

# Focus Groups Vs Usability Testing:

---

- Chris Gieger: Director, UI Design Practice – Computer Horizons Corp

It is very important that all parties involved in a redesign effort are on the same page in regards to the goals and expectations of a Focus Group Vs Usability Testing. Below is a set of questions and comments that will help facilitate the expectations of all parties involved. The end goal is to ensure each party's definition and expectation for performing these tasks are the same.

## First, determining which to use:

1. What knowledge do we expect to gain?
  - a. User's aesthetic preferences, functionality needs, expectations = Focus Group
  - b. How users: perform tasks, interact with functionality and interpret label names = Usability Tests
2. What will you expect to have the test subjects look at or use?
  - a. Mockups, competitor sites, color schemes, graphics = Focus Group
  - b. Mockups, wireframes, paper prototypes, on-screen prototypes = Usability Tests

## Focus Group Goals and Expectations:

1. Use the focus groups to reveal user needs and what they "want" from the site/application.
2. Expect the focus groups subjects to concentrate what they like, dislike and why.
3. Keep focus group studies separate from Usability Tests.
4. Realize that focus groups can only assess the way user "says" they perform certain tasks and not the way they actually "perform" them. Knowing this, avoid asking questions in a focus group that involve performing a task or whether the user "prefers" one navigation system versus another. People either love things, hate things or feel indifferently about them...and none of these have anything to do with whether something is usable or not.

For example: A question might be posed to a test subject asking "Do you 'like' dropdown menus?". The answer to this question would not provide any beneficial data. The answer you really want to know is whether "These dropdown menus, with these items, and this wording in the context of this page create are clearly understood and easy to use for most people who are likely to use this site". The only way to determine this is by observing how a user uses the dropdowns.
5. Expect focus group test subjects to compare your site to other competitor sites.
6. Run more than one focus group because the outcome of any single session may not be representative and discussions can get sidetracked.