Usability Test Report

Slack Interface

Claren Moyers

Product Under Test

Slack is an online platform meant to facilitate group collaboration for businesses and other complex and dynamic groups. The platform is primarily targeted to users on desktops, but it does have an app for on the go work. In their own words, "Millions of people around the world use Slack to connect their teams, unify their systems, and drive their business forward." This document describes a test plan for conducting a usability test during the development of the next version of Slack. As the fastest growing business application, Slack is looking to ensure that its products are suited to users all over the world, and not just in the western regions they primarily occupy today. Slack is looking to expand primarily into the Asian market as well as Eastern Europe. The goals of this round of usability testing include, establishing and validating user performance measures, identifying potential design concerns to be addressed in order to improve the efficiency, accessibility, versatility, and adaptability to different business practices.

The interface at its most basic is made up of a "workspace" that the user must be invited to or create themselves and "channels" of conversation within the workspace. The channels can be public for all members to see or private for a select group. There is also the capability to private message individual members of the workspace. It is not uncommon to be a part of multiple workspaces and therefore Slack has a functionality to quickly switch between them.

I chose to use slack for my usability test report since it is an interface that I have started using just this year. While it is a fantastic tool that makes a lot of sense for collaborative work, it seems like there is a learning curve attached to optimizing use which makes it interesting to create the tasks that participants would have to navigate and understand.

Usability Test Objectives

The usability test objectives are:
- To determine design inconsistencies and usability problem areas within the user interface and content areas. Potential sources of error may include:
  - Navigation errors – failure to locate functions, excessive keystrokes to complete a function, failure to follow recommended screen flow.
  - Presentation errors – failure to locate and properly act upon desired information in screens, selection errors due to labeling ambiguities.
  - Control usage problems – improper toolbar or entry field usage.
- Test the application or web site under controlled conditions with representative users. The tests will prove whether newly added features provide the support they are intended to for new audiences and continue to uphold the status of the brand.
- Use previous end user test results as the baseline for this round of testing which seeks to expand on past data with more diverse users and new features.

Business Case

Slack is choosing to implement this round of end user testing on the newest version of their app at this pivotal point in their business plan. Expanding to new regions with new needs and challenges requires assessment of the interface as it stands for the developers to know what functions need to be added or altered in order to cater to a wider range of users. If end user testing were to be ignored at this stage of

business growth there could be serious consequences to expansion and therefore a loss of revenue, customer loyalty and satisfaction, and wasted time and resources.

Methodology

The test will be conducted remotely. Our team will be stationed in a sound insulated room with computers and notetaking devices to record each session. The team will include a translator if possible and applicable. Otherwise, the session will be translated after completion. We will use a screen controlling application to share our current Slack version with the participant and request them to use a webcam with audio during the test so that we can record their feedback. Our team will only share our audio with the participant. We will request the participant to similarly be in a quiet space for the duration of the test for quality control purposes.

Participants

The participants chosen will all be of professional age (18-55) and currently working in a business environment that facilitates team communication or requires collaboration. The goal is to sample a diverse set of business sizes as well as fields of work, so the participants are not limited to any one set of expertise.
Slack would like to get representation from all target regions for expansion and is therefore dividing their target participants into professionals from:
1. Southeast Asia
2. East Asia
3. Middle East
4. Eastern Europe
The goal is to have 3-5 participants from each of these regions.

The testing will occur within a two-week period from January 1-14th at different times of day depending on where the remote user is located. The participant's responsibility is to complete a set of tasks on the interface while describing their thought process out loud and to participate in a debriefing questionnaire after all tasks have been completed. The participant will be encouraged to give their honest thoughts on the Slack interface throughout the process.

Participants will be recruited for this study through outreach to various businesses of a variety of backgrounds in the target regions. Those who are interested in participating from those businesses will be put in direct contact with our team in order to set up times and facilities for the test. The participants require no background knowledge of the interface but should regularly use a computer in their day-to-day activities and interact with their colleagues virtually (though email, intranet, or other slack competitor platforms).

Procedure

Participants will take part in the usability test via remote screen-sharing technology. The participant will be seated at their workstation in their work environment. Visual and verbal communications will be supplemented with a webcam that includes audio feed.

The facilitator will describe the platform being tested and the purpose of this set of user testing. The participants will then be reminded that it is purely a test of the interface and not a test of their skills.

Participants will complete a pretest demographic and background information questionnaire including information about their region, culture, language, and business. The participant will digitally sign their given consent agreement after they have been given time to read it. The session will begin after the participant has no further questions.

Introductory questionnaire questions are as follows:
1. What is your country of origin and current country of residence?
2. What professional field do you work in?
3. What is your primary language? What other (if any) languages do you know?
4. What gender do you identify with?

The facilitator will instruct the participant to read aloud the task description from the printed copy they have been given beforehand and begin the task. Time-on-task measures will begin. The facilitator will encourage the participants to 'think aloud' and remind them that a verbal record will exist of the interaction. The team will observe and enter user behavior and comments and log them for later use.

