234 Tips and Tricks for Recruiting Users as Participants in Usability Studies

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The research for this report was done in 2003, but the majority of the advice may still be applicable today, because people and principles of good design change much more slowly than computer technology does. We sometimes make older report editions available to our audience at no cost, because they still provide interesting insights. Even though these reports discuss older designs, it's still worth remembering the lessons from mistakes made in the past. If you don't remember history, you'll be doomed to repeat it.

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Contents

Executive Summary

By now, most companies accept the need to improve the usability of their websites, intranets, software designs, hardware designs, and other projects that have a user interface. Many companies also know that user testing is the simplest and fastest method in the usability engineering toolbox. (Unfortunately, many don't know about the other methods in the toolbox or how to combine multiple usability methods throughout the project lifecycle, but that's a story for another day.)

Lots of people believe in user testing, but not much testing takes place in real design projects. What's the cause of this discrepancy? Mainly, it is the barrier to firing off a quick, small test whenever people are faced with a design decision. Very few companies are positioned to make a test happen within the deadlines needed for a fast-moving development project. This lack of test-readiness means that testing becomes a rare and precious event that—at best—happens once in each project.

Single-test projects invariably defer their usability testing until the complete design has become available. This practice still occurs despite twenty years of experience uniformly showing that multiple rounds of testing and redesign are necessary to achieve acceptable quality of the user experience and the equally strong finding that it is a hundred times cheaper to fix usability problems if they are discovered in the beginning of a project instead of at the end.

To increase the proportion of companies that apply usability methods correctly, we must make it easier and cheaper to do the right thing.

The three main rules for simplified user testing are:

1. Get representative users
2. Ask them to perform representative tasks with the design
3. Shut up and let the users do the talking.

The third rule is surprisingly difficult, and rule #2 also requires some amount of experience to execute well. Still, the main obstacle to quick and frequent user testing is the difficulty of finding warm bodies that satisfy rule #1. Most companies have no procedures for getting five users to show up at specified times next Wednesday, and yet that's what is required for a successful usability study.

Participant recruiting is the unglamorous foundation for all user testing. Without recruiting you won't have any users to participate in your test. Having a systematic recruiting program in place will make a huge difference in the amount of usability testing conducted in your organization, and increasing the quality of your recruiting will have an immediate impact on the quality of the test results.

State of the Art for Recruiting

To assess the current state of recruiting usability study participants, Nielsen Norman Group conducted a survey of 201 usability professionals. Because we wanted to report how recruiting actually takes place in today's design projects, we deliberately surveyed a biased sample of respondents who were actively involved in usability testing and recruiting. Of course, because most companies don't currently conduct user testing, they also don't recruit test participants. The findings reported here relate solely to the practices of companies that do usability testing.

Of survey respondents, 54% were based in the United States, 8% were in the UK, 7% in Canada, and 5% in Australia. Continental Europe accounted for 14% of respondents, and Brazil, China, Ecuador, India, Israel, Mexico, New Zealand, Singapore, and South Africa were represented as well. Clearly, usability testing, and thus participant recruiting, is a worldwide phenomenon.

The survey data reported here was collected in 2002. Current participant incentives and recruiter fees tend to be higher than those listed in this report, but the relative magnitude of the various costs have stayed about the same.

Specialized Recruiting Agencies

Most companies recruit their own test participants, possibly because of the cost of engaging a specialized recruiting agency. Only 36% of respondents use an outside recruiting agency. Even these companies often handle some of their own recruiting: only 9% of respondents use outside agencies to find all their test participants.

The cost of using a recruiting agency can be substantial: the average agency fee was $107 per participant. There was substantial geographic variation in the fees, with the highest fees in the world paid in the West Coast region of the United States, where the average fee was $125 per participant. As we can attest from painful experience, Silicon Valley is not only an expensive place to do business, it's also a place where you have to work extra hard to recruit people who have not already been studied to death.

Companies that do their own recruiting reported spending an average of 1.15 hours of staff time for each participant recruited. Still, 24% of respondents reported spending more than two hours per participant, so if you don't have a streamlined recruiting process in place with a skilled staff person who specializes in recruiting, it may not always pay off to handle recruiting in-house.

Recruiting fees also vary dramatically by user profile. It is no big surprise that agencies charge twice as much to recruit high-end professionals ($161 per person) as to recruit average consumers or students (about $84 per person).

Incentives Provided to Test Participants

Monetary incentives were paid to only 10% of participants in internal studies, such as tests of intranets or MIS systems. This finding corresponds well with our recommendation not to pay a company's own employees extra money simply to participate in usability testing, because they are already being paid for their time (see Tip 26).

About a third (35%) of companies did provide a non-monetary incentive to internal test participants, most commonly a small gift, such as a coupon for a free book or a lunch in the company cafeteria.

In contrast, participants recruited from the outside most often received cash as their incentive for coming to the test. 63% of external users received monetary compensation, 41% received non-monetary incentives, and 9% didn't get anything. (The numbers total more than 100% because a lucky 13% of external users were given *both* monetary and non-monetary incentives.)

The average incentive paid to external users was $64 per hour of test time. Again, the US West Coast was the most expensive with an average incentive of $81 per hour.

Incentives varied even more by user profile than the agency fees did. High-level professionals received almost four times as much as nonprofessional users ($118 vs. $32 per hour, on average).

No-Show Rates

The average no-show rate was 11%, meaning that one out of nine users does not show up as promised. Unfortunately, no-show rates are highly variable from one study to the next, because of uncontrollable events like weather, traffic, and random personal events. So if you are running a "standard" simple test with five users, you might easily be hit by one or two no-shows.

We offer many tricks in this report for minimizing no-shows and for alleviating their impact on your study when they do occur, but unfortunately we cannot completely eliminate the problem. No-shows are highly annoying and, therefore, one of the main reasons we recommend paying fairly generous incentives to test participants, even when their normal hourly salary is relatively low.

How to Get Started with Systematic Recruiting

We strongly recommend that you treat participant recruiting as an important component of your user experience process. The more you have an established and systematic approach to recruiting, the easier it will be to make studies happen when you want to get usability data.

If you are a small company, or if you haven't done much user testing in the past, we recommend that you consider hiring a professional recruiting agency. If you can't afford the agency fee or if you conduct sufficiently many studies to employ an in-house recruiting specialist, you can certainly recruit your own test participants, and it will become easier to do so as you gain experience.

In either case, following best practices for recruiting will reduce the overall cost of your usability program and increase the validity of your test findings. If you get the wrong users, or if you don't get enough users, your usability studies will not generate the results you deserve and your credibility could suffer as a result.

Introduction

Participant recruiting for usability studies is a critical component of usability studies. Unfortunately, when time and budgets are tight, it is easy for participant recruiting to take a back seat to planning and conducting the actual research. Collecting valid data during usability studies depends on recruiting the right participants—those who reflect the characteristics of the targeted users of a system. Without the right participants, you will not get the data you need to make the best user-centered decisions for your system.

Who Should Read This Report

234 Tips and Tricks for Recruiting the Right Users as Participants in Usability Studies is intended for:

- User experience specialists who recruit participants themselves for studies they will be conducting
- User experience specialists who coordinate with others within an organization who will do the recruiting
- Designated recruiters who screen and schedule participants
- Those who work with a professional recruiting agency to handle recruiting needs
- Managers who fund and support studies where participants are recruited for usability studies.

Note: in this report, "we" always refers to Nielsen Norman Group (NN/g). When we address "you," we may be addressing one or all the readers described above. We are hopeful that you will recognize the "you" that is yourself.

What You Will Find in this Report

This report provides practical tips covering all aspects of the participant recruiting process for usability studies. The tips begin with examining the study goals to help define screening criteria, and end with following up with participants after test sessions are over.

Along the way, there are case-study examples and sample recruiting documents, such as screeners, background questionnaires, and consent and nondisclosure forms, as well as recruiting anecdotes contributed by practicing usability professionals. Sample forms also appear together in one place in Appendix B, and recruiting anecdotes appear in gray boxes throughout the report.

Our goal is to give you the practical information you need to approach participant recruiting with greater enthusiasm and less apprehension.

Sources for the Recruiting Tips

The majority of the tips, usability study examples, and sample recruiting documents in this report come directly from author Deborah Hinderer Sova's personal experience as a usability professional and former recruiter. Some of the advice in this report previously appeared in her paper *Challenges in Participant Recruiting for Usability Testing*, published in 1998 by Tec-Ed, Inc. and the IPCC (the professional conference of the IEEE). We thank Tec-Ed for permission to reuse good information. In addition, a few of the tips in this report are repeated from an earlier NN/g report, *230 Tips and Tricks for a Better Usability Test*.

Additional ideas come from an Idea Market event at the Usability Professionals' Association (UPA) conference. A lively discussion during among attendees about the challenges they face in getting the right participants for usability studies produced some good insight and practical ideas. We thank Dana Chisnell of Usability Works for organizing the Idea Market.

INN/g conducted a worldwide email survey to gather specific recruiting information about the usability community's collective experience. A 57% return rate with more than 200 responses from at least 25 countries indicates a countries indicates a strong interest in the recruiting aspect of usability studies. We thank those who participated in the survey and provided valuable information, including useful and provocative anecdotes from actual recruiting experiences. A full description of the survey contents and results is provided in Appendix A.

Overlapping Tips

You will find some overlap of advice dispensed in the tips in various sections of this report. Furthermore, as noted above, a few of the tips in this report overlap with some of the tips in another of our reports, *230 Tips and Tricks for a Better Usability Test* (which covers many other aspects of user testing, but includes a section on recruiting). Although this redundancy increases the page count somewhat, it allows each section of the report to be as complete as possible in its coverage of the advice for its particular topic—you won't need to buy another report or repeatedly turn to other sections to learn about the issues you might be working on at any given time.

Share Your Own Tips

Please feel free to contact us at info@nngroup.com to provide your comments with us on the advice presented in this report, or to share your suggestions for additional tips. We will try to respond to all suggestions. If we include one or more of your suggestions in a future version of this collection, we will send you a free copy of the report.

Tips and Tricks Summary

Planning Your Recruiting Needs

Successful participant recruiting takes thought and planning. This section helps you plan your recruiting needs with advice for:

- Developing recruiting criteria that will help you get representative participants,
- Determining appropriate incentives to encourage participation, and
- Choosing a study locale convenient to participants, which will garner a good show rate.

As noted in the introduction, to get the data you need to make the best user-centered decisions for your system—which may be a website, a physical product, or software—you need the right participants. So, our first recruiting tip is really more of a rule for conducting successful studies.

The Cardinal Rule for Recruiting

1. Know thy users

Any good usability book will tell you to "know your users." This advice is good not only for designing a user-centered system; but it also applies to designing an appropriate study of the system and recruiting the appropriate participants. To get representative participants, you must know who the users of a current system are, or who the targeted users of a newly developing system will be. Only participants who truly represent the actual users can provide the kind of valid feedback you need to make meaningful improvements to a design.

The last thing you want to hear during a usability study session is a participant saying, "I don't use this kind of [system]," or "I never do that [task] for my job." That person cannot help you discover the problems with that system or how well the system supports users' tasks.

No managers, please

Abbe Winter, Communication Officer, Brisbane, Australia

After convincing the manager who was leading the product team that it would be important to user test the site before releasing it, he provided us with a list of people he thought would be suitable testers. Unfortunately, being a manager, he had selected other managers who had little to no experience with the department's website in its current state, so they could not provide particularly useful comparative information about the improvements we were implementing.

"Build up an understanding of the types of users, tasks, applications, and computer platforms that are typical for your organization. Generalizing the specific experience from your previous user tests, field visits, and studies of installed systems will help you make more informed

judgments about the new interface." – *Usability Engineering*[1]

DEVELOPING RECRUITING CRITERIA

Only after you understand who the users are, what they do, and how a system is intended to help them do what they do, can you begin preparing criteria that will help you get the right study participants. It is important to learn as much as possible, as early as possible, about the targeted users of a system, so you can develop an accurate profile and recruit targeted participants in a timely fashion. This section provides advice that will help you find out more about the users.

LEARNING ABOUT THE USERS

2. Budget some time to meet early on with stakeholders.

To learn as much as possible about the users, make sure you budget time to meet, even briefly, with all the people and groups that can provide you with useful information. These groups include the usability study sponsors (the people paying for the usability study), the developers, the marketing department, technical support, training groups, technical field representatives, and, of course, some actual users.

3. Make a list in advance of the topics and questions that you want to cover with stakeholders.

Of course, it is possible to improvise when you have your meeting with the stakeholders. You are much more likely to get the most out of your time with them, however, if you prepare your topics and questions in advance. (Sample interview topics and questions to ask are provided under *Case Study Example* on page 24.)

4. Understand the study goals.

Effective recruiting begins the first time you meet with the study sponsors to plan the study. Confirming which key issues the study will address is the best starting point for determining which users should participate in the study.[2] The range of users you will need to recruit for a study is directly affected by the scope of what is being tested.

For example, if the study sponsors have existing systems, then they also have a customer base for those systems. For any new system or new version of a current system they develop, they may target current customers or a special subset of these customers.

Or, the study sponsors might be expanding their lines of business to target users who are different from their current customer base. For example, a developer of software designed for business professionals may create a home version of the tool. The home audience might be larger, but likely will be less experienced with the tool than the professional users.

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[1] Jakob Nielsen, *Usability Engineering* (1993), Academic Press. www.nngroup.com/books/usability-engineering

[2] Deborah Hinderer (Sova), *Challenges in Participant Recruiting for Usability Tests (1998)*, Tec-Ed, Inc. and IPCC.

If the study is limited to targeted areas of an existing system, you likely will need a narrower range of users. Recruit only those users who are most affected by the areas of the system on which your study goals focus. If you are evaluating the redesign of an entire system, or the design of a new system, you will likely need to recruit more users, possibly from several user groups.

5. Interview the system team.

If a product or development team is new to usability evaluation, do not expect them to present you with a clear set of recruiting criteria. They know what the system is supposed to do, and they may know who the intended users of their current system are. They may not fully understand how users are interacting with the system, however, or even how many different types of users are interacting with the system.

Be prepared to ask questions. Carefully interview even teams that are quite used to conducting usability studies on their designs, to ensure that you develop an accurate set of criteria for recruiting. (Sample interview topics and questions are provided under *Case Study Example* on page 24.)

6. Get a demonstration of the system.

Ask a quality assurance (QA) person to give you a demo of the system you will be evaluating. QA personnel understand the details of a system very well. They also can suggest questions to ask users and give you enough information to make you more credible when you talk with users.

If the system is still in the prototype stages, a demo from the product or development team will go a long way in helping you understand who the users are. Getting a clear picture of what the system does (or is intended to do) will give you an idea of who will be using it.

If the system is very specialized and targets a narrow audience, you will be able to develop a picture of the users fairly quickly. If the system is complex and targets more than one department or group in an organization, learn all you can about the differences in their tasks so that you can develop accurate recruiting criteria for all the user groups. Often, the more complex the system, the more user groups it will serve. You may have to plan more than one usability study to accommodate all the user groups or system components, and recruit accordingly.

7. Talk to current users.

Developing recruiting criteria for evaluating the design (or redesign) of a current system may be easier than for a new system, because the current system already has users that can be recruited as study participants. But don't rely solely on the system team's description of current users to develop recruiting criteria. Whenever possible, talk to the users themselves. Their information can confirm or challenge what the system team tells you, so it is quite useful to get users' input.

A change in system strategy sometimes can lead to a change in the expected users of the next version of the design. In such cases, the current users may not be representative for all the expected new users. Still, people who use the current design will likely also use the new one, so current users do provide a good source of insight.

Ask users to tell you how often they perform certain tasks, explain the kind of knowledge, training, and experience required to do their tasks, and how and where they interact with the system. Also ask the users to tell you about any problems they are experiencing with the system, which will help with the study design.

8. Find out about the legacy or manual system.

A new system or component may not yet have a firm user base from which to draw study participants, but any new system or component is being designed for a purpose. It may be replacing a manual or paper system or an outdated automated system. Those who use the old system most likely will become users of the new system.

When you interview the system team, find out who they are designing for and why the old system is being replaced. Even better, try to arrange to have an actual user demonstrate the current or legacy system—you will not only learn more about the user, but you may also uncover additional issues to evaluate that the system team is not aware of.

9. Talk to the marketing group.

Any good marketing group should be able to provide you with customer demographics, which include information like the age range of users, income levels, and generally what users do most often with the system—for example, an e-commerce website. This information is good to know because it can help you avoid pursuing participants who are known to be disinterested in a particular type of site, or who may be unable to afford the products or services the site is selling.

During the UPA Idea Market, an attendee said her company's marketing group was responsible for producing the screeners for usability studies. Although outsourcing the screener can save the user-experience team some time, you should review the screener with the product or development team—and get their signed approval—before using it. Keep in mind that the marketing team may present too broad a view—one that encompasses the entire market rather than the specific users you need for a specific usability study. The screener must be in line with the study goals so you don't over-recruit.

10. Find out about competitive or similar systems.

Both the product and marketing teams should know which systems are similar to or competing with the system you will be evaluating. You should research the competitors yourself by minimally reading about them. Reviewing competitor systems will help you get a better picture of the range of users of such systems. You may want to plan and conduct a separate competitive group in your study so you can get a fresh perspective of the advantages and disadvantages of each system.

11. Ask as many questions as you need to.

Don't stop asking questions of all your resource people until you feel you have a clear picture of the users you will need to evaluate the system, as prescribed by the study goals. (Sample interview topics and questions are provided below, under *Case Study Example*. on page 24.)

Case Study Example

This case study provides a practical context for Tips 1–11.

Case study summary: The issue-resolution component of the XYZ Project Management System is generating several help desk calls each week. The XYZ product team has decided to commission a usability study to better understand the problems the help desk has been logging, and to determine what other problems or workarounds users may not be reporting to the help desk. They plan to redesign the XYZ issue-resolution component based on the input from the help desk, the results of the usability study, and the recommendations of the user-experience team.

Sample interview topics:[3] You can elicit much of the information you need about users by asking about the users'

- Job title and job description
- Type of employer (size; retail / manufacturing / wholesale / service)
- Role regarding the system (uses it, or supports others who do)
- Frequency of use (infrequent, often, daily)
- Most-critical tasks
- Task transitions (which tasks precede or follow other tasks)
- Job benefits—using the system to increase performance (bonuses, raises, respect)
- Environment (where system is used, how it is set up)
- Task complexity (regarding the product or domain)
- Prior experience (with specific products, competitive, related, and predecessor).

Of course, if you have the opportunity to speak with actual users, these topics also can guide your discussions with them.

Sample interview questions: Using the topics listed above as a start, prepare a list of specific questions to ask the system team. More than likely, you will also ask questions that are not on your list to elicit elaboration or clarification. Both planned and follow-up questions are provided in the following table. These questions will help determine which users are affected by the study focus, which characteristics these users have, and whether you will need to recruit from several user groups.

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[3] Deborah Hinderer (Sova), *Challenges in Participant Recruiting for Usability Tests (1998)*, Tec-Ed, Inc. and IPCC; and Chauncey Wilson, Director, Bentley College Design and Usability Testing Center.

Who uses the system?

User Experience Specialist Questions	System Team Responses
Who enters issue resolutions into the system?	Project managers.
Would anyone else ever enter issue resolutions?	Occasionally account reps. They have system permission to do that.
Follow-up: How about administrative assistants? Would they ever enter a resolution for a project manager or account rep?	Well, technically they don't have permission, but if the PM or account rep gives them their ID and password, the admin can enter a resolution for them.
Follow-up: Will this situation change, or will assistants always be entering resolutions unofficially?	Based on what we know is happening, we're going to set up permission for account reps' and PMs' assistants to go in there "legally."
Follow-up: Does anyone else besides project managers and account managers have system permissions to enter resolutions? Project team members perhaps?	No, team members can enter a project issue, and they can suggest a resolution for an issue, but only a project manager or account manager has permission to enter the actual resolution.

What are different users' distinguishing characteristics?

User Experience Specialist Questions	System Team Responses
Which users enter what proportion of the resolutions?	Project managers enter 90–95% of the resolutions and account reps about 5%–10%.
Follow-up: Where do assistants fall in that ratio?	In with the account reps' 5%–10%.
Are the calls to the help desk coming mostly from new users or from experienced users?	The help desk hasn't been asking that. They do ask for job title though, so we know whether they're PMs, account reps, or admins.
Do these users need training to use XYZ, or can those new to XYZ learn it fairly quickly?	Well, the system is supposed to be quick and easy to learn—if you're a certified project manager or trained account rep.
Follow-up: So, do all the project managers who use XYZ have project management certification?	Yes, they already have it when they're hired, or they get certification right away through the company.

User Experience Specialist Questions	System Team Responses
Follow-up: And, do all your account reps receive training?	Yes, they go through our training and orientation program as soon as they're hired. They also go to seminars and classes whenever we add new products or services to our lines of business.
Recap: Okay, so the users of XYZ issue-resolution are certified project managers, trained account reps, and possibly their assistants, correct?	Correct.
How long does it take for a user to become "experienced"? *Added question (based on information volunteered by system team):* You're not sure if most of the complaints are coming from new users or experienced users, so we should include some of each in the test.	I'd say after three months, a user should really know how the system works.
About how many resolutions do you estimate each user enters and how often?	It varies, of course, depending on the project and how many projects they're working on at any one time.
Follow-up: Go ahead and give me your best guess. When I meet with one of the PMs, I can adjust your estimate if I need to.	Okay, I'm guessing that PMs roughly enter 8–10 resolutions per month, account reps only 3 or 4, and assistants possibly 1 or 2, maybe more, if their boss is pretty busy.
Where do users work with XYZ; at their desk (project managers), on a laptop in the field (account managers)?	They all work with XYZ in the office. We have plans to change to a web-based application that we'll put up on our intranet, and then people will be able to use it wherever they can access our intranet.
Follow-up: When will this change take place? *Note to self:* check back in about six months to ask about testing the web-based version of XYZ.	Early next year. We want to make sure issue resolution is working first.

DECIDING HOW MANY PARTICIPANTS TO RECRUIT

You will need to recruit varying numbers of participants, depending on the type of study you are running. This section provides advice for choosing the optimal number for your study.

12. For your study results to produce statistical significance, plan to evaluate with 10 to 12 participants per condition.

Smaller sample sizes will not give you reliable statistics from which you can generalize. If the study sponsors require statistical significance, and your organization does not have a trained statistician, we advise that you consult with one as you design your study and again as you write your study report. We also recommend the book, *Reading Statistics and Research* by Schuyler Huck, Addison Wesley Publishers.

13. For a less formal usability study, plan to evaluate with 4 to 5 participants per distinctly different user group.

Much research has shown that there are severely diminishing returns from usability testing any given design. The first few users find almost all the major usability problems, and you learn less from each subsequent study participant. The details of the mathematics behind this fact, including assumptions about users, tasks, and what constitutes a "problem," are given in a research paper from Bell Communications Research[4] and summarized in an Alertbox column.[5] On average, across a large number of projects we have surveyed, almost 80% of the usability problems represented by the selected tasks were found after testing four users.

We advise that you plan for five and expect to get four. Any additional users are wasted, because you will learn very little by repeatedly testing the same user interface. It is much better to stop after a short test, revise the design, and evaluate again. Iterative design produces no diminishing usability returns: every additional version you evaluate improves the quality of the final product.

Sometimes, however, development managers make some very tough decisions to limit the amount of iterative testing in order to balance testing against other business goals. Even so, we believe the key management insight for the usability lifecycle is to distribute the usability budget across as many small tests as possible instead of spending it all on a few big studies.

14. Consider other factors that might affect the number of participants you choose to recruit.

Other factors to consider include:

- **High failure risks.** A system for which the risks of failure are high might be a candidate for evaluating with larger samples.

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[4] Jakob Nielsen and Thomas K. Landauer: A mathematical model of the finding of usability problems. *Proceedings ACM INTERCHI '93 Conference* (Amsterdam, the Netherlands, 24–29 April 1993), pp. 206–213.

[5] Jakob Nielsen: Why You Only Need to Test with 5 Users. *Alertbox,* March 19, 2000. www.nngroup.com/articles/why-you-only-need-to-test-with-5-users

- **Multiple methods.** Evaluations using multiple usability methods require more participants to avoid using the same ones for more than one study within a short period of time.
- **Complexity.** The interface's complexity may affect the number of participants. (Also see Tip 6.)
- **Credibility.** Although you may not learn much after five people, the study sponsor may simply want a larger sample for credibility with their high-level management.

15. Don't forget to count the dry run, pilot, and backups in the number of participants you will need to recruit.

Dry run and pilot-test your study materials, and plan for sufficient extra participants to offset no-shows. You can save money by using internal people as your dry-run participants, and sometimes as pilots, if they come close to your recruiting profile. Most (83%) of NN/g recruiting survey respondents indicated that they use internal people (employees or closely partnered contractors of the study sponsors) as dry-run or pilot participants.

- **A dry-run participant** usually spends longer than the planned session time with the study facilitator to dry run the study materials and fine-tune the study system. This session helps uncover the problems in the facilitator's study script and the wording of the task scenarios. This session is more about examining the script, protocol, and system interaction, and less about observing actual participant performance. The study facilitator or study sponsor may have someone in mind as a dry-run participant, often an internal participant or even a member of the system team. The facilitator, study sponsor, or the actual recruiter, may call and schedule the dry-run participant. In most cases, one dry run is enough. If you discover a lot of problems with the script or the system, however, you may want to schedule another dry run.
- **A pilot participant** session is conducted as an actual study session to check the timings and feasibility of the tasks. This person ideally is recruited along with regular participants so that the pilot's characteristics come as close to the participant profile as possible. In general, we recommend devoting about 10% of the resources for any given study to pilot testing[6] to make sure that you are evaluating the right thing (and thus spending your remaining 90% correctly). With the smaller studies we usually recommend, this translates into a single pilot user in most cases. You may need more pilot tests, however, if the evaluation system or the study itself is very complex, if you have two or more distinctly different user groups, or if the initial pilot session shows you still have deficiencies in the study plan.

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[6] Jakob Nielsen, *Usability Engineering* (1993), Academic Press. www.nngroup.com/books/usability-engineering

- **Backups** are recruited to cover for no-shows and to ensure you get a full complement of participants. Responses to the NN/g recruiting survey indicated a worldwide average no-show rate of 10.6%. When your budget allows, plan to over-recruit by your own typical no-show rate, to help fill all participant sessions. If you don't know your typical no-show rate, we suggest you use the averages provided by the NN/g recruiting survey respondents (also see *Scheduling Backups* on page 101, as well as *No-Show Rates By Who Recruits* on page 159).

Tell your dry-run and pilot participants that you might be tweaking things or that you may need to consult with a colleague during their session.

DRAFTING THE SCREENING CRITERIA

After you've gathered enough information from the system team and decided how many participants you will need, you are ready to draft the recruiting criteria.

16. Ensure that recruiting criteria reflect specific user characteristics.

After you meet with the system team and any other groups or users, summarize for yourself—and reconfirm with the system team—which criteria you plan to use to recruit participants for your usability study.

Your recruiting criteria should reflect the specific user characteristics that you want your group of study participants to possess. The criteria description should also specify how many participants ideally will possess each characteristic, based on the overall number of participants you will be evaluating with, as shown below.

Based on the case study example, the set of recruiting criteria for the XYZ Project Management System usability test with five users of the issue-resolution component of XYZ would look like this:

Sample recruiting criteria description

Participant Characteristics for the XYZ System Usability Test	Number Needed
Total participants:	**9**
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Pilot	1
Regular	5
Backup	3

Participant Characteristics for the XYZ System Usability Test	Number Needed
User Groups: ---------- **Certified Project Managers:** must have entered at least eight issue resolutions into the XYZ system within the last month.	1 Pilot 3 Regulars 1 Backup
Account Managers: must have entered at least three issue resolutions into the XYZ system within the last month.	1 Regular 1 Backup
Administrative Assistants: must have entered at least two issue resolutions into the XYZ system within the last month.	1 Regular 1 Backup
Experience: ---------- **Less-experienced users:** must have less than three months' experience using the XYZ system.	2 Regulars 1 Backup 1 Pilot
More-experienced users: must have three months' or more experience using the XYZ system.	3 Regulars 2 Backups

For the XYZ case study example, the pilot participant will be a project manager who is an experienced XYZ user. Regular participants in the study will consist of three project managers, one account manager, and one administrative assistant. The group will be evenly split between experienced and less experienced users (four or five for each). Ideally, you will recruit one backup participant for each user type, for a total of three backups.

17. Use the recruiting criteria as the basis for your participant screener.

Incorporating the criteria table into your screener will reinforce the criteria for your recruiters and help ensure only qualified respondents are accepted into your study. (See *Preparing the Screening Script and Questionnaire* on page 55 for complete information on how to prepare a participant screener.)

18. If you are evaluating a website, plan to screen participants for prior experience using the Web.

By the time a user arrives at your website, s/he will almost certainly have visited many other websites. It will be exceedingly rare for somebody to make your website the very first place they go after getting access to the Internet for the first time. (The obvious exceptions to this rule are AOL, MSN, Yahoo! or one of a handful of other services that could indeed be somebody's first exposure to the Web.) Because virtually all your users will have general Internet experience, you should make sure that all of your study participants have some minimal amount of experience that is clearly defined in your criteria.

If you study users who have not used the Web before, all you will discover is that the Web itself is difficult and that current Web browsers are complex pieces of software. You will learn almost nothing about the usability of your own design because novice users will spend most of their time being stumped by the basic technology used to access the Web. Rest assured that you will discover many usability issues relating to new and inexperienced users, even if you evaluate with people who have several months, or even a full year, of experience using the Web.

19. If you are evaluating an application that is used by people new to a company, recruit new hires as participants.

Software usability for new hires (such as orientation or other human-resource systems) is very important. If these applications are hard to use, a new hire's first experience with a company could be a negative one. Therefore, evaluate such applications for first-time use. Be sure the new-hire characteristic is reflected in your screening criteria.

20. If you are evaluating an intranet, plan to recruit as participants mainly people who have been employees for a few months.

Even though usability for new hires is important, the vast majority of intranet use is by long-term employees except in companies with frequent staff turnover. In companies with stable staffing, we recommend that you recruit most of your study participants from people who have worked in the company for at least nine or 10 months. Again, be sure these characteristics are reflected in your screening criteria.

DETERMINING THE APPROPRIATE INCENTIVES

After you've learned enough about the users to create accurate recruiting criteria, you still have other decisions to make before you should begin drafting your screener. Figuring out the appropriate incentive for participating in usability studies can be challenging. What is right and fair? The old usability adage "it depends" is a very appropriate answer, because the incentive's appropriateness depends on many factors.

This section provides advice for helping you choose the incentive best suited to your participants and your study situation. It includes a summary of the responses to the NN/g recruiting survey, which asked respondents what they typically offer participants as incentives for usability studies. (Survey details are also provided in Appendix A.)

21. Research potential incentives for participants as you would user characteristics.

Be sure to discuss incentives with the study sponsors before making a decision. They probably have some idea of what may motivate their users, as well as what is appropriate for their users. They also should know of policy issues that would prohibit certain individuals from receiving any form of gift or payment—government workers, or employees for highly regulated industries like insurance or banking companies, for example.

For international studies, talk to some local contacts and do a little reading on your own to find out whether cash incentives would be considered insulting by participants. If so, consider offering appropriate non-monetary incentives. For example, in some countries such as Denmark, the UK, Australia, and New Zealand, participants consider a bottle of wine, champagne, or whiskey an attractive incentive because of the high tax on monetary payments.

Learn from your users, when you've offered them something they're not enthusiastic about, as illustrated in the following anecdote.

Show me the money!

Sarah L. Young, Human Factors Engineer, NCR

Regarding pitfalls, I discovered that some gift incentives we offered were more problematic than cash—some people don't go out to movies, some don't rent them, some don't like to get T-shirts, etc. However, most people LOVED getting cash!

22. Be as generous as your budget will allow.

The better and more appropriate the incentive, the easier it is to get users to participate. Although the incentive should not be the driving force behind participation, a substantial gift shows that you appreciate that the study participants have set aside precious time to help you,[7] as illustrated in the following anecdote.

Over and above

Sarah L. Young, Human Factors Engineer, NCR

When we are bringing in people, such as local grocery store cashiers, on their own time, we pay them in cash at the end of the test and pay them well compared to their normal pay scale. Sometimes we throw in a pair of movie tickets, which we can buy at a discount. This practice minimizes no-shows.

Even the simplest usability study costs around USD $5,000 after you add up the cost of your own time to plan and run the study and analyze the data, as well as the time of the team members who are helping you and the cost of the lab and equipment. More complex studies easily cost more than USD $20,000. Therefore, you probably spend at least USD $1000 per study user in overhead costs. It is easily worth a bit more money to minimize the risk of no-shows.

23. Do not let an incentive take the place of verbally thanking a user for participating.

People like to hear that they are appreciated, and they deserve verbal feedback. We tell participants, "Thank you very much for participating in our study today. Your feedback and input have been very helpful and will contribute to the improvement of [system]. It was nice working with you, and thanks again for your time." (Also see Tip 191.)

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[7] *How to Conduct Usability Studies*, a Nielsen Norman Group report, www.nngroup.com/reports/how-to-conduct-usability-studies

24. Be sure the incentive is commensurate with the time involvement of the participants.

For example if you require participants to go through orientation and training before the study, expect to offer an additional premium for the increased time commitment. (Also see *Planning for Training and Orientation* on page 53.)

The next two sections, *Monetary Incentives* and *Non-monetary Incentives*, provide advice for helping you decide when a monetary or non-monetary incentive is more appropriate for your study participants.

MONETARY INCENTIVES

Responses to the NN/g recruiting survey indicated that not everyone provides monetary incentives to participants, especially internal participants (generally, employees or closely related contractors of the study sponsors).

- Of the 166 respondents who use internal people as dry-run or pilot participants, only 7% provide a monetary incentive. (Many companies forbid internal cash payments because employees participating in usability studies is considered part of their job.)
- Of the 134 respondents who use internal people as actual study participants, only 10% provide a monetary incentive.
- The worldwide average rate paid to internal participants (pilot, dry-run, and regular participants) is USD $32 per session hour. (Note that participants receive a disproportionately higher per-hour rate for a shorter session, though, because a fixed amount of overhead is associated with sessions of any length.)
- The 184 respondents who use external participants recruit multiple user groups—for a total of 260 citations. Of the total participants, 63% received monetary incentives, in marked contrast to internal participants.
- The worldwide average rate paid to external participants is USD $64 per session hour—twice that of the internal rate.

25. Offer monetary incentives to participants who otherwise would be paid for their time.

When user testing sessions are held during regular business hours, people necessarily must take time off from their jobs to participate. Unless sessions are very short (20 or fewer minutes), most people can't fit a study session into their lunch hour, especially if they must commute to the session. Provide monetary compensation for working professionals. Respondents to the NN/g recruiting survey indicated that business professionals receive an average incentive of USD $83 per session-hour.

26. Avoid offering monetary incentives to internal participants who already are receiving pay for their time to participate.

Instead, offer your sincere thanks for participation and emphasize how useful their feedback is. Respondents to the NN/g recruiting survey indicated that 67% of those using internal people as dry-run or pilot participants, and 55% of those using internal people as actual participants, do not offer any incentive. However, 30% of survey respondents offer a non-monetary incentive to internal participants. If your budget allows, offer internal participants some quality corporate logo item, such as a polo shirt, jacket, or gym bag, to encourage continued interest in usability studies. If not, offer them something interesting or fun, as suggested in Tip 32.

