

appliedwebanalytics

5

EASY STEPS

TO LOW COST

USABILITY TESTING

A FREE REPORT FROM APPLIED WEB ANALYTICS

introduction



Thanks for downloading this guide to low-cost usability testing. We hope you find it useful.

Usability testing is one of the quickest, easiest ways to discover the fundamental obstacles that stop your website being more successful - and how to fix them. Immediately, you can turn more visitors into customers.

However, much of what has been written and appears on the Web on usability is based on myths and jargon. The biggest myth is that usability testing has to be complicated and expensive to get results. That's just not true, and in this report, we demystify the whole process, and tell you the five easy steps for simple, low-cost usability testing.

What is usability testing?

At its very simplest level, usability testing is watching real people use your site.

There are three forms of usability testing

- **DIY usability testing** – which costs almost nothing.
- **Remote usability testing** – which is relatively inexpensive
- **Laboratory usability testing** – which can be very expensive

Remote usability testing

A number of companies now offer a service which allows remote testing. You specify your target audience, supply a test script and within 48 hours you have the answers with a 15-20 minute video for each user and a brief written report.

Research shows that just five testers will give you robust, usable results.

Typical specifications for your target audience might be:

- Their age
- Their income level
- Their experience with the Web

The brief written report from each usability tester provides great insights into these key questions.

- What would have caused you to leave this site?
- What other ideas do you have about how this site could be improved?
- What did you like about the site?
- Anything else you would like to say to the owner of the site?

Remote usability testing is a relatively inexpensive way to get good results. At today's prices five users can cost as little as £100 including the videos and report. The videos are especially useful as you can watch them several times and often see different issues each time.

Finding a remote web usability service is relatively easy, although most are based in the United States rather than the UK, because the Web tends to be dominated by North American users. In our experience, this is not a major issue. Issues with web usability seem to be universal so you get just as good results.

However, the choice can be rather daunting, especially as new companies are always springing up. We are constantly monitoring providers of remote usability testing, so if you would like our current list of recommended providers, please send an email to usabilitytesters@appliedwebanalytics.com. We'll email you back free of charge.

We can also help you put together your target audience specification and write your test script for a small consultancy fee. Please call 0800 990 3580 or email info@appliedwebanalytics.com for more details.

Laboratory usability testing

Laboratory usability testing normally offers you the opportunity to view users using your site in a separate room, and will invariably use a professional usability facilitator, who will be trained in understanding the verbal and non-clues given off by a tester.

The usability testers will be chosen on their conformance to a 'screen' – a set of attitudinal and socio-demographic criteria, and they will be interviewed by the facilitator about their online shopping experience prior to the usability session beginning.

The dedicated usability sessions will normally use eye-tracking software, so that you can see where the user is looking as well as where they click. This is helpful in seeing the website through the eyes of the user.

After the session is complete, the facilitator typically spends a few days reviewing the videos and eye-tracking movements, in order to compile a report of problems and suggested fixes.

As you would expect, from the point of deciding to run a laboratory usability session to receiving the facilitator's report several weeks can elapse, and often these types of usability sessions can cost several thousand pounds.

the five easy steps

Whichever type of usability testing you opt for, you need to take the following five steps to get the best results, and get your website converting more visitors into customers.

Step 1

Choose your five usability testers

Who should they be?

Think of your best customers – those that spend the most with you and order the most frequently:

- Are they predominantly male or female, or evenly mixed ?
- Are they young, middle aged or elderly ?
- Are they on low incomes, comfortably off or wealthy ?
- How much experience do they have of using the Internet – very little, some or a lot ?
- Anything else about them, are they keen gardeners, for example.

Step 2

Write a test script

Writing the test script is not as difficult as it sounds. The key is to focus on what you really want to know about the way people use your site. Remember to ask your visitors to perform tasks that a lot of your Web site visitors carry out e.g. placing an order, signing up to an email newsletter, finding a specific item or a range of items.

TIP: Avoid the temptation to get the users to do too many tasks; they have only 15-20 minutes and so much patience. If you have got lots of tasks you want to get tested, then arrange for another batch of five testers.

TIP: A lot of our remote usability testers are based in the States so make sure you give them dummy UK addresses, otherwise you'll find some of them getting thrown by their US postcode being rejected.

