

# 3 Ways to Add Web Site Usability & Usability Testing Into Your Website Design

by Sandy Marsico

The word “usability” has been gaining popularity and is quickly becoming a standard in web design and development. But what is “**Web Site Usability**”? A derivative of the word “usable,” usability basically means easy or convenient to use.

Apply that to the worldwide web, and you get easy to use web sites.

So “easy-to-use” is pretty subjective, right? Well, that depends. Easy to use doesn’t just mean bigger buttons, quick links and a condensed navigation.

Here are 3 ways to incorporate web site usability and usability testing into your web site:

## Utilize Best Practices

Initial web site usability follows an extensive list of “best practices,” where you take into consideration how users would or should interact with a site, what users expect of a site, what they hope to accomplish on a site, their method of obtaining information and what might confuse them, annoy them, or would make them want to leave. Tons of research have already been done regarding these considerations. Be aware that not all users function in the same way, so it’s best to conduct usability testing with your users for the best user experience.

## Informal Usability Testing— Do It Yourself

According to Jakob Nielsen (March 2000), you only need 5-6 participants to catch 80% of your problems. Set aside some time and have your users try to complete a set of tasks. Assuming you don’t have access to your end user, grab a co-

worker (who isn’t on the project) and watch their expressions and their navigational habits. This activity is basic, rudimentary, and cheap, but it’s a start.

## Formal Usability Testing

When you are ready to conduct a formal usability study, have some of your customers or potential prospects available to participate in this study. Again, 5-6 users is fine, but don’t forget the gratuity.

These one-on-one sessions start out with a single user interacting with a web site or wire frame completing a set of tasks. Then have a moderator ask them follow-up questions regarding the experience.

These sessions usually involve a quiet room, a camera and tracking software to watch a user’s expressions and their navigational habits. After the study, the data is analyzed and a formal usability report with key findings and recommendations is written.

The goal of any usability test is to figure out what you’re doing right, what you’re doing wrong, and learn what your users want.

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