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**Usability Test for NYTimes.com**

**Audience Description for NYTimes.com:**

The audience for NYTimes.com is fairly evenly split male/female but slightly leans towards male according to the demographic profile described in their media kit. Also, most readers are above the age of 35 with the median age being 47 years old with a household income around $75,000. The audience of NYTimes.com tends to be college educated and in a professional/managerial job position. All of this information means that the average user of NYTimes.com in 47-year-old educated male with a professional, high-paying job.

**Chosen Testers:**

My first usability tester is Mike Ozmun, a 46-year-old male with no familiarity with NYTimes.com. Mike graduated from the University of Nebraska-Omaha with a bachelor’s degree in business management. Mike only uses the internet to pay credit card bills and would rather read the New York Times paper than go online to see the content. I classified Mike as a low-experience web user because he hasn’t used the internet for many years, spends less than an hour per week on the internet, doesn’t participate in any “advanced behaviors” online, and doesn’t care about current technology trends.

My second usability tester is Darrin Dick, a 36-year-old male with high familiarity with NYTimes.com. Darrin is a graduate of Savannah College of Art and Design with a bachelor’s degree in graphic arts. He currently has a job as a graphic designer at a business on Omaha. Darrin would be categorized as a high-experience user because he regularly reads content on NYTimes.com and has used the internet for 15-20 years. He also spends nearly 20 hours a week online, uses Skype, online chatting, and blogs among other “advanced behaviors”. Darrin is also skilled in computer science with the knowledge of how to fix computer equipment and keeps up with current trends in technology such as the iPad and the iPhone.

**Usability Testing:**

*Testing Environment for Mike Ozmun:*

Mike was tested in his home where he normally uses the computer in the rare event that he does use it. He used his home computer, which is a HP Desktop computer connected to the internet by high speed cable. Mike used Internet Explorer as his browser as it is the default program installed on the computer. Being a low-experience user, he doesn’t know any other browsers other than the default program. The computer is located in his home office with a central ceiling light and near an exterior window. The window proved to be a distraction because Mike would often look out the window to watch cars passing on the street.

*Testing Environment for Darrin Dick:*

Darrin was tested at his apartment where he usually uses his computer and the internet. He used is personal laptop, a MacBook Pro, connected to the internet by wireless internet from a router inside his apartment. Darrin used Firefox as his browser because he believes it is safer and more secure than using the default program of Safari. Darrin usually uses his laptop in the living room on the couch in front of the TV. The TV was on during testing and it didn’t seem to be a distraction because Darrin was able to tune out the television and multitask while checking his iPhone often.

*Test Results for Michael Ozmun:*

* **Task 1 Analysis:** Mike opened the browser and immediately went to Google. He then typed in “New Zealand Earthquake epicenter” into the search bar and clicked “Search” with the mouse. Mike then scrolled up and down the page using the rolling scroll on the mouse until he realized there was an images link at the top of the page. After clicking on that, he scrolled through the images until finding a map showing the epicenter of the earthquake being Christchurch, New Zealand.
* **Task 2 Analysis:** Mike typed in NYTimes.com into the browser address bar and clicked “go” and browsed the site for three minutes scrolling up and down the page with the rolling scroll on the mouse. “There’s so much writing and stuff in such a small space, I don’t even know where to start on here,” he said.
* **Task 3 Analysis:** Task 3 took nearly fifteen minutes to complete. Mike first clicked on the technology tab hoping to find an article about the Consumer Electronics Show. After scrolling up and down the page with the rolling scroll on the mouse, Mike couldn’t find anything about the show. He then clicked on the “Most Popular” link at the top of the page hoping to find an article about the show. That still didn’t turn up any results. He then clicked on “Times Topics” as a last ditch effort. Under the section of “Browse All Topics” Mike clicked on the letter “C” but couldn’t find a link to the Consumer Electronics Show. He then clicked on “I” hoping that it would be called International Consumer Electronics Show and he was correct. After clicking on the link, Mike found out that the show is held in Las Vegas in January every year.
* **Task 4 Analysis:** Mike failed to complete task 4. He attempted to complete it by clicking on the sports tab on the left side of the home page and then clicking on the soccer tab at the top of the page underneath the main navigation bar. After scrolling through the articles, Mike didn’t find anything relating to M.L.S or a game on March 15th.
* **Task 5 Analysis:** Mike also failed to complete task 5. He did find the careers link by scrolling to the bottom of the page with the rolling scroll on the mouse and clicked on the link “Work for Us.” This brought him to a page with a map of the United States with various blue dots on it indicating the availability of jobs in that area. After getting to this page, Mike didn’t know how to get to a list of job postings because none of the dots were linked to a job posting page.
* **Task 6 Analysis:** Mike failed to complete task 6 by only being able to find the front page of today’s paper, not the one from six days ago. He clicked on the link at the top of the page named “Today’s Paper” with his mouse and continued to scroll up and down the page with his mouse. Mike didn’t understand how to change the date and find a past cover of the paper so the task went incomplete.
* **Task 7 Analysis:** After reading this task, Mike claimed that he didn’t know what a podcast was. After a basic explanation, I told him just to look for the word on the screen somewhere. He scrolled and browsed the web page for two minutes before finding the podcast link on the left side of the webpage. He clicked on the link with his mouse which launched the podcast page. “Bits: Tech Talk” was the second link down on the webpage with a “Subscribe” button right below the icon. This launched the Apple iTunes store in which Mike could have downloaded the podcast, but considering he doesn’t have any use for it, he declined the option.
* **Task 8 Analysis:** Mike completed this task in nearly two minutes quickly locating the “Games/Crossword” link on the left side of the webpage. Mike then scrolled down the page until finding the “Brain Games” link and clicking on it with the left mouse button. This launched a page with all of the games created by Brain Games. The link “Familiar Faces” was located in the middle of the webpage under the Memory Games category. Mike then clicked on the “Play” button to start the game where he used is mouse to complete the tasks asked by the game.

