

## The 5 reasons why people don't user test



**“Wow – When I built it I didn't really see it from that point of view. I've got a bit of re-work to do I think.”**

These are the words of a developer that watched me use a piece of software he'd produced just a couple of days ago. It was a great piece of software. It did exactly what I wanted, but I tripped over several times when using it for the first time to get the job done.

At Platform Action we are strong advocates of user testing as part of the product development cycle and can help your organisation understand its benefits and get started on a path of enlightenment.

Watching users sit and scratch their heads at your beautiful creation can be a frightening and frustrating thing. All that work can appear to be unappreciated and there can be feelings of dread that you've made some terrible mistake. In fact, most of the time the product is a perfectly good solution to a well-defined problem, but if it's clunky to use it will never reach its potential as users will

gravitate to the lowest-friction solution.

Getting direct experience of the difficulties that users will encounter is the quickest way to find a solution that they will be happy to stick with long term.

User testing is a very simple process, whereby users or potential users of your product are brought into a controlled environment so that you can watch how they interact with it. It's well known by experienced practitioners of user testing that the benefits of doing it are so great and so rewarding that once you're a convert, there's nothing that will stop you continuing.

So why don't people adopt user testing?



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# Here are the TOP FIVE REASONS:

## 1) We haven't built it yet

### **"How can we test what doesn't exist?"**

Some of the best user tests I've done have been on a sheet of A4 with a pen and a bit of imagination.

I've found that the rougher the sketch, the more input I can get. I wonder if test subjects feel that the more unfinished a solution looks, the more likely I am to listen to their input. If I'm drawing a button on the page, they might think to offer up: "Why not put it there instead?" whereas once the button exists on a screen – even a prototype, they might not venture to believe it's moveable.



I've used various techniques to simulate interactions:

- Laying sheets of paper over each other to show different screen states;
- Cutting out paper controls and moving them around on the paper;
- Using a whiteboard and a dry-wipe marker;

While both you and the test subject might have to get a bit creative, and the engagement of the subject can be more variable, the investment required to get to a test is almost negligible. You could afford to perform a hundred tests for the same cost as building a single screen that fails to help the customer reach their goal.

## 2) We can do it later

### **"We're focussing on delivering the first version, then we'll test it."**

Yes you can. But let me tell you that the longer you wait, the harder the fall when you realise that your shiny new system is confusing the hell out of your actual users. In fact such is the strength of my advocacy of user testing it's possible that the very image I paint of watching users struggle, give up and say why they'd use a competitor's product is too painful to countenance, let alone admit to a superior.

Note to self: The feeling of watching users get the job done on a solution you've built is a truly wonderful thing. Talk about that more...

## 3) It's too expensive

### **"We don't have the budget (or the time) to user test right now."**

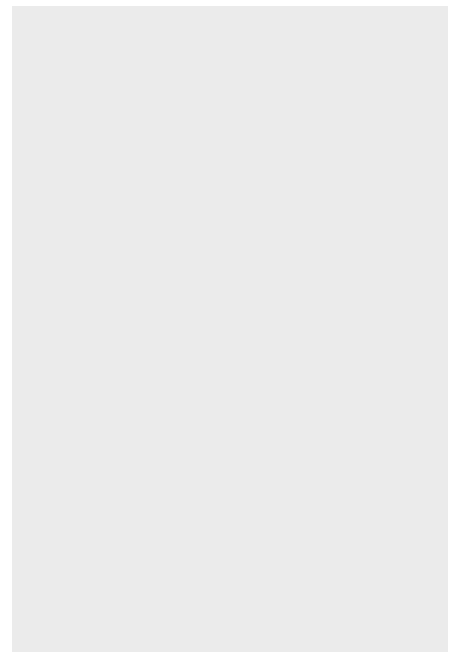
I've visited some very well-equipped CX labs. Recently I held an all-day workshop for a client in theirs because it wasn't being used. The books say you need one small, quiet space with a desk and two chairs. Then they start talking about video hook-ups and an adjacent room with a theatre set-up and a place for the team to gather and watch together.

When you add that all up, including the time for the whole team, it does start to sound expensive, but in reality I've rarely been in a situation where things go the same way as the books. That's not to say

all those things aren't wonderful tools if you can afford them, it's just that you can do a whole load of experimentation with what works for you before you have to spend anything like that sort of money.

Some inexpensive software, a spare desk (in a quiet space) and a regular commitment to a small amount of time is all it really takes. The benefits almost always outweigh the costs in terms of a more usable product. The tangible benefits come in customer retention and advocacy. Products that reduce customer work are very sticky.

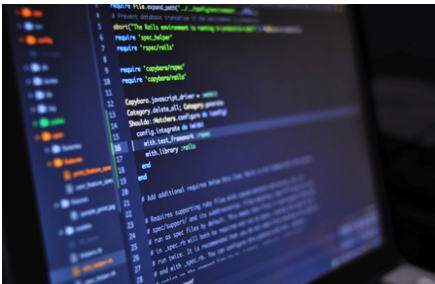
It is great when the whole team can get together to watch regular user testing sessions. Making it a team sport ensures that everyone is focussed on the goal of getting users over those hurdles and through to the conclusion of that journey right now. It is amazing how the corporate red tape opens up when everybody is embarrassed by the same problem. However, teams are expensive things and it is possible to start a very insightful and effective user testing operation with good use of screen recording and strong advocacy within the team. Management buy-in is good enough if you can't get them to actually show up. But do get them to sit down and watch a few video highlights with you!



4) Our developers are doing it

**"We've outsourced that to our developers. I don't know if they do it or not."**

I love those documentary series where the exec returns to the shop floor to see why the business is failing. They always sit in wonder at how can they have become so separated from the reality of the coal-face. As a product owner, watching your customers interact with your products and your team will really focus your decision-making on where it counts. After all, shouldn't the people who are deciding what products to make and improve have a full understanding of how those products are being used?



Very often, customers will use your product in unpredictable ways. They will try to achieve things that you hadn't envisaged, fail to achieve things you thought were obvious and completely miss features that cost the earth to put in. That feedback loop is vital to you as the owner of the product and/or proposition and should not be wasted on somebody that is insulated from the commercial decision making.

5) It's not a priority

**"Look, we'd love to, but we have such a lot of things we need to do right now we don't have capacity."**

I find it incredible the amount of times I hear this. "The experience our customers have when using our products is not our priority right now." Just think about how stupid that sounds.

Believing that if we build it, the experience will take care of itself, or that if we get it wrong we can fix it easily later and the customers will be okay in the meantime is either arrogant or foolhardy. It's a big gamble to take the approach that we'll definitely be able to put things right in a timely fashion once we've gone live with a product. It's an even bigger gamble that our early customers will stay around while we fix things rather than head to the hills spreading horror stories about our hard work.

If you've heard or used these excuses in your organisation and would like to learn more about the benefits of user testing and how to get it established, reach out to Platform Action and we would be glad to help you realise the benefits.