



AWA

How to Use Usability Testing to Increase Your Conversion Rate

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Introduction

Usability testing, a type of qualitative research, is one of the most powerful diagnostic tools used in Conversion Rate Optimisation (CRO).

That's because the most successful CRO projects focus on getting into the mind-set of your customers and really understanding why they behave the way they do. The key to getting really big wins is to engage with your customers.

Quantitative tools, such as analytics, are helpful to identify where the problems are. But that's as far as it goes, because all you're looking at is an aggregate of traffic flow around your site.

Usability gets to the heart of why customers are having those problems. It paints a picture of the customer journey, highlights what makes them get stuck on your website and why they leave without buying.

Usability testing is also a great way to interact with users and ask them follow-up questions to gain further insight. Their feedback can help your designers create improved web page designs that really meet the needs of your customers and help them to buy more.

This guide covers three key types of usability testing:

- laboratory
- remote unmoderated and
- remote moderated

Of the three, remote moderated is our testing method of choice, because we find it offers the most useful insights at a reasonable cost.

Usability testing is not as time consuming as you might think. Our clients are often surprised to learn that research has shown that a sample of just five users can identify around 85% of the issues that may be preventing your website conversion rates going to the next level.

For the most accurate results, however, we suggest using at least 15 participants and always using real users to carry out real tasks in realistic conditions, rather than a panel of paid volunteers.



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What is usability testing?

Usability testing is a technique used to evaluate the features and functions of a website by testing it on real users in a controlled environment. Participants may be asked to complete tasks while they are observed and sometimes recorded.

During usability testing, a moderator assesses the ease with which a user interacts with a website and carries out tasks.

Usability testing also reveals whether users feel comfortable with the interface of the website as well as aspects such as the flow, navigation and layout, speed and content - especially in comparison to similar sites.

Usability testing can help to uncover potential bugs and potholes in the system which may not be visible to developers and may escape other types of testing, research and analysis.

What types of usability testing are used in Conversion Rate Optimisation?

Laboratory usability testing

Laboratory usability testing is the most expensive method, as it requires special premises and equipment and the testers need to make a special journey to get to the lab, rather than being in their own home.

In qualitative laboratory testing, users are studied interacting with the website in person. In-lab usability testing usually works with small and specific sample sizes to better obtain qualitative data.

Typically, the user sits in front of a PC, mobile or tablet alongside a facilitator who gives the user tasks to perform. A one-way mirror is often used, so that a number of observers can watch the interaction, make notes, and ensure the activity is recorded. Sessions are usually filmed and the software used logs interaction details. This enables a number of stakeholders to observe how a customer interacts with the site first-hand.

The kind of tasks might be ‘Please buy a gift of a teddy bear, to be delivered to your niece in Gloucester on her birthday next Wednesday’.

The observers can see for themselves if participants are able to complete specified tasks successfully and any stumbling blocks they encounter along the way. It also gives a flavour of how long it takes to complete specified

tasks and helps generate ideas for the changes required to improve user performance and satisfaction.



In laboratory usability tests, a facilitator gives the user tasks to perform whilst other team members observe

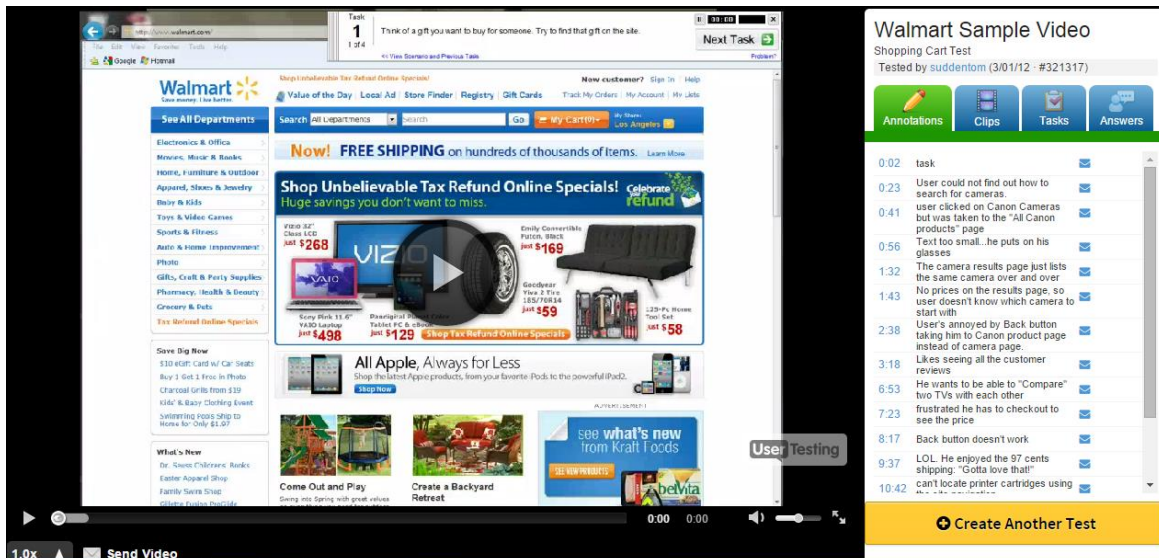
Remote unmoderated usability testing

This inexpensive usability testing method is deep as opposed to broad because it's designed to look at small, specific areas. It is ideal if the scope of the testing is limited to a specific feature, your participants are dispersed, or you need results fast.

