Overstock.com Pet Adoptions

Think Aloud Walkthroughs

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Summary

In order to test the Pet Adoptions section of Overstock.com, we performed think-aloud walkthroughs with 3 participants. This document describes the methodology and results of these walkthroughs. Overall, we found this methodology to be effective in highlighting specific usability errors of the site and found these errors to be consistent throughout the participants. This method was centered around a goal-centered approach where we asked the participants to complete a goal a typical customer would want to accomplish on the site and offered minimal guidance for the rest of the walkthrough.

Test Preconditions

All participants were required to not be familiar with Overstock.com. The participants were chosen to represent a variety of ages and shopping experience. Each participant also had adequate abilities and experience navigating website pages.

Test Introduction

To introduce the test to the participants, we used a uniform script. This was done to ensure the goals of the test were accurately described, minimize error in terms of bias in guiding the participants, and allow the test to be repeated in a similar manner.

Script

***Introduction:*** Thank you for participating in this test. We are going to be testing a subset of Overstock.com. Before we start, I would like to explain the goals of the test. We are testing the usability of the website. This means nothing you do is a mistake, as we are testing the website, not you. We want to learn how easy it is for you to accomplish your goals on the website and what is confusing or difficult about the process. Before each click, I want you to explain your observations of the webpage and why you are clicking the links that you are. Once you are ready to begin, I will describe the scenario and have you load the webpage.

***Scenario:*** After telling a friend that you are looking for a dog, she recommends that you go to overstock.com because they have resources to search for pets for adoption. You are now going to overstock.com to look for a dog to adopt. Please load [www.overstock.com](http://www.overstock.com) now.

Test Guidelines

***Participant Interaction:*** During the walkthrough, continually encourage the participant to communicate their thoughts. They should voice both their expectations of the site and their observations.

***Documentation:*** Document every major action by the user. If at any point their observations do not match their expectations, record this difference.

***Guidance:*** Offer minimal assistance to the user as they complete the goal. Only offer assistance to help them complete their goal when absolutely necessary, and document that section as containing a possible usability error. If the user has any questions as to what to do next, encourage them to do what they would if they were completing this goal alone.

***Continuation of Goals:*** The user will eventually complete the goal of the original scenario. To perform a more comprehensive test, you must offer new goals to the user. The goals themselves depend on the paths the participant has gone through so far. For example, if a user has only searched for dogs, then set a new goal to search for a cat. If they have not used the filters, the goal might be to find a specific kind of dog.

Walkthrough Highlights

Participant 1:

* Typed “Dog” into search bar of overstock.com, but no pet adoption results were found
* Noted that not all the dogs have size. It would be helpful for those that do to have pounds
* Found age ranges to be ambiguous, would prefer numbered ages
* Found individual pet page to meet her expectations
* Secondary Goal of finding a Labrador puppy set by tester
* Noted confusion over difference between baby and young
* Noted it would be helpful that when clicking on shelter name for details of the shelter to appear (currently more animals from the shelter are shown)
* Goal changed to find a cat
* Clicking back to original search screen erased zip code info, led to participant confusion as to why cats from outside her area were shown
* A seemingly full-grown cat had a picture dated 2011, but was marked as young, which led to more confusion over what “young” meant

Participant 2:

* Could not find dogs using search bar, need to be guided to “Pet Adoptions” tab
* Searched for a mixed breed dog, results were as expected
* Would like age to be in years
* Would like more direct options of contact to shelters, like a live chat or phone number
* Found issues with details of dogs being sparse
* Goal changed to find a cat
* After clicking “Cat” tab from search results, zip code was lost
* Description of a cat had formatting issues (open tags in the description)
* Running into a “No Results Found Error” erased zip code and all filters

Participant 3:

* After unsuccessfully searching, found the pet adoptions tab
* Did a general search in her area for dogs
* Applied filters for mixed labs, noted there were “not enough kinds”
  + Tester Note: there weren’t enough breed/hair filters because the filters represent the dogs in the current area search. In a global search, there are more filters
* Goal changed to search for cats
* After finding a cat, goal changed to find a short hair border collie
* No results found, filters are wiped. Not what participant expected

Results

Overall, the site allowed it’s users to accomplish their goals with minimal usability errors. We have identified the following usability issues from this test:

* Cross-site integration with the Overstock.com home page would be useful. Users seem to be having issues finding the pet adoptions section from the home page. A solution would be to have a search of an animal type to point them towards the pet adoptions section. Also, the header section containing the pet adoptions tab disappears when the user scrolls down, making it difficult to find.
* The no results error should be handled more gracefully. Current filters should not be discarded, and hitting “back” on the error page should return them to their last search, not the pet home page
* The detail fields of each pet may need refactoring. Users find age ranges and weights to be too ambiguous and would prefer specific years and weights.
* Remembering the zip code of the user when starting a new search would help prevent unexpected behavior.
* More details about the shelters on the site, including direct contact information