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Objectives

Research sessions were designed to gather global feedback on the ease of use of Rhythmbox.

When playing and manipulating music, participants are not especially concerned with the speed of their performance. They are, rather, in a mode of enjoyment. Testing enjoyment demands a different approach from testing performance. In particular, a time-to-task approach did not seem appropriate since we wanted to evaluate the ease of use and quality of interaction. Our measures were:

1. Did the participant succeed or fail?
2. How did the quality of the user experience enhance or detract from the interaction?

Methodology

Participants

8 participants were recruited by an external agency.

We screened for participants who were not Ubuntu users but who were heavy music consumers. We required that our participants:

- Be in the habit of spending at least 5 hours per week online for personal reasons
- Be heavy internet users, doing a combination of:
 - Reading
 - Writing
 - Posting comments
 - Sharing photos, music, and documents
 - Chatting
 - Listening to music and streaming radio
 - Watching video
 - Buying music
 - Downloading music
 - Publishing music
- Have a high level of interest in technologies

Participants were all from London, they were English speakers between the ages of 19 and 45: one was nineteen, four were in their twenties, one in his thirties and two in their forties. Five were Windows users, one a Mac user, and two used both Mac and Windows.

Of the eight participants, one was a composer and another a music consultant.

They were all heavily into managing and listening to music and 6 of them listened regularly to podcasts.

Technology

We used Rhythmbox version 0.12.8-0ubuntu3 and elected to preinstall Codecs as the shortcomings in the usability of the codec install process have been identified as part of previous research. The configuration of Rhythmbox was reset between participants.

Process

Participants were invited to the Canonical offices in Millbank, London where they participated in individual research sessions lasting approximately 60 minutes.

The sessions had 4 parts:

- Introduction to the tasks and process of session
- Getting-to-know-you questions where I explored who they were, what OS they use and more specifically, their relationship to music, how they collect, get and share music.
- Using Rhythmbox.
- Summary of impressions.

The sessions were conducted in English.

In preparation for the sessions, we had downloaded music and podcasts on a USB key and an MP3 Player and we had brought along a CD. An account with Ubuntu One had also been set-up so participants could experience the full buying process. The tasks included:

1. downloading music into the library
2. playing music
3. rating songs
4. downloading a podcast
5. listening to music from Last.fm
6. adding a radio station
7. buying music
8. finding music that had been played during the session

These tasks were presented as user-centred scenarios and comprised many sub-tasks so that performances could be evaluated in the context of user goals.

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Note that some participants did not perform all the tasks; participants who didn't perform all the tasks generally had experienced substantial difficulties with tasks at the beginning and they simply ran out of time.

Research findings by task

Task: You have just found out about Rhythmbox and you have installed it on your computer. Now you want to import your music. Your music is on a USB stick, on your MP3 player, and some on a CDs. How would you do it?

Importing music from USB - 3 participants succeeded, 3 failed

Participants who succeeded and naturally dragged and dropped the songs into Rhythmbox were impressed by the facility and speed of the application. However, the drag and drop actions need to be made more obvious to the others.

Users need prompts and feedback to successfully download their music from a USB key.

"It's really cool that you can drag and drop music. It cuts on the time it takes."

Many participants expected to see the USB key appear on the side menu so they could access their songs directly within the application.

Participants intuitively right clicked to get music off the USB key. They copied the song and when they got to Rhythmbox/music they right clicked to paste it, with no success.

Suggestion: Allow for right click actions or provide feedback on expected behaviour.

Following the paste option, a new window gave a choice between importing a file or a folder. This dialogue box confused participants since, in their minds they were not dealing with files or folder but with songs.

Suggestion: User familiar and domain-specific vocabulary.

When participants clicked on 'folder', a window opened with a list of songs that didn't contain the song they were trying to download, and they were presented with an option to 'open' or 'cancel'. At this point, participants wanted to save the song to their library and not open it.

Suggestion: User familiar and domain-specific vocabulary like 'import' instead of 'open' .

One participant right clicked on a song and tried to move it. He got an option to move it to home folder or desktop.

"Is Rhythmbox my home folder?"

The participant moved it to his home folder.

