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THE UX INSIGHTS COMPANY

When **Unmoderated Remote Usability Testing** is the Best Choice

Contents

Unmoderated remote usability testing (URUT) has grown a lot in recent years and has become a choice of many UX professionals. Despite the cumbersome name, URUT is a low cost and effective technique for collecting task based usability data.

In the 2009 UPA Survey, which gathers salary and other job-related information from UPA members, 18% of respondents reported using unmoderated remote testing. The results showed **the growth of this research method of around 28%** (and it wasn't even listed as a research method in 2007).

According to the recent 2011 UPA Survey, the number of UX Professionals who use URUT has increased to 23%.

Thus, unmoderated remote usability testing is here to stay. The proof is in the increased interest from the UX community and the explosion of remote usability tools.

A few other highlights from the 2011 UPA Survey:

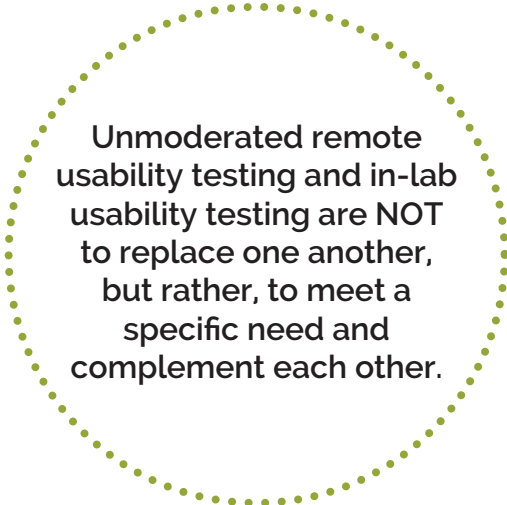| 82%	52%	50%	23%
of UX Professionals use SOME sort of usability testing (lab, unmoderated, moderated, heuristic, etc.)	are conducting testing in a lab	are conducting remote, moderated testing	are conducting remote, unmoderated testing

Until recently, when we talked about usability testing, we meant labs with a team of researchers observing users completing predesigned tasks. Even though lab usability testing is a great research method, it's not always feasible.

What if you need to conduct a usability testing with people from different countries? Or, what if you need to quantify your research? In such cases, remote usability testing is a more viable option.

To understand the difference between the two methods and the value in adding URUT to your research methods toolkit, let's first break apart each method at a high level and understand the value each brings to the table.

Unmoderated remote usability testing and in-lab usability testing are NOT to replace one another, but rather, to meet a specific need and complement each other.

In-lab Usability Testing

In a traditional lab-based research study, between 6-10 participants (varying according to needs and perspective) are brought into a "lab" environment to run through a series of tasks. Participants work on a pre-configured PC or Mac in a pre-configured environment, while being observed in a separate room either via a monitor or through a one-way mirror. During the study, participants are given tasks and asked to perform them with a researcher sitting next to them or in the other room. If using a think aloud protocol, participants are asked to express their thoughts out loud and the researcher can probe or ask further questions while the participants are walking through their task and after. Alternatively, in order to gauge the time spent on the task, participants can walk through their task with no interruptions, and questions can be left for probing after the task or after the study. There are variations to this method; however, we are defining the method in its most traditionally used form.

What's the value?

The value in this method comes from being able to probe users while they are walking through their tasks, gathering visual cues that include facial expression and body language, providing assists to stumped participants, and being able to change your question set or tasks mid-way through your research study. There are many other benefits depending on the variations of the method.

Unmoderated Remote Usability Testing (URUT)

In URUT, hundreds of participants simultaneously participate in a study from their own computer and in their own environment. During the study, participants are provided tasks by the URUT tool and are asked to walk through the tasks as they normally would. The participants are then asked to provide feedback after the task completion via likert scale, open-ended, multiple-choice and single-choice questions (just to name a few). Participants act and respond naturally as they are participating in their own time and when it is convenient for them. Participants are given the tasks in the same format and in the same manner - virtually eliminating moderator bias.

What's the value?

The value in this method is the ability to have participants participate from their natural context, to have a cross-representation of population across the country or internationally, and being able to gather statistically significant data. Additionally, URUT is a very cost-effective research method.

