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# Econsultancy Usability and User Experience Trends Briefing

January 2009

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# 1. Introduction

This is Econsultancy's first 2009 trend briefing about Usability and User Experience, which contains information about market trends in this area.

The information within this briefing is collated from a range of sources including:

- Econsultancy conferences, supplier showcases and roundtables<sup>1</sup>
- Third party events
- Research carried out by Econsultancy and other organisations

The purpose of Econsultancy's trend briefings (which are free to download) is to provide information relating to the latest trends, best practice, challenges and opportunities across a wide range of digital marketing and ecommerce topics.

## Further Econsultancy Reading:

Online Customer Engagement Report 2009

<http://econsultancy.com/reports/online-customer-engagement-report-2009>

Usability and User Experience: A Beginner's Guide

<http://www.econsultancy.com/publications/usability-beginners-guide/>

Usability and Accessibility Buyer's Guide 2008

<http://www.econsultancy.com/publications/usability-and-accessibility-buyers-guide-2008/>

Web Design Best Practice Guide

<http://econsultancy.com/reports/web-design-best-practice-guide>

User Experience Roundtable Briefing - May 2008

<http://www.econsultancy.com/publications/user-experience-roundtable-briefing-may-2008/>

<sup>1</sup> Companies in attendance at Econsultancy's November 2008 Usability Roundtable were: Barclays, Camelot, Cancer Research UK, Head London, Maxymiser, Nixon McInnes, Progenit, RedEye, Signet, Vodafone. The roundtable was moderated by Matthew Treagus ( [matthew.treagus@progenit.com](mailto:matthew.treagus@progenit.com) )

If you are interested in attending a future roundtable, or corporate membership of Econsultancy, please contact **Peter Abraham** on +44 (0) 207 681 4053 / [Peter@Econsultancy.com](mailto:Peter@Econsultancy.com).



## 2. About Econsultancy

Econsultancy is the leading source of independent advice and insight on digital marketing and ecommerce.

Our reports, events, online resources and training programmes help a community of over 75,000 registered marketers make better decisions, build business cases, find the best suppliers, look smart in meetings and accelerate their careers.

Econsultancy is an [award-winning online publisher of reports](#) covering best practice, user experience benchmarking, market data and supplier selection aimed at internet professionals that want practical advice on all aspects of ebusiness.

In addition, we host more than 100 events a year, such as The Online Marketing Masterclass, regular Supplier Showcases and Roundtables, an annual Future of Digital Marketing event, Digital Cream and a range of social events.

The [Econsultancy](#) site now attracts 175,000 unique users per month where they access research, read the blog and take part in discussions in the forums. And as a portal to the digital marketing community, Econsultancy members can also link up with other members and digital suppliers through our directories, as well as find a new job or new digital talent using the job listings.

Some of Econsultancy's client-side members include: Google, Yahoo, MSN, MySpace, BBC, BT, Shell, Vodafone, Yell.com, Dell, Oxfam, Virgin Atlantic, TUI, Barclays, Carphone Warehouse, IPC Media, Deloitte, T-Mobile and Estée Lauder.

[Join Econsultancy](#) today to learn what's happening in digital marketing – and what works.

Call us to find out more on +44 (0)20 7681 4052 or [contact us online](#).

### 2.1. Training Courses

Econsultancy also operates a highly popular [training](#) division, used by some of the world's most prominent brands for staff education, both in-house and via public courses. We provide training across all areas of digital marketing and at all levels from one day courses to diplomas to Masters in Digital Marketing.

Information about our Usability and User Experience training courses is available here:

<http://econsultancy.com/training/courses/usability-user-experience>

Call us to find out more on +44 (0)20 7681 4052 or [contact us online](#).

### 2.2. Contact

If you would like to know more about corporate membership and our roundtables or events then please contact us on +44 207 681 4053 or [Peter@econsultancy.com](mailto:Peter@econsultancy.com).

If you have any comments or queries about this briefing then please contact our Research Director, Linus Gregoriadis, at [Linus@econsultancy.com](mailto:Linus@econsultancy.com)

