

Usability ROI

Case Study: Breastcancer.org Discussion Forums

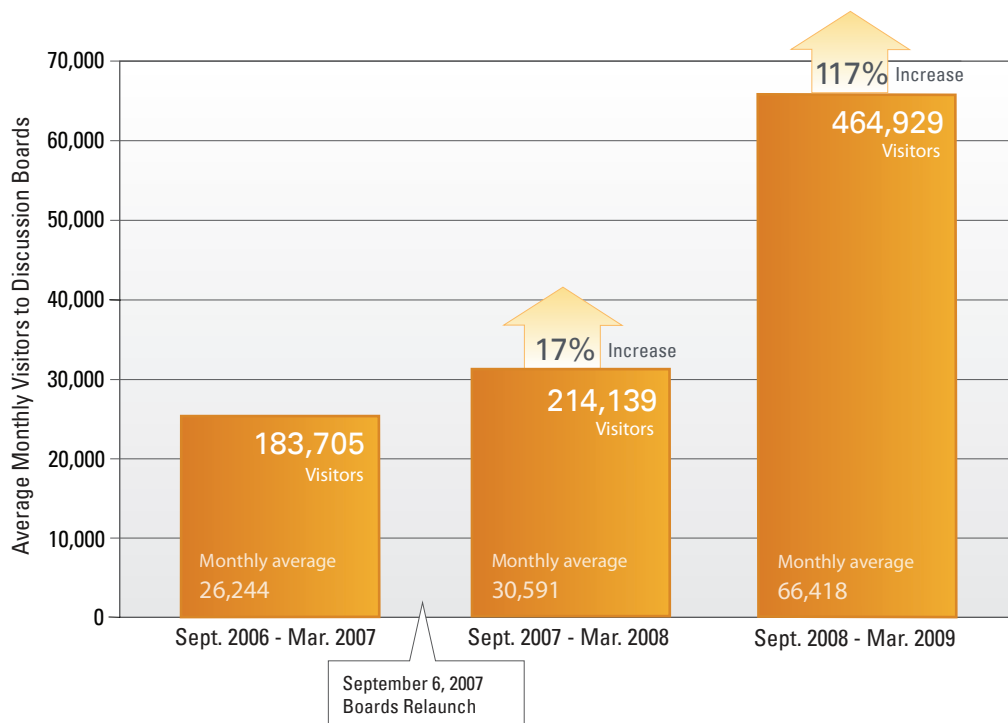
Breastcancer.org is a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing the most reliable, complete and up-to-date information about breast cancer. A crucial part of the organization's outreach is their online Discussion Boards — which offer support and information 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Unfortunately, severe usability stumbling blocks in the legacy third party platform were stifling community growth and generating high user support costs.

Foraker redesigned and redeveloped the system after conducting three rounds of user testing to pinpoint problem areas. Breastcancer.org has experienced a remarkable return on investment, with measurable success in traffic, member activity, usability, and costs.