Value to a researcher

- Unmoderated remote usability testing tools aggregate usability metrics that can be downloaded to a variety of file formats, such as PowerPoint, Word, Excel etc.

- Get feedback on short tasks or small changes that may be an overkill to test in a lab.

- Collect quantititave data to convince the executive staff.

These are just a few of the important benefits; there are many more according to the specific type of URUT that you are undertaking.

In outlining the differences and values in each method, you can see that one is not supposed to replace the other. Rather, each method meets a specific need and complements the other. Now that we understand the differences between and the value in each method, we are ready to explore why and when to use URUT to gain the most value and benefit for your research.

So, when would you use unmoderated remote usability testing for your research?

To collect data quickly and efficiently

To quantify usability

To get the right participants

To conduct studies on a limited budget

To compare designs

To identify the areas of a website that need the most improvement

To conduct competitive benchmark studies

To test users in their natural context

To understand user behavior

To validate or define your lab-based research

To test internationally without travelling

1. To collect data quickly and efficiently

In an ideal world, you have weeks of time to prepare for your research and to recruit the participants. However, in reality, this is not always the case. Sometimes design teams want to get feedback on the prototypes they are working on in a matter of days.

With a lab study, you need at least a couple of weeks to prepare. It takes time to find the right participants who can come to your location. In addition, you need to spend a couple of days in the lab.

With remote usability testing, you can set up a study within a couple of hours. Once the study is ready, all you need to do is to send a web-link to your participants.

This research method is especially valuable when you work on an agile timeline. Scrum/agile teams use this method because researchers can obtain feedback from a sample of participants, pause the study, analyze the results, iterate the designs, resume the study and repeat the process until the team is satisfied with the design.

2. To quantify usability

Usability professionals generally agree that for usability testing, you don't need large samples of users to identify most design flaws. However, this is not the case when it comes to measuring, benchmarking, and using metrics and key performance indicators to make solid strategic decisions.

With URUT, you can test large samples of geographically dispersed audiences. While users perform tasks, the software collects several kinds of UX data, including effectiveness ratios (the percentage of users able to complete the tasks successfully), efficiency ratios (time, number of clicks, and problems encountered), and satisfaction ratios (how users feel about the interactive experience). On top of these measures, you can collect click streams, the navigation paths chosen to complete tasks, and heatmaps.

After hearing a qualitative usability study presentation from the marketing team of one major international airline, the marketing director said, "We just can't make this kind of decision [redesigning the flight search and check-out process] based exclusively on research with just ten users. We'd need to combine it with quantitative data and test it with at least 250 users or so." He also added, "I'd like to see some industry benchmarks, both for the current website design and for the future version we'll be launching. So for this, I'd need to quantify usability and see if we are doing good or bad compared to the industry standards." He did not feel comfortable going up to the CEO to request a redesign budget based on evidence from a small sample of users.

3. To get the right participants

Imagine the following scenario: you need to recruit 100 people who own a parrot, who buy parrot food online, and who have never visited your website before. Remote usability testing enables you to recruit anyone who has access to the Internet. It is easy to recruit 6 – 12 people (varying according to your needs) for a lab study; however, when you need to recruit large numbers of participants, it is a lot easier to do it online.

When recruiting participants online, you have the following options:

- Intercept real visitors from your site
- Email an invite link to your private mailing list
- Recruit from a panel
- Post a link to your study on social media sites

4. To conduct studies on a limited budget

In-lab testing is expensive. Participants are typically paid at least $100 for undertaking the study. Also, lab moderators need to be paid for several hours of work.

With remote usability testing, you can test at a much lower cost. There is no need to travel and to oversee the participants, and user reimbursements are typically much lower.

Additionally, multiple research projects can be conducted simultaneously by one researcher versus needing a team of researchers.

