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# Contents

Overview of this guide  
**1. Introduction**
- 1.1 The concise edition
- 1.2 What, why, who...?
- 1.3 Using this concise edition
- 1.4 Supporting documents

**2. Describing and defining the target audience**
- 2.1 The importance of the target audience
- 2.2 The concept of the target audience in service development
- 2.3 Defining the target audience
- 2.4 Describing the target audience

**3. Planning audience research**
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Objectives of audience analysis
- 3.3 Choosing the methodology
- 3.4 Researching non-usage
- 3.5 Recruiting subjects for audience research
- 3.6 Other sources of audience data

**4. Collecting audience data**
- 4.1 Undertaking research: in-house or third party?
- 4.2 Overview of data collection methods

**5. Modelling the audience**
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Analysing quantitative data
- 5.3 Making use of qualitative data
- 5.4 Personas and user profiles

**6. Making use of audience research**
- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Audience research in context

**Glossary**
Overview of this guide

**CORE GUIDANCE**

**DESCRIBING AND DEFINING THE TARGET AUDIENCE**

Section 2
Defining who you would like your audience to be, and how to approach segmenting the audience

**PLANNING AUDIENCE RESEARCH**

Section 3
Setting clear objectives for research activities, and planning activities to meet these objectives

**COLLECTION OF AUDIENCE DATA**

Section 4
The methods available for collecting audience data, and deciding how to conduct the research

**MODELLING THE AUDIENCE**

Section 5
Analysing and interpreting the data collected to build up a picture of the audience

**MAKING USE OF AUDIENCE RESEARCH**

Section 6
Using the research to meet the needs, wants and expectations of the audience

**SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

**INTRODUCTION**
Section 1
An introduction to the toolkit, including an overview of how it might be used in practice

**GLOSSARY**
Annex A
A glossary of the key terms used in the toolkit (e.g., ethnographic research)
1. Introduction

1.1 The concise edition

1.1.1 This is the ‘concise edition’ of ‘The Guide to Researching Audiences’ (‘the Guide’). It is a shorter version of the main Guide, designed to provide an easily accessible summary of the key principles of audience research and some practical information.

1.1.2 The full version of the Guide contains more detailed information than this concise edition, but they are laid out in exactly the same way to make it easy for you to follow.

1.1.3 This concise edition also includes snapshots of the case studies which support ‘The Guide to Researching Audiences’ (see sub-section 1.4 below).

1.1.4 The Guide and supporting documents have been produced by Curtis+Cartwright Consulting Ltd on behalf of the Strategic Content Alliance.

1.2 What, why, who…?

What is in The Guide to Researching Audiences?

1.2.1 The Guide sets out the basic principles of audience research. These can be followed regardless of the type of service or audience, and will help you to conduct audience research more effectively (better results) and efficiently (lower effort), with fewer problems and unforeseen complications. They provide the building blocks to enable you to design, conduct and apply your own audience analysis research. What this Guide will not provide you with is a ready-made audience analysis programme specifically designed for your service.

1.2.2 It is a guide to current good practice and a starting point for further reading. There is nothing very radical in the Guide – there are many other resources available on audience analysis and modelling, some of which are referenced in Annex D (Bibliography) of the full version of the Guide.

1.2.3 The Guide has a specific focus on online digital services. The digital revolution has resulted in an explosion of possibilities: new and innovative services; a deluge of content; availability of additional research techniques (eg web statistics); and potential new audiences. Relationships between digital content and non-digital content, between digital services and non-digital services, and between a ’digital audience’ and a ’non-digital audience’ are a new and interesting consideration for service providers and are discussed in Annex C (Digital Audiences and Digital Services) of the full version of the Guide.

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Why do audience research?

1.2.4 It is increasingly important for public sector services and resources to be able to demonstrate that they are used and valued by an appropriate audience. The uses of audience research are discussed in detail at Annex B (Making Use of Audience Research) of the full version of the Guide, and extend far beyond simply demonstrating a certain number of visitors or website hits to tick a box on a service level agreement. Audience research can be used to:

- Develop a product or service
- Evaluate the service (eg audience satisfaction)
- Demonstrate accountability to funders (eg value for money, highly valued by a niche audience)
- Inform long-term planning
- Attract sponsorship and marketing
- Inform business planning (eg to feed into a business case)
- Inform the management of contractual relationships
- Support professional development

Case study extract... Design of the BBC iPlayer2

Using audience research to design, develop and test a new version of a service

In 2008 the BBC decided to launch a redesigned version of their iPlayer, to be known as BBC iPlayer2, in order to integrate the delivery of on-demand TV and radio. This redesign relied on extensive user engagement to gauge user perceptions and attitudes – it was important to check that existing users of both services would not react negatively to the new combined service. It was also important to find out how perceptions of the design of iPlayer2 might affect the audience’s attitudes towards the BBC as an organisation and content provider in the 21st century digital world.

Separate research projects were conducted to investigate design and usability. Two qualitative methods were chosen to investigate audience perceptions of the design – moderated ‘audience labs’ at which participants were able to try out the iPlayer2 and share their responses and reactions with other participants, and in-depth individual interviews. Participants were recruited based on their TV and radio consumption habits (eg TV only), with an emphasis on ensuring that radio users reflected the full spectrum of genres (music, drama/entertainment, comedy, news, documentaries etc).

Whilst a number of ‘radio only’ users were concerned about the implications these design features had for the functionality and service that radio listeners would receive, the response to the design was generally positive (eg the general look of the home page was well received: users liked the ‘cinematic’ feel of the widescreen).

The BBC is now collecting and analysing data from server log files, BBC message boards, blogs hosted elsewhere on the internet, and is using audience surveys to monitor the success of the iPlayer2. This data will be used to inform further service development.

1.2.5 Audience research should be seen as an ongoing process rather than an occasional, one-off event. Even a small audience research project is worthwhile. Many techniques can be implemented quite cheaply or adapted to a shoestring budget. A frequently expressed concern is that a piece of audience research won’t be any use because it isn’t good enough. Some insight into your audience is vastly better than none at all and these concerns should not deter you from undertaking audience analysis.