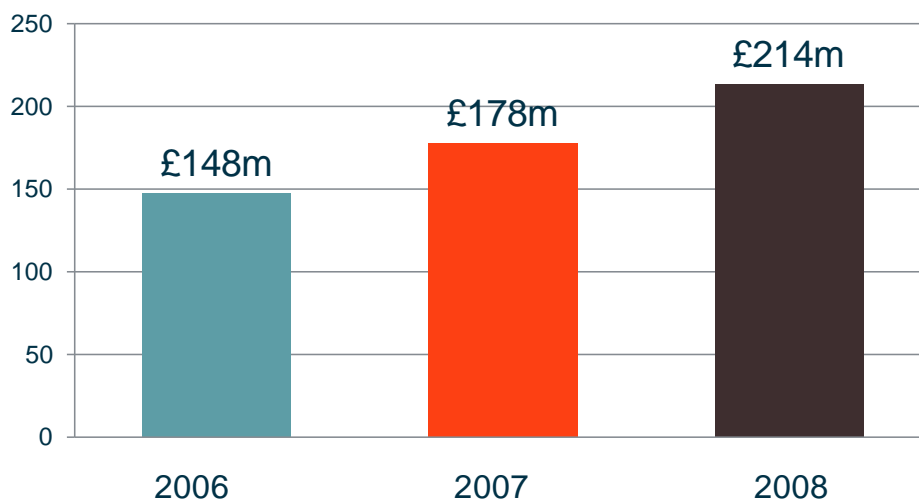
<http://econsultancy.com>



# 3. Marketplace Developments

## 3.1. Market Valuation

- The **Usability and Accessibility market** grew by an estimated 20% last year to a value of £214 million by the end of 2008, according to Econsultancy.
  - Value of market by year: (2006: £148m, 2007: £178m, 2008: £214m)



Source: Econsultancy Usability and Accessibility Buyer's Guide 2008<sup>2</sup>

- Despite the recession, the sector will continue to grow throughout 2009, because of the **strong commitment** within organisations towards usability and user experience and realisation that this is essential for business success.
  - Given the current economic climate, even more importance is being attached to both **acquiring and retaining** online consumers.
  - As companies seek to achieve a good ROI, online marketing is experiencing further growth. The knock-on-effect of this is to help drive investment in usability and user experience further.

### Insight

The usability marketplace is demonstrating an encouraging growth. This is a result of an awareness and understanding of usability concepts and practices from both client-companies and those in the digital sphere.

<sup>2</sup> <http://econsultancy.com/reports/usability-and-accessibility-buyer-s-guide-2008>

## 4. Trends

### 4.1. Increasing focus upon usability as a digital service

- The digital industry is increasing its focus upon usability concepts.
  - More agencies (not usability specialists) are adding usability studies or assessments into their service offerings.
  - There is a wider acknowledgement that the user should come first.
  - There is a greater emphasis on driving ROI from usability, especially given the current economic circumstances.
  - There is evidence that agencies are progressively trying to raise an understanding of usability among non-digital companies.

### 4.2. Differentiating usability and user experience

- There is a widening distinction between usability and user-experience. It is being more and more accepted that both are separate entities in their own right, and that usability is something which determines the user-experience.
  - Usability is the easiest process for creating a positive user experience.
  - User experience encompasses the overall “customer experience”.
  - There needs to be a greater emphasis upon usability creating a more positive experience for the user. Although they are separate in their own right, they need to work together.
  - One of the biggest challenges is trying to create a “brand experience” through usability.

### 4.3. Clients often misunderstand usability

- Employees of some organisations have raised concerns that there is sometimes a limited understanding by internal divisions of client companies of the importance both of usability and of online as a medium in general.
  - Internal restrictions are often imposed which make it difficult to maintain high standards in usability and user experience. Restrictions include, in no particular order.
    - i. Timescales
    - ii. Budgets
    - iii. Legal issues
    - iv. Internal process/system restrictions
  - Internal misunderstandings, processes and issues can hold back usability projects. E.g. response times, prioritising developments, etc.

### 4.4. Client strategies can compromise usability practice

- Overall, company strategy can compromise usability, the user experience and accessibility.
  - Offline campaigns can sometimes hinder online usability/user-experience practices.
  - Offline solutions surrounding customer experience don't always translate into digital practices.



- Timescales can be long, and this can also be compromising.
  - Usability factors are constantly evolving, and companies/agencies have to adapt quickly to this.
  - Products or services may have changed offline, therefore creating a negative online user experience if the digital experience has not changed accordingly.
- Sites with secure data (e.g. Financial Services websites), cannot be changed quickly, due to the secure nature of the data. This can be problematic.
- There needs to be a wider recognition of the importance of offline usability/user experience to compliment that of online.

## 4.5. Cross-over between usability and other digital areas

It is becoming widely acknowledged that an understanding of usability is increasing. This is beginning to cross over into other distinct areas of digital, such as Online PR, social media and e-commerce, instead of just being associated purely with website design.

- All these different areas are becoming more and more important in supporting the ideas surrounding a broader user experience.
- The gap between a marketing concept (either online or offline) and usability functionality is lessening, as a general understanding of usability increases. Marketing ideas are becoming simpler, in order to support usability in the digital arena, and vice versa.

## 5. Best Practice

### 5.1. The importance of usability testing

- The importance of usability testing cannot be underestimated. Testing is a worthy investment for understanding and developing digital marketing strategy or e-commerce.
  - Testing the variables of usability depends greatly on the marketplace of the company. Specific industries, products and services need different rates of testing, from seasonal through to regular. It is advised that this is understood before usability testing starts.

