

Usability Resources Inc

User Experience Research Services

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RECENTLY PUBLISHED ARTICLES

Links to recent speaking engagements and published articles are at www.usabilityresources.net/news/speaking.htm

INTRODUCTION

This portfolio offers prospective clients seeking usability and interface design services a sense of Usability Resource Inc's experience and capabilities. It contains a brief overview of the type of services we offer as well as the process we follow to help our clients create usable products. As you will see, we have significant experience in user research, focus group moderation, expert reviews, information architecture, and user interface design.

Value clients can expect from using our services

- Ability to create a strategy for their interactive product design that is based on genuine user needs.
- Detailed, accurate, and objective user feedback on their products presented in an actionable format
- Deeper insights into their target audience's world – this includes their context, goals, and tasks as well as their “readiness” to appreciate and use their product
- When requested, expert consultation on how to make their product more intuitive, easy to learn and use



KAY CORRY AUBREY'S BIOGRAPHY

Kay Corry Aubrey has 20 years' experience as a user experience researcher and designer. She consults with companies across a wide range of industries such as Moxie Software, AT&T, IABC, Affinova, and Avaya through Usability Resources Inc, the business she founded in 2002.

Kay is a RIVA-certified Master Moderator and a member of the Usability Professionals Association (UPA), and the Qualitative Researchers Consultants Association (QRCA) where she is a Managing Editor of the QRCA VIEWS magazine, a qualitative market research

journal. Kay has taught graduate-level courses in user-centered research and design for desktop and mobile applications at Northeastern University and Bentley University.

Kay holds an MS in Information Systems from Northeastern University, an MSW in Group Work and Community Organizing from Boston University, a BA from McGill University, and a Certificate in Graphic Design from the Museum School in Boston.

Usability Resources Inc is SOMWBA/DBE certified as a woman-owned business and is registered with the Central Contractors Registry (CCR). For further information on our company and services, please consult www.UsabilityResources.net.

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USABILITY TESTING

We'll help you find design problems with your product

Our clients hire us for usability testing when they need objective detailed feedback on their product from real end users.

We know how to get test participants to open up about what they love about your product, and more importantly, what they don't. You also see the areas of your product design that confuse and frustrate people, as well as those areas that are completely intuitive. Not only do you get priceless feedback, but you also discover just who your users are.

Whether your product is just a concept, is up and-running, or is someplace in-between, we can test it

If your product is still in concept or early design, we might use paper prototypes or electronic screen shots to elicit feedback. If the product is already released or in alpha/beta, we can run the sessions with the existing version, and perhaps blend our inquiry with prototypes showing new feature concepts. In between releases, clients often hire us to usability test their product and a competitor's to compare the two.

Our mobile usability testing focuses on the user experience in a real-world context

There is a world of difference between usability testing a desktop product and a mobile device. The device itself influences the way people interact with an application. An even more powerful influencer is the user's context and the fact they are "on the go" vs. in a controlled environment as they use your product. Our testing simulates real-world situations.

We deliver high-quality testing because we know how to identify and find the best test participants.

It's critical to enlist test users who meet the profile of your target user and who can be totally objective. We help you identify the characteristics of your most representative end users - those who will bring you the most valuable feedback. We then work with trusted field service providers to find articulate and passionate people who match the profile. It's a bit like being a casting director - excellent research results rely on careful recruitment. Clients never have to worry about the many details associated with recruiting we manage all aspects of the process, while providing regular updates on the panel.

Our service offers all the benefits of lab-based testing – minus the cost

We run studies remotely (over the Internet) or in-person. With either setup clients can watch the live sessions. We have a portable usability testing lab equipped with Morae software that we can set up in your office or any environment. Morae allows us to video record, create highlight clips, and broadcast sessions so your team can watch from an adjoining conference room or remotely over your VPN. This capability saves our clients thousands of dollars in facility rental and video recording fees.!

We work as a team with your team every step of the way

We let your team know exactly what to expect at every stage of the research. We encourage them to observe testing sessions. We discuss and evaluate the results with them. And finally, we facilitate debriefing sessions that are energetic, productive idea sessions in which the whole product team works together to create a more usable product.

