

# Making my mind up

## a quick usability review of two aggregated movie review websites

Browsing the web's two most popular movie review sites (as of September 2006), I was struck at how effective the information design of Metacritic was, and how poorly RottenTomatoes conveyed the same information.

Both these sites use the same source data and aggregate this data with the same goal - to inform their readers about what critics and (to a lesser extent) readers, think about a current film.

Comparing the two approaches is, I think, an object lesson in the benefits of simplicity, reducing visual clutter and using information as the primary interface element.

▶ **FULL REVIEW** [Comment >](#)

 A jumbled website, that seems pre-occupied with using distracting graphical gimmicks and a confusing page layout, resulting in a less than optimal reader experience.

 *Guy Dickinson*  
PARTICIPO

92 **Participo** | Guy Dickinson

A fantastic website - clean, simple layouts with an emphasis on actual data and devoid of graphical frills that making finding movie information a pleasure.

[→ Read Full Review](#)



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## Film

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All-Time High Scores  
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How Metascores Are Calculated  
Discuss Film In Our Forums

### Little Miss Sunshine

Fox Searchlight Pictures



Critics: **80** based on 36 reviews  
Read critic reviews  
How did we calculate this?

metascore **8.2** out of 10  
Users: **8.2** out of 10  
based on 121 votes  
Read user comments  
Rate this movie

MPAA RATING: R for language, some sex and drug content

Also On The Web  
[Internet Movie Database](#)  
[View The Trailer](#)  
[Official Studio Site](#)

Starring Abigail Breslin, Greg Kinnear, Paul Dano, Alan Arkin, Toni Collette, Steve Carell, Marc Turtletaub, and Jill Talley

Little Miss Sunshine is an American family road comedy that shatters the mold. Brazenly satirical and yet deeply human, the film introduces audiences to one of the most endearingly fractured families in

Wide Releases Now In Theaters  
[sort by name](#) [sort by score](#)

48 Accepted

**80**

Users:  
**8.2** out of 10

**Little Miss Sunshine**  
Fox Searchlight Pictures

The contrasting colours are used to good effect - the score is the most visible element of the page.

Reader ratings reinforce the primary score in an effective way - the reduced size reinforces the reduced importance of this score.

Interestingly, the studio is given significant prominence - perhaps appealing to film buffs (and industry users)?

'Above the fold' there isn't an actual review visible.

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Rotten Tomatoes

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SEARCH RT  
 Little Miss Sunsh Movies Search Adv.

## Little Miss Sunshine (2006)

REVIEWS SHOWTIMES ABOUT CREDITS POSTERS PHOTOS TRAILERS NUMBERS FORUM

CRITICS 93% USERS 95% MyCRITICS MyFRIENDS

**93%** CRITICS TOMATOMETER  
 Reviews Counted: 149  
 Fresh: 139 Rotten: 10  
 Average Rating: 7.8/10

CONSENSUS: "A moving, delightfully funny satire."

TYPE - Tomatometer Reviews Sort by Critic Source Rating Date

(1-35) of 149, sorted by last name z-a Page 1 Next View All

### GENERAL OVERVIEW

Toni Collette  
Steven Carell

RATED R  
1 HR 42 MINS  
COMEDIES  
LIMITED  
07-26-2006  
WIDE  
08-18-2006

Directed by Jonathan Dayton

Blog This  
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**CREAM OF THE CROP**  
**90%**  
 Average Rating: 7.5/10

**FULL REVIEW** Comment >

The characters in the Sundance hit *Little Miss Sunshine* are so adeptly drawn -- and superbly played -- that you can easily forgive the film's sometimes forced kookiness.

Glenn Whipp  
LOS ANGELES DAILY

**93**  
CRITICS TOMATOMETER

**CREAM OF THE CROP**  
**90%**  
 Average Rating: 7.5/10

**Little Miss Sunshine (2006)**

**FULL REVIEW** Comment >

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Glenn Whipp  
LOS ANGELES DAILY

Score is given a complimentary background colour - this makes it harder to pick out at first glance. Interestingly the font size is nearly an exact match. There is a secondary bar that adds little value but adds cognitive overhead.

Is this a reader's rating? It's presented on a different plane to the critic's score, but is not clearly labelled. Again, two separate ways to label the value are used.

The title floats above the content area.

Above the fold, a review extract and part of another review are visible

## What The Critics Said

All critic scores are converted to a 100-point scale. If a critic does not indicate a score, we assign a score based on the general impression given by the text of the review. [Learn more...](#)

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**100** **TV Guide** | Ken Fox

What makes husband-and-wife directing team Jonathan Dayton and Valerie Faris' hilarious debut such a great family film isn't that it's suitable for the whole family (it's not), but that it speaks a simple truth about what it means to be part of one.

[Read Full Review](#)

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**100** **Los Angeles Times** | Carina Chocano

As ambitious, honest and subversive as any American movie since "Election."

[Read Full Review](#)

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**100** **San Francisco Chronicle** | Ruth Steiner

Sly, near-perfect comedy.

[Read Full Review](#)

---

**100** **Baltimore Sun** | Michael Sragow

You won't see a brighter, truer affirmation of the All-American messed-up improvisational family than Little Miss Sunshine.

[Read Full Review](#)

CREAM OF THE CROP
► FULL REVIEW [Comment >](#)

90%

Average Rating: 7.5/10

► FULL REVIEW [Comment >](#)

**Little Miss Sunshine** isn't the kind of movie you want to beat up on: It's sweet-tempered at its core, and even when it's trying too hard to reinforce its own quirks, the charms of its actors filter through effortlessly.

