

Usability Survey

Welcome to our usability survey! This website evaluation draws primarily from years of experience in designing websites. The key to this survey is that questions and observations come directly from the users themselves.

Our experience indicates what the website user wants is:

- 1) as much product & service information as possible.
- 2) a simple and intuitive linking path to locate that information
- 3) easy-to-find calls to action, such as email, phone numbers, contact forms, and other links.

Most websites fall short in providing all three of these critical usability elements.

Section I -- Home Page

- 1) Why am I here?

At first glance, a user should understand what your company is about and what it does. Studies show a drop off rate of over 60% in the first five to seven seconds when users do not find what they are looking for on the home page.

- 2) What can I do?

A home page should prominently display multiple calls-to-action, paired with contact information or communication links. A call-to-action uses verbiage such as "Call Toll Free", "Request for Quote", "Contact Us", "Email Us", "Order On-Line", "Download Files", etc.

- 3) Where can I learn more?

There should be a number of obvious, intuitive paths to the product and/or service information from your homepage. It isn't enough to simply provide a "products" link to entice a user deeper into your site.

- 4) Does your home page read intuitively from left to right?

Usability studies show that users expect a home page to read left to right, like a book.

5) Is the information on your home page organized and easy to follow?

Organization and ease-of-use is essential. What you want to avoid is clutter, multiple columns, pockets of information scattered around the page, or any information disseminated in a haphazard manner.

6) Are there large blocks of paragraph-form body copy on your home page?

People do not read home pages. They scan from left to right looking for key elements. A large block of paragraph-form body copy is not advisable.

7) Is the company logo displayed in the upper left portion of the home page?

Usability studies show that users have come to expect a company logo in the top left corner of your home page.

8) Are there global navigation links (Home, About Us, Contact Us, etc.) at the top of the home page, as well as every other page on your site?

Your site's linking structure should ideally retain the same format from page to page. The preferred location for global navigation links is across the top of each web page.

9) Are there embedded links on the home page?

Navigation links should not be embedded within the written text on the home page. Links embedded within body copy tend to confuse users. Rather, navigation links should be separate from the body copy.

10) If text links are used, are they displayed in blue and underlined?

It should always be apparent to the user what is a link and what is not a link. The standard is to show links in underlined blue type.

11) Is there any animation, such as Flash, multimedia, or other graphics, that are distracting to users?

While graphics and multimedia can be important to the look and feel of a website, they shouldn't distract users or slow the download of the web page. The balance here is whether your site is to inform or to entertain.

Section II -- Product & Services Pages

1) Is the product and service information well organized on this site?

It's important that users are able to find the content they want quickly. One of the difficulties in trying to convey a large amount of product information is that navigation can become overly complicated. Users will then have a hard time finding what they are looking for.

2) Do your product and service pages have enough description content?

Descriptions of on your product and service pages is critical. It is the company whose website offers the right products and services, and the most abundant and useful information, that the user is most likely to contact. Offer every bit of information about your products and services that you can to help your users make an informed decision about your company. Browse through as many competing websites as possible: these web sites are your competition. Your site should offer as much, if not more. A good website offers abundant content, while making it easy to find relevant content.

3) Do you have separate pages for each of the primary products and services offered?

It's important to have separate web pages for each of the primary products or services offered on your site. It's very difficult to provide specific information for multiple products on a single page. With only one product on a page, you can offer more detailed content as necessary. Do not rely on your users to contact you for more information. Having separate pages for each primary product or service makes it easier for users to find the information they need and gives them all they need to make a good business decision.

4) Do your destination pages link to each other and back to the home page?

Linking all your relevant web pages to each other is important to the overall strength of your site. If this is not possible due to the large size of your website, consider linking all your web pages together into sub-groups. Once a user is browsing through a sub-group of pages, they should be able to easily navigate back and forth between all these pages. You want to avoid making your user hit the "back" button to continue moving "forward" through your site. All your page should link back to your homepage and that link should be easy to find on each page.

5) Does your site make use of PDF files?

PDF files are alright as supplemental spec sheets, but should be avoided as the only means of supplying product information. PDF files are a substantial negative towards a site's usability because they take longer to download and don't link to any other pages on a site. Nothing will annoy surfers more than a slow downloading page that could've been avoided. And perhaps the biggest drawback to PDFs is that they limit search engine exposure because they generally can't be "crawled" and indexed.

Section III – Web Site Design

1) Does your website design (layout, graphics, images, etc.) convey a positive impression?

The look and feel of your website says a lot about your company and the caliber of your products and services. The selection of images, the size and quality of photographs, your company logo and the quality of the art work will play an important role in projecting your company's image. This is the most difficult aspect of a website to evaluate because of its subjective nature. A picture is worth a thousand words.

2) Is your site built using frames?

Framed web pages are not optimal for search engine rankings because they are difficult for "spiders" to crawl. Frames are a design method that breaks up one page into multiple pages, which have their own code and work independently of each other. It is for this

reason that few framed web pages ever achieve good search engine rankings.

3) Does an "Intro" or "Splash" page precede your home page?

"Intro" or "Splash" pages are a negative. The typical intro page precedes a site's home page and asks the user to enter the site. Typically they offer no content except for graphics such as an animated flash movie. The main problem with that is that search engines crawl that first page in your site, and since they don't read graphics, they have a harder time finding content. The deeper the content found in a site, the less relevant the search engines will find it to be. Since there are no practical advantages to such an intro page, we strongly advise using a traditional home page as a first page in most cases, one that is more relevant to users and search engines.

Other design elements to consider:

4) Is the color scheme and font size on your web pages user-friendly (high contrast with good color compatibility)?

5) Is each page uncluttered and easy to read, allowing the eye to immediately focus on areas of importance?

6) Are the photos and graphics proportionate to the other content on the pages in your site?

7) Is the company logo in the upper left portion of every page in your website?

8) Does the company logo serve as a link to your home page?

If you have any question regarding this usability survey, please feel free to call Karl Stratman at 513-244-3303.