Guide to Low-cost Usability Tools

Dr. Peter J. Meyers

Why I Wrote This Guide

We've seen a flood of new web-based usability tools hit the market over the past year or two, many of them free or very low-cost. There have been some great blog posts comparing these tools, but I felt that webmasters and usability professionals needed a deeper dive into these resources. In particular, I wanted to actually test each of these tools on my own site, something nearly impossible to do in the scope of a blog post.

This guide covers 20 tools, grouped into 4 major types. My goal is to present you with an open-minded review so that you can better compare your options and decide for yourself where best to put your time and money.

Enjoy!
Dr. Pete

The 4 Types of Tools

I. Heat Mapping

Heat mapping (or click mapping) tools record visitor clicks to create visual maps of user activity. Section I also includes eye-tracking simulators.

II. Screen Recording

Screen recorders track individual visitors to your website to create a simulated video for each of those user sessions.

III. User Testing

User testing tools simulate traditional, task-based usability testing.

IV. User Feedback

User feedback tools solicit direct feedback from your website visitors.

How to Use This Guide

Each of the 4 types of tools has a section in this guide, and each tool has 2 pages: a general summary page and a page of more detailed screenshots. For each tool in the guide, I provide the following information:

Free - Capabilities available in the <u>free</u> trial version (if applicable).

Basic - Pricing and features for the most <u>basic</u> paid version.

Type - Required installation <u>type</u> (JavaScript, image upload, etc.).

Https - Lists whether the tool supports secure (<u>https</u>:) pages.

Table of Contents

* While I do my best to be unbiased, User Effect is a partner of UserTesting.com and an affiliate of Userfly.

AttentionWizard

www.attentionwizard.com

Free: Full access (beta)

Basic: n/a

Type: Image upload

Https: Yes

Overview:

Created by the conversion experts at SiteTuners.com, AttentionWizard uses an advanced algorithm to simulate "attention heat maps". Similar to the maps that more expensive eye-tracking studies might produce, these images help you get a sense for what elements of your site attract the most attention, as well as the order people may be drawn to them. AttentionWizard is currently in beta, so options are somewhat limited (output is currently available only as a PDF-based report).

AttentionWizard Screenshots

Attention Heat Map:

This is a sample virtual heat map generated by AttentionWizard. It attempts to map out the areas that will draw the most visual "heat". It can help you quickly understand how images, headers, and other visual elements can both reinforce and distract from your content.

Visual Hot Spots:

This blow-up shows how dramatically a logo and header text can draw visual attention. It also helps to show how attention flows from one element to the next. Understanding these hot spots can help you better understand how to strategically place critical visual elements.

Clickdensity®

www.clickdensity.com

Free: 1 site, 1 page, 5000 clicks

Basic: $5/month*

Type: JavaScript code

Https: Yes
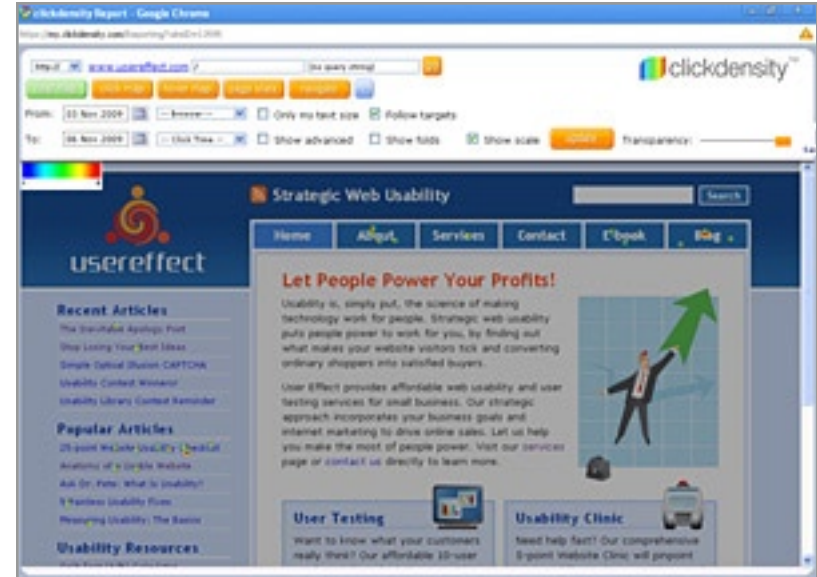
Overview:

Clickdensity tracks visitor clicks to produce a click map showing you hot spots of activity. Clicks can be displayed as a heat map, click map, or hover map. Customization options include filtering by browser type and date-range, as well as a useful transparency adjustment to view the heat map more clearly. Be sure to use the "Follow targets" option to standardize Clickdensity maps across browsers and resolutions.

* Basic paid package includes 1 site, unlimited pages, and 10000 clicks.

Clickdensity® Screenshots

Click/Heat Map:

The heat map view shows areas that attracted the most visitor clicks. This can be useful for understanding how your navigation, links, and ads compete for attention. Clickdensity provides useful information even with a fairly small amount of data.
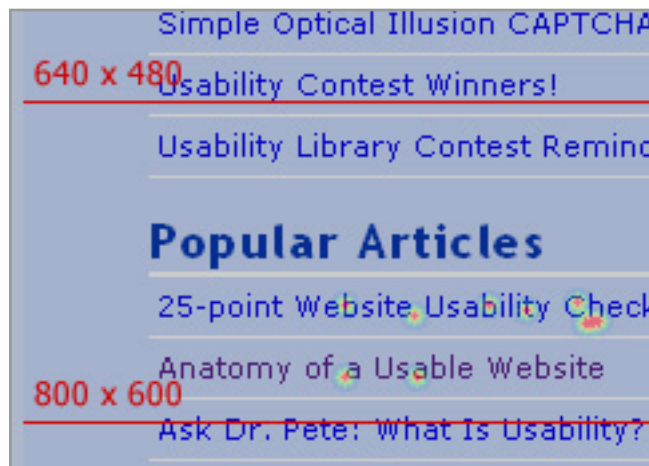
Fold Visualization:

Use the "Show folds" feature to see where popular screen resolutions would cut off on your test pages. This is very useful for visualizing how a wide variety of audiences see your site. Clickdensity also allows you to filter by major browsers.

