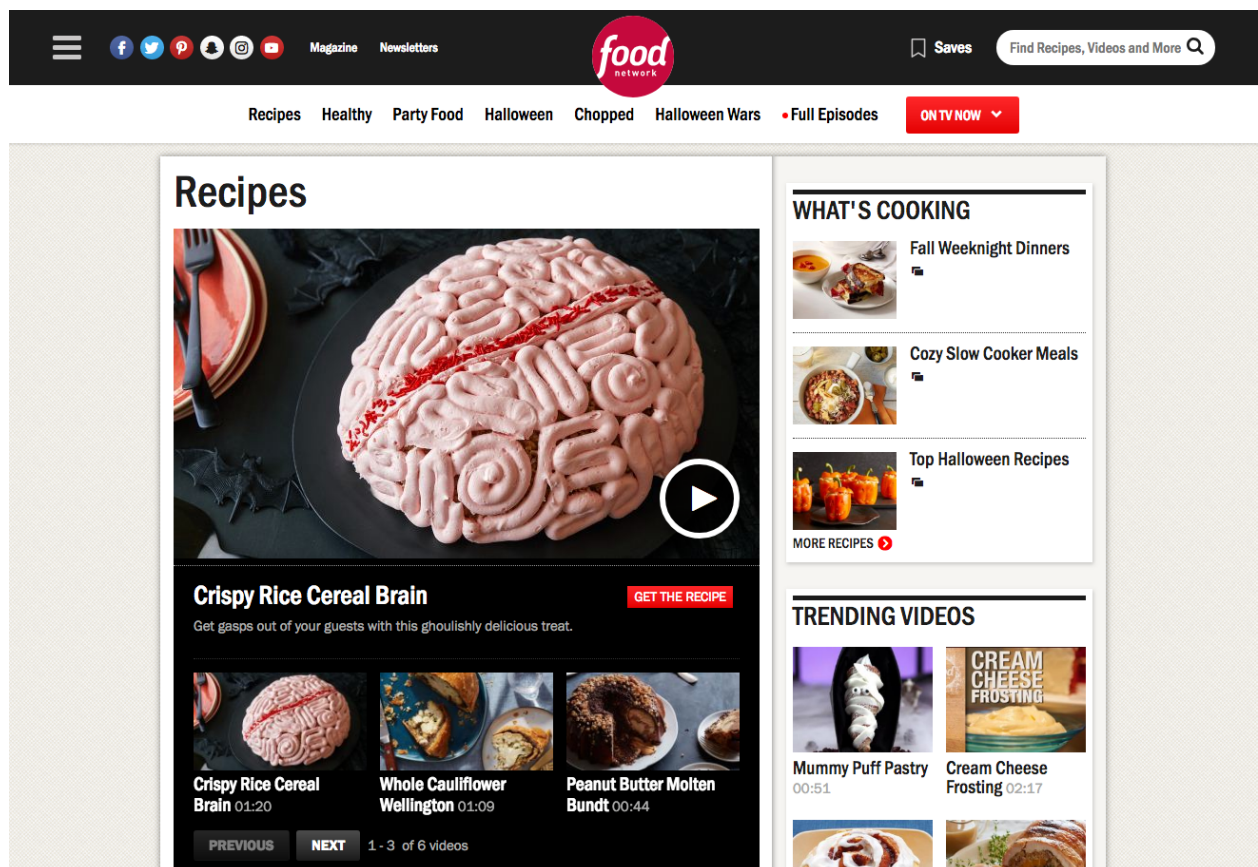
2. It is somewhat difficult to filter results when a user is trying to find a recipe.

When the user clicks “Recipes,” there are no options to filter recipes. Instead, the user sees “Trending” recipes and videos, recipes that are “In Season Now,” and other similar

options. Although this page is great for browsing, it does not give users the option to filter down recipe results if they have a general idea of what they want to make (for example “chicken dinner recipes,” “vegetarian,” or “30-minute meals”). Instead, users have to use the search bar.

