Executive Summary

This report presents the results of a small scale Usability Study which was conducted during the summer of 2005. The study investigates the usability of a database filter as menu structure with a focus on potential full-time or contract work with individual business owners or corporations.

Due to the fact that there are no publicly available studies on this subject, the intention is to determine the effectiveness of the filter technique for information navigation/design.

The study is centered on a task based set of usability tests, where test participants performed were tasked with locating specific information.

The test system is Windows XP as the operating system with Internet Explorer and Firefox as the web browser. The configurations followed basic/general multimedia configurations with sound, Flash player 7 and a display set to 16.8 million colors or better. All results and statements in this study are related to this preconfigured system.

Contents

A short description of the chapters will be given in the following paragraphs.

Aims:

The central questions of the survey shall be described, as well as whom it is aimed at and the intent.

Test design:

After a short introduction of the methods employed for the usability tests, we shall describe the scenario of users which constitutes this studies background. Apart from describing the tasks which test subjects had to perform, we will explain how test results were recorded and evaluated.

Technical Setting:

The operating systems, browsers and participants used for the test will be described here. After presenting the usability guidelines that the test was based on, the adjustments we made will be explained in detail and with examples.

Results:

After summarizing the main results of the survey, the subchapters "Wording" and "Information Architecture" will expand on the general requirements of an interactive system, and we will explain a way in which the results could be interpreted. After this, the results of the separate tasks will be discussed in detail. The way in which the test subjects dealt with the tasks will also be described and analyzed. The test tasks were followed by an interview, which investigated the users' impressions of the interface from different perspectives. The last paragraph summarizes these results and participant comments.

Recommendations:

The different elements of the presented results apply to the following target groups: small business owner, project manager and human resources.

Aims

As with every media developer, the goal is to find work either via contract or full-time employment.

Since the market is flooded with developers ranging in ability, potential employers are looking for someone who set's themselves apart from the rest who can set them (the company) apart from the rest.

Rather than trying to set eximietate apart with graphical design, the web interface is geared towards information design. This approach organizes the content in a participant friendly manner allowing quick access to what the visitor came for, information.

Test Design

The test was designed with quick information retrieval as the participant's goal. The usage tests, which focus on specific tasks, enable the observation and analysis of strategies and usage problems with the different types of participant's.

Methods

For each test subject, the test consisted of three parts:
- locate specific information
- locate information of interest to them
- interview regarding preference, problems, changes of opinion, and also considering the ease of learning

Usage scenario

The test could only cover a small number of usage scenarios possible "in the real world". The results enabled general conclusions to be drawn regarding different scenarios. The overall scenario consists of:
- Participants have a general competence in the daily use of a web browser
- The computer is preconfigured with multimedia capabilities.
- Common plug-ins are installed for Internet Explorer, Fire Fox and Opera browsers.

Test subjects

The test subjects had the following criteria:

- aged between 35 and 55

- made hiring recommendations or decisions

- background in media development and/or media project management

Tasks

Each participant was asked to locate information based on "what if" situations. If they were hiring for X position, what combinations of filter would they use and did they find the information they were looking for.

Technical Setting

Browser Configuration

Due to the various possible browser versions and machine configurations, which is then magnified by the number of vendors and operating systems, network connections types and speeds, the site will be configured to run minimal client requirements to include:

- PC

    - Pentium II (or equivalent)

    - 233 MHz processor

    - 32 MB RAM

- Macintosh

    - G3

    - 333MHz processor

    - 32 MB RAM

- Display of 16 bit or better

- Sound card and speakers

- Mozilla/4.0 compatible browser

- Flash Player (Version 7)

Arrangement

Clarity is one of the most important requirements of an interface. The arrangement of the choices, the logical organization of the choices in the menus are key to our scenario and user group.

Wording

Wording of options and choices determines if the interface requires procedural knowledge ("...I must choose at least one of these and and least one of these and then click here..."). To accomplish this, the companies and the the type of work performed for them are options. After the participant has made their a click of the "Done" button finalizes the selection.

Icons

When icons are well designed to clearly represent the action they perform, graphical icons enhance the look of the interface. However, icons also add a layer of learnability to an interface. To avoid this extra effort text will be used for buttons.

Results

Summary

The overall response to the functionality was very good. Testors liked the the personal touch of the welcome letter page and that the dataset could be preset to show only the areas that might be of interest to a particular client/person. However by preseting the data set it appeared that the preset data was the only data available.

Performance

With the exception of a rights restriced Macintosh lab with minimal software installed, all links provided the information the viewers were looking for.

Ease / Difficulty of the tasks

The filters worked as expected however not all category and companies had data associated with them.

Wording

It was determined that a Done button did not accurately describe its function. Changing the label to View was recommended.

Information Architecture

Information architecture is closely related to the wording of the interctions associated with an interface. The information architecture is characterized by hierarchies and the organization of grouping, "What's what" and "Where do I find it." With only three categories for each of the four companies the visitor did not have to exhautively experiment with comboniations to find data. However, the **miscellanous** category became the catch all, if a project was not **utility** or **education** related.

Tasks

Participants were asked to obtain information for:

- All of the categories for a specific company

- Specific category for a specific company

- All of the categories for all companies

- Specific category for all companies

- Browse for information of interest to the tester

Contact
eximietate, Inc.
Tom Petersen
tpetersen@eximietate.com
(815) 483-6857