INCREASING WEBSITE USABILITY TO IMPROVE CONVERSION

Why & Where to Begin
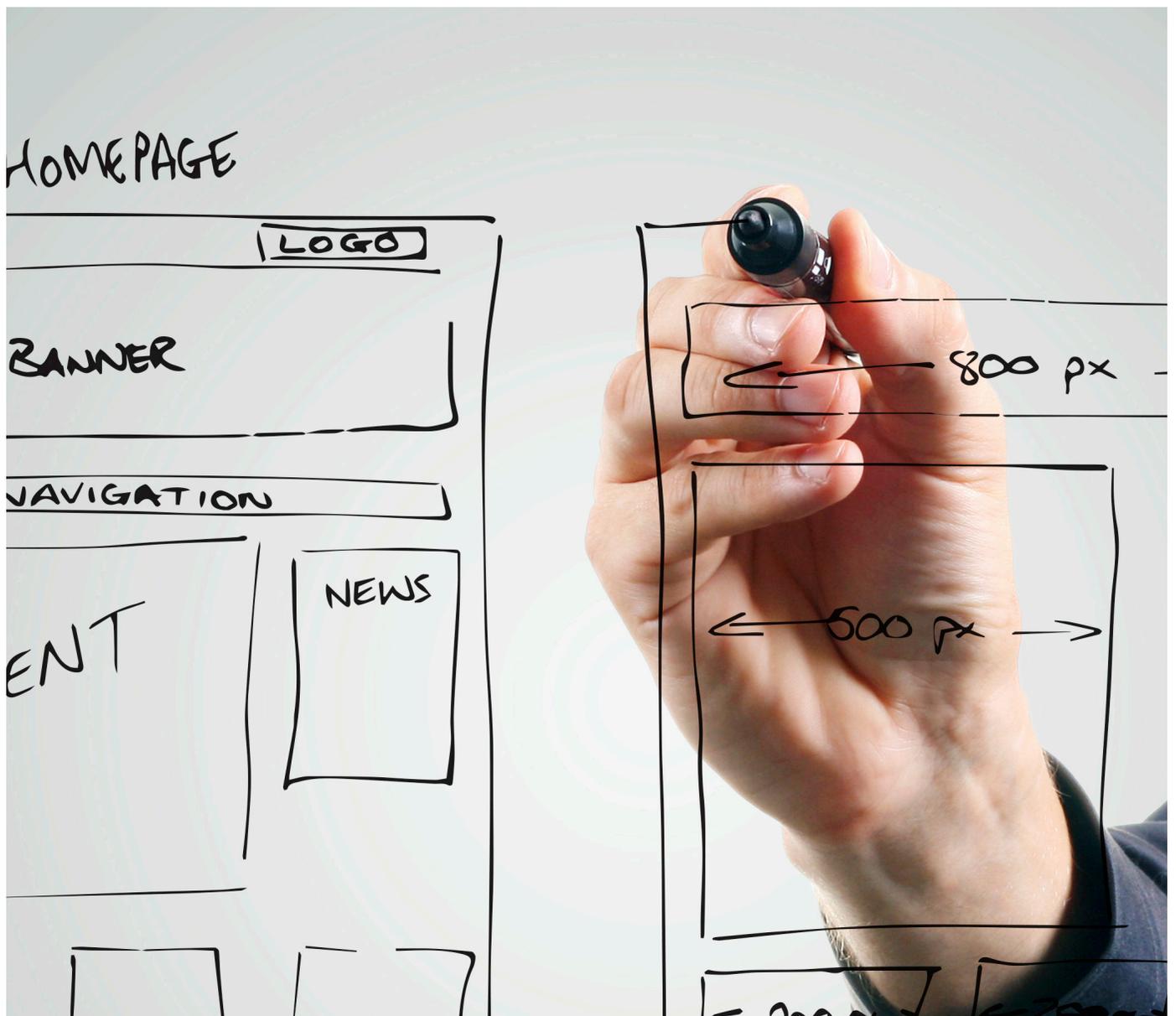
THE ROI OF A USABLE WEBSITE

Every $1 invested in improving the usability of your website returns $10 to $100. That's a pretty impressive ROI and it's been proved countless times over in the usability world.