Crazy Egg

www.crazyegg.com

Free: n/a

Basic: $9/month*

Type: JavaScript code

Https: Yes
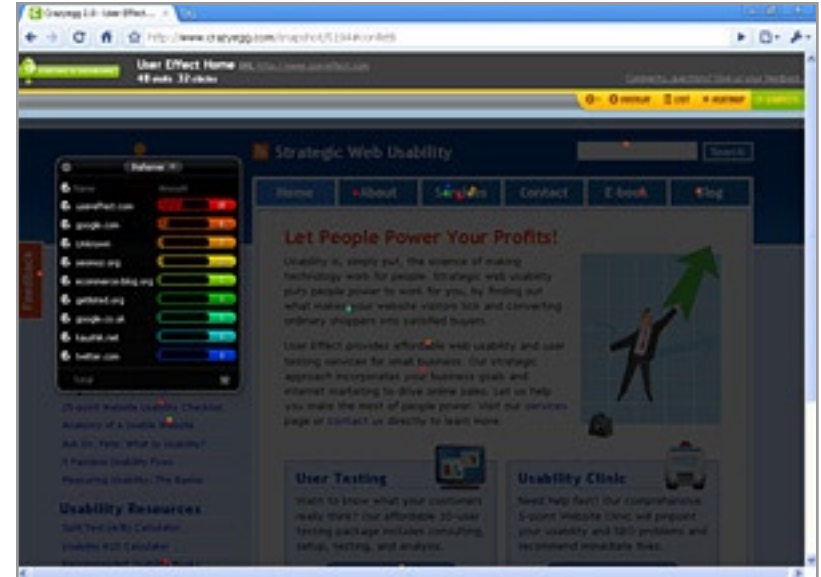
Overview:

Crazy Egg generates a variety of visualizations based on click activity, including a traditional heat map, simplified overlay, and "confetti" mode that lets you track clicks by source and other visitor metrics. The Crazy Egg reporting interface is very easy to use and, while the customization options are limited, the core reports are powerful and well-designed.

* Basic paid package includes 10 pages and 10000 visitors/month.

Crazy Egg Screenshots

Overlay Mode:

The simplest visualization in Crazy Egg is an overlay which aggregates clicks across objects (such as menu items). In this example, you can see that "Services" received 6 clicks over the time period of the test. Color-coding represents the relative click density.

Confetti Mode:

Crazy Egg's confetti mode allows you to dive deeper into visitor analytics. In this example, you can see a list of referrers and their relative activity. The colors next to each referrer are used to create points on a "confetti" map. Other metrics include search engines, country of origin, OS, browser, and time-to-click.

Feng-GUI

www.feng-gui.com

Free: 1 image/day*

Basic: $50 (50 images)

Type: Image upload

Https: Yes

Overview:

Feng-GUI uses a sophisticated algorithm to mimic the kind of heat map that would be produced by an eye-tracking study. This is not a click map, but a simulation of what actual gaze patterns might look like. Simply upload a screenshot, and the algorithm returns a heat map. While Feng-GUI isn't meant to replace a laboratory eye-tracking study, the results are impressive.

* Warning: Free heat-maps are publicly viewable by visitors to www.feng-gui.com.

Feng-GUI Screenshots

Gaze Patterns:

Gaze fixation patterns are simulated for graphics, form fields, and other items that the algorithm decides are visually interesting. Each item is marked with a visual scan order. Some items may be scanned more than once as the virtual visitor's eyes move around the screen.
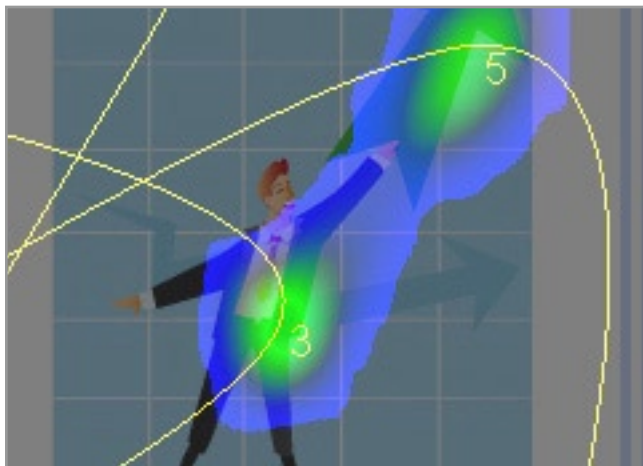
Complex Paths:

This shows a more complex path, with the virtual visitor's gaze returning to the graphic twice, once to focus on the man, and later to focus on the arrow that he's holding. Feng-GUI can help you get a clearer understanding of how visually complex a web-page can be.

ClickTale

www.clicktale.com

Free: 1 domain, 400 pageviews

Basic: $99/month

Type: JavaScript code

Https: Paid plans only
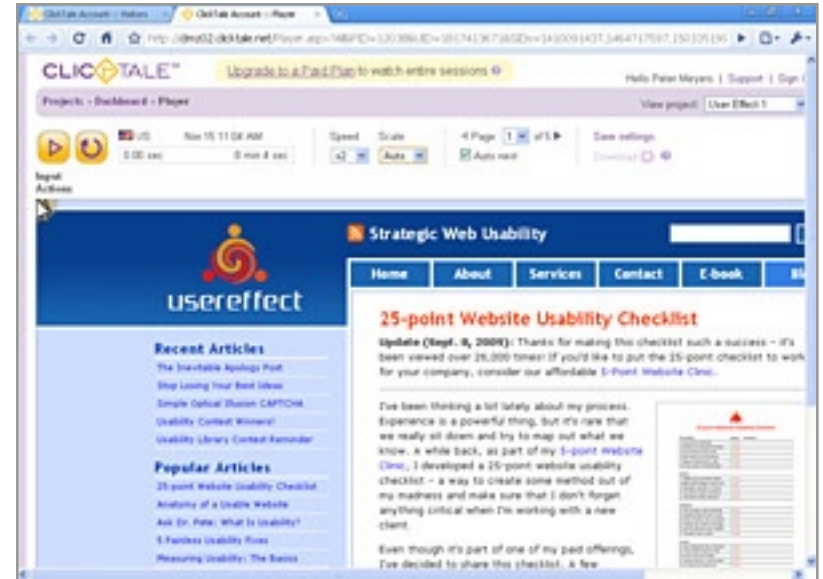
Overview:

ClickTale records individual visitor sessions and plays them back in a video format. The interface allows you to easily control the playback speed, flip through pages viewed, and see demographic information (country, browser, etc.) at a glance. The free plan is limited and only allows you to watch partial sessions for some visitors.

* Basic paid package includes 10 domains, 20000 pageviews/month, and 45-day history.

ClickTale Screenshots

Visitor Summary:

ClickTale provides a daily summary of visits, including useful statistics such as pages viewed, country of origin, visit length, referring URL, and entry page. You can easily move between days and visitors to target visits that are the most worth your while to watch in full.

Input Tracking:

In addition to basic click-tracking, ClickTale tracks left-clicks, right-clicks, and form field entries. For example, the "Input" tracking on the left show that the visitor entered "682" into a form field and then clicked [Enter]. This is a very useful complement to the video.

