Executive Summary - Website Usability Testing Guide

Executive Summary

Why Test for Usability?

Usability testing will save staff time, money and administrative overhead by defining what users need, how they find information and what information they are searching for. By listening to users, understanding how they interact with your site or tool, and responding to the needs users actually articulate programs can avoid spending unnecessary time and resources and better serve their users.

What to test for?

Jackob Neilson defines usability simply as the "quality attribute that assesses how easy user interfaces are to use." One way to measure a sites usability is to measure it against specific standards, such as Neilson's five "quality components" of usability, which will be referenced throughout the guide. These include:

- Learnability

- Efficiency

- Memorability

- Errors

- Satisfaction

When should I test for usability and who should be testers?

Testing groups of five users can identify 85% of the usability issues on a site. It is important to engage several testing groups throughout the process to ensure the most complete feedback, and to solicit feedback from current users, as well as groups you are targeting as future users.

How do I test for Usability?

The basic process, as outlined in more depth in this guide includes:

Create a testing script

The testing script articulates the purpose or goals of your site, the tasks your users performs to satisfy your site goals, and a set of scenarios in which your user would perform these tasks.

Identify the metrics you will use

This allows you to measure how well the users performed the tasks from the scripts you provide. These metrics may include:

- Length of time it takes a user to complete a task
- How well individuals learn and navigate the site
- Errors users make while on the site.

Determine the best test to capture this information

- Comparison testing compares two options for their strengths and weaknesses.
- A/B Testing tests for which option users prefer.
- Click testing and heat mapping will help you determine where your users click most

Additional considerations

- Staff lead testing (obtaining targeted information from testers), vs monitor users as they navigate the site on their own (avoiding the risk of moderator bias).
- In person testing providing the most controlled environment vs remote testing allowing users the most flexibility.

Compile testing results

This final step is where you establish a baseline, identify barriers to your users, and make data driven decisions regarding your site.

The balance of this guide will explore each of these aspects in greater depth, with special attention paid to ways of breaking this process down into manageable pieces.

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