If you would like detail on our unique approach to usability testing, and how we usually blend it with other qualitative research methods, please refer to a recent presentation we gave to the New England chapter of the Qualitative Research Consultants Association (QRCA) on "What Qualitative Researchers Should Know About Usability Testing. (http://www.usabilityresources.net/news/NH_UPA_Aubrey.pdf) .

OUR USER OBSERVATIONS AND INTERVIEW SESSIONS

Tap into your target audience to hear their thoughts and watch them use your product

Usability Resources User Observation and Interview Sessions are designed to help your software team learn about end users by listening and watching them interact with your product. We offer this service for both mobile and desktop products. Understanding your end users helps you and your design team minimize risk and enhance your team's ability to create more intuitive and successful products.

Our clients find these sessions are an efficient and cost-effective way to learn about the practical needs of their most important end users. They allow our client to see with their own eyes the specific areas of their product that are confusing or cumbersome for end users. Often these sessions are the first time a client sees a real user actually using their product!

How do the sessions work?

Our user observation and interview sessions are conducted either in-person or remotely. The in-person sessions are run like an ethnography, where we observe the individual using the client's product "in their native habitat", which is often their work place because we deal mostly with products for business. The remote sessions are run using application sharing technology such as WebEx (or GoToMeeting) and the telephone. Depending on the complexity of the client's application, we generally run 5-10 remote sessions, each lasting between 40-60 minutes. If logistics allow, we can also do these sessions in person – sitting alongside the user at their workstation, in their everyday setting.

During the session the end user logs into your product and walks us through the most critical tasks they perform. The user describes their task flow as we ask them about how they use the product, what works well and what works less well, gathering the information your team needs to build a better product. As experienced qualitative researchers, we know what to ask and how to ask it to get the most valuable information through a relaxed, informal conversation.

Members of your product and development team watch these sessions in real time and can interact with the participant, asking them questions about their goals, tasks, and use of the product. If a design review is included, we might show the end user mock-ups or live demonstrations of new product ideas to elicit their objective feedback.

We hand-select participants who match your target audience

Participants are carefully chosen to represent your target end users. Before the sessions we meet with you to identify the study objectives and characteristics of your most important users. Because many of our clients deal in very specialized applications, they usually provide us with leads to prospective participants that are drawn from their own end-user communities. To ensure timely execution of the study, we generally handle the actual participant recruitment and scheduling. .

Value and benefits you can expect from this service

At the end of each feedback session we like to hold an informal debrief with you and your team to discuss the observations that surprised you most. As we learn more about your target audience, we evolve our questions to gain deeper insights. After the sessions are complete, you'll receive a report that includes task analysis, outline of the various usage scenarios, an analysis of challenges with each scenario, identification of missing functionality. We work with you to prioritize the ideas that came out of the sessions so they can be applied to future product requirements.

While the written reports are a good record of your sessions, teams also value the “live” learning, the ability to interact with real end users, and the debrief discussions that occur around each session.

Our sessions deliver clear insights to our clients most critical questions

Our sessions can get you the answers to key questions like

- Are my users actually using the product to its fullest ability?
- What do users value most about my product?
- What do users find frustrating or challenging about my product?
- What modifications and refinements should we make to our products to enhance its usefulness to our target audience?

To see projects where we have leveraged our user observation and interview research method, please consult our Citrix EdgeSight and Memento Security case studies. (http://www.usabilityresources.net/UR_UI_DesignCaseStudies.pdf).

FOCUS GROUP MODERATION

What is a focus group and how does it fit into usability research?

A focus group is an interview with a small group of people who share common key characteristics. Focus groups are typically run in person though they can also take place online, or over the phone.

Focus groups are most valuable for design teams who want to better understand the perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes of a target market. Of all the qualitative research methods, clients tend to enjoy observing focus groups because they are entertaining as well as illuminating. Within the usability arena, clients should consider focus group interviews when being able to listen in on a conversation and observe body language would bring the most value. Here are some ways our clients have used our focus group service:

- Brainstorm for solutions to a design or market challenge
- Understand where their product fits relative to the competition
- Learn more about why customers buy their product
- Gain insight into the decision making process around product purchase
- Explore emerging trends and gather feedback to new product concepts

How can a skilled moderator help me achieve my objectives?

