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

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A usability study was done on the UNISA Library Website. Specific focus was given to a potentially new homepage design. A formal usability laboratory test was conducted. The participant profile included undergraduate and postgraduate UNISA students as well as UNISA staff members. The participants (10) came from various different backgrounds with six different languages in the participant group. The participants consisted of both expert and non-expert Web experienced users as well as a range of experience with the library website. Usability and eye tracking data were recorded. A post-test questionnaire and questions throughout testing captured participant satisfaction. The results of this study were presented to stakeholders in fine detail. This report presents a breakdown of the results with recommendations.

Usability and eye tracking data gave very useful results and several usability issues were identified. Participants did like the new look and feel of the main page. The consistent look of the library homepage compared to the UNISA corporate website was welcomed.

The main issue identified was the position of the most important and used tasks in the main menu (main menu is the middle of the page menu with 3 columns, similar to UNISA corporate website). Participants had difficulty finding the most important task, namely finding a book. Participants expected this information to be part of “e-books” and “request a book”. The word catalogue was not intuitive to novice library users, i.e. that it means that one can find books here.

- It is recommended that the very first link in the main menu be “Find a book”. This first group of links should have the most important tasks. “Find a journal” could also be included here.

- “Request a ...” should not be in the first area. These links created a great amount of confusion for participants, as it takes one to a screen where a login is required. These links should be renamed to a “log in” link to avoid confusion.

- The heading of the main menu also needs to be redesigned. “Library services”, “e-Resources” and “African digital content” do not currently fit the links provided. The first heading would be more appropriately named “Finding information”.

Another big issue was the inconsistency between library web pages. There were at least 7 different screen designs in one website. Also, buttons were not used in a consistent way. Different types of buttons exist; grey ones, and ones with pictures. The buttons have inconsistent names, for example “Search”, “Submit” and “Submit above search”. Page links and headings have different names, for example, the “renew books” link has the page heading “renewing library material”. The consistency is a major area that needs attention; the same look and feel needs to be implemented throughout the website.

Other important recommendations:

- Mouse-over information. It is very important that all links should have mouse-over information to provide users with additional information regarding the links they want to select. This is also an accessibility requirement to make provision for people with disabilities.
• “Ask a short question” – participants expected that this page is a FAQ, because of the questions and answers provided; however, these are instructions. FAQ should be available. “Ask a short question” could be renamed to “Submit a question” to avoid confusion. This should also not be the very 1st link on the main menu.

• Renew books:
  o Rename to “Renew and return books”. Participants expected to find information regarding the returning of books here. Include returning book information in this page.
  o Rename “via the OASIS library catalogue” to “online via the OASIS library catalogue”. This link should also be the first option in the bulleted option list.

• Keep instructions as short as possible. Eye tracking data showed that participants ignored lengthy instructions most of the time.

• Renew and view loan records:
  o This should be a link on the main menu. It is hidden in the catalogue.
  o The student number field should not be a masked password field.
  o Once logged in:
    ▪ This screen was very troublesome for participants. The screen has different buttons and links all over the screen. Participants could not find the “Borrowed items” button. This page should be redesigned.
    ▪ The functionality of the search bar at this point is also confusing. The search bar could be removed here.

• The grey left menu:
  o The heading should be renamed to reflect the information here more appropriately, for example “Library Admin”.

• “Clients with special” was difficult for participants to comprehend. This could be renamed to “Clients with special needs” or “Disability information” since most of the information available here are for persons with disabilities.

• Database page:
  o “a-z list of the names of all electronic resources” should be moved into the bulleted list.
  o This page should also have the same look and feel as the new main page.

• Thesis and dissertations:
  o The UNISA information should be moved to the top of that list.
“UnisaETD: electronic theses and dissertations”. This page should be replaced by the search page, which has all the information needed.

- The search page has a button “clear form” which has the focus. This results in the form being cleared if a participant hits Enter. This button should be removed, with the focus being on the “Search” button.

- Book results screen:
  - Separate the items more clearly. Participants related the headings to the wrong availability status.
  - It is not clear which items are books and which are not. Video cassettes for example are described as video cassettes. The same should be done for books.

- Author search. Participants never entered the surname of an author first as the page instructions inform. A short sentence could be moved to the top of the search box “Surname first: Mbeki, Thabo”

The subjective post-test questionnaire results corresponded with the objective usability results. The post-test questionnaire results showed that participants were overall not satisfied with the website. The post-test questionnaire consisted of the System Usability Scale questionnaire as well as open-ended questions and participant comments. The System Usability Scale reflected a low median of 55.00 (out of 100; standard deviation 20.98). Only 3 participants scored the website 70 or above. Participant comments included:

- “I think it’s a great initiative that UNISA has in place to improve the websites regularly and thereby improve our learning experience.”
- “For a first time user the site is not very user friendly, but if you have gone to all the links it is easy to remember what to find where, but takes time.”
- “Student training about the system is needed.”
- “The library system was difficult to use.”
- “The buttons do not look like buttons.”

The website is an important source of information and student’s reliance on the site will increase with the focus on research. Despite the difficulties identified, the website is frequently used and therefore it is recommended that once these improvements have been implemented, that a follow-up usability study is conducted.

Please contact Marco Pretorius, pretomc@unisa.ac.za if you would like more details.