

# User Testing: In-Person vs. Using [usertesting.com](https://www.usertesting.com)

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**Legal  
Services  
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## Background

User testing is a technique to assess a product’s usability by gathering direct input on how real users experience them. The Legal Services Society (LSS) values quality assurance and strives for this by way of usability testing whether for a print, online, or in person offering. In late 2016, we heard about how a PLEI service provider<sup>1</sup> was very pleased with an app called [usertesting.com](http://usertesting.com), an unmoderated online platform with which they user tested the revamp of their corporate site. In their words, “... *at a cost that was dramatically less than in-person testing, taking much less time, and producing results that were just as helpful as in-person testing*”. That along with the [usertesting.com](http://usertesting.com) promo tagline — “*real feedback, real people and real fast*” — prompted us to action. We wanted to compare online to in-person user testing, and to understand the benefits and limitations of online testing.

In March 2017, LSS requested that BluePrint Consulting Ltd. (the Consultant), the same contractor who was working on the MyLawBC in-person user testing, expand the scope of their work with LSS to include remote and unmoderated user testing through [usertesting.com](http://usertesting.com). Our team was able to evaluate the strengths and limitations of [usertesting.com](http://usertesting.com) while looking at it through the lens of our findings and experiences resulting from the in-person testing of MyLawBC.

## Activities completed

- In teams of 5, the Consultant guided us through the process of using [usertesting.com](http://usertesting.com). We were able to experience designing, conducting testing, and evaluating an unmoderated test in a series of 3 workshops<sup>2</sup>.
- Together, we identified early findings and obvious observations suitable for more in-depth small tests through the site. We ran 3 tests with 5 users each for a total of 15 testers.
- This add-on experience to the in-person user testing of MyLawBC took place from March 20 to April 4, 2017. **Appendix A** showcases a sample report which defines the test goal, results and key learnings.
- The Consultant also created some high-level reference materials, such as a guide to qualitative analysis of usability test results and a sample report template. We have organized the materials in a document called *Usertesting.com Workshop Package* (the Package). In the event that our funders and/or PLEI service providers are interested in obtaining a copy of the Package for reference, please contact Candice Lee, Project Manager, MyLawBC.

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<sup>1</sup> Drew Jackson of People's Law School shared his experience of using [usertesting.com](http://usertesting.com) c/o Agentic, their contractor working on their site revamp user testing.

<sup>2</sup> Three workshops: (1) Introduction to platform, (2) Running tests on [usertesting.com](http://usertesting.com), and (3) Insights and qualitative analysis



## What did we think of usertesting.com for digital projects?

- The corporate account set up process was straightforward. The online customer team was helpful and the support service prompt.
- The application interface was very quick and easy to use.
- The 24/7 availability and extensive pool of users was appealing, especially when we had just spent close to 50 man-hours recruiting and screening 23 users to participate in the MyLawBC in-person tests.
- In recruiting users, we could specify that we want Canadians, and were able filter by gender, age, limited income levels, technical expertise, device and operating system. Due to the limits within their prescribed filters, usertesting.com may not be suitable for LSS as a primary tool. The users we need to capture are quite specific, and with the basic application's available filters we were only able to capture some of our target groups..
- The basic version of usertesting.com does not provide much control on the user income range. Income options are either under \$40,000 or under \$100,000. If we have a pre-set income level, say under \$60,000, an upgrade on the platform from basic/standard to commercial/enterprise is required at a minimum fee of \$7,500 USD. With in-person testing, however, we can essentially create any user profile we wish without the associated price tag.
- Tests are generally 10-15 minutes long with no moderation, which limits the complexity and types of questions we can ask.
- Five users completed their tests overnight. We were impressed with the turnaround time of 24 hours.
- Users' voices were recorded, providing honest "off-the-cuff" feedback as opposed to relying on their typed feedback.
- There was a built-in transcription tool that took the testers' audio and transcribed it with a click of a button which we could cut and paste, making it convenient to include in test results and reports.
- The tester fee is \$50 USD per person, which was reasonable considering the small amount of prep required to set up the virtual test. We did not need to undertake the cost of locating testers ourselves or find space to accommodate them.

In theory, usertesting.com measures usability by 3 components:

- Effectiveness — the accuracy and completeness with which users can achieve specified goals,
- Efficiency — the resources expended in relation to the accuracy and completeness of goals achieved, and
- Satisfaction — the comfort and acceptability of the work system to its users and other people affected by its use.



The LSS team consensus was that [usertesting.com](https://www.usertesting.com) is best viewed as a supplementary tool after in-person user testing of a digital product such as MyLawBC. [Usertesting.com](https://www.usertesting.com) would be particularly valuable in cases where we have already received user feedback that a specific feature needs improvement (or when we had proof of concepts ready for solutions), as we can have users assess the effectiveness of our proposed solution before it goes live.