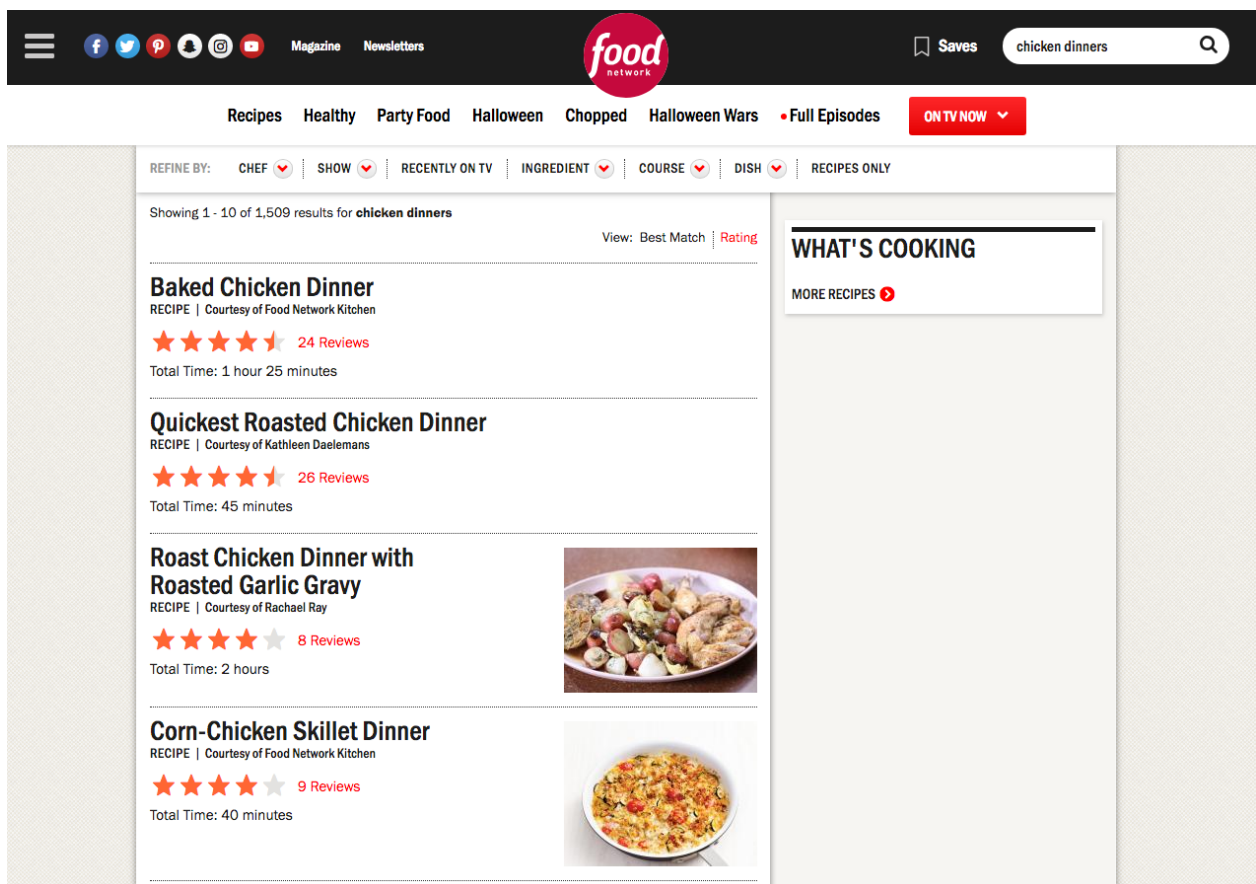
When I gave users the task to find a listing of vegetarian recipes on the site, 3/3 users first clicked on the “Recipes” section in hopes of finding a “Vegetarian” section or filter. However, because there is no filter bar on the Recipes page and no “Vegetarian” section, all 3 users had to give up and type “Vegetarian” into the search bar, which takes more time and effort than using a filter bar.

The “Recipes” page needs a filter bar so that users can search for a specific category of recipes without having to use the search bar.



Only after users utilize the search bar do they see options to filter recipe results. This filtration system is fairly extensive. However, there are some filtering options missing that users find important. In addition to the options available, users suggested that they would like to be able to filter recipes by dietary preferences, cuisine type, holiday, and recipe popularity. Users would also like to be able to specify ingredients they *don't* want in a recipe (either because of allergies or preferences).

Currently, filtering options include “Chef,” “Show,” “Recently on TV,” “Ingredient,” “Course,” “Dish,” and “Recipes Only.” Users can also choose to filter recipes by “Best Match” or “Rating.”



