KSU-Mart

Usability Study:
Participant Number Justification

To: KSU-Mart – Website Usability Study Team
From: Jim Allard **–** Team member
Date: 1/18/2015

Introduction:

Fellow team members, and stakeholders, it has been brought to my attention that there are concerns regarding the chosen number of usability test participants, currently eight, being too small. Many of you have expressed concerns that if we utilize so few participants that we cannot possibly identify all of the problems that appear to be plaguing our website and reducing our online sales. I have taken your concerns to heart and conducted research into modern usability studies, and I will share my findings here. Hopefully after reading this explanation I will have alleviated your concerns, and that we will all have learned a bit more about modern usability studies in the process.

Reasoning:

As it turns out there are many reasons for using so few usability participants in our study. Three of the key reasons being: saving time, saving money, ease of understanding the results. Also usability studies are vastly different things from a research project. In a usability study we are not worried about statistical significance, demographics, or market research. We are concerned with finding out what problems our customers face when using our website, and then go about fixing them. This should logically take far fewer test participants to discover than traditional research projects require.

Evidence from my research:

My research into this area of concern has yielded a lot of interesting evidence which supports or current small test participant numbers. In this section I will provide quotes directly from my sources.

- "The best results come from testing no more than 5 users and running as many small tests as you can afford." (Nielsen, 2000)

- "The most striking truth of the curve is that **zero users give zero insights**. As soon as you collect data from a **single test user**, your insights shoot up and you have already learned almost a third of all there

KSU-Mart

Usability Study:
Participant Number Justification

is to know about the usability of the design. The difference between zero and even a little bit of data is astounding. … As you **add more and more users, you learn less and less** because you will keep seeing the same things again and again. There is no real need to keep observing the same thing multiple times, and you will be very motivated to go back to the drawing board and redesign the site to eliminate the usability problems." (Nielsen, 2000)

- "**You don't need to find all of the problems.** In fact, you'll *never* find *all* of the problems in anything you test. And it wouldn't help if you did, because of this fact: You can find more problems in half a day than you can fix in a month. You'll always find more problems than you have the resources to fix, so it's very important that you focus on fixing the most serious ones first. And three users are very likely to encounter many of the most significant problems related to the tasks that you're testing" (Krug, 2014)

Conclusion:

Based off of this evidence I am convinced that our current selection of eight participants is sufficient to discover the problem(s) behind the 80% departure rate from our shopping cart. This in my estimation is a large problem which should be easily discoverable by our test participants. I'm also certain that we will discover other problems we can fix along the way. Should you wish to see my research or discuss this situation further do feel free to contact me.

Sincerely

Jim Allard

Sources:

- Nielsen, J. (March 19, 2000). *Why You Only Need to Test with 5 Users.* Retrieved from: http://www.nngroup.com/articles/why-you-only-need-to-test-with-5-users/
- Krug, S. (2014). *Don't Make Me Think Revisited: A common sense approach to web and mobile usability*. United States: New Riders.