1.2.6 A glossary of the key terms used in the Guide is provided at Annex A.

Who is the Guide for?

1.2.7 The Guide has been written for people in the UK public sector delivering online digital services, who wish to research their audiences.²

² Although it is focused on online digital services (ie those accessed via the internet), it will also be useful for researching audiences reached via other channels.
1.2.8 It is primarily aimed at non-experts who do not have market research skills themselves, and who do not have access to dedicated market research teams. It is therefore likely to be most useful for people in small organisations/services, or those conducting small projects in larger organisations. It may also be useful for people procuring services who want to know what guidelines to provide, and for those setting policies.

1.2.9 Audience analysis research should be done with commitment and support from senior management – without it, the full benefits of the research are less likely to be realised. Should it be required, this Guide provides you with some of the basic information needed to write an informal business case for audience research to facilitate buy-in from senior management.

1.3 Using this concise edition

1.3.1 The basic principles are structured as step-by-step activities in the lifecycle of audience research and are represented in Figure 1-1 on the following page.\(^3\)

1.3.2 How you choose to use the guidance to plan and conduct a programme of audience research will be influenced by many factors, including the maturity of the service, the budget available, the amount of digital content held and the breadth of the target audience.

1.4 Supporting documents

1.4.1 The Guide is supported by a separate document which provides real-world case studies demonstrating good practice in audience research.\(^4\) The case studies are from both the public and private sectors, and both the UK and abroad, and are useful to gain a practical understanding of what can be achieved when audience analysis is done well.

1.4.2 An illustrative case study presenting a hypothetical programme of audience research to put this Guide in context is available as a separate document.\(^5\)

1.4.3 A number of sector-specific and role-specific briefing papers on audience research are also available for:

- People setting policies
- People managing programmes of research and services
- People procuring digital services in the cultural sector
- People procuring digital services in the education sector
- People procuring digital services in the health sector
- People experimenting with digital media

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\(^3\) Note that although these activities are presented as separate activities in a linear process, in practice this is not likely to be the case – it is likely to be an iterative process.


## 1. Introduction

### SECTION 2
Describing and defining the target audience

This discusses the importance of knowing who you would like your audience to be, and provides guidance about how to describe and segment it. It will be especially relevant if you are currently designing a new service. However, it will also be relevant if you would like to start from the basics when planning research activities for services that are already in production and have an established audience.

### SECTION 3
Planning audience research

This is the place to start if you have already defined your target audience and wish to start planning your audience research. It addresses the importance of setting clear objectives for audience research activities, and things to consider when planning activities to meet these objectives. It also sets out example questions about the audience which can drive your research.

### SECTION 4
Collection of audience data

This provides an overview of the various audience analysis methods available (e.g., focus groups, web analytics). It also provides some information about the pros and cons of conducting the research in-house and contracting the work out to a market research company to help you decide the best route for your organisation/service.

### SECTION 5
Modelling the audience

This focuses on how to analyse and interpret the data that has been collected to address the specific research questions and build up a better understanding of the audience and their interactions with their service.

### SECTION 6
Making use of audience research

This briefly discusses using the information to build the service around the needs, wants and expectations of the audience.
2. Describing and defining the target audience

This chapter discusses the importance of the target audiences and looks at ways of defining the target audiences, and approaches to audience segmentation.

Knowing who you would like your audience to be and what service you intend to offer is a vital part of business planning and service development.

Both formal and informal approaches to defining the target audience are possible.

Segmenting the audience into different categories can be helpful when describing the target audience.

2.1 The importance of the target audience

2.1.1 Knowing who you would like your audience to be and what service you intend to offer is vital for any service. It may appear obvious, but it should be part of business planning as there are implications for funding and potential routes to sustainability for a digital service.

2.1.2 The characteristics of the target audience should influence the delivery of a service, the functionality provided, means of access etc. It is important to recognise that a service may have more than one distinct audience. Needs and expectations of the different audiences are likely to be only partly overlapping and the implications this has for service delivery should be considered.

Case study extract... oldbaileyonline

A good illustration of audience-focused service development

A project was funded to digitise the Old Bailey Proceedings to provide access to the text and scanned images of trial records. The project team was determined to create a resource that would reflect the needs of the different target audience segments, and consultations with the target audience provided evidence for its bid for funding, guided the design and features of the website, and guided the testing of the prototype website and later redesign.

The target audiences were identified on the basis of the content of the Proceedings and the project team’s professional experience of working in the London Archives, for example ‘community groups’ were identified as an important audience segment.

Following consultation with the target audience, the design specification included features aimed at meeting the needs of different audience segments. For example, it was discovered that some of the target audiences were not familiar with 18th century history, and that in the community groups segment schools were likely to be key users. Accordingly, a lot of background material was provided and dedicated ‘For Schools’ pages were included to provide guidance for teachers on ways of using the Proceedings in teaching, and resources tailored to school students including a timeline, glossary, tasks and primary source.

This audience-focused approach was successful – the size of the audience for oldbaileyonline has exceeded expectations and the service is clearly widely used and appreciated. For further information on the oldbaileyonline, see the website [www.oldbaileyonline.org].
2.1.3 Understanding the audience can be vital to give a sense of focus and identity to a service. Trying to be all things to all potential users is difficult. Different groups of users may have incompatible needs (e.g., experienced academic researchers will prioritise heavyweight search and analysis tools when using an archive; leisure users will expect a very user-friendly interface that lets them quickly explore the archive and get a flavour of the contents). This doesn’t mean that a digitised archive shouldn’t aim to appeal to both audiences, but understanding that these are distinct audiences with different needs should inform the design and development of the service.

2.2 The concept of the target audience in service development

2.2.1 Service development may be either resource-driven (e.g., because someone has a great idea) or audience-driven (e.g., if an organisation wants to extend its audience). Both approaches are valid, but detailed service development should take into account the intended audience for the service. The service must appeal to them, so their habits, needs and expectations will have an impact on the nature of the service and the ways in which it is promoted.