This filtration system needs additional filtering options for dietary preferences, cuisine type, holiday, and ingredients *not* to include. In addition to being able to sort recipes by relevance, rating, and “Recently on TV,” users should be able to sort recipes by popularity or “Most Reviewed.”

3. The site is lacking a “Recommended for You” section and there are no recommended recipe options when the user clicks on a specific recipe.

In user research interviews, 3/3 users mentioned that they would like to see “Similar Recipes” when they click on a specific recipe. Being able to see similar recipes to the one that the user has clicked on is very useful when the user has a general idea of what he or she would like to cook and wants to explore different recipes before deciding on one.

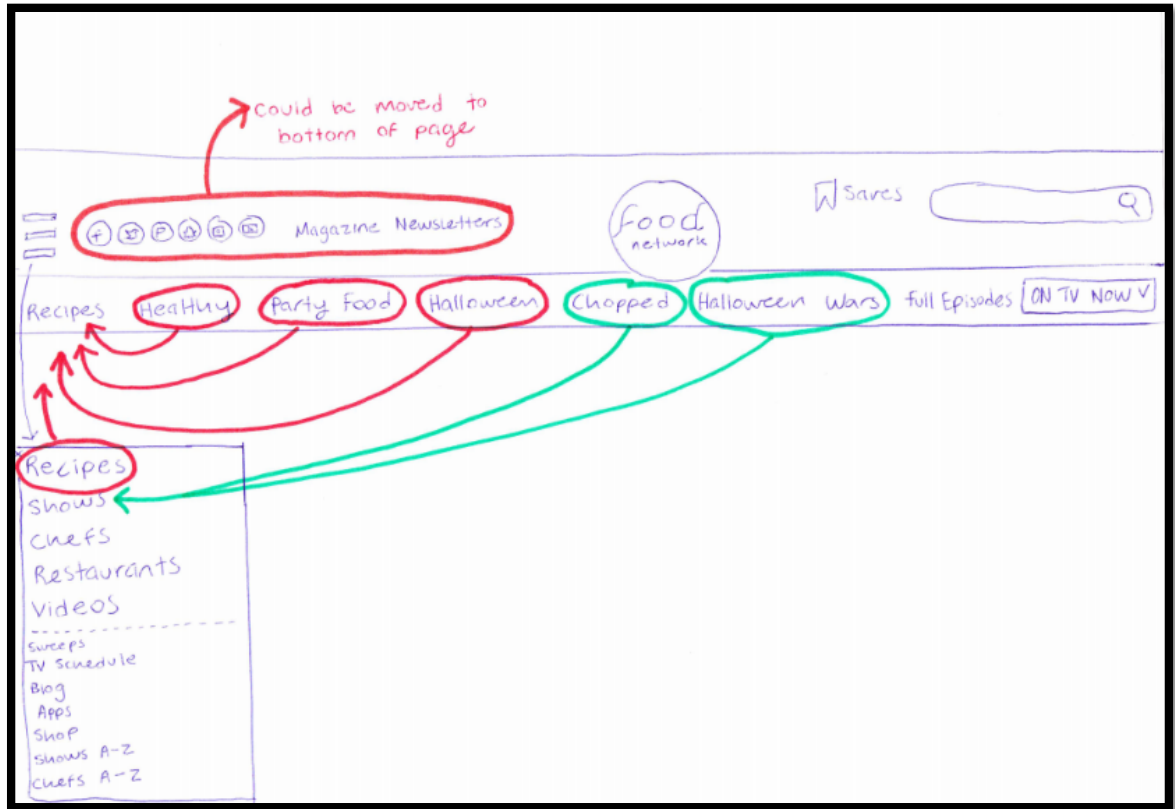
Additionally, there is no “Recommended for You” section. One user mentioned that it would be very useful if the website remembered past recipes that she had saved or liked and recommended new recipes based off of that data. When a website has personalized recommendations for a specific user, it attracts the user back to the website. Users will want to return to a recipe database that understands their tastes and preferences.

