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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

MassLegalHelp.org is a statewide, collaborative project of the Legal Services community of Massachusetts. Along with their other two websites, MassLegalServices.org and the forthcoming MassProBono.org, the mission of the MassLegalHelp.org web team is to improve access to justice for low income and disadvantaged persons through innovative use of the Web to interconnect, support, and educate advocates and the general public. As most of the content of the website is written by people within the legal services community, a usability study was designed to examine how an average user could navigate the site and understand the information it contains.

Users for the studies were recruited from community centers in the city of Boston. The participating centers were Orchard Gardens CC in Roxbury (4 users), the Gallivan CC in Mattapan (3 users), the Archdale CC in Roslindale (3 users, and Red Oak CC in Chinatown (2 users). All users had at least some prior experience with using computers, and were recruited by the directors of their respective community centers. The studies took between 45 minutes to an hour and half, and each participant was compensated \$20 for his or her time.

Overall, the responses to the site were very positive. Ten of the twelve users said they would use the site again, and eleven said they would recommend the site to others. The users liked the organization of the categories, and the amount of different information that could be found on the site. They also liked the headings within documents, which made it easier to quickly gather the information within the document. Several users commented that this site had good information for anyone to know, not just people with legal problems.

Users seemed to have trouble with some particular areas. Most of the users had difficulty with some of the longer documents—either they did not read to the end, or they missed important information within the document. Several users also had difficulty with some of the language and terms in the site.

Users generally navigated the categories well, and were able to return fairly easily to the homepage or previous pages. Several did have difficulty with the search option though—they entered whole phrases or questions which did not return the information they were seeking. Several users also had difficulty discerning the different areas of the website, notably the Get Legal Help option at the top of the page. The recommendations listed in this report may aid in making the site more accessibly and easy to use.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The usability testing was conducted over five sessions, at the computer labs of community centers around Boston. Each user was seated at a computer equipped with the Internet, and from one to four observers were seated around the user to take notes, count screens, and record the times. The users were asked to speak aloud during the studies and share with the usability team their comments or suggestions, and were either videotaped or tape-recorded to gather facial expressions and comments. The usability team consisted of Mass Legal Services interns David Noland and Jean Lee, with additional observation from MLS web staffers Gene Koo and Dan Puro, as well as intern Kim Vigilia. Tasks such as recording screen counts and timing of the tasks was split among available team members, and all observers took notes on user comments and reactions.

The users ranged in age from 16-45, and all were recruited by the directors of the community centers. They all had at least some experience with using computers, but otherwise were diverse in terms of educational background, computer usage, and Internet usage, and were representative of our target audience for the site. Each user was compensated \$20 for his or her time.

The users were introduced to the usability team, and the facilitator explained the purpose of the studies and the process that would be used. The participants then were given a consent form to read over and sign, and given a brief survey of background information to fill out. The users were then given a piece of paper with the URL for the site, and given a chance to browse the site and look around on their own. After they finished, we proceeded to the actual usability studies. The users were given scenarios in which they were asked to find certain information on the site. After the testing finished, the users completed a debriefing survey and were asked questions about their impressions of the site and any recommendations they may have for improvement.

The tasks were designed so that users would use different sections of the site, and have an opportunity to complete the tasks using several different means (e.g. go through the categories or search for key terms). After the testing, they were asked what they found easiest and hardest to use in the site, what they would recommend be changed, and what other kinds of information they would like to see on the site.

## **USER INFORMATION**

The participants in this study were recruited from Community Centers in the Boston area.

The participating centers were Orchard Gardens CC in Roxbury, the Gallivan CC in Mattapan, Archdale CC in Roslindale, and Red Oak CC in Chinatown.

