

Usability Summary Report

OneStart Portal Study

Executive Summary

To obtain empirical data to help guide the development of a OneStart portal prototype, user testing and an online survey was conducted with 18 participants representing *student*, *staff* and *faculty* categories from Indiana University. The materials used in the testing were three commercial portal applications: *MyYahoo*, *MyExcite* and *MyFidelity*. Observations from the user test sessions reveal several interface characteristics that work well along with some that are problematic. Data from the online survey reveal some clear preferences for OneStart content. User comments about the portal project were also collected. While specific recommendations based on this report have been left to the discretion of design team members, this study should serve to guide their decision making.

Usability Consulting Services
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Purpose of Study

The purpose of the OneStart portal study was twofold:

1. To identify the positive and negative attributes of existing commercial web portals in order to inform the design of the OneStart prototype.
2. To identify user preferences for potential OneStart content.

User Profile

We identified three primary categories of users for the OneStart portal study: *students*, *staff* and *faculty*. A cross-section of gender and age was included as best as possible. The timeframe of the study (early August) had an impact on the availability of appropriate participants; faculty and students were in short supply at this time of year. As a result, participants were recruited primarily through word of mouth and convenience sampling.

Table 1: User Profile

User category	Number	Gender	Comments
Student	5	5m	2 undergraduate, 3 graduate
Staff	8	2m, 6f	UITs, FMS, Continuing Studies
Faculty	5	3m, 2f	Education, Languages, A,M& ID (Apparel, Merchandising & Interior Design)
TOTAL	18	10m, 8f	

Method

User testing

The evaluation method used for the study was formal user testing. In this method, realistic users are identified and asked to perform realistic tasks using some form of the system. In this case, the "systems" were fully functioning commercial web portals. Seven sessions were conducted in the UITS usability lab and eleven sessions were conducted on site at the users' regular workstations.

Materials

In the absence of a OneStart prototype, the study examined users' performances and preferences for three commercial portal applications:

- MyYahoo (<http://my.yahoo.com/>)
- MyExcite (<http://www.excite.com/>)
- MyFidelity (<http://www100.fidelity.com:80/>)

Users were provided with a username (OneStart_test) and password (iutest) to login to each portal and were then asked to complete a series of tasks using each portal (see *Task Selection* for a list of the tasks used). Users were asked to think aloud as they performed their tasks. The test facilitator and observer recorded the users' actions and comments during the session. The lab sessions were also videotaped.

Each task was performed using each of the three portals (i.e. Task 1 was performed for MyYahoo, then MyExcite, then MyFidelity). Users were asked to begin each task with a specific portal to avoid any sequencing bias. Following the completion of each task, users were asked to identify their preference for the portal that they found to be most usable for completing the task.

The test sessions typically lasted 50-60 minutes and included Tasks #1-4 and #7. A couple of users performed quickly enough that Optional Tasks #5 and #6 were included, but the majority of participants did not perform these tasks.

Following the test session, users were introduced to an online survey (<http://www.indiana.edu/~usable/OneStart/survey.html>) designed to gather data on their preferences for potential OneStart content. The facilitator explained the online form and provided the participant with the URL. The form was completed on the individual's own time.

In the end, 16 participants performed the task portion of the study and all 18 participants completed the survey. The two participants who were unable to be scheduled for the task portion were oriented to the commercial portals and then asked to complete the online survey.

Task Selection

The tasks used for the OneStart study concentrated on user personalization of the portal interface. With only a couple of exceptions, each task was possible to complete using each of the three portals. In those cases where a portal did not support a particular task, users were instructed to ignore that portal for that task.

Table 2. Task List

#	Task	Begin with:
1	Add a new module of information to your page. You wish to be able to view your local weather information.	Yahoo
2	Change the number of columns on your screen AND move your weather module to a different column.	Fidelity
3	Add some Sports headlines to your News module.	Yahoo
4	Return the page to the way it was when we started. * Delete the weather module * Change the column layout back to its original * Remove the Sports headline from News	Fidelity
5*	Use MyYahoo to create a second page of content and name it <i>Activities</i> .	Yahoo
6*	Change the color scheme for the page to one that you would enjoy working with.	Excite
7	Logout of each portal.	Excite

*Indicates optional tasks that were only completed by a couple of participants due to time constraints.

