A Usable Moveable Feast: Usability and the Mobile Library Website

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- Provincial university
- 12,000 students
- 12 faculties
- Active research programs
- Two campuses
- Four libraries – one website
Mobile Landscape

• Mobile devices are becoming ubiquitous
• Nearly 4 billion subscribers worldwide (Horizon Report)
• Over 90% of Americans aged 18-29 have a mobile phone (Hu and Meier)
• Mobile cellular has been the most rapidly adopted technology in history (World in 2009)
• The evidence surrounds us on our campuses
Mobile Web Group

• Commitment to working collaboratively
• Culture of usability testing becoming entrenched
• Small(ish) group brings together relevant expertise: Services, Systems, Assessment, Branch perspective
• Meet as needed
• Reports to Web & eResources Committee
Survey: Method

- Brief web-based survey
- Invitation sent to all students
- Open for three weeks
- No incentives
Survey: Response

• Encouragement offered
  – “an excellent idea”
  – “even basic options would make a good start”
  – “this is a ‘must do’ thing”

• Nearly half the respondents were grad students

• More grad students than undergraduates owned smartphones
Survey: Devices

Current Device
- Smartphone, 45%
- Cell Phone, 39%
- Other, 16%

Next Purchase (<2yrs)
- Smartphone, 85%
- Other, 8%
- Cell; 7%
Survey: Mobile Web Use

How often do you access the mobile web?

- Daily: [Bar Chart]
- 2-3 x weekly: [Bar Chart]
- 2-3 x monthly: [Bar Chart]
- Rarely: [Bar Chart]
- Never: [Bar Chart]
Survey: Services of Interest

If available, how likely would you be to use...

- Library Notices
- Library Hours
- Contact Information
- Search for Articles
- Campus/Library Maps
- Catalogue

![Bar Chart]

[Values: 30 40 50 60 70]
Prototype Development

• Focus on common devices
• Limited number of resources and services:
  – Hours
  – Locations
  – Contacts and Help
  – Mobile databases
    • Web and apps
Mobile Usability Factors

• “It is neither easy nor pleasant to use the Web on mobile devices” (Nielsen, 2010)
• Mobile is a different (not smaller) web
  – Design, don’t scale, for mobile (Fling, 2009)
• Variety of mobile devices / capabilities
• Context is critical to understanding
  – Locations, network limitations
  – Usable does not equal useful
Test Design

• Two part test design
  – Off-site (independent) test and questionnaire
    • Intended to capture an element of context
    • Prompt users to think about use in situ
  – On-site (observed) test and interview
    • “Traditional” usability testing
    • Debriefing interview

• Graduate students (8)
  – Personally owned devices
Off-Site (Independent) Testing

- Unobserved
- URL provided to testers in advance
- Prompted to visit at a mobile location
- Questionnaire (web based)
  - Location
  - Technical difficulties
  - “What’s missing?”
- Prep for the visit
Off-Site Experiences

• On campus, home, work
• Expectations
  – Location information
    • Hours, maps, contacts
  – Search
    • absence of the catalogue noted
    • some technical issues with database access
On-Site Testing

- Scheduled < 1 week after off-site test
- Personal devices, personal preferences
- Six tasks
  - Location information (maps and hours)
  - Contact information (help and directory)
  - Search and access
- Debrief interview
  - Challenges
  - Accessing scholarly content
On-Site Testing: Recording
Findings: Interaction

• Network Preferences:
  – Most used mobile carrier’s network
  – Cost a factor for some

• Text:
  – Short text entry not problematic
    • Search queries, IM
  – Long passwords not fun
Findings: Structure

• Simple structure
• Limited choices
• Immediate need
Findings: Communication

- Clearly label or contextualize links
- Flexible communication options
Findings: Search and Access

• Strong interest in search (cat & db)
• Low interest in extended reading
• Variables affecting experience
  – Authentication
  – Large files
  – Applications
• An app for that?
Moving Forward

- Continued focus on “web”
- Extending support
- Testing
  - Undergrads
  - Field testing
    • Catalogue
- Strategize for the mobile web
Thank You!

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