

UAD1: These Kids Today

Testing Web Usability with Parents and
Incoming Students

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Usability Testing

us · a · BIL i · ty test · ing (noun): Any act that allows a website's creator(s) to observe real people as they use that website

Usability Testing

1. Observe

- Live and in person
- Over a webcam or video link

2. Record

- Handycam on tripod
- Screen recording software

3. Analyze

- Identify the “duh” moment (as in, “duh, we should really fix that.”)
- “Is there anything fundamental in our structure or approach that people just aren’t getting.”

Other Types of Usability Testing

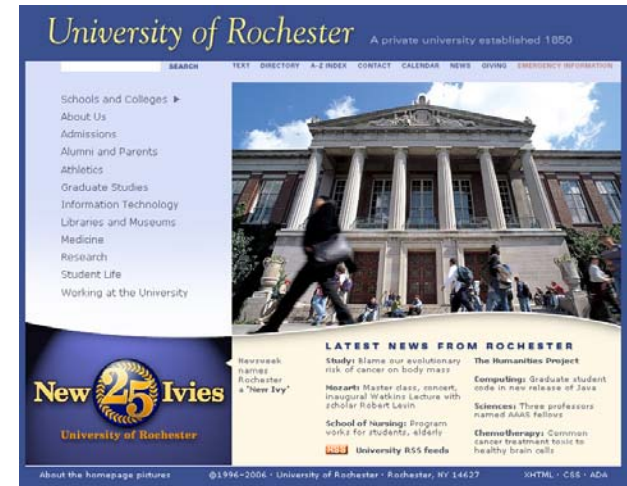
- **Card Sorts**
 - Ask for user input on information architecture
 - Write topics on cards and ask people to sort them into related concepts/categories
- **Focus Groups**
 - Ask for user input about needs, preferences and requirements
 - “What are you looking for in a website?”
- **Feedback Surveys**
 - Ask for user input on a new design or a proposed design

My usability testing philosophy

- Follow approach outlined by usability expert Steve Krug
- *Don't Make Me Think: A Common Sense Approach to Web Usability*
- Testing need not be elaborate or expensive
- Simply observe real people using your site while asking what they're thinking
- Not trying to prove or disprove anything (eg. "Flyout menus are always bad.") Instead, "Does *this* menu with *these* items work on *this* page for *this* person?"

Background: University Homepage

- Current design launched January 2004
- Goals of that design:
 1. More space for dynamic content (changing images, updated news and spotlights)
 2. A more consistent navigational scheme that allows visitors to find information easily across all schools and divisions
 3. Adoption of Web standards to conform with modern browsers, aid in accessibility for users with disabilities, and prepare for compatibility with future devices
- Usability tests conducted in advance of launch with current students, faculty, and University staff



Usability Tests: Fall 2006

Methods

- Two audiences: Newly enrolled College students, and parents
- Tests conducted during Orientation week
- Ten participants from each group
- Half of each group started at University homepage, half at College
- Screen capture / microphone
- Each session: 30 minutes

Observations: About Users Generally

- Searchers vs. Browse-then-searchers
- Reading vs. Scanning
- Users are quick to blame themselves when they can't find or do something
- Most-visited button? The Back button

Observations: About Parents

- Parents want to know what is going on with their kid, and they want to know *specifically*.
- Parents are more likely to read the text on a Web page than students were.
- BUT, parents are still quick to distinguish between text that is introductory “happy talk” and text that is informative and, again, *specific*.

Observations: About Students

- Students are *fast*. They are faster than you. They are faster than me. They are faster than their parents.
- Students “see” with their fingers as much as their eyes.
- Students discovered more of a page’s links than their parents.

We observed, we recorded: we analyzed

Findings:

- No search on the College homepage (duh!)
- No student job listings on “Working” page
- Is there a standard University fact sheet?
- Maps hard to find
- Search results confusing
- Online calendar is visually unappealing and incomplete
- Graphic look changes dramatically from site to site (makes it hard to know when you’ve left)

Now what? Recommendations

Low-hanging fruit: Easy stuff we can do now

- Add search to College homepage
- Add link to Student Employment to “Working” page
- Edit style sheet on Google search results to fix spacing issues
- Reorganize the About Us site to put “Fast Facts” (faculty-student ratio? average SAT scores? tuition?) up front
- Adds maps to A-Z Index and make more prominent on About Us site

Recommendations: Middle term

Changes that will take time to develop and implement but can be done outside a redesign:

Calendar

- Create a complete, University-wide events calendar that gives a visually compelling snapshot of what is happening across the University

Cut introductory text

- Identify and edit large blocks of introductory text so that text is spent conveying specific, usable information rather than generalities or “empty speech”

Recommendations: Long term

Features to seriously consider when we begin to work on next incarnation of the University and College homepages:

Consistent look and navigation

- Create a very simple template – even if it's just a top or bottom ribbon with University logo – that all pages must use in order to create a minimum of visual unity across site and a consistent method of returning to University homepage