"I moved it to somewhere, where has it gone?"

Suggestion: Use familiar and domain-specific vocabulary. Add a button that says: "Rip it into your library".

"I think the tracks are on the MP3 player but I don't know why you can't do anything with them."

"I am really confused. I don't know what's going on. Am I even in the right place?"

"I'm dying here, it is not going well, help!"

"Usually, I am used to being told what to do, to have prompts to help. I thought I did it but I'm stuck. At this point, it should be put in the library, not cancel or open. (...) At this point, I'd turn the bloody thing off and come back later."

Importing music from an MP3 player - 1 participant succeeded, 3 failed

The participant who succeeded in importing music from the MP3 was very pleased with the facility with which this was made possible.

"This was straightforward. This is more user friendly than iTunes."

One of the participants who failed to complete the task could not see MP3 player in the left menu. Two participants did not see where the MP3 player was because "devices" appeared behind the 'art work' in the left pane. Participants had to search; they looked under the top menu in music, edit, view and control. They could not find what they were looking for and finally concluded:

"I would not know what folder this is in. I don't know where this is putting everything. I don't want to have to use one app to listen to my music."

"Again I am looking for the MP3 player. I don't know where to find it. I presume it will be in 'places'."

One participant abandoned the task.

Suggestion: Make the location of the MP3 more visible.

Participants assumed that the music is automatically downloaded as it is on iTunes. One participant thought that the music was being automatically downloaded and did not realise that the content of the MP3 was only displayed. He mistakenly believed that the music had been downloaded when it had not been.

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Suggestion: Add a dialogue box that proposes to download music from the MP3 player with a button that would immediately do it. Alternatively, display a warning that the music has not been downloaded before the user disconnects from Rhythmbox or remove the MP3 player.

Participants expected to copy and paste through right clicking. One participant expected to copy and paste from the MP3 by right clicking and selecting 'import file'. But she got lost when she needed to select media. At that point she abandoned the task.

"I don't think this is working."

Suggestion: Anticipate users' actions and guide them through the process that is expected from them.

Participants expressed a concern about knowing where their music was physically. Two specifically mentioned that they like to have more than one copy and they like to be able to organise their music.

"I like to know where my music is on my computer. I like to have everything organised alphabetically and find what I want to play. I would not know what folder this is in. I don't know where this [Rhythmbox] is putting everything."

The participant who succeeded in importing music from a MP3 added:

"I would like to know if it is synched. If I eject it, I don't know if I have the music. I don't have a progress bar to show that it is synching."

Suggestion: Communicate what is happening with the music that is being imported – perhaps in a dialogue box.

Participants did not know what was going on, if something was going wrong or if they had to respond to the system in one way or another.

"It is just frustrating because I don't know what to do."

Suggestion: Provide constant feedback throughout the process of importing.

Participants could not find how to eject the device. The button in the top menu is not visible.

Suggestion: Make the eject button more visible, perhaps closer to the MP3 menu.

Importing music from CD – 5 participants successfully completed the task

Still, there were a few issues on the way to success. Participants need more feedback. In spite of the fact that participants were able to import easily from a CD, a few were looking for a clear sign that would say 'ripit' or 'burn CD'.

Suggestion: add a button: 'Rip it'.

Generally, participants would be reassured by more feedback on their actions.

"Looking at it now, it is not clear, I would not know how to put it in my computer. I expected a pop-up that tells you what to do."

"Usually, it will come up automatically. Dialogue box comes up."

Suggestion: Provide more guidance to users as they go through the process of importing music from a CD.

The words used were not always familiar to participants. A few participants who came across the button 'Copy tracks to the library' were not sure what it meant.

"It is not obvious, if it says ""copy music from CD", it would be more obvious. I don't know where the library is. I want to know where the tracks would go."

Even though participants succeeded in importing the music, a few tried several options before they were able to complete their tasks. Many participants did not see the 'copy tracks to the library' button. One participant wanted to copy the CD, and save it to his computer first, and to import it in the player later.

"I would expect to copy the CD to the drive, but I can't find... I usually use a different application."

One participant looked into the music menu and clicked on 'import file' expecting to get a list of songs from her CD.

