

---

# COMP 3008 Assignment 2

**Alyxander-Jacob Ricketts**

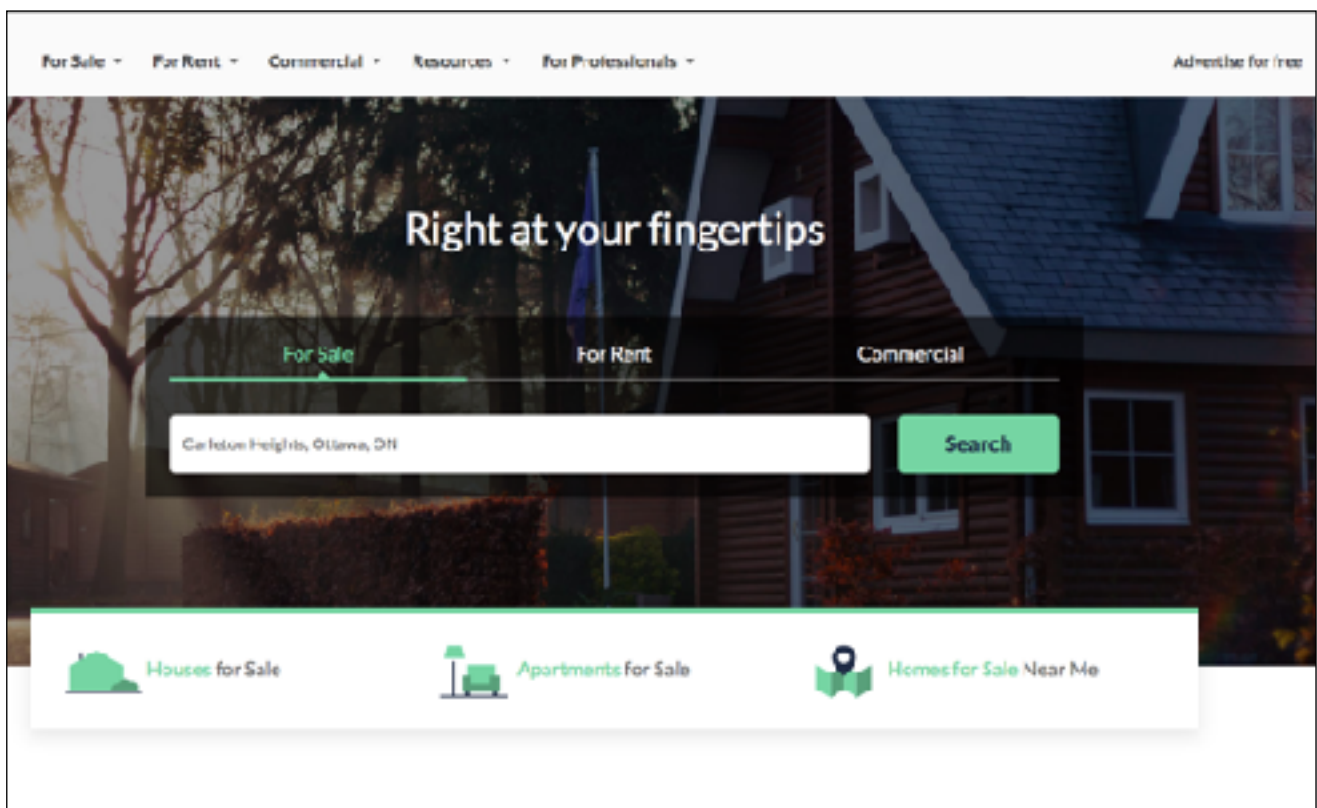
101084146

<https://www.point2homes.com>

Friday October 16th, 2020

---

## Website Usability User Study



---

# Introduction and Preparing the Study

## Study Setup

This study is being conducted in person and will be taking a Think-Aloud method approach. Given that this is a shorter study (10-15 minutes), they will be given a brief introduction and description of what the website is so they are aware of what to expect when beginning the study. The participants will be informed that this is a case study on the usability of the given website in order to gauge users satisfaction with the platform and its features after the study has been completed. The users will be given the website URL, instructed of the task and then will be able to begin when they are ready.

