

9 Actionable Steps to Improve Your Website's Usability

By Theresa Putkey



If you're working on a website that doesn't have the resources (right now) to do research and design, there are still some actionable steps you can take to improve the usability of your website. When it comes to improving your website's usability, there are two approaches:

- Do a bit of research, then strategize and fix problems
- Make changes based on best practices to see if things improve

These actionable steps can help you pick off changes that are low hanging fruit. As a caveat, these approaches not necessarily going to fix the problem, but they can be an approach in the absence of other resources (such as money or staff).

Approach 1: First Strategize, Then Fix

It's always good to do *at least a bit* of research or background work before you dive in and make changes. Here are some things I typically do as part of a larger project, which can be quite effective:

1. **Develop User Profiles or Proto-Personas:** Make sure that you know what information users need and what their high priority tasks are. Ideally this work is grounded in research, but you can develop draft profiles as a way to make your target user more concrete.
2. **Find the Common Tasks and Content:** You may know from your analytics, from purchases, or popular pages on your site what the major tasks and content are. Make sure that these are obvious in the navigation, the home page, and any relevant landing page.
3. **Look at Search Terms:** Use Google's Search Console to see what users are searching for before they arrive on your site. Look at your internal site search terms to see what users are searching for once they're on your site. Make sure the terms you use on your site match what users are searching for.
4. **Look at Competitors:** While not every competitor is doing the right thing, what are they doing that you think works? Can you mimic any of it on your site? Do they have good calls to action? Well written, jargon free content? Is the navigation easy to use on both large and small screens?

With these steps, you will most likely find things you want to change about your website. Keep your changes relatively simple and pick off low hanging fruit.

Approach 2: Make Changes Based On Best Practices

There are some best practices that can be applied in the absence of a research-driven approach. Please remember that “best practice” doesn’t mean foolproof! If you want to know what will make your site easy to use, you need to buck up and do some research.

5. **Get Rid of Jargon and Use Plain Language:** You can use a readability scoring website to see how difficult your website is to read. Adjust the content on your website to be easier to read and free from jargon (especially in the content aimed at new users). Assume users don’t know what you mean! Can’t get away from jargon? Define your terms.
6. **Prompt Users with Topical Lists:** While search boxes are great access points for users, sometimes people don’t know what term to enter in that leering, blank search box! You can read more about “recognition vs recall” to learn that it’s easier for users to scan a list of words to find the right topic instead of trying to type a topic into a blank box.
7. **Declutter Your Site:** Check analytics to see what content is not being used and archive it. Taking it off the site means that the remaining content is easier to find.
8. **Move the “About Us” Content:** On some websites, the “About Us” content is accessed from the main, or global, navigation. But many times this content isn’t relevant to users and their tasks. Move access to “About Us” to the header or footer and declutter the global navigation by this one item!
9. **Set Some Metrics and Start Tracking:** One way you can start to improve your website’s usability for the long term is to set some metrics and start tracking them. How long does it take for a user to complete a task? How many people don’t complete a task? Use analytics to track these metrics.

By applying these best practices, you can compare the experience of users before and after the change. If things improve, then you’ve made a good change. If things don’t improve, re-evaluate the change you’ve made.

Further Reading

- **Finding Empathy for Users** <http://uxpamagazine.org/finding-empathy-for-users/>
- **Redesigning Your Website? Don't Ditch Your Old Design So Soon**
<https://www.nngroup.com/articles/redesign-competitive-testing/>
- **How Much Time Does It Take to Create Personas?**
<https://www.nngroup.com/articles/persona-budgets/>
- **Simplicity Wins over Abundance of Choice** <https://www.nngroup.com/articles/simplicity-vs-choice/>
- **Usability As A Key Driver Of Revenue** <http://www.measuringu.com/blog/ux-driver.php>
- **10 Essential Usability Metrics** <http://www.measuringu.com/blog/essential-metrics.php>

About Key Pointe and Theresa Putkey

Key Pointe focuses on information architecture, taxonomy, user research and testing. Leveraging over 10 years of experience in information architecture and over 15 years in the technology industry, Theresa brings strong expertise to each customer.

Learn more at www.keypointe.ca