More Traffic

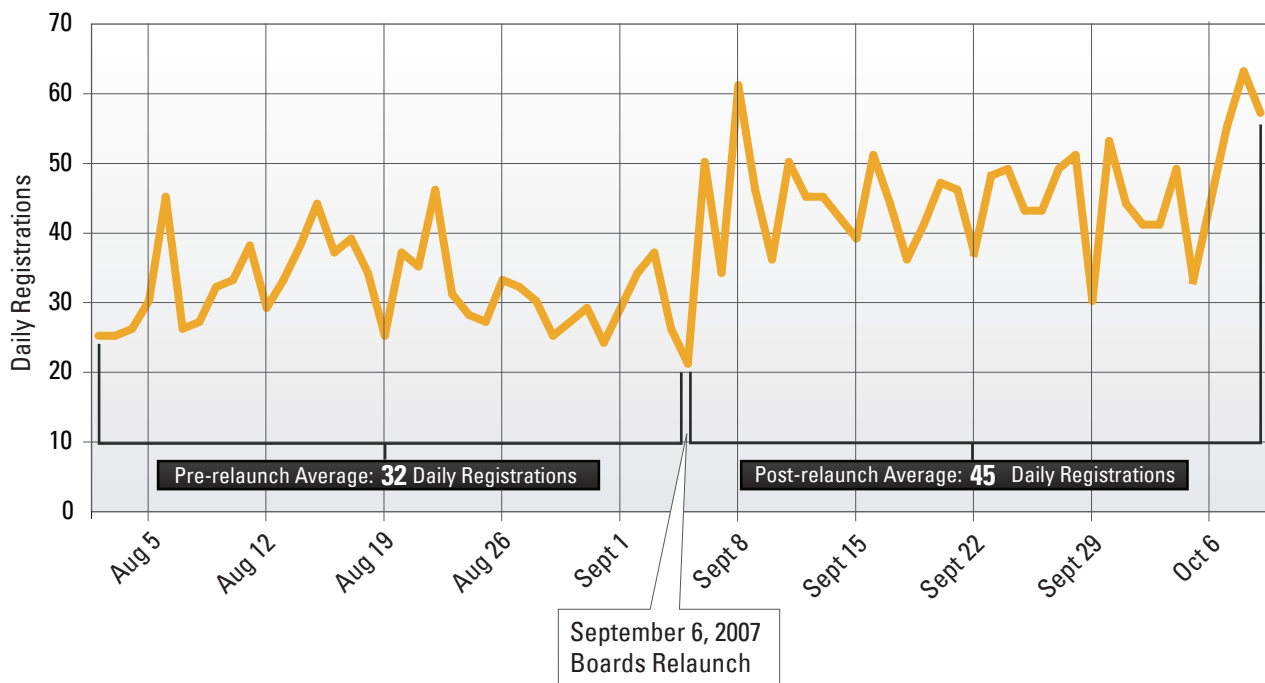
Usability begins even before people click through to a website. Does the site have an attractive listing in popular search engines for relevant queries? Are the URLs easy to email to family and friends? Does the site publish easily-indexed HTML and CSS? Foraker's comprehensive search engine-friendly design and development process included: semantic HTML/CSS code, search engine-friendly URLs, customized page titles, and other features that greatly enhanced the user experience of people *before* they visited the site.

As a result, search engine referrals (which were virtually non-existent on the legacy system) began to quickly and meaningfully contribute to traffic. Currently, 69% of traffic to the Discussion Boards comes from search engines.



Prior to the launch of the new system, the Discussion Boards averaged 26,244 unique visitors per month. Shortly after the launch, the Boards were averaging 30,591 unique visitors per month — a 17% increase. Just one year post-launch, the Boards experienced a 117% increase in unique visitors, with an average of 66,418 per month.

More Usage

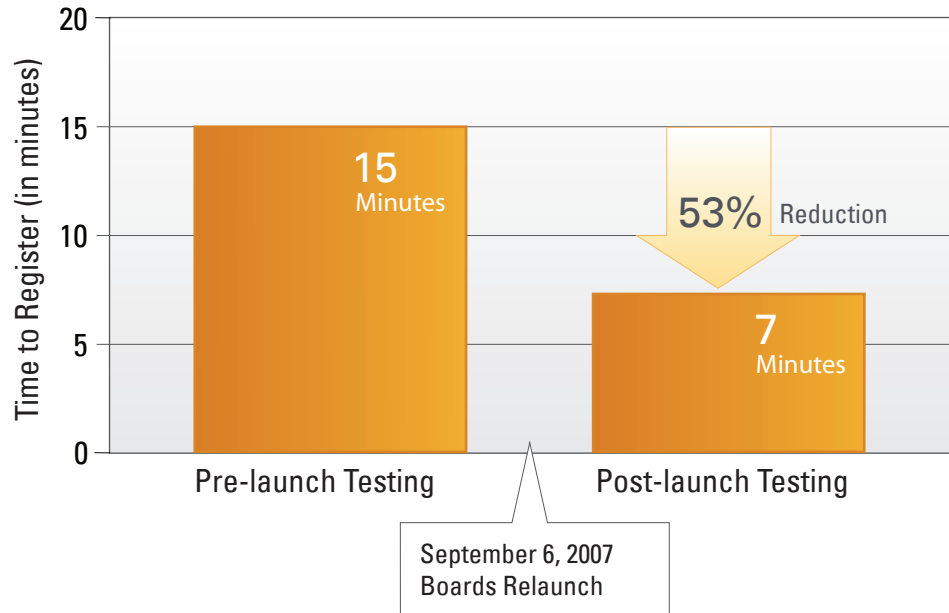


The redeveloped Discussion Boards began attracting new users immediately following the launch, and new user registrations reached an all-time high. Currently, the Boards are averaging 45 new user registrations each day, which is 41% more than with the previous system.

