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The ONS website – User research and developing personas

Topic

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Introduction

ONS was developing a new website and wanted to understand the users and the differences between different user groups in order to deliver a website that was fit for purpose. User personas were developed and used to assist with the development of the new website, these gave us insight into particular groups of users, their end goals and needs.

Methods / Problem statement

We conducted a wide-scale on-line survey published via our website, email system and social media channels to understand how users utilise our statistics. Assumptions were generated based on initial survey findings. We then conducted more in-depth user testing and user research in the form of telephone interviews to confirm the assumptions. The follow-up telephone interviews allowed us to gain more individual and specific insight into each user's requirements. We looked at current use of our website, but also asked about the ideal scenario.

Results / Proposed solution

As a result, we developed 3 personas – enquiring citizen, Information forager and expert analyst. These personas allowed us to get a better understanding of how these different groups interact with our website and use our data, which in turn allowed us to develop our website, and web products with persona behaviours in mind. We learnt that not all users are the same, and one-product does not necessarily fit all, but this has enabled us to tailor specific products and our associated websites to the needs of the most likely user types.

Further work to investigate and refresh these personas has recently been initiated, reviewing the previous findings to confirm if they're still accurate. This could result in making changes to existing personas or increasing the number of personas. Again, this will all be based on the findings from user research investigations, albeit the methodology in creating these refreshed personas has been changed.

Conclusions

A similar approach can be applied to the DIGICOM social network. This can provide a better understanding of users, giving the ability to develop products that users want/need. It will allow work to be prioritised based on the type of user it is aimed at, yet ensuring that the needs of all users can be taken into account and considered when building a new service.