Case study extract... Digitisation of the John Johnson Collection

A good example of engaging the target audience to focus service development

The John Johnson Collection, housed at the University of Oxford, is widely recognised as one of the most important collections of printed ephemera in the world. To broaden access to this array of rare or unique archival material, a project was conducted by the Bodleian Library (University of Oxford) and ProQuest to conserve, catalogue and digitise more than 65,000 items of the Collection.

The project team conducted some initial audience research to support their successful bid for funding through the JISC Digitisation Programme. The target audience for the digitised Collection was defined and the project team demonstrated the relevance of the Collection to these audiences. For example, letters of support were solicited from potential users in UK universities and international academics with an interest in ephemera, and the project team investigated which higher education course modules might use this ephemera.

To ensure that the digitisation would realise maximum benefit for users, audience research was an important part of the design, development and testing of the online digitised Collection. For instance, to assist in deciding which ephemera to digitise, statistics for physical use of the various components of the Collection over the previous three years were compiled.

Some parts of the Collection have now been digitised and are freely available to all UK universities, further education institutions, schools and public libraries. Uptake and use of these collections are being monitored using focus groups and surveys (user satisfaction), web statistics (user activity), and assessment of user-generated content and tagging (user engagement). This research forms an important part of the evaluation strategy for this project.

For further information on the John Johnson Collection, see the website [www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/johnson]. Some areas of the website are restricted to members of the HE community.

2.2.2 Understanding the target audience will be critical to the success of the service. Audience research will focus on finding out the sorts of resources and services that appeal to the target audience, how they would prefer to access the service, and the technologies they use. Background knowledge about attitudes, lifestyle, social interactions etc is also likely to be useful if the resource is to be primarily for leisure use rather than for formal learning.

2.3 Defining the target audience

2.3.1 Defining your target audience doesn’t need to be a difficult technical exercise. A good starting point may be to picture an ideal audience member – or a typical, actual audience member. How would you describe this person? The descriptors you use are good starting points for thinking about categories for audience segmentation.
2.3.2 A more formal approach to defining the target audience would be to develop a series of user profiles or fully worked personas as an aid to service design and development (see sub-section). Negative user descriptions, profiles or personas can also be helpful: the kind(s) of people your service is not intended for.

2.4 Describing the target audience

2.4.1 The characteristics of the target audience should influence the delivery of a service, the functionality provided, means of access etc. The features included in a description of the target audience will vary according to the service but may include residential address, occupation, gender, interests, technological expertise etc. A target audience may be very inclusive (eg all the people in Manchester) or highly specific (eg qualified medical professionals with a research interest in Osgood-Schlatter’s disease).

Audience segmentation

2.4.2 Audiences are often segmented into different categories. Published data (eg television viewing figures, newspaper readership) often segments the audience on the basis of demographic categories. Academic libraries are more likely to categorise users according to their role within academia. The most appropriate way to define a target audience and segment the actual audience will depend on the service and the objectives of the audience analysis work, and several different approaches to segmentation are possible.
3. Planning audience research

This chapter looks at defining research objectives, selecting and combining appropriate methods, researching non-usage and recruiting subjects.

Research need not be perfect to be useful – the key to good audience analysis is setting out clear objectives and planning appropriate research to achieve the objectives. Engaging non-users is important but presents special problems.

Objectives can be broadly divided into two categories: assessment of reach and uptake, and assessment of quality and impact.

Starting points for planning research include:
- Defining service development objectives.
- Defining questions about the nature and behaviour of the audience and non-users.

Different audience research techniques are suited to different objectives and methods can be combined.

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 Planning audience research should start with the basic question: What do you want to know about your audience? Considering why the knowledge is needed and how it will be put to use is also important. Understanding the audience is not an end in itself, but an integral part of developing and maintaining a successful and sustainable service. Understanding the drivers for, and uses of, audience analysis work will help to ensure that it is aligned with wider service vision and objectives, and may help to obtain buy-in from senior management.

3.2 Objectives of audience analysis

3.2.1 The key to good audience analysis is setting out clear objectives and planning appropriate research activities to meet these objectives. There is little point in spending time, money and staff effort collecting data unless it is going to be useful.

Case study extract... London Museums Hub

A good example of setting clear objectives to focus research activities

The London Museums Hub is a partnership of four of the 'big player' non-national museums in London: the Museum of London (lead partner), the London Transport Museum, the Geffrye Museum and the Horniman Museum. The Hub conducted a research project to investigate the potential for a joined-up approach to online audiences.
The project had a well-defined brief for the research, which stated that ‘the Hub lacks a coordinated strategic approach to qualitative online audience profiling and research… we aim to build a more complete understanding of the Hub’s online audiences, and use this knowledge to take a more strategic user-focused approach to online delivery’. This brief was underpinned by specific research questions about their online audiences: Who are our audiences? Why do they use our websites? What are their expectations of the websites? To what extent are these expectations currently being met?

The project used a multi-stranded approach to audience research (eg combining online questionnaires, face-to-face interviews, focus groups and web statistics) to gather information to answer these questions. The findings from this project were then used to take a more strategic user-focused approach to online delivery. For example, the research confirmed that the overwhelming majority of website usage was for planning a visit to a museum. However, the website was not a key factor in the decision to visit – the reputation of the museum in a particular field, location etc were the main factors.

Following this exploratory research, concrete steps have been agreed that will enable the Hub to move towards a common approach to collecting data on how online services are received by the audience and the broader impact that online services have on organisations as a whole. For more information on the London Museums Hub, see the MLA London website (www.mlalondon.org.uk).

3.2.2 Audience analysis can be divided into two broad, interdependent categories: assessment of reach and uptake, and assessment of quality and impact. In planning audience research it is helpful to decide how important each aspect of the analysis is.

3.2.3 Research objectives must be set according to individual service priorities and context. Starting points for identifying broad aims and framing objectives include service development objectives (eg how can we extend the reach of our service?) and questions about the audience and non-users (eg who are our audience? how do they use our service?). See Figure 3-1 and Figure 3-2 for examples.