How about the dollars invested in web development? Fixing problematic design can be costly business. Correcting an issue after the project has left the initial design phase can cost:

- 10 times more if found during development
- 100 times more if found after release

It's no secret that when changes are required, it's better to find them early and fix them early.

By involving users and key stakeholders throughout the lifecycle of website development, the likelihood of an initially usable site dramatically increases. Usability testing can identify design risks, draw attention to abandonment points, and remove site obstacles, all before the site is launched — or, in most cases, relaunched.

All in all, the case for usability testing is easy to make. The ROI is strong, best practices have been well-documented for decades, and the improvements in conversion rate speak for themselves. Knowing how to start can be the most difficult part of the process. In this paper, we'll solidify the need for a usability testing program and offer guidance on where to begin.

The Rule of Thumb: Every $1 invested in improving your website's usability returns $10 to $100.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS COUNT

In just three seconds, users decide if your website is credible or not.

Research by Nielsen Norman Group revealed, in most cases, users take only 10 seconds to browse a website, leaving shortly after if they haven't found a reason to stay.

When users arrive at a site with a specific task to accomplish, they typically attempt it for less than one minute before abandoning the site.
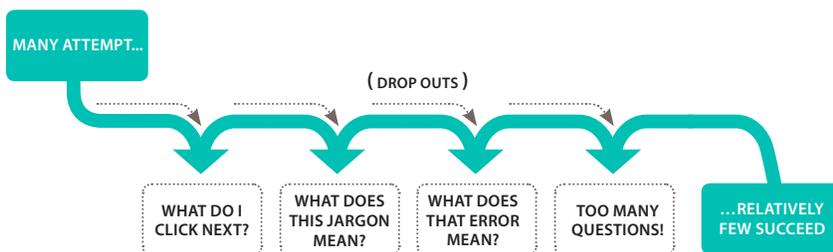
The majority of visitors who experience usability problems on a website never return.

In a 15-year distribution of website user experience review scores, Forrester Research continues to find significant problems with basic usability:

- 76% of sites have inefficient task flows
- 48% of sites don't perform well, and have lengthy page load times, broken links and images
- 68% of sites don't place required content in relevant locations

If users encounter something they don't like or didn't expect —whether by design or coded flaw — the result is the same. They leave. Fast.

MANY ATTEMPT...

(DROP OUTS)

WHAT DO I CLICK NEXT?

WHAT DOES THIS JARGON MEAN?

WHAT DOES THAT ERROR MEAN?

TOO MANY QUESTIONS!

...RELATIVELY FEW SUCCEED

What's the good news? Even decades after the inception of web development, there's still room to stand out in the Internet crowd.

HOW USABILITY TESTING INCREASES CONVERSION

Usability Testing Increases Conversion by Revealing:

1. **Potential Risks in Design:** Sites often contain areas that confuse users, making them unwilling or unable to convert, resulting in a negative experience. Usability testing identifies these areas of improvement.

2. **The "Whys" of User Behavior:** Where we might know that conversion is low or that users are unwilling to complete specific tasks, usability testing helps understand why this is the case.

3. **Actual Site Requirements.** While users tell us what they think they want, usability testing helps determine what users actually want or truly need. Psychology and experience tell us that these are not typically the same.

THE BENEFITS OF USABILITY

Usable Sites Benefit From:

INCREASED

- Conversion/response to calls to action
- Customer loyalty, retention and advocacy
- Customer satisfaction and trust

DECREASED

- Training, help desk, CSR and support costs
- Development time and cost
- User frustration

Forrester Research often showcases the results of improved usability. Their article "Fixing Known Usability Problems Pays Off" showed improved navigation alone had a significant impact on both conversion rate and order size. Here are a few tangible examples:

Usability Measurements

Effectiveness

- Number of errors
- Severity of errors
- Learnability
- Memorability
- Subjective satisfaction

Efficiency

- Time to complete tasks
- Number of steps to perform tasks
- Time to proficiency

User Identified Problem	Solutions	Results
Categories are not mutually exclusive	• Clarify menu item names • Add categories that reflect how users browse • Expose subcategories on the home page	• Conversion rate increased 42% • Average number of items per order increased 40%
	• Shorten the order/registration/subscription process • Add markers to show the user's status within the overall process	• Cart conversion rate increased 24% • Registration conversion rate increased 10%
Search function is not comprehensive, nor precise	• Add thumbnail images to on-site search results • Optimize search algorithms	• Conversion rate for visitors who used on-site search increased 23%