**Average Age/Standard Deviation/Range:** 25.25 / 9.95 / 16-45

**Gender:** 4 Male 8 Female

### **Highest Level of Education Completed:**

5 High School 5 Some College 2 College Degree

**Subjects/Majors:** Secretarial, General Education, Business

**Additional Trainings:** Computers, Office for Children Workshop, CPR

## **COMPUTER USE**

**General Computer Use:** 9 Daily 3 Once a week

**Computer Access:** 8 Home 5 School 6 Work 3 Other

**Internet Use:** 6 Daily 4 Once a week 1 Once a month 1 None

**Internet Access:** 7 Home 4 School 4 Work 2 None 2 Other

**Used Legal Services Before:** 1 Yes 11 No

## **RESULTS**

| <b><u>Tasks</u></b>   | <b><u>Average time</u></b><br>(St. Dev.)<br>[Range]<br>{#Respond} | <b><u>Average Screens Viewed</u></b><br>(St. Dev.)<br>[Range]<br>{#Respond} | <b><u>Success</u></b>                   |
|---|---|---|---|
| <b>1. Browse the site, and return to homepage.</b>  | 6:47<br>(1:56)<br>[4:12-10:11]<br>{10}                            | 13.4<br>(6.24)<br>[5-25]<br>{7}   | <b><u>Yes 10</u></b><br><br><b>No 2</b> |
| <b>2a. What are your two MassHealth managed care options?</b>                                 | 3:23<br>(1:38)<br>[1:20-7:08]<br>{10}                             | 4.1<br>(2.27)<br>[1-7]<br>{7}   | <b><u>Yes 5</u></b><br><br><b>No 7</b>  |
| <b>2b. If you wish to change your MassHealth physician, what number should you call?</b>      | 2:23<br>(2:02)<br>[0:05-5:23]<br>{5}                              | 3.5<br>(1.73)<br>[2-6]<br>{4}   | <b><u>Yes 5</u></b><br><br><b>No 7</b>  |
| <b>3. What does 'Implied Warranty' mean?</b>  | 4:08<br>(2:24)<br>[1:27-8:19]<br>{10}                             | 4.3<br>(2.87)<br>[1-10]<br>{7}  | <b><u>Yes 8</u></b><br><br><b>No 4</b>  |
| <b>4a. What is a paper that says you must vacate your apartment by a certain date called?</b> | 3:56<br>(2:44)<br>[1:15-9:01]<br>{9}                              | 6.0<br>(3.87)<br>[2-14]<br>{7}  | <b><u>Yes 7</u></b><br><br><b>No 5</b>  |
| <b>4b. Does this mean you have to leave your apartment?</b>                                   | 0:49<br>(0:57)<br>[0:02-2:38]<br>{7}                              | 2.7<br>(3.61)<br>[1-10]<br>{6}  | <b><u>Yes 8</u></b><br><br><b>No 4</b>  |
| <b>5a. How do you obtain a divorce?</b>   | 5:33<br>(2:44)<br>[3:08-11:12]<br>{9}                             | 5.9<br>(3.02)<br>[3-11]<br>{7}  | <b><u>Yes 5</u></b><br><br><b>No 7</b>  |
| <b>5b. Do you have to get a lawyer for the divorce?</b>                                       | 0:39<br>(0:27)<br>[0:03-1:20]<br>{8}                              | 1.2<br>(0.41)<br>[1-2]<br>{6}   | <b><u>Yes 7</u></b><br><br><b>No 5</b>  |
| <b>6. Who could you tell your cousin in Brockton to contact about a legal matter?</b>         | 3:43<br>(2:45)<br>[0:55-8:03]<br>{9}                              | 7.7<br>(4.57)<br>[1-12]<br>{7}  | <b><u>Yes 6</u></b><br><br><b>No 6</b>  |

## Survey Questions

**1. Overall, I found the MassLegalHelp.org web site easy to use.**

4 Strongly Agree    7 Agree    1 Disagree

**2. It was easy to find information that would help me solve my legal problems.**

4 Strongly Agree    6 Agree    2 Disagree

**3. Terms and wording were clear.**

4 Strongly Agree    6 Agree    2 Disagree

**4. I found the web site easy to navigate.**

5 Strongly Agree    6 Agree    1 Disagree

**5. The information was organized so it was easy to find what I needed.**

3 Strongly Agree    7 Agree    1 Disagree

**--What parts were the easiest to navigate?**

Get Legal Help

Consumer Law

Categories (5 people)