## Assigned Website

The assigned website is a home listing website for purchases or rentals. Users can navigate to the site to view homes in whatever area they are in and find listings from multiple other websites including those such as REMAX. The website operates in a variety of markets such as Canada, The United States, Mexico, and many more. Not only can users browse for houses that are posted, if they happen to be a real estate professional they can also advertise their own listings on the site as well. In addition to this users can find many real estate agents promoted on the site to in case they need one to help them find a home, or facilitate a sale. Given the nature of the website, I decided to give the participants tasks that would be common for those in our age group to be doing on a daily basis. The first task was to find the closest House or apartment near Carleton university and view the Listing. I felt this was a common task as many of the people our age in the city would like to be close to Universities, or the student housing area's around them. The second task was to find and view any 3 bedroom house or apartment listed in the last week. Again I felt this would be a common task for people our age as I find that the number of roommates people begin to have become smaller as the years in university pass by. In addition to that it is always beneficial to find the most recently listed houses as maybe there is something new on the market you have yet to see.

---

## Study Methodology and Recording Data

During this study the data will be recorded in various ways. The paper and pencil method (laptop in this case) will be used to record what the user doing on the site as well as their thought process during the time they are completing the tasks (**Appendix 1**). The entire in person study will also be audio recorded so that no information and / or participant opinions are lost due to the limitations of the paper and pencil technique or due to the limitations of human memory. The approach and methodology I took to this study was to collect both quantitative and qualitative data in the most efficient way possible. To do this I made sure to make note of anything I thought was important during each session whether that be exactly what the participant was doing, what they were saying, or any body language that could indicate how they were feeling towards the task. In terms of the qualitative data I opted to make the questionnaire the users were given mostly filled with quantitative questions (a mix between subjective and objective quantitative). In addition to this the users were given a question at the end of the questionnaire where they could express any issues they had with the site or other opinions. This was to ensure if there were any thoughts or feelings that they had, that were missed by me either while recording their actions or responses (while they were thinking out loud during the tasks) or during the questionnaire.

## Participant Description

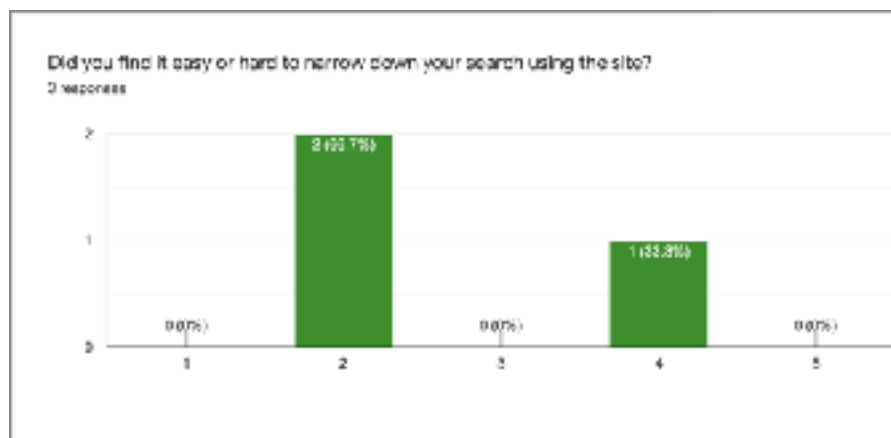
Participant 1 is a 23 year old female and a Carleton University alumni. She was in the communications program and has a slightly above average experience level with technology although not very much experience with these sorts of websites. Participant 2 is a 24 year old male and a Carleton University alumni. He was in the criminology program and has an average experience level with technology. He has fair bit of experience with websites of this nature. Participant 3 is a 22 year old male and a fourth year Carleton University student in the business law program. Due to his job he is well versed with various forms of technology. He has a vast experience with websites of this nature as he has searched for multiple houses in the past.