Solutions

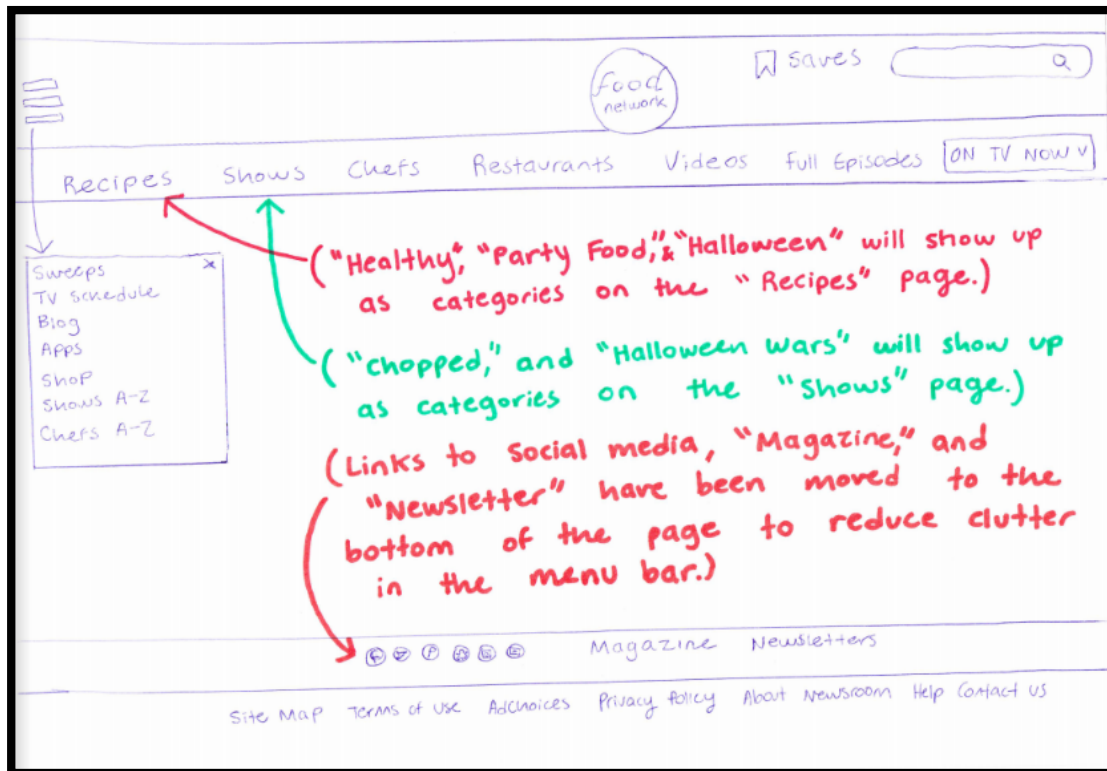
1. In my redesign of Food Network’s menu system, I will group menu items together in a more intuitive, less cluttered way.

In examining the current menu system, I determined that many menu items can be categorized within other menu items. I plan on moving the content from “Healthy,” “Party Food,” and “Halloween” into the “Recipes” section. I also plan on grouping “Chopped” and “Halloween Wars” within “Shows.” Additionally, I will move the links to

social media pages and the “Magazine” and Newsletters” buttons to the bottom bar of the page. These adjustments will help de-clutter the menu bar.

