

PROJECT 4: WEB SHOWCASE USABILITY

URL: http://www.eagles.k12.mo.us/sullivan/middle/young/portfolio/edsp_files/7361/index.htm

Testers and Methods

Becky, my first tester, is a middle aged woman who works as a teacher's aide at Sullivan Middle School and has quite a bit of experience with the Internet. She tested the site at school using a library computer running Windows XP with Internet Explorer 7, Windows Media Player 11, and a T1 LAN.

The second tester is Jenny (my wife), a 30-year-old stay at home mom of three children who also has many years experience with the Internet. Jenny tested the site on our home computer running Windows XP with Internet Explorer 6, Firefox 2, Windows Media Player 10, and a 512MB broadband connection.

Summary

Overall, my test went very well, but it should be mentioned that I have considerable experience with designing web pages. Both test subjects found the site easy to navigate and its features easy to use. Becky indicated that she might need to be a little more technically literate to use the page, but from talking to her, it seems more like she was referring to the content of the page, not necessarily the structure. Both testers found some glitches in functionality, but I will discuss those in the next section. Becky and Jenny also agreed that the site was not too complex and that it would be easy for most people to learn to use it very quickly. There were some issues with the audio and video on Becky's computer, but the embedded media worked perfectly for Jenny. Finally, both testers felt reasonably confident using the system and that it was easy to get going on the site.

For my observation, I watched Jenny using the site. There is not much to say here except that there was no hesitation or confusion apparent as she browsed the Web pages. The navigation structure appears to work as I intended.

Findings and Recommendations

The one major find that I found through my testing occurred when Becky was testing. She spent a considerable amount of time reading the material on each page, but when it came time to launch the media files, the computer froze up and crashed. This was very curious to me because I have not had any problems on any other systems or browsers. In fact, the computer she used in the library is identical to my school computer where I created most of my web page. The only difference is that the library computer had been upgraded to Windows Media Player 11 while my school computer is still running WMP 10. I am wondering if WMP 11 is still in beta, but I found no information to indicate that on Microsoft's website. Still, unless there was a fluke or some

other unknown conflict, if appears there may be some compatibility issues with WMP 11. However, since I don't really know how to resolve this short of converting everything to Quicktime, I'm going to leave it as it is and hope for the best.

Another minor issue that Jenny had with the site's functionality also involved the media files, but again, there is really not much that can be done about it. When using Internet Explorer, you have to click the player window to "activate" the control. This means that if someone clicks the "play" button once, it will not start playing the file. Internet Explorer sometimes required two or three clicks to start playing. In Firefox, however, this does not appear to be an issue.

Reflection

While my user testing did not result in any changes to my web site, I still feel that it is a valuable experience. This is not the first time that I have done a usability test, but it has always helped me to produce a better product. On recent projects, I now find myself thinking about usability while I am designing a site (or PowerPoint), trying to see it from an outsider's perspective. I feel this helps me to do a better job from the beginning and results in fewer major changes down the road. I also really enjoy watching someone else explore my work for the first time. It is especially gratifying to see the design working how it was intended.