27. Find out in advance whether certain participants are prohibited from receiving money.

As noted in Tip 21, many government workers are not allowed to receive any form of incentive—monetary or otherwise—because it might be seen as an attempt to bribe them. So, it is best not to tempt them by offering anything, especially money. As with internal participants, offer your sincere thanks for participation and emphasize how useful their feedback is.

28. Consider mitigating factors when deciding how much of a monetary incentive to offer.

Along with the NN/g recruiting survey, we also contacted a few recruiting agencies around the US and in London to get their recommendations for monetary incentives for various user groups in their areas.

Both the survey responses and the recruiting agencies indicated that one should consider:

- **Participant job category** – professional or student? The more professional the job category, the more you should expect to pay. For example, survey respondents indicated they offer a high-end professional (cardiologist, attorney, CEO) a much higher incentive (about USD $118 per session-hour) than administrative assistants or other support staff (about USD $50 per session-hour). Students are generally paid at a much lower rate than professionals (about USD $18 per session hour), or, as often as not, nothing. (Also see the table Monetary Incentives in US Dollars by User Group on page 35.)
- **Participant need** – senior citizen on a fixed income, or affluent retiree? Consider offering seniors on fixed incomes (who may appreciate a little extra money) a monetary incentive and affluent retirees (for whom extra money means less) an attractive non-monetary incentive.
- **Study location** – in the neighborhood, or a distant commute? If a commute is involved, or the study location doesn't provide parking, expect to add something to the base incentive for travel and / or parking—whatever is appropriate for your particular locale. Some survey respondents offer only travel reimbursement as an incentive; however, we recommend travel payments be in addition to another incentive.

- **Session length** – 15 minutes or two hours? Note that the incentive pay is not linearly proportional with the study duration. One has to pay disproportionably more for shorter studies to compensate people for commuting time and to motivate them to show up at all. For longer sessions (two or three hours), however, expect to pay a higher per-session incentive. NN/g recruiting survey respondents indicated that the worldwide average session length for internal participants is about 61 minutes, or about one hour. For external participants, the worldwide average session length is 72 minutes, or 1.25 hours.
- **Session day and time** – regular Monday-through-Friday business hours, after hours, or on a weekend? Business hours aren't always convenient for business people—they have to take time off from their jobs, and they expect to be compensated for that. Likewise, many people find it difficult to give up a weekend day for a two-hour commitment.
- **Study geographical location** – California or the Midwest? Europe or the rest of the world? Expect to pay higher incentives for the US West Coast than for the rest of the US. Likewise, European study participants generally receive a larger incentive than the rest of the non-US participants. (Also see the table Monetary Incentives in US Dollars by Region on page 36.)

Survey Responses on Monetary Incentives

The NN/g recruiting survey's 201 respondents generated 189 monetary incentive citations within a total of 560 distinct user-group citations (166 internal dry-run and pilot citations, 134 internal participant citations, and 260 external participant citations). We provide summary tables for monetary incentives by user group and by geographical location.

By user group

The following table details survey responses for monetary incentives provided, sorted by user group. For detailed information on user groups, see Appendix A, *User Group and Incentive Descriptions*, on page 150.

Monetary Incentives in US Dollars by User Group

User Group	Average USD $ Per Session Hour Paid	Total Citations
Internal Pilots / Dry runs	**$34**	**11**
General	$44	2
Professional	•	0
Support	$38	2
Technical	$5	2
Unspecified	$46	5
Internal Participants	**$31**	**13**
General	$33	2
Professional	$37	3
Support	•	0

Technical	$11	3
Unspecified	$37	5
External Participants	**$64**	**165**
Consumer	$54	68
Higher Professional	$118	23
Medium Professional	$69	22
Lower Professional	$50	6
Special Needs and / or Nonprofessional	$32	20
Technical	$67	22
Unspecified	$55	4
Total		**189**

As shown in the preceding table, external participant rates are double that for internal participants, with high-end professionals garnering the highest rate.

By geographical region

The following table summarizes the monetary incentives in US dollars paid to participants by geographical region.

Monetary Incentives in US Dollars by Region

Region Averages	Average Per Hour Paid to Internal Pilots / Dry runs	Average Per Hour Paid to Internal Participants	Average Per Hour Paid to External Participants	Total Number of Citations
US Average $73				**126**
Northeast $70	$33	$13	$77	
West Coast $79	$55	•	$81	
Rest of USA $69	$17	$7	$78	
Europe $34				**36**
	$23	$58	$34	
Rest of World $27				**27**
	•	**$18**	**$29**	
Total				**189**

As shown in the preceding table, monetary payment trends for internal participants by region are unpredictable. Monetary payments are highest on the US West Coast (USD $79 per session-hour on average), and lowest in countries outside of Europe and the US (USD $27 per session-hour).

Why are incentives twice as high in the United States as compared with Europe? One likely explanation is that Americans tend to feel over-surveyed and require more of an incentive to participate in studies. In contrast, Europeans might not yet be as tired of market research and may show more appreciation for being asked to influence the future direction of technology. It is understandable that the US West Coast participants are more expensive than those in the rest of the country (because the cost of living tends to be higher on the coasts), but why isn't the Northeast more expensive as well? Maybe the West Coast's large number of computer and high-tech companies cause people there to feel more over-surveyed than people on the East Coast.

Dispersing Monetary Incentives in Cash vs. by Check

Paying in cash

Although participants generally like the instant gratification that receiving cash offers, it is important to consider the drawbacks of handling what could be a lot of cash for the duration of your usability study.

29. Handle cash incentives prudently.

- You may have to transport lots of money to your study location, and you should take standard precautions against losing the cash or being robbed. Try not to carry cash incentives on your person for any length of time. Lost or stolen cash is next to impossible to recover.
- Avoid discussing in public, or during sessions and session breaks, how much cash you are holding for the study.
- Keep each participant incentive in a separate envelope labeled with the participant's name only (not the contents).
- During study sessions, lock the envelopes in a safe place, separate from the study room, until it is time to give the participant the incentive. If you cannot keep your eye on the cash, it may disappear.
- Ask participants to count and acknowledge the amount they receive. Have them sign a standard receipt for the study sponsor's records. (See the sample receipt provided on page 113.)

Paying by check

Checks provide some advantages over cash, as illustrated in the following anecdote.

Check, please

Anonymous Usability Professional

(This anecdote is offered not to scare you, but to encourage caution when dealing with large sums of cash.) One evening, in [a large metropolitan area], I was robbed at gunpoint. But, I was lucky for two reasons. First, I wasn't hurt (scared, yes; hurt, no), and, second, I wasn't carrying the huge amount of money I usually need for usability tests.

Even though it's sometimes inconvenient to get checks ready in advance, having peace of mind is worth it. Getting robbed tends to make you a little uneasy about carrying cash again. I will always handle participant incentives with checks in the future.

30. Consider the drawbacks, as well as the benefits, of dispensing checks.

The benefits of paying by check include:

- Checks allow you to feel safer carrying them.
- Checks are automatically easier for you or the study sponsor's accounting department to track, because they leave a very convenient paper trail.

The drawbacks of paying by check include:

- Participants must go through an extra step—cashing the check—to receive their incentive payment.
- Because checks are automatically more formal than cash, some participants may regard a check as payment for temporary employment. Be sure to explain that neither participation in the study nor payment of the incentive constitutes employment. (See the sample receipt provided on page 113 for how to handle this situation in writing.)
- Checks must be prepared ahead of time, so if you switch participants at the last minute (because of a no-show, for example), you may have a problem. To cover this situation, you may have to carry cash or signed, blank checks, which are the same as cash when it comes to safety.
- Some US businesses require a social security number for tracking who receives a check—a common practice for nonprofit organizations—but some participants resist providing what they consider private information. (Also see Tip 170.)

NON-MONETARY INCENTIVES

NN/g recruiting survey respondents indicated that they provide a variety of non-monetary incentives—especially for internal participants, but also for external participants. Most offered is food, often to supplement other primary incentives. Respondents offer gifts ranging in value from USD $5–$100. Gifts include something as simple as a nice writing pen, as entertaining as theatre tickets, or as fun as children's toys. Some non-monetary incentives offered by survey respondents include intangible items such as airline frequent flyer miles or the opportunity to make a difference. (Also see the detailed description of incentives provided worldwide on page 152.)

Sometimes, non-monetary incentives are more attractive—and more appropriate—than monetary incentives. Certain participants may be prohibited from accepting money; others simply would rather receive something else they consider more unusual or interesting, as illustrated in the following anecdote.

Good books and a management guru

Alison J. Head, Principal, Alison J. Head & Associates

For a study I conducted at a metropolitan library, we didn't offer money. Instead, we gave participants, which included a very diverse group of people who obviously love books, a beautifully bound journal from the Library Foundation. The book included a nameplate with the library's name. People really appreciated receiving such a handsome gift.

In another study for a charitable foundation, we didn't offer money to our participants, for whom (USD) $50 would mean very little. Instead, we got Tom Peters, a well-known management guru who sat on the board of this foundation, to send participants hand-written, thank-you notes. They were thrilled to receive a note from a well-known author, and Tom Peters was happy to provide the additional help to the foundation.

31. Offer a non-monetary incentive to participants who otherwise would not be paid for their time.

Students, retirees, and / or homemakers—those who do not have to take time off from a traditional, income-earning job—may be more attracted by the offer of quality merchandise. Consider offering these people a complimentary copy of the software or other product being tested, after it is released.[8] When your budget can afford it, consider offering tools such as pagers, PDAs, or cell phones.

An exception to this advice would be for participants such as senior citizens on a fixed income, or people with disabilities, who may not be able to work. People in these groups may appreciate a monetary incentive more than a non-monetary one.

32. Offer a non-monetary incentive for internal participants who already are being paid for their time.

Non-monetary incentives are offered by 31% of NN/g recruiting survey respondents who provide incentives to internal participants. If your budget allows, offer internal participants some high-quality corporate logo item to encourage continued interest in usability studies. If not, offer them something fun and / or interesting, as illustrated in the following anecdote.

Free lunch, with toys

Sarah L. Young, Human Factors Engineer, NCR

When we use people from around the office, we try to keep the tests as short as possible (15 minutes is good), and we give a T-shirt or a (USD) $5 gift certificate for the cafeteria. I have also put together a grab box with children's toys (party favors) and candy bars. I give participants a choice of two things. Some people like the toys for themselves and some like to take them home to their children.

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[8] Deborah Hinderer (Sova), *Challenges in Participant Recruiting for Usability Tests (1998)*, Tec-Ed, Inc. and IPCC.

In addition, as noted in Tip 23, don't forget to offer your sincere thanks for participation and emphasize how useful the participant's feedback is.

33. Find out in advance whether certain participants are prohibited from receiving any incentive.

As noted in Tip 27, many government workers and employees for regulated industries are not allowed to receive any form of incentive, even non-monetary ones. So, it is best not to tempt them with incentives. Instead, emphasize the importance of usability studies, the interesting experience participants will have, and offer your sincere thanks for their participation and useful feedback.

34. Consider rewarding the technologically curious with technology-oriented incentives.

Often, technical people are happy to take part in a usability study just to be involved in technology in a somewhat different way and to experience cutting-edge products or new designs. These people often are very happy to receive a new version of software. When your budget can afford it, consider offering tools, such as pagers, PDAs, or cell phones. Also, when it is feasible to do so, consider sharing key study results of the study with technical participants, who undoubtedly will appreciate improvements to technology systems.

35. Be imaginative about other non-monetary incentives you could offer.

Participants appreciate a variety of non-monetary incentives, including gift certificates to local popular merchants or restaurants, as well as movie, theater, or concert tickets. If you are evaluating an e-commerce website, consider offering merchandise sold on the site as an incentive. Even better (if feasible), consider having participants actually order, as part of your test, a certain amount of merchandise for which your study sponsors would pay.

36. Always offer food and beverages.

Offering complimentary food and beverages helps motivate people both to agree to participate and to attend study sessions. Participants appreciate not having to miss lunch or dinner to participate in a study—many may be arriving at the study directly from work.

Only 18% of NN/g survey respondents who reported offering incentives offer food and beverages either as the main incentive or as supplemental to other incentives. We think this percentage is too low, and advise you to offer refreshments to your participants. Because participants will be talking continuously during their sessions, consider offering some water, juice, and coffee at a minimum. Providing beverages will make sessions easier and more pleasant for them.

Let people know during screening and in follow-up confirmations what kind of refreshments you will provide.

37. When your study involves school children, check with their teacher and principal to find out what an appropriate incentive would be.

For studies with younger students, monetary incentives may not be appropriate. Instead, ask the principal or teacher whether incentives such as high-quality children's books, prepackaged art projects, educational toys and games, or savings bonds[9] (in the US) would be appropriate for their students. Also, find out what the school may be in particular need of, such as software for the school's computer lab, library books, or art supplies.

The following anecdote illustrates the value of involving teachers and principals.

Software is satisfying, and goodies are great!

Doug Wolfe, Principal, Salmon Brook Consulting

When I was developing elementary school software and websites for the Education and New Media department of a large publisher, user testing was absolutely essential. We had to tread very carefully in the area of recruiting children as test participants, however.

The best option was to do our testing in schools; however, paying test participants in that setting would have created all sorts of problems. There were questions about whether it was appropriate for cash to be exchanging hands in that setting, and there were questions about whether money should go to the students, the teachers, or the school. So, we usually approached the principal and teachers. The incentive for the principal was primarily to have a chance to influence the design of an educational product.

We would also offer to give the school a free copy of the final product as thanks for their participation. Our testing coordinator talked to individual teachers to find some willing to let us borrow some of their students during class time. Because of concerns about propriety, we also couldn't directly compensate teachers for their participation. Instead, we would encourage continued future participation by giving teachers thank you gifts—typically gift certificates for merchandise from our catalog. (Another advantage to this—the cost to the company was typically only 10%–20% of the face value of the gift certificate.)

We found, however, that our practice of giving out the gift certificates only once or twice a year often left the reward too distant from the disruption. So in addition to increasing the frequency with which we doled out the gift certificates, our testing coordinator came up with an additional thank-you gift. These were "goodie bags." We bought supplies in bulk, and for less than (USD) $5 each, we were able to put together a small, attractive gift bag filled with things like colored chalk (hard to get in public schools), stickers, pens, and other small items on which teachers often spend their own money.

[9] Disclosure: the United States Bureau of the Public Debt is one of our clients, but we hope you will believe us when we say that this is not why we list one of its products (savings bonds) as an appropriate incentive.

The goodie bags turned out to be a great success. One day our testing coordinator was visiting the school to drop off a couple of goodie bags for teachers who had helped us. Another teacher whose class had not participated in the testing was in the room when one of the teachers received her bag. She asked, "Can I get one of those, too?" Our testing coordinator, spotting an opportunity, said, 'Sure, I'll bring it by tomorrow.' When she dropped it off the next day, a conversation ensued about what we were doing, and the teacher ended up volunteering her class to participate in testing.

After that, our testing coordinator took to using the goodie bags as a recruiting tool. She always brought along a couple of extra bags in case she met a new teacher, and when she needed more test participants, she'd sometimes walk the halls after school with bags in hand, looking for teachers to introduce herself to. The goodie bags were a wonderful icebreaker that got a discussion started on a positive note and often led to the recruitment of new test participants. They also helped spread good will, so that rather than being perceived as a burden or a bother, our test facilitators were warmly received.

(Also see Tip 202 for additional resources on conducting usability studies with children.)

Survey Responses on Non-monetary Incentives

The 201 survey respondents generated 196 non-monetary incentive citations within a total of 560 distinct user group citations (166 internal dry-run / pilot citations, 134 actual internal participant citations, and 260 external participant citations). We provide non-monetary citations by user group and by geographical location.

By user group

The following table details survey responses for the types of non-monetary incentives provided, sorted by user groups. For detailed information on user groups and incentives, see Appendix A, *User Group and Incentive Descriptions*, on page 150.

Non-monetary Incentives by User Group

User Group	Gift	Redeemable Certificate	Food	Intangible	Total Citations
Internal Pilots / Dry runs	**18**	**6**	**12**	**7**	**43**
General	8	3	1	2	14
Professional	1	1	3	2	7
Support	0	1	3	0	4
Technical	3	0	4	1	8
Unspecified	6	1	1	2	10

User Group	Gift	Redeemable Certificate	Food	Intangible	Total Citations
Internal Participants	**19**	**13**	**10**	**5**	**47**
General	7	4	2	2	15
Professional	4	2	2	1	9
Support	2	2	3	0	7
Technical	0	3	3	2	8
Unspecified	6	2	0	0	8
External Participants	**58**	**24**	**13**	**11**	**106**
Consumer	22	11	4	2	39
Higher Professional	3	2	1	1	7
Medium Professional	10	3	1	4	18
Lower Professional	2	1	1	0	4
Special Needs and / or Nonprofessional	13	6	3	1	23
Technical	8	1	1	3	13
Unspecified	0	0	2	0	2
Total	**95**	**43**	**35**	**23**	**196**

As shown in the preceding table, gifts and gift certificates are preferred twice as often as other non-monetary incentives for both internal and external groups.

By geographical region

The following table summarizes the non-monetary incentives offered to participants by geographical region.

Non-monetary Incentives by Region

Region	Gift	Redeemable Certificate	Food	Intangible	Total Citations
USA	**47**	**24**	**8**	**13**	**92**
Northeast	5	3	5	4	17
West Coast	19	13	0	5	37
Rest of USA	23	8	3	4	38
Europe	**24**	**7**	**9**	**3**	**43**
Rest of World	**24**	**12**	**18**	**7**	**61**
Total	**95**	**43**	**35**	**23**	**196**

HOW INCENTIVES MAY AFFECT PARTICIPANT BEHAVIOR

Incentives encourage people to volunteer for usability studies. So by offering an incentive, you are trying to influence behavior—to get people to do something they ordinarily do not do. Incentives, however, sometimes motivate people to behave in unintended or unwanted ways. This section provides advice for helping you anticipate how the incentives you offer may affect your participants' behavior.

38. Ensure that the incentive amount is appropriate for the users' job category and the time involved.

As noted in Tip 21, before making a decision, be sure to discuss with the study sponsors the appropriateness of the incentives you would like to offer.

If a participant perceives that the incentive they will be receiving for a session is overly generous, they may feel obligated to say good things about the system, even if they don't like using the system. Similarly, if participants don't feel sufficiently rewarded, they may unduly criticize a system. The study facilitator must then expend more effort to judge which behavior or opinion is reliable, as illustrated in the following anecdote.

"Good" software, but I'll take the cash

Anonymous Usability Professional

I once worked with a participant who, although encountering several problems using the prototype test software, took great pains to say how wonderful he thought it was. Although I placed more stock in his actual task performance than his glowing words, it became clear to me that the anticipation of receiving either the monetary incentive or the software that we were offering (after it was released) guided his verbal responses.

My growing sense was that he wanted the money, not the software, but feared that if he spoke poorly of the software, he might not receive the money. Only after the money was safely in hand did he say that the software "might be hard to use."

39. Be aware that incentives can motivate people to exaggerate their qualifications when answering screening questions.

Be careful that your recruiting ad or preliminary recruiting phone call does not overemphasize incentives or divulge significant information about the system you will be evaluating. Some respondents may paraphrase the information you provide just to be accepted into the study and receive the incentive you are offering. (See the anecdote under Tip 138. Also see *Preparing the Screening Script and Questionnaire* on page 55, for tips on how to mitigate respondent exaggeration.)

HOW AND WHEN TO PROVIDE INCENTIVES

How and when to provide incentives vary depending on the size and makeup of your study team, and whether you are using a recruiting agency and / or employing a host or hostess to look after participants at the study locale.

40. Assign the job of distributing incentives to the team member for whom it makes the most sense to do so and have the same person do that for the whole study.

A person not involved in the study, such as a host or greeter, is a good choice for distributing incentives because his or her doing so will eliminate any question of the study facilitator "buying" good feedback. This tactic has the added benefit of saving the study facilitator time., If you are the facilitator and are responsible for incentives, however, and you would rather control that process yourself, by all means do so.

The person you assign to this task should perform it consistently from the first study session to the last—there will be less to keep track of, as well as less room for error.

41. Enclose monetary incentives, whether check or cash, in an envelope and place the envelope directly into the participant's hand.

Be sure to count a cash incentive in advance and put it into an envelope clearly marked with only the participant's name (not the contents). Then, place the envelope directly into the participant's hand; avoid intermingling the incentive envelope with other forms and materials that you give to the participant, where it easily could be misplaced or lost.

Ask the participant to acknowledge that s/he received the expected amount by signing a receipt for the incentive. (See the sample receipt on page 113.)

42. Consider whether to provide the incentive at the beginning or the end of the session.[10]

At the beginning of the session:

Advantage - You are less likely to forget to pay the incentive if you do it right away.

Disadvantage - Participants may feel obligated to speak positively if they receive the incentive before giving feedback. To encourage honest feedback, explain to the participants as part of your introduction to the session that the incentive is for their time, not their feedback.

Chauncey Wilson, Director, Bentley College Design and Usability Testing Center, offers the following insight:

> "The main issue here is an ethical one: Is the inducement large enough to "coerce" the participant into staying in an unpleasant or risky situation that s/he would normally avoid? Some people feel that paying at the end is more coercive than paying at the beginning, but there are ethical issues with both pre- and post-test payment. If you pay first, the payment sets up an obligation to continue. That obligation to stay in a session after being paid may be just as strong as the desire to obtain payment when you finish, so there is subtle pressure in both cases."

At the end of the session:

Advantage - Providing the incentive at the end of the session helps end the session on a positive note.

Disadvantage - In the rush to get ready for your next participant, however, do not forget to give your current participant the incentive. We suggest that you keep on hand a "To Do" checklist for the session, which includes the items:

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[10] Todd Chapin, User Interface Engineer, Speechworks International—administrator of an informal survey on when to give participants incentives.

- Give participant the incentive
- Have participant sign a receipt for the incentive

In most cases, we recommend giving participants the incentive at the end of the session. If we are using a lab facility that provides hosts, we have the host give participants the incentive and obtain receipts.

43. Plan to give incentives to participants who don't finish their sessions.

Occasionally, you may have to excuse a participant who turns out to be unqualified, or who simply wants to stop the session for one reason or another. When the session ends prematurely, plan to give an incentive for the person's participation—not solely as a reward for finishing their session. Participants who take time out of their schedules, show up, and contribute to your study deserve the compensation whether or not they finish the session. For this reason, you should pay any scheduled person who shows up in time to participate, whether you allow them to participate or not.

44. If an incentive will not be available by the time the study session takes place, provide an incentive voucher.

It is important for participants to feel confident that they will receive the incentive promised. Therefore, when the incentive, such as the next release of software, will not be available immediately, provide an incentive voucher to provide assurance they will be compensated. (See the sample incentive voucher provided on page 114.)

Give people some reasonable estimate of how long it will be before they receive the incentive. Be sure to have participants provide their preferred mailing address and an email address or phone number. We advise that you also give participants some small, inexpensive gift, such as a mouse pad, to provide the immediate gratification that otherwise would be missing.

We recommend not waiting until after the study is over to mail incentive checks to participants. Too much time will have elapsed. If possible, give participants their checks at the end of their sessions. If your company has a compelling reason to wait until after all sessions are complete before sending checks—perhaps a strict policy issue, or the desire to save overhead by having the recruiting agency prepare and mail checks—you should provide an incentive voucher and consider offering a small gift.

CONSIDERING THE STUDY LOCALE

The location of a study can influence participant attendance. If the study locale is inconvenient for participants or difficult to find, you could suffer a high no-show rate. If your organization has its own usability lab, then you probably will hold the majority of your studies at your own site. No matter where the sessions take place, however, you need to be aware of participants' needs and make participation as convenient and easy as possible for them.

WHEN PARTICIPANTS COME TO YOU

45. Choose a location that is easy to get to.

For your participants' convenience and, thus, a better attendance rate, whenever possible, try to use a venue that is on or near major thoroughfares and easily reachable by public transportation.

46. Plan to offer a premium for travel time and expenses.

Give participants who must commute to your study locale a travel-time premium, equivalent to the hourly rate you will pay for the session itself. Offer to reimburse all participants for gas mileage, taxi, train or bus fare, and parking, or make the incentive large enough to cover expenses.

47. Designate someone to greet arriving participants.

Whenever possible, we designate someone to greet participants. In our own venue, the receptionist signs people in and has them fill out participant forms. Alert the receptionist to expect usability study participants who may be asking for "the usability test" or even for the name of the recruiting firm through which contact was established. Participants will often behave differently from typical business visitors and may not ask for the study team members by name.

We advise providing participants with the name of someone on the study team. Understand that even if you do, the team members may not be in their offices if they are running a study in the lab. Make sure the receptionist knows who is on the study team and how to contact them or the lab.

When we use an external locale, we use the hosting service that is included with the facility we are using. If no hosting service is available, we allow enough time between sessions for the facilitator to meet arriving participants.

48. Find out in advance about venue security.

Locked buildings can be a major deterrent to good attendance. If your study takes place after regular business hours or in a building with high security, where doors are always locked, make sure the study sponsors notify security about conducting sessions after hours. Also be sure to let participants know during recruiting, and in session confirmation, what to expect and how to gain entrance. It is also a good idea to have the person in charge of greeting participants wait by the locked entrance at least 10 minutes before and 15 minutes after a participant's scheduled arrival time (especially in large metropolitan areas where traffic can be a problem). Consider the following two anecdotes.

The locked door syndrome

Author Deborah Sova, User Experience Specialist

For an after-hours test I conducted a few years ago,[11] I was returning to the locked, glass-door entryway of the test locale to meet my next participant. I was on time, but my participant was a little early. From the long, glass-enclosed hallway which approached the entryway, I saw someone with paper in hand peek into the lobby (the reception desk was visible from the door), presumably find it empty, and immediately return to her car—all before I could catch up with her and invite her back.

Since then, I try to budget for an after-hours greeter. My orientation materials explain after-hours security and instruct participants to call my cell phone number (which I do not disclose is my cell number) if they have any problems finding or entering the building.

Give them a sign

Ron Sova, Usability Specialist, Sova Consulting Group

At the large headquarters complex of an insurance client, we've been running some after-hours usability tests. We have someone meeting participants at the door when and where they've been instructed to come in. But because it's such a large place and a lot of the buildings look similar, we provide a map of the complex and put signs on the door. We also give participants the phone number of the lab, just in case they go to the wrong door.

49. If you are using a client's lab or other testing facility (not your own lab) tape a sign, prominently bearing your company name, to the external door.

Even if you send participants directions that clearly state the name of the company that is hosting the study, participants may forget this name and look for your company. Help them out by providing good signage.

50. If you are using your own facility, provide a direct-line phone at the external door with a sign saying that it is for study participants to use.

An external telephone is especially important when you are conducting sessions outside regular business hours and the reception may not be staffed. If you cannot get a special direct line installed, consider a telephone connected to your regular internal system and supplement it with a sign that clearly states the extension that participants should dial when arriving for a usability study.

[11] This anecdote describes a study author Deborah Sova performed while employed by Tec-Ed, Inc.

51. Provide a decent map to the study locale.

Wherever the study locale, it is a good idea to provide a map to the lab along with written driving instructions. We're pleased to report that 92% of the NN/g recruiting survey respondents indicated they provide a map and / or diving directions. We advise providing both. Even if a participant is taking a cab, driving instructions could be useful for the cab driver if s/he is unfamiliar with the area in which the lab is located.

If the lab is in a large business complex, provide a map of the complex so participants can find your building more easily. Any map you provide should be legible, contain sufficient detail, have the phone number where the study team can be reached, and use a typeface that is large enough be read easily (some people may be driving and reading a map at the same time, although we don't recommend it!). You might also consider including a picture of the entryway with some surrounding landmarks on your map. Remember that building numbers are sometimes hard to find in the dark.

Ask participants for feedback on the directions and map you provided. Then improve those materials for next time.

52. Understand that climate and surroundings also can affect attendance.

In cold climates, whenever possible, avoid scheduling studies during the heavy snow months—snow storms have been known to produce 100% no-show rates. Even though you may persevere and get to the study locale during inclement weather, your participants may not. Plan to schedule backups for the last days of your study to make up for potential weather-related no-shows.

Keep in mind that even good weather can interfere with attendance, as illustrated in the following anecdote.

Surf's up!

Laurie Kantner, Principal, Tec-Ed, Inc.

A colleague and I had scheduled some Saturday sessions in the San Francisco Bay Area, thinking it would be more convenient for working people to attend a session on their day off. When that Saturday dawned, however—brilliantly sunny, windy, and warm—not one of five scheduled (and reconfirmed) participants showed up for sessions. The surf was up! No one wanted to be indoors on such a magnificent day, including us. We had to scramble to get enough backups to fulfill our commitment to our client regarding the number of participants we agreed to schedule.

53. Take traffic into consideration for metropolitan venues.

If you schedule sessions during a large city's rush hour, in which participants must travel during heavy traffic periods, plan to allow additional time between sessions to allow for latecomers. (Also see the anecdote under Tip 156.)

WHEN YOU MUST GO TO THE PARTICIPANTS

Some participants, such as young school children, people with disabilities, or senior citizens, may find it difficult or impossible to get to a usability study session. Therefore, you may need to visit your participants at their schools, homes, offices, or special clubs to get the data you need.

Other times, it may be most expedient to go to your users. For example, if the system you are evaluating is for a large corporation using enterprise-wide software all over the world, it may be prohibitively expensive either to bring users to you or to hire and coordinate a usability team in each of the countries where you need run a study. Therefore, your team may decide to go to each country. Sometimes, though, you just have to change venue, as illustrated in the following anecdote.

From rural to urban

Nancy Shepard, Human Factors Engineer, Sun Microsystems

In one study I did for a company located in a rural area, I was faced with turning around usability results in a very short time and recruiting from a target market that I had begun to run out of in that rural area. Because of the engineering staff's increasing habit of invalidating study results by claiming that participants were not falling in the target market, I felt compelled to go to a richer source for recruiting.

I came up with the idea of taking the usability testing to the participants, so that I could tap the Denver metro area 60 miles south of this organization. Using a Sony home video camera, a laptop, a (USD) $100 scan converter, and the help of the guys at Radio Shack (electronics store), I was able to take my study on the road.

I met with eight participants in three days, traveling to their homes and offices. A bonus from this method was that by conducting the study in the participants' environment, I obtained much richer user scenarios and some unusual results that would not have been revealed had these people come to the usability lab. I also think my willingness to go "beyond the lab" to obtain participants gave me some increased credibility with the engineering staff. The only drawback was that the engineering team couldn't view the sessions, so I had to budget a little extra time for creating a highlights video.

This section provides advice for scheduling site visits in a considerate and thoughtful way—you want your participants first to agree to host you; then to feel good about inviting you back into their space if you ever need to return for future studies.

54. Plan to hold sessions with children at their school.

Parents and guardians feel more comfortable allowing their children to participate in a study if sessions are held in a safe environment, such as the child's school. Children are also more comfortable and secure in familiar surroundings. In addition, holding sessions in the school will be more convenient for everyone—the students, parents, and the study team. (Also see Tip 202 for resources on conducting usability studies with children.) The following anecdote illustrates the advantages of holding sessions in schools.

Back to school

Douglas Wolfe, Principal, Salmon Brook Consulting

In addition to dealing with the usual budget and time constraints for our usability tests, we also had to tread very carefully in the area of recruiting children as test participants. The best option was to do our testing in schools. It was more time efficient for us because we could test with eight children in one visit, the children were more comfortable in that setting, and it allowed us much easier access to a diverse group of students, with a wide range of ethnic and socio economic backgrounds.

55. Plan to hold sessions with senior citizens or people with disabilities where it's convenient for them.

These participants also feel more comfortable when sessions are held in familiar surroundings—possibly their homes, offices, or clubs. For these participants, it also may be essential for them to use their own, specially equipped systems for your test. For example, people with low or no vision will need their screen readers.

There are many other factors—too numerous to include in this report—that you should consider before scheduling sessions with seniors and people with disabilities. We suggest that you consult with an accessibility expert to help plan your study. (Also see Tip 202 for resources on conducting usability studies with seniors and / or people with disabilities.)

56. When planning to visit participants' offices, be sure to let the management staff know that you will be visiting and when.

Many participants might be willing to host your usability study sessions, but their managers may not be as eager, especially when they are not the study sponsors. Be sure to check with management staff first before invading their territory.

57. Plan times that are convenient for participants, but not disruptive to the organization.

When screening people for your site visits, be sure to ask about the most convenient time for them, and inquire whether that time will be a disruption to others nearby. You may have to ask your participants to book a small conference room, if holding a session in their cubicles could disturb others.

58. Find out about security and after-hours regulations.

If you will be visiting participants after regular business hours or in a building with security regulations, find out in advance how you will gain entrance and move about the building. Ask your first participant to meet you at the entrance and escort you to his or her office.

In addition, find out before you go whether you will need to:

- Get permission to park in the company's parking lot
- Obtain a visitor badge
- Arrange to be escorted from one place to another in the building

- Get permission to videotape or audiotape the session, if you are planning to tape the sessions.

For security reasons, it is often difficult to get permission to videotape on the premises of other companies. Find out well in advance what process to follow to secure permission to tape. Security approvals can take time, especially in large companies, and need to be initiated before you arrive for the study. Work through the study sponsors to make this process go smoothly.

59. Communicate to the study team the importance of respecting participants' hospitality, surroundings, and privacy.

When you visit people's homes, you are an invited guest, even though you are there for business purposes. Build time into your schedule to allow for people's natural desire to be hospitable. Plan to spend a little extra time engaging in conversation and pleasantries, making it worth your hosts' effort to be gracious to you.

When you visit participants at a place of business, however, avoid conversing or visiting unnecessarily with non participants. Do not ask to borrow supplies unless you've arranged to in advance, and never just help yourself to anything without asking first.

Wherever you go to visit a participant, plan to act in a way that you would want visitors to act while in your home, club, or place of business.

60. Let participants and their management know what to expect from your site visit.

Make clear in your recruiting documents what participants can expect from the session. For example, let them know whether you will be videotaping, and how the tapes will be used. It's important to let them know exactly how many team members will be convening on site and what forms they will be expected to sign beforehand. (Also see the anecdote under Tip 169.)

61. For international studies, carefully research logistical and cultural issues for visiting participant sites outside your own country.

For example, you will need to decide whether to recruit participants who speak your language expertly, or whether you will hire translators in each country. You'll also need a very good person or firm who can recruit for you. Even so, keep your list of international contacts handy—you may need them, as illustrated in the following anecdote.

The reluctant Europeans

Peter H. Jones, Ph.D., Redesign Research (USA)

The worst experience I've had with recruiting was for a European study, where recruiting for research centers is often handled by local individuals working from lists they have built up over the years. Our studies often need to recruit from defined user lists, however, so handing these candidate names to a traditional recruiter does not always work well. Giving one agency about a month to recruit 12 people, we had only six slots filled until the day before the first session. They were able to fill only eight or nine sessions even so.

I found that in some parts of Europe, even with offering decent incentives, and working with a defined user list, if people don't want to participate, you just won't get the sessions filled! So I've learned to recruit some of my own contacts.

Also note that the laws in Europe are quite stringent on recruiting and privacy so you need to engage a person or firm who is an expert at recruiting in the country of interest.

For more information on conducting international studies, see:

- The NN/g report, *230 Tips and Tricks for a Better Usability Test.* This report includes a section on international studies.
- The paper, *When the Field is Far Afield: Multiple-Country Observations of Complex System Use*, by Lori Anschuetz, Deborah Hinderer (Sova), and Janice Anne Rohn. This paper describes a usability field study of a complex system used internationally and can be found in the *Proceedings* of the 1998 Usability Professionals' Association (UPA) Conference.
- Elisa del Galdo and Jakob Nielsen: *International User Interfaces.* John Wiley & Sons, New York, 1996. ISBN 0-471-14965-9.