Results

The results section is divided into three sections:

- 1) Observed positive and negative attributes of the three commercial portals
- 2) User preferences for suggested OneStart content
- 3) User suggestions for additional OneStart content
- 4) Comments from user survey

1) Observed Positive and Negative Attributes

In Table 3, related observations in the negative and positive columns are loosely grouped by row (e.g. Users demonstrated uncertainty about how to add content to individual content modules (Neg). They tended to retrace their footsteps and returned to customize the entire page rather than just the module. Where redundancy permitted this, the user succeeded (Pos). Where redundancy was not built in, the user struggled.

Table 3. Positive and Negative Attributes

Negative	Positive
Functionality	
Uncertainty on how to add content to individ modules	Redundancy of personalization opportunities
	New browser window for personalization settings
Edit/-/X buttons often went unnoticed	Windows icon conventions were typically recognized
Yahoo content menus valued, but often unnoticed	Shortcuts were appreciated once learned
Confusion switching 2-3 column with Drag and Drop	Drag and Drop functionality for moving modules
	Radio buttons to select number of columns
Deleting a page in Yahoo problematic	Adding a page in Yahoo was easily done
Some uncertainty over mandatory content modules	Placing these modules in separate color helped this
Language	
Overlapping terms (Page Settings, Layout, Content)	Fidelity CUSTOMIZE button immediately understood
Ambiguous labels (OPTIONS to suggest color change)	LAYOUT and CONTENT links typically understood
	Clear, concise instructions were frequently read

Table 3. Positive and Negative Attributes (cont'd)

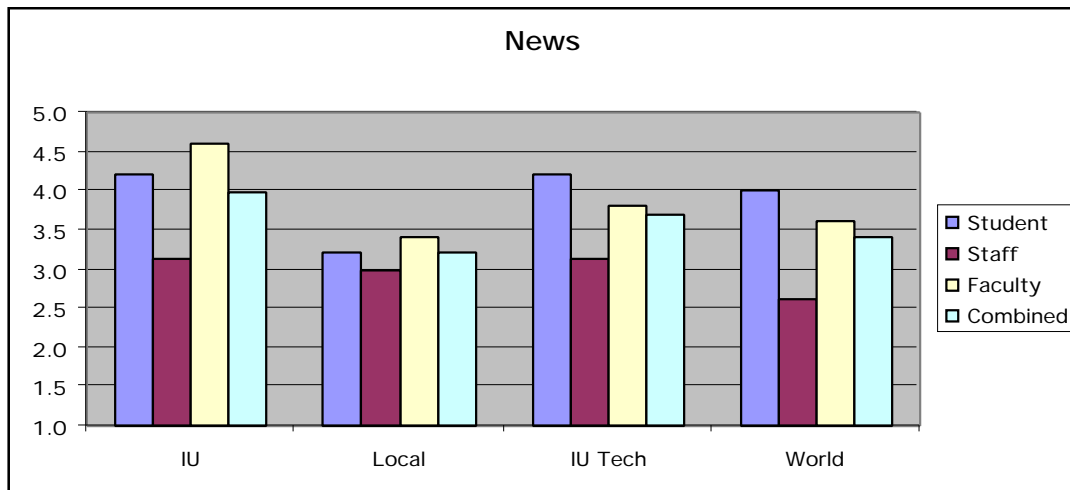
Negative	Positive
Appearance	
3 column layout "too busy"	2 column layout 'less busy' than 3
	3 columns reduces scrolling long narrow columns
	Generally equal preference for 2 and 3 columns
Changing color schemes generally not a priority	Preference for light, subtle backgrounds
Precise color control considered unnecessary	Providing color themes is sufficient
	Some preference for visible lists over listboxes
Navigation	
Small font and crowding of Personalization links	Placement of Personalize links at top of page
Frame design hides top navigation if scrolled down	Some preference for a single Customize Page button
Yahoo Personalize buttons vary location on screen	
Wizard default in Personalize mode caused confusion	Tab approach in Excite more clear
SAVE button appears off the screen (Fidelity)	Short personalization screens preferred (Excite)
Dual SAVE buttons appear on single screen (Yahoo)	
Feedback	
No confirmation of logout on Excite & Fidelity	Confirmation of logout on Yahoo
	Able to preview selected preferences (layout, etc.)

