

Eurekster take a big leap forward with LeftClick Labs

Achieved enhanced product clarity and improved development efficiencies



MEDIA / WEB

Eurekster is a leading search technology and service provider that empowers communities to own and refine site-based web search through its Swicki product. The patented Swicki technology enhances the web search experience by combining host and consumer customization with user collaboration. Through Swicki, publishers can now harness their brand and audience to become vertical search destinations. These vertical, site-specific searches retain and attract like-minded community members. Eurekster has won numerous awards in the Web2.0 arena and is listed as one of CNN's NextNet 25 companies.

BUSINESS CHALLENGES

- Key questions unanswered
- Product direction issue
- Lacked end-user centricity

BUSINESS CHALLENGES

A year ago, Eurekster took a major step forward with their first foray into product development and built a self-serve interface around their core technology.

Previously, Eurekster had been applying their technology through custom implementation as though they were consultants and the development cycle was anywhere from 3–6 months.

This presented a business problem, and they recognised this needed to change.

Overcoming this, the new self-serve product, a web based application provides and improves search for end users and allows any interested person who has a certain level of technical expertise to build a search engine of their own.

From its inception a year ago, the product called Swicki, now has over 33,000 search engines in existence and receives around 15 million searches from customers every day. "It's very successful" says Tac Leung, Vice

SOLUTION

- Customer research and end-user testing
- Detailed qualitative study involving Eurekster development team

President of Design at Eurekster.

The Swicki is a completely new revolutionary concept outside the existing paradigm; however, with this comes a multitude of challenges for the development team.

The developers were experiencing difficulty getting into the mind sets of the end user and lacked a real understanding of how end users would interact with their product.

The product required more investment in the end user experience: broadly, in users' motivations and barriers to engagement. Understanding these issues would plot the future direction for the product.

The main challenge was to immediately convey to users that by investing their time there was something good in it for them. This had to be achieved in manner that didn't require written explanations all over the page to make it clear to the user what's going on.

End users aren't typically looking to contribute to community: they are just searching or looking for something they

RESULTS

- Key questions answered
- Clarity of product direction
- Improved attitude towards end user
- Enhanced unity across disciplines

need. The interface had to make sense to someone who wasn't going to invest time.

Says Tac: "People just won't take the time, in a simple way users are lazy and they will only do what they need to do to get what they are looking for".

SOLUTION

Faced with these challenges, Tac decided to call in a referee and brought in the end user through Leftclick Labs.

Tac wanted the development team to observe first-hand the decision process that users make constantly when interacting with elements on the product interface.

One of the invaluable and slightly unexpected findings for Eurekster that came from the user testing was that the result wasn't one big 'aha' moment but a series of subtle but important things.

Without testing these subtleties are difficult to identify and express, but are helpful when trying to convince a developer with a list of

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Tac Leung, Vice President (Design), Eureka Inc

25 bugs to fix, which might take a week and involve major core engine issues, but really need to be done.

The testing amplified that the interface provides multiple points of contact for the user: everything on the page is doing something whether you intend it to or not.

The main value of the solution came in a well-written report which highlighted what was working, what was ambiguous and what wasn't working.

The report gave a clean list to wrap into the development cycle. It also provided a sense of the urgency around the magnitude of the issues and the priority with which they needed to be addressed.

Eureka valued the ability to allow a developer to sit and watch users interact and then to compare their observations with expert input about how people typically behave.

"This aspect puts an extra layer on top that gave context and really helped" says Tac.

Each developer now has a personal sense of intrinsic motivation to fix something, as they had personally witnessed several users baffled by the same issue.

The development team now have an historical memory of witnessing how much of an issue something really was. This first hand experience assists them in all the decisions that they have to make during

development and gives each developer a personal investment in the experience.

RESULTS

Today Eureka are still pushing out some of changes to the features tested. Some of the decisions that came out of the testing had really big repercussions.

Several of the issues raised from the end user experience seemed quite simple but in terms of the system some of changes were quite large. It's taking some time to update the design and change the architecture.

Eureka are rebuilding how searches are handled in particular their tracking cues. However, the usability testing eliminated the question of whether or not the changes needed to be done.

There's a consensus and group understanding of what needed to be done: "it was very clear, there was no need to cite evidence, or anecdotes, or anything, that consistency and that unity was a direct result of the usability tests and the report," says Tac.

The organisation now sees increased unity of the entire team in both the US and New Zealand and across disciplines, in both design and development.

The team are now pushing much more, and are cemented around really simplifying and making the product make sense for the user. They're no longer saying 'the user will figure it out'.

"There is a user-centricity to how our developers are acting now that they didn't have before. The more exposure developers in New Zealand can get to the kind of service that LeftClick Labs provide, the better the level of web and software programming, also the quality of the programmer, their skill level and their attitude for user centricity will all increase the value of that programmer for the rest of their life," says Tac.

Previously Eureka's 'dual developers' attitude leaned toward "it's easier for me to do it this way, it's harder for the user, but easier for me". Tac said that none of the team thinks like that anymore. Now they are saying "This is going to be really painful for us to do, but hey lets go do it" they don't complain anymore.

Tac's life is now much easier, previously a whole part of his life was a constant political challenge. "We no longer have discussions: my team now say, 'of course it's really hard to do, but it's the right thing to do'. That's really rewarding".

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For more information, visit

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