#### Insight

One company recently highlighted the worth of usability testing by informing us they had run an extremely successful campaign abroad. This was due to be introduced into the UK, but following pre-launch UK testing, it was realised that nearly 90% of users reacted negatively. As a result of this, the campaign was quickly changed and is therefore likely to have saved the company a great amount of money, time and stress.

- However, arguably, there are greater benefits to regular testing, no matter what the marketplace, as large, frequent amounts of data can be collected, which will ultimately help to identify positive and negative areas of success within the user experience and usability as a whole.
- Furthermore, large-scale commercial testing can sometimes take months, especially when carried out internally, by which time user expectations have changed or moved forward. Small, regular amounts of testing can combat this problem.

### 5.2. Should usability be tested internally or externally?

- Certain internal departments of client companies (e.g. marketing or online units) are beginning to recognise the importance of user testing. However, whether this is outsourced or done internally seems to be an issue.

#### Insight

There appears to be a divided line of thought as to where the growth of usability testing will happen.

Will specialist companies continue to flourish, or will companies begin to form their own in-house teams?

#### 5.2.1. Internal usability/user-testing

- Internal testing is cheaper than outsourcing.
- In-house testing helps to increase an understanding of usability.
- Data can be collected relatively easily, but there may be a difficulty in thoroughly assessing or understanding results.
- Restrictions such as time, or lack of technology, means that testing is unlikely to be as complete as possible.



## 5.2.2. External usability/user-testing

- External companies are, for the most part, unbiased when reporting results.
- They usually have far greater experience and knowledge than an in-house team.
- They are more likely to have better resources/technology/equipment.
- They are not tied to specific internal restrictions, therefore testing can be fast and accurate.

### Insight

In-house testing – on its own - is a route companies should be advised not to take, unless they have the relevant resources and understanding. Even then, results can be influenced by internal processes.

One comment Econsultancy has heard recently which highlights this was that “*it is definitely not a good idea to mark your own homework.*”

## 5.3. Usability and analytics can work together

- Usability has an extremely close relationship with analytics, as the two can work very well together.
- However, complex analytics data can be difficult to understand, especially with usability in mind. This is an area where specialist agencies can play an important role in translating data into actionable next steps.

## 5.4. Embracing social media to enhance experience

- As previously mentioned in *section 4.4*, there is a noticeable increase in the cross-over between usability, user experience and social media. Due to this, companies need to realise that users are increasingly expecting to engage with social tools online.
- As the internet continues to evolve to become more community-based, business models need to adapt to accommodate this. There already exists a wide and varying amount of online devices and tools to help do this, ranging from widgets and on-site consumer reviews to social network integration.
- Whatever the tools employed, it needs to be recognised that social media can directly impact on the user experience, especially where companies are offering direct products or services.
- However, it must also be realised that by trying to use social media too much, for example directing the customer away to a Facebook page, could easily dent the user experience and drive down overall usability.

### 5.4.1. Web 2.0 and usability expectations

As well as social networks, other “Web 2.0”-type sites have also had a distinct impact upon usability.

- User expectations of websites have risen in lots of different areas, thanks to the rise of sites such as Flickr and YouTube. As such, content providers are seemingly under more pressure to add new features and functions to keep up with this.
- Benchmarking data shows maps on many websites are now expected to have interactive functionality, such as integrating Google Maps or Multimaps data, and videos are expected to be delivered in a similar way as YouTube.