Having the right moderator is crucial to a productive focus group. The skilled moderator creates a relaxed atmosphere that helps participants feel comfortable with each other so they more freely share their opinions, reactions, and perspectives. A skilled moderator monitors the group's energy and direction while identifying themes in the conversation. They create a respectful, safe, and open place for participants to speak their minds. They keep things moving and make sure everyone participates, dealing productively with "dominators" and "cynics" in the group to maximize the session's productivity. They also probe on themes and contradictions that come out of the conversation and know how to leverage serendipity to help you meet your research goals. Good moderators know how to ask the right questions and present appropriate activities to keep energy high while driving the conversation to richer levels.

What is involved in running a focus group?

Successful focus groups are a result of careful planning and attention to detail. Generally we recommend 4-6 groups from different geographies and participant profiles. Once we decide with you that focus groups are the best way to meet your research objectives,

Usability Resources will work with you every step of the way to ensure that the process is smooth and headache-free for you. We'll work with you to identify participant characteristics, manage the recruitment and facilities, and create the discussion guide. We also capture all sessions on audio, video, and transcription so that nothing is left to memory.

What benefits can I expect to receive from this type of research?

At Usability Resources we “design with the end in mind” – the output from a focus group depends on what you want. Some clients want a detailed report, others value the “in the moment” experience of observing target users discuss their topics. We debrief with you to gather your “A-ha’s” and to learn the insights from these sessions of most value. Our reports are structured to communicate key findings as well as the implications and recommendations that follow from the new insights.

If you would like detail on our focus group method, please refer to a recent presentation we gave to the New Hampshire Usability Professionals Association on Where Focus Groups Fit into Design Research (http://www.usabilityresources.net/news/NH_UPA_Aubrey.pdf).

ONLINE ASYNCHRONOUS BULLETIN BOARD

Do you ever wish you could sit in on a panel of your target audience to gain a deeper understanding of their views on a particular topic, to learn their decision making process, or to hear their reaction to your product or service?

If this sounds interesting, Usability Resources would like to let you know about its multi-day online asynchronous bulletin board service.

Participants log into a customized bulletin board to answer questions, view stimuli, and interact among themselves and with the moderator. Clients log in to the secure bulletin board site at their convenience to “listen in” to the discussion.

When to consider this approach

This approach is an excellent way to gather insights when the target audience is geographically dispersed, difficult to recruit, or very busy. This approach works well for sensitive and controversial subjects or when it is better to give participants time to gather their thoughts before giving their opinion. We can control whether participants see each other's responses before providing their own. When objective results are necessary, we recommend running a “blind” study - where the participant does not know the study sponsor and the sponsor does not have access to personally identifiable information on participants.

Asynchronous online bulletin board discussion groups can be run as a free-standing research project or be combined with other methods such as remote or on-site usability testing, in-depth interviews, or user observation and walkthrough. Both participants and clients find the bulletin board method engaging and convenient. For deeper insights we supplement discussion guide questions with video, audio, pictures, and links to online exercises (such as card and picture sorts). In addition to providing text-based answers to discussion topics participants can upload video, audio, and images to further illustrate their world.

Client benefits

While our reports synthesize study results into absorbable and actionable insights, clients also receive a complete transcript of all interactions that occur while the board is active. We offer a complete service and handle all details connected to the bulletin board which includes project management, participant recruitment, discussion guide development, analysis and reporting. During the research we will run debrief sessions with you making quick adjustments that ensure you will receive the most value from this effort. If you would like to see the rich results that can come out of a project that uses the online asynchronous bulletin board approach, please refer to our International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) study on how to create vibrant online collaborative communities (<http://www.usabilityresources.net/experience/IABC.html>).

EXPERT REVIEW

A Usability Resources Expert Review allows you to get a fast assessment on your product's usability. In less than a month, you'll get a detailed report with our feedback on how your product meets – or doesn't meet – the needs of your key user groups.

Here's how an Expert Review works

We work with you every step of the way to ensure that the Expert Review is as productive and efficient as possible. First we learn the details of your product, your end users, their issues, and the range of ways they use your product. We work with you to map out scenarios that identify the 4-5 key tasks users need to be able to do easily with your product. To gather this information, we may talk with your customer-facing team or with actual users. Then we “put on the hat and shoes of your end user,” and experience the product as your user would, trying to complete the targeted tasks, and bringing the user's perspective to each task.