Figure 3-1: understanding non-users
Figure 3-2: questions about the audience

- WHO are they?
- DOES the service meet their needs and expectations?
- WHAT are the longer term effects of the service?
- WHO is not using our service?
- HOW do they use our service?
- HOW do they reach our service?
- WHAT are the longer term effects of the service?

Audience satisfaction

- Opinion
- Quality
- Reliability
- Convenience
- Importance

Frequency
- Regular
- Occasional
- One-off

Access
- Home
- Public
- Mobile

What for
- Contacts
- Collections
- How to find us

Subsequent use
- Search engine
- Referring site
- Direct

First use
- Search engine
- Recommendation
- Referring site
- Direct

Separate diagram

Demographic
- Age
- Gender
- Socioeconomic category

Function
- Professional
- Researcher
- Liaison
- Accidental

Goal
- Defined
- Systematic
- Impulse

Technology
- Expert
- Confident
- Novice

Domain
- Expert
- Some knowledge
- No knowledge

Expert
- Defined
- Objective
- Systematic

Confident
- Exploratory
- Expert

Novice
- Browsing
- Defined

Expert
- Quality
- Authority

Some knowledge
- No alternatives
- Alternatives

No knowledge
- No alternatives
- Alternatives

Clarity
- Comprehensive
- Clarity

Impact analysis
3.3 Choosing the methodology

Different approaches to audience analysis

3.3.1 Audience analysis methods can be categorised in different ways, but the distinction between quantitative and qualitative methods is an important one. Quantitative methods (eg surveys, web analytics) are usually more appropriate when statistically valid conclusions need to be drawn about the size, composition and other properties of an audience. Qualitative techniques (eg focus groups, one-to-one interviews) may be more appropriate for exploring attitudes and motivations in depth, discovering patterns of user behaviour and developing a relationship with audience members.

3.3.2 Ethnographic or observational techniques (eg diary studies, accompanied browsing) are increasingly used for studying usability and patterns of service use. Ethnographic data is often very detailed and may include computer collected data which is amenable to statistical analysis as well as a qualitative record of user behaviour.

Representative data

3.3.3 Samples are said to be representative when the composition of the sample audience – with respect to all relevant attributes – is the same as that of the audience as a whole. In some instances it is important to obtain data from a representative sample of the audience (eg to assess the level of uptake, to provide evidence for attainment of key performance indicators). However, representative data is not always vital, particularly when research is preliminary or exploratory.

Selecting appropriate methods

3.3.4 The kind of information you want about the audience should help to determine the methods you use, but pragmatic considerations (eg time, money, difficulty of recruiting subjects, staff availability and expertise required) will inevitably play a part. It is common to use a combination of methods in audience analysis projects, for example quantitative surveys are frequently combined with focus group or interview work. Table 3.1 provides a guide to the methods most likely to be useful in researching different aspects of the audience.

Case study extract... Europeana project

A good example of selecting appropriate research methods

Europeana is a 2-year project to design and build a web portal to make available to users a wealth of digital objects (eg photographic images, sounds, paintings, maps, manuscripts, books) from museums, libraries and archives across different European countries.

A `maquette` – an animated demonstration website – was initially developed based on user requirements and determined in consultation with content providers and technical developers. An audience research project was conducted to test whether this maquette lived up to the expectations and wishes of real end-users in terms of functionality, the interface and navigation. This was an important step towards developing a fully functional prototype Europeana site (launched in November 2008).

Although the response to the demonstration site was generally positive, a number of common concerns emerged. For example, it was found that the home page was not clear enough and did not give a good introduction to the site; the search results page lacked order in results, level of detail and presentation; and there was confusion about how the site could be browsed and searched. These results were fed back to the technical development team working on the fully functional prototype. For further information, please see the Europeana website [www.europeana.eu].
Table 3-1: selecting appropriate methods (Key: - unlikely to be suitable; * may be suitable, but of limited use; ** often suitable)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect of audience</th>
<th>Quantitative-survey</th>
<th>Web statistics</th>
<th>Ethnographic studies</th>
<th>Focus groups</th>
<th>Individual interview</th>
<th>Informal</th>
<th>Other approaches</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Satisfaction</td>
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<td>Reasons for non-usage</td>
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<td>Patterns of usage</td>
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<td>Tasks service is used for</td>
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<td>** user tracking</td>
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<td>Service usability</td>
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<td>Heuristic evaluation</td>
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<td>User requirements</td>
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</table>

3.4 Researching non-usage

3.4.1 Understanding non-use of a service is important: publicly funded services may have a responsibility to service a particular audience (e.g., senior citizens, ethnic minority communities).

3.4.2 Engaging with non-users may be difficult, time-consuming and potentially expensive, but it should be viewed as a necessary part of audience development work. Building relationships with non-users will pay dividends:

- The views of non-users are not represented in user surveys and the digital service is not meeting their needs; this may be an important failing
- Non-users can provide valuable insights for service development
- Engaging non-users can help demonstrate a commitment to that audience segment and increase knowledge about marketing and communication strategies that will be effective for that segment

3.4.3 Sub-section 3.5 of the full-version of the Guide provides more information on the importance of, difficulties with, and possible strategies for researching non-users.

3.5 Recruiting subjects for audience research

3.5.1 Recruiting subjects is a perennial problem and the easiest technique may not always be the best, and may lead to an unrepresentative, biased sample. Incentives can be used to aid recruitment, but care needs to be taken to ensure that the incentive is appropriate to the audience you seek to recruit.

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6 Heuristic evaluation is where expert evaluators assess the service’s user interface against recognised usability criteria. This method falls outside the scope of this guide but is described briefly in the full-version of the Guide because of its utility in the early stages of service development.

7 Responses to a survey may not provide very much information. Engaging more deeply with non-users through focus groups, discussion fora and interviewing will be necessary to build a richer, more meaningful understanding of non-usage.
3.5.2 Recruitment will be more difficult if a big time commitment is required or the research is going to be inconvenient for subjects. It is also important to bear in mind how your information collection techniques will influence response rates and the robustness of the data collected.