This is an example of a test script that we used when we were testing our own website www.appliedwebanalytics.com

1. Pretend you're a Marketing Director looking for a web analytics consultant
2. Browse www.appliedwebanalytics.com and tell us what benefits we offer to your business
3. Download our "10 easy steps to increase sales and murder the competition" – how simple was this ?
4. Sign up for our email newsletter – did we give you enough compelling reasons ?
5. Tell us about how easy or difficult the site was to use and how we could improve it

Once you have chosen the profile for your usability testers and created a test script, create an account and upload your test script to one of the several companies providing remote usability testing services.

Step 3

Evaluating the Usability Sessions

When reviewing the usability sessions, listen to what your tester is saying, but also watch their body language for hidden clues. Here are some tell-tale signs to look out for.

- When a user has stopped moving their cursor they are often pausing to think, hopefully most of your usability testers will tell you what they are thinking.
- Frantic cursor movements and scrolling the page up and down will tell you that they are looking for something, and if this carries on, cannot find it.
- Listen to the user's tone of voice during the video, increases in pitch and tone can betray rising levels of stress – what are they trying to do at this point ?
- Watch their cursors hover over what are assumed to be buttons or links – users often think 'If it looks like a button, it might be a button' – not surprising, really.
- Sometimes users will go in a strange direction only to realise their mistake and come back to the task at hand, don't worry it's the kind of thing we all do. More important is when users having gone off in a strange direction and don't know how to get back, without clicking the Home button and starting the whole process again.
- Don't always look for problems, if the users testing your site perform a task easily, then it's probably because you've made a website that's easy to use – for that task, at least.

Step 4

Creating a list of priorities

Whether you opt for DIY, remote, or lab testing, the value lies in how you use the information you've gained.

The chances are that you'll have identified between four and nine key problems. Some may be easier to fix than others – so how do you prioritise. We recommend using a table such as the one below which has been filled in to show some typical examples. You'll find a blank form in Appendix II .

Problem	How to fix it	Impact of Fix (High / Med / Low)	Cost to Fix (High / Med / Low)	Priority Ranking (1st , 2nd, 3rd, etc)	By when?
Common misspellings used in on-site searches results in "no results found"	Common misspellings are added to product attributes	Med	Low	1	30th Sept

Fill in the problems you saw, and how to fix them. If one problem has more than one possible fix, then create another line.

Once you have all the individual fixes in the table then rank the fix in terms of:-

Likely Impact

- How much difference do you think to the users' experience will this fix make? Use High, Medium or Low. In calculating the impact you should bear in mind how much a particular function is used e.g. if on-site search is not well used, then fixing this problem is not likely to have a significant impact on the site conversion.

Cost to Fix

- You may be technical enough to do this part alone, but if not get someone with some IT or Web experience to help you judge the complexity of these fixes. Rank the cost of the fix High, Medium or Low.

When you have filled in all of the above, it is usually obvious which problems to fix first, so you can rank them in priority. The final column is used to set a deadline for implementing the fix. There's no point in doing usability testing unless you intend to fix the problems with your website – and you need to set yourself clear timescales for you and your team.

Step 5

Repeating the Process

Designing and developing a user-friendly website is not a one-off process.

The world in which your online visitors doesn't stand still, they will visit your competitors' sites, grow older and require different things from your website.

You may want to focus on a particular area of your site – the search function, the checkout, the returns process – all good reasons for repeating the usability sessions.

Next time the highest paid person's opinion (the HIPPO), is in your view, just plain wrong, take the issue into usability – you'll get the right answer for both your business and your visitors.

How we can help:

If you're unsure of how to measure the results of your fixes, we offer a Key Performance Indicators Workshop, where we work with you to agree KPIs that will be used to measure your website performance. Call us on 0800 990 3580 to discuss how this workshop can help your business.

summary

In summary, there are three main ways of conducting usability testing. Whichever method you choose, the results are robust.

1. DIY testing
2. Remote testing
3. Laboratory testing

We recommend remote testing as it is relatively inexpensive both in terms of money and internal resources to manage the project. It gives excellent, reliable data that is easy to act on, and the report and videos are useful to refer back to.