Health Care Sources

Divorce (2 people)

Going back to home page

**--What parts were the most difficult to navigate?**

Divorce (2 people)

Family Law

Sub-categories (2 people)

Health Care

Get Legal Help (2 people)

**--What parts did you find most informative?**

Housing (3 people)

Family Law

Used Cars

Question + Answers

Home Page and Sub-categories

Consumer

Divorce

**--I would use this web site again.**

**Yes (10 people):**

For rights

Legal advice

It is easy to use and there are additional numbers to call

Lots of good info

It deals with everyday issues

**No (2 people):**

I am not patient enough

It is not easy to search for information

**--I would recommend this web site to someone else.**

**Yes (11 people)**

**No (1 person)**

# **RECOMMENDATIONS**

## **1. Cut down on long documents**

--Most users had difficult with documents longer than two screens worth of scrolling or 5-8 Q+A sections

### **Suggestions:**

--Have a Table of Contents for these documents, with links from the T.O.C to corresponding sections

--Have clear, accurate headings in documents—almost all users skimmed the headings when reading longer documents

## **2. Make [Get Legal Help](#) section more usable**

--Half of the users surveyed could not find what they were looking for in this section

### **Suggestions:**

--Word the link differently—‘Find a Lawyer’, with a link to MA Bar Association lawyer directory for those not eligible for legal services

--Move link to more central location on page—several users did not even look at the top of the page for this

--Show addresses of legal services programs in lists of programs—the addresses are available when the user clicks on an individual program, but not when there is a list of several programs for an area

## **3. Create a glossary of frequently appearing but technical terms**

--Most users were confused by some of the legal language in documents

--Some users did not seem to understand some of the sub-categories they could go to (for example; MRVP, SSI, etc.)

### **Suggestions:**

--Have separate glossaries for different sections (i.e. Housing glossary, Benefits glossary)

--Have words in glossary link to related documents (for example, Evictions would have links to documents about evictions)

**4. Create a ‘How to use this web site’ page, next to ‘About Us’, which explains the areas of the site, how to use each area, and common tips about navigating the page**

--Users with lower computer skills had difficulty navigating the site, particularly the search function and the Get Legal Help area

**5. Organize information within documents so the most useful/basic information is on top**

--Users read information at the beginning of documents much more carefully than towards the bottom

--Several users had difficulty finding information that was at the end of documents (for example; ‘[Separation and Divorce](#)’ and ‘[Buying a Used Car](#)’)

--Try to think from the point of view of a user when writing documents—the information that they would find most useful may not be the most important to someone in legal services—For example, in ‘[Separation and Divorce](#)’, it is not said that a person can get a divorce without a lawyer until the end, though that is information that would be important to many users

**6. Organize documents within categories so the most useful/basic information is on top**

--Users focused on the first documents they saw—several never moved past the first few documents in a category, even if those documents did not contain the information they needed

**Suggestions:**

--Documents dealing with basic rights/definitions should go first, with more specific ones underneath—most users will want to get basic information first (for example; users had to scroll down in the [MassHealth](#) section to get to the document ‘[How does MassHealth managed care work?](#)’)

**7. Make homepage easier to understand and navigate**

--Several users, particularly those with limited computer knowledge, had difficulty navigating the homepage

**Suggestions:**

--Make the divisions clearer between the Categories on the left, the options on the top, and the search bar

--Make sure the homepage is visibly different from other pages—some users thought they were on the homepage, when in fact they were on the [masslegalservices](#) page

or another page within [masslegalhelp](#); perhaps have HOME in large letters on the top of the page

- Have the picture at the bottom of the page return user to the top, to minimize scrolling
- Contact us link at bottom just leads back to homepage—have someone to contact there
- Have an easy link between [masslegalhelp](#) and [masslegalservices](#)

