

GLOSSARY

User Research

User research is a process of gathering information about users, their needs, behaviours, and preferences to inform the design of products, services, or experiences.

There are a range of user research approaches that are suited to different situations and objectives. The primary goal of user research is to gain a deep understanding of the target audience so that designers, developers, and other stakeholders can create solutions and strategies that meet user needs and expectations effectively.

Why it's important to understand user research terminology

- **Understanding user needs:** User research uncovers the specific needs, goals, and pain points of your target audience. Understanding these factors is crucial for addressing real user problems and providing true value to the people you want to reach.
- **Improving usability:** Issues using a website or service can frustrate users and lead them to distrust or leave your organisation. User research helps identify and address usability issues. It can also give you the insights into how disabled or disadvantaged users experience your website or service, which can be crucial for many charities.
- **Increasing engagement and satisfaction:** Understanding the motivations and behaviours of your target audience allows you to design features and interfaces that encourage them to engage with you. Aligning with user expectations and needs tends to result in higher user satisfaction. Satisfied users are more likely to become loyal advocates for your charity.
- **Minimising risk:** By conducting research early and regularly, you can identify and address issues before they become costly problems. This helps minimise the risk of using an approach or implementing a strategy that doesn't resonate with users. It helps you to prioritise services or features based on what your audience actually want or need.

User research is a fundamental part of any product or service (digital or not), helping your charity make informed decisions, create services and websites that resonate with users, and ultimately achieve your charitable goals. This investment in understanding and serving users not only leads to greater satisfaction and loyalty but also contributes to the growth of your mission, enabling you to make a more significant impact in the community.

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User Research glossary of terms

A/B testing

A controlled experiment where two or more versions of a product are tested to determine which performs better.

Accessibility

Ensuring that a product can be used by individuals with disabilities.

Audience interviews

A one-to-one session during which you ask the user questions and record or note down their answers. These are sometimes referred to as user interviews.

Card sorting

A research method that asks users to sort sets of information into groups that make sense to them. Used to understand how users categorise and organise information or content, and what language resonates with them.

Cognitive load

The mental effort required by users to process information and complete a task.

Competitive benchmarking

Comparing the usability of a product or service against industry standards, similar organisations, or competitors.

Consent

Obtaining permission from research participants after providing them with relevant information about the study.

Context

Understanding the specific situations and environments in which users interact with a product, service or organisation.

Contextual inquiry

A research method involving direct observation of users in their natural environment.

Customer experience journey map

A visual representation of the entire user journey, including emotions, actions and touchpoints.

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Empathy mapping

A team exercise that helps you to identify the thoughts and feelings of a particular group.

Ethics

Ethical considerations and guidelines for conducting research with human participants, ensuring their rights and privacy are respected. Ethics ensure a safe, comfortable, and respectful experience for your participants.

Eye-tracking

A research method that uses technology to monitor and record where users look on a screen or page.

Focus group

A small group of carefully selected participants who contribute to open discussions for research. Focus groups use group dynamics to get the shared experiences of similar people.

Heatmap

A visual representation of where users click or interact the most on a website or app.

Heuristic

A rule of thumb or guideline used to identify a product's common usability issues so that the problems can be resolved.

Heuristic evaluation

A method for identifying design problems and opportunities. It involves evaluating a website against established principles and good practices (heuristics).

Information Architecture (IA)

The organisation and structure of content. This aims to make it easy for users to find what they need.

Moderator

A person who leads and facilitates user research sessions or interviews.

Persona

A fictional profile of a user group, based on research and data, which is created to better understand and empathise with their needs and behaviours. It is used to provide context to aide direction or decision-making.

Prototype

An early version or sample of a product or technology (such as a website) used for testing and evaluation before committing the resources to building the final version.

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Recruitment

The process of inviting and selecting users to participate in research studies.

Remote user testing

Conducting user test sessions with participants who are not physically present, through online video calls and screen-sharing.

Stakeholder interview

A one-to-one conversation with a person who has a vested interest in the success of the product, service or strategy you're working on. Examples include other departments within your charity, an investor, a senior leader.

Survey

A structured questionnaire used to collect data from a large group of users.

Target audience

A group or individuals or entities that your organisation aims to reach and engage with. A defined segment of the broader population that shares characteristics.

Tree testing

An exercise that asks users to find items based on your website's navigation. This tells you how easily users can find information on your website.

Usability

How easy something (typically an interface) is to use. The extent to which a system, product or service can be used by specified users.

User Interface (UI)

The space where interactions between humans and machines occur. Typically this term refers to the visual elements and design of a website or app, including buttons, menus, and layout.

User journey

The step-by-step process that a user takes to reach their goal. The term can be applied to different contexts, from a single visit to one website, to an entire experience with an organisation across multiple different interactions.

User testing

A research method that uses real people to evaluate a product or service by observing their interactions and gathering feedback. Also referred to as usability testing.

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Users

An individual or group of individuals who interact with your organisation, products, systems, or services.

UX Design

User Experience Design. The process of designing products or services to provide a positive and meaningful user experience. Also referred to as user-centred design.