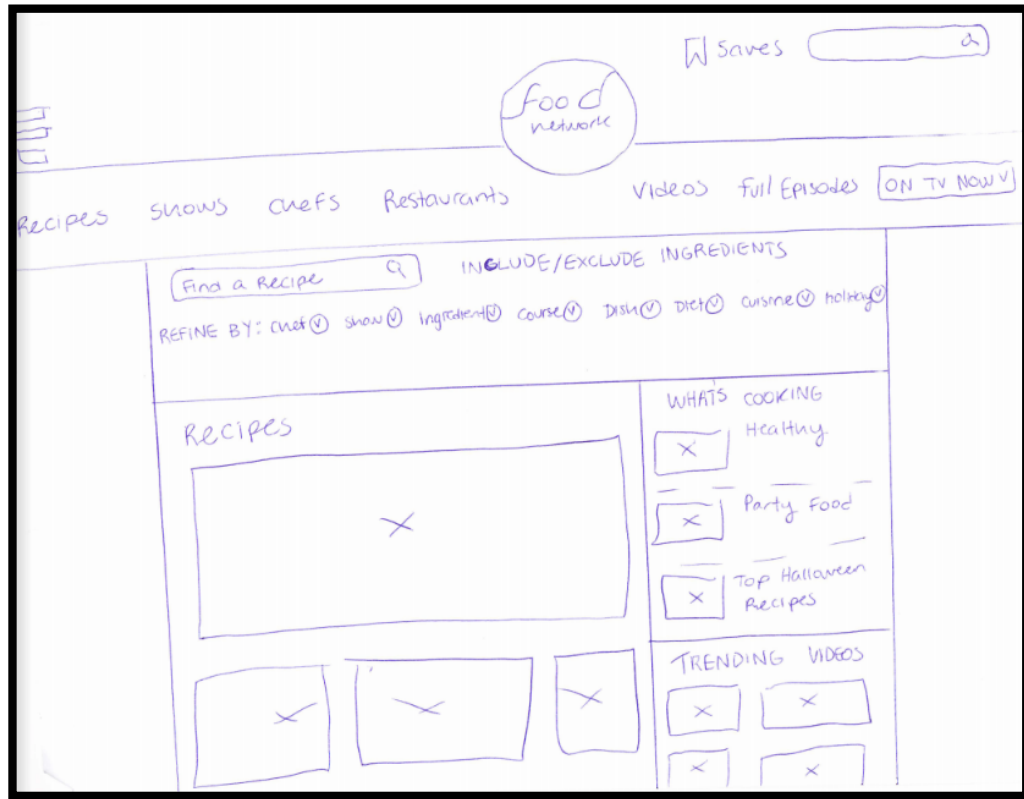


I also determined that the current menu system is not grouped and organized in an intuitive way. To fix this, I will move all of the most important menu options to the tab bar and keep all of the less-utilized menu options in the hamburger/dropdown menu. The most important menu options that will be moved to the tab bar include “Recipes,” “Shows,” “Chefs,” “Restaurants,” “Videos,” “Full Episodes,” and “On TV Now.” The less utilized menu options that will be kept in the hamburger/dropdown menu include “Sweeps,” “TV Schedule,” “Blog,” “Apps,” “Shop,” “Shows A-Z,” and “Chefs A-Z.” I have categorized these menu options as less utilized and less important because, in the current design, they are in a smaller, less noticeable font than the other menu options.