WHERE TO BEGIN

Ensuring a successful online customer experience starts with addressing a process of critical elements:

Understand + Document   **Reference + Follow**   **Measure + Analyze**   **Test + Refine**

1. Understand and Document Your Audience

Who's browsing your site, and why are they visiting? Defining the target audience(s) for your website, and getting to know them, is ground zero for great usability. Creating user personas can be an incredibly helpful way to document the profile of actual users and can serve as a reference when future design changes are proposed. Additionally, draft a customer journey map to visually illustrate user needs, interactions necessary to fulfill those needs, and the emotions experienced throughout the process.

- Who are the primary and secondary users of your site? Why do they visit?

- How do your site users differ from users on other marketing channels (social, mobile, direct mail, phone, etc.)?

- Have you established user personas (customer narratives that drive design decisions)?

- Are you using them to plan and prioritize design efforts?

- Have you created a customer journey map?

2. Reference and Follow the Best Practices in Usability

In the last 25 years, more than 2,400 best practices have been documented, and are specific to the type of site, navigation area, device used, and more. Leveraging tactics that are known to have a solid foundation and proven return can take the guesswork out of prioritizing design changes.

- Have you evaluated your current site against **industry guidelines**?

- Do all ongoing web projects that affect the user interface go through this evaluation?

3. Measure and Analyze Performance

Like any other business process, website performance can be benchmarked, measured and analyzed for areas of improvement. An analytics tool should be in place to help measure the health of your current site and know where to focus on improvement opportunities. You should know your conversion rate, and understand how it compares against industry stats.

- Do you have site analytics in place to track online conversion?

- Do you identify and track key conversion metrics, with regular results reporting?

- Do you know your site's current usability score? Developed 30 years ago, the **System Usability Scale** (SUS) is the industry standard for quantifying how users perceive usability.

4. Continuously Test and Refine

Once you understand your site's current performance landscape and conduct customer journey mapping on the areas you perceive as your biggest pain points, follow with exploratory usability testing with actual site users. This, combined feedback, will build a roadmap of prioritized opportunities for upgrades in design and functionality.

- Do you conduct usability testing on a regular basis to eliminate usability flaws and evaluate customer satisfaction?

- Do you have a survey strategy? Does it feed benchmarking efforts, customer insights, and identify opportunities for improvement?

- Do you receive feedback from customer service representatives on a regular basis?

- Do you periodically review in-site search results and error messages to discover customer needs and learn the customer's language?

- Do you review competitor sites on a scheduled and ongoing basis?

USABILITY IMPROVEMENTS PAY OFF, ALWAYS

Admittedly, a lot of work goes into a well-designed, usable site. Most companies conduct usability testing throughout the year, based on how quickly they can implement changes to their websites. Some companies test monthly or bimonthly, while others only test quarterly. Even firms new to usability, where it's not yet integrated with their design process, conduct testing once a year. And usable websites are the minimum requirement for users, no longer a differentiator — usability is purely expected.

But remember, usability improvements always pay off. The rule of thumb: Every $1 invested in usability returns $10 to $100. How much is an increase in conversion worth to your company? What about the intangibles of leaving visitors with a positive experience with your site? How does that experience translate to product advocacy and brand affinity?

That's the key word — experience. How customers experience your website will carry through every touch point with your product/service/brand. The customer experience (CX) is the new definition for differentiation, and optimizing your website for usability is the first step to take in exceeding expectations.

About RRD Marketing Solutions

RRD Marketing Solutions helps brands optimize engagement with their customers across all touchpoints—online, offline and onsite.

The group activates marketing resources in the most impactful way, through a combination of predictive insights, inspired content and meaningful interactions.

With a fully-customizable suite of research and usability testing services, our seasoned research and customer experience team offers an unparalleled first look into the customer's decision-making process and behavioral patterns.

Our services include: customer journey mapping, emotional testing, ethnographic research, eye tracking, focus groups, heuristic evaluations and usability testing.

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