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Seeing the truth in users' eyes

Tiny changes in design can have a huge effect on what your users notice and where their attention falls. Eye tracking helps you ensure you make the right changes.

Eye tracking relies on special hardware - an array of infrared lights and sensors, concealed within a special computer display, to detect and record tiny movements in the eye.

Using sophisticated software, we can see how people look at a website - what grabs their attention, what they ignore, where they look first, what they struggle to find.

So much of this is subconscious that it is impossible to find out by asking people.

Your most important customers

For instance, a website's most important customers - who are most familiar with it's design often complain if it is changed in any

way - even if other users agree that the new changes are for the better.

They can't say what they don't like, they just prefer the old design.

This leaves site owners with a dilemma: change the site (and risk alienating existing users) or keep things as they are (and risk a competitor getting ahead).

Eye tracking shows us which parts of the page existing users rely on - the important landmarks that help them interpret the screen.

In other words, it's possible to find out which parts of the page to change and which to keep the same.

Tiny changes, big difference

Eye tracking also shows how small changes in design can be used to direct a user's attention for better (or worse).

We tested a set of alternative page designs for one client which included legal disclaimer text - the kind of text that no one wants to read. One design had fractionally more white space and looser spacing in the disclaimer. We saw users spend three to four times longer looking at this area of the screen.

In other words, a small design change had (inadvertently) made participants spend time reading information that they had no interest in reading.

This shows the power of design to guide users' attention.

Used carefully, it can emphasise important areas of the screen, such as 'buy' buttons and search results. But it may also direct users' attention to irrelevant, distracting or secondary information. Eye tracking helps avoid such blunders.

I see what you see

cxpartners uses eye tracking as a matter of course in its user testing. A live feed of eye tracking means our designers can see how individual test participants are using websites.

So, if we want to understand what parts of a search results listing are important to users we can look at their eye movements as they use the page.

This is far more reliable than asking participants to tell us what they're doing - this kind of sub-conscious decision making is something no one is truly aware of.

Often users aren't even aware of the fact that they've read information on a page and claim they 'just knew it'.

A little deeper

Having this kind of deep insight is something most designers have never experienced. It takes a lot of the guesswork out of coming up with a great design. And it helps our clients understand how to redesign their sites and be sure the new designs will make things better.



About cxpartners

cxpartners is a user-centred design consultancy based in London and Bristol. cxpartners provides research, strategy and design to companies such as eBay, Virgin, and Nokia. Over the last 2 years cxpartners has helped its clients increase their revenue by £327m.

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