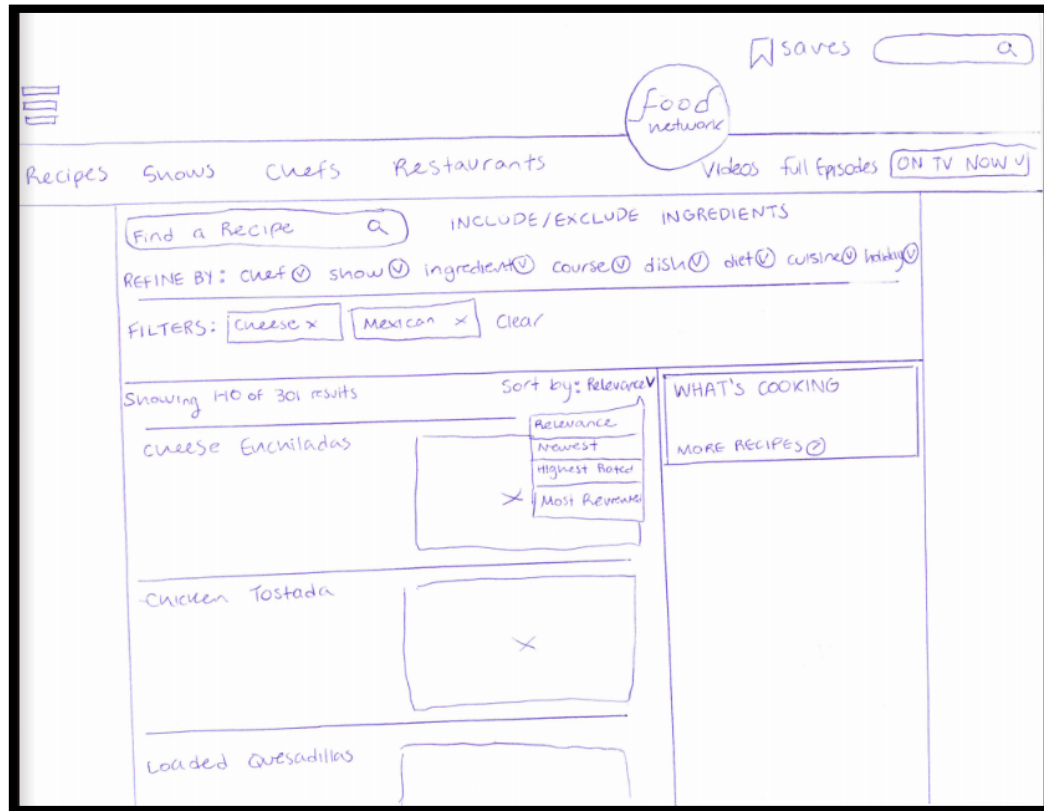


2. I will improve the recipe filtering function by making the filtering bar accessible in the "Recipes" section and adding new filtering options that are desired by users.

While interviewing users, I discovered that users are confused by the lack of a filtering option on the "Recipes" page. If the user has a general idea of what she would like to cook, she has to type it into the search bar as opposed to using a simple filtering system. I plan on including a search option and filtering system specific to recipes at the top of the "Recipes" page to fix this issue.

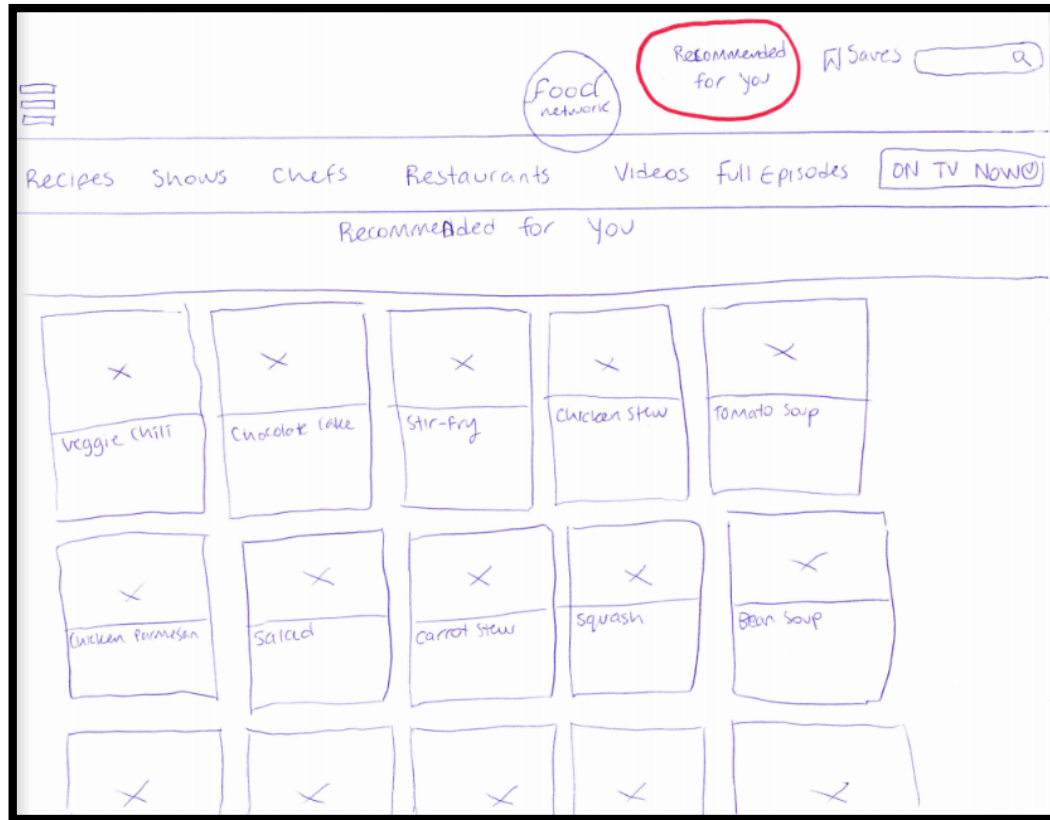


Additionally, I determined that users would like additional options for filtering their recipe results. I plan on adding "Dietary Concerns," "Cuisine," and "Holiday" as filtering options. I also plan on adding the option to "Include" and "Exclude" ingredients and sort search results by "Newest" or "Most Reviews." These additional options will allow users to easily find specific categories of recipes.