For unmoderated user testing, you'll need a software application package, such as whatusersdo or UserTesting, to administer the tasks and questions. This plays the role of a session facilitator to guide the participants through the session and record what happens.

In an unmoderated remote session, the participant can complete the study in his or her own time, on their own PC, mobile or tablet whilst recording the session for later review by the usability expert.

Although there is no real-time interaction with the participant, some remote testing tools allow pre-defined follow-up questions to be built into the study, to be shown after each task or at the end of the session.

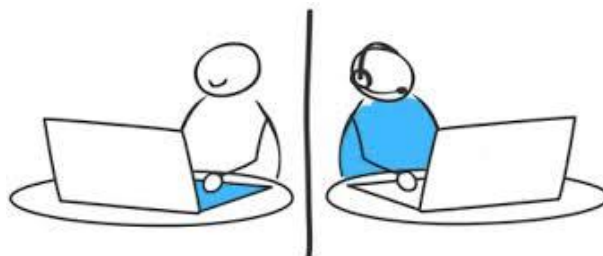


An example video you would get from UserTesting with annotations added

Remote moderated usability testing

By contrast, remote moderated usability testing is broad as opposed to deep. It's a way of observing users throughout the entire customer journey, although, when appropriate, it can also be used to look at specific issues in more detail.

In moderated remote testing, users and facilitators operate in the same 'virtual' space at the same time. The facilitator watches the usability test remotely as it happens and communicates directly with the participant via the telephone, email, chat, or a combination of methods.



To carry out remote usability testing, you need to recruit website visitors willing to take part. We use a simple software tool called Ethnio, although you can also email a subset of your database to find willing participants. In order to carry out the usability testing, you also need screen sharing and

recording software such as GoToMeeting or join.me. One of the great strengths of this method is that you are speaking to real users, while the experience of using the website is fresh in their minds.

Moderated sessions allow for interaction between the participant and facilitator, enabling the facilitator to ask questions for clarification or dive deeper into issues that crop up during the session.

However, the success of this method lies in the skill of the moderator. That person should, ideally, be the same person who is analysing the website using quantitative tools such as heat maps and analytics, so that they already have a good understanding of where the problems are. In addition, the moderator needs to be a good listener, and open to genuinely finding out what the issues are, rather than leading the tester towards a conclusion.

Case Study – Bettys

Bettys is a prestigious and popular chain of tea shops in the North of England, with a loyal and devoted following. It is famous for its cakes, which it also sells online.

During one usability session the facilitator overheard the tester's friend in the background saying "I didn't know Bettys sold cakes". This was strange, as the website clearly showed a basket symbol at the top and a large banner offering free delivery.

Rather than ignoring this chance remark, the researcher explored it in more depth. As a result, a new web page was developed which just added ten words to the home page.

"Shop online now – direct from our bakery to your door."

This was tested and led to a double-digit improvement in sales

Comparisons of usability testing methods

Usability testing methods:

Usability method	Pros	Cons
Laboratory usability testing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can include eye tracking which adds an extra dimension to data and analysis • Tests can include both qualitative & quantitative components 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's expensive • Participants aren't in their natural environment
Remote unmoderated usability testing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost effective • Timely - results usually arrive within 48 hours • Can observe participants in their natural environment • Can effectively target specific areas of the site, such as search or navigation features. • A useful and easy method of doing competitor analysis, by asking panellists to visit competitor websites • Some companies also offer an analysis service, although we recommend doing that yourself so that you really understand the user's experience and issues • Some platforms integrate with recruitment tools like Ethnio, enabling the research team to enjoy the benefits of outsourced usability testing without the drawbacks of using a panel with no real connection to the site. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a default, uses a panel of people who may not accurately reflect your visitors • Varying degrees of ability to select visitors matching specific criteria • Responses often feel "canned" as the panellists may be doing these reviews semi-professionally. Feedback becomes opinionated judgements rather than reflections on an authentic user experience. • Have to pre-set tasks which may seem 'false' • No opportunity to get a 'flavour' of your visitors • No ability to steer testers back on-course if they go off on a tangent (although a bad result can be rejected)