## **8. Make the ‘search for’ function more user-friendly**

- Several users typed in questions or whole sentences, and the results they got were not useful

### **Suggestions:**

- Have examples of proper searching under the search bar (Examples: MassHealth, implied warranty, etc.)
- Have the search link at the top of the page lead to a basic search, not the [advanced search](#) right away—some users clicked on it, and were confused by the [advanced search](#) options

## **9. User suggestions for information to add**

- More immigration information—one user remarked that while the [immigration section](#) has useful information, it lacks info about how immigrants can come to the US/become US citizens, and what paperwork they need, etc.
- Information on traffic violations
- A section for youth, with information on child abuse/neglect, teacher abuse, children’s rights, etc.
- Information about employment training opportunities

## **10. Under each category on the homepage, have a brief description of what is contained within**

- Users may not understand what each category contains
- For example; [Family Law](#) (Divorce, child support, etc.), [Consumer](#) (Bankruptcy, debt, etc.)

## **11. Make sure important rules are stated early on**

- Users may be confused if information is not explicit

--For example, several users were confused about whether they needed a lawyer to get a divorce by '[Separation and Divorce](#)'—the reader is advised to consult a lawyer several times in the document, but not told that one can get a divorce without a lawyer until the end

## **12. For each section, have brief intro that tells users to look at sub-categories on the left**

--When a category had both sub-categories and documents, users tended to focus on the documents, even if they were not relevant

### **Suggestions:**

--Have a short introduction for each category explaining the category and directing users to look at the topics to the left ([The benefits](#) section does this nicely)

## **13. Make sure categories have documents in them**

--The [unemployment](#) section has a sub-category, but no documents

--Two users seemed confused by the blank space when they went to this section

--Also, make sure all Q+A's in documents are answered (for example, [MassHealth](#) [FAQ](#) is missing the second answer)

## **14. Group similar documents together with brief summaries**

--Particularly in the [housing section](#), some users seemed overwhelmed by the amount of documents there

### **Suggestions:**

--Have the documents organized into related groups (For example: [In Housing=> Evictions=>#2](#), group together the documents that may be possible discrimination)

## **15. Clarify which links take you to documents and which take you to other sites**

--Users may not understand the globe next to links as signifying another web site, and be confused when they end up off-site

### **Suggestions:**

--Have a pop-up window or some form of notification so users know when they are going offsite

--This is particularly important in categories with a lot of off-site links, such as [Consumer](#)

**16. Have easily understandable definitions of ‘court complaint’, ‘notice to quit’, and ‘execution’ right under links in [Evictions=>#1](#)**

--Most users knew the terms ‘Eviction’ and ‘Eviction Notice’, but were confused when they saw there was more than one kind of eviction notice

--Definitions under these terms will make it easier for users to know where to look

**APPENDIX A**  
**MASSLEGALHELP.ORG CONSENT FORM**

**Investigators: David Noland, Gene Koo, Daniel Puro, Jean Lee**

OVERVIEW AND PURPOSE

This study will provide information about common user needs for the masslegalhelp.org and may lead to improving the site for accessibility and understanding. The goal of this study is to gather information about the navigation and content of the site.

PROCEDURES

- Participants will be asked to use the web site and speak aloud their thoughts while viewing the web site and completing certain tasks on it.
- Participants will be videotaped/tape-recorded.
- Data about time taken to complete tasks and problems with the site will be collected.
- Participants will be asked to complete a short survey at the end and give us their opinions on the site.
- The entire process will take between 1-1 ½ hours.

OTHER INFORMATION

Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the process. Once the data has been collected and reported, individual names will be destroyed, and the tapes will be erased. You are free to refuse to participate in the study and may withdraw at any point if you so choose. The study will not cause any undue stress or discomfort beyond that of normally using a computer or being videotaped.