One of UserZoom's customers presented a "**URUT vs. Lab Testing**" case study on the "**How to Conduct Remote Usability Testing**" webinar. Main points highlighted in the case study were:

- **Cost Efficiency**
  - Unmoderated testing can cost 50% less than traditional moderated testing (primiraly due to reduction in effort hours spent in a lab)

- **Timeline**
  - Reduced the 3 week lead time for recruiting to less than 1 week

- **Validation Testing**
  - Retest within days, instead of weeks
  - Moderated test: 180 hours vs. Unmoderated test: 40 hours
  - Remote Unmoderated Testing performed for 20% the cost of benchmark
    - Test 1 (Moderated) = $10,000
    - Test 2 (Unmoderated)   = $2000

- **Improved Confidence Intervals**

5. To compare designs

When you have more than one design alternative, you should let users decide which one is better. Sometimes you might think that the choice is obvious, but users might not agree. It is hard to argue with hundreds of participants who clearly indicate which design they like better.

You can also test wireframes and protototypes using URUT. It is important to test your prototypes with real users, as it is the point in time when critical design decisions set the stage for all that will follow. Most likely, you will want to do all the testing quickly and cost--effectively at this stage, and URUT gives you that flexibility.

6. To identify the areas of a website that need the most improvement

Task success rates and completion times will often reveal the areas of a website that visitors have the most difficulty with.

A traditional lab study can also help identify issues with a website. However, with a small number of participants, it is hard to know the magnitude of the problem.

Competitive user experience benchmarking is the process of comparing your website's performance to that of your competitors' websites. In user experience benchmarking, a website's performance is judged using various user experience metrics such as efficiency, effectiveness, and satisfaction. The practice of user experience benchmarking is excellent for determining how your website stacks up against the competition.

By utilizing statistically significant quantitative data, which can be easily achieved with remote usability testing, you can determine the relative quality of your website and the areas for improvement.

You can also conduct benchmark studies to obtain statistically significant usability metrics on how a website performs vs. the other versions of the site.

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your company
competitor 1
competitor 2
competitor 3

Look & Feel   Organization   Clarity   Brand Perception

8. To test users in their natural context

Testing participants in their natural context accounts for different systems, configurations, and setups. Since participants are not being observed, the data you gather not only accounts for a mix of these various environments and setups, but also encourages participants to act as they normally would.

When participants are in a lab, they have to complete the study on a preconfigured computer. This computer and its configuration can be totally different from what they have at home.

9. To understand user behavior

You want to understand why users come to your site and what they do once they come there. Remote usability testing uses a combination of web analytics (where users go) and surveys (why they go there) to create a complete picture of the user behavior. This data is valuable for you in designing the best user experience for your site.
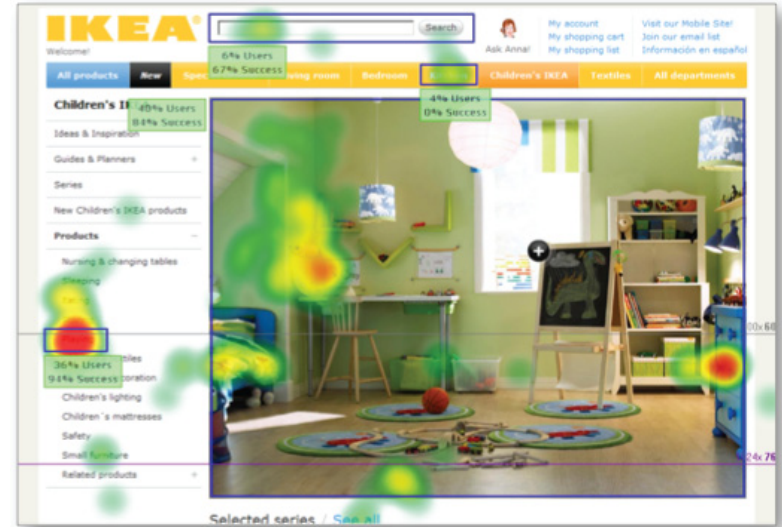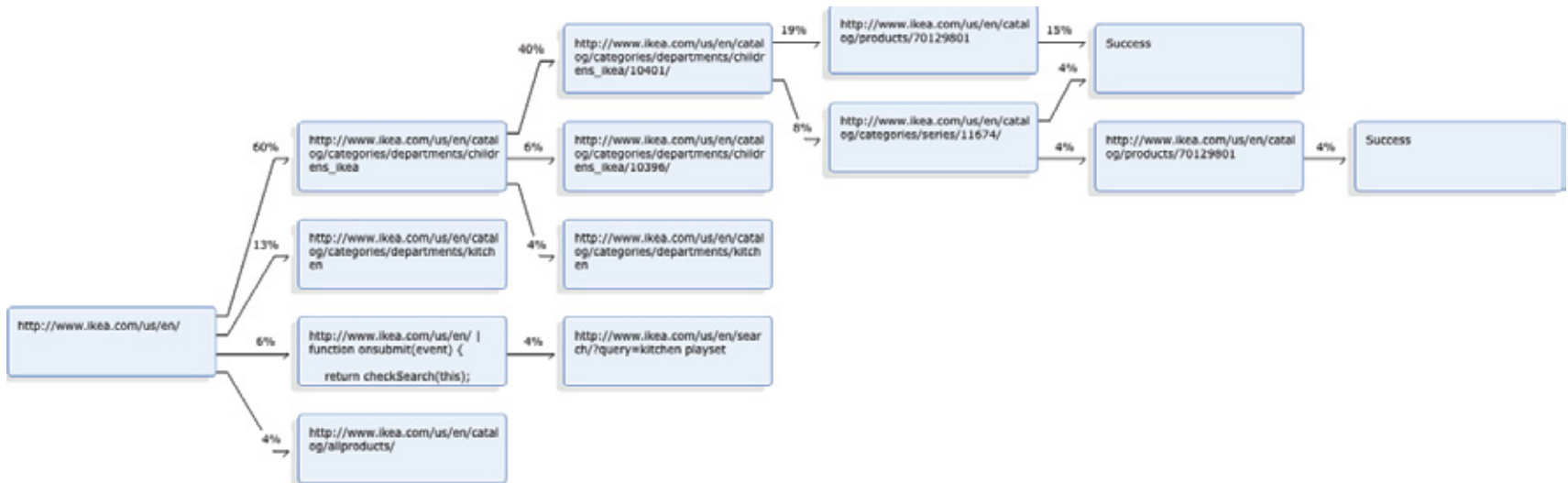