After all tasks have been attempted, the participant will complete a post-test satisfaction questionnaire and elaborate on their experience with completing the tasks.

Post-task questionnaire questions are as follows:
1. Do you feel that you successfully completed all the tasks on the task sheet?
2. What features (if any) seemed to be missing from the Slack interface?
3. What features (if any) would you add to the Slack interface if given the opportunity?
4. My overall impression of the Slack interface is ____
5. Would you consider using Slack for your professional needs as it exists currently?
6. Do you have any further comments or questions about Slack or this Usability test?
7. Would you be interested in participating in another usability test with our team in the future?

Roles

Facilitator
- Provides overview of study to participants
- Defines usability and purpose of usability testing to participants
- Assists in conduct of participant and observer debriefing sessions
- Responds to participant's requests for assistance

Data Logger
- Records participant's actions and comments

Translator
- Helps to real-time clarify communication between the test participant and the facilitator
- Changes depending on the region of the test participant
- Helps to transcribe the audio feed after test completion for reference by English speakers

Test Observers
- Members of the design and development team

- Investors
- Management and VP's
- Observers change depending on the date and time that they are available

Test Participants
- The representative user who is completing the tasks and questionnaires

Usability Tasks

In order to effectively test the interface, the participant will create a Slack account and be invited to join an already existing slack workspace that has been setup specifically for the purpose of this test. This means that the Slack workspace that the participant joins will have members, a channel, and preloaded messages that the participant will navigate throughout the tasks in order to give an accurate feeling to the situations. The pre-loaded Slack workspace and channels will be the same for all participants and will be generic enough in content to not prioritize one field of work over another.

The test will begin on the participant's email account that they will be prompted to log in to and wait for the first task to commence. The following tasks will be followed in the order that they're outlined and read to the participant using exact language as written.

1. In order to use Slack, one has to be invited to a workspace or create their own. As an employee, it is more common to be invited to a workspace, so the participant should be able to onboard onto the pre-loaded workspace that has been created as a first step to using Slack. The task given to the participant is as follows:
   "You have been invited by a colleague to join a new workspace for a project that you have been added to at work. Find the email notification you have been sent for an invitation to join a workspace entitled 'slack user test' and join the workspace."

2. Channels are the fundamental points of communication within a workspace for specific topics of conversation. It is common for channels to be added and is an important task for the participant to understand how to add channels themselves. The task gives details as to who to add and what to name it in order to make it a realistic experience. The task given to the participant is as follows:
   "Within your new workspace you decide that there needs to be a channel called 'fruits' added. Create a new channel and add the members 'John Deere,' 'Martha Stewart,' 'Pedro Metola' and 'Julia Roberts' making sure that the new channel you are creating is private."

3. The following tasks become more specialized or niche to different business practices but are important features that the slack interface has to help streamline workflow. Changing information based on location and work status is key to flexibility and efficiency of use. The task given to the participant is as follows:
   "You are on a business trip and discover that your Slack account is no longer syncing up in time with your colleagues. You need to show them that you are travelling and are currently unreachable. Change your time zone to (UTC- 03:00 Brasilia) and then change your status to show that you are travelling."

4. Slack wants to make sure that its various app features are clear to the participants as they are more hidden within the interface. The poll described in the task is one of the most commonly used. The task given to the participant is as follows:
   "You need to create a poll in your new 'fruits' channel to your colleagues to ask for their opinions. Create a poll with the different options as various types of fruits."

5. The purpose of this task is to see if participants can easily discern ways that Slack has tried to streamline workflow and provide shortcuts for users. With potentially thousands of messages to search through over months or years, findability within a reasonable timeframe is key. The task given to the participant is as follows:
   "You need to find a message that your colleague John sent about a month ago in the "nuts" channel that was about a client meeting with 'Martha' on March the 1st, 2017. Find the message in question as efficiently as possible."

Usability Metrics

Usability metrics refers to user performance measured against specific performance goals necessary to satisfy usability requirements. Scenario completion success rates, participant following closely to given dialog scripts, error rates, and subjective evaluations will be used. Time-to-completion of scenarios will also be collected.

The metrics to be counted during the tasks are:
1. Completion time
2. Number of times the participant backtracked to a previous page or had to start a task over
   a. This accounts for the number of errors
3. Completion of the task
   a. Either as a success, partial success, or failure
   b. The tasks end when there is a successful completion, the facilitator asks the participant to stop, or when the participant gives up and requests to be finished with the task.

The metrics to be counted after the task are:
1. Suggestions by user for improvement
2. User stated (subjective) satisfaction in the post-task questionnaire

Reporting Results

The Usability Test Report will be provided at the conclusion of the usability test. It will consist of a report and/or a presentation of the results; evaluate the usability metrics against the pre-approved goals, subjective evaluations, and specific usability problems and recommendations for resolution