The report includes annotated screen shots of particular issues in your product, with recommendations on how you can overcome design challenges. You'll learn various approaches for solving any usability challenges and have a chance to discuss the report results with us in detail as we present our findings.

In addition to expert reviews, we can also provide you with consultation in user research, interface design and usability testing. We enjoy working with clients who have a passion for delivering cutting edge technology that is solid, practical, and designed for usability. We have an extensive background in usability education and training, and are happy to teach your team how to incorporate user-centered design into their software development process.

Clients who have benefited from our expert review service

- The Mayo Clinic
- Boston Software Systems
- Raytheon
- Citrix Edgesight

USER INTERFACE DESIGN SERVICES

How do you know if your product has a great design?

Can your users use your product the way they're supposed to – without headaches, hassles or hold ups? Is your brand synonymous with simplicity and efficiency? Are user needs a major focus in your product design?

In addition to providing practical insights into your users, their goals and tasks, we can also provide guidance on how to apply user research to a new or improved product design. We know the needs of software business and we know software users. And we know how to bring the two together to design products that users love. We have over 20 years' experience in translating end user knowledge into an interface that's simple, intuitive, and satisfying for the user.

At Usability Resources, we learn your business goals, your technology's abilities, and your users' needs. We collaborate with your team every step of the way, ensuring that user-centered design integrates into your objectives effectively and efficiently.

No matter what stage your product is at – Usability Resources can make it better.

Our process helps you articulate a clear and central focus for your product's design. From the high-level navigation to the page layout your product will communicate its intended meaning and functionality. Your product design will be clean and simple and driven by user insights. Our user interface design services can include wire framing, information architecture, page design, as well as graphic design and guidance on 508 compliance.

In a typical project, we meet with the development team to learn your requirements and vision for your product, its intended market, technology considerations, and your concerns around the product's usability. We will then study the application's technology and its interface design framework.

We recommend a traditional approach to user-centered design, which involves initial user research to make sure we have an accurate understanding of the user's context, goals, and tasks. We then work with your team to iteratively create and usability test progressively more detailed product concepts until we arrive at a finished design. The early design renditions are low-fidelity paper prototypes that progress thru interactive prototypes which incorporate branding and interactivity.

For more information on our approach to user interface design and examples of design work, please consult our Citrix Edgesight, Memento Security, and Strong Women Strong Girls case studies (http://www.usabilityresources.net/UR_UI_DesignCaseStudies.pdf).

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What exactly is user research - and why should my project do it?

User research involves interviewing and observing your most important users as they perform particular tasks. It's a practical way to ensure the accuracy of the assumptions you've made about your audience before you create your product. I can tell you who is using your product, why they use it and how they use it. Having solid information on your end users, their objectives, their pain points, and how they organize their world will save you time.

How long is a typical research project with you?

My user research can take as little as 3 weeks from design to results. I adjust my technique to your objectives, schedule, and budget. If you have just a few weeks, I might suggest doing 8-10 phone-based focus groups, usability feedback sessions or in-depth interviews. My streamlined research is designed to produce actionable data that can be applied directly to your product design.

When is the right time to run a usability test?

Usability tests are valuable at any stage in the life of your product. If your product is still on the drawing board, I use paper prototypes to gather feedback on the effectiveness of your product concept, navigation, screen flow, and language - which allows you to make design changes before spending money on implementation. Clients have found value in usability testing mature products as well as competitor products.

How can focus groups help me design a better technology product?

My clients ask me to run groups for many reasons: to brainstorm Web site content or product concepts, to learn how their product stacks up against the competition, or to define personas. They are an efficient way to interview a group of people who share similar characteristics, to hear- in real time - what they think about topics that matter the most to you. Traditional in-person groups will give you the added opportunity to see your users "up close and personal" and to observe their body language as they discuss your product.

What is involved in recruiting participants for a user study or focus group?

If your product is geared towards a highly specialized audience, it makes sense to invest in formal recruiting. I work with you to determine the screening characteristics and detailed descriptions of the respondents, as well as accurate estimates for recruiting and honoraria. When your target users are hard to recruit or schedule for in-person research, I recommend remote research techniques such as multi-day online bulletin boards, phone-based interviews, online focus groups or usability feedback sessions.

Our development team wants to do the interface design themselves. Can you offer just mentoring and feedback?

