

Online marketing

“MarketWatch uses a research method combining eye tracking with traditional interviews for a holistic view of user behavior. Eye tracking adds spontaneous reactions and search patterns to traditional data such as mouse clicks and rational answers. It provides deep insights into why a user behaves as he or she does and contributes with better guidance for how to improve a design.” Peter Mackhé, Senior Research Consultant, MarketWatch

In several website surveys, MarketWatch had noticed that the way users navigated and responded to front pages varied substantially depending on the design and placement of banners and special offers, promoting companies' own products. To acquire deeper knowledge about the banner format's effects on user behavior and responses MarketWatch set up a comparative study of four different Telecom operator websites. A Tobii T60 Eye Tracker was used to define participants' visual attention and interest.

Key questions asked

The purpose of the study was to show if, and how, navigation is affected at front pages by large or moving banners, promoting companies' own products, and to learn more about banners' impact on user experiences. MarketWatch set out to answer the following two questions:

- How does design and placement of banners affect user behavior and website efficiency?
- How does design and placement of banners affect users' total experiences of a website?

The study

Representing a relatively generic industry with a limited number of key players, four different Swedish telecom operators' websites were chosen as study objects: Telia, Telenor, Tele2 and 3 (Hi3G).

At the time the study was conducted, all four operators were promoting mobile broadband services through special offers on the front pages of their websites. The ways the offers were visually communicated varied greatly between the different websites in terms of design and placement on the front pages.

The study involved 28 test participants, of which at least six were customers to each telecom operator (9 Tele2 customers, 7 Telenor customers, 6 Telia customers and 6 Hi3G customers).

In a first task-oriented part of the study, participants were instructed to locate “Mobile broadband services” and “Customer service” on the four different websites. Participants were asked to start at “their” operator site and continue to the other sites according to a top-of-mind procedure. A Tobii T60 Eye Tracker was



One of the participants in front of a Tobii T60 Eye Tracker.

used for displaying the different websites and tracking the gaze of participants as they searched for the defined targets.

A qualitative interview part then followed, in which participants were asked about their overall impressions and experiences of each website; what they thought was good and what was bad. Participants were also asked which one of the four sites they would rank as the best and the worst, and if any of the sites had made them interested in switching telecom operator.

The results

The results of the study indicated that the banner format had a negative impact on both navigation (function) and overall user experiences.

Eye tracking data gave clear support for a phenomenon sometimes called “banner blindness”. Most of the participants seemed to “avoid” banners with their gaze and did not see mobile broadband offers designed like this although they were right in front of their eyes (at the middle of the page on all front pages). The larger and more obvious the design of a traditional banner, the less the participants saw it and the less it helped them to navigate. Moving banners were less seen than non moving ones.

Analysis of individual gaze paths showed a search pattern in which participants maneuvered around the banners with their gaze, much like a pedestrian goes out of their way when they see a street peddler. A pure graphic design without images or moving elements, or a traditional text button or link, dramatically decreased the time it took to find the target.

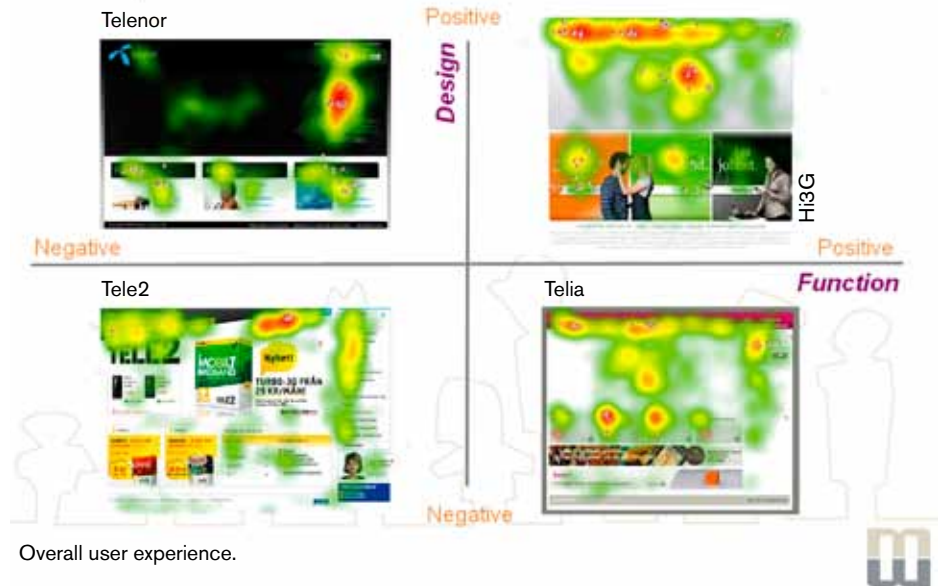


Gaze plot of the Tele2 front page, showing the gaze path of one participant.

The design and placement of the offers not only definitely influenced navigation but also the overall user experience. In the qualitative interviews, participants regarded Hi3G's site as the best by far. This site did not contain any moving banners and services were placed in an expected and favorable way that made the experience very positive. "It doesn't look like they are trying to sell me stuff, everything is nicely arranged", one respondent said.

Eye tracking data confirmed, and contributed with further explanations to the interview results. On Tele2's front page, described as "messy" by participants in the interviews, gaze paths were random and the numbers of fixations very large. On the other hand, Telia's front page was perceived as "clear" and gaze paths were more focused.

Furthermore, eye tracking data revealed a number of other problems with the sites. For example, high fixation lengths showed that participants hesitated before clicking the link with the wording "Buy!" on Telenor's front page.



Overall user experience.

Why eye tracking?

Eye Tracking provides spontaneous reactions, hard to catch with traditional methods. It provides deeper insights into why a user behaves as he/she does. For example, you can get information about what is seen before a user moves the mouse over or clicks on a link, revealing search patterns and the effectiveness of visual cues.

In website surveys, participants can use the Internet freely without a test leader sitting in, asking questions. When participants do not feel observed they get closer to a natural situation and behavior.

Why Tobii?

"Tobii's eye tracking hardware provides a natural test situation. Participants can move freely and act as they would in front of an ordinary computer screen. The eye tracking technology is completely integrated into an ordinary monitor and is not visible to the user. Tobii Studio provides comprehensive tools for recording and analyzing eye movements and other data streams," says Peter Mackhé.

About MarketWatch

MarketWatch first started in 1988 and has since then conducted well over 7,000 surveys in different areas, making their experience and accumulated knowledge one of the most extensive in the field today.

MarketWatch is known for its innovative ways of conducting surveys. Eye tracking is one of the methods that they have been using successfully with the objective of getting as close as possible to the consumers' actual behavior.

www.marketwatch.se

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