PLANNING FOR TRAINING AND ORIENTATION

In the NN/g recruiting survey, 44% of respondents indicated they provide some amount of orientation or training before sessions, but they didn't specify why.

You may consider providing orientation simply to help participants new to usability feel more comfortable with your study. Other times, as noted in our book *Usability Engineering,*[12] "One will have to train the users with respect to those aspects of a user interface that are unfamiliar to them but are not relevant for the main usability test. This is typically necessary during transition from one interface generation to the next, where the users will have experience with the old interaction techniques but will be completely baffled by the new one unless they are given training."

In addition, consider offering training to ensure participants achieve a minimum or greater level of expertise, or when you are evaluating advanced features.

[12] Jakob Nielsen, *Usability Engineering* (1993), Academic Press.

62. Decide early on whether and how much orientation or training participants need in order to provide effective feedback.

As noted in the excerpt from *Usability Engineering* and in the anecdote below, you should consider providing orientation or training if:

- The system you are evaluating incorporates a new idea.
- The participants are totally new to computers or the new technology.
- The system is complex and the intended users will receive extensive training before being assigned to work with the system.

Plan well in advance, and consider carefully how much orientation and training is enough for participants' comfort without jeopardizing the validity of your data.

A whole new system

Author Deborah Sova, User Experience Specialist

For a field study I conducted with physicians,[13] the study sponsors (a major medical equipment manufacturer) were hoping to get hospital physicians to adopt a new medical records system that also included some diagnostic capabilities and interfaced with email and other hospital systems. Most of these physicians did not use computers regularly—they had staff that handled "data entry." None of them was aware of the field of usability, either, although each of them said that at some time they had been rewarded, as well as thwarted, by technology.

So, the physicians needed orientation for learning about the value of the system our clients were proposing and why they personally should try using it. In addition, our clients had to offer computer and email training first, which they arranged through the hospital IT staff, so that we could effectively test the system with physicians and not spend session time explaining the use of a mouse and opening multiple windows.

Both orientation and training helped physicians feel more comfortable with the field study and more predisposed to try out a new idea. (It also helped that they received a few very nice incentives, such as a cutting-edge recording device for dictating notes.)

We provided an extensive orientation packet explaining the parameters of the field study, the difference between a usability session and training, the schedule of events for the duration of the study (three months long), and the benefits of being involved in system evaluation and usability in general. None of this would have been possible, however, without adequate advance preparation and planning with the study sponsors, the participating physicians, and the hospital IT staff.

[13] This anecdote describes a study that author Deborah Sova conducted while employed by Tec-Ed, Inc.

63. Get someone to provide training, preferably someone involved with or supportive of the study.

It is helpful and saves you some effort if you can get someone else to provide training, preferably someone involved with or supportive of study—perhaps an interested IT staff member with training experience, as noted in the anecdote above.

64. Arrange for participants to get the training in a timely fashion.

If possible, have your internal recruiter or an administrative assistant who can commit some time to your study make arrangements for scheduling and coordinating orientation and training with participants. During screening, be sure to let participants know of the need to go through orientation and training—that's not something to spring on anyone without sufficient notice.

65. Be sure that the study sponsor is involved in planning the training.

If the study sponsors are not directly providing training, they should plan it with you and commit to the extra cost for providing training.

66. Expect to provide additional incentives when participants must commit time to orientation and training.

Consider all the facets of incentive-giving in *Determining the Appropriate Incentives* on page 31 to help you figure out an appropriate additional premium for the additional time participants will invest.

PREPARING THE SCREENING SCRIPT AND QUESTIONNAIRE

After you've learned enough about the users to create accurate recruiting criteria, determined how many participants you'll recruit, figured out the appropriate incentive to offer participants, and determined the optimal study locale, you will need to prepare a participant screening script and questionnaire that accurately reflects all that information.

The participant screening script and questionnaire will be used by the person contacting targeted users, usually by phone (but sometimes via email), to recruit them as participants in your study. This document should contain not only questions specific enough to help determine whether the respondent is a good candidate for participation; it should provide all the particulars a participant will need in order to agree to participate and to get to the scheduled session on time.

A good screening script will allow recruiters to talk with potential participants without causing undue interruption in their schedule. A good questionnaire will allow recruiters to determine early in the conversation whether a candidate is suitable for the study. This section provides advice for helping you to get the most out of your screener and to schedule only qualified participants for your study. At the end of this section, on page 65, you will find a sample Participant Screening Script and Questionnaire. In the *References* section on page 188, you will find our suggestions for books on questionnaire design.

COVER PAGE AND OPENING SCRIPT

67. Prepare a cover page for your screener that includes quick reference information about the respondent.

Record on the cover page the respondent's name, gender, job title, company name, telephone numbers, preferred time and way to be contacted, email address and (if needed) surface address, acceptance into or rejection from the study and user group (if recruiting multiple groups). Also, it's a good idea to record the recruiter's name and the date of the call and to include the screening criteria table, which will serve as a reminder of the characteristics a respondent should possess.

68. Keep the opening script succinct and polite.

Your introduction will determine whether the respondent will speak with you or not. Some respondents may think you are a telemarketer trying to sell them something. Therefore, it is important that you immediately make clear who you are and the purpose of your call.

69. Whenever possible, provide the name of someone known to the respondent as a lead-in.

For example, "Hello, may I please speak to Erica Smith? This is Andrew Petersen from Acme Market Research. I am calling you today because Bill Edwards of Bay Town Usability suggested you might be interested in participating in a usability evaluation that we are conducting for one of his clients, who is in the process of redesigning their website."

70. Avoid saying too much about what you are evaluating so participants can't prepare in advance—especially when you will be evaluating with new users.

If the goal of your study is to learn how easy a system is to "walk up and use," you could taint novice experience levels by providing too much information about what you are evaluating—some candidates cannot resist studying up on the system. The naturally curious use the information you provide to look things up on the Internet in order to feel more qualified for the study.

Therefore, in your opening script, describe the system and the feedback you want only in general terms. To accommodate questions from respondents, instruct the recruiter to plead ignorance about the study so s/he won't skew the fresh perspective you hope to get from participants.

An exception to this advice is when you need to provide orientation and / or training for new technology or for those new to computers or technology, as described in *Planning for Training and Orientation* on page 53.

71. Avoid words that make a usability study sound like a scientific experiment or some type of psychological study.[14]

Avoid words and phrases like "lab," "experiment," "research," and "test subject" in your description of a usability test. Instead, use terms like "product evaluation" and "usability evaluation," which are less intimidating. (Also see Tip 184.)

72. Have someone on the study sponsor's team make the first contact by email or phone.

Preliminary contact by someone the users know, or at least know of, can help pave the way for smoother screening.

Stakeholder's request

Deborah Sova, User Experience Specialist

For a field study I was conducting for a world environmental institute, I needed to recruit current users of their environmental resources website. Targeted audiences included government workers who need to keep abreast of the latest environmental events and trends, university professors who need information for their course lectures, charitable foundations who need to know where best to disburse grants, and environmental club members who look for tips on how to raise environmental awareness. It would have taken weeks to make "cold calls" to all the various organizations to find people willing to participate.

I suggested instead that the study sponsor contact a few known website visitors in each category as a door opener for our recruiters to then follow up. It worked like a charm. The client accessed the institute's membership and newsletter recipient lists and sent well-worded emails. We received sufficient response to her initial contact to fill our schedule for site visits. The participants who responded to our sponsor's email request were motivated and gracious, and provided excellent feedback.

The wording of the preliminary-contact email should closely follow the opening script of your screener, and it should tell the candidate who will be following up with a phone call and approximately when. The message should ask the candidate to respond saying whether s/he would be interested in participating, and how and when the recruiter should follow up. (See the following sample script for a preliminary contact by a study sponsor.)

[14] *How to Conduct Usability Studies*, a Nielsen Norman Group report, www.nngroup.com/reports/how-to-conduct-usability-studies

Sample Script for Preliminary Contact by Study Sponsor

"Hello, [candidate's name]. I'm hoping to pique your interest in a usability evaluation we'll be conducting [timeframe—*such as "in three weeks"*] with current users of the [name of system—*or describe the system generically throughout, to avoid providing too much information*].

My group, [name of sponsor's group or organization] is very interested in getting feedback from [user group or groups] to learn how well [system] is supporting you in [performing your job / tasks / other]. This evaluation is very important to my group because it will result in a set of recommendations that will help improve [system] to better support our users in [performing their job / tasks / other].

"I think you are an excellent candidate for giving feedback to the evaluation team. Could you spare [number] minutes on one of these days [dates], and help us out with this evaluation? You don't have to do anything to prepare for it—the evaluation team will ask you to do some typical tasks and give your feedback. We are offering [incentive] for those who participate.

"Please let me know by [date and time] whether or not you are interested, and I'll have [recruiter's name] get in touch with you by [date]. Also, let me know when would be a good time for [recruiter's name] to call you.

"Thanks very much, [candidate's name]. I hope you'll be able to help us out with your participation.

"Best regards, *[if an email message]*

"[Sender's name] *[if an email message]*"

——End of Sample Script for Preliminary Contact——

SCREENING QUESTIONS

73. Put quick disqualifier questions first in your screening questionnaire.

For example, you may be evaluating how well a certain system serves the needs of the general public and, therefore, do not want highly technical people as participants. Ask for the respondent's job title or job description first.

As another example, your study may be evaluating the ease of readability for persons of middle age or older, and therefore, you do not want people under age 25 as participants. Ask the age-range question first.

Putting immediate disqualifiers first will save interview time—you can excuse Information Technology (IT) people immediately, without having to go through the remainder of the screener.

74. Screen out employees of competing companies.

You can avoid inviting competitor "spies" into the study by listing known competitors as disqualifying answers to the job / occupation question on the screening questionnaire. (For example, see Question 1 on the sample screener on page 68.) Whether or not you are worried about actual espionage, such users will have too much inside knowledge about the industry and will exhibit biased behavior.

75. Screen out the study sponsors' employees and their family members for studies evaluating systems designed for external users.

The study sponsor's employees will be biased and will know too much about the company and its products to be valid study participants. Add the sponsor's name to the list of disqualifying companies, to screen out its employees.

76. Use polite, socially acceptable phrasing when screening for possibly sensitive information.

The following table lists phrasing to avoid when screening for sensitive information such as age, gender, employment status, household income, language skills, and disabilities, and it suggests more-acceptable alternatives.

Sample Questions for Eliciting Sensitive Information

Avoid phrasing your questions this way:	**Instead phrase them this way:**
Age: How old are you?	Please tell me which of the following ranges your age falls within: 21–25 years, 26–30 years, 31–35 years, 36–40 years, more than 40 years.
Gender: What is your sex? [or] Are you male or female?	It is best not to ask these questions at all. Rather, use aural cues, such a voice pitch, or visual cues, such as spelling of candidate's name, to determine gender. If, after interviewing the candidate, you still are unsure, make note of it on the questionnaire. However, if you are prescreening with an email message, it would be acceptable to ask respondents to indicate gender.
Employment status: Are you employed, unemployed, or retired?	What is your current occupation?
Household income: How much money do you earn per year?	Please tell me which of the following ranges your annual household income falls within: (USD) $15–30k, $31–45k, $46–60k, more than $60k. [If you keep the ranges wide, people likely will feel more comfortable placing themselves within one.]
Language skills: How long have you been speaking [Language]?	Is [Language] your first or second, language? [If not the first language] Where and how did you learn [Language]?
Disabilities: Are you handicapped? [or] Are you disabled?	Do you use any special equipment, such as a screen reader or alternative input device, with your computer? [If so] Which devices and how often?

77. Avoid "giving away" the profile you are targeting.

As noted in previous tips, some respondents may answer screening questions the way they think they should just to get into the study. Ask questions in such a way that respondents will not know which answer meets your criteria. (However, be careful to ask enough information to ensure they meet your criteria—see Tip 78.)

The sample screening questions below demonstrate how to elicit information about a respondent's Web experience without giving away the experience levels you are looking for.

Sample Questions for Eliciting Web Experience

For a Web study in which you need a mix of, say, intermediate and advanced Web users, but no novices or experts, ask specific questions about Web usage and assign "experience" points to key responses.

- Do you have access to the Internet / Web at work or at home?
  - ❑ Yes [Continue]
  - ❑ No [End Interview]
- How long have you been using the Internet? [Do not prompt. Check the response that most closely matches the candidate's.]
  - ❑ Less than 1 yr [End Interview]
  - ❑ Between 1 and 3 yrs [Continue] (SCORE +1)
  - ❑ More than 3 yrs [Continue] (SCORE +2)

  SCORE:_____
- How much time do you spend on the Internet each week, not including time spent working with email? [Do not prompt. Check the response that most closely matches the candidate's.]
  - ❑ Fewer than 2 hours per wk [End Interview]
  - ❑ Between 2 and 5 hours per wk [Continue] (SCORE +1)
  - ❑ More than 5 hours per wk [Continue] (SCORE +2)

  SCORE:_____
- Please tell me which of the following Internet-related tasks you have performed. [Read through list and check all that apply.]
  - ❑ Chat / Online discussion forums
  - ❑ Categorizing bookmarks in your folders
  - ❑ Changing labels on a bookmark folder
  - ❑ Personalizing your browser
  - ❑ Searching for information on a long Web page
  - ❑ Upgrading / updating your browser from the Web
  - ❑ Web page design

- ❑ Performing searches on the Internet that include advanced features such as using quotation marks, parentheses, or the plus sign (+)

  0–2 tasks (SCORE +0)

  3–4 tasks (SCORE +1)

  5 or more tasks (SCORE +2)

  SCORE:_____

  Total score for previous 3 questions: _____

0–1	Novice	[End Interview]
2–3	Intermediate	[Need 4]
4–5	Advanced	[Need 4]
6 or more	Expert	[End Interview]

——End of Sample Web Experience Questions——

78. Ensure your screening questions accurately reflect the intent of your criteria.

Ask prospective study participants to demonstrate their knowledge. Don't waste time asking them to provide personal judgments. Screen both for insufficient knowledge and for too much experience. An example of a good screening question for too much experience is "Imagine that you have a long page with a lot of text displayed on your browser. How do you find out if the word 'hotel' occurs somewhere in the text?" Prospective participants who can answer this question may be overqualified for the test.[15]

The following two anecdotes illustrate the pitfalls of not seeking specific enough information.

Worried about Web experience

Anonymous Usability Consultant

For a usability test of a website, I needed people with a certain level of Web experience. The screener we used asked candidates to self-report their Web experience and comfort levels with using the Web. However, a test participant who had self-rated as Web competent clearly demonstrated during the test session that s/he was not at the Web competency level we needed. We realized we had to think about our screeners more carefully.

We now know that we should not rely on self-reporting, and that we need to ask a few more specific follow-up questions to gauge for ourselves whether a candidate possesses the competency needed to be included in the test.

[15] *How to Conduct Usability Studies*, a Nielsen Norman Group report, www.nngroup.com/reports/how-to-conduct-usability-studies

Distraught about districts

Dave Kreimer, Principal, Next Step Consulting

Recently, I was recruiting school administrators in the Chicago area. I was looking for administrators with certain titles, such as superintendent, which implied responsibility for several schools within a school district. The screener worked just fine in two of the three districts we visited. However, I did not know that many of Chicago school districts consist of only one or two schools.

My clients and I were disappointed to learn that the superintendents from the smaller third district had only about as much influence as a school principal from either of the first two larger districts. They made it into the study based on their titles, not on the actual level of influence that we needed.

Next time, I will add a question related to the number of schools each person supervises to better gauge their actual influence. I refine my recruiting screeners based on experiences like this one. With more tightly defined criteria, I find I can avoid most of the pitfalls and get the type of participants I require more consistently.

We would add to Dave's advice about including a question on the number of schools: ask this question before asking for job title, so people are not tempted to inflate the number to be accepted into the study.

79. Decide which criteria can be relaxed and which cannot be.

Certain segments of users are difficult to find and recruit. Therefore, you and the study sponsor should decide in advance which of the screening criteria your recruiter can relax somewhat to get the desired number of participants for the study. The following three case-study examples illustrate how to communicate criteria flexibility to the recruiter.

"Must-Have" case-study example for an investment usability study in which all participants must be experienced investors:

One of the criteria for determining investment experience is size of portfolio. The study sponsors want investors with portfolios valued only at USD $100,000 or more. You advise accepting people with portfolio values within 15% of the USD $100,000 target, however, simply because the value of even an experienced investor's portfolio can change dramatically from week to week in a volatile economy.

You and the study sponsors reach a compromise: the recruiter can accept people with USD $85,000 portfolios, if respondents had a portfolio valued at USD $100,000 sometime during the last two years. The "experienced" requirement is still "must-have" but the criteria for determining experience now has some flexibility. To communicate this flexibility in the portfolio requirement to the recruiter, construct your questions as follows:

- What is the current USD ($) value of your overall portfolio? [Do not prompt. Check the response that most closely matches the candidate's.]
  - ❑ 100,000 or higher [Continue]
  - ❑ $85,000 to $99,000 [Continue]
  - ❑ $51,000 to $84,000 [End Interview]
  - ❑ $0 to $50,000 [End Interview]
- What is the highest USD ($) value your overall portfolio attained in 200x–200y? [Do not prompt. Check the response that most closely matches the candidate's.]
  - ❑ $100,000 or higher [Continue]
  - ❑ Less than $100,000 [End Interview]

"Nice-to-Have" case-study example for a usability study of a tools and safety supplies website:

The study sponsors say that most purchases are made by men, but that it would be nice to have some women in the study too. You and the sponsors agree to try and get up to 10% women, but will accept 100% men, if getting women proves to be difficult. To communicate this preference to the recruiter, phrase your gender query as follows:

- Gender: [Observe; do not ask.]
  - ❑ Female [We'd like up to 10% women. However, if we are running out of time, and we do not have 10% women, it is okay to accept all men.]
  - ❑ Male [We'd like 90% men. However, if we are running out of time, and we do not have 10% women, it is okay to accept all men.]

"Information-Only" case-study example for another e-commerce website usability study:

A major department store is interested in knowing how site visitors will pay for purchases on its newly redesigned site. (They have experienced security issues in the past.) They want to know which participants most often use their credit cards, and which type of credit card, which users prefer calling an 800 number. No one will be excluded for using or not using one method or another, however. To communicate this request for information to the recruiter, construct your question as follows:

- What payment method do you use most often to purchase products or services online?
  [For information purposes only. We want to get a feel for whether site visitors prefer using a free phone ordering line or a credit card on the website.]
  - ❑ A credit card (specify card used most often): _____
  - ❑ The toll-fee phone number
  - ❑ Other (please specify): _____

INVITATION AND SCHEDULE

80. Include script for inviting the respondent to participate and provide some information on what to expect from the session.

We advise not giving away too much information about the system, or sometimes even the study sponsor. When you accept participants into the study, however, we do advise letting them know what to expect of the session itself:

- Tell them how the session will proceed.
- Advise them to bring prescription eye glasses if worn for reading (and to bring their computer glasses if the study involves using a computer monitor).
- Mention whether you will be video- or audio-taping the session or not.
- Inform them that consent, nondisclosure, and / or tax forms will need to be signed.
- Mention, if applicable, that you need a particular kind of personal information, such as a social security number (US), and why.
- Explain if, when, and how you will provide orientation and / or training.
- Discuss venue security issues (how to gain entrance and whom to call).
- Tell what kind of refreshments you will be offering.
- Explain what the incentive is, and how and when it will be disbursed.

81. Ask for the best way to contact the participant to confirm the appointment before the study.

Usually this will be by email or snail mail, though some people may prefer text messaging (SMS) or other formats such as Facebook if they don't check their email on a regular basis. It's also best to find out what phone number(s) can be used to call the participant for confirmation (see tip 148) or in case of last-minute problems. This will often be a mobile phone, even if you called them on a landline during the screening.

82. Include a master schedule on which the recruiter can record participant appointments.

Providing a schedule also allows you to communicate your preferred session times, how much time you want to keep available between sessions, and how you want to handle backups.

83. Include your screener as an appendix in your usability study report.

Doing so can save you work in the event that the study is repeated at a later date. You will not need to track down individual files if it's right in your report.

More important, a good screener—one that demonstrates the rigor of your recruiting—will help strengthen the validity of your data and enhance the credibility of the usability study team.

SAMPLE PARTICIPANT SCREENING SCRIPT AND QUESTIONNAIRE

The following sample screening script and questionnaire represents a complete screening document. It is based on a usability study conducted by the fictitious "Olympia Human Factors" on the equally fictitious "Aztech.com" website. People can buy utility services, such as electric, telephone, and cable TV, from independent sources on Aztech.com. The website acts as a kind of broker for these and other home services. Olympia and Aztech would like to conduct sessions with a cross-section of five general utility customers representing a mix of men and women who own a home or rent living quarters; have incomes between USD $34,000 and $75,000; are experienced computer and Internet users; and who shop online.

Aztech cannot provide a list of current customers, because they want to see how well the website induces traditional utility customers to consider buying services from alternative sources online. They do not have utility companies' customer lists. For that reason, they also will not be able to provide first contact, and the recruiter most likely will be working from a database or phone book. Olympia Human Factors will schedule backup participants in the last few time slots, rather than asking them to be on-call. If a backup is not needed, Olympia will cancel with sufficient notification, or send the backup the incentive. (Also see *Scheduling Backups* on page 101.)

Olympia Human Factors

Aztech.com Website Usability Test

Participant Screening Script and Questionnaire

Recruiter name:	
Today's date:	
Respondent's name:	
Gender:	[ ] Male [ ] Female
Telephone numbers:	Voice: _____ [ ] Home [ ] Work Best time to call: _____ Fax: _____
Job title:	
Company name:	
Email address:	
Accepted:	[ ] Yes [ ] No
Status:	[ ] Pilot [ ] Regular [ ] Backup [ ] N / A

Olympia Human Factors

Aztech.com Website Usability Test

Participant Screening Script and Questionnaire

Participant Characteristics	Number Needed
Total participants:	9
Pilot	1
Regular	5
Backup	3
Gender:	
Men	4–5
Women	4–5
Age	
20–30 years	1 R, 1 P
31–40 years	1 P, 2 R, 1 B
41–50 years	2 R, 1 B
Income and home ownership:	
$35,000–$45,000	1 R, 1 P
$46,000–$60,000	1 P, 2 R, 1 B
$61,000–$75,000	2 R, 1 B
Renter or Home owner:	All
Computer and Web Experience:	
Uses a computer at home or at work at least 5 hours per week	All
Has used the Internet for six months or longer, at least 5 hours per week.	All
Online Shopping Experience:	
Must have purchased something online with the last 3 months	All
Exclusions:	
Unemployed persons	0
Employees of utilities or home improvement / wireless / phone services	0
Previous market research or usability test participants (within last six months)	0

Olympia Human Factors

Aztech.com Website Usability Test

Participant Screening Script and Questionnaire

Opening Script

"Hello, may I please speak to Thomas Apollo? This is Artemis Hermes from Olympia Human Factors in San Francisco. I am calling you today because we are looking for people who might be interested in participating in a usability evaluation that we are conducting for one of our clients who is in the process of redesigning their website. Obtaining feedback from actual Web users is one of the important ways we can ensure development of a website that will be a valuable resource, as well as easy to use.

"We are looking for people in the San Francisco Bay Area who would be interested in spending about 90 minutes evaluating our client's website and offering feedback on their experience. Olympia will use this feedback to help our client improve their website for people like you. Your input into this process would be invaluable. I assure you that I am not trying to sell you anything now or in the future.

"As thanks for your participation in the website evaluation, you'll receive (USD) $100 at the end of your evaluation session. Does this sound like something you might be interested in?"

> [If yes, continue. If no, ask if s/he may know another person who might be interested, get that person's contact information, thank respondent for his / her time, and terminate the call.]

"Great. Sessions will take place at Diamond Focus, 123 Market Street, in San Francisco on Wednesday, January 8, and Thursday, January 9. Would a 90-minute session on one of these two days work for you?"

> [If yes, continue. If no, ask if s/he may know another person who might be interested, get that person's contact information, thank respondent for his / her time, and terminate the call.]

"If you have a few minutes, I'd like to ask you some questions to determine whether you're an appropriate candidate for the website evaluation. Do you have time right now to answer a few questions?"

> [If yes, go to Screening Questions. If no, arrange a time to call back.]

Olympia Human Factors

Aztech.com Website Usability Test

Participant Screening Script and Questionnaire

Screening Questions

Gender: [Observed only. Do not inquire.]

- ❑ Female [Accept 2–3 regulars and 1–2 backups. A woman as pilot is acceptable.]
- ❑ Male [Accept 2–3 regulars and 1–2 backups. A man as pilot is acceptable.]

[Note: Whenever you need to terminate the interview because the candidate does not qualify for the study, politely tell the candidate **"we already have enough people with your background, but thank you very much for your time."**]

1. What is your occupation and job title?

   Occupation: _____

   Title: _____

   [Exclude people who are unemployed. Also exclude any employees of competitors, such as a utility company, a wireless product or service provider, a cable TV or satellite-dish product or service provider, or a home improvement company (builders, roofers, plumbers, etc.).]

2. Please tell me which of the following ranges your age falls within:

   - ❑ Under 20 [Thank and terminate]
   - ❑ 20–30 [Accept 1 regular and 1 backup]
   - ❑ 31–40 [Accept 2 regulars, 1 backup, and 1 pilot]
   - ❑ 41–50 [Accept 2 regulars, and 1 backup]
   - ❑ More than 50 [Thank and terminate; be extremely tactful in excusing these people; say that we already have enough people in their age range right now.]

3. Which of the following salary ranges best describes your current household income?

   - ❑ $34,000 or less [Thank and terminate; be extremely tactful in excusing these people; say that we already have enough people in their salary range right now.]
   - ❑ $35,000 – $45,000 [Accept 1 regular and 1 backup]
   - ❑ $46,000 – $60,000 [Accept 2 regulars, 1 backup, and 1 pilot]
   - ❑ $61,000 – $75,000 [Accept 2 regulars and 1 backup]

- ❑ $76, 000 or higher [Thank and terminate; be extremely tactful in excusing these people; say that we already have enough people in their salary range right now.]

4. Do you own a home, or do you rent living space?

   - ❑ Neither [Thank and terminate; we would like people who make purchasing decisions on utilities, communications, entertainment, and home improvement for their household.]
   - ❑ Home owner [Continue]
   - ❑ Renter [Continue]

5. How many hours per week do you use a computer either at home or at work? [Do not prompt; check the response that most closely matches the candidate's.]

   - ❑ Fewer than 5 [Thank and terminate]
   - ❑ 5 or more [Continue]

6. Do you currently use the Internet?

   - ❑ Yes [Continue]
   - ❑ No [Thank and terminate]

7. How long have you been using the Internet? [Do not prompt; check the response that most closely matches the candidate's.]

   - ❑ 6 mos. or more [Continue]
   - ❑ Less than 6 mos. [Thank and terminate]

8. How many hours per week do you spend on the Internet, not including time spent working with email? [Do not prompt; check the response that most closely matches the candidate's.]

   - ❑ Fewer than 5 [Thank and terminate]
   - ❑ 5 or more [Continue]

9. Do you shop online?

   - ❑ Yes [Continue]
   - ❑ No [Thank and terminate]

10. What items have you purchased online within the last three months?

    _____

    If 0–1 item cited Thank and terminate]

    If 2 or more items cited [Continue]

Invitation

"Thank you very much for answering my questions. I'd like to invite you to participate in our study [if as a backup, say "as a backup participant." If the candidate wants to know more about backup status, read the boxed backup script on the next page]. As I explained earlier, your evaluation session will be held at Diamond Focus, 123 Market Street, in San Francisco.

"If you wear glasses while using the computer, please bring them with you to your session. You will use our client's website to do a few tasks. Then the evaluation staff will ask you a few follow-up questions to clarify their observations to ensure they thoroughly understand your actions with the site and obtain any additional feedback you feel is important. At the completion of your session, you will receive $100 as our thanks for your participation.

> *[If you will be videotaping session]* "I'd like to let you know that your session will be video taped, but that these tapes will be used by the project team within the company for analysis purposes only; all information, including your identity, will remain confidential. At your session, we will ask you to sign a videotaping consent form.]"
>
> *[If you will administer a nondisclosure]* "In addition, our client has asked that you sign a nondisclosure agreement which says that you will agree not to talk to anyone about the website you are evaluating. You may tell them that you helped to evaluate a new website, however."
>
> *[If you will provide orientation and / or training]* [Briefly explain what sort of orientation and / or training you will provide and what time commitment is needed from the participant.]
>
> *[If you will provide a meal or refreshments]* [Let people know that you'll be providing food and beverages and whether it will be substantial or simple.]
>
> *[If the incentive will not be provided at the session]* [If the incentive, such as the next release of software, you will provide is not available at the time of the session, explain to the participant how and approximately when s/he will receive it.]

Can we count on your participation? If so, I'd like to schedule a tentative appointment to reserve your space in the study schedule."

Schedule

"Because we are scheduling very few people for this study, it is extremely important that you keep your appointment with us. If for any reason you must reschedule, please contact me, [your name and phone number] as soon as you know. Please do not send anyone else in your place."

[Schedule participants for 90 minutes. Allow at least half-an-hour between sessions and an hour for lunch. Schedule appointments starting as early as 9:00 a.m. *[If applicable for your venue:]* Allow 45 minutes before a session you schedule to start during morning or evening rush hour. You may schedule people for evening sessions, if they cannot make it to sessions during regular business hours. If scheduling evening appointments, allow half-an-hour for dinner.]

Olympia Human Factors

Aztech.com Website Usability Test

Participant Screening Script and Questionnaire

	Date	Time	Candidate Name	Pilot, Regular or Backup
1.				Pilot
2.				Regular
3.				Regular
4.				Regular
5.				Regular
6.				Regular
7.				Backup
8.				Backup
9.				Backup

"Thank you for your time and for agreeing to participate in our study [if a backup, say 'as a backup' and read the boxed text below]. Please plan to arrive about 10 minutes ahead of your session time to fill in some participant forms."

BACKUPS:

"We may not need to see all backup participants. If we will not be working with you at your scheduled time, we will give you at least a half day's notice or send you the $100 with less notice. We appreciate your flexibility.

"May I please have your email address, fax number, or mailing address where I can send a confirmation letter? [Record contact information on the cover page.] I will contact you again closer to your scheduled appointment to confirm the date, time, and place with you. I will also provide directions and a map to Diamond Focus, if needed. Thanks again."

[Before ending call, confirm the appointment, the spelling of the candidate's name, email and surface addresses, and phone number(s). Also remind him / her to arrive 10 minutes early to fill out participant forms.]

Reconfirmation

[ ] Reconfirmed appointment [ ] Provided directions and map to Diamond Focus

Date: _____ [ ] email [ ] surface mail [ ] phone

——*End of Sample Screener* ——

Screening and Scheduling Participants

After your recruitment planning is complete, you may begin the process of actually contacting potential participants and scheduling them for sessions. Budget and staff permitting, you have a few options: 1) do the recruiting yourself (or within your organization), 2) hire an agency to recruit for you, or 3) have some other outside person do the recruiting.

The results of the NN/g recruiting survey indicate that a majority of companies were doing their own recruiting, as follows:

- 79% of respondents indicated that the person who will be running the study recruits participants for an average of 70% of the studies.
- 32% indicated that someone else within their company, usually clerical staff, recruits for an average of 32% of the studies.
- 12% indicated that a dedicated recruiter within their company recruits for an average of 67% of the studies.

The survey indicates that the remaining respondents hire a recruiting agency or have some other outside person recruit for them, as follows:

- 36% indicated that an outside recruiting agency recruits for an average of 61% of the studies.
- 13% indicated that some other person, usually the client, recruits for an average of 32% of the studies.

(Numbers total more than 100% because many companies use multiple methods. Also see *Who Recruits Participants*, on page 143.)

We also tested whether survey data would confirm the anecdotal data we received from usability professionals that the no-show rate is higher for professional recruiting agencies than for internal recruiters. The results from our survey tend to back up this claim, although the differences in no-show rates are not statistically significant. Three internal recruiter categories do only slightly better, while a fourth does only slightly worse—the person who runs the study—than the world average rate of 10.6%. Survey results indicated a no-show rate of 11.1% for people who run studies, and 10.8% for recruiting agencies. (Also see *No-show rates by who recruits*, on page 159.)

84. Whether you recruit yourself or use an outside source, don't cut corners.

Remember that all your hard work planning the study itself will not produce reliable results unless you make the effort to find the right users. Spend the time and money needed to conduct rigorous recruiting. (Also see the article written by Susan M. Dray, Ph.D. and David A. Siegel, Ph.D., *Penny Wise, Pound Wise: Making Smart Tradeoffs in Planning Usability Studies.* web.archive.org/web/20110718104321/http://www.dray.com/articles/pennywise.htm)

WORKING WITH AN OUTSIDE RECRUITING AGENCY

Even if your company is fortunate enough to have recruiters on staff, from time to time you may find it more expedient, or even necessary, to engage a professional, outside recruiting agency in order to meet your schedule. As noted above, the results of the NN/g recruiting survey indicate that 36% of the survey respondents hire an outside recruiting agency and that these companies use agencies for an average of 61% of their studies. Many good, professional recruiting agencies are available to help you with your recruiting needs. NN/g has used agencies all over the world with good results.

In addition to recruiting, many agencies offer a range of services, such as preparing screeners, hosting, and providing incentives to participants. Some agencies also have facilities you can rent for focus groups and usability testing, and often these facilities can provide lab techs and note-taking observers (for a fee, of course). This section provides advice for deciding when to use an outside agency, as well as finding, choosing, and working with agencies.

WHEN TO OUTSOURCE RECRUITING

In a 1998 sidebar to an Alertbox column on the cost of user testing,[16] we discussed when to outsource recruiting and when to do your own recruiting. We've incorporated that advice into the following tips on outsourcing.

85. Avoid using a recruiting agency if you are conducting a usability study of an intranet.

For an intranet usability test, the representative users are your own employees, so it doesn't make sense to ask an outside agency to recruit them. Instead, get your study users by randomly contacting employees in various departments or job categories. For example, you may ask department administrators to give you the names of people whose last names begin with a letter you chose arbitrarily from the alphabet. Change letters for each department you contact.

86. Avoid using a recruiting agency if you are conducting a usability study of a site that aims at a narrow group of external users.

Sometimes, the users are a specific, well-defined group (for example, an extranet may aim at the purchasing agents for major customers). Other times, the site has a list of registered users or existing customers. In these cases, you will probably have an easier time contacting these potential study users yourself, and they will be more willing to listen to you than to an external agency.

---

[16] "When to Outsource the Recruiting of Test Users," sidebar for Jakob Nielsen's Alertbox for May 3, 1998: *Cost of User Testing a Website.* www.nngroup.com/articles/when-to-outsource-recruiting-test-users

87. Use a recruiting agency if you are conducting a usability study of a site that aims at the general population or at a relatively broad group.

For these types of studies, it can be quite time consuming to call around to potential users and try to build a suitable schedule. It would be easier to have participants recruited by a company that specializes in recruiting. Go ahead and outsource the recruiting so that you can concentrate on the design of your site.

88. Use a recruiting agency if your study is tightly scheduled, and you simply do not have, or cannot afford, the resources to do the recruiting.

Occasionally, you will find that you just don't have the time or affordable personnel to do the recruiting for a study. For example, a highly paid senior study facilitator who takes two or three days to recruit for a study may cost more in time than your budget can afford. Take the opportunity to try out an agency who may be able to recruit for a lot less than a senior user experience staff member.

