



COLLABORATION

Phoenix Software

The Phoenix Software Development Team makes creative use of Adobe Captivate for the testing of our new Software Buyers' Guide

The Phoenix Software Buyers' Guide offers our customers a definitive online resource for software purchases. Its product range now exceeds 120,000 items and brings together detailed product specifications from dozens of software vendors, with customer-specific pricing and licensing agreements applied.

Developed in-house by the Phoenix Software Development Team, Software Buyers' Guide is built on Microsoft .NET. The challenge faced by the developers was to combine the complexities of software licensing procurement with an attractive and intuitive user interface. This was of paramount importance as users need to feel confident enough to be able to make software purchases online, without the usual assistance of their Phoenix Account Manager. The usability of Software Buyers' Guide would be vital to its adoption by customers and ultimately its success.

ADOBE CAPTIVATE 2

With Adobe Captivate 2 anyone can quickly create software demonstrations and simulations without programming knowledge or multimedia skills. Adobe Captivate is able to automatically record all on-screen actions made by a user, including mouse movements and keyboard activity. This recording can then be annotated with text captions that describe actions or other instructions for the intended audience. An audio soundtrack, such as a narration, can also be added.



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Once a recording is created, the timing of actions, captions and audio can be modified using a simple visual timeline. The final result can then be exported as a single Flash movie file which can be distributed as a standalone application or via a Web site. Adobe Captivate is an ideal solution for recording any software application to create a demonstration or interactive training tool.

SOFTWARE USABILITY TESTING

When considering methods of software usability testing, Adobe Captivate enabled the Phoenix Development Team to adopt a unique approach to testing Software Buyers' Guide.

This approach involved a slightly unconventional use of Adobe Captivate. Rather than creating a predefined software demonstration for users, Adobe Captivate was used to record the onscreen actions of test users as they attempted to complete example scenarios. A number of scenarios were designed to make users perform key tasks within Software Buyers' Guide, such as navigating the site, searching for products, adding products to a shopping basket and placing an order. The cursor movements, mouse clicks and keystrokes of test users were recorded in real time in order to see exactly how they attempted to

complete each scenario. In addition, users were encouraged to 'think out loud' while performing tasks and their commentary was recorded using a microphone.

Adobe Captivate allowed the development team to watch a playback of users' actions and gain an understanding of how they were attempting to interact with the site. In most cases, recordings showed that assumptions made by the developers were not necessarily shared by end users! In particular, user interface commands which were obvious to the developers were not always apparent to the end user.

Adobe Captivate captured exactly how users performed tasks and recorded unexpected actions or errors that were not anticipated by the developers. The use of Adobe Captivate provided valuable insight into the behaviour of end users which would have been more difficult to gain using conventional usability testing methods.

THE BENEFITS

As a direct result of using Adobe Captivate for usability testing, a number of improvements have been made to the user interface design of Software Buyers' Guide. For example, recordings showed that users were unsure how to navigate to specific products and had problems using the



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PHOENIX DEVELOPMENT TEAM



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search facility. The developers were able to make refinements to resolve these issues.

Also, some users were confused by elements of the user interface design, such as the positioning of buttons and options, or felt the interface was too crowded. Again, the developers were able to simplify the interface in places and make improvements. Most crucially the recording of each user's audio commentary showed that terminology chosen by the developers for screen labels did not match expectations for an eCommerce Web site. For example, technical terms used by the developers such as 'Add to Quote' and 'Place Order' were changed to 'Add to Basket' and 'Checkout', as these terms are more familiar to users when shopping online.

A key member of the development team said:

"Without Adobe Captivate the software testing phase would have been more time consuming and perhaps less accurate; this allows us to see exactly what users are trying to do and where we can improve the design of our software."

A complex software licensing resource such as Software Buyers' Guide requires a clear, intuitive user interface. The level of user participation in the testing process was greatly enhanced by the use of Adobe Captivate to record actual on-screen actions. The adoption of Adobe Captivate for software usability testing has enabled significant improvements to the user interface based directly on user feedback. In fact, usability testing is ongoing and changes made as a result of using Adobe Captivate will be incorporated into a new version planned for Spring 2007. The use of Adobe Captivate has positively contributed to the uptake of Software Buyers' Guide with our customers.

MOVING FORWARD

Phoenix Software has future plans to use Adobe Captivate for more conventional purposes. The plan is to produce demonstrations of software products from key vendors, such as Microsoft, Symantec and VMware, in order to assist our Pre-sales Technical Consultants provide demonstrations at customer sites.

For comprehensive online licensing and procurement

Software Buyers' Guide
<https://www.phoenixs.co.uk/obg>

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