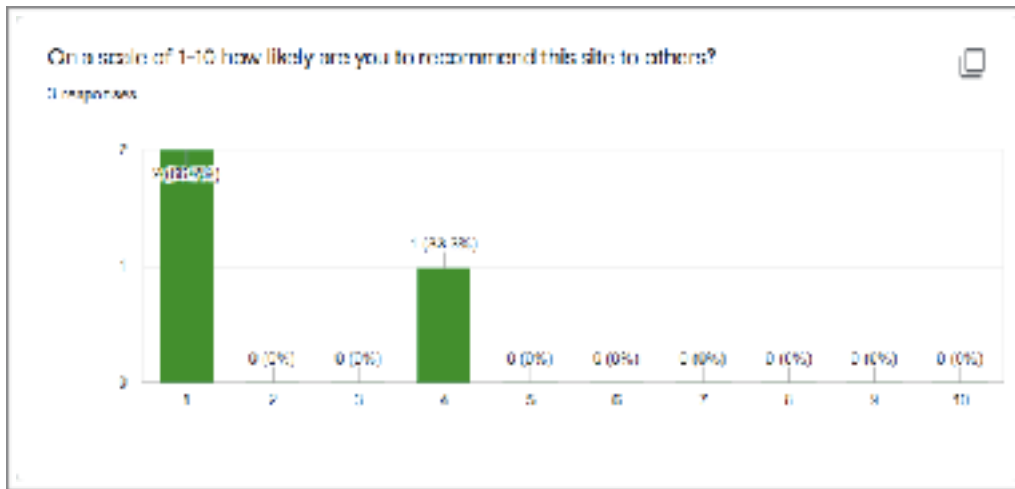
---

## Data Analysis and Main Insights

In the following section we will take a look at the data received from the study and analyze it to determine the trends within the users. Although there were many usability problems that were uncovered during the case study, the website did have some aspects that worked, and worked well. Firstly, the map. Once users found the map option, this area of the site worked well as they soon after found the location they were looking for. The filters on the website also worked very well and gave the users the desired output once they found where they were located. When being showed multiple listings, users were shown only the relevant information and a small slider for photos. This was a good use of space as the information showed did not clutter the listings and allowed the user to see all the information they would have wanted and a great example of the correct application of the Aesthetic and Minimalist usability heuristic.

Despite this site doing some things well, the participants did highlight some problems with the usability. Some main usability problems I found were the problems with the search, as well filtering listings out. Getting locked into certain locations when searching or not knowing how to go back a step while conducting their search proved challenging for users. Due to this issue, most users resorted to restarting their search all over again, which began to frustrate most participants. In addition, trying to find the specific filters that they wanted was another usability problem, although in this case only a minor one as users eventually figured this problem out. These findings can be seen when we look at the results from one of the questions from the questionnaire.

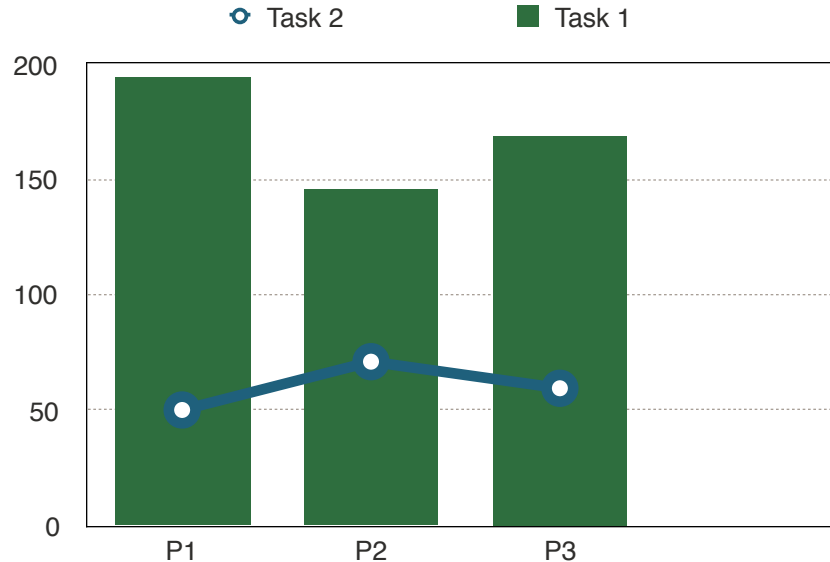




Users were generally unsatisfied and found the site difficult to use in relation to other sites they have used for the same purposes. On a scale from 1-10,

66.7% of participants were very unlikely to recommend this website to others and 33.3% were somewhat unlikely to recommend this site to others.