### Can [usertesting.com](https://www.usertesting.com) assist with user testing of print products and video projects

- There is a 10-15 minute time limit to the tests. [Usertesting.com](https://www.usertesting.com) can be used effectively to answer 1-2 very specific questions on a product vs. an in-depth study to gather insights or to reveal underlying assumptions through face-to-face user testing.
- [Usertesting.com](https://www.usertesting.com) can be used to generate initial timely feedback of a print creation, whether it is a new or re-design book cover, the organization of a flow chart, or the visual impact of an infographic, as opposed to broad impressions and suggestions for the improvement of a publication obtained through in-person testing with the target audience.
- [Usertesting.com](https://www.usertesting.com) can help to validate buy-in for a multi-stage projects. For example, when producing a 12-page comic book, we could ask testers early in the creative process about how they perceive the storyboard, or how the illustration style matched with the plot before the product reached the point in the development cycle where changes could no longer be made.
- Similarly, [usertesting.com](https://www.usertesting.com) can be employed as a means to invite feedback and observe visual reaction to preliminary footage of an animatic or short clip, prior to shooting successive sections of a storyboard or adding the soundtrack to the final deliverable.

It is worth noting that [usertesting.com](https://www.usertesting.com) is not the only platform out there for conducting remote testing. **Loop11** is a user testing tool that enables you to identify navigational and usability issues of any website. We heard that people are quite happy with it. The LSS team continues to explore these tools, as well as other new and emerging remote testing tools/apps which may better fit our service model.



## Pros and Cons of in-person testing vs. remote testing service

### *In-person testing*

PROS	CONS
Can get more comprehensive and actionable feedback	More effort and resource-dependent (from planning to execution)
Proven means of testing, with supportive resources for reference	Often requires more setup time
Can recruit pretty much anywhere (relevant lists in a database, legal aid clinics, conferences, etc.)	Scheduling issues (no shows, having problems getting people, etc.)
Easy to follow up with individual participants for a testimonial or progressive study	Can cost more (in terms of staff time, prep, honorarium for participants, etc.)
Can accommodate an elaborate user selection	Takes you away from other tasks

### *Remote testing service*

PROS	CONS
Can get fast results (good for preference test)	Has limitations to gather in-depth feedback
Logistics are handled for you, requires no setup	Quality control of responses can vary
Cost is known up front	Difficult to justify costs for a commercial enterprise version to pre-screen users if you don't test regularly
Can get this process started at any time	Insufficient time to implement meaningful user surveys given the time limit per test
Lower time commitment	Transcription feature generated inaccurate transcripts from participants with strong accents



## Uses and value of usertesting.com

- Testing hypothetical propositions or prototypes
- Quick validation on new ideas or new designs
- Assessing small usability issues, adjustments or enhancement
- Troubleshooting bugs or affirming fixes
- Optimizing an existing experience or layout
- Testing more participants in a limited timeframe
- Observing how users interact with an online product down to every movement the user makes
- Using session playback to deepen understanding of actions users make and problems they encounter

## Conclusion

In general, the LSS team appreciated the whole experience and found it rewarding in terms of learning how to apply usertesting.com to our work, in fewer than 6 hours over 3 hands-on interactive workshops.

LSS team feedback about the app was positive, despite the app's limitations. The fact that it is easy to use and generates feedback quickly may prove useful in testing small portions of new web content, or online and print creative elements that would otherwise remain untested (or be tested only in the whole of a larger project). Usertesting.com is no substitute for in-person testing, despite the fact that in-person user testing is more effort and resource-dependent. In-person testing forges direct interactivity with real users, supplemented by a pool of sensory properties and statistical data, which together create an in-depth analysis of the user experience, a feat which a 15 minute online test cannot replicate. Though the possibilities for future online user testing innovations are exciting, at this point in time the scope of apps like usertesting.com are simply unable to compete with in-person testing when it comes to large projects with a broad scope.



## Appendix A: Sample Report

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### Executive summary

Test Link: [Mylawbc.com/paths/wills](https://mylawbc.com/paths/wills)

Link to raw notes: <https://www.usertesting.com/dashboard/folders/default/studies/UrivrGnCYDII#!/>

### Test Goal

In the Make a Will pathway, we wanted to see if people would click the [Check Your Situation](#) link on the landing page before starting the pathway. In past user testing, users have proceeded through the pathway before realizing that they needed to check their situation. In some cases, this meant that they wasted time when the pathway couldn't help them.

### Key findings

Based on the test results, here are the key findings:

- Four out of five participants did not notice the link. This means they started the pathway without determining eligibility.
- The design doesn't support the prioritization of information causing users to not focus on the elements we want them to.
- Content doesn't facilitate scanning in the body text which would allow users to quickly see the important information.
- Users were confused by the term "Plan for your future" which means they focused energy on figuring that out rather than the main task.

### Test Protocol

Task number	Task summary
1	Click the Check your situation link in the body copy of the landing page.



After the task analysis, we conducted a post-test debrief.

- Participants were asked about any interesting or unclear behaviours they had observed during the test.
- They were also asked how likely would they be to use the Wills pathway based on their initial impression.

## Results

Below is a list of our findings listed in the order of score, usability finding, supporting evidence, and recommendations.

<b>Scenario</b>	Imagine you're married and you and your spouse want to make a will. In the will, you want to leave some money to a charity. You've searched Google and ended up on this page.
<b>Score</b>	Fail
<b>Usability finding</b>	Users had problems with the design and content, which caused them to be confused with the task. Content did not facilitate scanning so users could not quickly determine the important information. The visual hierarchy made the users focus on areas of the page that weren't the main task.
<b>Supporting evidence</b>	(Quotes or video clips)
<b>Recommendation/ comments</b>	Can attach sketches, quick mock-ups, etc.