

User Testing Guide

User testing lets you test ideas, website structure and navigation, devices, and user experience across your website

By watching people use your website to complete a task or series of tasks, you can better understand where they're getting stuck, and what changes might help to improve the website.

The outcomes of the testing will likely result in a list of action points, covering things like content, functionality, structure and navigation.

Where to begin ...

Rather than asking users to 'play around' on your website, or frame the testing around organisational aims, we need to structure user testing around specific, user-focused goals. (Although these goals may also align with your commercial and audience development goals – they should be framed around what the user wants to achieve.)

By setting very specific tasks you can check whether users coming to your website can understand how to use the website's navigation to find what they're looking for, and then successfully complete the specific task.

Example tasks

Here are some example tasks you might want to run through user testing – including the kinds of prompts that will help you to get useful, actionable feedback. Tweak the details and questions as necessary to make sure the testing fits, and will be useful for, your organisation:

Find a course

You're interested in taking a dance course. Find a course that starts within the next few months. Find answers to these questions:

- When and where is the course taking place?
- How much does it cost?
- Do you need to bring anything with you, or make any special arrangements?

Book a meeting room

You work in a local business and would like to book a team Away Day for 80 people. Find answers to these questions:

- Does the organisation offer meeting rooms for hire?
- Can they accommodate 80 people?
- What facilities are available?
- How do you book a room?

Find an event

You're interested in seeing a show. Go to What's On and find an event to attend within the next few months. Find answers to these questions:

- When and where is the event taking place?
- How much is it?
- What should you wear?
- If you need to bring anything with you?

Apply for a job

You'd like to work at the organisation. Find answers to these questions:

- Can you find any open vacancies?
- Is it clear how to apply?

Make a donation

You'd like to make a donation. Find answers to these questions:

- Find a page where you can make a donation
- How does the page make you feel?
- Are you able to add a donation to your basket?

Plan a visit to the venue

You've booked to see a show and want to plan your visit to the venue. Find answers to these questions:

- How do you get there?
 - What time should you arrive?
 - Does the building have wheelchair access?
 - How do you contact the venue for more information?
 - Can you bring your child with you?
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User testing participants

Who?

User testing can be done by anyone – but ideally not someone who works for your organisation!

User testing is most insightful when participants come to the test with as little prior knowledge as possible. (And they don't even need to be geographically close to you, or have had any prior engagement with you or your artform.)

How many?

Ideally you want 8 participants. Some specialists suggest that 5 people is enough to get meaningful feedback but by starting with 8 people you'll be able to:

- Adjust tests after the first couple of users if you find, for example, that you're running out of time, or not getting the information you needed
- Run meaningful testing even if one or two people drop-out

- Choose to split participants into smaller groups (of 3 or 4) in order to test more areas of the website.

You can find more info about the best number of participants here:

<https://www.uxdesigninstitute.com/blog/usability-test-how-many-users/>

Where do you find them?

There are several different ways to recruit participants – here are some ideas:

- Do a call-out via your social media channels
- Ask a partner organisation to share a call-out (Great if you have community groups or external hirers who're willing to help you)
- Ask peers at another organisations to share your call-out with their audiences (Remember website user testing can be done with people who aren't geographically nearby.)
- Work with a consultant who has a list of user testing participants they work with on a regular basis

A note on compensation

It's best practice to compensate participants if you can. This is most often done via vouchers – which are easier to arrange than cash as they can be given as a gift. Between £20 and £100 is typical, depending on how much of their time you're expecting.

Testing

Testing can take place over video call or in-person. If testing takes place over video call you have the benefit of being flexible with timings, and it's easier to record the session – with permission from the participants – for future reference.

Users should be encouraged to verbalise their thought-processes if they're able to during the session.

It's important the facilitator is experienced in Qualitative analysis and observation – you can practice this with colleagues! It requires a delicate balance – letting users

go down the wrong path and getting stuck, but making sure you provide enough guidance that they don't get frustrated.

It's also important to be able to differentiate between user error and problems with devices or the internet, for example, and actual technical / website issues. This takes practice, so conducting testing sessions via video-call and getting permission to record them can be very helpful in taking the pressure off 'in the moment', and potentially sharing the task of extracting useful information with colleagues.

An information sheet should be shared with participants before each session, outlining the following as a minimum:

- The purpose of the testing
- What to expect
- How long it'll take
- If it's being recorded: That the session will be recorded, how long you'll keep recordings for, who will have access to the recordings, and how participants can access the recordings
- That they can drop-out at any point.

As this is a qualitative approach to user testing, the outcomes won't be 'number of clicks' or 'seconds taken' to complete tasks. Instead, the facilitator will observe users on the website, taking notes of any areas where users go wrong, get stuck, find things confusing, or have feedback they'd like to share.

Outcomes

Once testing sessions are done, you should have an overview of the main pain-points for users. These will likely be top level things – such as site navigation, language or content. You may also notice things like technical bugs, or certain links or features that don't work as expected.

It may feel overwhelming if there are lots of areas where users are getting stuck!

But, once you prioritise areas for improvements and start making changes, a lot of seemingly-big issues are often quick and easy to fix.

Small things – like changing a word on a button or menu item, tweaking a page layout, or adding some explanatory text – can solve a surprising number of issues.

Bigger things – like new features, altering design frameworks, or overhauling a website's structure – will usually take more time. But having found these issues through user testing, at least you know the investment will be worth it!

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