FINDING A RECRUITING AGENCY

89. Check with your marketing department for existing contracts with recruiting agencies.

They may already have a contract with a focus group company that specializes in your industry and has all the necessary procedures in place to recruit people for studies.

90. Ask usability colleagues which recruiting agencies they've used successfully.

This is probably the best endorsement you can get. If you enjoy good results working with a recommended recruiting agency, be sure to thank the colleague who recommended the agency and let the agency know you were satisfied with their work. Also be willing to recommend the agency to other usability colleagues.

91. Visit www.stcsig.org/usability/topics/recruiting-firms.html

The Usability Special Interest Group (SIG) area of the Society for Technical Communication (STC) website provides a good deal of information about participant recruiters and lab facilities. The site lists agencies and labs outside the US as well.

We encourage usability professionals everywhere who have had a successful experience using a recruiting agency or lab / focus group facility to contribute to this resource through usewww@lists.stc.org .

STC asks for a range of useful information when you refer a business:

- Facility or agency name and website (if available)
- Address and contact information
- Does the firm have lab facilities? If so, does the facility have:
  - Interview rooms (no mirrors or observation rooms)?
  - Market research rooms (mirrors, observation rooms and recording capability)?

    - Usability setup (record from screen, picture in picture)?
    - Does the firm provide audio or videotapes and / or other supplies?
- Does the firm recruit participants?
    - Any restrictions (for example, recruiting only for sessions conducted in their facility)?
- Does the firm provide usability study facilitators, participant hosting / greeting, or other services for conducting usability tests?

Please note that updates to this resource list on the STC website are made on an irregular schedule by a volunteer staff. STC reserves the sole right to determine the contents of this resource list.

92. Post an inquiry on a professional usability mailing list.

The usability community is always happy to help with an inquiry, and most usability mailing lists have members worldwide, which is especially helpful when you need to find an agency in another country. We recently posted an inquiry on a usability mailing list to help us find recruiters in London and received three excellent recommendations the same day.

Because many usability mailing lists are privately owned and maintained, we cannot provide information about them directly. Instead, ask any seasoned usability colleague to recommend his / her favorite usability-related mailing list, and join. But be prepared to receive email on a daily basis. You'll quickly learn to scan the subject lines for the topics of interest to you. Be prepared to follow the posting and propriety guidelines of any email communities you join, or you could be expelled.

93. In the US, look up "Market Research" in the Yellow Pages of your telephone book. In other countries, try equivalent terms in the local language.

Carolyn Snyder of Snyder Consulting offers this advice:[17]

> "For a preliminary source of potential companies that can provide recruiting services, look in the Yellow Pages under 'Market Research.' A physical phone book is often superior to an online one for this type of search, because an online directory may provide only the company name, address, and phone number.
>
> "Company names may not be very descriptive—print ads are useful because they list services.
>
> "At the time of this writing (early 2001), it would be quite unusual to see 'usability testing' advertised as a market research service, so look for firms that conduct focus groups. Focus groups are similar to usability testing in that participants who meet a certain profile must travel to a facility at a scheduled time.

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[17] Carolyn Snyder, *Finding a User Recruitment Vendor (2001),* Snyder Consulting white paper www.snyderconsulting.net/booksarticles.htm

> "Thus, any company that's accustomed to conducting focus groups should theoretically have the resources to handle recruitment for usability testing."

94. To find recruiting agencies outside your local area, check online Yellow Pages.

Check the website of your local newspaper, which may have an online Yellow Pages. For example, "On Wisconsin," the website of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, produces a good many search results for "market research." It lists agencies for cities across the US, not just Milwaukee. www.switchboard.com/bin/cgidir.dll?MEM=1304

Note that, as Carolyn Snyder warns, you don't get a description of services offered. You can enter the name of a company that sounds promising as a search string in Google to learn more about them, however. www.google.com

95. Outside the US, check the STC resource that lists recruiting agencies and labs outside the US. www.stcsig.org/usability/topics/recruiting-firms.html

See Tip 91 for ways to contribute to this resource through usewww@lists.stc.org

96. Use Web search engines.

Try using the search strings: "usability research," "market research," "focus group recruiting," "usability recruiting," "participant recruiting," "usability labs," "usability testing," "user testing" and other similar queries, followed by the name of the city where you want to test. If you will be evaluating an interface in non-English speaking countries, try equivalent terms in the local language, but often it is also worth trying the English query terms, because some recruiting agencies use them in an attempt to attract international customers. In July 2005, the search results were less than optimal, although we turned up a few good hits with Google.

97. Create a spreadsheet or text file to record your recruiting agency research and share it with your colleagues.

This list will save you from having to research the same thing again and again. When you've used one of the recruiting agencies successfully, record a short description of your experience for colleagues who may access your file.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM A RECRUITING AGENCY

98. Allow adequate lead time—at least two weeks.

Survey respondents, as well as the agencies we spoke with, indicated that agencies usually need at least two weeks' lead time for recruiting. Some agencies may ask for more time, depending on the number of user groups you are targeting and the difficulty of finding the targeted groups (8% of the survey respondents who use agencies indicated they provide as much as five or six weeks lead time). Ask in advance how much lead time the agency requires and budget the time in your schedule accordingly. Some agencies may be able to handle emergency requests on shorter notice, but it's best to avoid this situation whenever possible—the fees generally go up for emergency requests. Plan ahead.

99. To be safe, budget recruiting fees within 10% of what you expect to pay in incentives.

NN/g researched recruiting agencies in the US—West Coast, Midwest, and East Coast—and in London for a study on the investor relations section of corporate websites.[18] We researched the same four user-group profiles in all three places: individual investor, professional investor, financial advisor / planner, and financial journalist.

The following table compares the recruiting fees that agencies quoted with the participant incentives that recruiting agencies recommended, in US dollars.

Recruiting Fees and Recommended Incentives in US Dollars

	Averages (15 agencies)		East Coast (8 agencies)		West Coast (1 agency)		Midwest (3 agencies)		London (3 agencies)	
Profile	**Fee**	**Incent.**	**Fee**	**Incent.**	**Fee**	**Incent.**	**Fee**	**Incent.**	**Fee**	**Incent.**
Individual Investor	$182	$167	$104	$138	$150	$200	$197	$203	$278	$126
Financial Advisor	$185	$180	$114	$191	$150	$200	$197	$203	$278	$126
Professional Investor	$191	$178	$114	$184	$175	$200	$197	$203	$278	$126
Financial Journalist	$195	$182	$106	$200	$200	$200	$197	$203	$278	$126
Overall Average	$188	$177	$110	$178	$169	$200	$197	$203	$278	$126

As shown in the preceding table, for this sample of 15 recruiting agencies, the difference between the average fee charged by recruiting agencies and the average incentive they recommend is USD $11, or about 6%. In this example, the US East Coast fees are generally less than in the West Coast and Midwest, but the London recruiting agencies generally charge higher fees, and they recommend lower incentives. London recruiters told us that participants generally are hard to get. After reviewing the data in the preceding table, we wonder whether London recruiting agencies should just recommend higher incentives, which might make their job easier, and possibly, in turn, lower their recruiting fees.

[18] *Investor Relations (IR) on Corporate Websites*: www.nngroup.com/reports/investor-relations-ir-corporate-websites

As noted earlier, 33% of the NN/g recruiting survey respondents indicated they use recruiting agencies for some portion of their studies. In the following table, we present average fee requirements (listed in US dollars) charged by recruiting agencies around the world for internal and external participants, as indicated by 116 recruiting agency citations in our survey, listed by region.

Average Agency Fees in US Dollars by Region

Region	Recruitment Fee per Participant	Number of Responses
USA – West Coast (Washington, Oregon, and California)	$125	21 external, 3 internal
USA – Northeast (Maine to Washington DC)	$113	24 external, 2 internal
USA – Other	$124	21 external, 2 internal
Europe	$108	18 external, 4 internal
Unspecified	$ 75	2 external, 0 internal
Rest of the World	$ 57	14 external, 5 internal
Average World Fee:	$107	100 external, 16 internal

As shown in the preceding table, the overall world average fee that recruiting agencies charge per participant recruited is USD $107. As in the previous example, fees for the US East Coast are generally less than those on the West Coast and other US regions, but European and other non-US, non-European recruiting agencies generally charge lower recruiting fees.

In the following table, we present average fee requirements (in US dollars) for internal and external user categories.

Recruitment Fee in US Dollars per Participant

User Category	Fee (USD)
Internal – 16 citations	
General Staff (example: “anybody” and “everybody”)	$84
Unspecified (no category given)	$73
Professional Staff (example: managers and executives)	$23
Technical Staff (example: system administrators)	$21

User Category	Fee (USD)
Support Staff (example: administrative assistants)	$10
External – 100 citations	
Teachers / Professors	$250
Professional Staff (example: managers and executives)	$161
Technical Staff (example: system administrators)	$119
Medical Personnel	$117
Consumers	$90
Students / Young Adults	$84
Unspecified (no category given)	$51
Welfare Recipients	$42

As shown in the preceding table, professional categories of external participants generally warrant the highest recruiting agency fees. Be aware, however, that each recruiting agency sets its own fees and charges based on participant profile, number of user groups, and difficulty of finding people in the targeted groups.

CHOOSING A RECRUITING AGENCY

100. Carefully screen a recruiting agency before engaging it.

To help determine whether a recruiting agency is suitable for your study needs, we recommend you ask them the following questions, which are based on Carolyn Snyder's advice[19] and NN/g's own experience using agencies:

- ***Do you have a facility available? If so, will you recruit for projects that are not conducted at your facility?*** Many agencies will not recruit for you unless you use their facility too. If you need a facility, this arrangement could work very well—some facilities may offer a host to greet participants and hand out incentives at the end of sessions. Hosting service is especially useful if you have no receptionist available at your own study facility. If you decide to use the agency's facility, be sure to find out what services like hosting, photocopying, video taping, and lab technicians will cost—are they included in the facility fee (often, upwards of US $1000 a day) or are they extra?

[19] Carolyn Snyder, *Finding a User Recruitment Vendor,* Snyder Consulting white paper, *2001.* www.snyderconsulting.net/booksarticles.htm

- ***[If the agency does not have its own facility] Do you work with any facility, or can you recommend one?*** If you need a facility, chances are that a recruiting agency will be able to recommend a good one. If possible, visit the facility before engaging it, to ensure it meets your study needs.
- ***What do you charge per recruited participant?*** Be prepared to explain the recruiting criteria you need for your study. Consider how experienced the agency is if they give you a quick answer without finding out more about what you need. If the agency does primarily consumer product testing, let them know your user profile may be more specialized than what they're used to—for example, it is a lot more difficult to recruit bond traders or network administrators than it is to find people who use everyday household products. If you find yourself having to explain usability testing, refer to it as "in-depth, one-on-one interviews," and save the detailed explanation for the agency you eventually engage.
- ***Can we provide our own screener?*** Some agencies require that you provide your own screener. We think it's best to do so, because your own carefully constructed screener will better ensure that the agency follows your desired criteria.
- ***How much lead time do you require?*** The agency's answer will depend on the difficulty of the user profile and how busy they are with other work. But, they should be able to tell you how much lead time they like to have for a typical project—usually two weeks.
- ***What is the range and number of people in your database?*** If you have difficult criteria for the recruiter to work with, the agency may ask you to supplement the process with contacts of people that can possibly provide participants. Even though it is more work for you, don't expect the agency to charge you any less, because it is still more work for them to recruit from outside their database.
- ***Will you provide incentives to the participants?*** Many agencies are willing to provide participants with the incentives, especially if you are going to be using their facility. Be sure to find out how they handle payments to participants, and how much they charge for this service. Often, they ask for a deposit for the incentives after you engage them for recruiting. It's also a good idea to review their receipt form, or better yet, provide your own. (See the sample receipt on page 113).

- ***How do you handle no-shows?*** Although good recruiting firms have a lot of practice getting people to show up as scheduled, they cannot guarantee full attendance. Ask about their confirmation policies to make sure you are satisfied they will make a sufficient effort to get participants to attend. Let the agency know that you are unwilling to pay for participants who don't appear and don't call to reschedule, or who arrive unreasonably late. Discuss your tolerance for lateness, especially if your study schedule is tight—you may not have enough between-session time to accommodate latecomers. Some agencies double-book sessions to ensure you have participants, but you will have to pay for both, even though one will be excused (also see *Scheduling Backups* on page 101). In general, it's best to let agencies do their job as they see fit, but it's helpful to strategize together on a contingency plan, especially for high-visibility projects.
- ***How do you handle participants who turn out to be unqualified for our study?*** Let the agency know that you are unwilling to pay for participants who appear for their sessions but turn out to be unqualified for the study (also see *Dealing with Unqualified Participants* on page 126.) The agencies that NN/g has dealt with have been willing to not charge for such participants.
- ***How do you provide updates on reaching desired quotas?*** Look for an agency that is willing to provide you with a summary spreadsheet or text file of whom they have recruited so far and the key characteristics of each participant. Don't expect to see participant contact information, however; they pledge confidentiality to their participants. (Also see Tip 112.) Getting an update every other day is not too much to ask. Many agency project managers also follow up with an email or phone call to tell you how it's going.
- ***Does your firm actually do the screening, or do you subcontract the work to another company?*** If the agency admits that they subcontract, you may wish to avoid them, unless someone whose opinion you trust has highly recommended the agency.

The following anecdote provides an additional caution about using recruiting agencies.

Financial viability and subcontracting

Neil Wehrle, Senior User Researcher, Razorfish, Inc.

If possible, check up on the financial viability of the recruitment firm, because the one we were using went bankrupt while we were in China, halfway through a major research project. Also check up on how they are actually recruiting, as the firm we were dealing with didn't disclose that they were subcontracting much of the work to others, which led to some uneven recruits.

101. Consider using a temporary employment agency.[20]

Most usability studies last one or two hours, which means that temporary employment agencies generally are not the best source of study participants. However, if you are running a study where you want to observe the same participants as they work with a system over a longer period of time (several days or even a few weeks), then you are moving into the area where temporary employment agencies are better than traditional recruiting agencies. People who are looking for temporary employment often have the time available to participate in a long-term study, and temporary employment agencies can help you find them.

It is possible to use temporary employment agencies for shorter studies. Usually you have to pay for four hours of service (about $50–$70 per person), even for a two-hour session. However, you still save money on the incentive and time to recruit. Just be sure to let the temporary employment agency know that your usability study is just a short, one-time commitment and you are not looking for temporary employees. (Also see Tip 103.)

Keep in mind that temporary employment agencies are often more successful in the summer months, when college students are readily available for short- and long-duration studies.

MANAGING A RECRUITING AGENCY TO YOUR BEST BENEFIT

102. Don't let a recruiting agency talk you into using more services than you really want or that your budget can afford.

Good agencies will tell you what they can and cannot do for you, and what they charge—then they will let you decide without pressure. If an agency tries too hard to push their "entire package," be prepared to keep looking.

103. When you are not looking for temporary employees and generally do not want the same people they recruited previously, say so.

Unless you are specifically requesting return participants for long-term studies (see *Reusing Participants* on page 104), it's a good idea to make clear that you are looking for one-time participants, not job applicants, as illustrated in the following anecdote from Singapore.

No applicants, please
Shaw Chian, Usability Consultant, User & Co., Singapore

We get our users mainly from recruiting agencies. So far, the biggest problem we encounter with the agencies is that people who register there are looking for a job rather than communicating willingness to participate in usability testing.

We try to work around this by telling the agency that we need different people every time (depending on the user profile we're testing). The agent commented, "This is the first time we ever got a request for different people for each assignment. Most employers prefer to get back the people we've recruited previously to reduce training time."

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[20] *How to Conduct Usability Studies*, a Nielsen Norman Group report, www.nngroup.com/reports/how-to-conduct-usability-studies

Try explaining usability testing to the agency if you continue to have problems with getting job applicants rather than usability participants. If the situation doesn't improve, you will need to find a different agency.

If you learn that an agency-recruited participant is unqualified only after the session begins, you should excuse the participant as you have planned in advance, and inform the agency.

104. Unless you need customers who are all from one particular company as participants, ask the agency to limit the number of recruits from any single company to one.

Even though you ask participants not to talk about the session—and they may even sign a nondisclosure agreeing not to discuss it—it is difficult for some people not to talk to their colleagues who may also be participants. This tendency increases if they've either really enjoyed participating, or found the system very difficult to use. They may think they're helping you out by "training" subsequent participants from their company, as illustrated by the following anecdote from Switzerland.

No talking, please

Marc Blume, Usability Consultant, Swisscom Innovations

We use an external marketing research or usability firm to do our recruiting. During one test session, we noticed that the participant had outperformed all his fellow participants. He seemed to know the system, understand the tasks, and finish much faster than everyone else.

After the session, at the debrief, we found out that he didn't really have special domain knowledge, but he had been coached by a co-worker who had completed a session the day before! Of course, we had to throw out his data because we were testing with novices.

Because we're a phone service provider, our customers are from all over, and we need participants from all over. But we now specify to our recruiters: no two people from the same company.

Marc's anecdote also reiterates the advice from two other tips: the need to administer a background questionnaire (Tip 171) to learn of recent experience, and to caution participants not to discuss the session with co-workers or associates who might also be participants (Tip 180).

105. Give your own screener to the agency.

Because you would have to provide a participant profile, and then review the screener an agency would devise, you may as well take the next step and provide the screener yourself (see *Preparing the Screening Script and Questionnaire* on page 55). If the agency tells you that they must use their own screener with your participant profile edited in, you can still provide them with your screener to use as the basis for their own, as cautioned in the following anecdote.

As good as you make it

Dave Kreimer, Principal, Next Step Consulting

I have a lot of experience using professional recruiting services associated with market research firms. I would say that they function a lot like

computers in that they are only as good as the instructions they receive. In the case of a computer, the software constitutes the instructions.

In the case of professional market research facilities, your recruiting screener is the key. A good one will get you what you need, and one that is flawed usually manifests in less than perfect participants.

106. Make sure the recruiter thoroughly understands the criteria.

Even if you provide your own screener, ask to speak to the recruiter the agency assigns so you feel confident that s/he will be recruiting the right people. Go over the criteria to review any flexibility that you've built in, and reiterate which are "must-haves" and which can bend somewhat (see Tip 79 for advice on building in flexibility).

Beating the screener

Peter H. Jones, Ph.D., Redesign Research

In recruiting, I've seen plenty of people beat the screener. In consumer studies, it might not be as important. But I work with professional researchers a lot—lawyers, investigators, journalists, scientists—and our findings have to roll up to address product design for a professional market. We need people that can express a clear opinion.

So after finding in some studies that some respondents gave very brief responses and no reflective insight for any tasks in more than an hour during the session, I started adding screening questions that require participants to freely discuss some "essay question" on the screener. However, the discretion to refuse admission is still with the recruiters, so you must also find recruiting agencies you trust to deliver on this.

Let the recruiter know s/he should feel free to call you any time there is a question on qualifying a participant, and be sure to provide a phone number at which you can easily be reached. If a few days have elapsed since your discussion, it's a good idea to check in with the recruiter the day s/he is to begin making calls just to answer any last-minute questions.

107. Communicate the logistical details of the study.

Recruiting agencies are used to working with many different clients using many different methodologies—for example, telephone interviews, which do not require participants to leave their home or office.

Hey, where's my participant?

Rolf Molich, DialogDesign

A user who was recruited by a marketing research firm thought that we would conduct telephone interviews. So the user was not prepared to come to the place where the test actually took place. It pays to follow up closely on test participants with a usable confirmation letter and personal telephone calls.

The anecdote above reiterates our advice to provide your own screener, which you can ensure provides logistical information for participants.

108. Review all recruiting progress updates to ensure the recruiting agency is meeting your criteria.

Speak with the recruiter right away if you feel they've scheduled someone who appears not to meet the criteria. Review the criteria again, and ask them to adhere to them more closely. If you find yourself having to reject numerous participants, cut your losses and look for an alternative recruiting agency.

109. Have the recruiting agency schedule sufficient backups.

NN/g recruiting survey respondents indicated that the average no-show rate for the recruiting agencies they hire is 10.8%, which is only slightly higher than the average world rate of 10.6%. Unfortunately, the observed no-show rate in any individual study will rarely be the exact average, but will fluctuate from 0% to 20% or more. In particularly unfortunate cases, we have encountered no-show rates of 50%, which can destroy a study that has only a small number of participants. We usually recommend having a recruiting agency recruit one or two backups per distinct user group. (Also see *No-show rates by who recruits*, on page 159, as well as *Scheduling Backups* on page 101).

110. Report in writing to the recruiting agency all latecomers, no-shows, and unqualified participants.

Send a return-receipt email to the recruiter to ensure that they know about latecomers, no-shows, and unqualified participants, and to ensure you have a record to check against the final invoice. (Not all email systems provide automatic return-receipt email—AOL for example does not confirm receipt. So, specifically ask for an acknowledgement in your email as well. If you do not get acknowledgement, send a certified or return-receipt letter to the agency.) As noted in Tip 100, find out in advance how the agency will handle latecomers, no-shows, and unqualified participants, and whether you will have to pay for them.

111. After the sessions are complete, provide feedback to the agency on the quality of their service.

If the agency performed less than satisfactorily, your feedback will help them improve. Assuming they did well, you will forge a good working relationship for the future. Let the agency know whether you will keep them in your files for future engagements. As suggested in Tip 90, freely recommend a good agency to other usability professionals. They will appreciate it.

112. Honor the agency's database privacy (and thus, participants').

Although you may ask participants recruited through an agency if they would be willing to participate again, you should never get or use agency-recruited participants' contact information to recruit them yourself directly. Don't even put them into your own database. Doing so would be an ethical and contractual violation because you are intruding on the recruiting agency's proprietary database, which is their lifeblood.

An intern's mistake

Anonymous Usability Consultant

I once had an intern who kept the names of people recruited through a recruiting agency and called some of them back for a subsequent study. The recruiting agency heard about it through one of the participants and got very angry with us. The assumption is that the recruiting agency "owns" the users, and we need to respect that.

Asking agency-recruited participants for their contact information would also constitute a breach of the confidentiality that participants are guaranteed when they provide information to agencies. Instead, let the recruiting agency know which participants express interest in returning for future studies and remind the recruiting agency the next time you use them and want those participants back.

Agency-recruited participants may spontaneously volunteer the names of friends, family, or colleagues they think might be interested in participating in a similar study. This ethical area is more gray. Even if you rightly do not put the participant's name in your database, consider carefully whether accepting an agency-recruited participant's referrals could damage your relationship with that recruiting agency.

DOING YOUR OWN RECRUITING

Our book, *Usability Engineering*,[21] advises: "Set up procedures that will allow you to recruit test users easily when they are needed. For example, cultivate relationships with major nearby customer sites and local colleges, set up contracts with temporary employment agencies, or build a database of interested volunteers (retired staff can often form a valuable source of volunteers with substantial domain knowledge). One of the major impediments to conducting user testing when it is needed is the time it may take to find appropriate users if one is not prepared."

As noted earlier, the results of the NN/g recruiting survey indicate that a majority of companies are doing their own recruiting, as opposed to having a recruiting agency or some other outside person recruit for them. Doing the recruiting yourself can be a rewarding, if challenging, experience. By following the advice provided in this section, we think you will be better equipped to meet the challenge.

INTERNAL VS. EXTERNAL STUDIES

For internal studies, you need to recruit participants from within the study sponsors' organization—their employees or closely partnered consultants. Of NN/g recruiting survey respondents, 83% indicated that they use internal people as pilot or dry-run participants and 67% said they use internal people as regular study participants.

[21] Jakob Nielsen, *Usability Engineering* (1993), Academic Press.

For external studies, you need to recruit participants who are customers of the sponsors' organization or their competitors' customers (if you are running a competitive study). For external studies, you may decide to save some recruiting time and money by having internal people act as dry-run or pilot participants for your study. In our survey, 92% of respondents indicated they use external participants.

These tips apply to both kinds of studies:

113. If you are new to recruiting, find a recruiting mentor or consider investing in training.

Mentoring is one of the easiest ways to teach and being mentored is one of the fastest ways to learn. If your organization already has a recruiter on staff, try to arrange a period of training with that person. If you are going to be the first recruiter in your organization, rely on the experience of the usability team to guide you. Find out if other organizations in the area have recruiters on staff and would be willing to provide some training for a fee.

114. Budget enough time to find, screen, schedule, and coordinate with participants.

Even if you know exactly where to find representative participants, you still need to screen them to ensure they meet your study criteria, schedule them, and follow up with reminders. If you are new to recruiting, it would not be unreasonable to budget two or three hours per participant needed in the study. This allotment takes into account the time you spend screening people you do not accept into the study, communicating with the study facilitator, and following up with all accepted participants.

Responses to the NN/g recruiting survey indicate that organizations that do their own recruiting spend an average of 1.15 hour (or 69 minutes) per scheduled participant. 51% of respondents whose organizations do their own recruiting indicated that they spend more than one hour, and 2% more than six hours. (For a full summary of survey results, see Appendix A.)

115. Budget time to prepare all the participant forms you will need for the study.

In addition to screening and scheduling, keep in mind that you also will have to prepare all participant forms when you are doing the recruiting yourself. After you have them in place, however, it's only a matter of editing them a bit for each study you do. (See *Preparing Participant Session Forms* on page 106.)

116. Ask study participants to suggest other study participants.[22]

Study participants often know other prospective study participants. Remember to ask for referrals. You might even suggest a deal in which everyone benefits. For example, "Usually we pay $75 to a study participant. If you get another qualified study participant for us, we'll pay each of you $150."

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[22] *How to Conduct Usability Studies*, a Nielsen Norman Group report, www.nngroup.com/reports/how-to-conduct-usability-studies

The more, the merrier

Rolf Molich, DialogDesign

In one case where we successfully applied this method, the study participant immediately suggested: "And if I get you *two* qualified study participants, how much will you pay?"

Be very careful about asking agency-recruited participants for referrals, however, as cautioned in Tip 112, and consider when, and when not, to reuse participants, as advised in *Reusing Participants* on page 104.

117. Create recruiting brochures that your study participants could give to friends and colleagues.[23]

Your recruiting will be much easier if prospective study participants trust you because you have been recommended by someone they trust. But, see the cautions in Tips 112 and 116.

118. Whenever possible, avoid using participants from the same company, department, or family.

As noted in Tip 104, although you ask participants not to talk about the session—and they may even sign a nondisclosure agreeing not to talk about it—it is difficult for some people not to talk to their colleagues or even family members who also may be participants, especially if they've either really enjoyed participating or found the system very difficult to use. They may think they're helping you out by "training" subsequent participants (also see the anecdote under Tip 104).

119. Ask for lists of people who have contacted customer service or the help desk.[24]

Often, such people are quite motivated to provide comments. We don't recommend recruiting more than 40% of the study participants this way, however, because such people are often on the extremely knowledgeable and motivated end of the continuum. Watch out for highly dissatisfied customers who wish to use the study session as an outlet for their complaints—this is not the sort of motivation you want. One or two articulate, critical devil's advocates can be quite useful in a study, however.

The following anecdote illustrates how a well-worded request by a public school system's Web manager successfully motivated people to participate and, at the same time, provided a fruitful usability training exercise for budding student Web designers:

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[23] *How to Conduct Usability Studies*, a Nielsen Norman Group report, www.nngroup.com/reports/how-to-conduct-usability-studies

[24] Ibid.

My most successful recruiting experience

Connie Lysinger, Web Manager, Portland (Oregon) Public Schools

Background: Portland Public Schools is an urban district with approximately 100 schools and another 50 or so special programs. Resources are very limited, so employing an agency for usability test recruiting is out of the question. Access to some of our key audiences is also very limited. (For example, teachers are available for only a couple of days before school begins in the fall, and again at the end of school in June). We have a public website of about 6000 mostly static HTML pages, and an intranet, which is our fastest growing area.

Usual approach to recruiting: Most of the time, we use a very informal recruiting process of phone calls and email to people selected at random or on the recommendation of our Help Desk staff. We try to make sure the testers represent a range of computer ease, familiarity with our websites, etc. For testing our intranet, we also try to select a range of job titles. We cannot pay anyone to participate. The advantage to this approach is the low cost. The disadvantage is the probably higher-than-normal no-show rate.

A break in tradition: While we were planning a complete redesign of our public website, I saved email for several months from site visitors who had reported trouble finding information on our site. When we had a prototype nearly ready, I emailed each of them with the message below (personalized with the month in which they contacted us). All of the individuals responded, and all wanted to participate. Although schedule conflicts prevented some from doing so, we had plenty of testers, representing all our major audiences.

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"Last [month name], you were kind enough to take the time to write us about your experience using our website. I'm hoping your interest will extend to giving us your input again.

"We are preparing a fresh look and some added features for the site, and expect to 'go live' with it in about 10 days. As you may be aware, the site is created by a team of student interns, who work hard to produce a high-quality product. In this role, they learn what it takes to make a website that is useful to its visitors and is easy to understand and navigate.

"Professional website developers employ usability testing to see if the design and content of the site actually work for the real audience members, and how easy or difficult it is for them to find what they're looking for on the site.

"I'm contacting you to find out if you would be willing to evaluate a prototype of our new site in a usability test session late next week. We will have several time slots available to choose from. You would need to allow two hours for the process. The test session will be held at the Child Services Center at S.E. 14th & Stark. The students of the Web Team will be present to observe and take notes along with me.

