

Usability Problem Analysis for Evernote (“印象笔记”)

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INTRODUCTION

Evernote (印象笔记) is a note organizer that allows users to write down things fast. This study’s primary goal is to test if this note pad is efficient enough for real users to use. This usability study for the Evernote app focuses on the iPhone user interface and tests several features that the system offers, and tries to find the inconvenient part to make future improvements. One participant is involved in this study with four tasks base on the app features. The participant was tested with the silent observer method and the think-aloud method. Ten minutes short interview was implemented after the test. The actions and answers of the participant were recorded for future analysis.

PRELIMINARY HEURISTIC EVALUATION

Violation	Rank	Explain	Solution
User control and freedom	5	User has to login or signs up once they opened the app. Users would want to try it out first, and forcing them to register might cause customer churn.	Provide users with the option to cancel the registration. Allow users to login inside the app.
Flexibility and efficiency of use	4	There are no options for overseas users to sign in with overseas phone numbers.	Provide an overseas phone number registration mode.
Consistency and standards/ Match between system and the real world	2	The avatar on the homepage (“首页”) links to the personal homepage interface. On the other hand, the avatar on “我的” links to personal settings and account upgrading. Users might expect to see a personal homepage clicking their avatar base on their previous experiences.	Click on the avatar leads to the personal home page on both of the “homepage” (“首页”) and “Mine” (“我的”) page. Change “My homepage” (“我的个人主页”) button to “Account upgrade” (“账户升级”) or delete this button. Other features in personal settings all move to “Settings” (“设置”).
Match between system and the real world	3	The icon for the selected feature in insert a handwriting note is confusing. Users might expect to see a lasso icon base on their previous experience. Users might be confused by the current paper-knife icon.	Change the paper-knife icon to a lasso icon.
User control and freedom	8	The function of inserting handwritten notes does not provide the users with the option to cancel the insertion. Users have to insert the handwriting first, then delete it.	Add a cancel button on the handwritten note page.
Recognition rather than recall/ Help and documentation	5	The right-swiping feature of the notes unclear, and there is no relevant guidance.	Add a right-swipe icon (e.g. an arrow) to the right side of the note.
Aesthetic and	5	The feature “超级笔记”, “思维笔记”, and	Integrate “超级笔记” and “思维笔记”

minimalist design		“新建笔记” are coincided and can be integrated.	into “新建笔记”.
Visibility of system status	6	After setting a note as a “快捷笔记”, no intuitive instructions are demonstrating that the relevant notes are marked on the main page.	Add the star icon to the note if it is marked.
Help and documentation	8	The big, medium and small button for the notebook feature is confusing. Nothing changes after changing this setting.	Need documentations to describe its functionality.
Consistency and standards/ Match between system and the real world	7	When posting the notes, the button for completing summary editing and publishing notes are too close; the button for canceling summary editing and canceling publishing are too compact. The user might select the button to publish the note subconsciously.	When the user is in the summary editing interface, remove the publishing button.

USABILITY TASKS

Four tasks were introduced in this usability study to test the efficiency of note-taking and organizing. The participant who took part in this study is the first time using this app and had user experiences on other relevant note-taking apps.

1. Use the app Evernote, add a new “super note” (“超级笔记”) and name it as “note 1” in the notebook “User task book1”. Use the voice recording function to record “note one record,” and write “this is note 1” using hand-written note function in “note 1”. Create a new notebook, “User task book2”, and move “note 1” from “User task book1” to “User task book2”.
2. Create “note 2” and “note 3” in the notebook “User task book2”. Organize all the notes in the notebook “User task book2” to “User task book1” at once.
3. Add an arbitrary image into the material library, and add the image to “note 1”.
4. Apply the template “Daily study plannings” (“每日学习规划”) to your note. Complete and publish this template. Modify the abstract of the note to “this is the summary of the usability test”, and publish.

USER INTERVIEW

1. Q: Do you like this app? If so, which feature attracts you the most? If not, what are your suggestions for improvements?

A: I think this app is not bad overall, and I would rate it as a 7 out of 10. I like its design and layout. Although the template feature is fancy and interesting, I think it isn't delightful if I am first using a template and it needs me to upgrade my account. Still, I have many suggestions for improvements. Many features confuse me; I had experiences using similar apps before, but this app does not follow these rules. Like the recording note part, I have no idea what does these buttons represent.

