

Reality Check Service Example: e-learning problems

A non-profit focused on education for medial professionals wanted to know two things: Why were Continuing Education completion rates for several online programs so low, and should future programs use the same design? They hired us to figure it out.

The primary problem with the programs was obvious right away: Users were required to read a page on the monitor, click “next,” read the next page, click “next,” read the next page... Arg!

That design error would account for low completion rates all by itself. Adults don’t like read a lot of stuff on the monitor, they want to read a piece of paper. (In fact, studies show that most people retain only 60% of what they read off a monitor compared to the same content read off of paper.)

☞ Design tip: Any content that cannot be *scanned* and easily understood should be easily printed.

The secondary problem was that the web tool used to confirm somebody completed a program was buried at the very end. People had to wade through many read/click pages before they got there.

☞ Design tip: If you want to know who is using your programs, require a log-on process upfront.

Back to design issues... Our analysis uncovered something else: The client’s website *already* offered several programs that fit the model for effective online design. These programs:

- ☑ Clearly positioned who might benefit, and how to get Continuing Ed credit *if desired*.
- ☑ Used a log-on that was required yet made subsequent log-on very convenient.
- ☑ Used .pdf documents that could be easily printed or read on the monitor.
- ☑ Used “interactive” web functions for testing knowledge.
- ☑ Used visuals in the tests, making those parts more than a boring quiz.
- ☑ Had a search function, though it needed fixing.

Analysis completed, the client was still missing something. They needed a design guide they could use for creating future programs. We provided a guide using examples from their existing programs for each design element.

Their questions answered, we suggested the project stop here. However, the client wanted us to continue. (If you work with a non-profit, you may guess why.)

A bit of conversation later, we thought the best use of remaining budget would be gathering information from their specific target users. We created a survey using SurveyMonkey.com. The survey results validated our recommendations: Most people wanted programs for tips and reference, only a few wanted Continuing Education credit.

☞ Design tip: Humans like to use info in lots of different ways, especially when info is online.
Design for flexible usage.

The client now knew why completion rates were low and how to fix it. They knew how future programs should look and operate. And they knew what their target audience wanted.

What the client said:

“This gives us the clear direction and validation we needed to move forward.”
(D. Berger, Director)