"I would appreciate your participation and candid input, both for the ongoing effort to improve our website and for the training of the student interns."

~~~~~~~~~~~~end of sample message~~~~~~~~~~~~

FINDING PARTICIPANTS FOR INTERNAL STUDIES

Because internal participants are usually the employees or closely partnered contractors of the study sponsors, they are easier to find and are apt to be easier to recruit than external participants. Internal participants are also likely to better understand the direct impact usability evaluation will have on making their jobs easier—unless they've received promises of tool improvements in the past that didn't come through. Unfortunately, in some organizations usability studies are commissioned but recommendations for improvements are not followed. If usability is known to be helping an organization, however, internal participants usually are willing, if not eager, to be involved in the usability evaluation process.

Do keep in mind that internal participants might worry about their performance being viewed by someone who might tell others (see Tip 186). In addition, although internal participants likely will not have to leave their place of work to participate, and therefore may not have to commute to the study, they may be more prone to work-related interruptions than external participants who leave their offices to participate in a study.

120. Talk to the product managers and developers.

The case study presented on page 24 summarizes an internal study. It describes how to work with product managers and developers to learn who the users of an internal system are. More than likely, the system team can provide you with names of users. Other times you may have to rely on additional resources to find the internal users you need. If so, ask a system team member to pave the way for you by letting you use his / her name when you talk with other people who may help you find internal participants.

121. Find out about internal special interest groups (SIGs) for your targeted users.

Larger organizations often have formal SIGs, especially for enterprise-wide systems with large numbers of users. Some organizations also have informal user groups. Your study sponsors should know of such groups. You may be able to get names of users from membership rosters, or you could ask the leader of the SIG to provide a recruiting notice to the group if s/he is protective of the membership roster. (See the sample script for preliminary contact by study sponsor on page 58.

122. Talk to management.

You may have a better chance of borrowing an employee for a usability study session if you first talk to the employee's manager. An employee also may be more willing to participant knowing his or her manager sanctions participation. Be sure to let the manager know that s/he will not be allowed to observe his / her employee's session, however. (Also see Tip 186.)

123. Give a usability talk at employee / management meetings.

Make sure the talk is succinct but entertaining. At the end of your talk, ask for names of people who might be interested in participating in upcoming usability studies.

124. Talk to administrative assistants in the system team's department.

Administrative assistants are often users and can be a source of a great deal of information about fellow employees who may meet your criteria.

125. Put up well-designed, succinct recruiting posters in strategic areas of the company.[25]

Secure permission to post such notices and make sure, as advised in other tips, that you pique people's interest without giving away too much information about the study.

126. Meet with the human resources department.

They certainly know the names of current employees and their job titles. They also know about new hires that you may be able to recruit as new or potential users. Be aware, however, that new employees may feel sensitive about being watched and "tested." Recruit them only if your study is evaluating systems designed for new hires. HR may also be able to provide the names of retirees who may fit an experienced-user profile. You might even ask HR to contact potential volunteers for you. Be prepared for HR security and privacy issues, though, and don't persist if you encounter them.

127. For quick, informal feedback, meet people in the hallways.

If you need only short, specific feedback on something you can show to people quickly, set up a little station in a hallway or outside the cafeteria (with permission, of course) and let employees come to you with their curiosity.[26]

FINDING PARTICIPANTS FOR EXTERNAL STUDIES

External participants may be somewhat more difficult to recruit than internal ones. External user groups might not be as well known to the study sponsors as internal groups. When you need to look for broad groups of people such as Palm technology users, online shoppers, stock market investors, and average consumers, your study sponsors might be able to point you in the general direction, but it will be up to you to find the targeted users.

As noted Tip 87, when the user profile is broad, you may have better luck recruiting by using a recruiting agency. If you have a recruiter on staff with time available, however, consider the tips in this section to help your recruiter find participants for your study.

128. Prepare a half-page description of usability and your current study that you can provide to people and organizations you approach.

The information sheet should closely match the introductory script of your screener. That is, without giving away specifics about your study (and, perhaps, the study sponsor), let people and organizations you approach know what usability is and why you are looking for people in their area. Emphasize how usability helps improve systems for users.

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[25] Chauncey Wilson, Director, Bentley College Design and Usability Testing Center, provided this tip.

[26] *How to Conduct Usability Studies*, a Nielsen Norman Group report, www.nngroup.com/reports/how-to-conduct-usability-studies

129. Contact the study sponsor's sales department.[27]

Sales people often know many users of a system and may even be able to provide you with a list or database of names, phone numbers, and email addresses. Keep in mind that these customer lists usually are highly confidential and that you should offer assurance (or even sign a form) that you will use the list only for recruiting users for the study you will be conducting. Also, agree to destroy or give back the list as soon as the study is over. Be sure to follow through on your agreement with the sales department. Offer to let the sales department send your letter as an alternative.

130. Give a usability talk at a customer conference or trade show.[28]

At the end of your talk, ask for business cards from people who might be interested in supporting usability or design work. This method can make it easier to bypass marketing / sales groups that are nervous about letting usability specialists contact customers.

131. Whatever resource you are tapping, always ask for permission to talk to or contact potential participants.

In some of the next few tips, we suggest several places outside the study sponsor's organization where you might find targeted participants. Wherever you go to recruit participants, however, it is very important not to interfere with establishments' everyday business and to get the business management's permission to speak with or contact their clientele.

132. Contact user and special interest groups (SIGs).

For example, if you are looking for participants with work-related injuries, contact SIGs for repetitive-stress injuries, hospital occupational-therapy departments, and organizations interested in accessibility compliance.

Specialized software often inspires the organization of SIGs or user groups. You may be able to get names of software users from membership rosters, or you could ask the leader of the SIG to send or post a recruiting notice to the group if s/he is protective of the membership roster. (Also see the sample script for preliminary contact by study sponsor on page 58).

133. Talk to the officers of professional organizations.

Discuss your project with an officer and then email your half-page information sheet with a request to distribute it to the organization if it is deemed an acceptable document. That way, the organization need not release its membership list, and only people who are actually interested will contact you.

134. Set up a booth at a strategic location.[29]

If you need "people off the street," (users that do not have to meet a strict user profile) set up a booth at a flea market, shopping center, farmer's market, or public transit hub. Depending on more-specific audience needs, you can set up your booth outside a campus computer lab, at an art fair, or a corporate customer visitor center. If you offer complimentary coffee and

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[27] Ibid.

[28] *How to Conduct Usability Studies*, a Nielsen Norman Group report, www.nngroup.com/reports/how-to-conduct-usability-studies

[29] *Ibid.*

donuts, you will have an even better chance of getting people to stop and talk with you. It is sometimes even possible to conduct short studies in this very informal setting if you need only short, specific feedback on something you can show to people quickly.

Given the focus on increased security in public venues, however, be sure to discuss with the proper authorities where and when to set up a booth so that you won't arouse anxiety.[30]

135. Approach civic and nonprofit organizations.[31]

Approach organizations that include the population you are seeking, such as churches, community service groups, and senior centers. Offer to donate money to the organization for each participant it recruits for you. Offering to make the donation in the name of the recruited participant would be a nice incentive for participants.

136. Look for users in their natural habitat.[32]

When evaluating a florist's website, go to a local florist's shop and talk with customers. If you are evaluating a library website, visit a branch of your local library.

For very specialized or unusual user profiles, look in specialized and unusual places to find participants. When looking for:

- **School children**, contact school principals and teachers and get their help to recruit their students**.**
- **People with disabilities**, contact hospital occupational and physical therapy departments, rehab centers, private physical therapists, accessibility compliance agencies, community support organizations, and nursing homes.
- **Senior citizens,** contact senior centers, retirement homes, nursing facilities, community support organizations.

(Also see Tip 202 for additional resources on conducting usability studies with senior citizens, children, and people with disabilities.)

For other specialized groups, you can visit various places to look for participants, such as consulate offices, sports clubs, airline offices, chambers of commerce, and unemployment offices. You will think of several others as you further consider the characteristics of the people you are seeking as participants.

137. Place an ad in a professional journal or publication.

It is fairly inexpensive to place an ad in these publications, but because many of these types of publications are monthly, be aware that the deadline for ad submission may not be optimal for your study.

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[30] Chauncey Wilson, Director, Bentley College Design and Usability Testing Center, provided the security caveat we added to this tip.

[31] *How to Conduct Usability Studies*, a Nielsen Norman Group report, www.nngroup.com/reports/how-to-conduct-usability-studies

[32] *Ibid.*

138. Consider additional resources for finding external participants.

Some additional resources to consider include:.

- **Newspaper ad.** Place an ad in the business section of the newspaper local to your study locale. Keep in mind that an ad may cast too wide a net, however. The ad must be worded to give limited information, lest people research the system. (See the anecdote at the end of this tip.)

  The ad should list your top two or three disqualifiers so you can eliminate people right away. We advise working with an expert copy writer to draft your ad. Note that you can pay up to USD $500 for a display ad you place in a newspaper, depending on the exact size of the ad and the length of time you run the ad.

- **Online services.** Some usability professionals have had good luck with posting ads in Craig's List jobs "et cetera" category (currently, no usability or market research categories are available). www.craigslist.org Other usability professionals have reported good results with Web Grrls and other online job-placement services.

  Expect to pay a fee of USD $70–$150 for an ad. Some sites let you post additional ads during the same period at a lower rate. However, people who read such online services tend to be among the more technologically literate parts of the population so they may not be suitable as the only participants for some types of studies.

- **Referrals.** Ask your family, friends, and colleagues who may know of people in your targeted participant groups for referrals. For example, if you are conducting an online banking study, and your neighbor is a banker, ask him / her for suggestions on how to contact customers. Ask if it would be okay to use his / her name as a reference when contacting people. Just be careful when recruiting these referrals to avoid people who are too close to you, so they won't skew the results. (Also see the anecdote below.)

  You can also follow up with participants after a study to ask them for referrals to other people they know who might enjoy participating as much as they did. Be careful, however, when asking agency-recruited participants for referrals. (See Tip 112, as well as *Reusing Participants* on page 104.)

- **Phone book.** We have successfully recruited for some studies using only the phone book. For example, for a study of a home version of a photo manipulation software product, we called several camera and printing shops listed in the Yellow Pages to find people who used digital cameras and were interested in such software.

The "Smith" brothers

William J. Cotter, Senior Participant Recruiter, Tec-Ed. Inc.

In two separate studies, one a competitive usability test of email programs, and the other a focus group on mobile communication devices, Tec-Ed usability specialists worked with participants who had answered our ads in the local paper.

In a session during the first study, it became obvious to the facilitator (author Deborah Sova) that the participant was unqualified and had misrepresented his prior experience with email. Deborah told me that this person had responded to questions very generally and performed poorly, even on easy tasks. In retrospect, I think he had probably looked at an email program or two before responding to the ad and had managed to supply "correct" answers to my screening questions.

In the focus-group project, the same facilitator (Deborah) had to deal with a lackluster participant who simply agreed with other participants' opinions, never offered any of his own insights or experiences, and had somehow "forgotten" to bring his mobile communication device. Something seemed very familiar to her about this gentleman's appearance and behavior.

After the session, Deborah called me and asked me to cross-check this participant's information with other past participants in the area. Sure enough, I turned up what might have been two brothers: "John" and "Peter" "Smith" working for the same "real-estate" agency, which I could not confirm was a real employer. "John" was the unqualified email participant and "Peter" was the unqualified mobile device participant. (Or, Deborah said, these two participants could have been the same person—it had been many months between the two studies.)

The lessons here are: 1) Don't give potential participants the opportunity to research the subject of your study—they may be able to use the buzzwords, but not have enough actual experience, and 2) Check participant names and their company names against your file of participants to ensure you don't recruit the same or closely related people. Even for an experienced recruiter like me, with well-developed radar, it's often difficult to tell when a skilled charlatan is misrepresenting information, however.

139. Reuse study participants from previous studies, when appropriate.

Keep a database of previous study participants and reuse them when appropriate. After each study, make a note of how expressive and articulate the study participants were and the depth of their comments, so you can target them for future studies. Use a participant no more than twice a year, however, and not on the same product or type of product.[33]

An exception to this advice would be for longitudinal studies where you want to track use over time. (See *When it is Okay to Reuse Participants* on page 104. Also see *Building and Maintaining a Participant Database* on page 129.)

[33] *How to Conduct Usability Studies*, a Nielsen Norman Group report, www.nngroup.com/reports/how-to-conduct-usability-studies

MAKING THE CALLS AND TRACKING RECRUITMENT PROGRESS

After you have a pretty good sense of who targeted users are, and where you can reach them, you can get your materials organized, dry run your screener (and revise, if necessary), and then begin calling people.

Getting Organized

140. Make a list of the people you will be calling; include phone numbers and other important tracking information.

Use this list to track who you have called and whether you need to call a candidate again. If you have a reference name, include it on the list so you will be sure to mention it when you call the prospective participant:

Name	Phone Number	Referred by	Screened	Call Back [date and time]

141. Prepare file folders labeled "Qualified," "Maybe," "Future Possibilities," and "Not Qualified."

File filled-in screeners in the appropriate folders and provide them to the project manager and / or study facilitator for review when requested. For participants you may have disqualified for a current study, decide if they might be qualified for a future study. If so, file their screeners in "Future Possibilities" and enter their information into your participant spreadsheet or database for future use.

142. Create a table on which to summarize participants and their characteristics.

This table should reflect the screening criteria. Fill in each accepted participant's information and provide the most recent update to the project manager and / or study facilitator at the end of each day of recruiting. (See the following sample (filled-in) participant summary table, which summarizes the participants for the usability study described in the sample screener on page 65.)

Sample Filled-In Participant Summary Table

Participants Scheduled for the Aztech.com Usability Test Wednesday, July 8, and Thursday, July 9, 2005									
	Phil Pilot	**Robert**	**Sam**	**Betty**	**David**	**Linda**	**Jane** Backup	**Greg** Backup	**Ellen** Backup
Gender	Male	Male	Male	Female	Male	Female	Female	Male	Female
Job title	Store Manager	Banker	Under-writer	Fitness Instructor	Dentist	Executive Secretary	Program-mer	Head Librarian	Financial Analyst
Age	31–40	41–50	31–40	20–30	41–50	31–40	41–50	20–30	31–40
Income (in USD $1000)	$46–$60	$61–$75	$46–$60	$46–$60	$61–$75	$35–$45	$46–$60	$35–$45	$61–$75
Renter or Home-owner	Renter	Owner	Owner	Renter	Owner	Renter	Owner	Renter	Owner
Computer use (hours per week)	10	20	40	15	5	30	60	25	20
Web use (hours per week / total)	5 4 years	7 2 years	10 1.5 years	10 3 years	5 .5 year	5 1 year	10 5 years	12 4 years	10 2.5 years
Online purchases	Books Tickets Music	Music Tickets Art Travel	Tools Music Tickets	Equipment Books Vitamins Travel	Drugs Dental supplies Tickets	Clothes Books DVDs	Books Garden tools Pet food	Office supplies DVDs Music	Books Tickets Music Travel
Session	Wed. 9 am	Wed. 1 pm	Wed. 3 pm	Wed. 5 pm	Thurs. 9 am	Thurs. 11 am	Thurs. 1 pm	Thurs. 3 pm	Thurs. 5 pm

Speaking With People

143. First, practice reading your script aloud.

Don't have a prospective participant on the line the very first time you read your script aloud. First, read it aloud a few times to yourself, to see where you may stumble over phrasing. Edit or practice it until it flows smoothly for you. Be sure, however, that your revisions don't change the intent of the content or add clues as to the right answers.

144. Test the script and screener questions with a couple of co-workers or friends.

If possible, pick people who come close to the profile you are screening for. If that's not possible, your screening questionnaire will still benefit from your asking objective third parties the questions aloud to see if they make sense.

145. Aspire to make a good first impression when speaking with candidates.

- Aim to sound professional, but cordial.
- Use adequate volume without forcing your voice and speak reasonably slowly.
- Repeat questions for hearing impaired individuals, without impatience.
- Excuse unqualified people graciously and ask if they'd be interested in a future study if they seem to have basic experience.
- Respect people's current schedule constraints, if they say this is not a good time to answer questions, and arrange to call back at a time more convenient for them.
- When scheduling, be sure to let the participant know of all available time slots, so s/he can pick the one most convenient for him / her. Try to get a second choice as well, in case the project manager or study facilitator must adjust the schedule later.
- When possible and appropriate, let backup participants know they are designated as backups and what they can expect. (Also see Tip 159.)
- Before ending the phone call with an accepted participant, reconfirm the date and time you both agreed on for that person's session, and verify contact information so you can send directions by mail.

146. Acquire the "radar" needed to recognize undesirable candidates.

This skill comes with practice. As you gain more experience, you will be able to recognize job seekers, technology spies or competitors, and others who provide exaggerated or "iffy" information to get into a study. The more experienced the recruiter, the less likely s/he will schedule unacceptable people.

Listen for responses, non-responses, and implications that will help you weed out unacceptable candidates. As soon as you decide a candidate is undesirable, excuse them politely and quickly, and file their screener in the "Not Qualified" folder.

Many of the following cautions are adapted from author Deborah Sova's paper *Challenges in Recruiting for Usability Testing*:[34]

Beware of:

- **Job seekers**, especially if you posted a recruitment ad to the local paper or an online job service. Job seekers may ask you:
  - How many other people will be there (vying for a job).
  - How to dress for the session (wanting their attire to be appropriate for a job interview).

[34] Deborah Hinderer (Sova), *Challenges in Participant Recruiting for Usability Tests (1998)*, Tec-Ed, Inc. and IPCC.

    - Extended questions about the system, the study sponsor, and where the study is being held (cross-checking their experience against what the sponsor may be looking for in an employee).
    - If they should bring their resume (an obvious clue).
    - How many days or months the study lasts (considering usability studies as a possible short-term job).
- **Technology spies or competitors**, who may:
    - Indicate too much knowledge about the system being tested, especially when the system is a prototype.
    - Ask extended questions about the system, possibly to compare how their own system measures up.
    - Try to find out how many participants will be there so they can bring enough business cards or samples—not all responses are this obvious, however.

Following Up With Participants

We are pleased to report that the vast majority (98%) of our survey respondents do some kind of follow-up with participants before the study begins to ensure participants show up for sessions, and 28% perform more than one follow-up activity.

- 92% provide driving instructions and / or a map to the sessions
- 81% make a telephone call
- 71% send an email
- 25% send a written letter

Reconfirming the appointment is essential to reduce your no-show rate, particularly if you can get to talk with the participant because it creates a social obligation on the part of the participant when they have agreed once again to come.

147. Send a confirmation email, SMS, fax, or letter a couple of days before the study to confirm session dates and times.

Include a map, and driving directions, if appropriate (also see Tip 51). Then, follow up with the phone call the day before to reconfirm and make sure participants know how to get to the study locale (see the anecdote under Tip 148). The following sample paraphrases the content of the invitation.

Sample Confirmation Message for Email, Fax, or Letter

Hello [participant name]:

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in the [study name] [if as a backup, say "as a backup participant" and include wording about what is expected of a backup]. As I explained when we spoke on [day], your evaluation session will be held at [facility name], [address], in [city] on [date and time]. Please plan to arrive about 10 minutes before your scheduled session time to fill in some participant forms.

Because we are scheduling very few people for this study, it is extremely important that you keep your appointment with us. If for any reason you cannot make it, or you find you will be unavoidably late, please contact [name of person who can resolve last-minute changes], at [phone number] as soon as you know. Please do not send anyone else in your place.

If you wear glasses while using the computer, please bring them with you to your session. You will use [generic description of system—remember you probably don't want the participant to practice in advance] to do a few tasks. Then the evaluation staff will ask you a few follow-up questions to clarify their observations to ensure they thoroughly understand your actions with the [system] and obtain any additional feedback you feel is important.

At the completion of your session, you will receive [incentive] as our thanks for your participation. [unless you will be sending the incentive later. See paragraph below.]

[If you are videotaping session] I'd like to remind you that, with your permission, your session will be videotaped, and that these tapes will be used by the project team within the company for analysis purposes only; all personal information, including your identity, will remain company confidential.

[If you will administer a nondisclosure] In addition, [we, or study sponsor] need you to sign a nondisclosure agreement that says you agree not to talk to anyone about the [system] you are evaluating. You may tell them that you participated in a usability study, however.

[If you will provide a meal or refreshments] We will be providing food and beverages. The food will consist of [describe, for example, small sandwiches and cookies].

[If the incentive will not be provided at the session] We will provide [incentive, such as the next release of software] approximately four weeks after your session. We will need the address to which you would like us to send the [incentive].

[Below, or attached] is a map and driving directions to [facility]. If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at [phone number].

Regards,

[Name]

——End of Sample Confirmation Message——

148. Reconfirm by phone the day before.

Also verify that participants know how to get to the study locale and resend a map and directions, if necessary.

Fewer dropouts at Bentley College

Chauncey Wilson, Director, Design Center, Bentley College

Over the last two years, I've seen a pattern regarding contacting people by email and by phone as a reminder. A personal phone call the day before seems to be more effective than a reminder email. The dropout rate with a personal phone call is about half that of an email contact.

At our Bentley College Design Center we do find a small percentage of people who forget their directions and figure that it is easy to find something

on a campus, but some of the folks wandered around and never made it to our lab. It is good to remind the person to print out the directions and put them in a safe place.

Communicating With the Team

149. Decide in advance who will recruit and schedule the dry-run participant.

Sometimes the study facilitator will enlist a co-worker on the spur of the moment to dry run the study protocol, and the recruiter need not be involved. But when the study is complex and the facilitator wants to dry run the protocol several days in advance, the recruiter likely will need to recruit and schedule a person, who can be internal, for a dry run of the session materials. (Also see Tip 15.)

150. Provide regular updates to the project manager and study facilitator.

Provide copies of the most recent update of the participant summary table (see example on page 97) at the end of each day of recruiting. Also, when requested, provide review copies of filled-in screeners (see screener example on page 65) in their appropriate folders (see Tip 141).

151. Discuss with the study sponsor and project team any difficulty you experience getting the desired number of participants.

If necessary, the team can discuss ways to relax criteria without compromising the study. (Also see Tip 79.)

152. Let the project manager and study facilitator decide which participants will be designated as pilots and backups.

If all participants are equally qualified, this choice will be a matter of scheduling people in the time slots that are most convenient for them. If you are having difficulty getting enough fully qualified people, however, you can generally use less-qualified people as the pilot and backup users. Let the project manager or study facilitator make the final decision. If this process affects the schedule, you may have to call participants to adjust their appointment times.

Scheduling Backups

153. Plan ahead for inevitable cancellations and no-shows.

Increase the likelihood of your getting a final pool of representative participants by scheduling backup users. The average no-show rate reported by respondents of the NN/g Recruiting Survey is 10.6% (a full summary of survey responses is provided in Appendix A). When your budget allows, plan to over-recruit by your own typical no-show rate, to help fill all participant sessions. If you don't know your typical no-show rate, we suggest you use the averages provided by the NN/g recruiting survey respondents, or schedule one backup for each user group represented. (Also see *No-Show Rates By Who Recruits* on page 159.)

You can schedule backups in a few different ways:

- **On-call** participants agree to be available to participate at any time on a certain day or half-day and will come to the lab when called.

- **Floater** participants agree to come to the lab at a time that overlaps two other sessions so that they can fill in for either session should it become necessary. You must pay both, though, if they both show up.
- **Double booking** participants involves scheduling two participants for the same time slot, and releasing one if both show up. Pay both for showing up.
- Include **extra time slots** in which you can schedule all your backups. Make them the last appointments in your schedule, and cancel them with as much notice as possible if they are not needed.

Backups also can cover for sessions in which you find it necessary to excuse a participant during a session for one reason or another.

154. Ask people to be "on call" only when you know they have flexibility and that they can reach the study locale quickly, when needed.

The on-call arrangement tends to work better for internal participants, who are more likely to be in the same building or office complex as the study team.

155. Designate "floaters" only when your budget allows and people are willing.

Because floaters come to the lab and stay for a designated period of time overlapping two sessions, you should plan to pay a higher incentive for their greater time spent. If possible, provide distractions such as television or magazines and refreshments for floaters.

156. Plan to "double book" only when you need the guarantee of 100% attendance under a tight time constraint.

Because some participants may be disappointed to make the effort to come to a session, only to be excused as soon as they arrive, we advise avoiding double booking. Even though you pay the excused person, s/he may still feel dissatisfied if s/he was eager to participate, as illustrated in the following anecdote.

Don't count me out!

Anonymous Usability Professional

We were performing a usability test on short notice under a really tight schedule, so we double-booked every slot to make sure we had a full complement of participants. Unfortunately, we didn't have any previous experience dealing with double-booking. We used a fake reason to excuse one of the two people—usually the one who arrived second—with something like "There was a scheduling mistake. Our [recruiter] inadvertently booked two people for the same time. We went ahead and started the session with the other person who got here first." Then we offered the second participant the honorarium anyway.

For one session, this arrangement backfired on us in a big way. One person was pretty late, so we assumed he wasn't coming or would understand why we started without him if he did arrive. He did arrive and evidently had made some kind of Herculean effort to get to the test session—he'd left work early because he had to ride his bicycle through rush-hour traffic. He was disappointed, then agitated, then just plain angry, demanding to be

rescheduled in a session that evening.

We knew we couldn't do that because of all the double booking and the time crunch we were under. We explained that we had no more slots available, but he wasn't satisfied with our explanation and he argued with us quite a bit. Unfortunately, we ended up having to call a security guard to usher him out of the building. Fortunately, we never heard from him again.

We now avoid double-booking whenever possible, however. If we can't avoid it, we make sure we have a very good reason. Our policy now is to let people know that they may not be used in a session, but that they'll receive the honorarium regardless. Most people are okay with that as long as they know up front. We wish we had done this the first time we had to double-book!

Consider preparing an in-depth user questionnaire for the second person to fill out, so they can still make a contribution to the study. If you have the resources and personnel, also consider reserving a place where you can run a partial session with the second person. If you can do neither of these things, we think it's better to let people know they may not be called to participate. Avoid handing people a built-in excuse not to show up, by letting them know they will still receive the incentive if they appear for their appointment.

157. Whenever possible, schedule backups as your last participants of the overall schedule.

We think this is the most humane way to treat backups, and it wastes the least amount of time. Tell scheduled backup users that you might cancel their session, with notice, and that they will still receive an incentive (you might be able to negotiate a lower rate in the event of adequate notification).

158. Whenever possible, use fully qualified participants as backups.

You want the person who steps in for a no-show to be representative of the system users so that you get the best possible data. Still, if you have had to relax your screening criteria for a particularly difficult recruit, it is obviously better to designate the more marginal participants to serve as the backups.

159. Let participants know that they are backups, what they can expect, and that, as backups, they are important to the study.

Avoid giving backups participants the impression that they are less important than other participants. Let them know that you regularly schedule a full complement of qualified participants to cover for no-shows and that they will be performing a valuable service as backups.

160. Plan to compensate backups whether or not they participate.

Plan to compensate backup participants even if you do not call them to substitute for a no-show; they've made room in their schedule for the study and have fulfilled their commitment. For backups you cancel, even with notice, expect to provide at least half the regular incentive.

REUSING PARTICIPANTS

Reusing participants has advantages, but it also poses problems when you use the same base group repeatedly. This section provides advice for when, and when not, to reuse study participants.

WHEN IT IS OKAY TO REUSE PARTICIPANTS

161. You can reuse participants for studies that do not focus on ease of learning.

If you want to find out how well a system performs during extended use, or how much iterative designs improve a system over time, you can reuse the same participants. It's a good idea to evaluate with novice users to make sure the system meets their needs, but when your study does not need to take into account how easy it is to learn to use the system, then reusing participants is okay.

162. You can reuse participants when the entire user base is from one company, or a specific department of one company, but don't use any one person more than twice in a year.

If a system is designed for a narrowly targeted group, such as insurance agents, and no one else will use the system, you will probably have to reuse participants to evaluate new versions of the system. You will not be able to recruit agents from competing insurance firms. If the pool of agents is large enough, you may be able to use each person no more than twice in one year.

163. You can reuse participants when you need to schedule people very quickly, and you know they fit your recruiting criteria.

If a study participant is good at thinking aloud and sparkling with catchy quotes, you can reuse that study participant, but, again, don't use a study participant more than twice a year and not on the same system or type of system.[35]

One advantage of reusing participants is that you can skip some of the preliminaries and dive right into the study, which can save you a little time., Don't skip taking care of participant needs in the process, however. (See *Honoring the "Participant Bill of Rights"* on page 117.)

WHEN TO AVOID REUSING PARTICIPANTS

164. Avoid reusing participants for iterative tests of the same system if you want to study ease of learning or first exposure to a design.

People cannot erase their experience. A person who has participated in a previous study of an earlier version of a certain design will remember some things from that session and will not approach the new version with a completely fresh perspective.

---

[35] *How to Conduct Usability Studies*, a Nielsen Norman Group report, www.nngroup.com/reports/how-to-conduct-usability-studies

165. Avoid reusing participants who have already participated in any usability study twice in one year.

You want to prevent developing a pool of "professional participants." After a few sessions, participants can become accustomed to the types of problems they think they are expected to find, and you lose the fresh perspective you need, as illustrated by the following anecdote from Switzerland.

> **Expert testers**
>
> **Marc Blume, Usability Consultant, Swisscom Innovations**
>
> We have stopped reusing participants altogether because after a while we found it takes more effort to get good data from them. They become expert testers and lose their user perspective. They become more like an evaluator and want to help do the redesign, not the study tasks. We feel it is always better to get a new participant whom we haven't seen before and who hasn't been in a study before.

166. Avoid reusing participants whom you have had to excuse from a previous study because they demonstrated questionable motives.

The best way to avoid this situation is to mark suspect or undesirable participants in your spreadsheet or database: those who misrepresented their qualifications, were interested only in the incentives, or were job-seekers or technology spies who beat your screener.

167. Avoid reusing participants whom you know from previous studies have not honored the nondisclosure agreement.

Again, the best way to avoid this situation is to mark these participants in your spreadsheet or database after you learn they disregarded their pledge of nondisclosure.

Preparing Participant Session Forms

Throughout this report, we have referred you to this section for samples of participant forms, which you will need for interacting with participants before, during, and after sessions. All the forms provided in this section also are presented in Appendix B.

This section describes the participant forms you might need, and why, and provides results from our recruiting survey indicating how many respondents administer the types of forms described in this section. (A full summary of survey responses is provide in Appendix A.)

168. Print multi-page forms back-to-back and number the pages using a "1 of x" format.

This approach will minimize the number of sheets you must issue and will make clear to the participants how many total pages a form is.

169. Create all participant forms in plain, understandable language, not "legalese."

Legalistic forms can be a major deterrent to people agreeing to participate, as illustrated in the following anecdote.

> **Get out of here!**
>
> **Phillip Scarborough, Usability Consultant, San Francisco**
>
> In a field study with hospital physicians, the study sponsors (a major medical equipment manufacturer) had done the recruiting and were also required to provide the consent forms. At our very first session, however, the physician seemed somewhat distrustful of the whole process (the sponsor had not made it clear that three of us would be occupying the physician's office or that we'd be videotaping).
>
> The physician was so put off by the legalese in the sponsor's consent form that he not only refused to sign the form—he also asked us to leave his office and not return. It was the first time, and hopefully the last, that I was requested to leave a session!

170. If a participant refuses to sign a form that you or your study sponsor require, excuse that participant from the study.

If your study sponsors require their legal forms to be signed, as in the preceding anecdote, inform participants during recruiting. A participant may still refuse to sign a consent form at his / her session, however. Depending on your or the study sponsor's legal requirements, you may have to excuse him or her from the study. State that you understand his / her concerns and provide whatever incentive you planned.

Some examples include:

- If a study sponsor is required by their legal department to get signed nondisclosures, you must comply or excuse the participant.

- If you need a participant's social security number to provide a monetary incentive, ask if s/he would be more comfortable providing that information over the phone directly to the bookkeeper. If not, you will have to excuse the participant or ask him or her to participate without an incentive. (Also see Tip 181.)
- If the participant is shy about videotaping, ask if you can just take notes and shut down the video equipment in his or her presence.

Whenever you excuse participants because of their refusal to sign required forms or to compromise, flag them in your participant database or spreadsheet.

Background Questionnaire

Of the NN/g recruiting survey respondents, 68% administer a background questionnaire before or at the beginning of a study session.

171. Administer a background questionnaire to the participant just before the session begins.

Doing so will mitigate the possibility of working with an unqualified person who may have slipped through the screening process. When participants answer screening questions with no prompting from a recruiter, you may discover they report they have more or less experience than they reported to the recruiter. (Also see *Dealing with Unqualified Participants* on page 126.)

If you ask participants during screening to arrive at their sessions 5–10 minutes early, you can administer the background questionnaire without taking up valuable session time. Make sure the person assigned to greeting participants has enough copies for the day. You need not provide a copy of the filled-in background questionnaire to participants.

172. Avoid mailing the background questionnaire to participants in advance.

More than likely, they will forget to bring it with them to their session, and you will have to administer it as part of your session, compromising available task time. Furthermore, sending participants the questionnaire in advance gives them an opportunity to try to recall what they told recruiters. By administering the questionnaire just before the session begins, without participants' prior knowledge, you are more likely to get reliable information.

The main exception to this advice occurs if you have a very complex background questionnaire, which we don't recommend. Sometimes you may need to find out details about the participants' work environment (say, which version routing software is installed on their network) that can be difficult to remember, and which would be easier for people to supply if they received the questionnaire at their office. Ask participants to fax the questionnaire to you in advance, and provide some copies of the form at the session just in case they forget to do so.

173. Base the background questionnaire on the essential questions from the screening questionnaire.

Try to keep the background questionnaire short—10 questions or fewer. If you are reusing the screener as a template, be sure that you strip instructions to the recruiter first.

The following example of a background questionnaire is based on the screener example on page 65.

SAMPLE BACKGROUND QUESTIONNAIRE

Background Questionnaire for [study name]

Please take a few minutes to answer the following questions to help us better understand your background and areas of interest. We use this information only to provide background and usage context in which to interpret the input and feedback you'll give us in your session today. We will keep your name confidential, and anonymously report the information you provide today.