3.5.3 User registration can also be exploited easily by digital services for audience analysis. This allows the service to associate user characteristics with user behaviour. Registered users may be more frequent, more loyal or more committed to the service and therefore more willing to participate in research.

3.5.4 An extension of this idea is to set up research panels – a sample of audience members who have been recruited specifically for the purpose of regularly (ie on an ongoing basis) responding to qualitative and/or quantitative surveys.

3.6 Other sources of audience data

3.6.1 Don’t neglect the possibility of increasing your understanding of your audience by looking at research done by other service providers on their audience or by using data from population surveys carried out by market research organisations, government agencies or academic bodies eg the Oxford Internet Institute biannual survey of internet usage.

3.6.2 In addition, exploiting informal knowledge about your audience (eg observations by staff who interact directly with the audience, technical support emails) is a smart thing to do and can be particularly valuable if resources for audience analysis are limited.

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8 Subject to the provisions of the data protection legislation.

9 Oxford Internet Institute surveys, www.ox.ac.uk/microsites/oxis
This chapter provides an overview of different methods for collecting audience data and considers outsourcing audience research.

The pros and cons of conducting research in-house and commissioning an independent market research agency to undertake it on your behalf are discussed.

Data collection methods covered include:
- Quantitative surveys
- Interviews
- Focus groups
- Web statistics
- Ethnographic (observational) techniques

4.1 Undertaking research: in-house or third party?

4.1.1 Technological advances make it increasingly tempting to conduct research on a ‘DIY’ basis, rather than commissioning an independent market research agency to undertake it on your behalf. However, it is worth considering a number of factors before deciding if the in-house or commissioned research route is most appropriate.

Table 4-1: critique of approaches to undertaking research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
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</table>
| In-house research            | ■ Can often be the least expensive option – especially if expert in-house resources are available.  
                                | ■ Knowledge of the audience: expert knowledge and/or experience can help in planning and conducting research.  
                                | ■ Greater level of control: a market research agency might have different ideas about how to research an audience.  | ■ Lack of experience in conducting research can lead to poor research design and other problems that an experienced research agency would have anticipated and planned for.  
                                |                                                                      | ■ Questionnaire design is surprisingly difficult to get right. Poorly designed questions result in ambiguous or misleading data. Experience of questionnaire design is important.  
                                |                                                                      | ■ Similarly, unless knowledge of statistical and sampling techniques is available in-house, mistakes can be made – both at the planning and at the analysis stages.  |
| Commission market research   | ■ If carefully selected, a research agency will bring expertise and experience to bear, resulting in a more efficient (possibly even more cost-effective) survey and greater clarity of understanding.  
                                | ■ The involvement of a respected, independent third-party brings credibility to the research.  
                                | ■ Respondents are generally more likely to respond openly and honestly to a third party.  
                                | ■ Market research agencies have access to the specialist resources required to conduct research (eg recruiters and survey tools).  | ■ Commissioned research can be expensive.  
                                | company                                                                  | ■ The process of identifying potential research agencies, writing a research brief and briefing the selected agency takes time.  
                                |                                                                        | ■ Even market research agencies experienced in your sector will lack your detailed knowledge. Be prepared to spend time ensuring that the agency understands the nature of your audience and what you are trying to find out about it.  |
4.1.2 If you do decide to use a market research company, ‘The Research Buyer’s Guide’ published by the Market Research Society has some useful information both on the type of market research company to choose from and also on the questions to bear in mind when selecting a company. It includes advice on whether to sub-contract some elements of a research project to consultants (e.g., quantitative interviewing or recruitment of focus groups), or buy in the full service (where professionals will help to design the research and collect, analyse and evaluate data).

Case study extract... Teens Music and Technology: BBC research

An example of using a research agency and managing the relationship

The BBC conducted a project to investigate the role that music plays in the lives of young people and the extent to which young people use technology to access and perhaps share music with their friends. The hope was that an insight into the behaviours of this age group would lead to new ideas about how the BBC should be developing mobile products and services for this audience group.

A research agency was commissioned by the BBC to undertake this work. The BBC had very specific requirements of the work – it was important that the project had music at its centre rather than using technology as the focus, the research must ‘get beneath the skin’ of young people and offer a real insight into the part music plays in their lives, and the output needed to be a ‘design tool’ to inspire and stimulate discussion and spark ideas. Because of these specific requirements, it was necessary for the BBC to work very closely with the research agency to ensure that the research met their requirements. A continual dialogue was essential, beginning at the point that the idea for the research was conceived and continuing right through to final reporting.

An ethnographic approach was adopted as this has the potential to offer rich detail and deep insights into the behaviours, practices and everyday lives of people. The research agency designed the final report to be visually stimulating, full of images of the different lifestyles and interests of each of the participating teenagers and the groups they belong to, and most importantly, a document that invited readers to immerse themselves in the world of these teenagers. The report centred on the personas of four friendship groups, representing different interests, lifestyles and importantly, tastes in music. Because the format of the report was critical to kick-start discussion amongst designers and producers, this led to close consultation with the research agency on iterative drafts of the report to ensure it lent itself to this purpose.

To date, the output of the research has been used in an informal way. However, it is planned that a series of creative workshops will be organised, challenging designers to react to the findings with new ideas, solutions to some of the issues that young people have identified, and generally engage in constructive debate about the way forward for the BBC in this area.

4.2 Overview of data collection methods

4.2.1 Information and a critique on different methods of collecting audience data is summarised in the following table. More practical guidance for using these methods is provided in the full version of the Guide. The set of methods covered is not intended to be definitive and detailed information on how to implement each method is not provided.

4.2.2 Most audience analysis methods can be used or adapted successfully by non-specialists; however, there are some circumstances under which it may be appropriate to consider outsourcing one or more elements of an audience research project (see above, section 4.1).
Case study extract... Arthritis Source

A good example of using complementary research methods to gather information

Arthritis Source is an informational website, developed and hosted by the University of Washington, providing accurate and authoritative information about arthritis and related conditions. After being in service for four years, a project was conducted to characterise the audience of the service and to redesign the website to meet their needs.