Clixpy

www.clixpy.com

Free: 10 captures

Basic: $5 for 100 captures

Type: JavaScript code

Https: Yes

Overview:

Clixpy captures and plays back individual visitors sessions (up to 10 for the free trial). The Clixpy playback interface is simple and very easy to use. Visitor screen resolution is easy to track in Clixpy and screens render accurately, making it easy to see how visitors with different browsers and screen sizes are interacting (or having difficulty interacting) with your site.

Clickpy Screenshots

Session Summary:

The Clixpy session summary makes it easy to play back visitor sessions and tracks basic data, including: pageviews, session length, browser, resolution, and visitor location. Clixpy also allows you to save sessions for easy viewing at a later time.
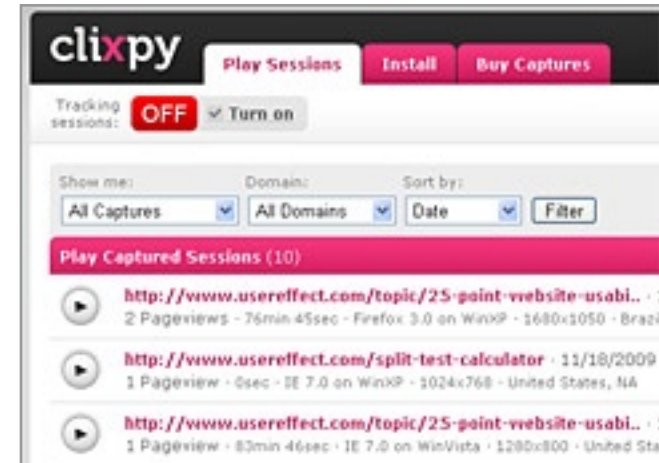
Playback Controls:

Clixpy has very simple and intuitive playback controls with a small screen profile. Pageviews are broken out (the numbered buttons at the top of the image) to allow you to easily skip between screens or jump to mid-session before playback.

OpenHallway

www.openhallway.com

Free: 1 single-user test

Basic: $49/month*

Type: Direct visit

**Https:** Yes

Overview:

OpenHallway captures recordings of visitors sessions, but instead of capturing direct website visitors, lets you send out an invitation link to your own test subjects. Subjects attempt to perform a chosen task or answer a question in an unmoderated fashion, recording until they feel the task is complete. OpenHallway also supports audio, so that test subjects can record their observations through a standard PC microphone.

* Basic paid package includes unlimited tests up to 3 hours of recording, SSL data transmission.

OpenHallway Screenshots

Recording Session:

Test subjects arrive at an instruction page with a simple task, click on "Start Recording" when they're ready to begin, and then browse normally in a new window until they feel they've completed the task. No additional setup is required on the subject's side.
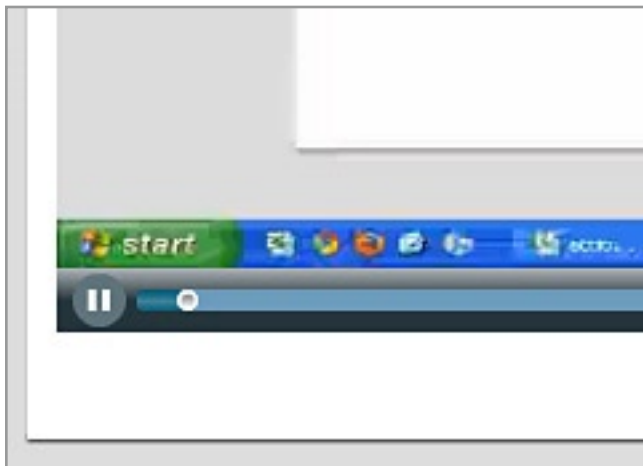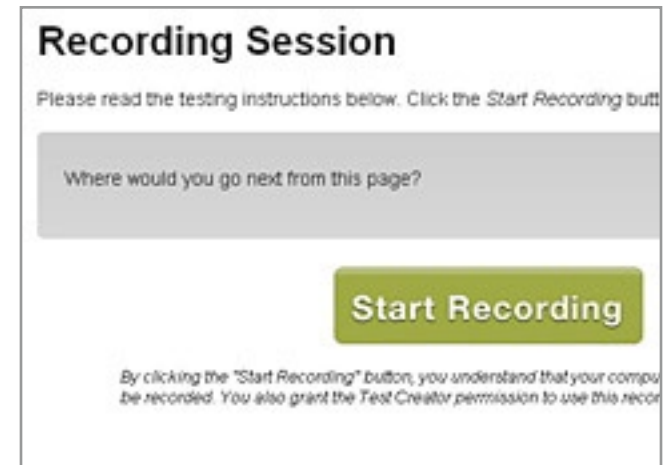
Video Playback:

OpenHallway uses more of a traditional web video interface to play back test sessions, with a player embedded in the administrative system. The video is a bit compressed, but playback quality was fine for normal uses. Open Hallway supports audio, but I wasn't able to test that function for the guide.

Userfly

www.userfly.com

Free: 10 captures/month

Basic: $10/month*

Type: JavaScript code

Https: Plans over $50/mo. only

Overview:

Userfly captures individual visits in video format, including scrolling and clicks (on both clickable and non-clickable areas). A simple playback interface allows you to pause the action and flip through pages viewed by any particular visitor. I have experienced some minor rendering issues with the Userfly playback system, but they don't generally affect the data quality.

* Basic paid package includes 100 captures/month, 30-day storage, <u>no</u> https support.

Userfly Screenshots

Visitor Summary:

Userfly allows you to view recent visitors in one easy-to-manage list. The visitor summary includes information on total pageviews, user's geographic location, referring URL, and landing URL.
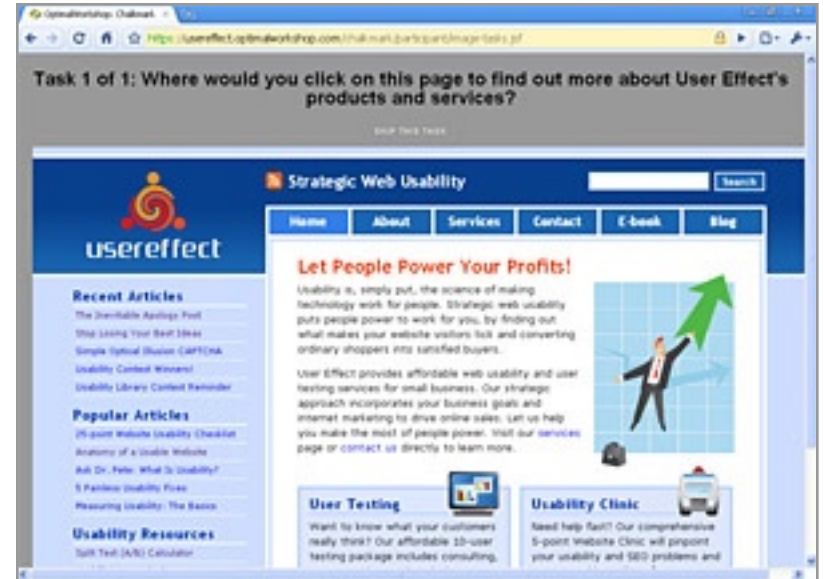

Playback Interface:

The visitor session playback interface is very easy to use, with simple play, pause and stop functions, a progress indicator, and a pulldown of all of the pages viewed during that particular session.

