H.com Usability Baseline
Test Plan – FINAL

Parts of `H.com` have been tested or evaluated for usability, but there has been no overall look at the entire site. The result is an uneven experience for visitors to the site, which may lead to problems with completing reservations. To gather objective data to begin to create baseline usability measures, we will conduct a usability test that takes a holistic look at the site.

Overall objectives for the study

We will gather baseline data about the overall effectiveness of `H.com`. The goals of this study are to:

- Assess the overall effectiveness of `www.H.com` for different types of users performing basic, common tasks.

- Identify obstacles to completing room reservations on the site.

- Create a repeatable usability study protocol.

Research questions

In addition, in this study will try to answer these questions:

- How easily and successfully do travelers get started with making a reservation on the site?

- Does the starting point make any difference in whether travelers are successful in reaching their goal on `H.com`? If so, what are the differences?

- What paths do travelers take to completing a booking?

- How well does the site support the paths and goals of the travelers? That is, how closely does the organization and flow of the site match travelers' expectations?

- What obstacles do travelers encounter on the way to completing a booking, whether using a credit card or rewards?

- What questions do travelers ask as they work through their reservation?

- How do travelers feel about how long it takes them to complete an online booking, both the perceived of time and the number of steps?

At the end of the sessions, we will have quantitative data:

- Errors in completing a reservation – we will know where the participant selected the wrong link to reach the goal, taking "wrong turns"

- Errors by starting point or path – we will know how many and which errors participants made after starting out at a specific point, and we will be able to determine whether the starting point affects the number and types of errors made further down the path

- Whether participants completed reservations – we will know, even if participants make errors on the way, if they can complete the reservation

We'll also have qualitative data:

- The verbal protocol – the running commentary that participants make as they think aloud – will give us indicators about what participants were confused by and why

- Debriefing interviews will tell us what stands out about the experience of using the site, which should help us set priorities on potential changes to the site

Location and setup

We'll use a controlled setting to conduct the sessions. The study will take place in the rented market research facility of Acme Research in Fresno, California. There will be a testing room with a one-way mirror to an observation room. Participants will use a Windows PC and Internet Explorer 6.0 with a high-speed connection to the Internet. The PC that the participant uses will also have Morae recorder installed on it and a web camera attached. The web camera will capture the participant's face; the Morae software will record what's happening on the screen (and can collect other data). I will bring a digital voice recorder to the sessions to create a set of audio recordings for backup.

Recruiting participants

We will select participants who have a variety of experience booking travel and accommodations. They will be people who book their own travel and who stay in hotels. UsabilityWorks will recruit 8 participants with the characteristics outlined in the following table.

Characteristic	Desired number of participants
Participant type	
pilot	1
regular	12
backup	2
Total number of participants	**14**
Travel frequency	
infrequently: 1–5 trips per year	4
moderately often: 6–12 trips per year	4
very often: 13 or more trips per year	4
Types of travel	
mostly business	6
mostly leisure	6
Booking experience	
book their own trips and accommodations	all
book online most of the time	6
book on the phone or other method	6
Age	
21–30	2–3
31–40	4–5
41–50	4–5
51–60	2–3
Gender	
female	6
male	6

We will exclude people who are

- travel agents or work in the travel industry

- meeting, party, or event planners

- association/convention staff

Methodology

This usability study will be somewhat exploratory but will also gather assessment data about the effectiveness of `www.H.com`. Participants will fall into three groups by the starting point they use to perform the main task, which is to reserve a room. We will collect data about error and success rates as well as qualitative data about participants' experiences using the site.

We will use a between-subjects design

In this between-subjects study, each participant will work through one task path (in a within-subjects study, each participant would try all paths in counterbalanced order). I will conduct up to 30 individual 45-minute usability study sessions. Each participant will perform one of three major task "paths" using `www.H.com`. I'll use 15 minutes of each session to explain the session to the participant, review basic background information with the participant, and then conduct a post-test debriefing interview. During the middle 30 minutes of the session, participants will work to reserve a room at an H property in a major U.S. city.

`www.H.comH.comwww.H.comH.com`**Session outline and timing**

The test sessions will be 45 minutes long. I will use 15 minutes of each session for pre-test introductions and post-test debriefing interviews. The sessions will take place at Shugoll Research in Bethesda.

Pre-test arrangements

Have the participant:

- Review and sign nondisclosures and recording permissions.
- Fill out a background questionnaire (with the same questions as the screener).

Introduction to the session (2 minutes)

Discuss:

- Participant's experience with usability studies and focus groups.
- Importance of their involvement in the study.
- Moderator's role.
- Room configuration, recording systems, observers, etc.
- The protocol for the rest of the session.
- Thinking aloud.

Background interview (3 minutes)

Discuss the participant's:

- Experiences booking their own travel.
- Reasons for booking their own travel.

Tasks (30 minutes)

Participants will start at one of three points to reserve a room at an H hotel in a major U.S. city where H has multiple properties.

Post-test debriefing (10 minutes)

- Ask broad questions to collect preference and other qualitative data.

- Follow up on any particular problems that came up for the participant.

Session schedule

The table below lays out a daily schedule of sessions for the study.

Time	Monday, April 23	Tuesday, April 24
10:00 – 10:45	Meet up, set up	Session 4
11:00 – 11:45	**Pilot session**	Session 5
12:00 – 1:30	*Debriefing*	*Debriefing*
1:30 – 2:15	*Revise session script if needed*	6
2:30 – 3:15		7
3:30 – 4:15	Session 1	8
4:30 – 5:15	Session 2	9
5:30 – 6:15	Session 3	10

Measures

To answer these questions:

- How easily and successfully do travelers get started with making a reservation on the site?

