Card Sorting

Card sorting is a technique that assists in determining a website’s information architecture by asking the users to categorize content in a way that makes sense to them. The content is represented by cards that users can physically move and organize. It is an easy, inexpensive, and hands-on way to get users’ input on content, layout, and terminology and their preferences on what kind of information should feature more prominently on the website.

# Preparation

Card sorting is best done in groups of 1-3 for a total of 15 participants. The length of the session depends on how large of a sort you’re running, but 1 hour should be enough for most sorts.

Like any usability test, it is recommended that you do a run-through first to discover any issues with the test.

There are two kinds of card sorting. An open card sort (which is what we’re doing today) has no pre-established groupings, while a closed card sort does.

## Materials

* Index cards, with each card representing a link (or topic) on your page. You can label the cards by hand or by printing out sticker labels to adhere to the cards. Keep the labels short.
* Stack of blank index cards for sorters to add cards representing content they think are missing or should appear in multiple places.
* Blank index card in a different color for Group Headings cards.
* Rubber bands and clips to hold the cards together after the sort.
* Pens

Give each session gets a new set of cards.

# General Directions For the Sorter

* (If the sorter has seen the site before…) Forget what you know about our current site!
* Put cards in to groups, based on how you would expect to find them on a website
* Split groups in to sub-groups if necessary
* Write names for the groups and sub-groups on colored cards
* Put to one side content that you would want a link to it on the home page
* Add any cards you think are missing
* Rename any cards that are unclear
* Cards can be in more than one group (make duplicates using the blank index cards)
* Set aside any cards that do not fit in to your groups
* Talk things through!

# During the Sort

Help facilitate the test and answer the sorters’ questions. Be sure to also note any observations you’ve made of their interactions with the cards and any comments made.

# Clean up

Take a picture of the resulting sort, so you don’t lose the information. You can also write down the resulting sort. If there is no camera on hand and if you don’t have time to write down the resulting sort, be sure to neatly bundle up the cards in the order put together by the sorter.

# Evaluating the Card Sort

You can use the qualitative method of looking for patterns and commonalities among all the sorts. Also take into account of your observations of user behavior during the sort and the sorters’ comments.

There are card sort spreadsheet templates out there that you can download to quantitatively analyze your results. Linked below is one from Maadmob.com. Maadmob.com also includes a template for your cards’ labels. <http://maadmob.com.au/resources/card_sort_analysis_spreadsheet>

# Additional useful Links

* Usability.gov - Card Sorting: <http://www.usability.gov/how-to-and-tools/methods/card-sorting.html>
* BoxesandArrows.com - Card Sorting: a Definitive Guide: <http://boxesandarrows.com/card-sorting-a-definitive-guide/>
* Card sorting demonstration on Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TNvdgXCqEvM>
* A Comparison of Card Sorting Analysis Methods: <http://openarchive.cbs.dk/bitstream/handle/10398/8587/Ather_Nawaz_2012.pdf?sequence=1>