Chalkmark

www.optimalworkshop.com

Free: 3 tasks/survey

Basic: $109/month*

Type: Image upload

Https: Yes

Overview:

Chalkmark allows you to upload a series of images and create pre-defined tasks. You invite users to participate (via a custom link) and Chalkmark guides them through the tasks, recording clicks to measure task completion. The results of this simplified user testing are presented as a heat map indicating where your users clicked to complete each step in the survey.

* Basic paid package includes unlimited surveys and unlimited tasks.

Chalkmark Screenshots

Task Overlay:

Survey participants see a screenshot overlaid with the given task. In this example, the task is: "Where would you click to find out more about User Effect's services?" Each task is considered to be a single step in a process, with a corresponding click to move forward.
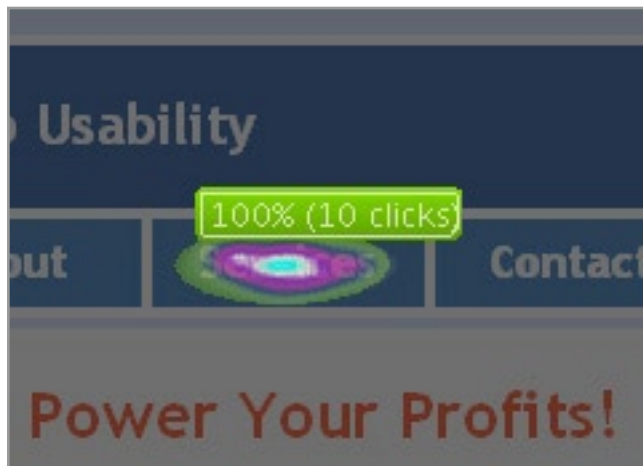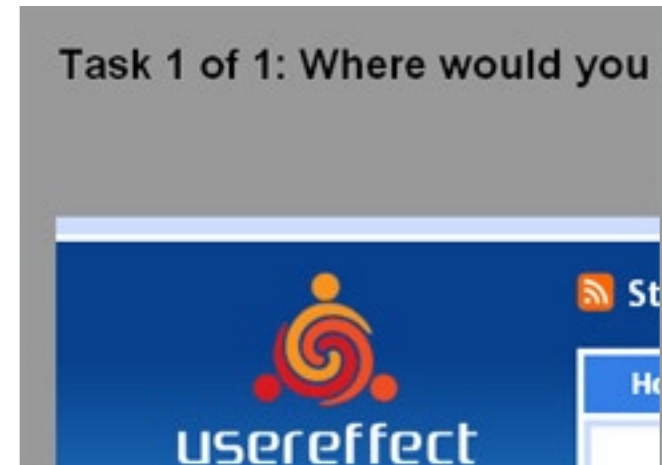
Task Completion Map:

For each task, Chalkmark creates a heat map to show where your survey participants clicked. In this case, we can see that 100% of users correctly identified the "Services" menu tab. This can help reveal whether people are having trouble with critical tasks on your site.
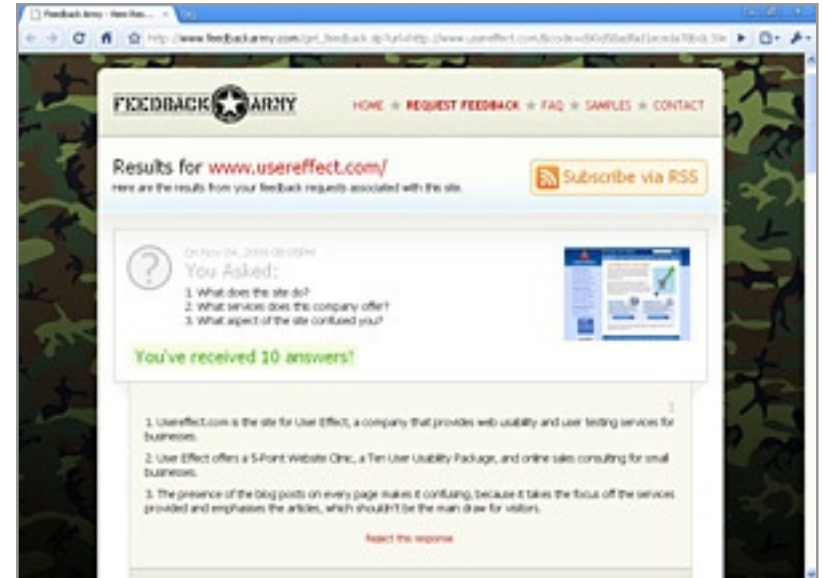
Feedback Army

www.feedbackarmy.com

Free: n/a

Basic: $10 for 10 users
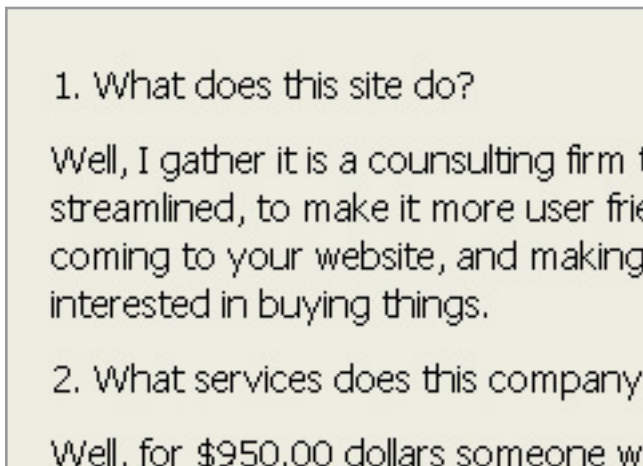
Type: Direct visit

Https: Yes

Overview:

Feedback Army lets you select a short series of questions and solicits users to visit your chosen URL and answer those questions (via Amazon's Mechanical Turk program). Test results are provided as text responses only. While responses can be basic, the price-tag makes Feedback Army attractive for getting initial feedback prior to more expensive testing. Refund requests are available in the event of low-quality feedback.

Feedback Army Screenshots

Test Questions:

Feedback Army lets you ask test subjects simple, open-ended questions about your site, such as "What services does this company offer?" Participation is self-guided by the visitor, so it's generally best to keep the number and scope of questions small.

On Nov 04, 2009 08:05PM
You Asked:
1. What does this site do?
2. What services does this company offer?
3. What aspect of the site confused you?

ve received 10 answers!