The research project used three research methods to gather complementary information about the audience for Arthritis Source. Logfile analysis was used to explore patterns of usage – which pages were being accessed most frequently, and when were they being accessed? An online survey of users was conducted to collect a broad range of data about users – why they used the website, what their role was with respect to arthritis [eg medical student], demographics and IT expertise. Telephone interviews were then conducted with selected respondents of the online survey to gather more detailed information about users’ knowledge of arthritis and their interactions with Arthritis Source.

Information about their audiences and the use of resources was used by the team at the University of Washington to discover and prioritise redesign objectives. For example, the research revealed that nearly 20% of users were based outside North America, so basic changes were made to internationalise the content, eg both generic and brand names for drugs were included. Furthermore, some common misconceptions about arthritis among the website audience were revealed, and an online quiz about common myths and misconceptions was designed to help overcome these misconceptions.

Audience analysis is now routine for Arthritis Source and the design is tweaked when there is evidence of a change in user needs, or to take advantage of changes in the technological landscape, eg the site now includes more video clips and podcasts as high-speed internet access has become more widely available. The website’s commitment to assessing and responding to audience needs is signalled to the audience: web statistics are publicly available and very short online quizzes have been placed on many of the pages asking users to rate their usefulness.

For further information, see the Arthritis Source website [www.orthop.washington.edu/uw/tabID_3370/Default.aspx].

Table 4-2 (part 1 of 2): overview of data collection methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Information</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus groups</strong></td>
<td><strong>Description:</strong> Focus groups can be organised in many ways and in many formats. However, all formats are based on the premise of a small group of respondents discussing issues and being guided by an experienced facilitator (sometimes called a moderator).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Uses:</strong> For exploring attitudes and motivations and for generating new ideas. Focus groups are often used as the precursor to some form of quantitative survey research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Pros:</strong> Useful for creative discussion and new ideas, relatively short timescales, well-suited to introducing and gaining reactions to stimulus materials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Cons:</strong> Relies on sufficient numbers of audience being clustered in a geographical area, respondents might not be prepared to discuss personally, commercially or academically sensitive subjects with others, requires experienced facilitators.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>One-to-one in-depth interviews</strong></td>
<td><strong>Description:</strong> In-depth interviews conducted on a one-to-one basis, by telephone or in person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Uses:</strong> For understanding the range of attitudes and motivations which might exist within an audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Pros:</strong> Can be used to collect qualitative or quantitative data, good quality data, more in-depth information can be collected, stimulus material can be shown.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Cons:</strong> Relatively expensive, require a high level of respondent cooperation and commitment, time-consuming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method</td>
<td>Information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Quantitative surveys**      | **Description:** Quantitative surveys involve using a sample of an audience/population as the basis for producing a statistically reliable picture of the whole. Includes postal, email, telephone, and internet surveys.  
|                               | **Uses:** For providing quantifiable information about an audience. For example, its profile and its patterns of usage and behaviour.       |
|                               | **Pros:** Vary depending on method. In general: cost-effective, offer a large proportion of relevant audience a chance to respond, low level of commitment from respondents, internet and email surveys can provide very immediate feedback.  
|                               | **Cons:** Vary depending on method. In general: sample is often self-selecting, no guarantees of response rates, method should be chosen carefully (ie not all potential respondents will have internet access or will be comfortable using it), interpretation of questions can be subjective. |
| **’Traditional’ web statistics** | **Description:** Web servers generate log files when they serve a request, which is typically directly from a ‘user agent’ – usually a browser such as Internet Explorer or Firefox. These log files record the request which was made, the status of the response (success, failure etc) and some basic information about the user agent. This method considers relatively simple ways in which these log files can be processed to generate quantitative information (web statistics) regarding the use of the service.  
|                               | **Uses:** For understanding, on aggregate, the ways in which an online resource (or collection of resources) is used, for example the relative usage of different parts of a site, and how the usage varies over time.  
|                               | **Pros:** Low cost in time and effort, information can be available immediately, provides an ’at-a-glance’ view of how busy a site is, and which sections of the site are most used.  
|                               | **Cons:** Limited insight into user behaviour, very crude measures of demographic of audience, tempting to infer too much from the information which is available. |
| **Web analytics**             | **Description:** Web analytics is a more advanced method for investigating the actions of users. Web analytics will include the information available from traditional web statistics, but whereas web statistics is focused on the resource, web analytics is focused on individual users. The actions of these users can be combined to provide bulk information on a service, but at a far higher level of detail than that available from traditional web statistics.  
|                               | **Uses:** Web analytics can be particularly helpful to support site design decisions, by understanding the decisions that users take when using a resource.  
|                               | **Pros:** Information can be available immediately, provides extensive information on user behaviour, can be used to segment users based on a range of behaviours and possibly on demographics.  
|                               | **Cons:** Commercial web analytics packages are expensive, setting up reporting is time-consuming and demands good business and technical knowledge, insight into user behaviour from web statistics must be validated. |
| **User observation techniques (ethnography)** | **Description:** Ethnography is a term used to encompass a wide range of techniques and approaches. At its core is a desire to understand human culture by observing behaviour, but this broad principle is increasingly used in commercial, public and social research contexts. It includes user tracking studies (eg shadowing, diary studies) and use testing (eg task-focused activity sessions).  
|                               | **Uses:** Ethnography and observational techniques can offer an insight into how audiences use and interact with services and resources. For digital services very detailed data about usage can often be captured unobtrusively by computer logging techniques.  
|                               | **Pros:** Vary depending on method. Example – use testing is an excellent way of identifying problems with usability.  
|                               | **Cons:** Vary depending on method. Generally time-consuming and resource intensive. |

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11 In this document, we have divided the measurement of online resources into ‘traditional’ web statistics and web analytics. This is a somewhat artificial boundary, but one that is necessary to consider the full range of opportunities. Traditional web statistics consider bulk information on a resource (ie looks at usage from the service’s perspective), whereas web analytics considers the actions and pathways chosen by individual users (so looks at usage from a user’s perspective).
5. Modelling the audience

This chapter deals with analysis and interpretation of audience data to address specific objectives and improve understanding of the audience.

