

TRENDS



January 8, 2007

Where To Get Help With Usability Testing

Usability Vendors Report On Experience, Capabilities, And Location

This is the second document in the “Usability Testing For Managers” series.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our survey of usability vendors uncovered 47 firms that have significant experience conducting usability lab tests. In addition to usability expertise, many of the vendors also have capabilities in user research, user recruitment, and design. Companies in search of outside usability know-how can seek help from these specialists, which are scattered throughout the US.

TARGET AUDIENCE

Application development and program management professional, customer experience professional, interactive marketing professional

NUMEROUS VENDORS HAVE USABILITY SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE

To identify vendors that provide usability evaluation services, Forrester surveyed 56 firms about their usability projects over the past 12 months. We found that:

- **Experienced usability lab testers abound.** We asked vendors how many usability lab tests that they had conducted over the past year (see Figure 1).¹ Usability Sciences and Sachs Insights were the top contenders, with 175 and 150 lab tests, respectively. Not far behind, Human Factors International and User Insight conducted roughly 100 tests each. Four other firms conducted 40 or more, while the remaining vendors made our cutoff by reporting at least three lab tests each.
- **Vendor size doesn't equal usability expertise.** For some large vendors, usability evaluation is just one of many service offerings. So, it's not surprising that four of the eight firms with more than 30 full-time employees (FTEs) completed 10 or fewer usability lab tests each. And some of the smallest vendors, those with five or fewer FTEs, conducted up to 50 tests over the past year. In fact, some individual usability consultants, such as Janice (Ginny) Redish, Ph.D., of Redish & Associates and Jeff Johnson of UI Wizards, are some of the biggest players in the field, drawing on decades of professional usability experience (see Figure 2).
- **Usability vendors have diverse skill sets.** Forty vendors reported traditional usability evaluation services like cognitive walkthroughs and heuristic evaluations.² Thirty vendors provide user recruitment services, and 28 have capabilities in user research techniques like persona development and focus groups.³

- **Vendors congregate in tech hubs.** Usability vendors are widely distributed across the US (see Figure 3). Fourteen firms are the only usability practitioners in their area. But, multiple firms are located in tech hot spots: Austin and Seattle are home to three firms; New York City and Washington, D.C., to five; and Boston and San Francisco/San Jose are home to six.

Figure 1 Usability Vendors By Size, Lab Testing Experience, And Capabilities

Vendor	# of FTEs	# of lab tests completed in previous 12 months	Card sorting	Cognitive walkthrough	Focus groups	Heuristic evaluation	Persona development	User recruitment	Web analytics analysis
Aaron Marcus and Associates	11-15	6	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Alucid Solution	6-10	20	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
American Institutes for Research	31+	30	●	●	●	●			●
Anthro TECH	2-5	15	●	●	●	●	●		●
Aptima	31+	10	●	●	●	●	●		●
Aquilent	31+	9	●		●	●	●	●	●
Bentley College Design and Usability Center	6-10	22	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Blink Interactive	11-15	60	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Canyon Ergonomics	2-5	5	●	●		●			
Comadrona Communications	11-15	10	●	●	●	●			
Da Vinci Usability	2-5	4	●	●	●	●	●		
Design Science Consulting	16-20	30	●	●		●	●	●	
Dray & Associates	2-5	10	●	●		●	●	●	
Electronic Ink	31+	25	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Enervision Media	6-10	5	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Ergosoft Laboratories	2-5	10	●	●	●	●	●		
Expero	6-10	30	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

Figure 1 Usability Vendors By Size, Lab Testing Experience, And Capabilities (Cont.)

Vendor	# of FTEs	# of lab tests completed in previous 12 months	Card sorting	Cognitive walkthrough	Focus groups	Heuristic evaluation	Persona development	User recruitment	Web analytics analysis
First Insights	2-5	14	●	●	●	●	●		
Gomoll Research & Design	6-10	10	●	●	●	●			
Hanna Research and Design	2-5	30	●	●	●				
Highland Technologies	2-5	6	●	●	●				
Human Factors International	31+	100	●	●		●	●	●	
Human Interfaces	2-5	50	●	●	●		●	●	
Interface Design and Development	2-5	5	●			●			
The Leede Group	2-5	35	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Lextant	21-30	25	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Limina Application Office	6-10	8	●	●		●	●		
Mad*Pow Media Solutions	11-15	6	●	●	●	●	●		
MauroNewMedia	6-10	28	●	●		●	●		●
MAYA Design	21-30	N/A	●	●	●	●	●		
The Merge Computer Group	31+	3		●		●			
Molecular	31+	10	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Nicholas Research	21-30	45			●		●		
OTIVO	2-5	30	●	●		●	●		
Performance Research & Design	2-5	30	●	●	●	●			

Figure 1 Usability Vendors By Size, Lab Testing Experience, And Capabilities (Cont.)

