



UsabilityNorth



Case Study Website Usability Evaluation



Client Leeds Met University

“It is our view that all websites should address real user needs and meet client business objectives.”

Dr Tony Renshaw, Usability North,
Leeds Metropolitan University.

Synopsis

Leeds Metropolitan University approached the Usability North team to undertake a full evaluation of its existing website, in preparation for a full redesign. Working in partnership with the Leeds Metropolitan prospectus team, Usability North undertook an expert review and comparative evaluation involving three competitor universities.

Two different groups – 24 schoolchildren and 16 parents – completed a set of tasks online. Eye tracking software collected the necessary data and questionnaires, interviews and video techniques supplemented the information to provide comprehensive results.

Although the evaluation is still ongoing, the preliminary results have identified a number of simple changes that would significantly improve usability of the site plus recommendations for long-term design strategies.

The issue

Leeds Metropolitan University has to compete with other universities, both in the area and throughout the country, for new students. The University's website is seen as playing a key role in attracting new students as it provides an online prospectus and allows students to undertake related activities, such as finding out about accommodation, finance, facilities and social life at Leeds Metropolitan University.

When looking to review and redesign its existing site, the University was keen to ensure that the new website design would be easy to navigate, user-friendly and genuinely meet the requirements of potential and existing students.

The prospectus team at Leeds Metropolitan University is responsible for the development of the website and contracted Usability North to conduct a full evaluation of the existing site. The intention being that the results from the usability study would be used to inform the redesign of the University's site.



Continued Overleaf>

The Project

Working in partnership with the prospectus team, Usability North quickly identified the required usability approaches, namely an expert review and a series of comparative evaluations conducted with three competitor universities.

Two separate groups were recruited by Usability North to take part in the study:

- 24 x schoolchildren, who would be applying to universities in a year's time
- 16 x parents whose children would be applying to universities in a year's time

The evaluation process, designed by Usability North, involved interviews, questionnaires and an eye tracking study of the participants as they completed a series of tasks online, which was recorded on video.

Preparation

Together with the prospectus team, Usability North identified six separate tasks, representative of the actions visitors to the website might make, which would test the functionality of the site. The tasks were:

- Find a specific course
- Order a prospectus online
- Arrange a campus tour
- Find information about university accommodation
- Find out about part-time working
- Find out about career advice

All tasks were tested to ensure that they were clearly worded to avoid confusion; to check that there was only one way of completing the task and that the sites would respond as expected.

A trial run was conducted by Usability North' personnel, to ensure that the tasks could be completed fully, the eye tracking software could capture the necessary information and that there were no glitches with the system.

For the participant's convenience, Usability North visited the relevant schools to test the group of school children, while the group of parents attended the test facilities at the University.

Results

Evaluation of Leeds Metropolitan University's website is still ongoing, however Usability North presented a preliminary report to senior management, which highlighted the websites good points and identified areas which required further work to improve user satisfaction.

The client was genuinely surprised with some of the findings, particularly the time it took to complete certain tasks. They were also impressed by the fact that simple changes, suggested by Usability North, resulted in significant improvements very quickly.

From the initial results, Usability North also provided the client with an indication of where long-term design strategies should also be modified to enhance user experiences.

Delighted with the results so far, the client is keen to complete the evaluation exercise.

Benefits

Usability North offers clients:

- Leading experts in the field of usability evaluation
- Low cost access to state-of-the-art technology and facilities
- Potential to increase customer profitability through improved return on investment (ROI)
- Potential for increased sales through improved products
- Bespoke projects – customer focussed approach designed to achieve the client's objectives
- Legislative compliance
- World-class service



“At Usability North we can rapidly deliver tried and tested approaches to ensure successful website evaluation projects.”

Professor Janet Finlay, Usability North, Leeds Metropolitan University.

For further information contact:

Usability North
Innovation North
Leeds Metropolitan University
Headingley Campus
Leeds
LS6 3QS

Tel: +44 (0)113 283 8608
Email: info@usabilitynorth.co.uk
Web: www.usabilitynorth.co.uk