

Case study

Website usability testing for Kingston University



Kingston
University
London





Business and Enterprise Centre benefits from usability testing insights

Kingston University is a large educational establishment in South West London, with origins dating back to 1899. In addition to serving a community of around 20,000 students, it offers a variety of business services through its Business and Enterprise Centre.

The university's business services include consultancy and professional development opportunities, marketed primarily through two microsites. In tandem with an internal restructure and a renewed focus on digital marketing strategy, the university approached us to provide usability testing insights, specifically to help optimise its two business facing microsites.

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Georgina Cox, Business Engagement and Marketing Manager, Kingston University





The challenge

As Business Engagement and Marketing Manager, Georgina Cox is part of a team charged with generating income for the university, through the provision of services and courses to businesses and other commercial customers.

As she says, this can be a challenge when the university's main website reflects its primary focus on undergraduate recruitment, rather than being geared to a business audience.

Our main objective was to test the usability of Kingston University's 'Services for Business' and 'Short-courses' microsites, including identifying any factors likely to impact sign-up.

Research questions included looking at key website pages and user journeys to evaluate whether:

- participants could successfully navigate, find information and complete specific activities
- participants experience any difficulties
- the content and instructions were understood
- the language and terminology were appropriate for the audience.



Key considerations

Our work was part of a wider review by Kingston University that included an SEO audit, and competitor benchmarking.

While it had not previously undertaken usability testing on the two microsites, the client team

was enthusiastic about the process, and keen to get involved with and learn from it. With these factors and budgetary considerations in mind, our experienced UX consultants devised a fast and cost-effective approach that would deliver qualitative insights to inform the web team's work.

What we did

We agreed a rapid round of one-to-one usability testing, with simultaneous live note taking to involve the client team. The methodology involved a scenario-based usability testing approach with the 'think-aloud' protocol.

Georgina Cox comments, "I thought the consultants were very good. All the preparation was very well explained, and they were very communicative. They came over here for a pre-meeting which was very useful, and were very happy to answer our questions."

Recruiting appropriate participants is a vital stage of the user testing process. We established clear target criteria with the university, then recruited

