

## Recession Proof Usability

### User Vision's advice on leveraging your eCommerce investment

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Yes, it's a recession. Credit has turned crunchy and consumer confidence is at periscope depth, nervously scanning the horizon for the next financial depth charge. Woolies is RIP, the housing market is in deep freeze, and business on the Internet is still growing ... no, wait, that can't be right!

Sure, Internet Retailing reports that "ASOS sales continue to defy the crunch", Sainsbury's online sales are up 30% and it is going to expand its online operation to non-food items this year. While Shop Direct is expanding into Europe, and there are good results for Debenhams, Tesco, Amazon, and even Woolies is coming back – online only.

#### Battening Down the Hatches

OK, so eCommerce is still doing well, but customers have changed their purchasing behaviour:

- value for money is at a premium
- impulse purchases are a bit less impulsive
- value brands have grown hugely

- most (though not all) luxury brands have contracted
- price comparisons are a must
- checking customer reviews is common before spending, even when the cost is at a good, discounted price

#### Usability ROI

Exploring and improving the usability of your website has always been a no-brainer. Who would want a *less* usable site? Who would think leaving products and services hard to find or difficult to apply for could do anything but lower sales and degrade the brand experience?

If your eCommerce investment is measured in fractions of millions, it's obvious that bringing the voice of your user into your web development process is central to your website's success: Meeting your user's needs; addressing their concerns; fulfilling their desires.

Back in the boom years, usability consultant Jakob Nielsen calculated the average improvement on a website's key performance indicators at 135% after tackling usability issues. That's more than doubling metrics like your conversion rates. Our own extensive

experience with top brands in the food, mobile, FMCG and financial sectors repeats this experience again and again. Good usability is a commercial multiplier.



Does the text on this icon help or hinder your customers? Are you going to test this on real users, or just guess?

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## Usability in Recession

OK, fine, you might think: usability is a wise investment during sustained economic growth, but what about now? During a period of retrenchment and iron tight budgetary constraints, why push your limited resources into making it easier for your customers to buy your products?

Well, the clue is in the question: why make it easier for your customers to buy your products? Because it's a recession and that makes it more difficult for your customers to buy anything.

## Recession is Another Usability Barrier

Think of recession as an additional usability barrier: you may have unintentionally put usability obstacles in the way of turning your visitors into customers AND they have their "batten-down the hatch" behaviours

adding an additional layer of reticence to making a sale.

Investing in usability can remove these barriers:

- Letting you understand what sense your visitors make of your product offering and how this matches their expectations.
- Giving you the qualitative research to understand how site visitors convert to becoming customers by being persuaded to place something into their shopping basket.
- Granting you an insight into how your customers are influenced by issues of trust and emotion, and how their personal goals map on to your products.
- Allowing you to track what issues customers have as they travel down the funnel of your checkout process.

These customer insights translate to actionable usability issues. You get to learn what is wrong, why it is wrong, and what recommended solutions are available to put it right.



Even when your functionality is excellent, poor usability can compromise the utility of your product

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## Social Media

Of course, you might not care to understand your own usability issues, but your customers will, and they will blog and tweet about it. Who would you rather be from this selection of tweets in the last hour as we wrote this?

*"I have to admit that I'm loving my new phone. Apple really have usability nailed."*

*"Bad usability - struggling to view my postal address in ICICI bank site"*

*"My word, Eventbrite is a big old world of usability and functionality FAIL."*

Or perhaps you'd rather tweet this:

*"We're preparing a new release with a new fresh design and improved usability. Watch out at the end of this week :)"*

If your price is right and the navigation and purchasing process is easy, your customers will recommend your service and hence support your marketing campaign. And if not, they'll be even keener to mention it.

## Recession Usability 1:

### Know thy Users

Obviously, you are working through the detail of your web analytics, trying to infer what your users are up to. Well, you could just ask them. Online surveys are quick, simple and inexpensive.

We at User Vision use True Intent, a comprehensive system that captures users' expectations when they arrive at your site, tracks what they actually do whilst visiting,

and then asks them about the experience when they want to leave. It combines the best of analytics and surveys.

Surveys, of course, can only ask fixed questions. To dig deeper into your users' experience, think of holding Focus Groups or conducting more detailed user profiling.

## Recession Usability 2:

### Know thy Self

Usability testing is a method for uncovering the problems that real users experience with your product or web site under the actual conditions of use.

There are two main types of test:

- Asking real users (based on your demographic requirements) to carry out realistic tasks and observing where they experience problems. This can be supplemented by additional technologies, such as eye-tracking.
- Asking a usability consultant to do an expert evaluation of the site, and measuring it against set of standard heuristics (rules of thumb).

We at User Vision do both, and conduct some 200 usability test projects a year, on some 3,000 participants — it's what we do!

You can do usability testing at any point during the project life cycle, but the earlier you carry out testing the greater the business benefits.