*Test Results for Darrin Dick:*

* **Task 1 Analysis:** Darrin opened Firefox and typed google.com/images into the address bar and typed “New Zealand earthquake epicenter” into the search bar and clicked “Search” with the left mouse button of the track-pad on the laptop. He then scrolled down the page using the track-pad until he found a map depicted the town of Christchurch as the epicenter of the earthquake.
* **Task 2 Analysis:** Darrin typed in NYTimes.com into the Firefox address bar and hit enter to launch the site. He then browsed the site for three minutes reading various articles and playing a YouTube video on the main page of the site. “I like the classic look of NYTimes.com with the different size columns, but they try to stay current by using YouTube videos as main stories,” he said.
* **Task 3 Analysis:** Task 3 took Darrin nearly one minute to complete. He typed “Consumer Electronics Show” into the search bar on the NYTimes.com home page which turned up a link to an article about the International Consumer Electronics Show which is held in Las Vegas every January.
* **Task 4 Analysis:** Darrin failed to complete task 4 on the NYTimes.com website but proved he could find the information by searching on another site, mlssoccer.com. He found that Seattle will be playing Los Angeles in Seattle on March 15th via the schedule tab on the homepage.
* **Task 5 Analysis:** Darrin completed task 5 by immediately scrolling down to the “Work for Us” link with the scroll on his track-pad and clicking on it with the left mouse button. This launched a page with a map of the United States with various blue dots on it. Darrin noticed a button near the top of the page stating “Start your search now!” and clicked on it launching the Times Talent page. Here he clicked the Major Department drop down menu and clicked on the word “Advertising” and hit enter. This gave him a list of job postings across the country, including one called Account Executive in Florida. Darrin e-mailed the link to his friend by opening his Gmail and copying and pasting the web address from the search bar on the webpage into the content area of his e-mail and clicked send.
* **Task 6 Analysis:** Darrin completed this task by first clicking on the link “Today’s Paper” at the top of the webpage. He then scrolled down to the calendar with his track-pad and clicked on the 20th which was six days ago. In the center of the page were covers of various editions of the New York Times from that day. In comparing the main images of the New York City edition and the national edition, both images were the same.
* **Task 7 Analysis:** This task took Darrin nearly one minute to complete. He immediately knew where to locate the podcast link and quickly clicked on it with his left mouse button after finding it on the left side of the webpage. He then located the podcast “Bits: Tech Talk” and clicked on the subscribe link bringing up the Apple iTunes page. After clicking the download button, the podcast was saved to his iPhone.
* **Task 8 Analysis:** Darrin quickly completed this task by locating the “Games/Crossword” link on the left side of the webpage. Darrin then scrolled down using his track-pad to find the Brain Games category and then located the “Familiar Faces” link under the category of memory games. “This game is really cool. I’ve always wondered what it would be like to be a waiter,” he said.

**Testing Conclusions:**

My two testers were fairly similar in their conduct of completing each task, but had varying success due to their difference in experience level. Mike used the technique of searching and clicking through links to complete each task, while Darrin used the technique of searching for links and utilizing the search bar to complete tasks. This advanced use of utilizing the search bar to complete tasks can be attributed to Darrin’s high level of internet experience. Mike had low efficiency and high errors considering that he failed three tasks and took a lot of time figuring out the other tasks clicking on various links that produced no results. Darrin had high efficiency and low errors considering that he only failed one task and took little time to complete the tasks he was asked of. Mike’s results coincide well with the results described in the book on page 25 completing nearly 66% of the tasks. Darrin had above average results only failing to complete one task of the eight he was asked of.

After this usability test, I’ve concluded that NYTimes.com offers good usability, but not great. The site is more accessible by high-experience users rather than low-experience users as shown in this usability test. The amount of content and links on the page can be confusing and overwhelming for low-experience users, while high-experience users are more capable of zoning in on the information he/she wants to find. I believe that the site could make improvements by better describing articles in their headlines so readers know exactly what to expect when opening the link. Also, the site could use more white space and content could be spread out more to avoid users being overwhelmed by the amount of content on the webpage.