2. Q: Do you think the software is easy to learn and to use?

A: It is easy to learn as a user who has relevant experience, despite there exist some confusing features, like the “共享” and “分享” part. These are two things with similar functionality, and I don't think this function is commonly used.

3. Q: Do you think the software can accomplish your goals efficiently? If not, which part do you think can be simplified?

A: As a note-taker, I think I would use it expertly after two or three days. However, if an app cannot attract me in 10 minutes when I first download it, I would probably delete it immediately. Evernote shows too many features on the homepage, and it makes me anxious and makes me feel that I need to learn a lot of new stuff. It should put all these kinds of stuff into a new page and delete “助理” because I cannot think of a reason to use this feature.

4. Q: Would you choose this product as a note-taker? If not, what are the outstanding points for other note-taking apps?

A: If it is my first time using a note-taker, I will use this app. I think other software functions are concise and clear enough to complete my basic needs for taking notes. I do not need these extra features. And I think the function of sharing my note on Weibo is incredibly useless because most people dislike sharing their notes and daily plans casually.

USABILITY STUDY OBSERVATIONS

I found several features for the Evernote note-taking app that still need improvement in this usability study. These shortages were apparent by observing participants going through the usability tasks. I found out that the overall user experience is good, but some details would affect their user experiences. For instance, the user was required to register for the first time entering the app, and no options for cancel registration were given to them. During registration, users are asked to bind their phone numbers, and some users who care about their privacy might choose to opt-out. Moreover, the binding phone number did not provide the option for overseas users.

The participant rarely used the “assistant” (“助理”) feature. When the participant opened this page and saw sharing the notes with Weibo, she immediately treats this page as a social interface and never clicked it again. The participant spent most of the time on the homepage and note-taking. In the interview afterward, the participant said that she does not want to have any social features in functional software.

For users with relevant software using experiences, the operation for some features is different from other software to confuse users. For example, the cropping icon in note-taking is different from what users usually see as a lasso icon. When moving notes to other notebooks, users dragged the note habitually. However, Evernote requires users to adjust the location of the note inside the note. After clicking on the voice recording note function, the software would start recording directly. According to the experience of other recording software, users default that they have to click the start button to start recording. Therefore, too many buttons and built-in functions on the note-recording function would confuse users who first use this app.

In addition, some windows in the app were linked to external web pages, so the pop-out speed is slow, which affects the efficiency of the software. Some button icons cannot demonstrate their functionality straightforward. As an example, the use of “共享” and “分享” button is vague.

Last but not least, the participant thought the helping documentation for Evernote needs improvements. The participant said when she was confused and went to the helping center, and the searched content had nothing to do with what she wanted. When she searched the way to move the notes, the searching result was about mobile devices because the keywords are both “移动”. On the other hand, she was using the app on the phone, and the helping document would show her how to solve this problem on a computer, which is useless.

STRENGTH, WEAKNESS, AND SOLUTIONS

Strength

- The overall design is simple and clear. The target user group is clear, and can well fulfill their needs of note taking.
- The template feature is fancy and creative and provides a lot of convenience for users.
- Evernote provides users with a social platform for note-sharing. If users like to share their notes and their lives with others, this app can well-met their needs.

Weakness:

- The operation for some features is different from other relevant software (i.e. the buttons for the recording notes).

Solution:

1. Change the icon and the button to follow other common-used software settings.
2. Add a start button to start recording.
3. Change the icon for cropping to a lasso.

- Parts of the function classification is not clear and straightforward. The allocation for functions can be more concise.

Solution:

1. Move the “assistance” page to the “findings” page because they both belong to social functions.
2. Move other features besides basic note-taking on the homepage (i.e. templates, material library) to a new page.
3. Integrate the super-note and the mind map function with the new note function.
4. When the user is in the summary editing interface, remove the publishing button.

- Too many essential functions are built-in so that it would be troublesome for some users.

Solution:

1. Adjust the note-moving function to the main page.
2. Integrate note-sharing and link-sharing functions into one function. The original position can be replaced as the book-marking function.
3. Add a notification at the homepage when the note is marked.

- The user lacks control freedom in registration.

Solution:

1. Allow users to register inside the app, or provide an option to quit registration when users are first entering the app.
2. Add registration options for overseas devices.