

Usability in Hong Kong - Is There a Difference?

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Are there differences in the way Hong Kong (HK) users work and interact with web sites? This article is a preliminary insight into some of the observations we have made during usability activities in HK. People are task focused and the thrill of the Internet is soon disappearing. People want a quick answer and this is especially true in HK where everything is **fast paced** and within **instant reach** including supermarkets, transport, entertainment and now with information & Internet services directly pumped into the home via I-cable (www.i-cable.com) and telecom broadband (www.netvigator.com)

Some observations based on evaluations and research to date indicates the following: -
(These are not conclusive, but offer an insight into Asian users online experience)

- **More patience** to put up with **badly designed systems** - users appear to be more willing to accept poorly designed interfaces. Perhaps this is related to the lack of maturity in web design on some HK sites. Many businesses think that - "if it looks cool, it has to be useful" This is seen through the overuse of flash and flash introductions, lack of white space use, overuse of advertising graphics, blinking text and non-standard link colors.
- **Fast is better!** Faster access to important functions, download time and less steps to get to the target.
- **Ordering online is not a high priority.** This is mainly because of the ease of reach of products and services in HK and confirmed in a recent usability walkthrough of some "product and service" pages where online ordering was rated very low.
- **Less likely to criticize the system openly.** Users feel it may not be polite or appropriate. This makes it difficult when reviewing systems.
- **Asian Men are time, task and success focused.** Men want to complete a task independent of the amount of time allocated in a usability session. Asian men consider it a failure if they are not able to complete the task. Men will also often want to know the answer or success point of a task as they do not want to be seen as failing. They try and drill down to the information they need with speed and consider this the highest priority and are not open to saying if they "don't know" something.
- **Asian Women** are more willing to abandon a task if they cannot find the information they want. They are not as concerned if they fail to complete a task.
- **Age.** Consideration is always given to asking age questions. This is especially true of Asian women who can be sensitive to this.
- **Evaluation timings.** We usually schedule at least an extra 30 minutes between each test, as users like to come "fashionably" late in HK.
- **Reporting of results.** The customer expects results to be reported much faster including recommendations for fixes.
- **Test, test and more testing.** To date there is more focus on the testing part of the usability lifecycle as design is seen as the responsibility of the "Design House" and analysis of the resident company "Business Analyst" However, useful data can be gained from both and designers are often interested to learn about usability techniques.
General observations for both Asian users include:
 - **Time is valuable.** This is closely related to the business speed in HK and people asking for a real value for their time. Giving a gift at the end of an evaluation session is especially appreciated in Asia.
 - **Buying online.** HK users are reluctant to buy or transact online due to lack of trust. HK users prefer to physically shop and browse products.

- Reluctant to speak or comment while browsing. The test facilitator must work and focus extra hard on trying to get valuable comments from the target users (this also involves good questioning and generous amounts of patience and goodwill)
- Users will **rely heavily on a site search** if the site categories do not provide an obvious trail to the information
- Users **don't like to read copious amounts** of information online
- Users **do not like to scroll** and prefer to have important information presented in the first viewable area of the browser window.