

# Conducting usability research with a team of one

By Christine Kowalski

HighEdWeb Track Session: APS7

# “Redesign? Sure, but let’s do some usability testing first...”



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#### Weather or Not?



Summers in Western New York are wonderfully temperate and pleasant with high temperatures predominantly in the low 80's, and overnight lows typically in the 60's. Warm days are

refreshingly offset by cooler, but comfortable evenings...  
[More on WNY weather](#)

# Spring 2007 – Pre-Redesign Usability Research

- Had a TOTAL “thank you for your time” budget of \$150 dollars for one focus group, dozens of card sorts and usability tests, and an online web survey that was sent to over 27,000 people
- Had 3 students help with the “testing and analysis” phase of the project

# “Hooray we’re finished! Well, not quite...”

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# Fall 2008 –

## Post-Redesign Usability Research

- Had a TOTAL “thank you for your time” budget of \$100 dollars for one focus group, 25 usability tests, and an online web survey that was sent to over 10,000 people
- No students helping with the “testing and analysis” phase of the project, and only other “web team” co-worker resigned in April 2008

# Wait a minute... Total budgets of \$100 and \$150 - really?

Well, no. The actual costs were...

- In 2007, \$253.04
  - Catering = \$96.24
  - Focus group video taping = \$106.80
  - 5 Starbucks gift cards = \$50.00
- In 2008, \$277.90
  - Catering = \$126.50
  - Focus group video taping = \$151.40

# Recruiting participants

- For the Online Survey:
  - Used listservs
  - Posted the link on our home page
- For the Card Sort, Usability Tests, and Focus Group:
  - Selectively emailed outgoing faculty, staff, and students

# Methodology

- Before conducting this research, all participants signed an IRB release form
- The Card Sort:
  - Used an “open-ended” card sort
- The Focus Group:
  - Five questions designed to foster discussion with limited interaction from moderator

# Methodology - The Online Survey

- 10 questions total - quantitative only
  - Yes/No questions
  - Radio button questions
  - General usage questions
- Collected emails for prizes independently of the survey responses

# Methodology - The Usability Tests

- 10 questions total - qualitative/quantitative
  - *Part 1:* Two general questions
  - *Part 2:* Five separate “task” question sets, a different set for each group tested
  - *Part 3:* Three general questions

# So how do you do this research by yourself?

- Step back and take a look at what it's going to take to accomplish your goals:
  - Time
  - People
  - Money
  - Supervisor approval

Or in my case, it was more like,  
“How do I overcome these four  
major hurdles?”

- “I don’t have time during the day”
- “I don’t have enough manpower”
- “I don’t have a budget”
- “I don’t have buy-in from my supervisor”

# Hurdle #1 - “I don’t have enough time during the day”

## *How to overcome it*

- Test end-users on your lunch break
- Evaluate participants before or after work
- Arrange to do the usability test on the weekends
- Have your student intern perform the evaluations
- Ask a user to take a “5-Second Test”

# Hurdle #2 - “I don’t have enough manpower”

## *How to overcome it*

- Get web stat collection tools to do the work for you
- Use a web cam to capture usability tests
- Test fewer participants: “5 users is all you need”
- Collect the data over a longer time-frame

# Hurdle #3 -

## “I don't have a budget”

### *How to overcome it*

- Use free tools to help you collect web site data
- Ask your Admissions department, Alumni Association, and fundraising departments for freebies they might be trying to get rid of
- Use pen/paper instead of renting video equipment
- Ask people to volunteer their time

# Hurdle #4 - “I don’t have buy-in from my supervisor”

## *How to overcome it*

- Show how usability testing is a not big production
- Illustrate the results/statistics of preliminary tests
- Ask your design team to watch a usability test
- Hold a post-focus group viewing party

# Thank you for your time!

This was HighEdWeb Track Session: APS7  
Any questions?

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