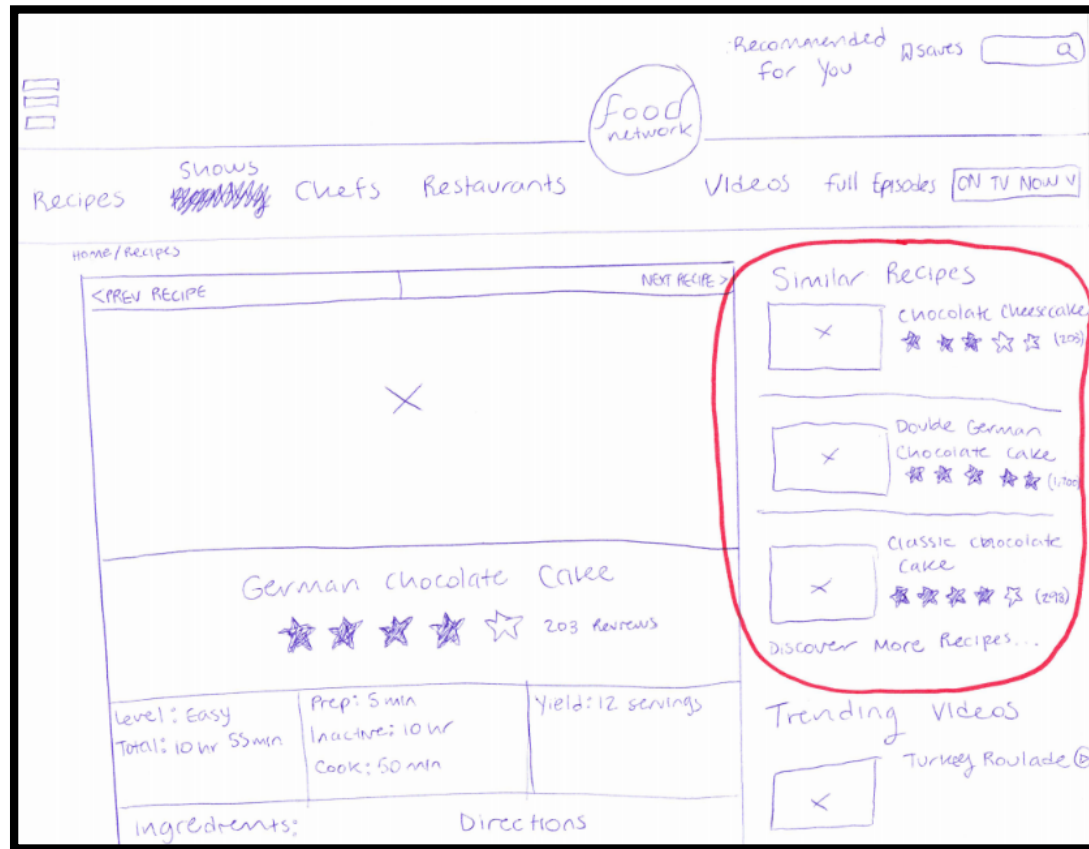


3. I will add a “Recommended Recipes for You” section to the website. I will also include a “Similar Recipes” section that appears when the user clicks on a specific recipe.

Food Network users I spoke with were very interested in seeing a “Recommended Recipes” section based on recipes they had viewed or saved in the past. I plan on adding a “Recommended for You” page for users who have a Food Network account. The “Recommended for You” page will help users easily discover new recipes that are aligned with their tastes and preferences.



Users also expressed their desire to see similar recipes in a sidebar when they click on a specific recipe. I plan on including a "Similar Recipes" section in the sidebar when users click on a specific recipe. This will replace the "What's Cooking" section of trending recipes that is currently displayed in the sidebar next to recipes.



Conclusion

These improvements to the site navigation system and the recipe filtering functions, as well as the addition of recommended recipes, will improve users' ability to easily navigate through the site, find certain categories of recipes, and discover new recipes that are aligned with their tastes and preferences. The new navigation system and recipe filtering functions will enable users to explore the contents of the site with ease, while the recommended recipes sections will encourage users to return to FoodNetwork.com to easily find recipes that they will enjoy.