

## **10 Principles to make your Website more Usable**

In the context of a website, usability is the efficiency with which a user can perform self-set tasks. **Usability can be measured objectively** via performance errors and productivity, and **subjectively** via user preferences and interface characteristics.

### **1. What are your objectives?**

Seems obvious but you want to “**convert**” the visitor – by making a sale, getting a sign up, or registration, or just getting them to contact you. That is the point of your website, so start with the goal and work backwards. Ensure that the whole site leads the user to your goal.

### **2. What does your user need?**

If you ensure the users’ needs are fulfilled, you are more likely to get a “conversion”. So, **design your site around your users’ needs**. It is best to research this. Ask your clients what they need. It may surprise you. But your website will be more relevant and focused.

### **3. Spend time on the sitemap**

The organisation of information is key to your users’ experience when visiting your website. Information should be organised in a way that is **logical to the user** – not to reflect your departmental structure for example.

### **4. Follow convention**

This does not mean being a copycat, but **general protocols, or standards have emerged on the web** – use these rather than make up your own. Examples are the navigation structure you use, and the use of common labels for buttons. If you do not follow convention users will be confused.

### **5. Conceptual testing**

From the conceptual side you should test the website early rather than try to fix things at launch, or post launch. **Test the website’s organisational structure** by asking test subjects where they would go to find information. Later show them **wire frame layouts** with buttons and see if they can intuitively complete the tasks they want to do (like use the shopping basket). Any confusion should be examined and put right.

## **6. Technical testing**

From a technical standpoint you should test the website on **different browsers** to make sure it performs as expected under different conditions. You should also consider the time that it takes your pages to load, and ensure the graphics are not too heavy. Users are highly intolerant of slow **page load speeds** and any weird browser issues.

## **7. Typography & design**

There has been a considerable amount of **research on the speed that users can navigate, read, and comprehend a page layout**. Do yourself a favour and ensure your design doesn't slow down, or worse turn off your visitors. The font you use, the size of text, the space between the lines, the line width, the length of paragraph, the colour of text and background, the use of animation – all this has been researched and its impact understood for different types of user profile.

## **8. Content style**

Similar to point 7. above, the content style has a huge impact on the usability of a website. Basically users tend to skim text and dip into detail – rather than read a whole page. They prefer short, bulleted points, and the ability to print something they find useful. **Write for the user, not for the marketing department.**

## **9. Content sell-by-date**

There is no point building a beautiful website and then not **keeping the website up-to-date**. This is a sinful oversight. This is something that a user will judge and react to quickly by leaving the website.

## **10. Defer to the statistics**

A website's visitor log is a function of its usability. By examining the statistics you can see **what pages are being visited most**, and for how long. You should respond accordingly and consider what is not being viewed and whether it should stay. Similarly you can see **where visitors are leaving your site**, and if they are not completing the payment process (for example), you can at least see at what stage they quit. This richness of data is a market researchers dream. **Act upon it.** Your website can only get better.