---

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

**I voluntarily consent to participate in the study described above. I understand the process involved, and understand that I may ask the investigator questions about the research or about participants' rights.**

---

Signature of Participant

Date

**APPENDIX B**

**MassLegalHelp.org Usability Test**

**Participant Information**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_

**Education Experience**

(Circle highest level completed)

Elementary                  High School                  Some College                  College Degree

Graduate degree                  Additional training \_\_\_\_\_

Subjects studied/Major

**Computer Use**

(Circle all that apply)

*General Computer Use:*

Daily                  Once a week                  Once a month                  Other \_\_\_\_\_                  None

*Computer access:*

At home                  At work                  At school                  Other \_\_\_\_\_                  None

*Internet use:*

Daily                  Once a week                  Once a month                  Other \_\_\_\_\_                  None

*Internet access:*

At home                  At work                  At school                  Other \_\_\_\_\_                  None

**Other Information**

Have you used legal services before?                  Yes                  No

## **APPENDIX C**

### **MassLegalHelp.org User Tasks**

*We will be giving you some scenarios—act as if you were the person in the scenario, and try to find the information you would need.*

1. You have heard of the masslegalhelp.org web site from a friend.
  - >Browse the site for a few minutes, and look at information that may be interesting to you or your friends and family.
  - >Return to the homepage
2. You are thinking about applying for MassHealth managed care, but wish to find out more about it first.
  - >What are your two options if you do apply?
  - >If you wish to change your MassHealth physician, what number should you call?
3. You are shopping for a used car and you see one that says it has an ‘Implied Warranty’. What does this mean?
4. You receive a paper that says you must vacate your apartment by a certain date.
  - >What is this paper called?
  - >Does this mean you have to leave your apartment?
  - >Return to masslegalhelp.org home page.
5. You and your spouse wish to file for divorce. You have no children, and have agreed on dividing your possessions and assets.
  - >How do you obtain the divorce?
  - >Can you get this divorce without the services of a lawyer?
5. Your cousin lives in Brockton and needs help with a legal matter.
  - >Who could you tell your cousin to contact?

## APPENDIX D

| Task List   | Time | Screens | Success | Comments |
|---|------|---------|---------|----------|
| 1. Browse the site.<br>Return to the homepage.  |      |         |         |          |
| 2. You are thinking about applying for MassHealth managed care, but wish to find out more.                                      |      |         |         |          |
| a. What are your two options if you do apply?   |      |         |         |          |
| b. If you wish to change your MassHealth physician, what number should you call?  |      |         |         |          |
| 3. You are shopping for a used car, and you see one that says it has an 'Implied Warranty'. What does this mean?                |      |         |         |          |
| 4. You receive a paper that says you must vacate your apartment by a certain date.  |      |         |         |          |
| a. What is this paper called?   |      |         |         |          |
| b. Does this mean you have to leave your apartment?   |      |         |         |          |
| 5. You and your spouse wish to file for divorce. You have no children, and have agreed on dividing your possessions and assets. |      |         |         |          |
| a. How do you obtain the divorce?   |      |         |         |          |
| b. Do you have to get a lawyer for the divorce?   |      |         |         |          |
| 6. Your cousin lives in Brockton and needs help with a legal matter.  |      |         |         |          |
| a. Who could you tell your cousin to contact?   |      |         |         |          |

## APPENDIX E

### MassLegalHelp.org Usability Survey Questions

1. Overall, I found the MassLegalHelp.org web site easy to use. *(Check one)*

Strongly agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly disagree

2. It was easy to find information that would help me solve my legal problems.  
*(Check one)*

Strongly agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly disagree

3. Terms and wording were clear. *(Check one)*

Strongly agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly disagree

4. I found the web site easy to navigate. *(Check one)*

Strongly agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly disagree

--What parts were the easiest to navigate?

---

---

--What parts were the most difficult to navigate?

---

5. The information was organized so it was easy to find what I needed. *(Check one)*

Strongly agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly disagree

6. What parts did you find most informative?

---

---

7. I would use this Web site again                      Yes                      No

--Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_

8. I would recommend this Web site to someone else                      Yes                      No