1. What is your occupation and job title?

   Occupation: _____

   Job title: _____

2. Which of the following ranges best describes your age?
   - ❑ Under 20
   - ❑ 20–30
   - ❑ 31–40
   - ❑ 41–50
   - ❑ More than 50

3. Which of the following salary ranges best describes your current household income?
   - ❑ $34,000 or less
   - ❑ $35,000 – $45,000
   - ❑ $46,000 – $60,000
   - ❑ $61,000 – $75,000
   - ❑ $76, 000 or more

4. Do you own a home, or do you rent living space?
   - ❑ I own a home.
   - ❑ I rent living space.
   - ❑ I neither rent living space nor own a home.

5. How many hours per week do you use a computer at home? How many hours per week at work?

   Home: _____ Work: _____

6. How long have you been using the Internet?

   _____

7. How many hours per week do you spend on the Internet, not including time spent working with email?

   _____

8. What items have you purchased online (on the Web) within the last three months?

   _____

——End of Sample Background Questionnaire——

Consent Forms

Of the NN/g recruiting survey respondents, 45% indicated that they have participants sign some sort of audio / video taping consent form before a study session or at the beginning of a study session.

174. For studies with minors, administer a consent form that requires the signature of the minor's parent or guardian.

With minors, it is imperative that you have custodial permission before allowing them to participate in a session. Try to minimize the amount of information that parents or guardians must fill in. Provide a copy of the signed minor consent form to the participant's parents or guardians when they bring their child to the session.

The following sample minor participation consent form assumes that you have already spoken with teachers from the school where you will be conducting a study with elementary school children, have interviewed the parents of the recommended students, and are now sending consent forms to the parents of the students you would like to have in your study.

SAMPLE MINOR CONSENT FORM

Permission for Participation in After-School Software Evaluation Study

Your child, [blank fill-in line for name of child], has been recommended by his / her school teacher, [blank fill-in line for name of teacher], to participate in an after-school computer software evaluation study at his or her school, for which s/he will receive [incentive description, such as "hardbound illustrated children's book"]. [Name of usability firm] is conducting the study with the full knowledge and consent of [blank fill-in line for name of school and school's principal].

Before [name of usability firm] can accept your child into the software evaluation study, we require your permission as described below. Please read all information before signing this consent form.

By signing this form, you certify that you are the parent or legal guardian of [blank fill-in line for child's name]. Your signature also certifies that you give your child permission to participate in the after-school computer software evaluation study conducted by [name of usability firm], and that you have read and understand the study as described below:

- Your child's software evaluation study session will take place after school, in the school's [blank fill-in line for room, such as "library" or "gymnasium"].
- The software evaluation study will ask for feedback and opinions from [grade level] graders about a new software package that features [describe, such as "multimedia literature"] for children in your child's age group. The developers of the software want to ensure that it engages children, teaches them effectively, and is easy to use.
- The software evaluation study will not evaluate your child's computer, reading, or comprehension skills. In this study, your child will be the evaluator.
- [Usability firm] staff will observe your child's activities with the software and will ask your child for feedback and opinions of the software.
- [Usability firm] staff will videotape the session, and your child's likeness and voice may appear on highlight videotapes to be used for noncommercial, data reporting purposes only within [company name].
- Your child's identity will be held confidential on all videotapes, study data, and study reporting.
- Your child's session will last 75 minutes (one hour and 15 minutes) and will include a 10-minute break after each half hour.
- During one of the session breaks, [usability firm] staff will provide snacks consisting of juice or milk, and cookies (without seeds or nuts of any kind). If your child has any food allergies, or if you do not want your child to have a snack, please indicate below:

  _____

- _____

- Your child is not obligated to complete an entire session; your child is free to discontinue the session at any time. If your child chooses to discontinue the session, [usability firm] staff will not release your child until s/he is met by you or someone you designate.
- You may be present during the study session, but you will not interact with your child or the study facilitator during the session, unless it is to end the session.

- For your child's protection, [usability firm] prefers that the person who brings your child to the session also meets your child after the session. If this request presents a hardship for you, please indicate below. Please provide your phone number and the best time to reach you so that [usability firm] and / or [blank fill-in line for name school principal] can make other arrangements with you.

  _____

  _____

- For participating in the study, your child will receive [incentive description].
- To ensure the validity of our study results, your child must refrain from speaking about his / her evaluation session with other students until after the entire study is complete.
- [Usability firm] staff has reserved an appointment on [blank fill-in line for date, time] for your child's session in [room in school]. If this date or time is inconvenient, please indicate below. Please provide your telephone number and the best time to reach you so that [usability firm] and / or [blank fill-in line for name school principal] can make other arrangements with you:

  _____

  _____

We will do our best to make this experience interesting and fun for your child. Our goal is to help make design changes to [the system] so that children just like yours can use it more easily and effectively. We appreciate your child's help very much.

I have read and understand the description of the software study above, and give my permission for my child to participate.

Signature: _____

Print name: _____

Date: _____

Please fill in, sign, and return this form to your child's teacher by [day, date]. [Usability firm] cannot accept your child into the study without this signed form. You will receive a copy of your signed form at your child's session. Thank you!

——End of Sample Minor Participation Consent Form——

175. Have participants (or parents or guardians of child or minor participants) sign recording consent forms before sessions you plan to video- or audio-tape.

Provide a copy of the signed consent forms to the participant (or the parent or guardian of a minor). (See the following sample consent form.)

SAMPLE PARTICIPATION CONSENT FORM[36]

Understanding Your Participation

Please read this page carefully before you sign it.

You have agreed to participate in a usability study that will evaluate [system]. By participating in this study, you will help [usability consulting firm or study sponsor] to improve [system] in future redesigns. [Usability consulting firm] staff will observe you and record information about how you work with the [system]. We will also ask you to fill out questionnaires about your experience and answer follow-up questions. We will record your comments and actions using written notes and video cameras.

[Usability consulting firm] will use the data from your study session, including videotapes, solely for the purposes of evaluating the [system] and sharing the results of these evaluations with [the study sponsor]. Your full name will not be used during any presentation of the results of this study.

By signing this form, you give your permission for [usability consulting firm] to use (circle one answer for each):

- Your recorded voice (yes) (no)
- Your verbal statements (yes) (no)
- The videotape of your session (yes) (no)

You will receive [incentive] for your participation; however, your acceptance of this [incentive] does not constitute employment by [usability consulting firm], [market research firm or facility], or [the study sponsor].

If you need a break at any time, please inform the study facilitator immediately. If you have questions about how the session will proceed, you may ask them at any time. You may withdraw from your study session at any time.

If you agree with these terms, please indicate your agreement by signing below.

Signature: _____

Print name: _____

Date: _____

——End of Sample Participation Consent Form——

[36] Form based on one administered by Optavia Corporation.

Incentive Receipt and Voucher

176. Have participants sign receipts for incentives they receive.

Of the NN/g recruiting survey respondents, 33% indicated that they have participants sign a receipt for incentives received. We advise always having participants sign a receipt for incentives. You should keep the original of the receipt and provide a copy to the participant. Receipts are important for both monetary and non-monetary incentives, for inventory and accounting purposes. (See the following sample receipt form.)

SAMPLE RECEIPT

Receipt for [Monetary or Non-monetary]

Thank you for participating in the [system] usability evaluation. Please acknowledge that you have received from [usability consulting firm, market research firm or facility, or study sponsor] [the exact amount of money, or describe the non-monetary incentive, if it is merchandise] for your participation by signing below. Note that your acceptance of this [incentive] does not constitute employment by [usability consulting firm, market research firm or facility, or study sponsor]. Thanks again for your participation!

Signature: _____

Print name: _____

Date: _____

——*End of Sample Receipt Form*——

177. Give participants an incentive voucher if their incentive will not be available by the time study session takes place.

It is important for participants to feel confident that they will receive the incentive promised. When the incentive, such as the next release of software, is not immediately available, give participants an incentive voucher to provide assurance they will be compensated. Be sure to have participants provide their preferred mailing address. You should provide the original voucher to the participant and keep a copy. (See the following sample incentive voucher.)

Make sure that you track these vouchers carefully, and remember to tell the participants that there is a chance that the product could be delayed. If the incentive is delayed much longer than expected, follow up with participants to let them know about the delay. The delay may annoy some participants, but not as much as would not telling them about a delay and forcing them to contact you to find out what is happening with their incentive.

SAMPLE INCENTIVE VOUCHER

Voucher for [name of incentive, such as software package name]

Thank you for participating in the [system] usability evaluation. [Usability consulting firm, market research firm or facility, or study sponsor] will send you [describe the non-monetary incentive] as soon as it becomes available, approximately [time frame] to thank you for your participation. Note that your acceptance of this honorarium does not constitute employment by [usability consulting firm, market research firm or facility, or study sponsor].

Please print the name and mailing address to which you would like [non-monetary incentive] sent:

Name:

_____

Address:

_____

_____

If for unforeseen reasons, [incentive] release is delayed, how shall we contact you to let you know?

[ ] Send mail to the address provided above.

[ ] Send email to the this address: _____

[ ] Call me at this telephone number: _____

Thanks again for your participation!

——*End of Sample Incentive Voucher Form*——

Nondisclosure Form

Of the NN/g recruiting survey respondents, 57% indicated that they have participants sign some sort of nondisclosure form before a study session or at the beginning of a study session.

178. Avoid nondisclosure agreements whenever possible.[37]

Because usability studies are conducted with a small number of strangers, there usually is little risk that they will leak corporate secrets to the world. In particular, there is no reason for nondisclosure forms if you are evaluating existing websites that are already available on the Internet for anybody to see at any time. Having to sign a nondisclosure agreement can be a barrier to participation—study participants have refused to participate in studies for this reason. (See the anecdote under Tip 169.)

The use of nondisclosures often depends on how soon a product will go to market and on corporate policy. A usability person who violates the corporate nondisclosure policy could get into real trouble.

179. If corporate policy requires that participants sign a nondisclosure agreement, ensure that participants sign one.

When recruiting, let participants know they will need to sign a nondisclosure agreement before their session. You should keep the original of the nondisclosure and provide a copy to the participant. (See the following sample nondisclosure agreement.)

SAMPLE NONDISCLOSURE AGREEMENT

Nondisclosure Agreement for [name of study]

In this session, you will be working with [*or* shown, *if a focus group*] a [system type, *for example a website or software tool*] in its development stage. By signing this form, you agree not to share information you learn about this [system], which is considered proprietary, and which we share with you only so that you can participate in this evaluation [*or* discussion, *if a focus group*]. By signing this form, you also agree not to share information about your session to anyone, especially those you know who also may be participating in this study, until after [month year]. We appreciate your strict adherence to this agreement.

Signature: _____
Print name: _____
Date: _____

——*End of Sample Nondisclosure Form*——

180. Even if you do not administer a nondisclosure form, ask participants not to discuss the session.

If you conduct sessions with customers all working for the same company, the likelihood is high that they will have the opportunity to speak to one another about the session. Therefore, even if you don't require participants to

[37] *How to Conduct Usability Studies*, a Nielsen Norman Group report, www.nngroup.com/reports/how-to-conduct-usability-studies

sign a nondisclosure agreement, verbally emphasize how important it is for them not to discuss the study session with co-workers or to show them the system components they evaluated until six months after the projected release date. Explain that a fresh, unbiased point of view is needed from all participants in the study. (Also see the anecdote under Tip 104.)

Tax Forms

Of the NN/g recruiting survey respondents, 3% indicated that they request participant information for tax forms.

181. In the US, check a current-year tax guide to find out how much any one person may be paid in a calendar year before you must produce and mail a 1099 form.

The tax code for From 1099 is available from the Internal Revenue Service website.
www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/i1099m02.pdf

Be sure to obtain the participant's:

- Legal spelling of his / her name
- Social security number
- Current address as of January 31 of the following year (which is the deadline for you to mail this form).

(Also see Tip 170.)

If participants ask why this information is being collected, we usually advise them that we will not be reporting anything to the Internal Revenue Service unless they receive more than the allowed limit from us in a year. Because most studies involve incentives far below this limit, this effectively means that you will not need to report most users.

182. Avoid using any one participant so often that you must report his or her incentive earnings to the government.

Beware of encouraging "professional" participants; the more you use the same participants, the more they understand what you are looking for in an evaluator. (Also see *Reusing Participants* on page 104.)

183. Consult with a tax expert and the CFO in the study sponsor's company to learn about any additional tax information you should collect or know about when providing incentives to participants.

Keep in mind that your or the study sponsor's company may have more stringent rules for submitting tax forms than the government, and that local governments may have different requirements from State, Provincial, or other higher levels of government.

Honoring the "Participant Bill of Rights"

Another critical component of participant recruiting includes how you treat participants throughout their entire usability-study experience, not just during screening and scheduling. When participants have a good overall experience, they are more likely to want to come back if needed, and to recommend others they know as participants. Of the NN/g survey respondents, 14% indicated that they provide participants with a "Bill of Rights" document, which we think is a fine idea.

We believe that usability professionals should become familiar with ethical guidelines for conducting studies with human beings, such as those published by the American Psychological Association. In addition, we point you to **"***Main ethical considerations for user testing."*[38]

This section incorporates many of these considerations into the practical advice we provide for helping you maintain high ethical standards while interacting with participants.

TREATING PARTICIPANTS AS HUMAN BEINGS

184. Remember that participants are people, not "test subjects."

As noted in Tip 71, avoid words that make your study sound like a test or experiment, so people won't feel like they are subjects of an experiment. In your screening script, and again in your session introduction, make it clear that the design of the system is the subject of your study, not the participants. Make it clear that their role in the study is as evaluators and that you are not evaluating them.

Despite telling participants they are not the subjects of the study, many often feel tremendous pressure to perform, and they can easily feel inadequate as they experience difficulties with the system. The session facilitator has a responsibility to make participants feel as comfortable as possible during and after the session.[39]

Therefore:

- Acknowledge the special skills or knowledge of the participant and the need to involve people with these skills in the evaluation process.
- Never laugh at participants' actions or opinions; similarly caution observers never to laugh or comment on participant behavior.
- Avoid referring to participants as "guinea pigs" even in a lighthearted manner. If participants refer to themselves as guinea pigs, neutrally explain again that the system is the subject of the evaluation, not them.
- Consider that the protection of your participant is paramount, followed by protection of the study sponsor company, followed by protection of the data.[40]

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[38] Jakob Nielsen, *Usability Engineering,* Table 9 "*Main ethical considerations for user testing,"* page 184. 1993, Academic Press.

[39] Jakob Nielsen, *Usability Engineering,* 1993, Academic Press.

[40] Chauncey Wilson, Director, Bentley College Design and Usability Testing Center.

- The overriding principle is that the participant should leave the study session feeling no worse than when s/he arrived and, ideally, should feel better from the experience. [41]

185. Chat with participants to help them feel comfortable with the study session.

Converse cordially with participants before the session begins and during breaks. Always remember the human aspect of the study and help alleviate any nervousness people may feel, especially when they may feel they are not performing well.

186. Don't allow a participant's manager or co-workers to observe sessions.

Refuse to run the study if managers insist on being present. Assure participants you will not report information about the participant's comments and that their manager or co-workers will not be informed about the content of their study session.

187. Be sensitive to cultural diversity.

- Maintain a neutral, but cordial, demeanor when you encounter a participant from a culture noticeably different from yours. Do not comment on what you may consider unusual dress or appearance.
- Politely ask participants to repeat what they've just said if you experience difficulty understanding a foreign accent.
- Be prepared to explain verbally any of the information in the participant forms if the need arises.
- Avoid engaging in political discussions of any kind or commenting on world problems—keep the focus on the study and the tasks at hand.

188. Be sensitive to individuals who are mentally or physically challenged, without feeling awkward.

- Maintain a neutral, but cordial, demeanor. Do not comment on what you may consider unusual mannerisms or appearance. Although a disability is an integral part of who they are, it alone does not define them. Don't make them into disability heroes or victims—treat them as individuals. [42]
- Plan to spend more time with participants who are mentally or physically challenged, but don't make decisions for them about participating in any activity. People with disabilities are the best judges of what they can or cannot do. [43]
- Don't automatically offer to help—it may appear patronizing. Adults with disabilities want to be treated as independent people.[44] Let the individual ask you for whatever help they need when they need it.

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[41] Ibid.

[42] Judy Cohen, Access Resources, *Disability Etiquette—Tips on Interactions with People with Disabilities* (1998), Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Association. www.epva.org

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid.

- Refrain from asking questions about a person's challenges or limitations—the person may feel like you are treating him / her as a disability and not as a human being.[45] Do listen, however, when someone wants to explain any limitations s/he may have.
- Similarly when referring to participants with disabilities in your report, put the person first. Rather than saying "disabled person," say instead "person with disabilities." When referring to a specific disability, say, "a person who is blind" or "a person with low vision" rather than a blind (or nearly blind) person.[46]

(See Tip 202 for resources on accessibility-related usability studies.)

189. Make the first task very simple.[47]

No matter how you emphasize to participants that you are not evaluating them, initially they will still feel pressure to perform well. A quick success relaxes participants and helps them to feel more comfortable in the surroundings and with thinking aloud. A simple task might be "In today's session, you'll be working with Acme's website. Go ahead find the site as you normally do."

190. Consider gracefully ending a session if you sense that a participant is uncomfortable and hesitates to ask to be excused.

Plan in advance how you might stop a session if you become aware that someone is having a negative reaction. Here are some cues to help you gauge whether to stop a session. Pay attention if a participant:

- Appears very flustered—red in the face when the room is not overly warm, stutters when s/he hadn't in the beginning of the session, raises the pitch and volume of his or her voice, actively fidgets in his or her seat, or becomes suddenly quiet and sullen.
- Looks as if s/he may cry—the eyes are red or watery, and the facial expression is tight.
- Becomes overly self-deprecating—saying things like, "I feel so stupid," or 'I'm such an idiot."
- Begins constantly looking at his or her watch.
- Smashes or slams the keyboard or mouse.
- Becomes verbally abusive to you or the observers.

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[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid.

[47] *How to Conduct Usability Studies*, a Nielsen Norman Group report, www.nngroup.com/reports/how-to-conduct-usability-studies

191. Express gratitude, and follow up with a thank-you note.

As noted in Tip 23, don't let the incentive be your only expression of thanks. People like to hear that they are appreciated, so express your gratitude verbally as well. You should thank even those participants who did not provide what you consider decent feedback—at some level, they may know it and feel bad about it otherwise.

After the sessions are over, send an email or note to each participant to thank them for their participation. You may also take that opportunity to ask them if they'd like to be involved in future studies and / or if they may be able to provide a referral. We're happy to report that at least 56% of the NN/g recruiting survey respondents send a thank-you note, and 18% ask for referrals. Unfortunately, 34% of respondents do not follow up with participants after sessions. A thank-you note goes a long way in making a participant feel appreciated and motivated to return.

Sample Thank-You Note

Dear [participant name],

[Study team and / or study sponsors] would like to thank you for participating in our [name of study] last [day or date]. You provided us with valuable feedback, which we will use to make recommendations for improving [system].

[If you want the participant back again:] If you are interested, and with your permission, we'd like to contact you again for future studies. Please return the enclosed post-paid card to let us know your interest.

[If you want referrals:] If you know of someone else who may be interested in participating in a usability study, please return the post-paid card to let us know the name of the person you are referring how we may contact your referral.

Thanks again for your time and interest in our study.

Sincerely,

[Study team facilitator and / or study sponsor project manager]

——*End of sample Thank-You Note*——

192. In your study results, be sure to quote participants and report their data accurately and anonymously.

Even though participants are likely never to see your results report, ethically you are obligated to quote them accurately and to hold their identity confidential.

193. Consider using memory aids so that you can easily recall each participant.

In addition to assigning a unique number or code to each participant, consider writing down in session notes neutral memory joggers that will to help you remember individual participants' actions when you compile the data at a later time. For example, note:

- The color of a person's clothing and hair. For example, "the blond man wearing a red turtleneck shirt."

- The resemblance of a participant to someone you know or is famous. For example, “the woman who looks just like Aunt Marie.” Or, “the man who resembles Prince Charles.”
- A catch phrase that a participant may have repeated several times. For example, “the woman who always said, ‘Now isn’t that something?!’ Or, the man who repeatedly said, ‘This just doesn’t work!’”

Obviously, these memory aids should not be included in the formal report. To protect the participants’ anonymity, their appearance should not be described in the report, even though it’s a great way for you personally to remember who did what. Refer to participants only by the number or code you assign.

ATTENDING TO PARTICIPANTS’ PHYSICAL COMFORT

In addition to caring about participants’ emotional well-being, you need to ensure their physical well-being paying special attention to seniors, children, and people with disabilities or physical challenges.

194. Provide an adequate number of breaks in the session—with food and beverages available.

For sessions longer than 90 minutes, plan breaks. Be especially mindful of children, seniors, or people with physical challenges, who may need breaks more often to move around or eat at specified times during the day. At the beginning of the session, let participants know that they can ask for a break at any time in addition to the planned breaks you have scheduled. A selection of coffee, tea, water, and juice, plus a basket of chocolate and crackers or potato chips (crisps) is an inexpensive way to make people feel well cared for.

195. Be sure participants know where to find the closest lavatories (toilettes).

This information is something all participants want to know.

196. Provide comfortable, ergonomic chairs for participants.

Chairs should have both seat and back adjustments. Keep some small pillows on hand, in case you need to boost children or shorter individuals so they can easily and comfortably reach the system. Ideally, you should provide a choice of chairs—include some chairs with arms and some without.

Let the participant choose the chair s/he feels would be the most suitable, however For example, never suggest a large person take the larger of two chairs. Likewise, do not immediately offer to boost with pillows a person of diminutive stature. If you will be conducting a session with a wheelchair user, be sure to remove the chair currently placed by the workstation before that person enters the room.

197. Position the monitor, mouse, and keyboard a comfortable distance from the participant.[48]

You also might want to set the resolution so that it is similar to what the person uses at home or work.

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[48] Chauncey Wilson, Director, Bentley College Design and Usability Testing Center, contributed this tip.

198. Make sure the room environment is physically comfortable.

- Ensure the heat or air conditioning—whichever is appropriate for the season—is fully operational. Get to the session early to make any necessary adjustments in the session room's temperature.
- Make sure the room also is properly ventilated, so people won't become sleepy during the session. Plan to prop the door open a crack if the air becomes stale.
- Don't choose a session room that is cramped for space. Limit the number of observers allowed in the room; better yet, restrict them to a designated remote observation area.

199. Help make the room visually appealing and less lab-like.

The addition of a one or two framed images in subdued colors, some small tropical plants, and cheery window treatments can go a long way to contribute to the relaxed atmosphere you'd like to provide for participants., Do not choose plants with a strong, cloying scent or a lot of pollen, however. Also do not decorate with marketing posters for your own products, because they could bias participants' responses.

200. Provide coloring books and reading material to keep child participants occupied while they wait for their parents or guardians to retrieve them.

Although you don't necessarily have to entertain children who are waiting for their parents or guardians, it would be helpful to provide children's books to make their wait more pleasant.

201. Respect participants' personal space.

If you sit in the lab with participants, be sure to allow enough room, so you are not encroaching on their personal space. If possible, sit a little bit behind them so they feel less like they are being observed and can't as easily watch you taking notes.

While working with people with disabilities, avoid grasping their arms, on which they may depend for balance. Also avoid touching anyone's wheelchair, scooter, or cane—people with disabilities consider their equipment part of their personal space.[49]

202. Research additional resources when planning studies with seniors, children, or people with disabilities as participants.

Some resources we recommend include:

- *Senior Citizens (Ages 65 and older) on the Web*, an NN/g report. www.nngroup.com/reports/senior-citizens-on-the-web
- *Children (Ages 3-12) on the Web*, an NN/g report. www.nngroup.com/reports/children-on-the-web
- Allison Druin's work with children as study participants at the human-computer interaction lab of the University of Maryland. www.cs.umd.edu/hcil/kiddesign

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[49] Judy Cohen, Access Resources, *Disability Etiquette—Tips on Interactions with People with Disabilities* (1998), Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Association. www.epva.org

- Hanna, Risden, and Alexander: "Guidelines for Usability Testing with Children" *Interactions*, September and October 1997. www.microsoft.com/usability/UEPostings/p9-hanna.pdf
- *How to Conduct Usability Evaluations for Accessibility: Methodology Guidelines for Testing Websites and Intranets With Users Who Use Assistive Technology*, an NN/g report. www.nngroup.com/reports/accessibility/testing
- Judy Cohen, Access Resources, *Disability Etiquette—Tips on Interactions with People with Disabilities* (1998), Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Association. www.epva.org

The preceding resources are also listed in the References section of this report on page 189.

ENSURING PARTICIPANTS' SAFETY

It may be obvious to readers that usability professionals should not impose safety risks on their study participants without explicit informed consent. Yet, you may not think of all the ways in which participants may simply feel unsafe. You should try to anticipate as much as possible how your study locale, staff, and / or facility could affect people's perception of personal safety.

203. Make sure you know who is dropping off and retrieving a child participant to and from your session.

As noted in the sample minor consent form on page 109, for parents' and your own peace of mind, and for the child's safety, know in advance to whom to release a child participant. If you are unsure, contact the child's parent, guardian, teacher, or principal. The child may be willing to go with a person unknown to you, but that is no assurance that the unknown person should take the child (consider custody disagreements, for example).

204. When sessions take place in the evening, provide an appropriate escort for participants who would feel unsafe, or even uneasy, without it.

A female participant or study team member may not be comfortable walking to the session room alone with a male. In addition, an unlit parking lot can seem foreboding at night, and even a well-lit parking lot can be imposing to a person walking alone any distance to a parked car. Consider the following anecdote.

The dark parking lot

Ron Sova, Usability Specialist, Sova Consulting Group

For after-hours testing, we try to prevent women participants and team members from feeling uneasy about walking thorough a big, mostly empty building to the lab with a man unknown to them. So, I meet male participants and a female colleague meets women participants. It's been working really well.

We thought we had everything covered until a young woman participant seemed very nervous about having to walk back to her car through a large parking lot alone. So, we arranged to have a security guard accompany her, and we're now making security escorts part of our standard procedures.

205. When sessions take place in the evening, make sure you have more than one team member.

For the reasons stated in Tip 204, it would be best to include both a man and a woman on the study team and for the participant to see both team members before the session begins. It is not necessary for the participant to see all the observers. It is important only for the participant to see that both a man and a woman are present.

206. Remove obstacles in the study room that may hamper or endanger the mobility of participants, especially people with physical challenges.

This caution includes cables in places that could cause problems. Ideally, all usability studies would take place in wheelchair-accessible venues that also accommodate people with low or no vision.

ENSURING PARTICIPANTS' PRIVACY

An excerpt from *APA Code of Professional Ethics,* [50] EC5.2

An APA member, whenever dealing with data concerning individuals, shall always consider the principle of the individual's privacy and seek the following:

To minimize the data collected.
To limit authorized access to the data.
To provide proper security for the data.
To determine the required retention period of the data.
To ensure proper disposal of the data.

207. Provide repeated assurance that you will report participant data anonymously.

As noted in several previous tips, participants are entitled to anonymity, including in video clips. Reiterating that you are protecting privacy increases participants' comfort with speaking more freely, for which you'll be rewarded with more reliable data.

Reassure participants:

- During recruiting and screening
- In participant forms
- At the beginning of the study session
- During the session
- In the session wrap-up.

208. Don't ask agency-recruited participants for their contact information.

As noted in Tip 112, asking agency-recruited participants for their contact information would constitute a breach of the confidentiality that participants are guaranteed when they provide information to agencies. Instead, let the agency know which participants expressed interest in returning for future

[50] American Psychological Association (APA). *Ethical principles of psychologists and code of conduct.*

studies and remind the agency the next time you use them and want those participants back.

209. Don't put non-agency participants' names into your recruiting database or spreadsheet without their knowledge or consent.

It is perfectly acceptable to ask non-agency-recruited participants if they are interested in returning for future studies; but never contact them without having asked first. Often, we've included a question on the background questionnaire for permission to contact again.

210. Observe strict rules for handling videotapes.[51]

Most usability test centers have strict rules for who can watch tapes from usability studies. Unfortunately, we have seen examples where usability tapes were handed to other usability professionals outside of the organization (with the best intentions, of course), or where a usability test center entertained visitors by showing video clips with "funny" episodes from usability studies where study participants were picking their teeth or combing their hair while facing the two-way mirror, and so forth. Sharing videotapes in this manner is totally inconsiderate of fellow human beings and unethical.

211. Define rules for data retention.

In the UPA Idea Market, attendees reported that they hold data for time periods ranging from one month to five years. One attendee reported that his company purges data only as the files fill up, with no specific schedule. We recommend that you define a reasonable amount of time for data retention and destroy participant data on a regular schedule. We suggest three months after a regular study, six months for more complex projects, and a year for iterative testing and design projects.

212. Consult with your organization's legal department to learn about the legal ramifications of usability testing and evaluating with participants.

Also, as reported by UPA Idea Market attendees, many larger corporations have complicated guidelines and policies about nondisclosure and privacy issues. Become familiar with these policies so you can always comply with company regulations, while managing the privacy of your participants, as illustrated in the following anecdote.

The wait for approval

Anonymous Usability Specialist from a large corporation

Here is the situation we face when we try to recruit customers for our usability sessions:

We develop enterprise software that costs companies a minimum of tens of thousands of dollars. Customers and potential customers usually want to shop around to ensure that the software they are buying best matches their needs. Unfortunately, shopping around means that they may also tell competitors about our plans.

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[51] *How to Conduct Usability Studies*, a Nielsen Norman Group report, www.nngroup.com/reports/how-to-conduct-usability-studies

As a result, we usually need to develop a formal confidentiality agreement (a nondisclosure agreement) between our company and the participant's company. The pitfalls of developing such an agreements are that they:

1. Are very specific. We need to list the exact products that the participant will be examining (including things such as manuals). If someone else brings in a participant for a session, we cannot show them our product unless the agreement that they signed lists our product explicitly. This can be frustrating to both us and the participant, because they have usually traveled for the session and don't understand why they cannot see a product when they have signed a confidentiality agreement with us.
2. Involve our legal department as well as the customer's and / or participant's legal department. The time lag can be quite long and unpredictable as usually these nondisclosure agreements are low priority for our customers' legal departments.
3. Are usually not needed unless specific designs are shown. Development or executives will often talk about future plans in a general way to the customers. The customers often are interested and want to see our product and give us feedback on direction. In their minds, all of a sudden, they need to sign an agreement that wasn't needed when they previously talked to our company.

As a result, we need to do a lot of planning and coordination across various divisions, teams, and so forth, to make sure that we can get the feedback we need during the proper phase in the design cycle.

Also, meet with your, or the study sponsor's, chief legal adviser to discuss potential legal issues that could invite civil suits. For example, in social psychology research, company lawyers ask researchers to retain tapes for two years, which is the statute of limitations for civil actions in many US states.

DEALING WITH UNQUALIFIED PARTICIPANTS

Despite your best planning and screening efforts, an unqualified participant or two may slip through the process and appear for a study session. This section provides advice for handling this often delicate situation with grace and dignity.

213. Try to discover unqualified participants before the study session begins, with a background questionnaire.

As advised in Tip 171, administering a background questionnaire before the session will mitigate the possibility of working with an unqualified person who may have beat the screener. When participants answer screening questions with no prompting from a recruiter—they may turn out to have more or less experience than they reported to the recruiter.

214. Try to determine the cause of a qualification discrepancy, and act accordingly.

When a qualification discrepancy occurs, clarify with the participant first.

- **Misunderstanding.** Perhaps the participant simply misunderstood a question that s/he can answer satisfactorily now. In that case, proceed with the session if the person otherwise qualifies.
- **Almost qualified.** If after speaking with the participant, you feel that s/he may be qualified, but not highly qualified, talk with the study sponsors, who, hopefully will be there observing sessions or reachable by phone. Discuss ideas with them for adjusting scenarios somewhat so that you can collect some meaningful data. If you come to a good compromise, proceed with the session, and get whatever data you can from the participant. If you do hold a session with a person whose qualifications are not at the same level as the rest of the study participants, be sure to indicate that person's data as such in your report. If at the end of the session, you find you have only minimally useful data, you may need to conduct a session with one of your scheduled backups.
- **Not qualified.** If you decide to excuse a participant, do so gracefully. Explain that his or her background does not quite match the profile you need and apologize sincerely for the inconvenience. Provide the incentive to mitigate bad feelings over this recruiting error. Allow the person to wait in the reception area if s/he must wait for a cab or public transportation. If you haven't already provided a transportation or commuting premium, offer one at this time, and if possible, obtain a receipt.

215. If during the session, you discover a job seeker, competitor, technology spy, or incentive-only seeker, deal quickly and firmly with the situation.

Despite your best efforts and the experience of your recruiter, you may find yourself with one of the above-mentioned participant types. It will be only a matter of time before you discover their hidden agenda, which did not surface during screening.

The subversive scientist

Peter H. Jones, Ph.D., Redesign Research

There are times when a respondent answers the screening questions to fit the study requirements but then exhibits serious drawbacks in the session. For example, for a scientific study, we had a researcher qualify on every point in the screener, but when he showed up, he refused to follow the directions of the study—not overtly, but covertly. With every usability task, he would stop and talk about his research interests, then lead off into unrelated points, all the while fooling with the interaction task and making comments about the content, and not the interaction. Motives? Very questionable.

- **Job and incentive-only seekers.** You may be able to get past their hidden agendas and get meaningful data.
  - **Tell the job seeker**: "This is a usability evaluation of [system], and not a job opportunity. We are not employment recruiters, nor do we know what employment opportunities are available at [company]. If you would like to continue with the study tasks and the evaluation, we can. If you would prefer to end the session, we can do so. We will still honor the incentive we agreed to provide."

- **Tell the incentive-only seeker:** "We'd like you to focus on the tasks at hand. I assure you, you will receive the incentive we agreed to provide. Would you like to continue, or shall we end the session? We will still honor the incentive we agreed to provide."

- **Competitors and spies.** You should dismiss these people as soon as you know what they are after to minimize the amount of knowledge they glean from your study.
  - **Tell the competitor or spy:** "Thank you very much. We've learned enough in the session with what you have shown us already. We're going to let you out early." Then provide the incentive and escort him / her out.