2) User preferences for suggested OneStart content

The following tables represent user preferences for proposed OneStart content from the online survey (<http://www.indiana.edu/~usable/OneStart/survey.html>). The categories for each of the various content areas are presented with the average ratings for *Student*, *Staff* and *Faculty* categories. An overall or combined rating is also provided. The rating scale was a 1-5 Likert Scale (1=not very important; 5 = very important). The raw data, including standard deviations for each user category, is provided in the Appendix.

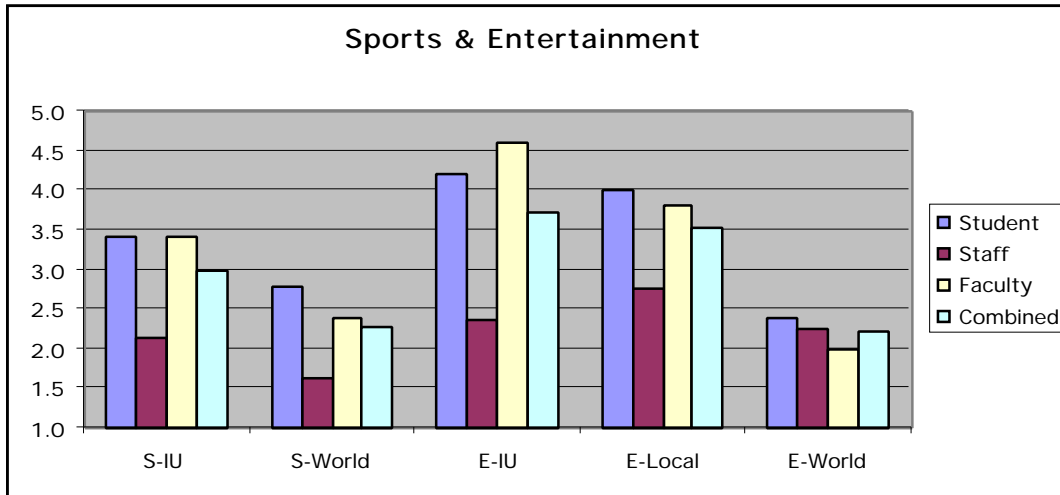
News

All user categories expressed a desire to have News content available in OneStart. Students and faculty expressed a greater interest than staff overall. News content related to Indiana University and UITS was deemed particularly important.



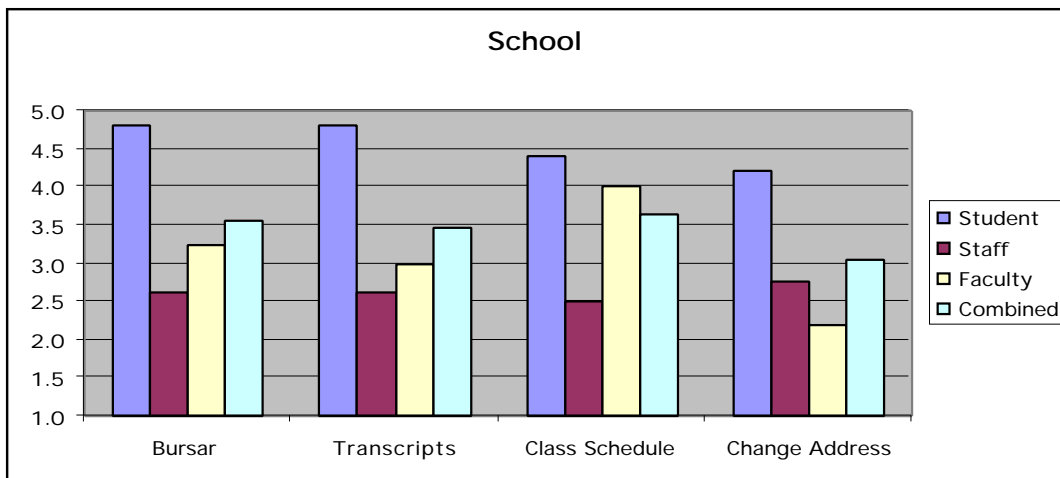
Sports

Regarding sports and entertainment, the Student and Faculty categories expressed the greatest interest once again. IU-related and local entertainment news was desired heavily by both of these categories. World sports and entertainment was not as important overall.



