

LIS3201
Research and Data Analysis
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Assignment 1
Group K

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SITUATION

We at BigAmpz, a maker of high quality speakers, amplifiers, and subwoofers, have hired you to analyze the newly developed prototype website created by our development team. You have been hired as a usability analyst that will use various user-centered design methods to test the usability of the prototype website. You will be meeting our assistant when you arrive at Austin-Bergstrom International Airport, where you will then be picked up by our corporate limousine and taken to our headquarters located in downtown Austin. You will meet with the development team when you arrive at our location to discuss various parts of the website. Our CEO will be meeting with you and the development team to discuss what he is looking for in the testing phase of the prototype website.

BACKGROUND

When the company first started, we created a simple website. It served its purpose early on, but now we are growing into a larger company and our customer base is expanding. This increased demand led us to a major crisis with our old website. First off, the old site is terrible. This is greatly due to the fact that the website was originally developed by one ill-prepared employee. This happened to be the CEO's seventeen-year old son. The entirety of the old website exists on a single scrollable page. Looking at it now, the site is just horrendous. There is information all over the place and nothing is organized. All the speakers we sell are just randomly placed in the middle of the page. The user has to continuously scroll just to find the product they want. Then they click the buy item button and have to go through the checkout system, which is very prone to security threats. The users cannot even find the store locator as it is all the way down on the bottom, buried beneath twenty pages of products. We sell speaker

cables and the like, but since they are all the way on the bottom, they are the least purchased items on the site. Even with all of that however, the site did suffice. That is until the crisis came.

Six months ago, the previous version of the website crashed. No one knew exactly what happened. Not even the so called genius seventeen-year old we had working on it. The losses were catastrophic and a new development team was hired immediately (and the CEO's son was politely terminated). They began by researching what could have caused the site to crash. They informed the company that old version of the site was far behind the times when compared to current Internet trends and technology. As a result, the site crashed due to bandwidth overloads, poor software, and poor planning. It remained down for an extended period of time. In effect, our company's shares took a big drop and our main online competitors (King of Amps and Totally Speakers) were able to easily scoop up a large portion of our once loyal customers.

In designing the new website, the development team tried to mirror and improve upon the strategies being used by our competitors. Special attention was given to security, layout, and organization. The CEO does not want to repeat the mistakes of the past and consequently has very high expectations for the new website. He is confident that if the company rolls out a brand new, modern and up-to-date website, that BigAmpz will once again become number one. The new prototype of the BigAmpz website is complete and ready for testing. This is where you come in.

MISSION

This prototype has good organization and many functions that we feel are going to make our site stand out among the rest. Instead of the single scrollable page we have now, the products will be divided by category, type, model, etc. This should make the pages a lot smaller and

should reduce the vertical scrolling. A user will be able to begin at a central point and branch out. There will be breadcrumbs allowing the user to return to their previous locations. All of this was done in effort to help reduce the cognitive load on the user.

With the prototype website ready to go, we want you start getting a group of end users together to start testing this thing. You should start by getting a solid testing base. Even though Jakob Nielsen says you only need to test five users, we want more. How can you find a lot of the problems and get good results when using only five users? However, we want some results quickly, so do not invite the entire state of Texas.

First, conduct a usability test of the design with the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis. Create several tasks or scenarios for the users that focus on some of our new features mentioned above. We want you to try to observe and record the user's actions so we can see what sections of the site the users tend to gravitate to. Finally, interview the users afterward to see how they felt about the tasks you gave them.

You should use video or take notes to monitor some quantitative data such as the number of clicks or the time it takes for the user to complete the given task. Finally, you may want to take a look at some secondary data. You could do some competitive benchmarking, looking at our competitor's websites to see what they do well and what they do poorly. You could also look at some site statistics websites to look for what kind of browsers our customer base use, their resolutions, the time of day they access the sites, their demographics and more.

This should give you some ideas to start with. There are many other methods you can use to get some good results. You are the usability analyst, so you know what other options you have out there. We are here to help you whenever you need us. Good luck.

INTENT

You will be instrumental in any of the changes that are made to the prototype website (if any are necessary). You will meet with the CEO and the development team at the completion of your research in order to go over the results. With the data you get from watching the users movements, we can maybe restructure the site so that the areas the users seemed to go to more are brought more to the forefront. The video data or notes you took will be used to judge the emotions of our consumers and their response to the tasks that you presented them. You will then present your findings on the quantitative data that you recorded. These quantitative results will tell us if the user is having problems completing the certain task, or if it simply takes too much work to complete it. All of the results from the research on the prototype website will allow us to make various decisions about what may need to be deleted, changed or added to the website. Our goal is to use this data to make the new website better, faster and more user-centered.

I would be lying to say that there is no pressure on you, our valued usability analyst. We need your research to be thorough and accurate in order to put out the best website that our consumers have ever seen. You will be paid up front for any research costs that you have and on completion of your research you will receive the rest of your pay. I look forward to meeting you when you arrive in Austin.

SWOT

Strengths

1. You are a professional usability analyst who has experience with usability testing, high fidelity prototypes, and various other methods that focus on user-centered design.

2. The company is very cooperative and willing to listen to all ideas and opinions.
3. You are working with a highly qualified development team who has creative and interactive ideas.

Weaknesses

1. You are unfamiliar with Austin, Texas and the possible local user base.
2. You were not directly involved in the development of the prototype website, so it will take time for you to get adjusted to the site.
3. The closest you have come to an audio speaker is a concert. You know absolutely nothing about speakers, which can make it hard to relate to the user base and the company.

Opportunities

1. You can be part of the fast growing and energetic company known as BigAmpz.
2. You will gain valuable recommendations for future jobs assuming the job is done well.
3. You will taste great Texas food and will get to enjoy the many the larger than life experiences the state has to offer. Everything is truly bigger in Texas.

Threats

1. You could run a faulty usability test and cause our website to inadequately cater to the need of our customers.
2. The prototype website could turn out to be completely unusable.
3. You could garner a bad reputation by means of your work on this project.

4. You may have to deal with difficult users that have the potential to get angry at you if the site is not usable.