Abstract

A Study on the Usability of Online State Government Performance Data

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A study was conducted in identifying potential usability barriers of three state government Web sites when accessing information on government accountability. Each Web site was selected based on availability of cost and performance data on state government activities. The targeted user of state government Web sites is a taxpayer in any adult age group with reading comprehension skills at eighth grade or high school levels.

The study is considered a heuristic evaluation. It utilized usability criteria that target all adult age groups inclusive of senior citizens. The criteria take into account reading comprehension associated with information content. It also utilized usability criteria associated with color deficient vision, aging vision, and vision impairments. Usability criteria included: text resizing, screen reader output, readability, navigation, consistency, reading complexity, and programming errors. The Web sites were also checked for number of years of data, cited source information, and the availability of help information.

The findings of the study revealed potential issues that could impede the use of the Web site by targeted users. Older adults, in particular, may find the Web sites difficult to use when taking into account normal aging factors of vision, cognition, and motor skills. The Web sites either did not support resizing of content or resizing of content introduced potential readability barriers. Web site navigation was not always intuitive and for some pages required the effective use of mouseover technology. Though most content was written at a high school level, examples of reading complex content was found on each site. The use of color remains a usability issue in terms of contrasting foreground and background colors (difficult for those with aging vision or vision impairments), colors used to relay information (potentially unseen by those with color-deficient vision), and saturated colors adjacent to one another (may cause eye fatigue). Each of the Websites provided help features supported by contact information. In most cases, information was supplemented with source citations or contact information.

Web developers of government sites may find the results of this study beneficial in designing sites that promote usability by all citizens.