Office of Citizen Services and Communications and FirstGov.gov

Usability Testing Lessons Learned
and
Site "Refresh"

Presentation to Federal Web Content Managers Group

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How We Continuously Improve FirstGov

- Feedback from visitors

- Input from Call Centers

- Input from Government Agencies and Partners

- Benchmarking against Best-in-Class

- Internet and Market Research Statistics

- Usability Research

- FirstGov Focus Groups & Usability Tests

Purpose and Value of Usability Testing

- Tests whether average users can:
  - find information on your website, including Top Requests
  - navigate easily from one section to another
  - understand language and terminology
  - understand new content features or functionality

- Provides evidence-based data for improvements

- Reveals obstacles that are not apparent during development

- Helps settle difficult internal debates

- Provides "Real users" input

- Ensures user satisfaction, creating a desire to return

- Has high value and Return-on-Investment

FirstGov Usability Model

- Conduct either informal or formal testing several times a year – usability is not a one-time effort

- Educate key stakeholders about value of usability

- Integrate testing with other outreach activities

- Testing a small number of people is usually sufficient

- A hybrid of Usability Testing and Focus Groups is ideal

- Invest more in design, less for Usability (it's easier to identify the problem than to fix it)

- Take advantage of free or low-cost resources

Usability Testing Methodology

- Follow-up to Usability.gov testing in February 2002

- 6-month contract w/UserWorks, Inc. from April – September 2002   Cost: $85,000

- Testing in Silver Spring & Kansas City

- 32 total participants: 3 Citizen/Business/Govt Employee focus groups and individual usability testing

- Diverse group by age, gender, ethnicity, skill level

- Only one participant had used FirstGov before

- Included interviews with key stakeholders (incl. Mark Forman and CEG President Patricia McGinnis)

Usability Model: Planning

- Review project purpose, scope, and objectives

- Do ongoing industry research and benchmarking

- Do Heuristic Review (evaluate site against industry standards)

- Develop test methodology:

  - Focus Groups vs. one-on-one Usability vs. Hybrid
  - Conduct stakeholder interviews?
  - Number of participants
  - Demographic profile and characteristics of participants
  - Location of testing (gov't agency, outside lab, participants' workplace)
  - Timing (what time/day of the week and for how long)
  - Who will facilitate (agency staff vs. contractor)

Usability Model: Planning   (2)

- Develop recruitment screening tool

- Develop usability scenarios, stakeholder interviews, and/or focus group script

- <u>Estimated</u> Costs: Will depend on: # of participants, location of testing, extent of redesign, length of contract, type of usability/design contract

  - In-house Usability and Design: ($0 - $5,000)

  - In-house Usability plus Graphic Design Firm ($30,000 - $100,000)

  - Contractor for Usability & separate Design Firm ($60,000 - $250,000

Usability Model: Hybrid Approach

Benefits:

– Provides findings that are more scientifically based and also reveals general assumptions that can be acted upon.

– Allows for tight scripting to reveal very specific problems but also provides flexibility to uncover hidden information.

– Provides one-on-one input and also takes advantage of creativity that emerges through group interaction.

Usability Model: Testing and Reporting

- Conduct interviews and testing

- Document findings, including video and audio clips

- Develop recommendations that address usability issues

- Review results with agency web team. Prioritize recommendations and develop implementation workplan

- Provide executive briefing to decision-makers

Usability Model: Redesign and Launch

Redesign and Retesting:

- Develop design requirements

- Develop template prototypes

- Test one or more prototypes (on paper or via the web)

- Make modifications and code new templates

Launch and Evaluation:

- Launch re-designed website

- Measure impact of redesign against performance metrics

Usability Model: Lessons Learned

- Doing your own Usability is cost effective, but it raises credibility questions.

- You need a good facilitator (energetic but non-intrusive).

- One hour sessions are best. People get tired after that.

- Recruitment is critical. Be sure the contractor can get quality participants and has replacements available.

- Location of facility and timing of tests has a big impact on recruitment.

- Have clear rationale for how you choose usability scenarios.

Usability Model: Lessons Learned   (2)

- Bring stakeholders in at key points – have them watch at least one testing session.

- Brief video clips are very powerful.

- Do a good "Heuristic Review" that evaluates your site against industry standards. Document results.

- Paper prototypes can sometimes yield more candid feedback.

- Always re-test before implementing new changes.