- Does the starting point make any difference in whether travelers are successful in reaching their goal on `www.H.com`? If so, what are the differences?

- What paths do travelers take to completing a booking?

- How well does the site support the paths and goals of the travelers? That is, how closely does the organization and flow of the site match travelers' expectations?

- What obstacles do travelers encounter on the way to completing a booking?

- What questions do travelers ask as they work through their reservation?

- How do travelers feel about how long it takes them to complete an online booking, both in the perceived amount of time and the number of steps?

I will collect both performance and preference data during the test sessions.

Performance:

- Errors of omission

- Errors of comission

- Number of tasks completed with and without assistance—I will track two levels of prompting when participants need assistance.

  None   Participant completed a task without prompting.
  Try again   Participant completed a task when asked, "Can you think of any other place to look?"

Preference:

- Appropriateness of site's functions to users' tasks

- Perceived amount of time and number of steps

- Ease of use overall

- Usefulness of terms and labeling

Report contents

I will deliver a draft of the final report to my point of contact at `www.H.com` that:

- Briefly summarizes the background of the study, including the goals, methodology, logistics, and participant characteristics

- Presents findings for the original questions to investigate

- Gives quantitative results and discusses specifics as appropriate to the question and the data

- Provides visuals of pages of `www.H.com` that are relevant to specific questions where they will help reviewers understand what we are talking about

- Discusses the implications of the results

- Provides recommendations

- Suggests follow-on research

H will review the draft and comment on it. I'll incorporate agreed changes and then present a summary of the findings in a meeting at H's headquarters.

Project schedule

Planning meeting / kickoff

We have already had a planning meeting, in which we agreed on the basic participant characteristics and defined the tasks at a high level. Based on our discussion in that meeting, I'm now creating this test plan.

Test plan, session script and materials

After H reviews the test plan, I will create a session script and data collecting materials that I will use during the sessions. This ensures that all of the participants receive the same instructions and that I gather data on the same issues throughout the study.

It is important that H review this test plan carefully and provide feedback. Major changes to the participant characteristics and the session tasks and activities after I create the session script could result in questionable data and findings.

Test environment

We'll use a controlled setting to conduct the sessions. The study will take place at Acme Research in Fresno, California. There will be a testing room with a one-way mirror to an observation room.

Participants will use a Windows PC and Internet Explorer 6.0 with a high-speed connection to the Internet. The PC that the participant uses will also have Morae Recorder installed on it and a webcam attached. The webcam will capture the participant's face; the Morae software will record what's happening on the screen (and can collect other data). I will bring a digital voice recorder to the sessions to create a set of audio recordings for backup.

Moderator role

I will sit in the room with the participant while conducting the session. I will introduce the session, conduct a short background interview, and then introduce tasks as appropriate. Because this study is somewhat exploratory, I may ask unscripted follow-up questions to clarify participants' behavior and expectations. I will also take detailed notes and record the participants' behavior and comments.

Sessions will be digitally recorded on video and audio using TechSmith's Morae product. I will debrief with observers throughout each day of testing, in particular at a mid-day lunch break and at the end of the day. I'll ask observers to contribute their observations about surprises and issues and we will continue to identify and tally those throughout the sessions. This way, observers have an active part in the sessions and reach consensus about major issues before the final report comes out.

Reviewing, tabulating, and analyzing data

Using my notes and the recordings, I'll tabulate and analyze the data to answer the key questions (listed in the Goals section of this document) with findings and recommendations. I'll provide these results in a final written report and a presentation at the H offices in Bethesda.

Project timeline

What	When
Initial working meeting - Review project objectives, scope, deliverables - Identify participant selection criteria - Agree on final schedule	February 26
Deliver final screener and test plan	April 4
Recruit participants	April 5-22
Deliver final session script	April 18
Dry run of the session script	April 19
24 to 30 usability study sessions of 45 minutes each	April 23-27

What	When
Deliver final written report	May 11
Present study findings	May 11

Deliverables

- A working session with the director of user experience, with input from team to identify participant characteristics and recruiting strategy; develop detailed research questions; and finalize schedule and deliverables.

- Draft and final copies of participant selection criteria in a screening script.

- A test plan (this document) describing the general approach and schedule for the study.

- Draft and final copies of the session checklist (a script that I also use for note taking during the sessions and observers can use to follow along).

- Dry run of the session checklist in my office.

- 24 to 30 usability study sessions of 45 minutes each (along with one pilot session with a participant).

- Daily debriefings with observers.

- Morae recordings of each session.

- A final written report of complete findings.

- A presentation of findings and recommendations at the H offices.

Tasks

Participants start from one of three starting points: All participants will use `www.H.com` to book a hotel room (up to the point of entering a credit card number or just before completing the rewards reservation) in a major U.S. city that has multiple H properties. Within that task, participants will select a hotel and room based on a combination of price and amenities. Each group will start at a different point:

Group 1	Start at `H.com`
Group 2	Start at non-branded search from Google (example: premium San Francisco hotel 4 star hotel).
Group 3	Start from a branded search from Google (example: H Hotel Atlanta)

Let the participants start where they would normally start: Because you'll select participants for different combinations of characteristics, expect that different types of participants are motivated to do different things. Briefly interview the participant at the beginning of the session to get some impression of how the particular participant approaches booking travel arrangements–especially accommodations–and let them perform the task within their own context. This way, in addition to getting a feeling for the overall usability of `www.H.com`, you can also identify usage patterns that could be further investigated in follow-on research. Finally, you will also get a better understanding of the traveler's thought processes and how `H.com` fits into that traveler's life.