216. If, during the session, you become uncomfortable with a participant's behavior, or it is clear that the participant is ill with something like the flu or a cold, excuse that participant.

You need not work with participants who make you uncomfortable either with abusive behavior or with obvious contagious illnesses.

- **Tell the verbally abusive participant:** "You obviously have become unhappy with this session [or the software, or the website], so I am going to end the session now. We will still honor the incentive we agreed to provide, unless you don't wish to receive it." Then escort him or her out. If necessary, be prepared to call security for an escort, and do not hesitate to tell the participant that is what you are going to do should s/he become even more abusive.
- **Tell the sick participant:** "It appears to me that you are not feeling very well. I don't want to impose on you any longer, nor do I wish to become ill myself. So why don't we end the session early and let you go home for some rest? We will still honor the incentive we agreed to provide, and we thank you for making the effort to attend the session even though you're not feeling well.

217. If unqualified or abusive participants were agency-recruited, let the agency know.

The recruiting agency will have to honor the agreement you made with them at the time of engagement as to who pays for the unqualified participants, you or the recruiting agency. They cannot be expected to pay for a participant who was ill.

218. Review and edit your screener to prevent participant-qualification problems in the future.

You may have to work on the qualifying skill- or experience-level questions to better weed out unqualified people. Also review *Screening Questions* on page 58 and the sample screening script and questionnaire on page 65.

Of course, you cannot screen for illness before the session, but you can tell participants to call you if they become ill before their session. You also can use anti-bacterial wipes on the keyboard and mouse to help protect you and the participants from contagion.

Future Planning

To make recruiting easier for you and your organization in the future, we offer tips for building a participant database and hiring and managing a staff of recruiting specialists.

BUILDING AND MAINTAINING A PARTICIPANT DATABASE

Often throughout this report, we suggest creating a spreadsheet or database of participants from which you can draw candidates for future studies. Of the NN/g recruiting survey respondents, 18% ask current participants for referrals, and 3% ask current participants if they'd like to return for future studies. Keep in mind, however, the caveats we mention in *When to Avoid Reusing Participants* on page 104.

219. Keep the data simple.

You don't need to track an enormous amount of information. We suggest including the following items:

- Date participant is entered and by whom
- Participant's name, job title, and company or school name (if known)
- Participant's contact information: voice, fax, email, and cell / pager (if known)
- Participant's gender and age range
- Short profile of participant's experience
  - Computers used (Mac, PC, Unix)
  - Software (non-games as well as games)
  - Web (in addition to email)
  - Domain field (finance, technical, marketing, for example)
  - Consumer shopping (if appropriate).
- Participant's past study dates and systems evaluated (even if not in one of your studies)
- Short description of positive or negative aspects of participant's past sessions
- Who referred participant (if applicable)

220. Use readily available spreadsheet or database software.

The information we suggest you track can be maintained easily in an Excel, Lotus, or other spreadsheet. If you plan to grow your file to include hundreds of entries, however, consider starting with an actual database program, such as Microsoft Access, Act! or FileMaker Pro.

221. Whenever possible, get referrals and add them to your participant file.

Ask non-agency-recruited participants to recommend their colleagues, associates, friends, and family who may be qualified and interested in participating in usability studies. Keep in mind that you will want to cross-check for close relationships before you inadvertently schedule two people from the same company or family in the same study. (See the anecdote under Tip 138.)

222. Include participants you may have disqualified for a current study, especially if they might be qualified for a future study.

Participants you may have disqualified for a study may be well-qualified for a future study. If so, and they seem interested, enter their information into your participant spreadsheet or database for future use. However, flag in your database any unqualified participants whom you don't want to use again so you don't inadvertently recruit them again later.

223. Audit your participant database yearly.

Weed out participants who are no longer available or interested, and update contact information for those who are still viable candidates. If you have the staff available to do so, audit the database more often—say, every six months. One way to do this unobtrusively might be to send out holiday greetings with mail-back cards for changed information.

224. Put into place a security policy for the database.[52]

Create a security policy for the database that lists the rules for using it and for protecting participants' privacy. Don't put the database on a machine available to the Internet, and consider password access.

BUILDING AND MANAGING A RECRUITING STAFF

Only 12% of the NN/g recruiting survey respondents have dedicated recruiters on staff. If your company has the budget, however, and your user experience group is very busy conducting usability studies full time, you may at some point consider hiring recruiting staff to augment the UE group. Our survey results indicate that people who both run the study and also do the recruiting have a higher no-show rate than any other recruiter, internal or external. If you don't think you have the budget to hire someone, consider mentoring someone within your organization to become a recruiter.

Don't worry if you think you cannot keep a recruiter busy full-time—you can assign this person other usability related activities, which will only help augment his or her recruiting skills. The more your recruiter understands about usability, the better.

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[52] Chauncey Wilson, Director, Bentley College Design and Usability Testing Center, provided this tip.

225. Choose as your recruiter or recruiter-trainee a person who is multi-talented.

An effective recruiter:

Likes to talk

- Enjoys speaking with people
- Has a well-modulated, pleasant speaking voice
- Reads aloud well, without sounding stilted or unnatural
- Has performed some other type of professional telephone interviewing.

Has good computer and Web skills

- Can effectively use word-processing, spreadsheet, database, and Web tools.

Has good communication skills

- Has decent writing skills
- Communicates very well verbally
- Will keep the study team apprised of recruiting progress and difficulties.

Is genuinely interested in usability

- Knows, or will learn, some usability basics. (Reading the three usability books in the References section is a good start.)
- Shows interest in observing some study sessions.

Has good project coordination skills

- Demonstrates attention to detail
- Is diligent in following up with participants
- Can multitask.

226. Avoid candidates who are more interested in a usability engineering job.

You may receive applications from people who are interested in a career as usability engineer[53] even though they don't have the professional skills for the job. We recommend hiring only someone who views recruiting as a rewarding job for its own sake—avoid treating the recruiter position as an entry-level job for usability engineering. If the new hire is more interested in a usability engineer job, one of two things could happen: 1) s/he may simply bide time waiting for the more interesting opening, not adequately performing their current job, or, 2) if the person performs very well, you will soon promote him or her to the desired job, and you would then have to train a new recruiter.

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[53] For the purposes of this discussion, we can think of a usability engineer as a specialized professional who conducts studies, analyzes data, and works with a design team to improve the quality of user interfaces.

INTERVIEWING POTENTIAL RECRUITERS

227. Schedule a phone interview with a potential recruiter, even if s/he is someone you already know.

A phone interview will give you a chance to assess a potential recruiter's telephone skills and voice quality in context.

228. Provide a generic screener to a potential recruiter and have him/her screen you and other colleagues.

You will be able to assess how well a potential recruiter reads a script and screening questions and fields questions from potential participants.

229. Show a potential recruiter your current recruiting and participant forms and ask him/her to suggest improvements.

You will be able to assess:

- How well the candidate understands your process
- His / her attention to detail
- Whether s/he willingly takes initiative.

Consider including some minor flaw, such as a compound or confusing question, to assess the astuteness of an experienced recruiter or to demonstrate a flaw to an inexperienced one.[54]

230. Ask an experienced recruiter about participant follow-up, scheduling backups, and handling no-shows.

You will be able to assess the candidate's experience level by how knowledgably s/he discusses these issues with you.

231. Ask all potential recruiters to demonstrate or discuss the skills listed in Tip 225.

Consider administering a skills-assessment form to see what the potential recruiter sees as personal strengths and weaknesses.

MANAGING RECRUITERS

232. Expect to pay recruiters a salary commensurate with a skilled administrative assistant in your organization.

Expect to pay a bit more than that for an experienced recruiter.

233. Consider other tasks your recruiters can do.

If your recruiters are not busy with full-time screening and scheduling, train them to perform other usability study-related tasks, such as:

- Setting up the session room
- Ordering and setting out food and beverages
- Preparing participant session forms from templates
- Resetting the system and getting forms ready between sessions

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[54] Chauncey Wilson, Director, Bentley College Design and Usability Testing Center, contributed the "flaw" suggestion.

- Hosting and greeting participants
- Occupying the attention of child participants after sessions, while they wait for parents to arrive
- Obtaining, preparing the receipts for, and disbursing incentives
- Creating and maintaining a participant spreadsheet or database
- Arranging for other needs or providing transportation.
- Tabulating questionnaire or survey data (if you are satisfied with their attention to detail)
- Training other recruiters before things get busy again.

When your staff is not busy with full-time usability work, you can ask recruiters to help with some other administrative tasks.

234. Help recruiters feel involved in usability.

- Invite recruiters to observe some sessions, especially ones for which they've done the screening and scheduling.
- Have recruiters attend usability study or process planning meetings to learn what goes into building the screening criteria.
- Schedule recruiters as dry run or possibly even pilot participants.

Appendix A: Participant Recruiting Survey

In 2002 Nielsen Norman Group conducted a worldwide email survey to gather specific information about the usability community's collective recruiting experience. We received 201 responses, indicating great interest in the recruiting aspect of usability studies. We thank those who participated and provided valuable information.

ABOUT THE SURVEY

BACKGROUND

We created a plain-text survey that we could send in the body of an email message, which people could fill in as a reply to the email. Jakob Nielsen posted a notice about the survey on the Useit.com website and sent it to the Alertbox mailing list, inviting people who conduct user studies to request a copy of the survey: We also posted a similar notice on a widely accessed usability mailing list.

CONTENTS

The survey introduction explained the research NN/g was conducting and the incentives respondents would receive for responding to the survey, as follows:

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Nielsen Norman Group—Participant Recruiting Survey

Nielsen Norman Group (NN/g) is preparing a practical report on recruiting participants for usability studies and we would like to ask you to take part in our preliminary research. Please take a few minutes to fill in the survey below, which asks about the participant recruiting process for your usability studies. You needn't be the person who actually does the recruiting to provide valuable information.

To thank you for your time. NN/g will:

- Provide all respondents with a summary of the survey results.
- Offer all respondents a 50% discount on the published NN/g participant recruiting report.
- Randomly select 10 respondents to receive a complimentary copy of any NN/g usability report, up to a value of $250.

If you do not wish to receive any of the items listed above, please indicate your preference at the end of the survey. Simply reply to this email and type your responses directly into the survey in your reply.

NN/g will not use respondents' email addresses or other identifying information in reporting survey results or in the published NN/g participant recruiting report; all respondents will remain anonymous.

Thank you.

==========

Survey Questions

The survey contained 10 recruiting questions—some with multiple parts. We collected information on:

1. The geographical areas from which respondents recruit participants
2. Who recruits participants: the study facilitator, a staff recruiter, an outside recruiting agency, or some other person
3. Internal time spent recruiting
4. Agency lead time required and agency fees
5. User profiles, incentives offered, and session length
6. No-show rates
7. Pre-session interaction with participants
8. Participant documents
9. Post-session follow up with participants
10. Recruiting anecdotes (from respondents who agreed to be contacted; anecdotes are provided within the body of this report, not in the survey results).

Privacy Statement

NN/g also provided assurance of privacy with the following wording at the end of the survey:

"NN/g will use respondents' email addresses only to send a summary of the survey results, to contact the winners of our drawing, to inform respondents of the procedure for getting the 50% discount, or to contact respondents who answered "Yes" to providing NN/g with a recruiting anecdote. Afterwards, NN/g will delete all respondents' email addresses. NN/g will not sell or disclose respondents' email addresses to anyone else.

"NN/g also will not use respondents' email addresses or other identifying information in reporting survey results, or in the published NN/g participant recruiting report; all respondents will remain anonymous."

RESPONSES

- We received 350 email messages requesting a copy of the survey.
- The survey was completed and returned by 201 people, for a response rate of 57%
- Of the 201 responses, 63 (or 31%) were received as the result of our having sent a reminder to the requestor to fill in and return his or her survey.

World Responses

The 201 responses came from at least 25 countries in the following geographical areas:

- 54% US – 108

- 22% Europe – 44 (UK–16, Germany–6, Denmark–4, Sweden–3, Switzerland–3, France–2, Italy–2, Netherlands–2, Spain–2, Austria–1, Belgium–1, Finland–1, Romania–1)
- 21% Rest of the World – 43 (Canada–15, Australia–11, India–3, New Zealand–3; South Africa–3, Mexico–2, Singapore–2, China–1, Brazil–1, Ecuador–1, Israel–1)
- 3% Unspecified – 6.

United States Responses

We divided the 108 US responses into three major regions as follows:

- 30% Northeast (Maine to Washington DC) – 32
- 32% West Coast (California, Oregon, and Washington) – 35
- 38% All other US areas – 41.

SURVEY RESULTS

GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS FROM WHICH PARTICIPANTS ARE RECRUITED

Question 1:

When recruiting for usability studies, from which geographical areas do you most often seek participants? If you regularly seek participants from more than one area, please indicate your top two locations.

Results for Participant Geographical Areas

The 201 survey respondents specified 296 locations, which included city, region (state or province), and country. We designated five regions—areas that contained 17% or more of the total regional citations. Under the regions below, we list the three most-often-cited cities within each area.

- USA Northeast (Maine to Washington DC) – 17% of locations specified (51 of 296).
  New York City – 14
  Boston – 11
  Washington DC – 6
- USA West Coast (California, Oregon, Washington) – 17% of locations specified (51 of 296)
  San Francisco – 14
  San Jose – 7
  Seattle – 7
- USA, all other states – 20% of locations specified (59 of 296)
  Chicago – 9
  Dallas – 4
  Denver – 4

- Europe – 22% of locations specified (65 of 296)
  London – 10
  Zurich – 3
  Paris – 2
- Rest of the world – 24% of locations specified (70 of 296)
  Toronto – 8
  Sydney – 7
  Melbourne – 5

The three most-often-cited cities in the world are New York and San Francisco, with 14 citations each, and London, with 10 citations.

In the following table, responses are sorted by larger region (shaded, centered horizontal bar), country (in alphabetical order), region (in alphabetical order), and city (in alphabetical order).

Geographical Areas from which Participants are Recruited

USA Northeast (Maine to Washington DC): 17%			
Country	**State, Province, or Region**	**City**	**Number of Citations**
USA	Connecticut	Hartford	1
	District of Columbia	Washington	6
	Massachusetts	Boston	11
	Maine	Unspecified	1
	Maryland	Baltimore	1
	New Hampshire	Manchester	1
	New Hampshire	Unspecified	2
	New Jersey	Newark	1
	New Jersey	Whippany	1
	New York	New Plats	1
	New York	New York	14
	New York	Potsdam	1
	New York	Rochester	1
	New York	Unspecified	1
	Pennsylvania	King of Prussia	1
	Pennsylvania	Philadelphia	3
	Virginia	Arlington	1
	Virginia	Danville	1
	Virginia	Fairfax	1
	Virginia	Falls Church	1
17% – USA Northeast TOTAL: 51			

USA West Coast (California, Oregon, and Washington): 17%			
Country	**State, Province, or Region**	**City**	**Number of Citations**
USA	California	Bay Area	1
	California	Brisbane	1
	California	Los Angeles	2
	California	Palo Alto	2
	California	Pleasanton	2
	California	San Diego	3
	California	San Francisco	14
	California	San Jose	7
	California	Santa Barbara	1
	California	Santa Cruz	1
	California	Silicon Valley	1
	California	Sunnyvale	1
	California	Unspecified	1
	Oregon	Portland	5
	Washington	Olympia	1
	Washington	Seattle	7
	Washington	Unspecified	1
17% – USA West Coast TOTAL: 51			

USA – All Other States: 20%			
Country	**State, Province, or Region**	**City**	**Number of Citations**
USA	Arizona	Phoenix	1
	Arizona	Unspecified	1
	Colorado	Denver	4
	Florida	Boca Raton	1
	Florida	Fort Lauderdale	1
	Florida	Jacksonville	1
	Georgia	Atlanta	2
	Georgia	Rowell	1
	Illinois	Bloomington	1
	Illinois	Chicago	9
	Illinois	Unspecified	1
	Kansas	Kansas City	1
	Kentucky	Bowling Green	1

	Michigan	Ann Arbor	1
	Michigan	Detroit	1
	Michigan	Lansing	2
	Minnesota	Minneapolis / St. Paul	3
	Missouri	Joplin area	1
	Missouri	Kansas City	2
	Missouri	St. Louis	2
	North Carolina	Chapel Hill	1
	Ohio	Cleveland	1
	Ohio	Columbus	1
	Ohio	Dayton	1
	Ohio	Findlay	1
	Texas	Austin	3
	Texas	Dallas	4
	Texas	Houston	1
	Texas	Unspecified	1
	Utah	Logan	1
	Wisconsin	Madison	3
19% – USA Non-Northeast and Non-West Coast TOTAL: 56			
	Unspecified	Metropolitan Areas	1
	Unspecified	Unspecified	2
1% – USA Unspecified Total: 3			
54% – USA Total: 161			

Europe: 22%			
Country	**State, Province, or Region**	**City**	**Number of Citations**
Austria	Unspecified	Vienna	1
	Unspecified	Unspecified	1
			Austria Total: 2
Belgium	Unspecified	Brussels	1
			Belgium Total: 1
Denmark	Eastern Jutland	Unspecified	1
	Unspecified	Copenhagen	3
			Denmark Total: 4
Finland	Unspecified	Helsinki	2
	Unspecified	Tampere	1
			Finland Total: 3
France	Ile de France	Paris	2
	Other than Ile de France	Small cities	1
	Unspecified	Unspecified	2
			France Total: 5
Germany	Baden–Württemberg	Karlsruhe	1
	Baden–Württemberg	Tübingen	1
	Bavaria	Munich	1
	Berlin–Brandenburg	Potsdam	1
	Hamburg	Hamburg	1
	Hessen	Frankfurt	1
	Unspecified	Berlin	2
	Unspecified	Unspecified	1
			Germany Total: 9
Italy	Lazio	Rome	1
	Lombardia	Milan	1
	Sicily	Palermo	1
			Italy Total: 3
Netherlands	Noord–Holland	Amsterdam	1
	Unspecified	The Hague	1
			Netherlands Total: 2
Romania	Unspecified	Unspecified	1
			Romania Total: 1

Spain	Unspecified	Madrid	1
	Unspecified	Barcelona	1
	Unspecified	Valencia	1
			Spain Total: 3
Sweden	Unspecified	Stockholm	2
	Unspecified	Unspecified	2
			Sweden Total: 4
Switzerland	Unspecified	Bern	2
	Unspecified	Zurich	3
			Switzerland Total: 5
United Kingdom	England	Bristol	1
	England	Liverpool	2
	London	London	10
	England	Wirral	1
	Hampshire	Southampton	1
	Norfolk	Norwich	1
	Sussex	Brighton	1
	Tyne	Sunderland	1
	Unspecified	Milton Keynes	1
	Unspecified	Unspecified	2
			United Kingdom Total: 21
Unspecified	**Europe**		**Unspecified Europe: 2**
			22% – Europe TOTAL: 65

Rest of the World: 24%			
Country	**State, Province, or Region**	**City**	**Number of Citations**
Australia	Queensland	Brisbane	1
	Australian Capital Territory	Canberra	3
	Hunter	New Castle	1
	New South Wales	Lismore	1
	New South Wales	Sydney	7
	Victoria	Geelong	1
	Victoria	Melbourne	5
	Unspecified	Unspecified	1
			Australia Total: 20
Brazil	Unspecified	Sao Paulo	1
			Brazil Total: 1
Canada	British Columbia	Vancouver	2
	British Columbia	Victoria	2
	British Columbia	Unspecified	1
	Ontario	Ottawa	2
	Ontario	Toronto	8
	Ontario	Waterloo	1
	Prince Edward Island	Charlottetown	1
	Quebec	Montreal	1
	Saskatchewan	Regina City	1
	Unspecified	Unspecified	1
			Canada Total: 20
China	Unspecified	Hong Kong	1
	Unspecified	Shanghai	1
			China Total: 2
Ecuador	Guayas	Guayaquil	1
	Pichincha	Quito	1
			Ecuador Total: 2
India	Delhi	New Delhi	1
	Maharashtra	Mumbai	1
	Tamilnadu	Chennai	2
			India Total: 4
Israel	Unspecified	Tel Aviv	2
			Israel Total: 2
Mexico	Unspecified	Mexico City	2

			Mexico Total: 2
New Zealand	Unspecified	Auckland	2
	Unspecified	Wellington	2
	Unspecified	Hamilton	1
			New Zealand Total: 5
Singapore	Unspecified	Unspecified	2
			Singapore Total: 2
South Africa	Eastern Cape	Unspecified	1
	Gauteng	Johannesburg	1
	Gauteng	Pretoria	1
	Unspecified	Cape Town	1
			South Africa Total: 4
			Unspecified: 6
			24% – Rest of the World TOTAL: 70

Regional Citations GRAND TOTAL: 296

WHO RECRUITS PARTICIPANTS

Question 2:
Who does the recruiting for your usability studies? Indicate a percentage for each of the following choices:

- The person who runs the study
- A dedicated recruiter within my company
- Someone else within my company (specify who)
- An outside recruiting agency
- Other (specify who).

Results for Who Recruits

- 79% of respondents indicated that **the person who runs the study** recruits participants for an average of 70% of the studies, and 28% of respondents indicated that the person who runs the study recruits 100% of the studies.
- 36% of respondents indicated that **an outside recruiting agency** recruits participants for an average of 61% of the studies, and 9% indicated that an agency recruits 100% of the studies.
- 32% respondents indicted that **someone else within their company** recruits participants for an average of 32% of the studies. “Clerical staff” was cited most often (six times), and other support staff, such as customer service or receptionists, were cited five times.

- 13% of respondents indicated that **some other person** recruits participants for an average of 32% of the studies. "The client" was cited most often (16 times).
- 12% of respondents indicated that **a dedicated recruiter within their company** recruits participants for an average of 67% of the studies, and 6% indicated that dedicated recruiters recruit 80%–100% of the studies.

Percentages total more than 100% because we allowed multiple responses. In fact, it seems that most companies combine two different approaches to recruiting, depending on the project.

Recruiter tables

The following five tables provide the breakdown of percentages for each recruiter type cited by respondents. For example, in the **Recruiter 1** table directly below, 57 respondents indicated that the person who runs the study recruits 100% of the studies in their organizations.

Recruiter 1: The person who runs the study

Number of Citations	Percentage of Studies Cited
57	100%
2	95%
15	90%
15	80%
7	75%
6	70%
6	60%
13	50%
2	40%
5	30%
3	25%
8	20%
12	10%
6	5%
1	1%
Total Citations: 158	Average: 70%

As shown in the preceding table, 79% of respondents (158 of 201) indicated that the person who runs the study recruits participants for an average of 70% of the studies, and 28% of respondents (57 of 201) indicated that the person who runs the study recruits for 100% of the studies.

Recruiter 2: An outside recruiting agency

Number of Citations	Percentage of studies cited
19	100%
8	90%
1	85%
8	80%
1	75%
2	70%
2	60%
8	50%
4	40%
1	25%
3	20%
1	15%
8	10%
7	5%
Total Citations: 73	Average: 61%

As shown in the preceding table, 36% of respondents (73 of 201) indicated that an outside recruiting agency recruits participants for an average of 61% of the studies, and 9% (19 of 201) indicated that an agency recruits for 100% the studies.

Recruiter 3: Someone else within my company

Recruiter Cited	Number of Citations	Percentage of Studies Cited
Customer Service Project Manager Development Manager Consulting Manager	1 1 1 1	100%
Project Manager or Development Manager	1	95%
Test Center Board Room Concierge	1 1	90%
Not specified	1	80%
Associate Producer Project Manager	1 1	75%
Not specified	1	65%
Clerical Staff	2	50%
Communications Sales Rep	1 1	40%

Recruiter Cited	Number of Citations	Percentage of Studies Cited
Not specified	1	
Not specified Marketing Staff Product Manager Customer Service	7 1 1 1	30%
Clerical Staff Not specified	3 2	25%
Not specified Account Rep Other UE Specialist Website Manager Web Developer Clerical Staff	7 1 1 1 1 1	20%
Other UE Specialist	1	15%
Not specified Other UE Specialist Visual Designer Business Manager Website Manager Project Manager Client Services Instructional Designer	5 3 1 1 1 1 1 1	10%
Not specified	4	5%
Receptionist Not specified	1 1	1%
	Total Citations: 64	Average: 32%

As shown in the preceding table, 32% of respondents (64 of 201) indicted that someone else within their company recruits participants for an average of 32% of the studies. “Clerical staff” (highlighted in blue) was cited most often (six times), and other support staff, such as “Customer Service” or “Receptionist,” were cited five times (also highlighted in blue).

Recruiter 4: Some other person

Recruiter Cited	Number of Citations	Percentage of studies cited
Research Office	1	100%
Client	1	80%
Client	1	70%
Client Not specified	2 2	50%
Client	1	45%
Client	1	40%

Recruiter Cited	Number of Citations	Percentage of studies cited
Client	1	35%
Client Usability Firm	2 1	30%
Team Manager	1	25%
Account Manager Data Logger Client Not specified	1 1 1 1	20%
Client Observer Person Playing Computer	6 1 1	10%
Student	1	5%
	Total Citations: 27	Average: 32%

As shown in the preceding table, 13% of respondents (27 of 201) indicated that some other person recruits participants for an average of 32% of the studies. "Client" was cited most often (16 times).

Recruiter 5: A dedicated recruiter within my company

Number of Citations	Percentage of studies cited
7	100%
2	95%
2	90%
2	80%
2	60%
2	50%
1	40%
1	30%
1	25%
2	20%
2	10%
Total Citations: 24	Average: 67%

As shown in the preceding table, 12% of respondents (24 of 201) indicated that a dedicated recruiter within their company recruits participants for an average of 67% of the studies, and 6% (13 of 201) indicated dedicated recruiters recruit 80%–100% of the studies.

INTERNAL TIME SPENT RECRUITING PARTICIPANTS

Question 3
If you or someone else within your company does the recruiting, how much time is spent per participant recruited, on average?

Results for Internal Time Spent Recruiting

Internal time spent recruiting participants

Time Range in Hours		Number of Citations	Percentage of Citations
Low	High		
0.25	0.33	21	17%
0.50	0.75	40	32%
1.00	1.50	34	27%
2.00	2.50	22	18%
3.00	4.59	5	4%
5.00	6.50	3	2%
Average Time Spent: 1.15 hours		Total Citations: 125	Total: 100%

As shown in the preceding table, 62% of respondents (125 of 201) indicted that internal people who spend time recruiting participants spend an average of 1.15 hour (or 69 minutes) per participant recruited. 59% of these 125 respondents spend .5 to 1.5 hours per participant recruited, and 24% spend 2 to 6.5 hours per participant recruited.

AGENCY LEAD TIME REQUIRED AND FEES CHARGED

Question 4:
If you use an agency, how much lead time does the agency require, on average? What does the agency charge per recruited participant, on average? Provide the average fee an agency charges per participant in your nation's currency; you do not need to convert to US dollars. ***[NN/g performed conversion to US dollars using the website www.x-rates.com/calculator.html before compiling the following tables.]***

Results for Agency Lead Time

Lead time required by agencies

Time Range in Weeks		Number of Citations	Percentage of Citations
Low End	High End		
.24	.33	8	12%
1.00	1.50	21	31%
2.00	2.50	30	40%
3.00	4.00	6	9%

Time Range in Weeks		Number of Citations	Percentage of Citations
5.00	6.00	5	8%
Average Lead Time: 1.93 weeks		Total Citations: 67	Total: 100%

As shown in the preceding table, 33% of respondents (67 of 201) indicated that agencies require average of 1.93, or nearly two weeks' lead time.

Results for Agency Fees

As noted in the preceding table, 33% of respondents (67 of 201) indicated they use recruiting agencies for 8% – 40% of their studies. In the following table, we present average fee requirements (listed in US dollars) charged by agencies around the world for internal and external participants, as indicated by 116 agency citations generated by the 67 positive responses in our survey, and listed by region.

Agency fees by region

Region	Recruitment Fee per Participant	Number of Internal Citations	Number of External Citations
USA – West Coast (California, Oregon, and Washington)	$125	3	21
USA – Other	$124	2	21
USA – Northeast (Maine to Washington DC)	$113	2	24
Europe	$108	4	18
Unspecified	$75	0	2
Rest of the World	$57	5	14
	Average: $107	Total: 16	Total: 100

As shown in the preceding table, the overall world average fee that agencies charge per recruited participant is $107. The US Northeast is generally lower than the West Coast and other US regions, and European and other non-US, non-European agencies generally charge lower recruiting fees than their US counterparts.

In the following table, we present average fee requirements (listed in US dollars) for internal and external user categories.

Agency fees by user category

User Category	Recruitment Fee per Participant
Internal – 16 citations	
General Staff ("anybody" and "everybody," for example)	$84
Unspecified (no category given)	$73
Professional Staff (managers and executives, for example)	$23
Technical Staff (system administrators, for example)	$21
Support Staff (admin assistants, for example)	$10

User Category	Recruitment Fee per Participant
External – 100 citations	
Teachers / Professors	$250
Professional Staff (managers and executives, for example)	$161
Technical Staff (system administrators, for example)	$119
Medical Personnel	$117
Consumers (buys readily available goods and services)	$90
Students / Young Adults	$84
Unspecified (no category given)	$51
Welfare Recipient	$42
Average World Fee:	$107

As shown in the preceding table, professional categories of external participants generally warrant the highest agency fees

PARTICIPANT USER GROUPS, INCENTIVES, AND SESSION LENGTH

Question 5:
For your response to this question, provide information for each of the types of usability study participants indicated below. For each user group, please provide answers for your typical study with that user group.

- Internal users (employees within the study sponsor's company) as dry run / pilot participants ***[NN/g provided one entry opportunity].***
- Internal users (employees within the study sponsor's company) as actual participants ***[NN/g provided one entry opportunity].***
- External users ("Average" consumers and other, more-specific targeted groups) ***[NN/g provided three entry opportunities].***

For each group, describe the targeted users, the incentives you provide, and the average session length. For incentives, please indicate averages in your nation's currency; you do not need to convert to US dollars. ***[NN/g performed conversion to US dollars using the website www.x-rates.com/calculator.html before compiling the following results.]*** Be sure to indicate any non-monetary incentives you provide as well, such as software, company merchandise, or gift certificates to local merchants.

User Group and Incentive Descriptions

The following descriptions of the user groups and incentives respondents cited will provide context for the results for Question 5.

Internal User Groups

We organized all internal user groups that respondents cited using as dry run, pilot, or regular study participants into four separate categories—general, professional, support / clerical, and technical—as described below. Many respondents provided data about usability studies they conduct with internal users, but did not specify an internal user group.

- **General (nonspecific):** anyone, colleague, employee, everyone, friend, general user, new hire, non-developer, non-project personnel, staff, student, subject-matter expert, volunteer.
- **Professional:** academic, administrator, business analyst, consultant, faculty, journalist, manager, market or other researcher, study stakeholder, travel agent.
- **Support / clerical:** administrative assistant, call center staff, clerical staff, customer service staff, human resources staff, librarian, secretary, operational staff.
- **Technical:** developer, documentation specialist, electrical engineer, HCI student, help desk staff, instructional designer, network engineer, network administrator, product manager, scientist, software engineer, system administrator, trainer, UI designer, usability staff.
- **Unspecified:** Respondents did not specify a user group.

External User Groups

We organized external user groups that respondents cited into six separate categories—high-end professional, medium professional, low-end professional, technical, consumer, and unpaid / nonprofessional—as described below. A few respondents provided data about usability studies they conduct with external users, but did not specify a user group.

- **High-end professional:** architect, attorney / lawyer, CEO, consultant, executive, physician, surgeon, professional investor, real-estate agents / brokers.
- **Medium professional:** academic, administrator, banker, business analyst, consultant, exporter, faculty, financial advisor / planner, graphic designer, insurance agent / broker, manager, market or other researcher, marketing / salesperson, nurse, journalist, professor, public-health official, teacher, travel agent.
- **Low-end professional:** administrative assistant, artist (performing, visual), call center staff, clerical staff, construction worker, customer-service staff, farmer, government worker, human-resources staff, librarian, secretary, office manager, operational staff, truck driver.
- **Technical:** developer, documentation specialist, electrical engineer, help-desk staff, instructional designer, network engineer, network administrator, product manager, scientist, software engineer, system administrator, trainer.

- **Consumer** (person who purchases goods or services available to the general public): cross-section of general public, electronics (including cell phone, computer, PDAs, internet), big-ticket items (furniture, autos, large appliances), services (banking, financial, repair, utilities, telephone, travel and leisure).
- **Special needs or nonprofessional:** children, homemaker, medical patient, person with disabilities, retiree, senior citizen, student, public-assistance recipient, volunteer.
- **Unspecified:** Respondents did not specify a user group.

Incentives Provided

We organized incentives into the broad categories of monetary and non-monetary. Non-monetary incentives fell into four separate subcategories—certificates for merchandise, food and beverages, "intangible rewards," and tangible gifts—as described below. Some respondents indicted that they provide a non-monetary incentive, but did not specify what it was.

- **Monetary incentives:** we present all monetary incentive information in US dollars and, for easier comparison, monetary incentives reflect a dollars-per-hour rate, not dollars-per-session.
- **Non-monetary incentives:** for purposes of presenting data, we have placed all cited, non-monetary incentives into the following categories:
  - **Certificates:** redeemable certificates and coupons in denominations ranging from $5–$50 for book shops, department stores, restaurants, corporate cafeterias, local merchants and coffee shops.
  - **Food and beverages:** bottle of champagne, liquor, or wine; cake, coffee or tea, dinner or lunch, prepackaged snacks, refreshments or treats.
  - **Intangible rewards:** airline frequent-flyer miles, charging time to project (not overhead), job performance, extra credit (for students), internet access, members-only website privileges, merit certificates, opportunity to provide input for improvement, study results, thanks, time off, training, and travel expenses for study covered.
  - **Tangible gifts:** merchandise ranging in value from around USD $5–$100, including coloring books (for children), compact discs, flowers, logo merchandise, movie passes, office supplies, software, theatre tickets, and toys and "trinkets" (for both children and adults).
  - **Unspecified:** respondents did not specify a non-monetary incentive.

Results for Participant User Groups Cited

Internal dry-run / pilot participants

- 83% of respondents (166 of 201) indicated they use the following internal groups (as described above) for dry-run and / or pilot sessions:
  - 27% Unspecified (45 of 166)
  - 25% General (41 of 166)

    - 24% Technical (40 of 166)
    - 16% Professional (26 of 166)
    - 8% Support (14 of 166).
- 57 minutes is the average length of time for internal dry-run / pilot sessions.

Actual internal participants

- 67% of respondents (134 of 201) indicated they use the following internal groups as actual participants in usability studies:
    - 28% Unspecified (37 of 134)
    - 23% General (31 of 134)
    - 22% Professional (29 of 134)
    - 16% Technical (22 of 134)
    - 11% Support (15 of 134)
- 65 minutes is the average length of time for internal participant sessions.

External participants

- 92% of respondents (184 of 201) indicated they use external participants. Some cited up to three user groups each for a total of 260 citations comprising the following user groups as participants in usability studies:
    - 37% Consumer (96 of 260)
    - 16% Special Need / Nonprofessional (42 of 260)
    - 15% Medium Professional (39 of 260)
    - 13% Technical (34 of 260)
    - 11% High-End Professional (29 of 260)
    - 5% Low-End Professional (13 of 260)
    - 3% Unspecified (7 of 260).
- 72 minutes, or about 1.25 hours, is the average length of time for external participant sessions.

Results for Incentives Provided

Respondents indicated the monetary and non-monetary incentives that they provide to participants. From that, we extrapolated the number of participants who receive no incentive at all. As shown in the following table, 67% of internal pilot / dry-run participants, 55% of actual internal participants, and 9% of external participants receive no incentive, for an overall average of 37%—a little more than a third of the sample.

Types of incentives by user group

User Group	Monetary Incentives	Non-monetary Incentives	No Incentive	Total Citations
Internal Pilots / Dry Runs	11	43	112	166
Internal Actual Participants	13	47	74	134
External Participants (35 offered both monetary and non-monetary and are counted in both columns)	165	106	24	295 (Overlap) – 35
Total	**189**	**196**	**210**	**560**

Monetary Incentives

As shown in the preceding table, survey respondents indicated that not everyone provides monetary incentives to participants, especially not to internal participants (generally, employees or closely related contractors of the study sponsors).

- Of the 166 respondents who use internal people as dry-run or pilot participants, only 7% provide a monetary incentive.
- Of the 134 respondents who use internal people as regular study participants, only 10% provide a monetary incentive.
- The worldwide average rate paid to internal participants (pilot, dry-run, and actual) is USD $32 per session hour.
- 184 respondents who use external participants recruit multiple user groups—for a total of 260 citations. Of the total participants, 63% received monetary incentives, in marked contrast to internal participants.
- The worldwide average rate paid to external participants is USD $64 per session hour—twice that of the internal rate.

The following table provides survey responses for monetary incentives provided, sorted by user group.

Monetary incentives in US dollars by user group

User Group	Average USD Paid Per Session Hour	Total Citations
Internal Pilots / Dry runs	**$34**	**11**
General	$44	2
Professional	$0	0
Support	$38	2
Technical	$5	2
Unspecified	$46	5
Internal Participants	**$31**	**13**
General	$33	2
Professional	$37	3
Support	$0	0
Technical	$11	3
Unspecified	$37	5
External Participants	**$64**	**165**
Consumer	$54	68
Higher Professional	$118	23
Medium Professional	$69	22
Lower Professional	$50	6
Special Needs or Nonprofessional	$32	20
Technical	$67	22
Unspecified	$55	4
Total		**189**

As shown in the preceding table, of internal staff who receive monetary incentives, technical staff receive the lowest incentive rate. (Technical people often are motivated to participate for the opportunity to be involved in technology in a new and different way.) As pilot and dry-run participants, professional staff receive no monetary incentive—perhaps because they may have some stake in the study. Interestingly, support staff are paid as pilot and dry-run participants but not as actual participants.

The above table also indicates that external monetary rates are double that for internal participants, with high-end professionals garnering the highest rate.

The following table summarizes the monetary incentives offered to participants by geographical region and user group.

Monetary incentives in US dollars by region

Region	Average USD Paid Per Session Hour to Internal Pilots / Dry runs	Average USD Paid Per Session Hour to Internal Ppts	Average USD $ Per Hour Paid to External Ppts	Total Citations
USA $73				**126**
Northeast $70	$33	$13	$77	
West Coast $79	$55	•	$81	
Rest of USA $69	$17	$7	$78	
Europe $34	$23	$58	$34	**36**
Rest of the World $27	•	**$18**	**$29**	**27**
Total				**189**

As shown in the preceding table, monetary payment trends for internal participants by region are unpredictable. Monetary payments are highest on the US West Coast ($79 per session-hour on average), and lowest in non-European, non-US countries ($27 per session-hour).

Why are incentives twice as high in the United States as compared with Europe? One likely explanation is that Americans tend to feel over-surveyed and require more of an incentive to participate in studies. In contrast, Europeans may not yet be as tired of market research and may show more appreciation for being asked to influence the future direction of technology. It is understandable that the West Coast in the US is more expensive than the rest of the country (because the cost of living tends to be higher on the coasts), but why isn't the Northeast more expensive as well? It might be because of a similar phenomenon on the West Coast. With its higher number of computer and high-tech companies, the West Coast's population may simply feel more over-surveyed than people on the East Coast.

Non-monetary Incentives

The 201 respondents generated 196 non-monetary incentive citations within a total of 560 distinct user-group citations (166 internal dry-run / pilot citations, 134 internal participant citations, and 260 external participant citations).

We provide non-monetary citations by user group and by geographical location.

Non-monetary incentives by user group

User Group	Gift	Redeemable Certificate	Food	Intangible	Total Citations
Internal Pilots / Dry Runs	**18**	**6**	**12**	**7**	**43**
General	8	3	1	2	14
Professional	1	1	3	2	7
Support	0	1	3	0	4
Technical	3	0	4	1	8
Not specified	6	1	1	2	10
Internal Participants	**19**	**13**	**10**	**5**	**47**
General	7	4	2	2	15
Professional	4	2	2	1	9
Support	2	2	3	0	7
Technical	0	3	3	2	8
Not specified	6	2	0	0	8
External Participants	**58**	**24**	**13**	**11**	**106**
Consumer	22	11	4	2	39
Higher Professional	3	2	1	1	7
Medium Professional	10	3	1	4	18
Lower Professional	2	1	1	0	4
Special Needs / Nonprofessional	13	6	3	1	23
Technical	8	1	1	3	13
Not specified	0	0	2	0	2
Total	**95**	**43**	**35**	**23**	**196**

As shown in the preceding table, gifts and gift certificates are the preferred incentives, being offered two times as often as other non-monetary incentives for both internal and external groups.

The following table summarizes the non-monetary incentives offered to participants by geographical region.

Non-monetary incentives by region

Region	Gift	Redeemable Certificate	Food	Intangible	Total Citations
USA	**47**	**24**	**8**	**13**	**92**
Northeast	5	3	5	4	17
West Coast	19	13	0	5	37
Rest of USA	23	8	3	4	38
Europe	**24**	**7**	**9**	**3**	**43**
Rest of the World	**24**	**12**	**18**	**7**	**61**
Total	**95**	**43**	**35**	**23**	**196**

NO-SHOW RATES

Question 6:
On average, indicate what percentage of scheduled participants in your studies fail to show up for their test sessions?

Results for No-Show Rates

As shown in the following table, the overall average no-show rate for our survey sample is 10.6%.

No-show rates

No-Show Rate Range	Number of Citations
0% – 1%	45
2% – 5%	40
6% – 8%	7