1. What does this site do?

Well, I gather it is a counsulting firm t
streamlined, to make it more user frie
coming to your website, and making
interested in buying things.

2. What services does this company

Well, for $950.00 dollars someone wi

User Feedback:

Visitor feedback is provided as answers to your pre-defined questions in HTML/text format. Although the results are simple, a sample of 10 users can provide a fairly impressive amount of insight, especially early in the usability testing process.

Loop[11]

www.loop11.com

Free: 1 project, 5 tasks

Basic: $350/project*

Type: Direct visit

Https: Yes

Overview:

Loop[11] lets you combine a virtual user test with survey questions. Simply define your custom tasks, landing URLs, success URLs, and questions. Loop[11] will provide a custom link that you can send to your participants and measures task success (via click activity) and records answers to your survey questions. Each project can have multiple tasks (limited to 5 for the freebie).

* Basic paid package includes unlimited tasks and up to 1000 participants.

Loop[11] Screenshots

Task Overlay:

Loop[11] presents tasks as an overlay on your website (you set the page the visitor lands on for each task), displaying the current task and % completed for the overall project. Questions can be placed between screenshots to gather more detailed information from your visitors.

Project Dashboard:

The Loop[11] project dashboard provides summary data and analyses, including task completion rates, aggregate answers to survey questions, and additional statistics about your individual participants (browser, time on test, time on task, page views per task, etc.).

Usabilla

www.usabilla.com

Free: Full access (beta)

Basic: n/a

Type: Direct visit or Image upload

Https: Yes

Overview:

Usabilla lets you create predefined tasks using either live pages or uploaded images and then invite users (via a custom URL) to attempt those tasks. The front-end interface is a simple overlay that guides the visitor with questions you create, such as "Where would you click next?" in this example. Usabilla records clicks and also allows visitors to leave notes. This tool is currently in beta and some features seem to still need ironing out.

Usabilla Screenshots

Show Points View:

The "Show Points" view lets you see where individual visitors clicked on screens during the task. You can also view notes left by visitors, but currently this feature is only available through an XML export.

Heatmap View:

Usabilla is a bit of a hybrid - although the implementation is more of a user-testing tool, the back-end data has more in common with the heat-mapping tools in this guide. Here you can see an actual heat map view, based on the click activity shown in the previous screenshot.

UserTesting.com

www.usertesting.com

Free: n/a

Basic: $29/user

Type: Direct visit

Https: Yes

Overview:

UserTesting.com uses its own, pre-screened testing pool to run simple usability tests based on the pages and questions you select. Results are a hybrid of video and voice-over walkthrough, where users think out loud as they complete the pre-defined tasks. UserTesting.com also allows you to request users based on specific demographics or custom requirements, and will attempt to match test subjects appropriately.

UserTesting.com Screenshots

Visitor Playback:

Like a screen recording tool, UserTesting.com lets you play back and pause a visitors session, highlighting clicks. Additionally, visitors talk over the session, providing critical feedback about what they're thinking and why they're taking the actions as you watch.
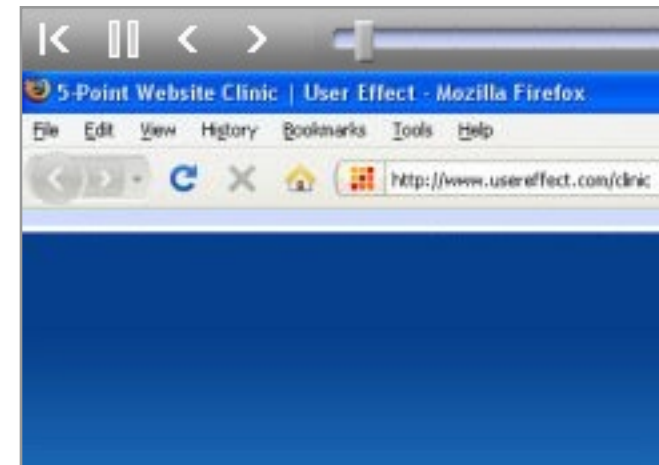
Written Summary:

Test subjects also provide written feedback, which can help you get a quick synopsis and also insure that your core questions are covered. Video playbacks generally run about 10-15 minutes, while written summaries are fairly condensed (less than a page).

UserVue

www.uservue.com

Free: 14-day trial

Basic: $149/month*

Type: Direct visit†

Https: Yes

Overview:

UserVue is a moderated testing package from the makers of Morae, a popular, professional usability testing platform. With UserVue, you can invite a participant and then observe and record a session in a teleconferencing-style format. Text chat functionality is also supported. The final session can be saved as a video file or exported for use with Morae.

* Basic paid package includes unlimited sessions and unlimited phone time.
† Requires an additional (free) software installation for both the observer and participant.

UserVue Screenshots

Facilitator Interface:

From the facilitator interface, you can initiate a session, set up a call, and even invite additional observers. UserVue works similarly to web-based teleconferencing software, with additional session-recording controls.
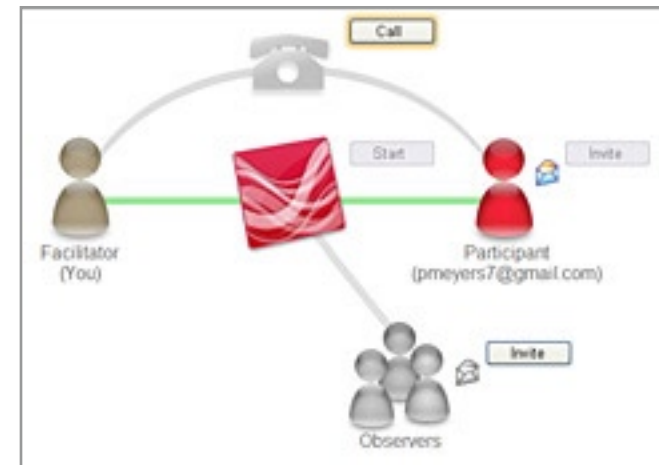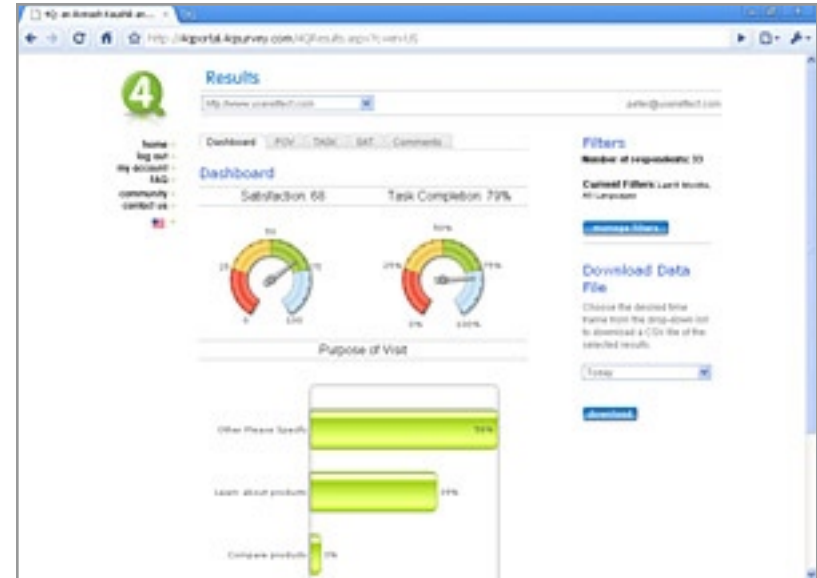

Facilitator Window:

Once the session is started, the facilitator can view the test subject's screen directly while providing instructions by phone. A chat interface appears on both the facilitator's and subject's screens for additional communication options.