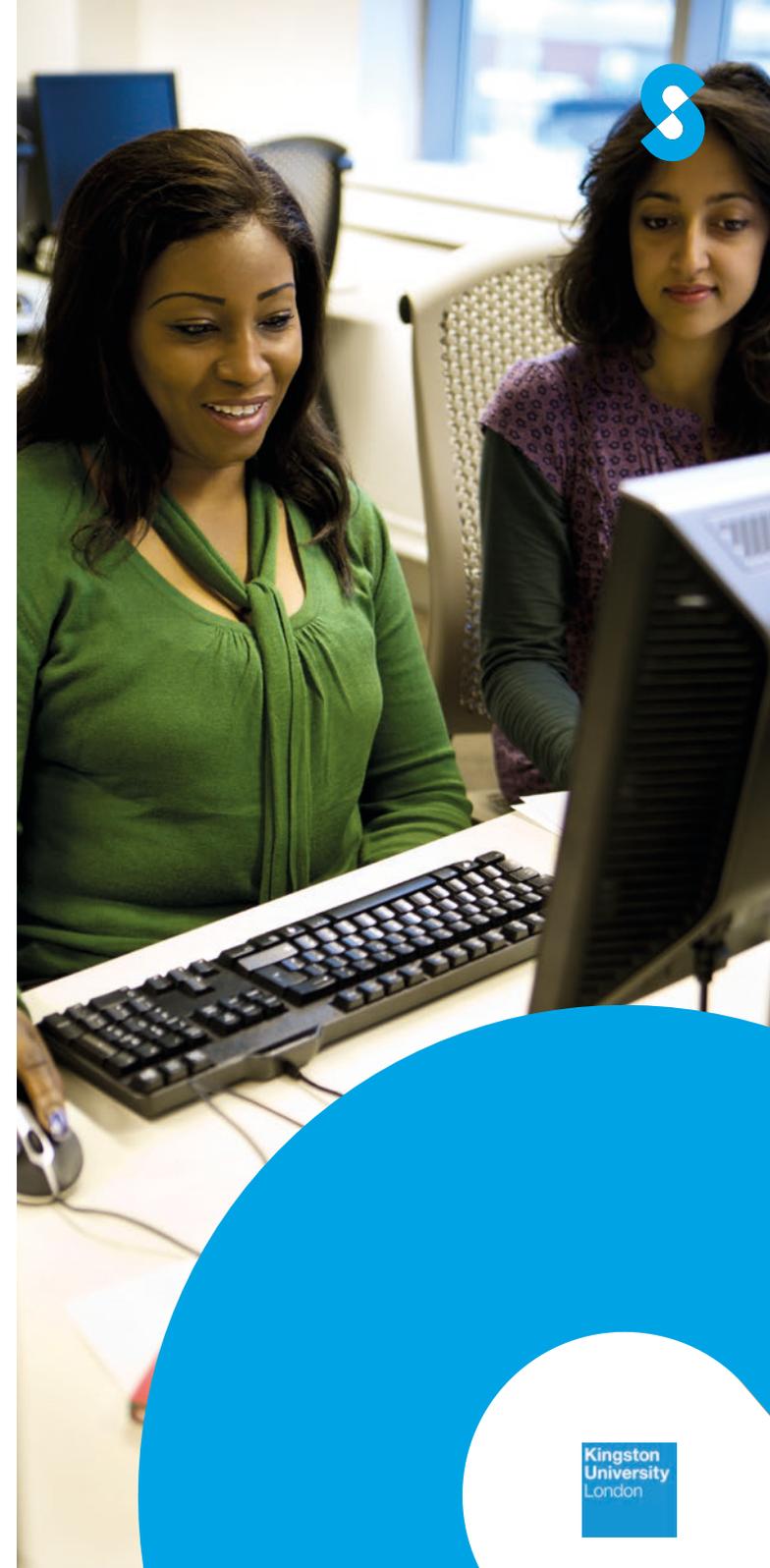
4 participants. In broad terms, these were business users with budget for and an interest in business courses or support.

We ran the four one hour testing sessions over the course of a day. One of our researchers moderated the sessions, while another facilitated simultaneous live note taking with Georgina and her colleagues.

Immediately after the four sessions were completed, our consultants ran a collaborative analysis workshop and debrief with the Kingston team. We went through the findings, discussing priorities and potential solutions.

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Benefits

“The user testing gave us the evidence to be able to go back to the web team and make a solid case for the changes we were advocating,” comments Georgina Cox.

By way of example, she cites university staff requesting the inclusion of long text sections on the website. The user testing showed conclusively that site users were not reading lengthy content – instead wanting to know very briefly what was on offer, and how to make contact.

The research also showed that people couldn’t find the university’s case studies easily enough, endorsing a point Georgina had already suspected, and also highlighted the need to

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avoid academic language. She says, “Occasionally jargon and technical language can creep into our communication, and this was instantly rejected by our business users.”

Observing user testing first hand

“Observing the user testing sessions first hand was a really interesting experience. The consultant came back into the room after each session – it was great to have that time working with a specialist who was completely dedicated to our project,” says Georgina.

She also found it valuable that the discussions from the workshop were directly reflected in our written follow-up, commenting, “The report was comprehensive and very clear, with screenshots covering everything we’d talked about. That made it easy for us to go over everything and prioritise recommendations.”

Powerful surprises

Georgina sees it as vitally important to gain feedback from users, concluding, “When you work in a large organisation, you need external evidence to be able to sell-in ideas to colleagues. Even when you think you know your audience, there is such value in actually testing your understanding with real users... it can throw up a few surprises!”

Could your business benefit from expert UX insights?

For friendly advice on how we can help
your business, just get in touch.

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