

Website Usability

Website usability is all about improving your ROI by making your website more efficient and satisfying to users so this month we are presenting the ABC (accessibility, believability and content) for the important factors in website usability.

If it is more efficient and satisfying to users you can:

- Keep visitors on your site
- Increase customer satisfaction
- Increase sales
- Decrease support costs
- Promote repeat business
- Reduce development time

Usability is not one-dimensional but a combination of factors including:



- Clear, consistent site structure
- Easy to learn and fast navigation
- Effective search functionality
- Simple error handling
- Good content presentation (both text and images) so it has the x factor

Objectives

For excellent usability, like many things in business, the first step is to clearly define your organization's and users' objectives.

Yours may be revenue and profit related but to get there you have to satisfy the users needs which may be, for example, **easy to find products** that are **attractively presented** at the **right price** and **immediately available** for delivery.

Most of the people who visit your web site probably know little or nothing about web technology and care even less but that one sentence above gives you some idea of what they are likely to want if you have an ecommerce site – though in fact it's likely to be more than just those 4 basic needs in bold.

So to get started ask more detailed questions such as:

- Who are the users?

- What are their needs?
- What information do they want?
- How do they want it?
- What's their web experience level?
- What hardware and software will the majority use to access your site?
- Where do they expect the "on sale" items to be?

The areas to think about are:

Accessibility:

- Does each page load quickly? Large pages that load slowly and flash that takes ages to load means people will click away no matter how great you think it looks. Use rich media such as flash and video sparingly and only when it really enhances your goals.
- Can it be easily read? Some colour combinations are difficult to read as are some fonts. If it's not black on white in a sans serif face with adequate line spacing there better be a good reason!
- Have you labelled all your images? Sight-impaired visitors use ALT tags and search engines need them to understand images too.
- Your own 'Not Found' pages. If a page on your site doesn't exist a white page with "404 Not Found" is a good way to lose a customer.



Believability

- Tell me your name. People generally expect the logo to be in the upper-left of the screen and linked to the home page
- Tell me about you. Confidence and trust are important on the web and people need an easy way to learn more about you.
- Tell me how to contact you. Visitors want to know that they can get in touch with you if they need to so list your contact information as part of the text.
- Tell me what you do. A good headline and sub heading that tells me what's on the page.
- Tell me your prices. If you expect me to buy online or take a trial then let me know the cost.
- Tell me your terms. I want to make sure as best I can that you won't 'rip me off'.

Content

- Find out why users visit your website and get the site structure right this so they can get the information they want fast.
- Confuse them and you'll lose them. Be consistent in the whole site design.
- Make your navigation easy to find, read and use and concise. If you get past 7 menu items, think hard about why.



- Local navigation should be used to make it easy to find related items.
 - Use breadcrumbs to show users their current location and make fast jumps.
 - Make site search prominent. Usability guidelines suggest the upper-right corner of the page.
 - Most people don't read but skim. Use headings and subheadings.
 - Put important stuff above the fold (where the bottom of the screen cuts off a page).
 - Make in text links stand out and use them sparingly so they don't disrupt your content.
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- Make content 'about you' and not 'about us'. Visitors want their needs met not your company being boastful.
 - Provide relevant interactive content but don't overdo it and make sure downloads work
 - Use confirmation messages to close the loop when people respond.