

How easily are your website users finding what they want?

Learn the answer with website usability testing

Research shows people can't find what they want on a website about 60% of the time.¹ And more than 4 out of 5 users leave a website if they feel they have to make too many clicks to find what they want.^{1,2}

How can you help those users—the people who visit your site trying to find information? Through website usability testing. If you help users spend their time effectively, they'll probably spend more of it with you.

What does usability testing mean?

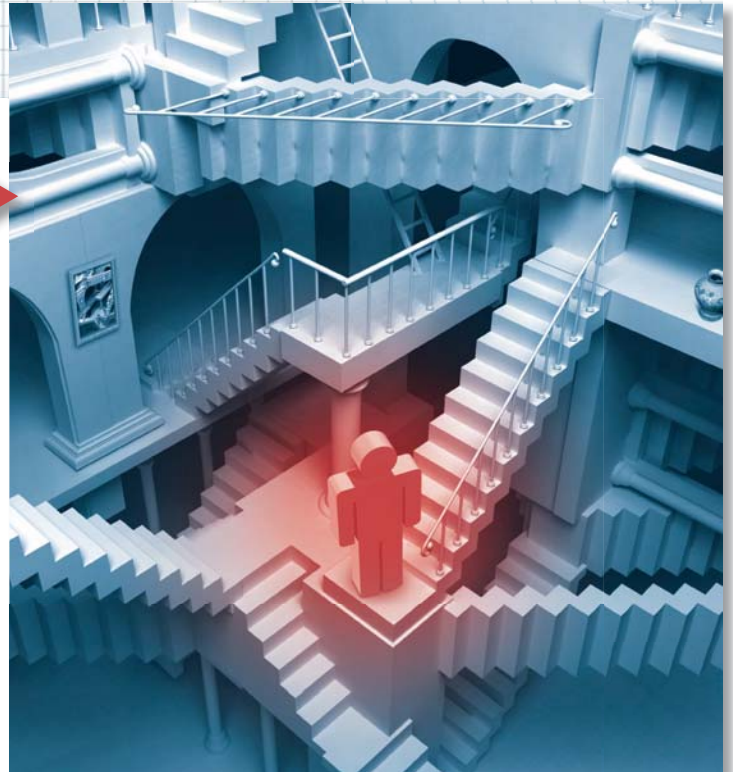
- Assessing how easy it is to use your website.
- Determining whether your site makes sense to the person viewing it.¹

What does usability testing reveal?

- Areas of confusion on the site.³
- Intuitive viewing sequences.³ (Do users follow the paths you intended?)
- How quickly users can find information.

What can you do with the knowledge you gain from testing?

- Help users save time. 81% of online shoppers value convenience when making purchases.¹ For many of them, saving time is more important than saving money.¹
- Improve your brand. Brand equity can rise



Website users can't find what they want about 60% of the time.¹ And more than half the users who experience a problem on a website never return.¹

about 5% in a user's mind if the user finds the information they want.⁴

- Build familiarity. More than half (59%) of online shoppers limit purchases to a handful of sites they know and trust.¹
- Deter people from leaving your site. Jakob Nielsen, a usability researcher and author of *Prioritizing Web Usability*, says leaving a website is the first line of defense when users encounter difficulty.⁵ "If users get lost on a website, they leave. If a website's information is hard to read or doesn't answer users' key questions, they leave."⁵

Turn to the back page for a usability testing model.

How 5 people can pinpoint 85% of your usability problems

To start testing, you need to recruit 5 representative users of your website. They could be current users or prospective users. By testing just these 5 users, you can reveal about 85% of all your site's usability problems.⁶ In fact, testing just one person can tell you about one-third of all there is to know about the usability of your site.⁶

Once you've recruited 5 users, it's time to conduct the test. It's best to keep the tests short, about 30 to 60 minutes. 5MetaCom follows a 5-step interview process for usability testing:

1 Warm-up Explain the goals of the test. Make the user feel comfortable. Ask general background questions. (What's your title? How often do you use this website? Other websites? What do you do on the site?)

2 Initial reactions Take the user to your homepage. Have them look at the page without clicking anything. Then ask prepared questions. (What's your first impression? What kind of information is on this site? Who would use this site? How often?)

3 Task execution Ask the user to carry out specific tasks, such as locating a particular product, price or piece of information. (Can you find the company's phone number? How quickly can you check out? Can you find the price for product XX?) Encourage the users to think out loud as they navigate. As the user carries out each task, observe and record the click path. Ask for suggestions to make tasks easier. The interviewer also should rate the degree of difficulty the user experiences with each task by using a scale such as:

0	1	2	3
Unable to complete task (gave up)	Completed task, but with more effort/frustration than expected	Completed task with only minor delays (little frustration)	Completed task with ease; no difficulty

4 Free time Give the user about 10 minutes or so to explore the website, undirected. Observe their actions and ask follow-up questions. (Why did you visit that section? What caught your attention? What interests you most?)

5 Review Discuss the usability experience with the user. (What was your overall impression of the site? Is it easy/difficult to navigate? What makes it that way? Who would benefit from this site? What did you like most/least about this site, and why? What would you do to improve the site? Is anything missing from the site?)

Testing results should provide clear direction for modifications and improvements to your website. Once those improvements have been implemented, you might consider testing a second (and possibly third) group of 5 users. Such follow-up testing helps by probing deeper into the site—into areas the initial users might have missed because they were stumped by surface-level problems that have since been corrected.⁶

¹ Bentamy, K. Website Profitability Part I – Website Usability. Web Standards Group. October 2007. Available at <http://webstandardsgroup.org/resource/888>.

² Website Design Survey. Spring 2001. Knowledge Systems & Research Inc., a subsidiary of Arthur Andersen.

³ Ruel, L. and Paul, N. OJR's "five guide" to do-it-yourself website usability testing. Available at <http://www.ojr.org/ojr/stories/070802rael/>.

⁴ Maximizing Customer Interaction and Profit. Usability Sciences Corp. May 2003. Accessed September 2009 at www.dfwima.org/slides/jschueler.ppt.

⁵ Nielsen, J. Usability 101: Introduction to Usability. Jakob Nielsen's Alertbox. Available at <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/20030825.html>

⁶ Nielsen, J. Why You Only Need to Test with 5 Users. Jakob Nielsen's Alertbox. March 2000. Available at <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/20000319.html>.



According to research, just 5 users can reveal about 85% of a website's usability problems.⁶

Usability testing tips

- Keep questions open-ended and neutral. Don't reveal too much information. For example, if you say, "Did you notice the navigation bar?" you've told the user the purpose of the bar. A better question might be, "What did you notice?"
- Allow about 30 minutes between test sessions. Use the time to review or discuss findings. It also provides cushion in case a test subject runs late.
- When providing directions or feedback, avoid using terms like "good" and "well done." Such words could give the impression you're testing the user instead of the website.
- Test users individually (not in a group), and let them solve problems on their own. If you help them (or users help each other), it could invalidate the results.
- Test across multiple variables, such as computer speed, screen resolution, browser window size and software programs. Your customers don't all use the same systems and programs.