<p>Remote moderated usability testing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost effective • Can be run with your real visitors, not a panel • Can watch them use the website naturally rather than using constructed scenarios • Participants are observed in their natural environment • A moderator or facilitator keeps sessions on track • There is the potential to ask more general questions about, for example, needs and buying behaviour which can help to get in the user's mind and construct personas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time consuming • Needs lots of traffic given the response rate and selection process of users to participate • Some sessions may not work out for technical reasons
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How to run usability tests yourself

Remote unmoderated

For this type of testing it is better to run multiple sessions, targeting specific areas and looking for themes and patterns. Users carry out the tests in their own time, on their own device and are recorded on video ‘thinking aloud’ to provide more detailed feedback.

Typical steps for remote unmoderated usability testing:

- 1 Identify the tasks you want testers to complete
- 2 Supply some elementary profiling to the panel to screen your testers to be similar to your existing customers
- 3 Provide a script outlining what you want the testers to do
- 4 Create the tests
- 5 Wait for the results to come in
- 6 Watch the videos to identify opportunities for improvement
- 7 Analyse the data

Remote moderated

For a remote moderated usability test, you will need to use a facilitator as well as find a team of testers – we recommend between five and 15 users, ideally recruited from your own site. We have found that offering a voucher or discount in exchange for their time increases the number of testers willing to participate.

Typical steps for remote moderated usability testing

- 1 Find website visitors willing to help, using tools such as Ethnio or via a visitor survey or panel company
- 2 Arrange a suitable time for the testing session
- 3 Prepare a script outline. Moderated usability testing is usually unscripted, as you want to sound natural, and also have the freedom to fully explore issues with the users as things come up during the course of the conversation. However, it can be useful to have a script outline to use during the testing session. This should be used as a back up to ensure that you cover all the topics you need to explore.
- 4 Use screen sharing and recording software such as GoToMeeting or join.me. It is always worth having a trial run with this software so that you're comfortable with it.
- 5 Ask the user to use the website on their PC, mobile or tablet as they usually would and to speak all their thoughts out loud, even if it has nothing to do with the website
- 6 Resist temptations to guide the user. You will learn far more by letting them get on with it and observing closely.

- 7 Make extensive notes during the testing session
- 8 Be open to new and unexpected insights during the session, and don't be afraid to explore them
- 9 Watch the video of the session several times to identify opportunities
- 10 Analyse the data

How to use the data gathered from usability testing in the CRO process

Usability testing is considered a vital diagnostic tool during the research and analysis phase of Conversion Rate Optimisation to identify optimisation opportunities.

Once you have completed the usability session or watched the videos, identified issues and common themes and collated this with other qualitative and quantitative data, you can use this intelligence to prioritise opportunities and develop hypothesis about how to improve your site.

A less well known use for usability testing is the valuable role it can play during the creative execution phase to help develop new designs for web pages, prior to those pages being A/B split tested

At AWA we often go back to our original testers to get user feedback on wireframes and potential new designs created to address the opportunities we identified. Users are often happy to help, and give useful feedback. It's quick and inexpensive to change a wireframe in the early stages, rather than the finished artwork or a web page.

Case Study – Northern Parrots

Northern Parrots is the UK's largest online pet store specialising in parrot toys, food and accessories. The website converts at well above industry average, so it was a challenge to find ways to improve it. The key to success lay in usability research.

The moderator discovered that customers' relationship with their birds was unusually intense – even stronger than dog owners feel for their dogs. Owners loved nothing better than to find new and exciting toys and treats to keep their pet happy – and the parrots loved nothing more than seeing their new box of treats being delivered.

This insight led to an understanding that users wanted to browse the site and be inspired, yet the site was really set up for those searching for something specific.

This, together with other improvements, such as a testimonial from a vet and a stronger value proposition, led to the creation of a new home page which brought in 34.7% more sales than the old one.

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Involving the users again at this stage dramatically increases the likelihood that the improvements will actually solve the problems the users were encountering. That means that your chances of a successful split test, which translates into higher sales, are also dramatically increased.

Top tips for successful usability testing

Top tips:

- Use the right type of usability testing for the job – are you looking for broad or deep insight? What is your budget?
- Use representative users, real tasks and a controlled environment.
- Use a trained external tester to moderate the tests, or train internal staff. Using untrained testers can introduce bias, fail to target representative users and tasks, misinterpret user behaviour or simply miss important jewels of insight.
- Users may feel more comfortable giving honest and frank feedback if they think that the moderator is external to the company and therefore unlikely to be emotionally connected to the website. Make it clear at the start of the session that you will not be offended by their comments and that the aim of this is to get real, honest feedback in order to improve the overall experience.
- Keep out of the way of the users and resist the temptation to intervene. Rather than trying to help users if they struggle with a particular feature, use the test to gain insight by observing, listening and making notes. Remember, the user is not an idiot – their ‘failings’ are the golden nuggets that lead to successful Conversion Rate Optimisation.