4Q (iPerceptions)

www.4qsurvey.com

Free: Full access

Basic: n/a

Type: JavaScript code

Https: Yes

Overview:

Co-created by iPerceptions and analytics guru Avinash Kaushik, 4Q is a custom survey engine based on 4 simple questions, ranging from overall experience to task completion, plus room for an open-ended response. The 4Q survey appears as a pop-over window and is permission-based. You can customize questions and control the rate at which the survey is displayed to new visitors, minimizing interruption to your site.

4Q Screenshots

Survey Dashboard:

4Q provides an easy-to-use dashboard to track overall survey results, such as the "Task Completion" gauge on the right. You can quickly view the purposes of your users' visits, their overall satisfaction, as well as task completion for each of the pre-defined goals.

Task Completion: 79%
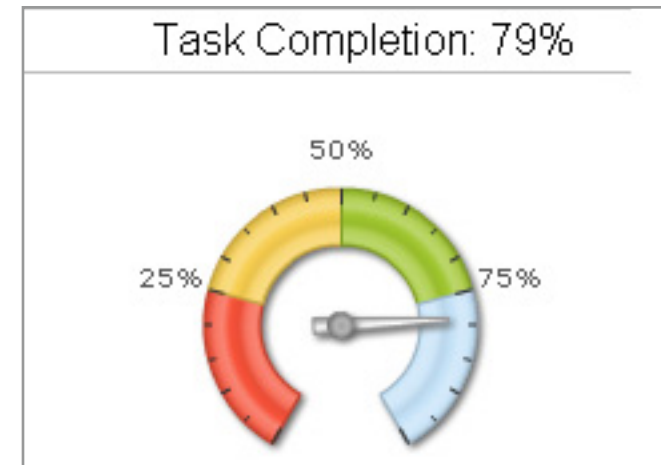
Date	Text
16.11.2009	Read the blog
15.11.2009	checklist items
14.11.2009	learn about the company
13.11.2009	research
13.11.2009	Education

Open-ended Data:

You can define open-ended questions, such as a goal that doesn't match your pre-defined list. In this case, data is presented for visitors who selected "Other" as their goal/purpose. 4Q lets you summarize data quickly but also dig deeper for more detailed results.
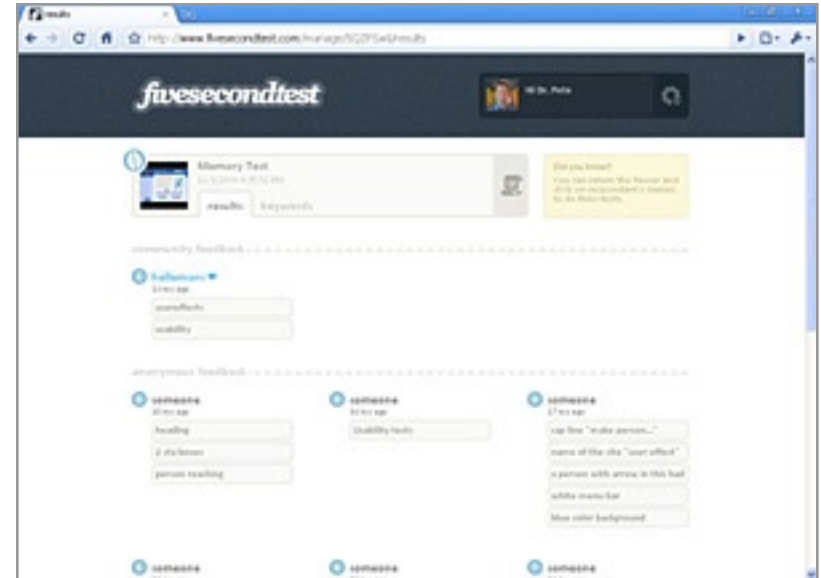
Fivesecondtest

www.fivesecondtest.com

🐷 **Free:** 15 responses

$ **Basic:** $4 per token*

📇 **Type:** Image upload

📷 **Https:** Yes

Overview:

Fivesecondtest allows you to upload a screen image to perform a simple memory test. Test subjects see your screen for 5 seconds and are either asked to list what they can remember or complete a click-based task (your choice). This emulates usability's "5-second rule" and can help you better understand your site visitors' first impressions.

* Each paid "token" includes 30 responses, within about 2 hours. Free responses take about 12 hours.

Fivesecondtest Screenshots

Individual Feedback:

Fivesecondtest breaks down feedback by individual user, letting you see what each user was able to remember about their 5-second visit. In this case, the visitor remembered a header, 2 buttons, and a graphic, but missed core information, like the company name.

Keyword Feedback:

You can also view aggregate feedback, based on individual keywords. For example, 3 visitors mentioned some form of "usability" while 2 mentioned "user testing". This summary can help you better understand themes across visitors and see if you're hitting the mark.

Get Satisfaction

www.getsatisfaction.com

Free: Basic options

Basic: $19/month*

**Type:** JavaScript code

Https: Yes
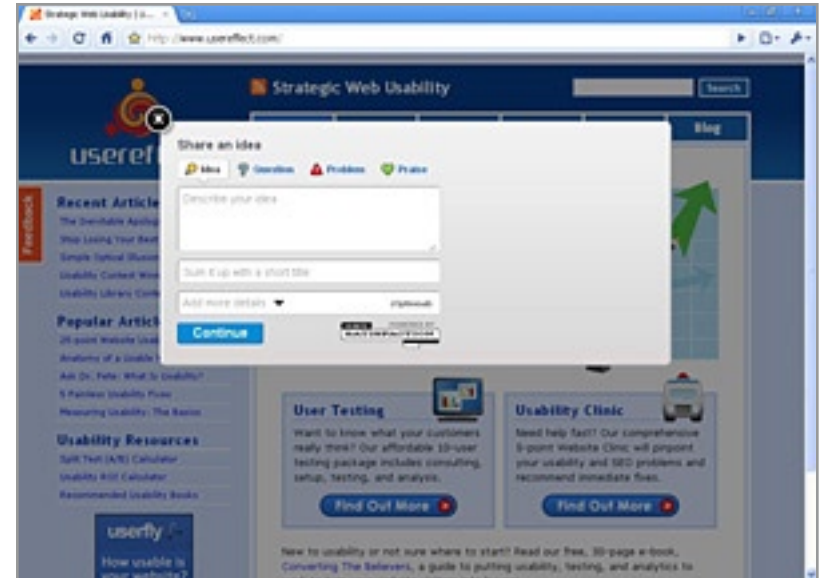
Overview:

Get Satisfaction combines a survey engine with a full-service customer feedback center. The basic survey lets site visitors communicate an Idea, Question, Problem, or Praise, which then gets fed into a forum-style site dedicated to your company. Full setup requires creating both company and employee accounts, but even the free feature set is robust enough to produce valuable feedback and let you communicate with customers.