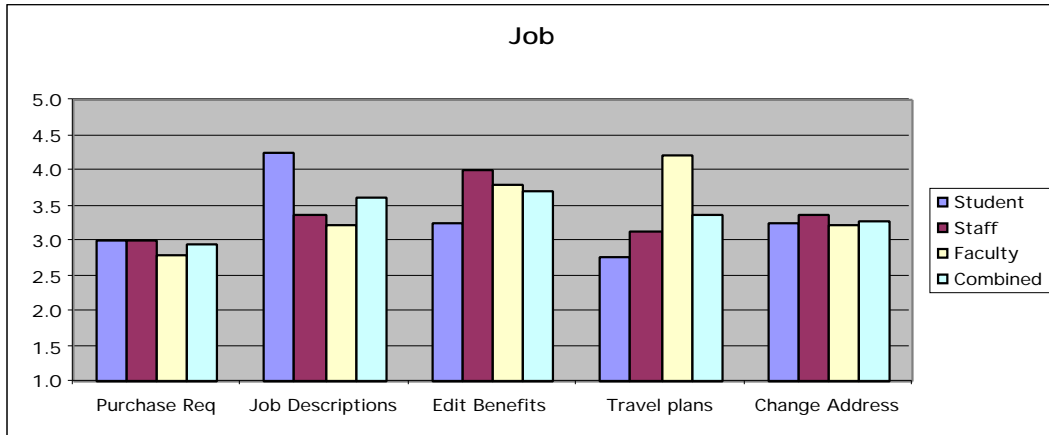
School

Not surprisingly, the Student category expressed the greatest interest in being able to view school-related information. Faculty also indicated a desire to be able to view course schedules.



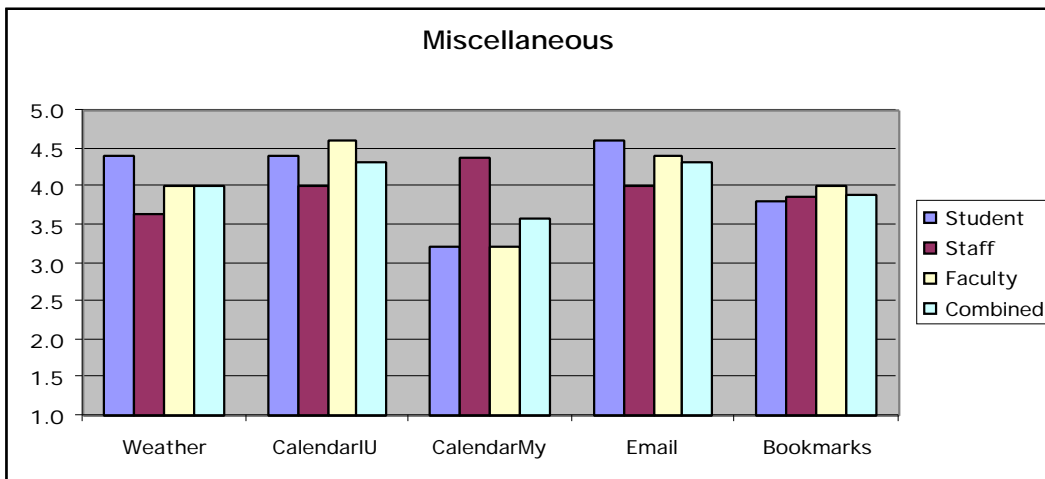
Job

The Staff user category saw the opportunities for editing personal benefits as highly desirable. Both Staff and Students expressed a desire to be able to view job descriptions online (it is unclear as to whether students were thinking of IU-related jobs or career postings in general). The Faculty user category expressed a great interest in having travel related content and activities in OneStart.