Of course! In all my engagements I see myself primarily as a catalyst for the teams I work with. I am a professional moderator with decades of teaching experience, and I enjoy transferring usability skills to team members, so they can pick up the ball and run with it once our engagement ends. In many situations, clients hire me solely to do user research and usability testing. I deliver the information in a format that is easy to translate into user requirements and a user interface design.

How long is a typical user interface design project with you?

Design projects typically run between 6 weeks and 3 months. The length of the design phase will vary with the complexity of your application, service, or Web site, your development schedule, and whether I need to help you define user requirements.

TESTIMONIALS AND CLIENT LIST

We asked our customers what they liked most about working with Usability Resources. Here are excerpts of what they said:

“Usability Resources provided Moxie Software with a third party, unbiased usability study on our software platform. Their methodology was very effective and their ability to gain the perfect respondents quickly was impressive. They provide fantastic, detailed insights - yet were also able to synthesize results and provide strategic recommendations. Their deliverables were top notch. Moxie gained valuable insights, great project management, and a partner in the process. I can't wait to do our next project with Kay and her team.”

Dennis O'Malley, VP WW Services, Moxie Software

“Kay has a unique and deep understanding of mobile user interface requirements. She has really helped our customers improve the user experience for the mobile apps they create with MobiFlex.”

George Adams, CEO, MobiFlex, Inc.

“Kay's work at Affinova was extremely valuable and still is to this day. Her experience in usability testing has helped Affinova identify a great user interface for respondents. She was a pleasure to work with and I would highly recommend her for usability testing.”

Janet Thai, Marketing Manager, Affinova

“During Kay's time at Monster, she provided interaction design assistance and drove user research. Kay designed and conducted a usability study to find out just how recruiters use search to find job candidates. Her analysis – which delivered tactical results – dispelled some long-held beliefs, confirmed others and identified opportunities for product development. “

Suzanne Lunny, UX Lead/Interaction/Visual Designer, Monster Worldwide

“She identified the gaps and barriers where people were getting stuck, and she found ways to make it easier for them. As a result of her excellent research and design our users are able to do things on their own.... She was fantastic to work with, both professionally and personally.”

Liz Carver, Editor-in-Chief, Massachusetts Medical Society

“Her user research especially helped guide a more intuitive design. Kay was able to work closely with our product management and engineering teams to not only to design the UI for the next release of our product, but also lay the foundation for a more robust user experience in future releases. Kay did a great job and I would highly recommend her for user experience design.”

Gary Lombardo, Director of Product Management, Citrix

“Her expertise produced a user-friendly, intuitive interface. In addition to the design, she took her ideas to customers for feedback. All of this was completed in the very tight timelines.”

Laurie Fernald, Engineering Project Manager, Avaya

“Kay was great to work with. She took the time to understand our business, and to learn what we do and for whom. She is easy to work with, wonderful - always easy to communicate with.... Kay helped us develop a baseline and standards that we use going forward in developing the UI.”

Kevin McCarthy, Director of Product Management, Trillium Software

“Her #1 most valuable contribution was an outside objective voice. Being able to leverage what she’s done previously and come in with a fresh ideas and a fresh perspective on things we’ve been hashing through for a long time.”

Matt Toolan Director of Client Services, ITCentrix

“Usability Resources most valuable contribution was the wake up call to the engineering people - the eye opener”

Frank Kjaersgaard, Product Manager, Progress Software

“Kay delivered what was asked for and more... she gave us more insights than we ever expected on our target audience and into how we can improve the usability of our hospital’s online recruiting effort. She did an expert review of our site where she really put on the end user’s hat and shoes. The results were very clear and complete. We will be able to use her work well into the future.”

Brent Bultema, Public Relations Director, Mayo Clinic

HERE ARE SOME OF THE CLIENTS WITH WHOM WE HAVE WORKED

- 170 Systems
- Abt Associates
- Affinova
- AbtSoft
- AT&T
- Avaya
- Bomgar Corporation
- Boston VA Medical Center
- Center for Connected Health
- Citrix
- Constant Contact
- IABC
- iRobot
- IT Centrix
- IBM
- Kurzweil Educational Systems
- Massachusetts Medical Society
- Memento Security
- Monster Worldwide
- Moxie Software
- Oracle Corporation
- Progress Software
- Staples
- Strong Women Strong Girls
- Trillium Software
- Verizon