

⇒ Usability Audits

Why and when

Usability audits, or heuristic reviews, can be used to review a site in its early stages, to enable 'obvious' issues to be identified prior to full usability testing, thereby reducing the costs of developing a usable site. It is also a cost effective way of assessing a small site where the costs of 'real' user testing are difficult to justify.

Our approach

At the heart of WUP's approach to all its services is the recognition that a good 'User Experience' is the key goal for a successful web site. A good user experience is achieved when a user achieves their goals quickly and easily. An understanding of how 'real' users use a web site is, therefore, crucial in understanding a site's usability. Most of our work involves testing sites with 'real' users. As a result, we have built up considerable experience of looking at web sites through 'users' eyes. This expertise is not a substitute for testing with real users, but can be drawn on to identify the more obvious usability issues on a site, and it has helped inform our Usability Framework, which has been developed by reference to the academic literature but has also been tested in a large number of usability testing sessions, where 'real' users have tested web sites. It is, therefore, very 'user' based.

How we do it

Pre Research

In order to ensure the audit is appropriately focused we discuss with the project manager:

- The target site users – we need to be able to undertake the review from the perspective of the target users, taking account of their likely understanding of the site owner, goals they can achieve, understanding of link labels, suitability of content etc.

- The site aims – we need to understand what the site owners expects the site to achieve for them so we can assess how well these aims are likely to be achieved
- The site content and functionality – we need to have a comprehensive understanding of the site and what can be achieved on it

The Audit

The audit is undertaken from the perspective of a user (or users) as agreed with the client and is conducted as follows:

- The review is initially conducted by one expert evaluator
- The interface would be reviewed against the criteria on our usability framework and any other criteria agreed with the client
- The review would include key user focused tasks (to be agreed with the client)
- The evaluator would categorize usability issues into three bands (Serious, Moderate, Minor). The focus of the review is normally to identify the serious and moderate category of usability issues
- The conclusions of the review are confirmed/checked by a second evaluator

Outputs

A report would be produced that summarizes the usability issues identified. This report would:

- List the issues found, categorised and prioritised by severity
- Explain why they are problems
- Make recommendations for addressing these issues

The report may be presented and discussed if required.

Client Examples

WUP has undertaken usability audits for a number of clients. Recent work includes:

Client	Project	Date
ISD Scotland (Part of NHS)	Usability audit of prototype	August 2006
Scottish Library	Usability audit of 'Wish you were here'	August 2006
British Library	Usability audit of library catalogue interface	April 2004

Fees

Most of our work is tailored to individual client's requirements and we quote an inclusive price each piece of work. However, typically we charge a fixed fee (e.g. £1,500) plus a charge per page type tested (i.e. £100). So a 20 page type audit would cost £3,500.