"I don't understand. I would have done it by now or something should be flashing. Now, I am stuck."

Some participants were not sure of the role of the progress bar. One participant was not clear if the progress bar was indicating that the track was playing or if it was showing the speed of download.

"The red line [progress bar] is showing it is playing the track but maybe it is showing that it is saving."

One participant looked for a format setting but wasn't sure he actually succeeded.

"I'm trying to find preferences where I can set the format. What format the library should be in. I would like to choose CDAAC. I thought I did, but I didn't actually. No button to say that I pushed it. If I choose it it doesn't represent my choice."

Suggestion: Provide a confirmation that a format has been set.

Task: You want to get your favourite podcast. How would you do it?

All 8 participants failed to complete the task

Many of our participants expected to be presented with a list of podcasts to choose from when they selected podcast in the right pane. When they got to an empty screen, they were not sure what was expected of them.

"I don't know what I am looking for. I don't know what to search for. I would like to have a list of podcasts that are available. (...) I don't know how to get a feed in the first place."

Participants struggled with unfamiliar vocabulary and did not know what 'feed' and 'episodes' meant in the search area.

"I don't know what 'feeds' mean. 'Episodes' is probably one in a series."

"I would not know how to get a feed in the first place."

They got messages they couldn't understand.

"'Import errors' is a bit technical for me. At my level, I try something 4 times and then I go somewhere else. I have other things to do. I will spend 10 minutes but that's all. I would not have struggled that long with the podcast. I would just use another site and just get stuff to listen to. I would go somewhere else quite quickly."

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Suggestion: Use familiar and domain-specific language.

Often, participants listened to podcasts directly from the website or from their MP3 player.

"I never had the need to listen to [a podcast] other than on the website."

One participant dragged and dropped a podcast from a MP3 player to her desktop. She then tried to drop it directly into Rhythmbox. She believed she would have more control if the podcast was on her desktop.

"This way I can see where it is."

For all participants, the dialogue box asking for a URL was puzzling. Many participants unsuccessfully tried to copy a URL from a podcast they found on the internet.

"I would not know how to get the URL into there. Not the right URL. Half of the problem is it needs to be compatible with the RSS feed. Normally, I click on one button and it appears automatically in my podcasts. My head is spinning. I would be frustrated."

The interactions around downloading a podcast provided no feedback or guidance to users. Consequently, users had no resources to solve problems that occurred.

"I feel stupid that I cannot find a podcast."

Suggestion: Provide adequate feedback and guidance.

When participants went to a website and tried to download a podcast from there they faced 2 issues:

1. They didn't know which url they needed to copy in the box and often, they copy of website url.
2. When face with a choice of subscribing to iTunes, Zune or Zencast, participants didn't figure out that clicking on iTunes would give them the option to download in Rhythmbox.

Suggestion: Provide adequate feedback and guidance.

Task: You want to add a radio station you often listen to. How would you do it?

5 participants attempted the task and all of them failed to complete it. There were a number of reasons why people struggled to complete the task.

Difficulty of setting up: Cannot access the right plug-in.

After participants wrote the URL of a new radio station, and clicked on the newly-added station, they got a dialogue box asking to search for a plug-in in order to listen to the radio and when looking for the plug-in, participants got a message that no plug-ins were found.

Not clear what the search box was for or how to use it.

Participants expected the search box to find the radio station or at least, to provide information about the radio station, such as its URL. They didn't know what kind of results they could get by searching.

"The search box is going to confuse people a lot. Nothing comes up. There should be differentiation between the results of the search. I originally thought you could search the internet through the search."

One participant tried to search for genres she liked. She typed in 'garage' and got a blank screen.

"Now I am confused. Is something supposed to happen? I don't know."

Then she searched for 'rock and roll' and even though it is a genre covered by Rhythmbox, it showed no results because the participant did not spell it the way it is spelled in Rhythmbox.

"I feel dumb right now. It is not doing anything. I thought it was me."

One participant didn't really know what a URL was. She had to google it.

"God, I just don't know what that is. I don't think it is the website address."

Another participant wrote 'Resonance 104FM' and was asked for a URL.

