

Usability testing

“Eye tracking provides better data than just asking participants why they behave in a certain way, since what they say does not always match their actual reactions and thoughts. Eye tracking lets you monitor what they see or don’t see.”

Andreas Mattsson, VP Engineering at Spotify

Spotify’s business concept and long-term survival relies on its ability to recruit and keep massive numbers of users. In a usability study conducted to secure efficient support for new member registration on Spotify’s website, eye tracking uncovered several barriers within the subscription and payment processes. Eye tracking also showed that many users had difficulties getting started with the application and pointed out easy-to-rectify reasons. The study used a Tobii T60 Eye Tracker and Tobii Studio to collect and analyze gaze data.

Key questions asked

The purpose of the study was to evaluate usability of the homepage and the Spotify application. The key questions Spotify wanted answered were:

- Is the design of the homepage clear enough to guide users in the process of subscribing to the Spotify Premium service?
- Define usability problems linked to the subscription and payment process on the Spotify site.
- Describe users’ perception of using the application for the first time.

The study

Spotify provides an innovative music service where users can download an application that allows them to legally access a large music library online and listen to the music on their local computer. The service can either be used as a free service, which means that short commercial messages are played at a regular interval between songs, or as a subscription where users can listen to music without commercial interruptions.

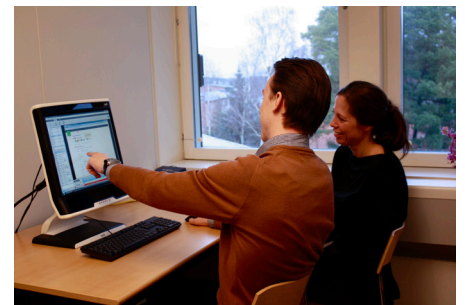
One part of the study focused on the subscription and payment processes. To get users to register for the subscription service, the link to the registration process must be easy to find on the homepage. In addition, both the registration and the payment process must be as quick and simple as possible to avoid drop outs. The second part evaluated usability of the actual application.

24 participants with no prior experience of Spotify were recruited for the study to reflect the perspective of a first time user.

Presenting the website and application to each participant, they were assigned several tasks, i.e. register for a monthly membership

and download the program, log in to the application, and play a song. A Tobii T60 Eye Tracker was used for stimuli display.

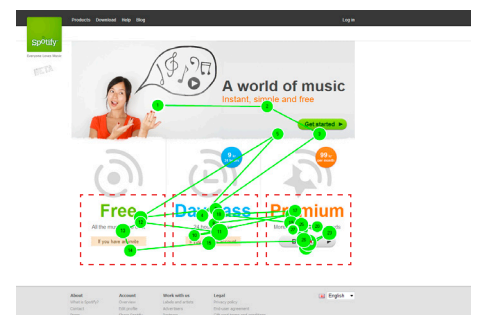
After task completion, each participant was interviewed. Using a Retrospective Think Aloud (RTA) protocol, participants were asked to verbalize their thought processes assisted by images and a playback of the test session in which gaze data were overlaid the homepage and the application.



One of the participants together with the moderator in front of the Tobii T60 Eye Tracker.

The results

Although most participants managed to find the correct link on the homepage to sign up for a premium subscription, eye tracking data showed that they did consider several other options before making their choice.

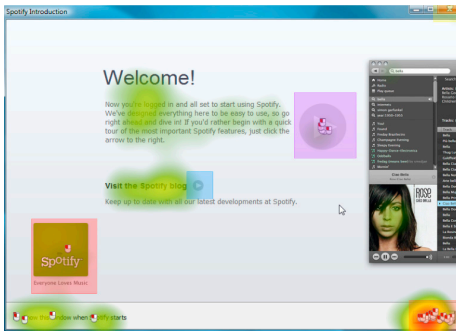


One participant trying to find the correct link on the homepage to start the registration process.

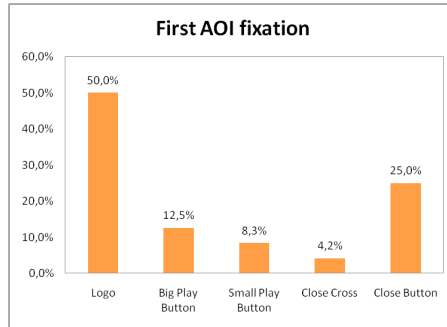
This indicates that links and terminology used on the page were unclear and confused the test participants. Moreover, the different payment options for the subscription were obscure according to the participants' feedback during the post-task RTA session and the eye tracking data collected while participants were executing the process.

Participants were generally satisfied with the ease of use of the program. However, when the participants started the application the first time, they were greeted by a 'Welcome' page behind which the actual program was hidden.

One third of the participants were unable to locate the correct buttons to proceed from the welcome page to the Spotify application. Eye tracking data showed that these participants focused mainly on the largest calls to action on the page, namely the Spotify logo and a big image resembling a play button, which do not lead to the program.



Heatmap of the welcome page with areas of interest (AOIs).



Areas of interest first fixated on by the participants.

"The study gave us rectifiable insights in a very short time," says Andreas Mattsson, VP Engineering at Spotify.

"The most important and surprising insight gained from the study was that the 'Welcome' screen presented to the users was useless. It was even worse than useless as it prevented users from actually using the program. We thought it would help them understand how to use the software, but instead it proved to be the complete opposite."

Spotify is currently in the process of implementing changes in line with the findings from the eye tracking study.

Why eye tracking?

After the study was completed, Andreas Mattsson made the following comments:

"It was very interesting to see where people actually looked. Eye tracking provides better data than just asking participants why they behave in a certain way, since what they say does not always match their actual reactions and thoughts. Eye tracking lets you monitor what they see or don't see."

We find eye tracking particularly useful for testing process efficiency, e.g. how easy it is for a user to sign up for a subscription, or complete a payment process.

While we haven't made any interface changes yet, the study provided us with ideas on what can and needs to be done. It also confirmed some usability issues we were already aware of."

About Spotify

Spotify was founded in 2006 and has since launched a music service that offers users unlimited access to an online music catalogue. The service is provided as a subscription or a free version funded by commercial messages in between songs. Spotify is currently available in Sweden, Finland, Norway, UK, France and Spain and has more than 1 million users in these countries.

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