Vendor	# of FTEs	# of lab tests completed in previous 12 months	Card sorting	Cognitive walkthrough	Focus groups	Heuristic evaluation	Persona development	User recruitment	Web analytics analysis
RelevantView	16-20	N/A	●	●	●			●	
Tec-Ed	16-20	30	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Sachs Insights	11-15	150	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Sway Design	11-15	6	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Terranova Group	2-5	7	●	●	●	●	●	●	
theUEgroup	11-15	22	●	●	●	●	●	●	
ThoughtWare Solutions	2-5	50	●	●	●	●			
Usability Architects	6-10	5	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Usability Sciences	31+	175	●	●	●	●	●	●	
User Insight	21-30	105	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
User-Centered Design	6-10	20	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
UserWorks	11-15	25	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

Base: 47 usability vendors

Source: Forrester's Q4 survey of usability vendors

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Source: Forrester Research, Inc.

Figure 2 Usability Vendors With One FTE

Vendor	Years of experience
Advanced Common Sense	18
Pink Frog Interactive	15
REALeResearch	20+
Redish & Associates	25+
Softerware Usability Consulting	10+
Solomon Solutions	12
UI Insight	7
UI Wizards	28
Whitney Interactive Design	15+

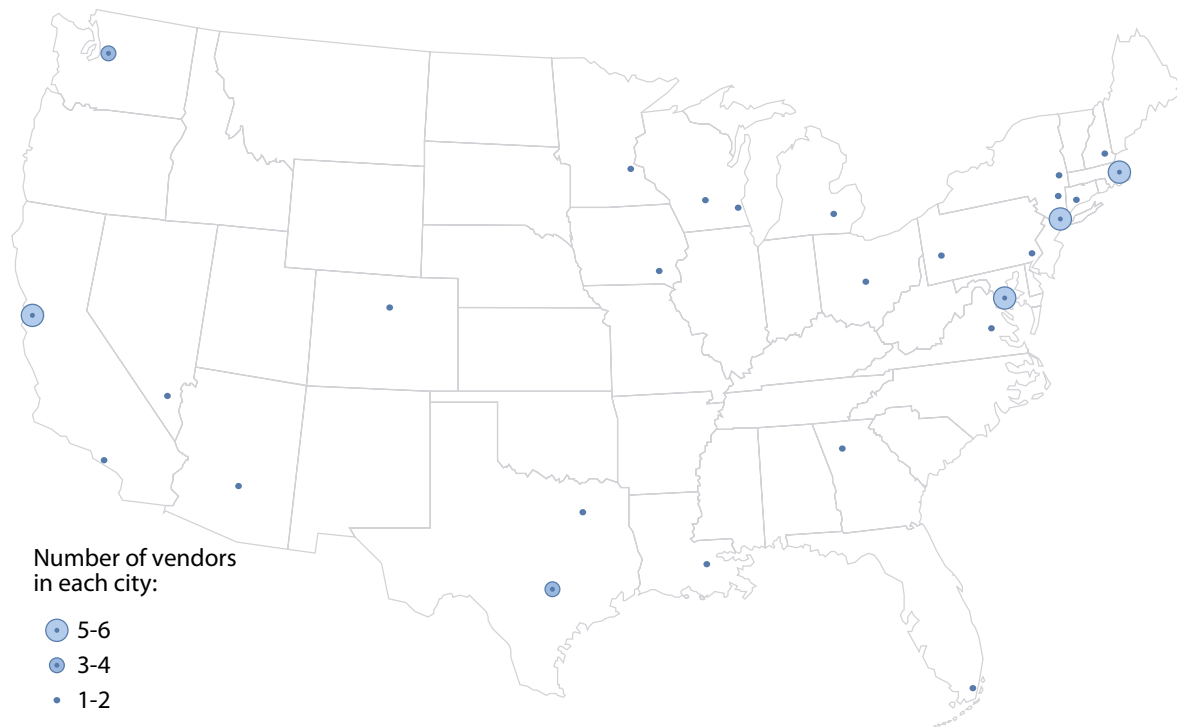
Source: Forrester’s Q4 survey of usability vendors

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Source: Forrester Research, Inc.