Figure 1. Heatmap

Figure 2. Clickstream

10. To validate or define your lab-based research

Have you ever presented findings from a lab usability test only to receive push back on the data, because only 5–10 people participated in your study? Sometimes, you need greater numbers to give stakeholders the warm-and-fuzzy feeling they need to make million-dollar design decisions. URUT allows you to ensure that the research you are currently conducting is valid and is a true representation of reality.

11. To test internationally without travelling

International research is very expensive and at times put aside due to the cost and the time commitment. URUT allows you the flexibility to conduct a study in many international locations without taking a step out of your home. It removes the barriers that have traditionally impeded this very critical research.

To summarize, user experience design is critical in today's highly competitive online marketplace. This is driving user experience designers, researchers, and marketers to focus on the customer and their online experience. There is a need to gather more concrete statistical and geographical data which can be readily obtained through remote research methods.

About **UserZoom**

UserZoom is the #1 platform for cost-effective and agile usability testing and user experience analytics. We offer a worry-free, all-in-one solution: software + services + recruitment.

1 Software Platform

Unmoderated Remote Usability Testing

✔ Live Web & Mobile Task-based Surveys
✔ UX Benchmarking
✔ Competitive Research
✔ International Research

Information Architecture & Design Validation

✔ Card Sorting
✔ Tree Testing
✔ Click Testing
✔ Prototype Testing

CX Measurement / VOC

✔ Live Web & Mobile True Intent Studies (Intercepts)
✔ Online Surveys
✔ Web Analytics Integration

2 UX Research Services

Our UX Research Team ensures your success:

1. Strategizing
2. Initial training & support
3. Setting up studies
4. Managing all recruiting tasks
5. Launching, monitoring
6. Analyzing results, reporting

3 Recruiting Solutions

We recruit in 3 ways:

1. Using a Panel
✔ Strict quality controls
✔ National and international reach
2. Customized invitation layer
✔ Intercept studies
3. Invitation links
✔ Private email list
✔ Social media

Software Platform **1**
UX Research Services **2**
Recruiting Solutions **3**

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The best way to understand the power of UserZoom is to see it for yourself

Request a Free Demo

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