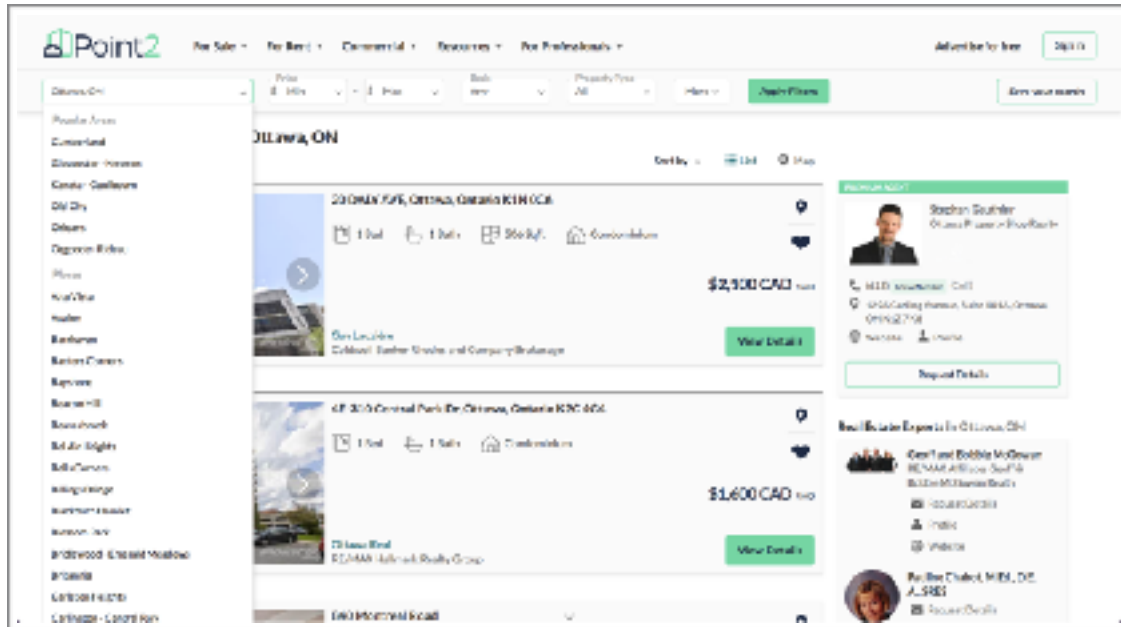
When taking into account challenges the users said they faced while using this site, it is clear that participants did not like the learning curve that this site required to use in relation to other sites they have used in the past. The following chart:



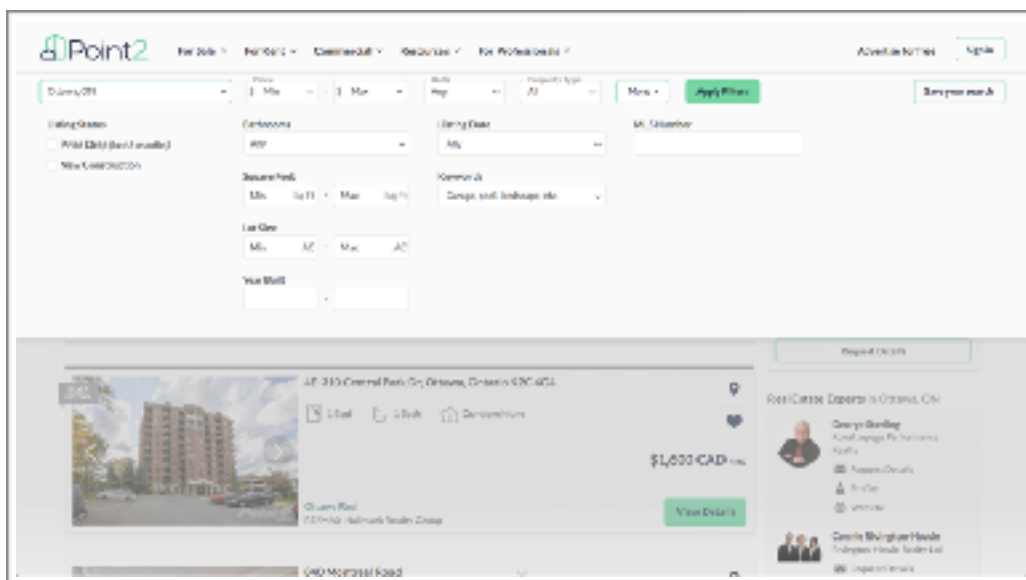
shows the time it took each participant to complete each task in seconds. This is a clear example of the considerable learning curve involved. In addition to this, having tasks that users would normally consider as easy take a greater amount of effort left them feeling annoyed and frustrated (See overall satisfaction chart in appendix 3).

## Usability Heuristic Violations

**User control and freedom:** When using the places dropdown menu, users could not figure out how to exit out of this narrowed search, if they clicked the wrong location they would have to go back to the main page and begin their search all over again



**Negative transfer effect:** Users are used to being able to input specific parameters into their search from the beginning when using other sites so having to search for the options they wanted once beginning their search made it difficult to identify where to look.