More Usable

Foraker's comprehensive user-centered design process included 3 rounds of usability testing. Each study included 7 participants who were either in treatment for breast cancer or had recently finished.

While primarily focused on the Discussion Boards, these studies also included paper prototype testing and card sorts to evaluate proposed changes to the main website's information architecture, as well as dozens of phone interviews with breast cancer survivors. Testing results were directly integrated into the new platform.

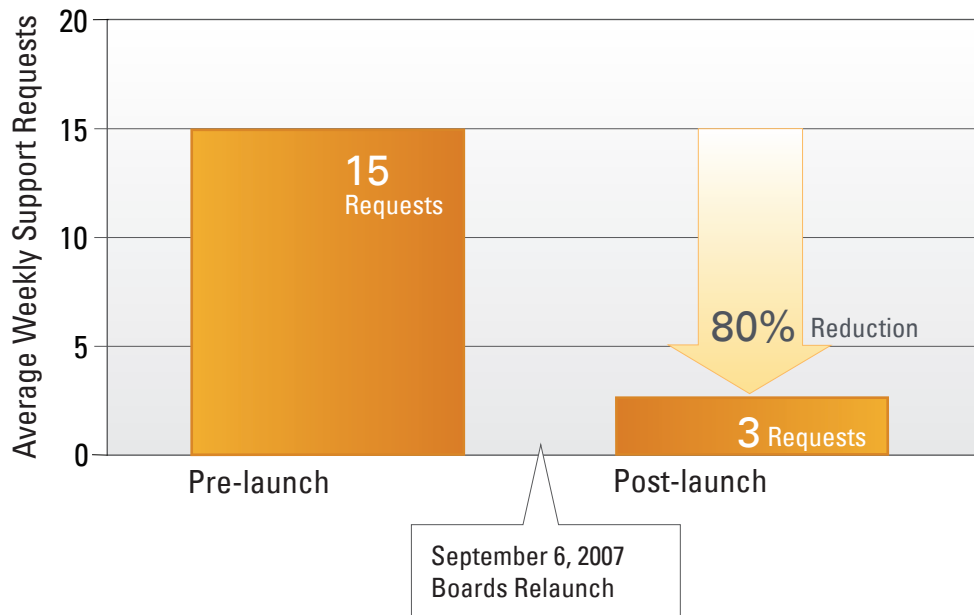


The new system improved the usability of the registration process. On the legacy system, usability testing participants took an average of 15 minutes to complete the registration process. On the new system, usability testing participants took an average of 7 minutes — a 53% decrease.

The posting process was also vastly simplified in the new system. As a result, the volume of posts per day increased sharply. Just three days after launch, 99% of all 49 forums had at least one user-generated post. Currently, the Boards average 1,218 new posts per day — 206% more than with the previous system.

Lower Costs

On the legacy system, users were forced to rely on help desk support to achieve common tasks like registration, posting, and password retrieval. On the redesigned system, users are able to easily register for new membership accounts and post messages, as well as report spam and retrieve forgotten passwords via an automated system.



The number of help desk support requests averaged 15 per week in the year prior to launch of the redesigned system. One year following launch of the redesigned system, help desk support requests averaged 3 per week — an 80% decrease.

Help desk costs averaged \$932 per month in the year prior to launch of the redesigned system. One year after launch of the new system, help desk costs averaged \$293 per month — a 69% decrease.

Conclusion

Usability improvements made during this project continue to save Breastcancer.org money every month. Much more valuable to the organization, however, is the vast increase in their ability to fulfill their mission. Breastcancer.org can now reach millions of additional visitors with middle-of-the-night support, practical advice, and answers to tough questions — from other breast cancer survivors.