

UX Café Report

Conducted on February 18 & 25, 2020

Research Question: How do students deal with resources that require a password in Omni?

Methodology

Methodology used was task analysis, with two separate tasks. One task represents the way the current system works, while the second task represents a potential method of improving access to resources that require a password.

Both tasks were to try to find the latest article in a specific online journal.

Task 1: Swimming World Magazine (old method, with page of passwords in metadata section)

Task 2: Quintessence International (new method, with main link directing to passwords page)

The specific goals of this study were:

- to determine whether the new method of directing users to a passwords page was better than the old method (to the extent of being worth the effort of transitioning between the methods)
- to gauge if there were any potential breakdowns still occurring with the new method

Results

The task analysis had 16 participants: 8 during week 1, and 8 during week two. Of those participants, 6 were given task 1, and 10 were given task 2. Once we felt confident that task 2 was easier than task 1 for users, we focused on trying to gather more data on how to improve task 2.

Data gathered with this sample size is not statistically significant, and should not be used quantitatively. However, Nielsen and Landauer have demonstrated that 4 users is still enough to identify around 75% of issues in a system¹.

Finding 1: In both cases, nearly every user either failed to access the journal, or indicated that they would not have successfully found the journal if they hadn't realised from the prompt that there was a way to do so. However, users were usually able to progress further with the new method than with the old method, and were confident that changes to make the password process more obvious would help them succeed in the future.

Finding 2: Many users struggled to notice the "View Online" link, and ended up spending time trying to understand the Virtual Browse, which looked like a list of articles on first glance. This seemed to stem from users assuming there would be a way to access individual online articles directly from the journal search surrogate.

Finding 3: Users who were able to successfully reach the passwords page mentioned that they would have understood what the page was for more quickly if the title and table headers had been visible when the page loaded.

Additional feedback: Unrelated feedback provided by users includes:

One user expressed confusion with how to physically find books in the library based on what's provided in the catalogue. Another user expressed frustration that RACER cancels resources that are present at Western Libraries, and don't provide a clear process of what to do next to get a different copy of a book when Western's copy is missing. This user also mentioned that the request for purchase form was too long.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Since users are having a hard time with this, it may be worth exploring if there's any other solutions to allow students to access these resources without needing to enter a separate username and password. If there are no other available options, the new method was more successful than the old method.

Recommendation 2: Having journal issues or articles appear directly in the search surrogate would align the most strongly with the mental model we perceived in our users. In lieu of this: Since the virtual browse is causing confusion to students, we should look to either (a) hide or reduce the visual importance of the virtual browse, or (b) rename the virtual browse to something like, "Other related resources", to make it more clear that it isn't browsing within the displayed resource. More visual weight should also be given to the "View Online" link, to try to get more users to click it sooner. Additional testing can be done with these changes to confirm that they guide users in the right direction more quickly.

Recommendation 3: Ensure that users are able to see the title of the password page when they visit it, as well as table headers or section headers that indicate that they're looking at user names and passwords.

Some potential options that may accomplish this:

- Use a floating title and floating headers to ensure that this information is visible when users load onto the page with an anchor link.
- Highlight the specific database in the table, but load the page at the top rather than with an anchor link --- users will have to scroll to find the journal they're looking for, but may be more likely to successfully identify the purpose of the password page in the process.
- Replace the table with another display method that provides more information that's visible when the page loads --- either through displaying each database in a card format that describes each field, or by having an individual page for each database.

Additional testing can be done with any of these changes to confirm that they are helping users understand the purpose of the password page.

¹Nielsen, Jakob, and Landauer, Thomas K.: "A mathematical model of the finding of usability problems," *Proceedings of ACM INTERCHI'93 Conference* (Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 24-29 April 1993), pp. 206-213.