* Basic paid package includes company rep account, customization, and ability to host on your own URL.

Get Satisfaction Screenshots

Feedback Tab:

The most recognizable feature of Get Satisfaction is the "Feedback" tab, shown here on the lower-left of the screenshot. You can customize the position and color of the tab, which seems to be popping up on more and more sites recently.
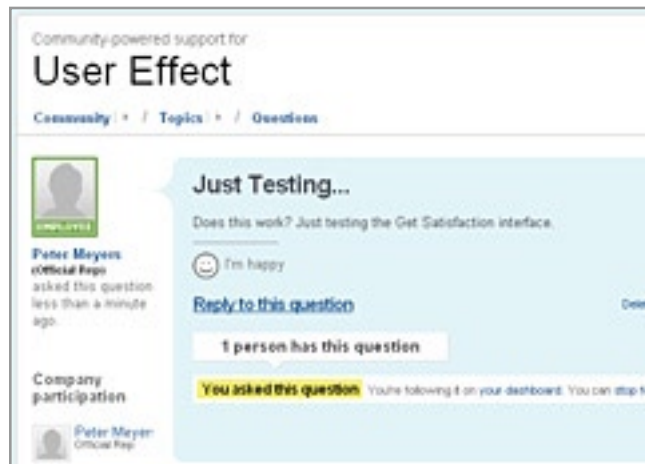
Company Forum:

Survey responses are fed into an online support forum, where you can respond directly to customers. In this respect, Get Satisfaction is less a survey engine and more of an ongoing customer support and communications tool.

Kampyle

www.kampyle.com

Free: 1 form, 50 items

Basic: $99/month*

Type: JavaScript code

Https: Paid plans only

Overview:

Kampyle installs a feedback tab in the corner of your website that pulls up a pop-up survey. The survey assesses the visitor's overall reaction (using 5 emoticons as options) and also presents choices to report bugs and give suggestions and compliments. On completion, the visitor can optionally submit their email address. Although the Kampyle survey is passive, you can also actively solicit feedback on exit for a percentage of visitors.

* Basic paid package includes 3 feedback forms, 250 feedback items, https: support.

Kampyle Screenshots

Feedback Tab:

Kampyle creates a "Give Feedback" tab in the corner of your website (you specify which corner). Clicking on the feedback tab presents a pop-up window with the feedback emoticons and comment options.


Feedback Monitoring:

The free version of Kampyle only allows you to see your feedback in a web-based email inbox, including the rating, comments, and some basic user information. Advanced analytics, visitor demographics, and Google Analytics integration are available with paid versions.

Skribit

www.skribit.com

Free: 1 blog

Basic: $24.95/year*

**Type:** JavaScript code

Https: Yes
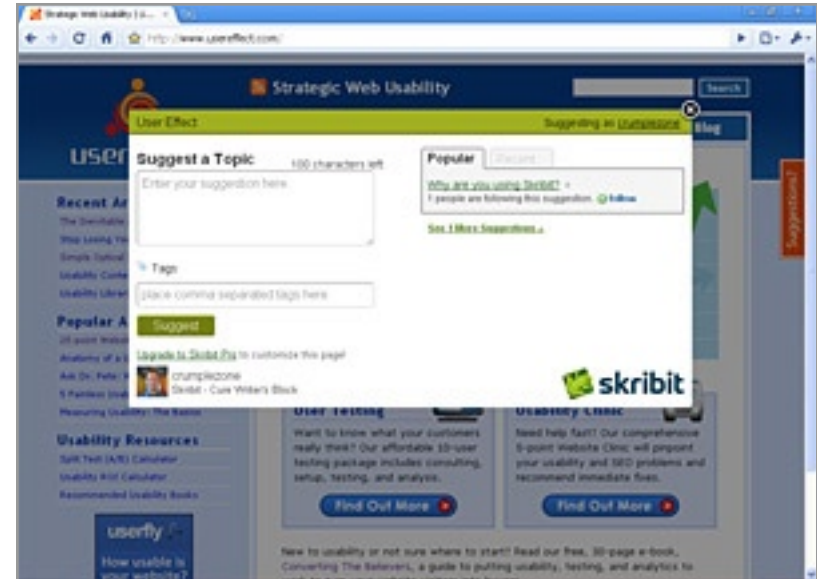
Overview:

Skribit is a user-feedback add-on designed for bloggers, evident from their tagline: "Cure Writer's Block". While the functionality is similar to some of the other survey tools, the structure and focus is designed for blog authors looking for topic suggestions. Skribit lets you choose between either having a "Suggestions?" tab that creates a pop-over form or a widget that's permanently visible on your site.

* Basic paid package includes unlimited blogs, advanced customization, and suggestion moderation.

Skribit Screenshots

Suggestions Tab:

Skribit installs a "Suggestions?" tab on your website that opens a pop-over form. The tab position and color is customizable, although the form customization is a feature of the paid package. You can also opt to install a visible widget directly on your site.
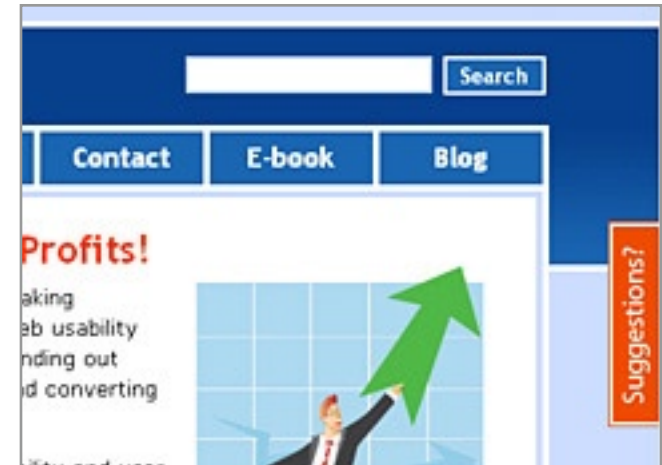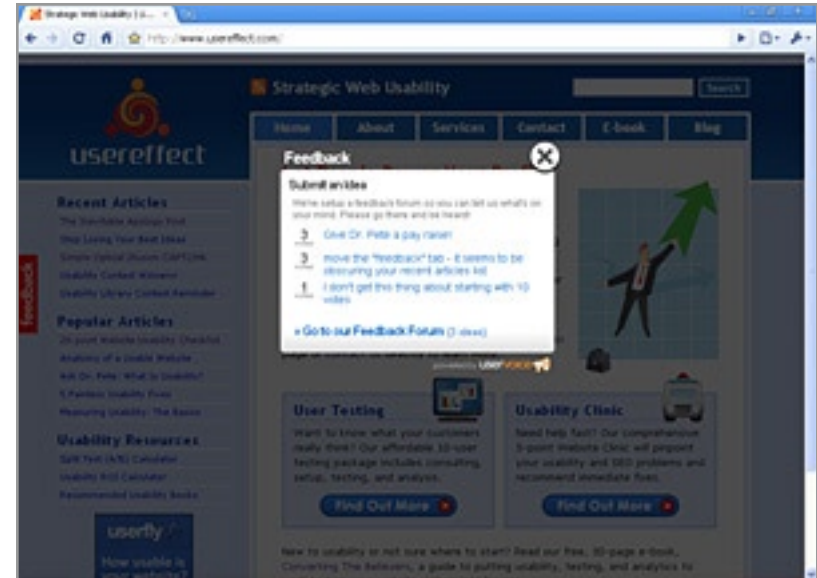

Feedback Dashboard:

Suggestions are logged in a dashboard along with comments. Skribit has some additional social media functions that allow you to tag suggestions and follow commenters. You can also track popular suggestions, as you would popular blog posts.

UserVoice

www.uservoice.com

Free: 100 voters/month

Basic: $19/month*

Type: JavaScript code

Https: Yes

Overview:

UserVoice creates a "Feedback" tab on your site that generates a pop-over window when clicked. Instead of soliciting direct comments, this feedback window uses a Digg-style voting system, where visitors can easily view and vote on previous comments. Customization is limited on free accounts (including placement of the "Feedback" tab), but UserVoice provides a 15-day free trial on their paid plans.

* Basic paid package includes unlimited, private forums, 100 voters/month, basic analytics.

UserVoice Screenshots

Feedback Pop-over:

The UserVoice feedback window allows visitors to view and vote on previous comment. Each visitor is allowed up to 10 votes initially. Visitors may also click through to the feedback forum screen to leave a new comment.
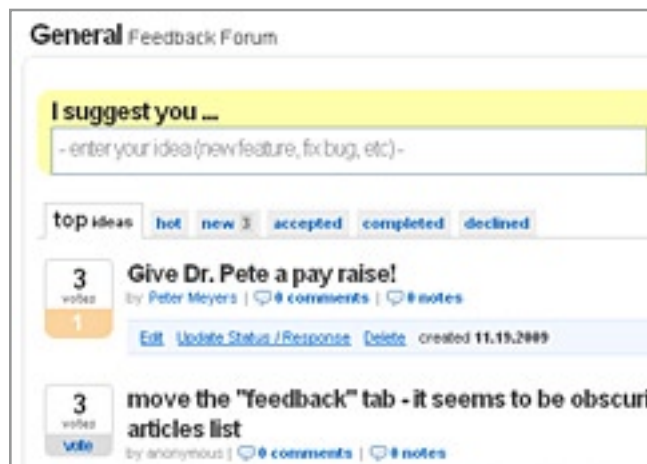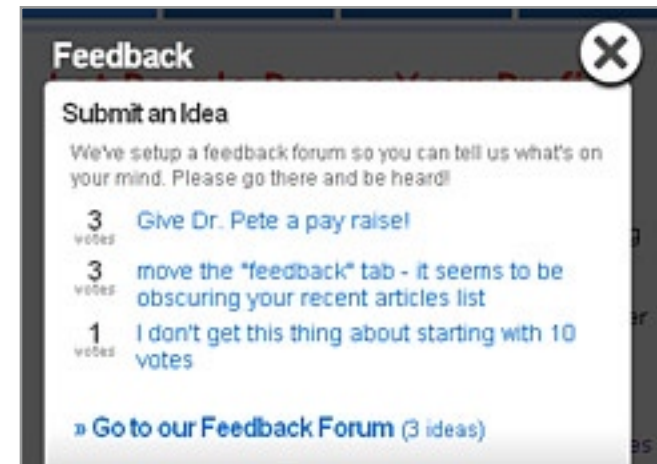
Feedback Forum:

The feedback forum screen allows visitors to view more details about previous comments or leave a new comment. UserVoice also has administrative screens for viewing comments, but the functionality is similar. The voting-based system may be more appropriate for larger sites with heavy traffic.

I. Heat Mapping Tools

	Free	Basic	Type	Https
AttentionWizard	Full access	n/a	Image upload	Yes
Clickdensity	1 site/page	$5/month	JavaScript code	Yes
Crazy Egg	n/a	$9/month	JavaScript code	Yes
Feng-GUI	1 image/day	$50 (50 images)	Image upload	Yes

II. Screen Recording Tools

	Free	Basic	Type	Https
ClickTale	400 pageviews	$99/month	JavaScript code	Paid
Clixpy	10 captures	$5 (100 captures)	JavaScript code	Yes
OpenHallway	1 user	$49/month	Direct visit	Yes
Userfly	10 captures/mo.	$10/month	JavaScript code	Paid

III. User Testing Tools

	Free	Basic	Type	Https
Chalkmark	3 tasks	$109/month	Image upload	Yes
Feedback Army	n/a	$10 (10 users)	Direct visit	Yes
Loop[11]	1 project	$350/project	Direct visit	Yes
Usabilla	Full access	n/a	Direct visit	Yes
UserTesting.com	n/a	$29/user	Direct visit	Yes
UserVue	14-day trial	$149/month	Direct visit	Yes

IV. User Feedback Tools

	Free	Basic	Type	Https
4Q (iPerceptions)	Full access	n/a	JavaScript code	Yes
Fivesecondtest	15 responses	$4/test	Image upload	Yes
Get Satisfaction	Basic options	$19/month	JavaScript code	Yes
Kampyle	1 form	$99/month	JavaScript code	Paid
Skribit	1 blog	$24.95/year	JavaScript code	Yes
UserVoice	100 voters/mo.	$19/month	JavaScript code	Yes

How to Contact Me

If you have questions or comments about this guide, or if you'd like to learn more about how to put any of these usability tools to work on your own website, please feel free to contact me directly at:

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