"I expect to come up with a list of results. If it were me, I would say 'no, thank you, I'm back to iTunes'."

Task: You want to connect to your Last.fm account and listen to music.

Two participants had Last.fm accounts. They failed to connect to their accounts.

The 'Building a Last.fm station' boxes were not clear to participants. Participants could not figure out how to use the add boxes at the top of the screen.

"The middle box looks like a search thing. I don't know what I would put in there. This is not connected to the internet."

There was unexpected interaction when trying to connect to Last.fm. Participants were offered to set up an account or to join the Rhythmbox club when they intended to sign in. Participants expected to have to sign in and be automatically connected.

"This is confusing. I expected to have a sign in, not to set up an account. I expected that once I put in my details, I should be connecting with my play list and stuff."

"It is not linking the accounts. I don't want to join Rhythmbox because I don't know what it is. You get the option to join this group."

Suggestion: Provide the option to sign in immediately after choosing the Last.fm option.

Task: You want to buy music. Where would you go. How would you find a title you want?

8 participants completed all the tasks on Ubuntu One, including finding a title, selecting and buying, and browsing.

Overall, the impressions of the Ubuntu One music store are positive and the store is perceived to be greatly superior to Jamendo and Magnatune because it is more visual, has a friendlier organisation of titles and is searchable.

"Ubuntu One is much more visual, the others are boring."

"I like this because it is presented as a web page instead of a list of titles. I can search by genre, and search by artist. (...) This is all very easy to work out."

"It has new releases, new albums, new singles, new compilations cds. It is easier visually, you know what you want, instead of going through the list. It is important that the lists are being organised. Also most popular and most highly rated. You would at least listen to it. The more that is on there, the more likely you are to buy something – you would at least listen to it."

Many participants commented that it was very good that there were many choices of music stores.

"This is good that you can click on different stores and see what they have."

One participant asked if it was possible to add stores to the existing list.

Finding Ubuntu One store is not easy for everyone. Some participants had problems finding the store. They were looking for recognisable symbols, like a shopping cart. One participant looked under the music menu looking for words like 'shop', 'purchase', or a pound sign.

Suggestion: Add a recognisable icon to the music store. Design multiple points of entry for the store.

Ubuntu One is set-up for purchasing rather than for browsing for entertainment. A few participants mentioned that Rhythmbox could offer more when browsing purely for entertainment.

"This is well set-up if there is something specific you want to buy. I like to look around, just for entertainment. I would like to see the 10 most popular songs of the day, for example. On the home page of the shop, whenever there is more stuff on the page, people are more likely to buy."

Participants would like some collaborative filtering and links. Many participants suggested that collaborative filtering would help their browsing, and suggested for example adding 'similar titles', 'similar songs' as well as links to blogs and events in the music world.

"I would like to type in 'Oasis', sometimes I like to listen to a band and see 'these guys are similar to'. Sometimes it is nice to give you an idea of a band."

"I would like to look at similar artists. Sometimes I don't know the genre and it would help me to understand it."

“Great to have background [on the artists]. It’s quite good.”

Participants were not able to find music albums or tracks that were free. They didn’t know where to start.

“I don’t know, it doesn’t jump out at me. They need a tab where they list free music. Don’t know where it would be.”

Buying is straightforward

The overall buying process is “very straightforward” but too slow. One criticism of the buying process was that it is far too slow and while the system is engaging in the process, users are left waiting.

“Too slow. By now, I would have forgotten all about it. With iTunes everything happens at once, once your money is in their account. There is nothing to keep you on this page once you press that button. I would like to sleep at this moment. People will be frustrated and they may try again, but I would be on to the next thing.”

Previewing tracks is easy.

Participants appreciated that you can preview music before buying it. All our participants found the preview button and listened to tracks. But they did say that listening time should be longer.

Deleting an item from the checkout is easy.

All participants could easily remove an item from the checkout list. They all saw the ‘x’ and recognised that it meant ‘remove’. One participant said that he would have preferred if the whole track was highlighted when he deletes a track or an album.

“I want to be able to click on the track itself. There could be an option, delete or remove.”

