Chapter XII

Remote Usability Evaluation of Web Interfaces

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ABSTRACT

Usability testing is a process that employs a sample of future users to evaluate software according to specific usability criteria. With the unprecedented growth and reach of the Internet, it is hard to reach representative users of Web sites across the world. The new branch of remote usability testing has emerged as an alternative. While it is prohibitively expensive to conduct usability testing on a global range of users, it is technically possible and is more feasible to remotely collect the necessary information about usability problems and to analyze them the same way we do local tests. In this chapter, we present systematic methods and tools to support remote usability testing and evaluation of Web interfaces.

INTRODUCTION

Before launching a Web site on the Internet, one should test and validate it in order to ensure that the software fulfills the criteria defined in the requirements stage. The costs and the benefits of usability tests are largely demonstrated by the human-computer interaction (HCI) community (Karat, 1990; Pressman, 1992). Therefore, different types of usability
Remote Usability Testing

Remote usability tests can be defined as the usability tests where the testers performing observation and analysis are separated in space and/or time from the participants (Hartson, Castillo, Kelso, Kamler, & Neale, 1996). One of the undeniable advantages of remote usability testing is the fact that it is a cost-effective solution; it enables testing a large panel of participants in their own environment by remotely located testers and observers. In addition to identifying major usability problems similar to those found in traditional lab testing, remote tests uncover more problems because of the larger number of test participants (Tullis, Flieschman, McNulty, Cianchette, & Bergel, 2002a).

The emphasis of this chapter is on systematic methods and tools to support remote usability testing and evaluation of Web interfaces. It also presents the advantages and limitations associated with the different infrastructures for conducting usability testing (Moha
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