

Electoral Commission Votes Yes For User Vision And Usability

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Voters across the UK will find voting easier when Electoral Commission design guidelines are published later this year, following comprehensive research by the independent body.

Initial findings from the examination have already been published online on the Electoral Commission's website, www.electoralcommission.org.uk.

The Electoral Commission wants to make sure that voters are put first when election materials are being designed, with easy to use and understand ballot papers allowing voters to be clear about how to vote and what their choices are.

With this in mind, the Commission appointed User Vision, one of Europe's leading usability consultancies, to understand how voters engage with and use ballot papers and existing election materials across the UK.

User Vision was assisted by Caroline Jarrett of Effortmark, a specialist in the usability of forms.

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This work is part of the Electoral Commission's project "Making Your Mark" - to produce design guidance for ballot papers and other electoral stationery. Â

Content is currently prescribed by law and the Electoral Commission aims to bring greater consistency to the design of materials used at elections and referendums held in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland

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Chris Rourke, User Vision MD explains: Â

"Being able to use a ballot paper correctly is actually a fundamental civil right and we are delighted to have worked with the Electoral Commission to ensure that everyone in the UK is able to vote confidently and correctly.Â This is an important project for us and one that we are very proud to be part of."

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The research examined existing voting materials in order to identify what issues and problems are associated with their use, and to discover existing good practice.

User Vision looked at the whole voting experience, from arriving at the polling station to leaving, as well as the postal voting process.

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In depth interviews were conducted with voters and first time voters in England, Scotland and Wales and Northern Ireland. First they were asked to participate in mock elections using existing voting materials.

After voting, the participants were asked what they thought of the voting task and what elements of the process made it easy or difficult to vote.

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User Vision looked at all aspects of voting materials:Â ballot papers and the instructions that accompany them, notices in polling stations and polling booths, postal voting statements and, in Northern Ireland, declarations of identity.

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The Electoral Commission will now take the recommendations, along with the findings from its complementary focus group research, and produce design guidance encompassing all voting methods used in UK elections.

The Commission has also sought input from other organisations and individuals with different areas of expertise to help formulate the guidance.

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While this work is primarily focused on enabling voters to vote confidently and correctly, having design guidelines should also help to achieve consistency of design in voter materials, irrespective of when or where a person is voting; give Returning Officers clear guidance and design criteria to consider when designing materials and selecting and managing their suppliers; and inform design decisions by governments and eventual Commission consideration of new designs as incorporated into draft legislation.

About User Vision

User Vision is one of Europe's leading independent user experience consultancies, specialising in usability testing, web accessibility, eye tracking, user needs assessments and expert usability evaluations. Â

The company tests and improves usability across many platforms including websites, interactive TV, software, mobile phones, keyboards, and consumer products. Â

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At the heart of User Vision's work lies the basic concept that a website or product that is easy to use gives a business competitive advantage.

The company takes a straightforward, practical approach to user needs analysis, problem solving and usability testing, leading to effective design solutions.

Launched in 2000, User Vision has grown organically and remains free from venture capital.

The company has pioneered usability and accessibility for many years working with organisations like the BBC, HSBC, Nokia and the DTI. Operating internationally in Dubai, Spain, France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, the UK and Ireland, User Vision is a powerful, independent force in usability and accessibility.

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