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**KnowHow**NonProfit

## How to understand web users' needs

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### Things you'll need

- Your charity's strategic plan
- Access to web stats like Google Analytics
- Access to a survey tool like SurveyMonkey

Knowing what people hope to achieve when they come to your site will help you to assess how effective your website is, and whether you are using your resources efficiently. There are plenty of ways to find out, and doing all or some of the following things can be helpful.

## 1 Who's using your website? Who do you want to be using your website?

Make a list of who you think is using your website, for example:

- People who your charity helps, and maybe their friends and relatives.
- Donors and supporters.
- Job hunters and potential volunteers.
- Professionals in your field, e.g. doctors or social workers.
- Journalists.

It's useful to consider at this point if there is anyone you'd like to be using your website who might not be doing so. The strategic plan for your organisation will be helpful here – for example maybe your charity wants to engage more with decision-makers and politicians.

Focus your research around the groups that are important to you, although be open minded as other groups may emerge as you do more research.

## 2 Shadowing and observing

It's useful to learn as much as you can about the groups you have identified, and you can do plenty of research without even asking people about websites.

If your charity runs services to the public, can you go along and do some shadowing? This will help you to get a sense of what people expect and want from the charity.

With permission, you could listen in on helpline phonecalls.

You could also attend fundraising or volunteer recruitment events to find out more about people who support your charity.

If it is not possible to meet directly with your audiences, chat to those people who do.

### **3 Statistics and alerts**

Look at the web analytics for your website. They will reveal much about your audience e.g. which devices they are using and the times of day (or year) that they visit. Seeing which search terms they enter helps you to understand the language they use. If your users are searching for 'manic depression' but your website uses the term 'bipolar disorder' then you can improve your keywording.

You can also set up a Google alert so you can be notified when people search for your organisation. See [How to set up a Google alert](#).

### **4 Feedback, surveys and testing**

To find out what people think of your website you could run a survey. It is important to ensure that the questions are well thought out and that you will actually be able to make use of the answers.

You could also run usability testing to find out how your users actually engage with your website. It can be extremely helpful and humbling to see that few people can find the donate button that you thought was so prominent. You can do usability testing in person or remotely and there is lots of guidance on the internet to get you started.

See [Usability testing demystified on A List Apart](#)

### **5 Social media**

It is worth taking some time to look at the kind of followers you have on social media and what people are saying about your charity. Even if they are not specifically commenting on your website you can still learn a lot about who they are and what they are interested in. However, be aware that a lot of people don't contribute to social media even though they do use the web.

### **6 Top tasks analysis**

Gerry McGovern, in his book 'The stranger's long neck' describes a methodology that you can use to discover the top tasks that people are coming to your website for. His research shows that a large proportion of users go to websites for the same small set of reasons. If you can meet this set of needs, then your website will be successful and people will be more likely to want to become involved with your organisation.

## How to conduct a top task analysis by Jeff Sauro

Putting people's needs first & When a tiny task is important to the organisation (a case study of how the Norwegian Cancer Society improved its website using top tasks)

## 7 Personas

So what can do you with all this data that you have gathered about your users? It can feel overwhelming to have so many opinions and preferences to collate and manage, and all those facts and figures can be hard to equate with real users. Some charities create personas to help them. A persona is an imaginary person who represents an audience group. The persona has a name and biographical information, usually even a photo. When you are creating new content or features, you can say 'So how would our potential trustee Jackie experience this part of this site?'

There is a great description of personas in the book 'Letting go of the words' by Ginny Reddish.

See Cancer Research UK talk about their use of personas at a Together London event.