

Guide on the Side Final Report - Langara College

Alli Sullivan – Teaching and Learning Librarian, Langara College

May 2017

DESCRIBE HOW THE SYSTEM WAS TESTED AT YOUR INSTITUTION.

How often did you use the system during the pilot?

I started testing Guide on the Side early in the sandbox aiming to create a guide that taught users how to easily use our discovery layer. I probably spent a few days (4-5 sessions) working with the product.

How many users did you have testing the system?

At Langara, I (Alli Sullivan) was the sole tester of the product. In my role of Teaching and Learning Librarian, part of my duties are to explore new ways of creating learning objects for our students both online and in person. Dan Slessor (Communications Librarian) was also enrolled in the sandbox, but his duties did not permit him to spend time building a guide.

What types of activities did you try in the system?

Guide on the Side seemed like an interesting tool to pair with our recent website re-design that aims for a more easily navigated website. We are also exploring “just in time” instruction possibilities, giving students more automated help when problems arise. Our discovery layer is our main search function of the library web site and I tried to create a guide that would walk students through a search, focusing especially on quickly examining search results to identify scholarly articles.

WHAT PARTS OF THE SYSTEM DID YOUR USERS LIKE? DISLIKE?

We never got to user testing of the system, but as a creator, I appreciated that the interface seemed fairly easy to use. The learning curve was not terribly high. Some of the idiosyncratic language could have been better explained (chapter breaks vs. page breaks, etc). However, options to customize did not seem robust if you were not a programmer.

HOW COULD THIS APPLICATION BE USED IN A TEACHING AND LEARNING CONTEXT?

GotS is a good idea for complex and unfamiliar web activities like searching in academic databases or going through the catalogue. Since many institutions have designed their main library websites differently, the ability to have a tour or walkthrough for new users is attractive. However, once you get to the database itself, the search interface is identical. It would probably be nice to be able to share these guides easily so that we are not re-inventing the wheel with every guide.

WERE THERE TECHNICAL ISSUES WITH THE SYSTEM DURING THE SANDBOX PROJECT?

Unfortunately, our testing with GotS was brief because there were elements that were not compatible with our web design. If your website is designed to open many links in new tabs or in new windows, the guide will not accompany the new tab. After running into this issue, I consulted with our web design team who confirmed that the new tab links were a deliberate decision and provided me with the user centered philosophy around that decision. There were work-arounds suggested, like using the pop-up window method instead of the "Guide on the Side", but I thought that defeated the purpose of the tool.

WERE YOU ABLE TO FIND SUPPORT INDEPENDENTLY (IE FROM A USER COMMUNITY OR OTHER OPEN RESOURCES, LIKE WEBSITES AND BLOGS) WHEN YOU EXPERIENCED ISSUES?

There was a Google Group for Guide on the Side that seemed to be well utilized. The issue that I had with new tabs was noted in 2014 by a user with similar issues, but changes would have to be made site-wide in the javascript to overcome that. Other suggestions included configuring the JavaScript, but the discussion suggested that might also not be effective in our case. I do not have that much control over the website, so I chose not to spend more time with the product.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU HAVE TO OTHER INSTITUTIONS WHO MIGHT BE CONSIDERING USING THIS SOFTWARE?

To get this project to work, I would suggest that users develop a good relationship with their web team or make sure that they have overall control of their web design. We are rather limited in what we have control over, so Guide on the Side ended up not being an appropriate product for us.