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# ALA Midwinter 2015 LITA Preconference Review: How User Testing Can Improve the User Experience of Your Library Website

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# ALA Midwinter 2015 LITA Preconference Review: How User Testing Can Improve the User Experience of Your Library Website

📅 February 12, 2015 👤 Brianna Marshall (<http://litablog.org/author/bmarshall/>)

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*Editor's note: This is a guest post by Tammi Owens*

Last July, Winona State University's Darrell W. Krueger Library rolled out a completely new website. This January we added to that new user experience by upgrading to LibGuides and LibAnswers v2. Now, we're looking for continuous improvement through continuous user experience (UX) testing. Although I have some knowledge of the history and general tenets of user experience and website design, I signed up for this LITA pre-conference to dive into some case studies and ask specific questions of UX specialists. I hoped to come away with a concrete plan or framework for UX testing at our library. Specifically, I wanted to know how to implement the results of UX testing on our website.

## **The instructors**

Kate Lawrence is the Vice President of User Research at EBSCO. Deirdre Costello is the Senior User Experience Researcher at EBSCO. I was a little nervous this seminar was going to be surreptitious vendor marketing, but there was no EBSCO marketing at all. Kate brought decades of experience in the user research sector to our conversations, and Dierdre, as a recent MLIS with library experience, was able to connect the dots between research and practice.

## **The session**

There were six participants in our session, with a mix of public and university libraries represented. Participants who attended the session are at all stages of website redesign and have different levels of control over our institutional websites. Some of us report to committees, while others have complete ownership of their library's site. As in the Python pre-conference, participant experience levels were mixed.

The session was divided into four main sections: "Why usability matters," "Website best practices," "Usability: Process," and an overview of UserTesting.com, a company EBSCO uses during their research. Kate and Deirdre presented each section with a slide deck, but interspersed videos and discussion into their formal presentation.

The introductions to usability and website best practices were review for me, but offered enough additional information and examples that I continued to be engaged throughout the morning. Some memorable moments for me were watching and discussing Steve Krug's usability demo (<http://youtu.be/QckIzHC99Xc>), and visiting two websites: [readability-score.com](http://readability-score.com) and [voiceandtone.com](http://voiceandtone.com).

After lunch, Kate went step-by-step through a typical usability testing process in her department. She has nine steps in her process (yes, nine!), but after she explained each step it somehow went from overwhelming and scary to doable and exciting.

After another break, Kate and Deirdre invited Sadaf Ahmed in to speak about the company UserTesting.com. Unfortunately, this was less hands-on than I expected it to be, but I was gobsmacked by the information that could be gleaned quickly using the tool. (In short: students use Google a *lot* more than I ever imagined.)

At the end of the day, Kate and Deirdre set aside time for us to create research questions with which to begin our UX testing. By that time, though, everyone was overloaded with new information and we all agreed we'd rather go home, apply our knowledge, and contact Kate and Deirdre directly for feedback.

### **Further study**

To make sure we could implement user testing at our own institutions, Kate and Deirdre distributed USB drives filled with research plans, presentations, and reports. If they referenced it during the day, it went on our USB drives. This is proving to be beneficial as I make sense of my own notes from the session and begin the research plan for our first major UX test. Additionally, Kate ordered several books for all attendees to read in the coming weeks. These items alone, along with the new network we created among attendees during the day, may be the most valuable part of the session going forward.

### **Review in a nutshell**

This pre-conference was, for me, well worth the time and money to attend. The case studies we discussed contributed to my understanding of how to ask small questions about our website in order to make a big impact on user experience. I left with exactly the tools I desired: a framework for user testing implementation, and connections to colleagues who are willing to help us make it happen at Winona State.

*Tammi Owens is the Emerging Services and Liaison Librarian at Winona State University in Winona, MN. Along with being a liaison to three academic departments, her position at the library means she often coordinates technical projects and gets to play with cool toys. Find her on Twitter (@tammi\_owens ([https://twitter.com/tammi\\_owens](https://twitter.com/tammi_owens))) during conferences and over email ([towens@winona.edu](mailto:towens@winona.edu)) otherwise.*

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Beyond Usage Statistics: How to use Google Analytics to Improve your Repository

Presenter: Hui Zhang

Offered: October 11, 2016

Social Media For My Institution; from "mine" to "ours"

Presenter: Plamen Miltenoff

Offered: October 19 - November 9, 2016

Online Productivity Tools: Smart Shortcuts and Clever Tricks

Presenter: Jaclyn McKewan

Offered: November 8, 2016

DETAILS : <http://www.ala.org/lita/learning/online>

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