---

## Reflection on the Process

While setting up the study, I anticipated participants may have some issues with the usability of the site but I did not anticipate the learning curve that took place in which users had a tough time figuring out how to use and navigate the layout of the site. It appears that first time users have trouble figuring out the layout of the site and finding their desired result, more so than I originally expected. While conducting the study, I found it harder than I thought to log all of the things I wanted to keep track of. Making sure the user continued to “think-aloud” as well as keeping track of what they were doing / saying, and making sure to time them at the same time proved harder than previously anticipated. While doing analysis, I thought it would be harder to come to a conclusion on what the data was telling me and how it all correlated but as it turns out, all of the users seemed to have a similar experience on the site and both the quantitative and qualitative data seemed to illustrate that. If I were to do another study I would try to have a partner or someone to assist me in keeping track of all the data during the study as focusing on all areas at the same time proved to be challenging. Otherwise the study seemed to have ran smoothly with all the participants understanding the structure and instructions, and carrying out the tasks as they normally would have under normal settings. To my knowledge nothing about how the study was conducted influenced the participants actions or opinions and appeared to be unbiased throughout the case study.

---

# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Session Notes

### Participant 1 Notes

#### First Tasks:

User was very confused to start off, was unsure of where to start  
Attempted to type in Carleton university  
Undesired results, went back to the homepage  
Typed in ottawa  
Looked at filters to see if there could be more specification on the location of the houses  
Looked at filters again  
Found the map feature and searched around till Carleton University was found  
Found house closest

#### Second task:

Typed in ottawa  
Looked in filters, set # of bedrooms to 3  
Searched for desired location  
Scrolled through houses  
Changed "Sort by" filter to "newest"  
Found first house

### Participant 2 notes

#### First Task:

searched ottawa  
went back to home page  
searched Carleton  
looked at filters  
went back to home page  
searched ottawa  
found map  
found Carleton on map  
found closest listing and clicked on link

#### Second Task:

searched ottawa  
clicked filters  
clicked more filters  
found listing date filter  
changed bedroom filter  
clicked listing

### Participant 3

#### First Task:

typed in Carleton university address  
went back a page  
typed in ottawa  
found map  
did a radius around Carleton  
found house

#### Second Task:

typed in ottawa  
changed bedroom setting  
changed other settings (specified for detached house, semi, etc)  
changed newest setting  
found listing



---

## Appendix 2: Questionnaire Data (Excel)

Timestamp	Overall Experience	Narrowing Search	Likely Recommendation	Other Sites used
10/16/2020 18:29:18	2	2	1	4-6 others
10/16/2020 18:35:12	1	2	1	1-3 others
10/16/2020 18:57:53	3	4	4	7+ others

Challenges using this site:

**Participant 1:** First, I wouldn't be likely to trust the site as there are no testimonials on the main page. The option to only search by city on the main page further affected my ability to navigate the site, as the filters were hidden and relatively hard to find at first glance. I felt as though those options should be more accessible to help a user narrow down their search quickly, as there are many different options (that are easier to use and reputable by name) for the services rendered.

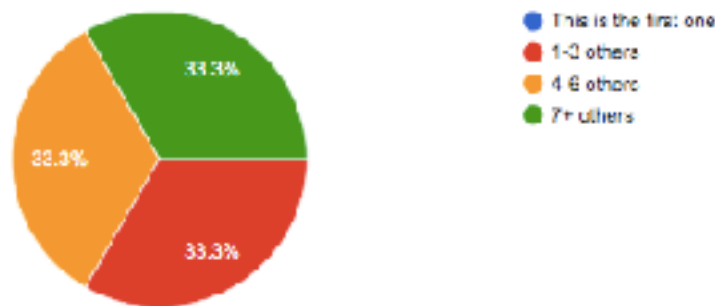
**Participant 2:** Yes. Firstly, when given the website name, I used a "." instead of using the word "point". Secondly, could not find places near ideal destinations such as Carleton University. When finally told there was a map, did not know where to find it. Finally, the way in which one can find options to filter and limit the properties is extremely infuriating. For example, I tried finding a place in Ottawa which had to include a 3 bedroom house that was listed within the past week. I found one option after searching for displeasurable amount of time.

**Participant 3:** Not really. Search didn't work when including city for address

### Appendix 3: Other Questionnaire Graphs

How many other real estate / home rental websites have you used in the past?

3 responses



How was your overall experience using the website?



3 responses