- Where possible, developers, designers and project managers should attend the user tests as observers. They're also useful to show to the management team.
- Be patient – we usually watch videos created during usability testing three to four times and gain additional insight on each viewing.

Are you using usability testing?

Usability testing is a vital part of our CRO projects and has helped us discover insightful data about the way users behave on our clients' websites, and the reasons behind this behaviour .

From learning how your website visitors use your website, what obstacles they face and what their motivations are, usability testing offers a huge range of benefits for your business. With just five usability testing sessions, you can:

- Identify around 85% of the issues that may be stopping your website visitors buying
- Observe how your visitors actually behave on your website
- Identify frustrations, complications and questions that your visitors experience when they use your site
- Get into the mind of your visitors, why are they on your site, what drives them to buy from you?

Discovering all this gives you the ideal opportunity to optimise you conversion rate and increase revenue per visitor.

Appendix – Tools and resources

Below is a list of tools, books and websites which you may find helpful for your usability testing.

Usability tools

Remote unmoderated usability testing tools

- UserTesting - <http://www.usertesting.com/>
- whatusersdo - <http://www.whatusersdo.com/>
- Loop11 - <http://www.loop11.com/>
- UserZoom - <http://www.userzoom.co.uk/>

Remote moderated usability testing tools

- Ethnio - <http://ethn.io/>
- GoToMeeting - <http://www.gotomeeting.co.uk/>
- join.me - <https://www.join.me/>

Books and website articles:

- **Rocket Surgery Made Easy: The Do-It-Yourself Guide to Finding and Fixing Usability Problems** - a book on how to run usability studies

<http://www.amazon.co.uk/Rocket-Surgery-Made-Easy--yourself/dp/0321657292/>

- **Remote Research** - a book containing useful techniques on how to run moderated usability sessions <http://www.amazon.co.uk/Remote-Research-Real-Users-Time/dp/1933820772>
- **Why You Only Need to Test with 5 Users** - <http://www.nngroup.com/articles/why-you-only-need-to-test-with-5-users>

About the author



World leading CRO expert and boardroom advisor, Johann delivers mind-blowing talks on how to increase conversion rates, with success stories from blue chip companies from around the globe, including Canon, Avis and Interflora.

Drawing on his experience as Chief Operating Officer at the global website optimization agency AWA digital, Johann's sparkling performances combine up-to-date knowledge and wisdom with profound insights and actionable takeaways that will have your delegates smiling and scribbling intensely.

Johann is also co-author of the Amazon best seller E-Commerce Website Optimization: Why 95% of your website visitors don't buy – and what you can do about it.

If you need any further help or advice, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

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Next steps

Are you serious about implementing website improvements that deliver massive sales increases to the bottom line?

At AWA we're here to help companies like yours master all aspects of web optimisation. That's why we're offering a free consultation with one of our Lead Optimisers – to show you how to get up to speed with CRO.

Your free, no-obligation consultation is tailored to your business, to give you some of the most useful and practical advice you'll find anywhere. Delivered at a time to suit you, there's no limit on the number of people who can attend, so your whole team can benefit.

Lasting 30 minutes, you'll learn

- Exactly how to get an effective CRO programme running in your business (OR how to optimise your efforts, if you already have an in-house CRO programme)
- The top conversion mistakes most multichannel businesses make, and how to avoid them
- 5 personalised recommendations to implement now for fast results

Book your free no-obligation 30 minute CRO consultation now. Just follow the link on the next page and fill out the form so we can get it all set up for you.

Free no-obligation 30 minute CRO consultation

Note: this is not a sales presentation. We aim to give you the best advice we can in 30 minutes to help you do CRO yourself.

[Get a free consultation](#)



AWA digital is one of the UK's leading conversion rate optimisation consultancies, helping multi-channel and online retailers increase sales, repeat business and visitor satisfaction.

Our experienced team of web analysts and ecommerce specialists use a range of tools – from in-depth website data analysis to usability testing – to show you how you can quickly boost conversion rates, repeat business and visitor satisfaction. Our pinpoint analysis of your online campaigns will show exactly what's working, what's not and what you need to change to get results that you are bound to make you smile.

We offer our services to both multi-channel and ecommerce retailers, as well as agencies who wish to extend their range of services to include conversion rate optimisation.

Our direct clients include Dunelm, Richer Sounds, Barbour, Interflora, Cotton Traders, Ironmongery Direct, Dune, Bettys and Taylors of Harrogate as well as a number of large and small B2B businesses.

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