Data from an audience analysis project should improve understanding of the audience in several ways:

- Answers to specific research questions – or further evidence
- New knowledge about the audience and its interactions with the service
- Objectives for future audience research

Topics covered in this chapter include approaches to analysing quantitative and qualitative data, potential problems with data interpretation and developing personas or user profiles for service development.

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 This section deals with the issues involved in analysing and interpreting the data to address the specific research questions and build a better understanding of the audience and its interactions with the service.

5.1.2 The audience data must be analysed appropriately: the techniques used will depend on the type of data and the aims of the research. The data should provide evidence that can be interpreted to draw conclusions relevant to the specific objectives of the research. It is important to be sure that the data really do provide evidence for any statements you make and that you have considered all the possible interpretations of the data. Full analysis and interpretation of the data should also provide wider insights into the audience, and its behaviour and relationship with the service.

Case study extract... JISC national e-books observatory project

A good example of analysing research data to understand user behaviour

The JISC national e-books observatory project is a 2-year project led by JISC Collections, which is investigating user behaviours and the demand, usage, delivery and business models for course text e-books. The outputs of this research will support the future procurement of e-books in the sector.

This project is using a number of complementary research methods including web analytics, user interviews and surveys to understand how users interact with electronic books. For example, the project is using web log data to provide quantitative measures of usage and suggest a number of possible interpretations of user behaviour. However, this data must be treated with care (e.g. does a low number of searches indicate that a user has quickly found the resource they wanted, or that they have given up after one attempt?). More detailed analysis of usage data (i.e. web analytics) may be informative, but interviews and surveys are being conducted to help validate assumptions and inferences from the web log data, and to develop an understanding of user behaviour.

For further information, please see the project website [www.jisc-collections.ac.uk/catalogue/jiscebooksproject].
5.1.3 Analyzing the data from audience research will be easier if the research was well planned and conducted. Many problems in analysis and interpretation can be avoided if data collection procedures are selected and implemented with the analysis in mind. Sometimes a trade-off needs to be made between simplicity, convenience and reliability of recording, and convenience and power for analysis. Paper-based data collection might be easiest to administer, but data will have to be coded and entered onto a computer before analysis.

5.1.4 Analysis of the data from an audience research project should improve understanding of the audience in several ways:
- Answers to the specific research questions – or at least relevant evidence
- New knowledge about the audience more generally
- Further questions about the audience to be addressed in future work

5.2 Analyzing quantitative data

5.2.1 Quantitative data can be analysed statistically to explore relationships between variables. For example, to answer questions such as ‘Are registered users more likely to download files from a service?’ and to uncover homogeneous segments of the audience.

5.2.2 Techniques include regression and correlation analysis (for defining relationships between variables) and factor and cluster analysis (to look at relationships among variables).

5.2.3 Potential problems with interpretation of quantitative data include:
- Poor questionnaire design. Decisions about questionnaire design can have implications for the interpretation of the results, for example the exact wording of statements about satisfaction with the service could affect the proportion of the sample who appear to be content with the service
- Instructions and/or responses are misunderstood. Piloting a questionnaire on a small sample or using interviewers to collect survey data can help avoid these problems
- The sample of respondents is unrepresentative. Obtaining a representative sample is particularly difficult when surveys are distributed to an unknown set of potential respondents. If the sample is likely to be unrepresentative it is important to consider the implications for interpretation of the data and caveat the conclusions

5.3 Making use of qualitative data

5.3.1 Interpreting qualitative data is necessarily a subjective process, so if resources permit it may be worth involving more than one person in analysis and presentation of the data.

5.3.2 Presentations of qualitative data will usually attempt to summarise the content and import of the material, and typically include quotations from the material. For a group discussion this would usually include a judgement about variations of opinion between group members and comments on possible reasons for differences of opinion. A brief summary of the flow of discussion can be helpful to elucidate the context for the views and attitudes expressed by group members.

5.3.3 It is possible to code or categorise qualitative data so that quantitative techniques can be applied. Coded qualitative data can be presented in tabular or graphical format as a supplement to textual digests of the material.
5.4 Personas and user profiles

5.4.1 A persona is an archetype, with the personal traits, lifestyle, aspirations, beliefs, needs and goals etc typical of a segment of the audience. Personas can help to provide focus for service development work that has fairly high-level, generic objectives, eg to make the site easier to use or 'make the site more appealing to school age children'. The process of developing a persona is often quite involved, including detailed interviews with potential users, ethnographic studies, novel activities – anything which will help to foster a good understanding of the audience.

5.4.2 If resources do not permit the creation of fully fledged personas, it may be possible to achieve some of the same benefits by developing user profiles – descriptions of typical users, oriented to the service under consideration and focusing on interactions with the service, needs, expectations and attitudes towards the service.
6. Making use of audience research

This chapter reinforces the message that audience analysis should be seen in the context of the service as a whole

Audience analysis can provide many benefits, but any decisions on use of the data will depend on the wider service context and priorities.

A strategy for realising the full value of audience analysis work is discussed.

6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 Audience research is a tool for service development and can be used to provide the benefits discussed in Section 1; however, audience research is an aid to decision-making and not a substitute for it. Evidence from audience research can help service providers make informed decisions about spending on digitisation, new services, support for different platforms, promoting the service to new audiences etc but it is not a substitute for business planning or the political decisions that need to be made about priorities for publicly funded services.

Case study extract... Penn Data Farm

Using audience research to monitor resource usage and organisational performance

The University of Pennsylvania developed a repository of quantitative information, the Penn Data Farm, to aid the measurement and assessment of library resource use and organisational performance.

The ultimate aim of the Data Farm is to support excellent ‘customer’ management and to optimise the design and delivery of library resources and services. Examples of how staff have used the Data Farm to achieve this aim include analysing information on the use of electronic resources (including frequency of usage, cost per use and status of users) to determine the optimum allocation of money for electronic resources – this is particularly important as library budgets are squeezed. The Data Farm has also been used to track the use of resources produced in-house for University of Pennsylvania members (eg course guides, teaching materials, guides to library services for a subject etc) to refine their understanding of the University members’ needs and work out how to meet them.