Suggestion: Highlight the entire track when deleting an item.

One participant mentioned that he would have liked to have a confirmation that the item had effectively been deleted.

"... back to basket to make sure that the transaction doesn't go through."

Suggestion: Confirm that an item has been deleted before proceeding to the checkout.

Uncertainty about what users are actually buying.

Participants were not entirely clear about what they were buying. They wondered if they would own the music, where would it be physically stored, and whether they would be able to import it on other devices.

"I would be concerned with where this music goes. Sometimes I bought music and didn't know where the music was stored. I want to know that the music is mine. I want to be able to use any kind of device."

Suggestion: Inform users about the ownership of the music as they enter the Ubuntu One Store.

Miscellaneous other topics

Desirable features for Ubuntu One

Participants, while browsing, often explore new artists and new music genres. It is a time when they gather information and opinions. Consequently, they would like to be provided with more information.

"I would like to know about the artist, get more information, a link to a blog or a particular site. More interactivity with other things that are going on in the media-driven world. A write up."

How would you rate your songs so you could easily find your favourites?

3 tried to rate music: 2 succeeded and 1 failed.

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The option to rate music is hard to find. Participants expect to see a column where they can rate their music. Two found the option under 'Preferences' and the 'Details' tab, one by chance.

"It is not obvious. There might be a more obvious way to do it. (...) This is hidden. I want another column – a column that you can hide, even."

"I don't see the point of that. I don't know how to rate it. It is not obvious. In the Windows player, there is a column with stars. Maybe in the top menu."

"It's a bit of a long way around. The route is too long. You need a rating column and you can rate it. I got lucky."

Suggestion: Add a column that can perhaps be hidden in the main screen of the library.

There was confusion about songs shown in the section. It was a surprise to participants that only a selection of titles rated showed up in the rating list. They expected to see all the songs they had rated in descending order. They finally understood that only ratings of 4 stars and more are displayed in 'my top rated'. They felt that all the songs they had rated should appear under the section.

"It only rates 4 and 5 and not 3. It should rate all the top rated. You've gone to the effort of rating it, you should see it."

Suggestion: Include all rated songs in the list.

Play button: 7 participants gave unsolicited feedback on the play button. 6 found it problematic.

6 participants commented on the play button and were a bit disturbed by the fact that the button did not change with the state of the player (play/pause).

"It didn't make sense to play or stop. I presumed there would be a change. I don't think that works for me. It should have a different pause button."

""Is it on play or pause?"

"You have to give people a stop button. There are a few idiosyncratic functions that can start to annoy me after a while. Start and stop, search box is unclear what it searches."

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Suggestion: Make button change in appearance to signal different modes of the player.

How would you find a list of the songs you have listened to during the session? 4 participants gave feedback on this section.

There was confusion around 'recently played'. All 4 participants expected to find everything that they had played, regardless of how long they had been listening to it.

"I presumed the tracks I've just played would appear. But they don't. I have no idea why. I would presume they would be there. (...) I want the recently played to show. I don't play tracks all the way through. It should show everything even if you play just a couple of seconds. I don't think that people listen to the whole track."

"I would like to see all the songs that I have played, even if I didn't listen to all of them."

Suggestion: Add all songs played in the recently-played regardless of the duration of listening.

Now, you want to quit Rhythmbox and go out. How would you do it? 8 participants failed to quit.

All our participants thought they had quit Rhythmbox when they had only closed the application.

"'Close' should turn the thing off."

"Not sure what the difference is between 'quit' and 'close'. Why are there two things?"

Help: 1 participant

One participant looked under 'help' to find a way to quit Rhythmbox. Unfortunately, the screenshots used in the help section do not correspond to the actual application and so the help was not useful.

"[Help] outdated and doesn't have the right graphics. This has reinforced my decision to never use this."

Suggestion: It is vital to update the help section since it is an important resource.

What would you expect to find in missing files? 1 participant

One participant looked under 'missing files' and found songs in there. He didn't know what these files were, didn't know why they would be missing and why he needed to know.

"What is missing files?"

Suggestion: Use familiar and domain-specific language to refer to what is contained in this section. In addition, provide a justification for this category.