Details and Results of formal usability lab testing of the UNISA Corporate website

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A usability study was done on the UNISA Corporate Website (www.unisa.ac.za). A formal usability laboratory test was conducted. The participant profile included current and potential UNISA students as well as UNISA staff and lecturers. The participants (10) came from various different backgrounds with seven different languages in the participant group. The participants consisted of both expert and non-expert Web experienced users. Usability measures included task completion rate, task completion with and without assistance, error recovery rate and real time events. Eye tracking data for participants were recorded. A post-test questionnaire and questions throughout testing captured participant satisfaction.

Post-test questionnaire results showed that participants were overall satisfied with the website. One of the questions: “It was simple to use this website”; scored a good high rating. However, the usability data showed that participants needed assistance with several tasks. Usability and eye tracking data gave very useful results. Task completion rate was found to be high, but several participants required assistance with tasks.

Finding information about a degree proved difficult for non-expert Web participants, all needing assistance finding the information. Expert Web participants found the information easily. Eye tracking showed many fixations on the home page all over the screen for non-expert participants, demonstrating that the information is difficult to find. This could be improved by reducing the number of menus. The menu at the bottom of the home page should be included in the “information about” menu. The top right menu and bottom menu was neglected by participants. All non-expert participants struggled to find the library on the top right menu. This menu can be improved by moving it closer, to the top of the “information for” menu area. Several links, such as Library and Study Fees should be included on the home page.

Very few participants made use of the drop-down boxes on the right of the home page. This is a very useful feature, and improvements will see greater use. Each drop-down box should have a clear label, such as “select college:”. They should also be separated from each other, as they currently appear to be independent on each other.

Participants found the brochure cart difficult to use. An online shopping cart, as typically used in websites like Kalahari.net and Amazon.com, is a metaphor for buying online. A customer would add one or more items in a cart, and then proceed to a checkout to pay for these items. The UNISA cart does not work like this. A possible solution would be to drop the cart metaphor, and simply include a link with each degree that says, download/print the brochure. Another solution would be to redesign the cart concept from scratch using user-centered design.
The UNISA library proved to have many issues with participants struggling a great deal. Issues included inconsistent buttons, incomprehensible terminology and inappropriate placement of elements on information capture and results screens. A separate usability study for the library is recommended.

It was found that several colleges did not have updated college and contact information. Another issue was terminology used throughout the website, for example, it is not clear what a MAGview file is; what the difference between formal and in-formal courses are; and what a qualification code is. Links should also be named consistently, for example, “courses and programmes” and “formal courses and programmes” go to the same link.

It is recommended that once these improvements have been implemented, that a follow-up usability study is conducted.

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