Key Results: What's Important
(Citizen rankings on Left; Decision-maker rankings in parentheses)

1. Access to information about topics of interest to me (3)

2. Up-to-date government news (6)

3. Contact elected officials and other personnel (2)

4. Online transactions (4)

5. Learn about the U.S. and how government works (6)

6. Change citizens' perception of government (1)

7. Engage in online community forums (5)

Priorities for New Templates -- Home Page

1. Retain well-functioning aspects of current site

2. Maximize prime real estate

8. Improve Search Usability

3. Target needs of majority of users

7. Improve Access to Topics

4. Home Page should be directory of site -- flexible and scalable

6. Devote more space to consumer info & services

5. Need to highlight timely news and features

www.firstgov.gov

9. Improve consistent look and feel

10. Improve organization and visual appeal of text heavy pages

11. Maximize benefits of re-purposing and cross-referencing content via CMS

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○ Federal ○ State ○ Both
Search a State
Go
Advanced Search

Business Gateway   Government Gateway

Citizen Gateway

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This section provides resources for all Americans regarding health, diseases, drugs, food and nutriti...

General Health | Online Health | Health by Population Group | Health by E...
Health Topics | Health Insurance | State & Local Health Resources | Food...
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- Federal Forms
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- Questions About Government?
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Select a Topic Go

America Responds to Terrorism

Comment to Government

Customer Survey

Health

General Health Sites

Facts for You: Health Statistics and Facts

Fitness and Sports

Global Health.gov

Health and Medicine at Science.gov

Health Data Warehouse

Healthfinder: Health Information Guide

Healthfinder en español

Kids Health Sites

MEDLINEplus: Consumer Health Information

Health and Disease Information from the National Institutes

State and Local Health Resource Finder

Dialysis Facility Compare

Doctor and Dentist Directories

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Public Health Clinic Locator

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▶ Shop Online
▶ Apply for Government Jobs
▶ Change Your Address
▶ Find Parks & Recreation Spots

▶ Renew Your Drivers License
▶ Get a Passport Application
▶ Apply for Social Security Benefits
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Information by Topic
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▶ Arts, History and Culture
▶ Benefits and Grants
▶ Defense and Global
▶ Education and Jobs
▶ Family and Home

▶ Health
▶ Money and Taxes
▶ Public Safety and Law
▶ Science and Technology
▶ Travel and Recreation
▶ Voting and Elections

Especially For
▶ Kids
▶ Parents
▶ Seniors
More Audiences

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Contact Elected Officials ▼

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Home > Citizens > Online Sevices

Online Services

On this Page

- ▶ Auctions and Sales
- ▶ Benefits
- ▶ Citizenship
- ▶ Consumer Information
- ▶ Forms, Applications, and Official Records
- ▶ Health

- ▶ Homes and Communities
- ▶ Jobs
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- ▶ Publications and Subscriptions
- ▶ Taxes and Money
- ▶ Travel and Recreation

Government Auctions and Sales

- Auctions – Bid in federal, state and local auctions
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- Loans and Investments – Unclaimed money, mortgages and loans...
- Real Estate – Houses, commercial buildings, land ...
- Souvenirs, Books and Gifts – Stamps, artwork, jewelry, memorabilia, books...
- Supplies and Equipment – Office supplies, tools, military equipment...
- For Government and Non-Profit Buyers – Supplies, furniture, computers, equipment for government and non-profit organizations
- Find Sales by Agency – From the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts to the White House Historical Association, buy from a particular agency

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Benefits
- Determine Eligibility for Federal Programs - Check if you're eligible for food

Focus

File Your Taxes Online – for Free!
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News and Features
- Expanded GovBenefits website
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Top Requests
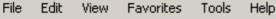- Shop Online
- Find Government Benefits
- Search Government Jobs

The Australian Government already uses the Citizen Gateway as their Home Page.   The Canadians are planning to do the same.

Usability Research and Resources

- Usability.gov   http://www.usability.gov/guidelines/

- Jakob Nielson   http://www.useit.com/

- Jared Spool   http://www.uie.com/

- Steve Krug, Roger Black   Don't Make Me Think: A Common Sense Approach to Web Usability

- IBM   http://www-3.ibm.com/ibm/easy/eou_ext.nsf/Publish/572

- IEEE Guidelines   http://www.ieee.org/web/developers/style/

- Web Style Guide   http://www.webstyleguide.com

- Plain Language   http://www.plainlanguage.gov

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