Stephanie Zacharek  
SALON.COM

► FULL REVIEW [Comment >](#)

The characters in the Sundance hit **Little Miss Sunshine** are so adeptly drawn -- and superbly played -- that you can easily forgive the film's sometimes forced kookiness.

Glenn Whipp  
LOS ANGELES DAILY NEWS

► FULL REVIEW [Comment >](#)

Unlike so many films that force life lessons down your throat, **Little Miss Sunshine** weaves them into the fabric of the story.

Chris Vognar  
DALLAS MORNING NEWS

► FULL REVIEW [Comment >](#)

Despite the indie-film stereotypes in the character profiles, the actors find the humanity in their roles and stick to it through every joke and tragedy.

Jeffrey Westhoff  
NORTHWEST HERALD (CRYSTAL LAKE, IL)

► FULL REVIEW [Comment >](#)

You'll be delighted, if a bit breathless from laughing, to be along for the ride.

► FULL REVIEW [Comment >](#)

A very funny and touching family drama about the wisdom that often comes not with success but with failure.

Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat  
SPIRITUALITY AND PRACTICE

HOT PICK

► FULL REVIEW [Comment >](#)

...screenwriter Michael Arndt, along with Dayton and Faris, have taken this "dramedy" and infused it with a rare humanity amidst the gay porn jokes and corpse gags.

Pete Vonder Haar  
FILM THREAT

Here's a sample of the next 'fold' featuring the reviews:

- \* Single column layout assists in rapid scan of key elements
- \* High contrasting text increases readability
- \* Spacing enhances readability
- \* Each element is a review, there is no 'sorting' of elements required by the reader.

- \* Multi column layout makes it harder to scan
- \* Mix of high contrast graphics jars with the text, decreasing readability
- \* There is a mix of elements within this content area - the movie poster, and the 'hot pick' element. This decreases readability.
- \* The advertising block reduces repetitive layout causing dissonance when scanning the page



40

Village Voice | Jim Ridley

Like the shambling VW van its hapless characters steer from Albuquerque to Redondo Beach, *Little Miss Sunshine* is a rickety vehicle that travels mostly downhill.

[Read Full Review](#)

FULL REVIEW

[Comment >](#)



Like the shambling VW van its hapless characters steer from Albuquerque to Redondo Beach, *Little Miss Sunshine* is a rickety vehicle that travels mostly downhill.



Jim Ridley  
VILLAGE VOICE

This is the same review block from both sites:

40

Village Voice | Jim Ridley

Scoring is applied to each individual review, adding useful meta-information for the reader to evaluate how the average score was reached. Colour blocks (green, yellow, red, reinforce the level of scoring at a glance.

The review publication is given the same level prominence as the score - this allows the reader to quickly 'grade' the relative relevance of the reviewing journal.

The wider width of the review element increases readability.

Scoring for each review is a binary tomato or 'splatted' green tomato. It isn't immediately obvious that this is 'data' or just page adornment. The lack of a specific value reduces the utility of the 'splat' icon.

The publication title is given less prominence and appears after the review, providing less evaluative choice before spending time to read. The featuring (where available) of the reviewers photo is of questionable utility, but looks nice.

The cube review element forces unsightly line breaking and decreases reading efficiency.



Richard Roeper  
EBERT & ROEPER

FULL REVIEW

[Comment >](#)



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Jim Ridley  
VILLAGE VOICE

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Village Voice | Jim Ridley

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# Film

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sort by name    sort by score

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- 17 Material Girls
- 65 Miami Vice
- 68 Monster House
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- 50 Night Listener, The
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- 53 Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest
- 75 Prairie Home Companion, A
- 51 Protector, The
- 27 Pulse
- 73 Scanner Darkly, A
- 48 Scoop
- 58 Snakes on a Plane
- 48 Step Up

The sidebar is used to good effect on metacritic - providing rapid (and sortable) access to metacritics reviews of current films.

Readers can quickly assess the score threshold with colour and clear score labelling.


Metacritics sidebar (and actual site) doesn't offer detailed meta data about the movie.

Rotten Tomatoes features significant metadata about the movie in it's sidebar. The typical task of a reader may be to decide on a particular movie to watch that day - Rotten Tomatoes ' sidebar doesn't facilitate that goal easily, as rapid scanning of other films is reached from another page.

### LITTLE MISS SUNSHINE

#### GENERAL OVERVIEW

Toni Collette  
Steven Carell



RATED R  
1 HR 42 MINS  
COMEDIES  
LIMITED  
07-26-2006  
WIDE  
08-18-2006

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Directed by **Jonathan Dayton**

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### TICKETS & SHOWTIMES

Tickets & Showtimes for Little Miss Sunshine

Location: Zip (or) City, State


Enter your zip code or city, state to find theaters showing this movie in your area.

Sun, Sep 10, 2006 | [Change](#)

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### CLIPS & TRAILERS

View All 19 Clips & Trailers for Little Miss Sunshine



Porn & Poker

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### MOVIE INFO

**NUMBERS**  
Box Office: \$35,734,630  
[details...](#)

**CONSENSUS**  
A moving satire about a dysfunctional family obsessed with winning, *Little Miss Sunshine* captivates and convulses with its perfectly-cast ensemble and delightfully funny script.

**SYNOPSIS**  
"Little Miss Sunshine" is an American family road comedy that shatters the mold. Brazenly satirical and yet deeply human, the film introduces audiences to one of the most endearingly fractured families in recent cinema history: the Hoovers, whose trip to a pre-pubescent beauty pageant results not only in comic mayhem but in death, transformation and a moving look at the surprising rewards of being losers in a winning-crazed culture. [more...](#)

**MPAA RATING**  
R, for language, some sex and drug content



RELEASE COMPANY

