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# What is a Benchmarking Usability Study?

It’s a study whose goal is to determine how effectively & efficiently people in the intended audience can use can use a website or app. (Here, we’ll use the term “tool” to stand for website, mobile app, desktop application, or any digital tool.) During these studies we also collect data about users’ perceptions of the tool. Metrics or KPIs from these studies can be used for competitive evaluations or for tracking progress over time (longitudinal research). By the way, a “usability study” is the same thing as a “usability test.” However, if we are working directly with participants, we try not to use the word “test” as that is intimidating.

The participants who try out the tool do it on their own without a facilitator there to help them. By having they do it on their own, the results are more, as we researchers like to say, “ecologically valid” because the environment in which the testing is done is similar to the environment in which the tool will be used. We currently use a vendor called UserZoom as the platform for collecting the data & providing participants.

# What results can you get from these studies?

It’s possible to collect the following data. Any questions you might ask via an online survey are also possible.

## Quantitative Metrics or KPIs

* Measures of tool UX effectiveness:
  + Percentage of users who successfully complete each task.
  + Number of users who feel they encountered no problems in a task.
* Measures of tool UX efficiency (ease):
  + Average time for task
  + Average number unique page views
  + Average number of clicks
* Perceptual measures
  + Task based:
    - How easy was it to perform the task?
    - How confident are you that you performed the task correctly?
  + [SUPR-Q](https://measuringu.com/10-things-suprq/) (Standardized User Experience Percentile Rank Questionnaire) scores. SUPR-Q is a widely used 8 item questionnaire that measures the quality of a digital tool’s UX. The SUPR-Q has gone through multiple rounds of validation and is used by hundreds of organizations around the world. SUPR-Q scores can be compared to scores for other sites if one buys the [license](https://measuringu.com/product/suprq/) to the score database.
  + What is your impression of BCBSNC (Can be taken before AND after using the tool to check for a brand lift from using the tool)?
  + NPS (Can be taken before AND after using the tool to check for a brand lift from using the tool)

## Qualitative Data

* Click paths take by users through the tool in each task
* Comments on problems/frustrations (hassles) encounter while performing the task
* Any other comments shared by users while attempting the tasks or at the study’s conclusion

# How long does it take to do a benchmarking study?

After everyone agrees on the tasks, user questions, & the site is ready, allow for at least four weeks to build the study, run the participants, & analyze the results. Running the participants can be often be done as quickly as a week or two.

# How many users do you need for a benchmarking usability study?

50 more participants. The reason you need that many is to have a reasonably good chance of gathering statistically significant data to use in comparisons with competitors or with your own tool over time. You can run a study with far fewer participants if you want to gather qualitative data to inform design enhancements, but those small studies are not appropriate for comparing different tools.

# Who are the UserZoom participants?

UserZoom maintains a panel of many users from across the globe. We use screener questions to be sure we get participants fitting these criteria:

* US residents (we can also do only NC residents, but it takes longer to get results if we do)
* 18 or older (sometimes 64 or younger too)
* Must play a role in decisions on health insurance purchases
* Do not work for the healthcare industry or digital media

# What tasks do we ask use?

Participants should be attempting the most important tasks, i.e.,

* The most critical tasks for them to be successful in using your tool, e.g., read about coverage
* The most frequent tasks they are likely to want to do with this tool, e.g., find a claim

Make a list of both the most critical & most frequent, then narrow that list to 5-6 tasks you want to use over & over to compare one version of the tool to the next. Keep in mind that it should take most participants no longer than 20 minutes to attempt all the tasks & answer questions about them.

# What information is needed about each task?

* Task details - Very specific information about what to do, including any details that would affect how the task is performed, e.g., find the chiropractor closest to zip code 27707 who is accepting new patients.
* A validation answer - Since we are counting how many users successfully completed each task we need a way to validate whether users were successful without our being there to watch. “Task validation” can be accomplished by asking users a question, e.g., What is the name of the chiropractor who is closest to zip code 27707 who is accepting new patients? This validation question will mirror the task they were asked to attempt.
* Other options for the validation question – We usually provide 4 other answer options. Those options can be particularly informative in the results if they are answers that we anticipate people might select when they take the wrong path through the tool. For example, the other options could the names of chiropractors who were at the top of the results before the user selected to sort by distance, or they might be ones at the top are not accepting new patients.

# What’s needed to get a study started?

1. Confirm a schedule with Leslie.
2. Determine the participant requirements, e.g., is 65 & older OK? (See “Who are the UserZoom Participants”).
3. Provide emails of participants or decide to use the panel.
4. Decide on the task’s users are to attempt & how they will be validated. (See “What tasks do we use” & “What information is needed about each task.”)
5. Consider providing usability goals you hope the UX can meet for each task, e.g., percentage who are successful, how long a task will take, number of clicks required per task.
6. Decided what questions to ask users after they attempt the task & after they finish the test. (see “What results can you get from these studies” as a good starting place.)
7. Provide a link to a site outside the firewall or for our coworkers, it will work with a site inside the firewall. It’s also possible to use wireframes or comps created by the Digital Experience team & displayed via our prototyping tools.