10%	46
12% – 15%	20
20%	21
25%	12
30% – 50%	8
60%	2
Average No-Show Rate: 10.6%	Total Citations: 201

Note that respondents did not provide ranges; rather we combined cited ranges so this table would not be inordinately long.

No-show rates by who recruits

We tested whether survey data would confirm the anecdotal data we received from usability professionals that the no-show rate is higher for professional recruiting agencies than for internal recruiters. The results from our survey tend to back up this claim, although the differences in no-show rates are not statistically significant. Three internal recruiter categories do slightly better, while a fourth—the person who runs the study (presumably a usability professional)—does slightly worse than the **world average rate of 10.6%**, as described below. The following bullet points summarize the no-show rates from best to worst, for internal and agency recruiters:

- **Someone else within the company: 10.1%**
  32% of respondents indicated someone else from within their company, usually support staff, recruits for an average of 32% of the studies.
- **Some other person: 10.4%**
  13% of respondents indicated that some other person, usually "the client," recruits for an average of 32% of the studies.
- **Dedicated recruiter with the company: 10.5%**
  12% of respondents indicated that a recruiter within their company recruits for an average of 67% of the studies.
- **Recruiting agencies: 10.8%**
  36% of respondents indicated that an outside recruiting agency recruits for an average of 61% of the studies.
- **Person who runs the study: 11.1%**
  79% of respondents indicated that the person who runs the study also recruits for an average of 70% of the studies.

PRE-SESSION INTERACTION

Question 7:
Which of the following do you provide to participants before their sessions?

- Telephone call to confirm session date and time
- Email message to confirm session date and time
- A written letter to confirm session date and time
- A map to session location
- Driving directions to session location
- Transportation to session location
- Some amount of orientation or training before the session
- Other [please specify].

Results for Pre-session Interaction

Pre-session interaction

Items Provided Before Session	Number of Citations	Percentage of Respondents
Telephone call to confirm session date and time	162	81%
Email message to confirm session date and time	143	71%
Driving directions to session location	94	47%
A map to session location	91	45%
Some amount of orientation or training before the session	89	44%
A written letter to confirm session date and time	51	25%
Transportation to session location	19	9%
Other (some respondents cited more than one item): Brief description of project objectives – 3 Parking – 3 Info on local transportation – 2 Demo passwords – 1 Description of food and incentives – 1 Outlook meeting invitations (for internals) – 1 Phone call to supervisor – 1 Poster in organization – 1 Preview interview – 1	14	7%
Nothing	4	2%

As shown in the preceding table:

- 98% of respondents (197 of 201) provide at least one of the eight queried items.
- The top three items cited were:
  - Phone confirmation – 81%
  - Email confirmation – 71%
  - Directions to session location – 45%
- 2% of respondents (4 of 201) provide nothing.

PARTICIPANT SESSION DOCUMENTS

Question 8:
Which of the following documents do you ask participants to read, fill out, and sign before or after their sessions?

- Background questionnaire
- Nondisclosure agreement
- Audio or video recording consent form
- Participant "Bill of Rights"
- Receipt for incentives received
- Tax form, such as (USA) W4 or other
- Other [please indicate]:
- None.

Results for Documents Provided to Participants

Documents provided to participants

Documents Provided Before Session Ends	Number of Citations	Percentage of Respondents
Background questionnaire	136	68%
Nondisclosure agreement	115	57%
Audio or video recording consent form	91	45%
Receipt for incentives received	67	33%
Participant "Bill of Rights"	29	14%
Nothing	24	12%
Other: Post test questionnaire – 6 Participant's instructions form – 3 Simple project description – 2 Interface rating – 2 Photo release form – 1 Critical incident survey – 1 Receipt for expenses only; non-income – 1 Brochure and documentation – 1 Quantitative survey – 1 Thinking Aloud – 1 Verbal audio or video consent – 1 We own the invention rights – 1	21	10%
Tax form, such as W4 (USA) or other	6	3%

As shown in the preceding table:

- 76% of respondents (177 of 201) provide at least one of the seven items we asked about.
- The top three items cited were:
  - Background Questionnaire – 68%
  - Nondisclosure agreement – 57%
  - Audio-video consent form – 45%.
- 12% of respondents (24 of 201) provide no documents.

PARTICIPANT FOLLOW-UP

Question 9:
What follow up, if any, do you pursue with participants?

- Thank-you email or note
- Request for more participant referrals
- Other [please specify]:
- None.

Results for Participant Follow-Up

Follow-up with participants

Follow-up Activities with Participants	Number of Citations	Percentage of Respondents
Thank-you email or note	112	56%
None	68	34%
Request for participant referrals	37	18%
Other (some respondents cited more than one item): Ask if participants want to participate again – 6 Send or personally deliver incentives – 6 Debrief or summary document – 5 Notify when the site goes live or undergoes a revision – 4 Send follow-up questionnaire – 4 Send results of study – 3 Clarify data – 3 Tell how participant input was used – 3 Offer a limited license edition – 1 Answer questions that could not be answered by the session facilitator – 1 Unspecified follow up – 1	37	18%

As shown in the preceding table:

- More than half the respondents send a thank-you email or note – 56%.
- A third of the respondents send nothing – 34%.
- Almost a fifth request participant referrals – 18%.
- Some follow up with participants in other ways – 16%.

Appendix B: Sample Scripts and Forms

The following sample scripts and forms appear throughout the body of this report to illustrate information provided in the recruiting tips. We repeat them here for your convenience:

- Background Questionnaire
- Confirmation Message – sample text
- Dealing with Unqualified Participants – sample script
- Eliciting Sensitive Information – sample script
- Eliciting Web Experience - sample questions
- Meeting with the system team – sample topics and questions
- Minor Consent Form
- Nondisclosure Agreement
- Participation Consent Form
- Participant Database Information to Track
- Participant Screening Script and Questionnaire
- Participant Summary Table
- Preliminary Contact by Study Sponsor – sample script
- Incentive Forms – sample receipt and voucher
- Thank-You Note – sample script

BACKGROUND QUESTIONNAIRE

Background Questionnaire for [study name]

Please take a few minutes to answer the following questions to help us better understand your background and areas of interest. We use this information only to provide background and usage context in which to interpret the input and feedback you'll give us in your session today. We will keep your name confidential, and anonymously report the information you provide today.

1. What is your occupation and job title?

   Occupation: _____

   Job title: _____

2. Which of the following ranges best describes your age?
   - ❑ Under 20
   - ❑ 20–30
   - ❑ 31–40
   - ❑ 41–50
   - ❑ More than 50

3. Which of the following salary ranges best describes your current household income?
   - ❑ $34,000 or less
   - ❑ $35,000 – $45,000
   - ❑ $46,000 – $60,000
   - ❑ $61,000 – $75,000
   - ❑ $76, 000 or more

4. Do you own a home, or do you rent living space?
   - ❑ I own a home.
   - ❑ I rent living space.
   - ❑ I neither rent living space nor own a home.

5. How many hours per week do you use a computer at home? How many hours per week at work?

   Home: _____ Work: _____

6. How long have you been using the Internet?

   _____

7. How many hours per week do you spend on the Internet, not including time spent working with email?

   _____

8. What items have you purchased online (on the Web) within the last three months?

   _____

——End of Sample Background Questionnaire——

CONFIRMATION MESSAGE

[Sample Confirmation Message for Email, Fax, or Letter]

Hello [participant name]:

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in the [study name] [if as a backup, say "as a backup participant" and include wording about what is expected of a backup]. As I explained when we spoke on [day], your evaluation session will be held at [facility name], [address], in [city] on [date and time]. Please plan to arrive about 10 minutes before your scheduled session time to fill in some participant forms.

Because we are scheduling very few people for this study, it is extremely important that you keep your appointment with us. If for any reason you cannot make it, or you find you will be unavoidably late, please contact [name of person who can resolve last-minute changes], at [phone number] as soon as you know. Please do not send anyone else in your place.

If you wear glasses while using the computer, please bring them with you to your session. You will use [generic description of system—remember you probably don't want the participant to practice in advance] to do a few tasks. Then the evaluation staff will ask you a few follow-up questions to clarify their observations to ensure they thoroughly understand your actions with the [system] and obtain any additional feedback you feel is important.

At the completion of your session, you will receive [incentive] as our thanks for your participation. [unless you will be sending the incentive later. See paragraph below.]

[If you are videotaping session] I'd like to remind you that, with your permission, your session will be videotaped, and that these tapes will be used by the project team within the company for analysis purposes only; all personal information, including your identity, will remain company confidential.

[If you will administer a nondisclosure] In addition, [we, or study sponsor] need you to sign a nondisclosure agreement that says you agree not to talk to anyone about the [system] you are evaluating. You may tell them that you participated in a usability study, however.

[If you will provide a meal or refreshments] We will be providing food and beverages. The food will consist of [describe, for example, small sandwiches and cookies].

[If the incentive will not be provided at the session] We will provide [incentive, such as the next release of software] approximately four weeks after your session. We will need the address to which you would like us to send the [incentive].

[Below, or attached] is a map and driving directions to [facility]. If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at [phone number].

Regards,

[Name]

——End of Sample Confirmation Message——

DEALING WITH UNQUALIFIED PARTICIPANTS

- **Tell the job seeker:** "This is a usability evaluation of [system], and not a job opportunity. We are not employment recruiters, nor do we know what employment opportunities are available at [company]. If you would like to continue with the study tasks and the evaluation, we can. If you would prefer to end the session, we can do so. We will still honor the incentive we agreed to provide."
- **Tell the incentive-only seeker:** "We'd like you to focus on the tasks at hand. I assure you, you will receive the incentive we agreed to provide. Would you like to continue, or shall we end the session? We will still honor the incentive we agreed to provide."
- **Tell the competitor or spy:** "Thank you very much. We've learned enough in the session with what you have shown us already. We're going to let you out early." Then provide the incentive and escort him / her out.
- **Tell the verbally abusive participant:** "You obviously have become unhappy with this **session** [or the software, or the website], so I am going to end the session now. We will still honor the incentive we agreed to provide, unless you don't wish to receive it." Then escort him or her out. If necessary, be prepared to call security for an escort, and do not hesitate to tell the participant that is what you are going to do should s/he become even more abusive.
- **Tell the sick participant:** "It appears to me that you are not feeling very well. I don't want to impose on you any longer, nor do I wish to become ill myself. So why don't we end the session early and let you go home for some rest? We will still honor the incentive we agreed to provide, and we thank you for making the effort to attend the session even though you're not feeling well.

ELICITING SENSITIVE INFORMATION – SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Avoid phrasing your questions this way:	**Instead phrase them this way:**
Age: How old are you?	Please tell me which of the following ranges your age falls within: 21–25 years, 26–30 years, 31–35 years, 36–40 years, more than 40 years.
Gender: What is your sex? [or] Are you male or female?	It is best not to ask these questions at all. Rather, use aural cues, such a voice pitch, or visual cues, such as spelling of candidate's name, to determine gender. If, after interviewing the candidate, you still are unsure, make note of it on the questionnaire. However, if you are prescreening with an email message, it would be acceptable to ask respondents to indicate gender.
Employment status: Are you employed, unemployed,	What is your current occupation?

Avoid phrasing your questions this way:	Instead phrase them this way:
or retired?	
Household income: How much money do you earn per year?	Please tell me which of the following ranges your annual household income falls within: (USD) $15–30k, $31–45k, $46–60k, more than $60k. [If you keep the ranges wide, people likely will feel more comfortable placing themselves within one.]
Language skills: How long have you been speaking [Language]?	Is [Language] your first or second, language? [If not the first language] Where and how did you learn [Language]?
Disabilities: Are you handicapped? [or] Are you disabled?	Do you use any special equipment, such as a screen reader or alternative input device, with your computer? [If so] Which devices and how often?

ELICITING WEB EXPERIENCE - SAMPLE QUESTIONS

For a Web study in which you need a mix of, say, intermediate and advanced Web users, but no novices or experts, ask specific questions about Web usage and assign "experience" points to key responses.

- Do you have access to the Internet / Web at work or at home?
  - ❑ Yes [Continue]
  - ❑ No [End Interview]
- How long have you been using the Internet? [Do not prompt. Check the response that most closely matches the candidate's.]
  - ❑ Less than 1 yr [End Interview]
  - ❑ Between 1 and 3 yrs [Continue] (SCORE +1)
  - ❑ More than 3 yrs [Continue] (SCORE +2)

    SCORE:_____
- How much time do you spend on the Internet each week, not including time spent working with email? [Do not prompt. Check the response that most closely matches the candidate's.]
  - ❑ Fewer than 2 hours per wk [End Interview]
  - ❑ Between 2 and 5 hours per wk [Continue] (SCORE +1)
  - ❑ More than 5 hours per wk [Continue] (SCORE +2)

    SCORE:_____

- Please tell me which of the following Internet-related tasks you have performed. [Read through list and check all that apply.]
  - ❑ Chat / Online discussion forums
  - ❑ Categorizing bookmarks in your folders
  - ❑ Changing labels on a bookmark folder
  - ❑ Personalizing your browser
  - ❑ Searching for information on a long Web page
  - ❑ Upgrading / updating your browser from the Web
  - ❑ Web page design
  - ❑ Performing searches on the Internet that include advanced features such as using quotation marks, parentheses, or the plus sign (+)

    0–2 tasks (SCORE +0)

    3–4 tasks (SCORE +1)

    5 or more tasks (SCORE +2)

    SCORE:_____

Total score for previous 3 questions: _____

0–1	Novice	[End Interview]
2–3	Intermediate	[Need 4]
4–5	Advanced	[Need 4]
6 or more	Expert	[End Interview]

——End of Sample Web Experience Questions——

INTERVIEW TOPICS FOR MEETING WITH THE SYSTEM TEAM

You can elicit much of the information you need about users by asking about the users'

- Job title and job description
- Type of employer (size; retail / manufacturing / wholesale / service)
- Role regarding the system (uses it, or supports others who do)
- Frequency of use (infrequent, often, daily)
- Most-critical tasks
- Task transitions (which tasks precede or follow other tasks)
- Job benefits—using the system to increase performance (bonuses, raises, respect)
- Environment (where system is used, how it is set up)

- Task complexity (regarding the product or domain)
- Prior experience (with specific products, competitive, related, and predecessor).

——End of Sample Interview Topics——

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE SYSTEM TEAM

Using the topics listed above as a start, prepare a list of specific questions to ask the system team. More than likely, you will also ask questions that are not on your list to elicit elaboration or clarification. Both planned and follow-up questions are provided in the following table. These questions will help determine which users are affected by the study focus, which characteristics these users have, and whether you will need to recruit from several user groups.

Who uses the system?

User Experience Specialist Questions	System Team Responses
Who enters issue resolutions into the system?	Project managers.
Would anyone else ever enter issue resolutions?	Occasionally account reps. They have system permission to do that.
Follow-up: How about administrative assistants? Would they ever enter a resolution for a project manager or account rep?	Well, technically they don't have permission, but if the PM or account rep gives them their ID and password, the admin can enter a resolution for them.
Follow-up: Will this situation change, or will assistants always be entering resolutions unofficially?	Based on what we know is happening, we're going to set up permission for account reps' and PMs' assistants to go in there "legally."
Follow-up: Does anyone else besides project managers and account managers have system permissions to enter resolutions? Project team members perhaps?	No, team members can enter a project issue, and they can suggest a resolution for an issue, but only a project manager or account manager has permission to enter the actual resolution.

What are different users' distinguishing characteristics?

User Experience Specialist Questions	System Team Responses
Which users enter what proportion of the resolutions?	Project managers enter 90–95% of the resolutions and account reps about 5%–10%.
Follow-up: Where do assistants fall in that ratio?	In with the account reps' 5%–10%.
Are the calls to the help desk coming mostly	The help desk hasn't been asking that. They do ask for job title though, so we

User Experience Specialist Questions	System Team Responses
from new users or from experienced users?	know whether they're PMs, account reps, or admins.
Do these users need training to use XYZ, or can those new to XYZ learn it fairly quickly?	Well, the system is supposed to be quick and easy to learn—if you're a certified project manager or trained account rep.
Follow-up: So, do all the project managers who use XYZ have project management certification?	Yes, they already have it when they're hired, or they get certification right away through the company.
Follow-up: And, do all your account reps receive training?	Yes, they go through our training and orientation program as soon as they're hired. They also go to seminars and classes whenever we add new products or services to our lines of business.
Recap: Okay, so the users of XYZ issue-resolution are certified project managers, trained account reps, and possibly their assistants, correct?	Correct.
How long does it take for a user to become "experienced"? *Added question (based on information volunteered by system team):* You're not sure if most of the complaints are coming from new users or experienced users, so we should include some of each in the test.	I'd say after three months, a user should really know how the system works.
About how many resolutions do you estimate each user enters and how often?	It varies, of course, depending on the project and how many projects they're working on at any one time.
Follow-up: Go ahead and give me your best guess. When I meet with one of the PMs, I can adjust your estimate if I need to.	Okay, I'm guessing that PMs roughly enter 8–10 resolutions per month, account reps only 3 or 4, and assistants possibly 1 or 2, maybe more, if their boss is pretty busy.
Where do users work with XYZ; at their desk (project managers), on a laptop in the field (account managers)?	They all work with XYZ in the office. We have plans to change to a web-based application that we'll put up on our intranet, and then people will be able to use it wherever they can access our intranet.
Follow-up: When will this change take place? *Note to self:* check back in about six months to ask about testing the web-based version of XYZ.	Early next year. We want to make sure issue resolution is working first.

——*End of Sample Interview Questions*——

MINOR CONSENT FORM

Permission for Participation in After-School Software Evaluation Study

Your child, [blank fill-in line for name of child], has been recommended by his / her school teacher, [blank fill-in line for name of teacher], to participate in an after-school computer software evaluation study at his or her school, for which s/he will receive [incentive description, such as "hardbound illustrated children's book"]. [Name of usability firm] is conducting the study with the full knowledge and consent of [blank fill-in line for name of school and school's principal].

Before [name of usability firm] can accept your child into the software evaluation study, we require your permission as described below. Please read all information before signing this consent form.

By signing this form, you certify that you are the parent or legal guardian of [blank fill-in line for child's name]. Your signature also certifies that you give your child permission to participate in the after-school computer software evaluation study conducted by [name of usability firm], and that you have read and understand the study as described below:

- Your child's software evaluation study session will take place after school, in the school's [blank fill-in line for room, such as "library" or "gymnasium"].
- The software evaluation study will ask for feedback and opinions from [grade level] graders about a new software package that features [describe, such as "multimedia literature"] for children in your child's age group. The developers of the software want to ensure that it engages children, teaches them effectively, and is easy to use.
- The software evaluation study will not evaluate your child's computer, reading, or comprehension skills. In this study, your child will be the evaluator.
- [Usability firm] staff will observe your child's activities with the software and will ask your child for feedback and opinions of the software.
- [Usability firm] staff will videotape the session, and your child's likeness and voice may appear on highlight videotapes to be used for noncommercial, data reporting purposes only within [company name].
- Your child's identity will be held confidential on all videotapes, study data, and study reporting.
- Your child's session will last 75 minutes (one hour and 15 minutes) and will include a 10-minute break after each half hour.

- During one of the session breaks, [usability firm] staff will provide snacks consisting of juice or milk, and cookies (without seeds or nuts of any kind). If your child has any food allergies, or if you do not want your child to have a snack, please indicate below:

  _____

  _____

- Your child is not obligated to complete an entire session; your child is free to discontinue the session at any time. If your child chooses to discontinue the session, [usability firm] staff will not release your child until s/he is met by you or someone you designate.
- You may be present during the study session, but you will not interact with your child or the study facilitator during the session, unless it is to end the session.
- For your child's protection, [usability firm] prefers that the person who brings your child to the session also meets your child after the session. If this request presents a hardship for you, please indicate below. Please provide your phone number and the best time to reach you so that [usability firm] and / or [blank fill-in line for name school principal] can make other arrangements with you.

  _____

  _____

- For participating in the study, your child will receive [incentive description].
- To ensure the validity of our study results, your child must refrain from speaking about his / her evaluation session with other students until after the entire study is complete.
- [Usability firm] staff has reserved an appointment on [blank fill-in line for date, time] for your child's session in [room in school]. If this date or time is inconvenient, please indicate below. Please provide your telephone number and the best time to reach you so that [usability firm] and / or [blank fill-in line for name school principal] can make other arrangements with you:

  _____

  _____

We will do our best to make this experience interesting and fun for your child. Our goal is to help make design changes to [the system] so that children just like yours can use it more easily and effectively. We appreciate your child's help very much.

I have read and understand the description of the software study above, and give my permission for my child to participate.

Signature: _____

Print name: _____

Date: _____

Please fill in, sign, and return this form to your child's teacher by [day, date]. [Usability firm] cannot accept your child into the study without this signed form. You will receive a copy of your signed form at your child's session. Thank you!

——*End of Sample Minor Participation Consent Form*——

NONDISCLOSURE AGREEMENT

Nondisclosure Agreement for [name of study]

In this session, you will be working with [*or* shown, *if a focus group*] a [system type, *for example a website or software tool*] in its development stage. By signing this form, you agree not to share information you learn about this [system], which is considered proprietary, and which we share with you only so that you can participate in this evaluation [*or* discussion, *if a focus group*]. By signing this form, you also agree not to share information about your session to anyone, especially those you know who also may be participating in this study, until after [month year]. We appreciate your strict adherence to this agreement.

Signature: _____

Print name: _____

Date: _____

——*End of Sample Nondisclosure Form*——

PARTICIPATION CONSENT FORM

Understanding Your Participation

Please read this page carefully before you sign it.

You have agreed to participate in a usability study that will evaluate [system]. By participating in this study, you will help [usability consulting firm or study sponsor] to improve [system] in future redesigns. [Usability consulting firm] staff will observe you and record information about how you work with the [system]. We will also ask you to fill out questionnaires about your experience and answer follow-up questions. We will record your comments and actions using written notes and video cameras.

[Usability consulting firm] will use the data from your study session, including videotapes, solely for the purposes of evaluating the [system] and sharing the results of these evaluations with [the study sponsor]. Your full name will not be used during any presentation of the results of this study.

By signing this form, you give your permission for [usability consulting firm] to use (circle one answer for each):

- Your recorded voice (yes) (no)
- Your verbal statements (yes) (no)
- The videotape of your session (yes) (no)

You will receive [incentive] for your participation; however, your acceptance of this [incentive] does not constitute employment by [usability consulting firm], [market research firm or facility], or [the study sponsor].

If you need a break at any time, please inform the study facilitator immediately. If you have questions about how the session will proceed, you may ask them at any time. You may withdraw from your study session at any time.

If you agree with these terms, please indicate your agreement by signing below.

Signature: _____

Print name: _____

Date: _____

——End of Sample Participation Consent Form——

PARTICIPANT DATABASE INFORMATION TO TRACK

- Date participant is entered and by whom
- Participant's name, job title, and company or school name (if known)
- Participant's contact information: voice, fax, email, and cell / pager (if known)
- Participant's gender and age range
- Short profile of participant's experience
  - Computers used (Mac, PC, Unix)
  - Software (non-games as well as games)
  - Web (in addition to email)
  - Domain field (finance, technical, marketing, for example)
  - Consumer shopping (if appropriate).
- Participant's past study dates and systems evaluated (even if not in one of your studies)
- Short description of positive or negative aspects of participant's past sessions

- Who referred participant (if applicable)

PARTICIPANT SCREENING SCRIPT AND QUESTIONNAIRE

Olympia Human Factors

Aztech.com Website Usability Test

Participant Screening Script and Questionnaire

Recruiter name:	
Today's date:	
Respondent's name:	
Gender:	[ ] Male [ ] Female
Telephone numbers:	Voice: _____ [ ] Home [ ] Work Best time to call: _____ Fax: _____
Job title:	
Company name:	
Email address:	
Accepted:	[ ] Yes [ ] No
Status:	[ ] Pilot [ ] Regular [ ] Backup [ ] N / A

Olympia Human Factors

Aztech.com Website Usability Test

Participant Screening Script and Questionnaire

Participant Characteristics	Number Needed
Total participants:	**9**
Pilot	1
Regular	5
Backup	3
Gender:	
Men	4–5
Women	4–5
Age	
20–30 years	1 R, 1 P
31–40 years	1 P, 2 R, 1 B
41–50 years	2 R, 1 B
Income and home ownership:	
$35,000–$45,000	1 R, 1 P
$46,000–$60,000	1 P, 2 R, 1 B
$61,000–$75,000	2 R, 1 B
Renter or Home owner:	All
Computer and Web Experience:	
Uses a computer at home or at work at least 5 hours per week	All
Has used the Internet for six months or longer, at least 5 hours per week.	All
Online Shopping Experience:	
Must have purchased something online with the last 3 months	All
Exclusions:	
Unemployed persons	0
Employees of utilities or home improvement / wireless / phone services	0
Previous market research or usability test participants (within last six months)	0

Olympia Human Factors

Aztech.com Website Usability Test

Participant Screening Script and Questionnaire

Opening Script

"Hello, may I please speak to Thomas Apollo? This is Artemis Hermes from Olympia Human Factors in San Francisco. I am calling you today because we are looking for people who might be interested in participating in a usability evaluation that we are conducting for one of our clients who is in the process of redesigning their website. Obtaining feedback from actual Web users is one of the important ways we can ensure development of a website that will be a valuable resource, as well as easy to use.

"We are looking for people in the San Francisco Bay Area who would be interested in spending about 90 minutes evaluating our client's website and offering feedback on their experience. Olympia will use this feedback to help our client improve their website for people like you. Your input into this process would be invaluable. I assure you that I am not trying to sell you anything now or in the future.

"As thanks for your participation in the website evaluation, you'll receive (USD) $100 at the end of your evaluation session. Does this sound like something you might be interested in?"

> [If yes, continue. If no, ask if s/he may know another person who might be interested, get that person's contact information, thank respondent for his / her time, and terminate the call.]

"Great. Sessions will take place at Diamond Focus, 123 Market Street, in San Francisco on Wednesday, January 8, and Thursday, January 9. Would a 90-minute session on one of these two days work for you?"

> [If yes, continue. If no, ask if s/he may know another person who might be interested, get that person's contact information, thank respondent for his / her time, and terminate the call.]

"If you have a few minutes, I'd like to ask you some questions to determine whether you're an appropriate candidate for the website evaluation. Do you have time right now to answer a few questions?"

> [If yes, go to Screening Questions. If no, arrange a time to call back.]

Screening Questions

Gender: [Observed only. Do not inquire.]

- ❑ Female [Accept 2–3 regulars and 1–2 backups. A woman as pilot is acceptable.]
- ❑ Male [Accept 2–3 regulars and 1–2 backups. A man as pilot is acceptable.]

[Note: Whenever you need to terminate the interview because the candidate does not qualify for the study, politely tell the candidate **"we already have enough people with your background, but thank you very much for your time."**]

Olympia Human Factors

Aztech.com Website Usability Test

Participant Screening Script and Questionnaire

1. What is your occupation and job title?

   Occupation: _____

   Title: _____

   [Exclude people who are unemployed. Also exclude any employees of competitors, such as a utility company, a wireless product or service provider, a cable TV or satellite-dish product or service provider, or a home improvement company (builders, roofers, plumbers, etc.).]

2. Please tell me which of the following ranges your age falls within:

   - ❑ Under 20 [Thank and terminate]
   - ❑ 20–30 [Accept 1 regular and 1 backup]
   - ❑ 31–40 [Accept 2 regulars, 1 backup, and 1 pilot]
   - ❑ 41–50 [Accept 2 regulars, and 1 backup]
   - ❑ More than 50 [Thank and terminate; be extremely tactful in excusing these people; say that we already have enough people in their age range right now.]

3. Which of the following salary ranges best describes your current household income?

   - ❑ $34,000 or less [Thank and terminate; be extremely tactful in excusing these people; say that we already have enough people in their salary range right now.]
   - ❑ $35,000 – $45,000 [Accept 1 regular and 1 backup]
   - ❑ $46,000 – $60,000 [Accept 2 regulars, 1 backup, and 1 pilot]
   - ❑ $61,000 – $75,000 [Accept 2 regulars and 1 backup]
   - ❑ $76, 000 or higher [Thank and terminate; be extremely tactful in excusing these people; say that we already have enough people in their salary range right now.]

Olympia Human Factors

Aztech.com Website Usability Test

Participant Screening Script and Questionnaire

4. Do you own a home, or do you rent living space?

   - ❑ Neither [Thank and terminate; we would like people who make purchasing decisions on utilities, communications, entertainment, and home improvement for their household.]
   - ❑ Home owner [Continue]
   - ❑ Renter [Continue]

5. How many hours per week do you use a computer either at home or at work? [Do not prompt; check the response that most closely matches the candidate's.]

   - ❑ Fewer than 5 [Thank and terminate]
   - ❑ 5 or more [Continue]

6. Do you currently use the Internet?

   - ❑ Yes [Continue]
   - ❑ No [Thank and terminate]

7. How long have you been using the Internet? [Do not prompt; check the response that most closely matches the candidate's.]

   - ❑ 6 mos. or more [Continue]
   - ❑ Less than 6 mos. [Thank and terminate]

8. How many hours per week do you spend on the Internet, not including time spent working with email? [Do not prompt; check the response that most closely matches the candidate's.]

   - ❑ Fewer than 5 [Thank and terminate]
   - ❑ 5 or more [Continue]

9. Do you shop online?

   - ❑ Yes [Continue]
   - ❑ No [Thank and terminate]

10. What items have you purchased online within the last three months?

    _____

    If 0–1 item cited [Thank and terminate]

    If 2 or more items cited [Continue]

Olympia Human Factors

Aztech.com Website Usability Test

Participant Screening Script and Questionnaire

Invitation

"Thank you very much for answering my questions. I'd like to invite you to participate in our study [if as a backup, say "as a backup participant." If the candidate wants to know more about backup status, read the boxed backup script on the next page]. As I explained earlier, your evaluation session will be held at Diamond Focus, 123 Market Street, in San Francisco.

"If you wear glasses while using the computer, please bring them with you to your session. You will use our client's website to do a few tasks. Then the evaluation staff will ask you a few follow-up questions to clarify their observations to ensure they thoroughly understand your actions with the site and obtain any additional feedback you feel is important. At the completion of your session, you will receive $100 as our thanks for your participation.

> *[If you will be videotaping session]* "I'd like to let you know that your session will be video taped, but that these tapes will be used by the project team within the company for analysis purposes only; all information, including your identity, will remain confidential. At your session, we will ask you to sign a videotaping consent form.]"
>
> *[If you will administer a nondisclosure]* "In addition, our client has asked that you sign a nondisclosure agreement which says that you will agree not to talk to anyone about the website you are evaluating. You may tell them that you helped to evaluate a new website, however."
>
> *[If you will provide orientation and / or training]* [Briefly explain what sort of orientation and / or training you will provide and what time commitment is needed from the participant.]
>
> *[If you will provide a meal or refreshments]* [Let people know that you'll be providing food and beverages and whether it will be substantial or simple.]
>
> *[If the incentive will not be provided at the session]* [If the incentive, such as the next release of software, you will provide is not available at the time of the session, explain to the participant how and approximately when s/he will receive it.]

Can we count on your participation? If so, I'd like to schedule a tentative appointment to reserve your space in the study schedule."

Schedule

"Because we are scheduling very few people for this study, it is extremely important that you keep your appointment with us. If for any reason you must reschedule, please contact me, [your name and phone number] as soon as you know. Please do not send anyone else in your place."

Olympia Human Factors

Aztech.com Website Usability Test

Participant Screening Script and Questionnaire

[Schedule participants for 90 minutes. Allow at least half-an-hour between sessions and an hour for lunch. Schedule appointments starting as early as 9:00 a.m. *[If applicable for your venue:]* Allow 45 minutes before a session you schedule to start during morning or evening rush hour. You may schedule people for evening sessions, if they cannot make it to sessions during regular business hours. If scheduling evening appointments, allow half-an-hour for dinner.]

	Date	Time	Candidate Name	Pilot, Regular or Backup
10.				Pilot
11.				Regular
12.				Regular
13.				Regular
14.				Regular
15.				Regular
16.				Backup
17.				Backup
18.				Backup

"Thank you for your time and for agreeing to participate in our study [if a backup, say 'as a backup' and read the boxed text below]. Please plan to arrive about 10 minutes ahead of your session time to fill in some participant forms."

BACKUPS:

"We may not need to see all backup participants. If we will not be working with you at your scheduled time, we will give you at least a half day's notice or send you the $100 with less notice. We appreciate your flexibility.

"May I please have your email address, fax number, or mailing address where I can send a confirmation letter? [Record contact information on the cover page.] I will contact you again closer to your scheduled appointment to confirm the date, time, and place with you. I will also provide directions and a map to Diamond Focus, if needed. Thanks again."

[Before ending call, confirm the appointment, the spelling of the candidate's name, email and surface addresses, and phone number(s). Also remind him / her to arrive 10 minutes early to fill out participant forms.]

Reconfirmation

[ ] Reconfirmed appointment [ ] Provided directions and map to Diamond Focus

Date: _____ [ ] email [ ] surface mail [ ] phone

——*End of Sample Screener* ——

PARTICIPANT SUMMARY TABLE

Participants Scheduled for the Aztech.com Usability Test Wednesday, July 8, and Thursday, July 9, 2005									
	Phil **Pilot**	**Robert**	**Sam**	**Betty**	**David**	**Linda**	**Jane** **Backup**	**Greg** **Backup**	**Ellen** **Backup**
Gender	Male	Male	Male	Female	Male	Female	Female	Male	Female
Job title	Store Manager	Banker	Under-writer	Fitness Instructor	Dentist	Executive Secretary	Program-mer	Head Librarian	Financial Analyst
Age	31–40	41–50	31–40	20–30	41–50	31–40	41–50	20–30	31–40
Income (in USD $1000)	$46–$60	$61–$75	$46–$60	$46–$60	$61–$75	$35–$45	$46–$60	$35–$45	$61–$75
Renter or Home-owner	Renter	Owner	Owner	Renter	Owner	Renter	Owner	Renter	Owner
Computer use (hours per week)	10	20	40	15	5	30	60	25	20
Web use (hours per week / total)	5 4 years	7 2 years	10 1.5 years	10 3 years	5 .5 year	5 1 year	10 5 years	12 4 years	10 2.5 years
Online purchases	Books Tickets Music	Music Tickets Art Travel	Tools Music Tickets	Equipment Books Vitamins Travel	Drugs Dental supplies Tickets	Clothes Books DVDs	Books Garden tools Pet food	Office supplies DVDs Music	Books Tickets Music Travel
Session	Wed. 9 am	Wed. 1 pm	Wed. 3 pm	Wed. 5 pm	Thurs. 9 am	Thurs. 11 am	Thurs. 1 pm	Thurs. 3 pm	Thurs. 5 pm

PRELIMINARY CONTACT BY STUDY SPONSOR – SAMPLE SCRIPT

"Hello, [candidate's name]. I'm hoping to pique your interest in a usability evaluation we'll be conducting [timeframe—*such as "in three weeks"*] with current users of the [name of system—*or describe the system generically throughout, to avoid providing too much information*].

My group, [name of sponsor's group or organization] is very interested in getting feedback from [user group or groups] to learn how well [system] is supporting you in [performing your job / tasks / other]. This evaluation is very important to my group because it will result in a set of recommendations that will help improve [system] to better support our users in [performing their job / tasks / other].

"I think you are an excellent candidate for giving feedback to the evaluation team. Could you spare [number] minutes on one of these days [dates], and help us out with this evaluation? You don't have to do anything to prepare for it—the evaluation team will ask you to do some typical tasks and give your feedback. We are offering [incentive] for those who participate.

"Please let me know by [date and time] whether or not you are interested, and I'll have [recruiter's name] get in touch with you by [date]. Also, let me know when would be a good time for [recruiter's name] to call you.

"Thanks very much, [candidate's name]. I hope you'll be able to help us out with your participation.

"Best regards, *[if an email message]*

"[Sender's name] *[if an email message]*"

——End of Sample Script for Preliminary Contact——

RECEIPT FORM

Receipt for [Monetary or Non-monetary]

Thank you for participating in the [system] usability evaluation. Please acknowledge that you have received from [usability consulting firm, market research firm or facility, or study sponsor] [the exact amount of money, or describe the non-monetary incentive, if it is merchandise] for your participation by signing below. Note that your acceptance of this [incentive] does not constitute employment by [usability consulting firm, market research firm or facility, or study sponsor]. Thanks again for your participation!

Signature: _____

Print name: _____

Date: _____

——End of Sample Receipt Form——

VOUCHER FORM

Voucher for [name of incentive, such as software package name]

Thank you for participating in the [system] usability evaluation. [Usability consulting firm, market research firm or facility, or study sponsor] will send you [describe the non-monetary incentive] as soon as it becomes available, approximately [time frame] to thank you for your participation. Note that your acceptance of this honorarium does not constitute employment by [usability consulting firm, market research firm or facility, or study sponsor].

Please print the name and mailing address to which you would like [non-monetary incentive] sent:

Name: _____

Address:_____

_____

If for unforeseen reasons, [incentive] release is delayed, how shall we contact you to let you know?

[ ] Send mail to the address provided above.

[ ] Send email to the this address: _____

[ ] Call me at this telephone number: _____

Thanks again for your participation!

——*End of Sample Incentive Voucher Form*——

THANK-YOU NOTE

Dear [participant name],

[Study team and / or study sponsors] would like to thank you for participating in our [name of study] last [day or date]. You provided us with valuable feedback, which we will use to make recommendations for improving [system].

[If you want the participant back again:] If you are interested, and with your permission, we'd like to contact you again for future studies. Please return the enclosed post-paid card to let us know your interest.

[If you want referrals:] If you know of someone else who may be interested in participating in a usability study, please return the post-paid card to let us know the name of the person you are referring how we may contact your referral.

Thanks again for your time and interest in our study.

Sincerely,

[Study team facilitator and / or study sponsor project manager]

——End of Sample Thank-You Note——

Acknowledgements

People and Organizations

Carolyn Snyder, Snyder Consulting

Finding a User Recruitment Vendor, a white paper.

www.snyderconsulting.net/booksarticles.htm

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Insights from a usability mailing list posting.

Jurek Kirakowski, Human Factors Research Group

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Society for Technical Communication (STC)

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Tec-Ed, Inc. and IPCC (IEEE Professional Communication Society)

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By Deborah Hinderer (Sova).

Todd Chapin, User Interface Engineer, Speechworks International

Administrator of an informal survey on when to give participants incentives.

UPA Idea Market

Dana Chisnell, Moderator.

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