Figure 3 US-Based Usability Vendors

3-1 US-based usability vendors by location



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Source: Forrester Research, Inc.

Figure 3 US-Based Usability Vendors (Cont.)**3-2 US-based usability vendors by state****Arizona**

Phoenix

- Interface Design and Development

California

Los Angeles

- Canyon Ergonomics
- Comadrona Communications

San Francisco/San Jose

- Aaron Marcus and Associates
- Nicholas Research
- OTIVO
- REALeResearch
- theUEgroup
- UIWizards

Connecticut

Westport

- RelevantView

Colorado

Englewood

- UI Insight

Florida

Miami

- Softerware Usability Consulting

Georgia

Atlanta

- Terranova Group
- User Insight

Iowa

Fairfield

- Human Factors International

Louisiana

Baton Rouge

- Alucid Solution

Massachusetts

Boston

- Advanced Common Sense
- Aptima
- American Institutes for Research
- Bently College Design and Usability Center
- Da Vinci Usability
- Molecular

Michigan

Ann Arbor

- Tec-Ed

Minnesota

Minneapolis

- Dray & Associates
- The Leede Group

New Hampshire

Portsmouth

- Mad*Pow Media Solutions

New York

Brewster

- Performance Research & Design

East Chatham

- Enervision Media

New York City

- First Insights
- MauroNewMedia
- Sachs Insights
- Solomon Solutions
- Whitney Interactive Design

Nevada

Henderson

- ThoughtWare Solutions

Ohio

Columbus

- Lextant

Pennsylvania

Philadelphia

- Design Science Consulting
- Electronic Ink

Pittsburgh

- MAYA Design
- Pink Frog Interactive

Texas

Austin

- Ergosoft Laboratories
- Expero
- Human Interfaces

Dallas

- Highland Technologies
- Usability Sciences

Virginia

Richmond

- The Merge Computer Group

Wisconsin

Madison

- Sway Design

Milwaukee

- Gomoll Research & Design

Washington, D.C.

- Aquilent
- Limina Application Office
- Redish & Associates
- User-Centered Design
- UserWorks

Washington

Seattle

- Blink Interactive
- Hanna Research and Design
- Usability Architects

Base: 56 usability vendors

Source: Forrester's Q4 survey of usability vendors

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Source: Forrester Research, Inc.

RECOMMENDATIONS

PARTNER WITH A USABILITY VENDOR

Companies that haven't established in-house usability groups or that seek the objectivity of a third party should engage a usability vendor for evaluation services. Before making initial contact with vendors, project managers should:

- **Pinpoint why you're doing testing.** Project teams should ask the following questions before embarking on any usability evaluation: What do we hope to learn from the test and what will we do with the results? How soon do we need the results? Who within the company will see them? Decisive answers to these questions will help potential vendors more accurately scope and price your project.
- **Establish your available budget.** The size and cost of usability testing projects vary widely, from small usability lab tests less than \$5,000 to massive engagements that can run to more than \$100,000.⁴ It's critical to let potential vendors know how much of your project budget can be allocated to usability efforts.
- **Determine your ongoing needs.** Usability experts agree: Usability testing is most effective when conducted early and often. Before connecting with a usability vendor, consider how you expect to involve them in your project on an ongoing basis. Then work with your vendor to translate those expectations into a usability road map that outlines its role and expected contributions throughout the project life cycle.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ We sent our survey to more than 90 usability vendors listed in the service provider directories of the Usability Professionals' Association and the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society. Of the 56 vendors that responded, we excluded nine that did not conduct at least three usability tests in the past 12 months or that have only one FTE.
- ² More information on usability methods can be found at the US government's usability Web site and at the European Union's Usability Net Web site (<http://www.usability.gov/methods/> and <http://www.usabilitynet.org/tools/methods.htm>).
- ³ User recruitment is the single biggest driver of usability lab testing costs. See the November 29, 2006, Trends "[Budgeting For Usability Lab Tests](#)."
- ⁴ Forrester recently surveyed 47 usability vendors that had conducted usability lab tests on digital and physical products over the past year. While a few vendors said that they provided testing services for less than \$5,000, realistic usability budgets should account for fees up to \$20,000 per engagement. See the November 29, 2006, Trends "[Budgeting For Usability Lab Tests](#)."

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