Whichever route you choose, there are always five steps to usability testing:

1. Choose your testers (target audience specification)
2. Decide what you're going to test (write a test script)
3. Evaluate the results (Evaluation form or Key Performance Indicator Workshop)
4. Act on the information and make the fixes
5. Repeat the process – usability testing is a continuous cycle of improvement

If you need help with script writing, target audience specification or defining the KPIs for your website, get in touch.

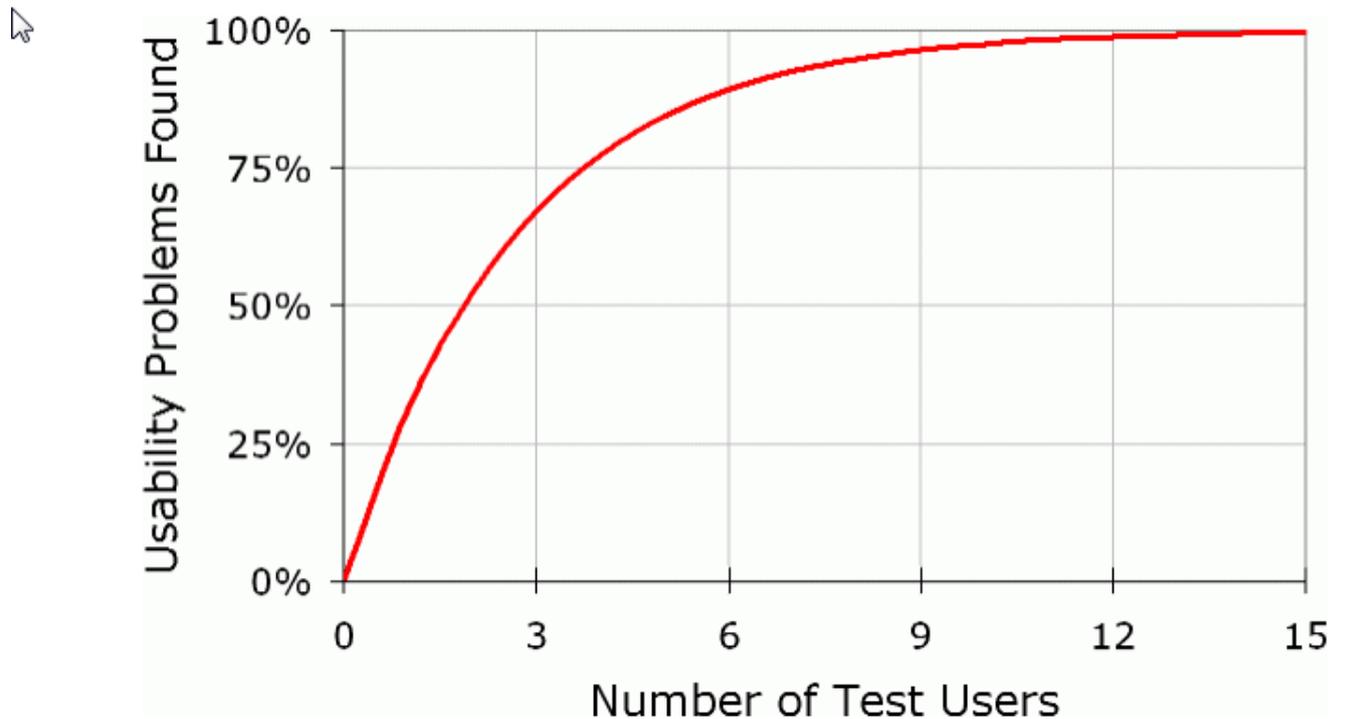
We are always happy to advise on any aspect of improving your website to get more sales and ROI. Please call us anytime on 0800 990 3580, email info@appliedwebanalytics.com or visit www.appliedwebanalytics.com

appendix 1

Why 5 Testers Is All You Need



You want to get a quick handle on what problems your current website is causing your visitors. Whether you decide to go for DIY, remote or laboratory usability testing, the number of testers doesn't need to change. Jakob Nielsen, a veteran of Web site usability, as far back as 2000 discovered that you only need **5 users** to spot 85% of usability problems.



Jakob Nielsen's Alertbox, March 19, 2000:

If you are too busy, not too sure of exactly what to do or want to use a company that has run these usability tests many times, please get in touch with Applied Web Analytics on 0800 990 3580 or visit www.appliedwebanalytics.com



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