Whitepaper

Making Your online presence more usable

Usability is what makes a web site work. More specifically, it's the degree to which a web site or software program helps users do what they want to do. Whether they intend to make a specific purchase, find a specific piece of information or simply browse, usability is what helps users fulfill their objectives efficiently

What is Usability?

There are many ways to measure the usability of a web site, including:

> ➢ How quickly can a user find a specific item or piece of information?
> ➢ How many steps does it take to achieve a goal?
> ➢ Do users become lost, disoriented or overwhelmed?
> ➢ Does the design help users reach their goals, or does it get in the way?

Though usability is critical to the success of any interactive design, it's consistently the most frequently overlooked and undervalued aspect of design, possibly because usability problems are frequently invisible to the untrained eye.

Why is Usability Important?

A company's brand is the sum of its customer interactions. This includes:

> ➢ Store visits
> ➢ Receiving media-based marketing messages
> ➢ Support and telemarketing calls
> ➢ Product use
> ➢ Web site visits

Many companies spend millions of dollars on marketing media, attempting to "communicate" their brand. Customers increasingly base their brand perceptions on their interactions with a company, and how those interactions live up to the marketing promises the company makes. In short, a multimillion-dollar ad campaign can be instantly sabotaged by a dinner-time telemarketing call or an dissatisfying web site visit.

Poor usability carries damaging consequences, regardless of the type of application being designed.

Type of Application	Consequences of poor usability
Informational web site	Unsatisfactory interaction and subsequent damage to the brand
Intranet or software application	Reduced productivity, creating a steady flow of lost resources
E-commerce web site	Aborted transactions, abandoned shopping carts, low conversion rates (browse-to-buy ratios)

How do You Make a Web Site Usable?

Designing a usable web site begins with learning about the user. Some user needs and characteristics can be inferred and uncovered by experts. However, to maximize usability requires observing real users using the application in the intended usage environment. There is much ground between these two approaches. And somewhere within that continuum is the best solution for every application.

The design must be grounded in a solid understanding of the intended users and their objectives in using the site. This is called "design for use," or "user-centered design." Every design decision, from functionality to visual design, should be evaluated in terms of what solution best serves the users' ability to fulfill their objectives.

You Don't Really Need Real Users, Do You?

Many companies choose not to conduct user testing, or truly user-centered design based on a number of well-worn objections:

"Believe me, we know our users better than anyone, maybe even better than they know themselves. Our sales people are in constant contact with our customers. They're totally in tune with their needs. In fact, some of our current staff came directly from client organizations."

Unfortunately, none of these beliefs change the fact that we all hold assumptions about our customers and users. In fact, customers and users are constantly evolving and we never really have a full understanding of what they need and how they'll respond to a new product or touch-point until we bring them in and do the research.

Usability Techniques

Today's usability practitioner has a wealth of tools and techniques to draw from, all appropriate under certain circumstances.

Usability Technique	Description/Outcome
Focus Group	Focus Groups assemble members of the target audience for open discussion functionality. Focus groups can effectively test and develop concepts to inform design.
Ethnographic Research	Observing users conducting tasks in their native environment. This reveals work habits, task flows and environmental factors that affect design. Ethnographic Research is essential when designing applications to be used by specific users in a specific environment.
Heuristic Analysis	Expert evaluators assess the design. Heuristic Analysis is useful to test rough designs. Experts are better able to understand an incomplete interface. And, fixes can be made more cheaply in early design phases. If designs are tested with experts first, later user testing can focus on less obvious issues, which can arise only from user testing.
One-to-one user testing	Test users matching the target demographic carry out key usage scenarios/tasks. This is a thorough technique, uncovering bugs that emerge only with members of the target audience.
Competitive Usability Evaluation	Conducting one-to-one usability tests of competitor sites reveals best practices and enables clients to benchmark their site against those of their competitors.
Field Test	Usability testing by actual users in the actual usage environment after application launch. Field testing provides useful data to inform future design iterations.

What Role does Usability Play at Ray Business Technologies?

Ray Business Technologies believes in user-centered design. For many interactive design agencies, usability is an afterthought. At Ray Business Technologies, it permeates our approach, from information architecture, to design, to engineering.

Ray Business Technologies designs and builds applications for real use by real users. This creates web sites that work -- that strengthen our clients' brands by creating positive interactions -- information and products found easily, experiences that satisfy users by recognizing and paving the way to their objectives.

Why is Usability a Key Part of the Ray Business Technologies Process?

More than any other design factor, usability determines the success or failure of any serious web initiative. By making usability the focal point of our design approach, we ensure that our clients receive maximum return on their investment. Ray Business Technologies provides Online Presence solutions to its clients that strengthen brands, set the stage for transactions and increase efficiency. Usable design creates a perception of value and an expectation of future positive interactions.

About Raybiztech

Raybiztech is a leading Global Information Technology (IT) Services and Solutions, a CMMI Level 3, ISO 27001:2013 and ISO 9001:2015 Certified Company. We are a Member of NASSCOM, HYSEA, NJTC, and AIIA. Raybiztech offers comprehensive end-to-end IT Services for Business Application Development, Enterprise Solutions, Enterprise Collaboration Services, Testing and Quality Assurance Services, Cloud Computing and IT Infrastructure Management to organizations in the Banking & Finance, Insurance, Healthcare, Manufacturing, Retail, Media & Entertainment, Leisure & Travel, Telecom and Energy & Utilities verticals as well as Independent Software Vendors.