Carrying out usability testing of early wireframe prototypes or in some cases sketches can refine what your users need and impact on the interface design before you've spent the major part of your money on the development process, so reducing development costs.

You can expect to see critical usability issues in any number of areas, but typical ones include:

### **Information Architecture (IA)**

This is the structure of your site, the flow of pages down from your homepage.

#### *Why is it Important*

Your IA gives your content a place to be. It allows users to get a sense of context if they landed on a deep page straight from a search engine, and is one way that users can navigate around your site.

#### *Quick win tips*

- Clearly label links within a page with meaningful names.
- Ensure that the label of a link matches the page title of the destination page.
- Use breadcrumb trails to help users locate where they are within the IA of your site.

### **Site Accessibility**

How does your site display in different environments? Can your site be used by people with disabilities, including blindness?

#### *Why is it Important*

Making your site accessible for use by people with disabilities not only increases

your audience reach but also ability for it to render well on different technology platforms.

The PC is no longer the only medium for displaying websites. Smartphones are finally bringing web usage to the mobile phone.

#### *Quick win tips*

- Grab a smartphone and see how your site performs.
- Conduct an accessibility test on your site with some people who have a range of disabilities: The same pointers that help your site be available to users who have to use a range of assistive technologies also helps your site render well on different media.

### **Site Layout and Design**

How is information laid out and visually realised across your pages.

#### *Why is it important*

Information Design prioritises what's highlighted and what's low-lighted on your site. You need to be confident that your Calls to Action are prominently in view, and not drowned out by too much detail.

#### *Quick win tips*

- Use headings, putting the key words first, to improve scan-ability
- Ensure your Calls to Action are clear and unambiguous

## **Let Others Add Value**

Your site is not an island. The web is a web: a vast web of 3 petabytes (growing 100 terabytes a month) and 1.4 billion users.

### *Why is it Important*

However great your functionality, your users can add greater value. YouTube is a successful site not only because it lets you upload and download videos; it also lets you rate and comment on the videos, and embed the videos in your own sites. Allow users to interact with the material and apply it for their own uses.

### *Quick win tips*

- Seek to build social media relationships with new and existing customers.
- Be generous and give away what you can, so that you convert users into your own marketers.
- Give users the tools to link back to you

## **Recession Usability 3:**

### **Know thy Enemy**

You don't just have to worry about your own usability. Your competitors are trying to elbow their way into your customer share. They are not above either learning from your best practice or leveraging competitive advantage from their own usability investment.

So conduct an expert evaluation of your principle competitors:

- what are they doing better
- what are they doing worse
- where could you learn from them

Alternatively, in your own full usability test, stick in a task from a competitor's website, and see how real users fare trying to achieve the same thing, head-to-head with the competition.

## **Recession Usability 4:**

### **Know thy Business**

Do you think you need to do a full site redesign? Before investing in a change, find out from your customers if this is what they need and if it is in line with your business objectives.

Can you achieve enough quick wins to improve usability and achieve your short term goals and win over more customers?

Investing in usability will allow you to decide whether it is best to act strategically or tactically to improve your website. Better, even if you decide that short-term goals need to predominate at this time, you'll still also have an important long term piece of research for the future of your website.

## **Recession Usability 5:**

### **Know thy Content**

It's the content that, in the end, persuades and appeals. It needs to tell a convincing story. It needs to be readable to your audience. It needs your audience to identify with it. These are high bars.

Testing with users, whether in surveys or focus groups or usability tests are the only real — personal opinion free —

methods of knowing that you've got it right.

## Recession Proof Usability: User Vision

Applying user research — from simple surveys to full usability studies — will let you know what your users need from you and what their experience of you.

The recession is just another barrier to people spending their money with you. You need to lower that barrier as you do with all usability barriers, or be vulnerable to the competition that will.

User Vision is a long standing, highly regarded User Experience Consultancy that can help you **add the voice of your users to your website**, and help you get more **return on investment** from your web spend.

Of course, being a user experience consultancy, it would be embarrassing if our product wasn't well received! But we work hard with our users - you - to make sure that doesn't happen, and it seems to work!

## User Vision

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User Vision is like an extension of our team. We can call on them at any time and they never say no. We really enjoy working with them; they are great fun, while being very focused and professional.

**Sainsbury's Finance**  
**Online Operations Manager**

Usability is something we take very seriously and because of that we enjoy working with and trust User Vision. User Vision is always very proactive, efficient and cost effective.

**Emirates Airline**  
**Internet Communications Manager**

User Vision have become part of our extended team and we rely on them to ensure that we are getting it right when it comes to accessibility and user experience.

**Student Loans Company**  
**eBusiness Manager**

User Vision's expertise has been invaluable to us in the course of our site redesign, and they are consistently professional, dedicated and personable, all of which makes them a pleasure to work with.

**Economist.com**  
**Web Producer**

Since I first met User Vision, through the assessment, to final presentation, I've been very impressed by your professionalism, support and quality of your consultancy.

**BMI Healthcare**  
**Internet Marketing Manager**