The team at the Data Farm are always looking for ways to collect and exploit more audience data, but they remain very conscious of the limitations of their data – it is often difficult to know what web usage statistics really mean, and usability analysis is an important complement when designing new tools etc for a digital service. For further information, see the Penn Data Farm website [http://metrics.library.upenn.edu/prototype/datafarm].

6.1.2 Because distinct audience segments have different requirements, it is important to understand the relationship between them and prioritise allocation of resources appropriately. Audience analysis can provide information about audience segments, their relative size, and how they use, value and access a service, but decisions about resource allocation still depend on service priorities.
6.1.3 Decisions about how to develop and promote the service are still business decisions, not least because use of the service will depend on the quality of the resource, and the success of the marketing strategy. Of course, audience analysis should inform both these activities.

6.2 Audience research in context

6.2.1 At the conclusion of an audience research project, when the data has been collected, analysed and interpreted, and conclusions have been drawn, it is important to make sure that the full value of the research is realised. For example:

- The results of the research should be disseminated to stakeholders and other interested parties
- Everyone who helped with the project should be thanked; this includes staff who helped to carry out the research, participants and anyone else who contributed
- Consider the implications of the findings for service development and audience development
- Look at the conclusions of the research – Were the specific objectives met? What lessons can be learned for future work?
- Plan follow-up and future research
- Assess the wider implications of the work (eg are there any implications for long-term strategy?)

6.2.2 It may be appropriate to share some of your findings with partners in the same sector, other public sector organisations serving a similar audience etc.

Case study extract... Archival Sound Recordings

Using audience research to develop a service and monitor its use

The British Library’s Archival Sound Recordings website, conceived as a way of increasing access to the Sound Archive’s extensive collection, was launched in 2006.

Audience research played a central role in the development of the website. The initial phase of work related to the challenge of developing a website that met the needs of its audience in terms of content, usability and accessibility. Consequently, a specification for the website was developed and this became the focus of the initial audience research work. A user panel consisting of 10-12 individuals from a variety of HE and FE institutions (a mix of academics, librarians and researchers) was set up to represent the needs of the target audience throughout the development and refinement of the website. The demonstrator version of the website was also tested on new people who were fresh to the site. Testing was conducted in a dedicated ‘usability lab’, and led by trained facilitators who shadowed the users.

Subsequent to the launch of the Archival Sound Recordings website, audience research was used as a way of ensuring that the website was fulfilling the role for which it was intended in the HE and FE communities. In addition, a programme of audience analysis which has examined how and when the website is used has been undertaken. The British Library team also engaged with users to develop case studies on ways of making use of the Archival Sound Recordings, which will be used to promote the resource to the academic community.

For more information on the British Library’s Archival Sound Recordings, see the website [http://sounds.bl.uk].

6.2.3 It should also be noted that audience research projects will often result in change – whether it be directly to the service offered, or to the organisation itself (eg as a result of a change in company strategy). Change must be carefully managed, and will require thoughtful planning and sometimes sensitive implementation, and above all engagement with the people affected by these changes. Useful further reading on the management of change in a programmatic context is Managing Successful Programmes (MSP), Office of Government Commerce (OGC), 2007 edition.
## Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Audience development</strong></th>
<th>Activities carried out to increase the audience for a service or resource.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Audience satisfaction</strong></td>
<td>Establishing if the audience is happy with the service that is being provided. For example, is it happy with the quality/content/accessibility/comprehensiveness of the service? Interrogation of audience satisfaction is often done in tandem with audience analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Digital service and digital audience</strong></td>
<td>In this guide, <em>digital</em> is used to refer to resources and/or services exploiting digitised content or delivered <em>via</em> a digital channel. In most instances this means a service which is available online, but it also includes digitised resources distributed on CD and could include digital television services which share some of the characteristics of online digital services. <em>Digital audience</em> refers to the audience for a digital service or resource.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnographic research</strong></td>
<td>Research based on observations of human behaviour, carried out in a ‘naturalistic’ setting. This can include ‘observation’ <em>via</em> automated recording devices and is sometimes extended to include observations of subjects made in a laboratory – the crucial point is that behaviour in response to the relevant stimuli should be normal and that the presence of the researcher or the observational equipment should not interfere with or affect the subject’s behaviour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formative research</strong></td>
<td>In the context of service development and delivery, this term covers research carried out during service development work, as part of the development process, to provide feedback on the work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Front-end research</strong></td>
<td>In the context of service development and delivery, this term covers research carried out in the planning and preparation of a service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus group</strong></td>
<td>A group of individuals selected and assembled by the researcher to discuss and comment on the topic under consideration. Subjects’ personal experience of the topic and interactions amongst group members are the distinguishing features of the technique.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Impact analysis</strong></td>
<td>Analysis of the longer-term effects of a service (or group of services) on its audience. Longer-term evaluation methods are required to determine if the impact of a service is lasting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reach</strong></td>
<td>In this guide, <em>reach</em> is used to refer to the number of people to whom a service or resource is available. Different from <em>uptake</em>, which refers to usage of the service or resource.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Summative research</strong></td>
<td>In the context of service development this refers to evaluative research assessing the extent to which a service has met specific criteria for success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Target audience</strong></td>
<td>The intended audience for a service or resource.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Segmentation</strong></td>
<td>The process of dividing an audience into different categories or <em>segments</em> on the basis of criteria relevant to the service or resource under consideration. Segments are relatively homogeneous and distinct from other segments with respect to the chosen characteristics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Usability</strong></td>
<td>A measure of the quality of the user experience of a service or resource. It generally encompasses factors such as ease of learning, efficiency of use, memorability, error frequency and severity, and subjective satisfaction with the interface.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>User-centred design</strong></td>
<td>A design philosophy which places the goals, expectations and skills of users at the centre of the design process: the service or product is designed to fit the user. Typically, users are involved throughout the design and development process, including user testing of the service or product whilst it is under development.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>