Miscellaneous

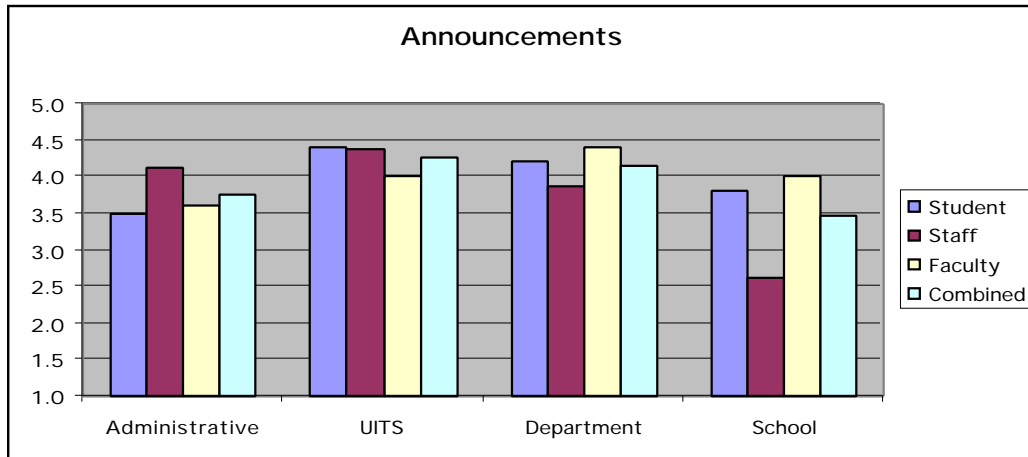
The Miscellaneous category represented the highest preferences across user groups with virtually every user category indicating a desire for each of these information modules. It is possible that the staff preference for a personal calendar feature is due to the established use of Microsoft Outlook at IU by staff members.



Announcements

Having IU-related announcements delivered to their OneStart portal was desired by all user categories with specific types of announcements corresponding as expected by the

different groups (e.g. Staff was more interested in Administrative, UITS and Department related announcements and less interested in School related messages).



3) User Suggestions for Additional OneStart Content

Data was gathered from the online user survey and duplicate suggestions were aggregated. Items mentioned most frequently and that were cited as being most important appear at the top of the table.

Table 4. User Suggestions for OneStart Content

Rank	Freq	Topic
5	5	Person directory
5	4	Library services (database searches)
5	3	Government agency pages (IRS, etc)
5	3	IU system links to launch FIS, TOPS, Oncourse etc.
5	2	Airline fares (eg. Travelocity)
3	2	Health info and news
5	2	Enrollment status for the classes I teach
5	2	Faculty award deadlines, memos, council minutes
5	2	Parking
4	2	Retail/shopping
5	2	Reports Viewer (FDRS)
4	2	Payroll information (in advance of receiving of check; IRAs)
5	1	Instant messaging utility for students
5	1	View campus and building maps
5	1	Customizable space (eg. Google search engine)
5	1	View current status of meal points & campus access money
5	1	Benefits info (change address, beneficiary)
5	1	IUB locker space
5	1	Online STEPS & PROSTEPS class announcements
5	1	Specific national news - marketing, distance education, ed tech
5	1	Data direct predefined queries
5	1	IU statistics, institutional research
5	1	Departmental web site access
5	1	Career opps for undergrads & grads nearing degree completion
5	1	Course registration
4	1	International Services info
4	1	Exchange rates
4	1	Virtual IMU bookstore (order texts, supplies, IUwear)
4	1	SRSC events & activities (sign up for courts)
4	1	IU room reservations
4	1	National news - foreign language content
4	1	Other university websites
4	1	Credit Union services
4	1	Review paid time off, sick hours used
-	1	Student financial information

4) Comments from User Survey

Table 5. User Comments

Students
I would really like the option to include space for content from whatever URL I choose. For instance, I'd like the Google search engine form to appear on my home page along with the other content. Maybe you give a choice of a handful of the better search engines as options to place on the page (like you can add their portholes to your own personal web page). How about quick access to university-wide newsgroups.
Options like color and columns aren't very important. A standard IU layout and look would do just fine.
Staff
It would be very important to me to be able to customize the appearance to make it readable and usable for me--large type, color coding, emphasis on the important segments, etc. If I'm limited to someone else's design it might make the difference.
I like the concept of having the ability to have multiple pages for OneStart. Different things may be important to me at different times throughout the year, so having this option would be a great benefit.
I think doing something specifically geared towards IU is an amazing concept. It will have to be tweaked.
It seemed to me that the bullet type pages with very little text on the page were the easiest to follow. I would also like to see either the tabbed format or some sort of way to title the columns on the page.
Please create applications for students first - features and links to info for employees can wait.
Faculty
I think this is a great idea, I'd definitely make it my home page. Anything that would make information from various parts of the university easily accessible would be a great help to me on a day-to-day basis.
Basic tutorial for first-time personalizers.

Appendix