

Usability testing

“While looking for methods how to improve the user experience of our price and consumer review websites, we came across Tobii eye tracking technology. We were immediately attracted by its ease of use and impressive results. In the fast, challenging online environment continuous improvement is a prerequisite for success – and Tobii provides Ciao with the necessary tools for this.”

Daniel Keller, Managing Director at Ciao GmbH

Ciao GmbH, a Microsoft company, is provider of Europe’s leading shopping and consumer review websites. Its community and unbiased reviews are Ciao’s key assets. They are a rich and powerful source of information for any user looking to make well-informed online purchases. To improve the overall user experience of its websites, Ciao conducted several usability studies, working with the latest eye tracking hardware and software from Tobii. The new review pages recorded a significant growth of reviews, both written and read.

Key questions asked

Ciao wanted to identify key user experience success factors, detect areas that required modifications plus collect input on how to improve the overall user experience of the websites.

First, Ciao studied a number of other websites to identify best practices. Then they conducted a full-scale usability study of their own review websites to detect areas that required modification.

The results

Thorough evaluation of internal user data, eye tracking data and qualitative interview results provided a holistic view of user behavior. Correlated with users and community members’ intrinsic motivation, the behavioral insights gave clear directions where improvements had to be made and provided a foundation for unambiguous recommendations.

One specific lesson drawn from the usability study was to offer the user a larger text input field in which to write the review. Another new element created based on the test findings were sliders on the review-write page. Sliders that allow the user to easily define attributes of the product being reviewed were put on the right-hand side, where Ciao noticed intense user perception.

An essential success factor of a review-write page is its ability to drive users to complete a review. Ciao wanted to create a page where the fields and tools for posting a review attracted and kept the users’ focus.

Eye tracking data showed that with the old solution, a lot of user attention was on the image in the upper left corner, and on the FAQ section next to the input field — both of which are not crucial elements.

In the new solution, the input field was instead placed in the upper left corner to attract more user attention, and the image was moved to the right-hand side. The FAQ next to the input field was replaced with interactive rulers, allowing the user to provide more pieces of information about the product. The FAQ was hidden in interactive tool tips that do not show up until the user starts to write a review. Eye tracking data showed a significant increase in visual attention paid to key elements.



Heat map of old review-writing page



Heat map of new review-writing page

These changes helped to increase website stickiness significantly—which was easily measured e.g. by the number of page views in a session.

Ciao successfully launched a new review-writing page with cutting-edge usability and compared the post-launch with the pre-launch figures. They recorded a double-digit growth rate of new reviews published!



Source: Omniture, March 2009. Graph showing the number of reviews posted on www.ciao.co.uk. The improved review page was introduced in January 2009.

The new review-writing page on ciao.co.uk and other Ciao countries was not the only core page derived from the eye tracking test results. Ciao also launched a completely new page for reading reviews.



Heat map of old review-read page



Heat map of new review-read page

Analyzing eye tracking data immediately after exposure to the old review read page, Ciao found that users did not perceive the review summary and the first lines of the reviews and therefore often exited the page. Also, a high user interest was recorded for the white area on the right-hand side, indicating that the user's attention was not focused on the review itself.

In the new solution the review summary was placed above the fold, the review was moved up, and additional products were displayed with images on the right-hand side in what was formerly a white area. Eye tracking data showed that users fixated faster and longer on the review summary.

The improvements on the review-read page led to higher conversion rates, more review reads and consequently higher overall community activity.

Ciao will continuously improve its newly launched web pages by applying the results of its ongoing user experience. Further improvements on the review-write and review-read pages will be implemented on all Ciao websites.

The study

Independent tests with several smaller test groups of six people each were conducted in which Ciao balanced different criteria such as age and gender.

The participants were asked to complete different tasks on the analyzed websites, such as "Please write a review about Michael Ballack" or "Comment on someone else's review and say that you liked reading it". Each participant was left alone to complete the tasks without being interrupted by questions or losing focus while trying to express his/her thoughts. While they performed the tasks, a Tobii Eye Tracker recorded their eye movements.

Each test was completed with an interview. Each participant was asked to perform 'retrospective' thinking and express their user experience while watching a playback of their test session. The gaze replay worked as a memory cue, helping the participants to remember what they were thinking while solving the task.



Ciao used a Tobii T120 Eye Tracker and Tobii Studio for testing and analysis. Eye tracking data provided clear insights into the users' website perception and surfing behavior.

Why eye tracking?

"Tobii Eye Trackers provide exact, objective and, so to speak, "scientific" user experience data and results. All this is available within a short time frame—results that would have meant enormous cost and technical effort in the past," says Thomas Weber, Senior Product Manager at Ciao GmbH.

Markus Tauscher, Team Leader Design at Ciao GmbH adds "Web design in particular can benefit greatly from the advanced user experience analysis methodologies. As user focus becomes more and more important, Tobii's products are the perfect approach to focus on online users' real needs."

"When specifying a feature, what you often think of as common sense eye tracking often reveals is actually not—and that is of unique value," says Marco Bendel Business Analyst and Product Manager at Ciao GmbH.

"At Ciao we use the latest state-of-the-art development methodologies. So we have no detailed up-front models for testing purposes. Tobii's easy-to-use eye tracking technology allows us to do fast, regular and short user experience tests. This way we can further shorten release cycles while taking user-friendliness into account. We would never want to abandon eye tracking," says Daniel Keller, Managing Director of Ciao GmbH.

About Ciao GmbH

Ciao GmbH, a Microsoft company, is provider of Europe's leading shopping and consumer review websites. The firm operates shopping communities in seven countries and languages (ciao.co.uk, ciao.de, ciao.fr, ciao.it, ciao.es, ciao-shopping.nl, ciao.se). Internet users will find about seven million products and more than five million independent product evaluations and reports of people's experiences in over 20 top categories. Ciao is ranked the most popular comparison shopping web site in Europe.

Ciao GmbH was founded in Munich in 1999 and since 15 October 2008 it has been a Microsoft Company (NASDAQ: MSFT).

For more information visit www.ciao-group.com

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