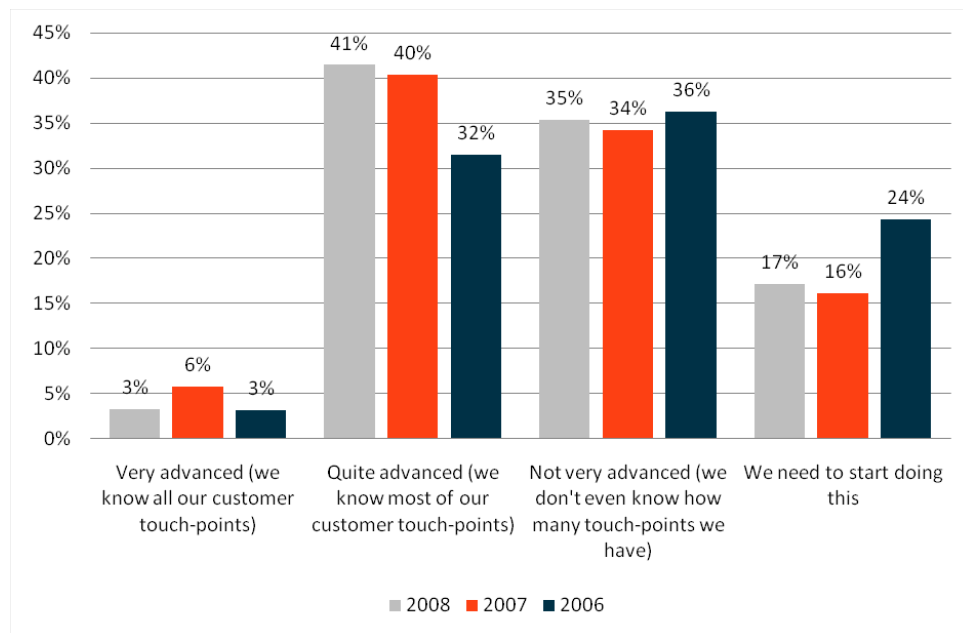


- Retailers are particularly subject to increased expectations, especially if their competitors have adopted new technologies.
- However, new functionality can create added complexity for measurement. Where before, measurement has focused on page impressions or conversions, how do you count these new interactions when there is no noticeable impact on page impressions?
- Additionally, there is no point adding new features, unless this is done in a relevant and correct way. Many clients are keen to find out about the latest technology. But it is important to think about the relevance of new applications to the user before implementing them – again, negative relevance can impact usability.

## 6. Data and Statistics

- The chart below shows the extent to which companies are *mapping customer experiences in order to obtain a single view of the customer*, including trend data for the past three years. [Source: Econsultancy / cScape Online Customer Engagement Report 2009<sup>3</sup>]
  - There hasn't been a radical improvement since 2006 but the proportion of companies who are either "not very advanced" or not doing this at all has decreased from 60% to 52%.

*How advanced are you at mapping customer experiences to obtain a single view of the customer?*



- A third of public sector websites don't comply with the government's own standards of accessibility, according to a study by the Public Accounts Committee published<sup>4</sup> in 2008.
- Average returns from usability work have fallen "substantially" in the last few years, according to stats published by Jakob Nielsen in February 2008. The average ROI Nielsen's clients saw from projects was 83%, down from 135% six years ago, but high enough to show they are still well worth the effort.
- Significant improvements in quality of product images, descriptions and checkout processes were recorded among leading retail brands, including WH Smith, HMV, John Lewis, Waterstones, B&Q, Topshop, Marks & Spencer and Argos.<sup>5</sup>
  - The report also identified that online retailers were focusing upon supporting users with **more site search and browsing functions** than before.
- A similar Webcredible study also criticised UK **travel websites** for poor standards of usability. The highest scoring website was Opodo, while Monarch came off worst.

### Further Reading

For more statistics see Econsultancy's Internet Stats Compendium.

<http://www.econsultancy.com/publications/internet-stats-compendium/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://econsultancy.com/reports/online-customer-engagement-report-2009>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.usabilityhq.com/blog/usability/uk-government-websites-criticised-for-lack-of-usability.html>

<sup>5</sup> Source: Webcredible's 2008 High Street E-commerce Usability Report.



# 7. Resources and White Papers

Online Customer Engagement Report 2009

<http://econsultancy.com/reports/online-customer-engagement-report-2009>

Usability and Accessibility Buyer's Guide 2008

<http://www.Econsultancy.com/publications/usability-and-accessibility-buyers-guide-2008/>

User Experience Roundtable Briefing - May 2008

<http://www.Econsultancy.com/publications/user-experience-roundtable-briefing-may-2008/>

Usability and User Experience: A Beginner's Guide

<http://www.Econsultancy.com/publications/usability-beginners-guide/>

Internet Statistics Compendium

<http://econsultancy.com/reports/internet-statistics-compendium-december-2008>

Web Design Best Practice Guide

<http://econsultancy.com/reports/web-design-best-practice-guide>

Econsultancy/Bunnyfoot Usability & User Experience Report 2007

<http://www.Econsultancy.com/publications/usability-and-user-experience-report-2007/>

User Experience Request for Proposal template

<http://www.Econsultancy.com/publications/user-experience-rfp-request-for-proposal/>

User Experience Business Case

<http://www.Econsultancy.com/publications/user-experience-business-case>

World's 'Top 10 usability gurus' ...

<http://www.Econsultancy.com/news-blog/363802/revealed-world-s-top-10-user-experience-gurus.html>

Interview: Jakob Nielsen

<http://www.Econsultancy.com/news-blog/363326/interview-with-jakob-nielsen.html>

Interview: Jesse James Garrett on Ajax, Amazon and Web 2.0

<http://www.Econsultancy.com/news-blog/363947/jesse-james-garrett-on-ajax-amazon-and-web-2-0.html>

Webcredible 2008 High Street E-commerce Usability Report

<http://www.webcredible.co.uk/user-friendly-resources/white-papers/>

