

Darwin City Council website Australia's best!

After the rousing success of our first case study "[Airline Website Usability](#)", we thought we'd have a look at how user friendly six of Australia's capital city council websites are. Council websites have become an integral source of information for people living in cities. They provide information on everything from pet registration to garbage collection dates and noise restrictions. This is why we decided to assess the usability of council websites, for six of Australia's capital cities. Using [Loop¹¹](#), a website usability testing tool, we rated the user experience of the 6 following websites:



CITY OF MELBOURNE



CITY of PERTH

The following task was asked of 600 participants (100 per website):

"You are a new resident in [City Name] and need to find out what day your household waste will be collected for disposal. Find the page of the website with this information?"

Our participants were sourced from [Mechanical Turk](#) where we paid the nominal sum of \$30 for the bulk of the participants. Thanks to all those who got involved.

Overall, the Darwin City Council website had the highest usability score with Perth City Council scoring the lowest.

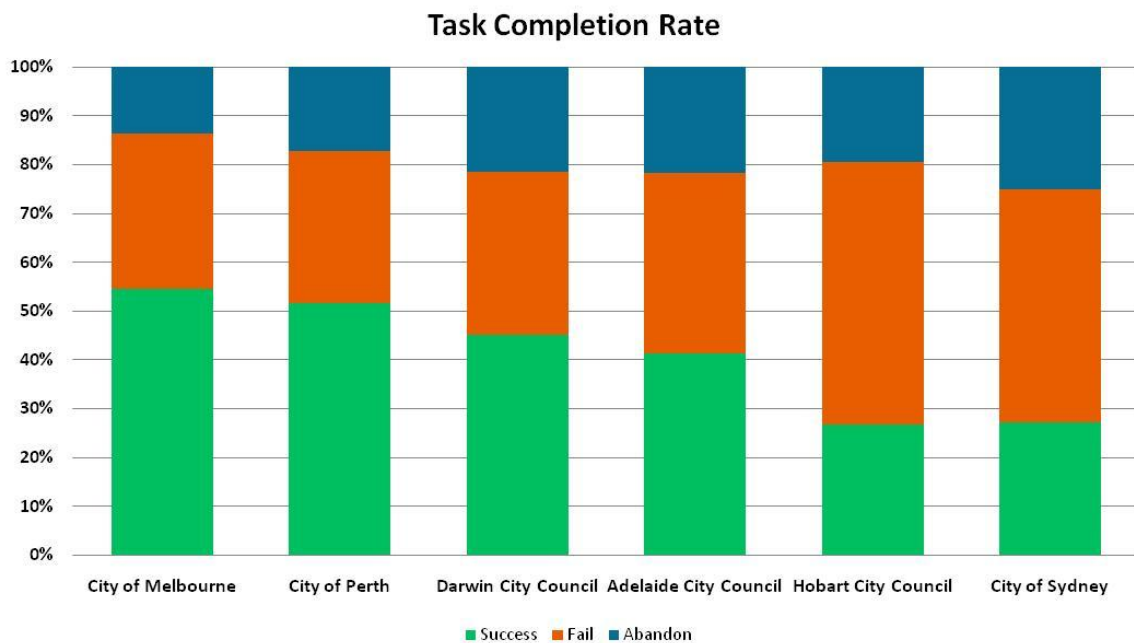
These are the results of the study:

Task Completion Rates:

In general, each website had one page dedicated to waste collection dates and times, such as these pages from [Melbourne City Council](#) and [Darwin City Council](#).

If the participants found the appropriate page they were deemed to have completed the task successfully, otherwise they were considered to have failed it, or they may have abandoned the task if it all became too hard.

The results indicate that finding information on waste collection is not as easy as it should be with only two Councils scoring over 50% on the task completion rate.



The City of Melbourne just edged out the City of Perth to lead the way, but shockingly Sydney and Hobart City Councils both scored a 27% task completion rate; less than half of Melbourne’s 55% task completion rate.

Not surprisingly, the Sydney and Hobart City Council websites also had the highest rates of task failure, and Sydney had the highest task abandonment rate. However Hobart had the second lowest task abandonment rate. This means participants thought they had reached the correct page, when in fact they didn’t. Upon closer inspection of the Hobart City Council website, the waste collection information is in fact a PDF file that can only be downloaded through one small link located at the bottom of the “*Domestic Waste Collection*” Page:

Domestic Waste Collection | Hobart ...

- Commercial Collections
- Green Waste and Annual Clean Up
- Composting and Worm Farms
- Street Cleaning
- Stormwater and Waterways
- Graffiti
- Public Health and Food
- Environmental Health
- Occupational Licence

All residential properties are allocated a 120 litre bin which will hold approximately two of the current standard garbage bags. If after a three month trial, larger families who actively participate in kerbside recycling are finding they need a greater capacity, they may apply for a 240 litre upgrade (request must come from the owner), charges apply see below.

Costs
For households that have received a larger 240 litre wheelie bin an annual charge of \$100 will be charged through the rating system. A rebate system is in place for those households with five or more permanent residents. This rebate is for the full \$100 and will apply from the moment a Statutory Declaration (available from customer services) is received stating that five or more people reside at the property.

Waste Types

What sort of waste can I place in the wheelie bin?
The system is for the collection of non-recyclable, household waste.

Please do not place in your wheelie bin:

- Hazardous waste or sharps;
- Hot ashes;
- Oils, paints, solvents or other liquids;
- Heavy builders rubble, car parts, large timber or metal pieces.

Note: It is preferred that green waste be taken to McRobies Gully Waste Management Centre, where it can be converted into compost & mulch. There are also three green waste collections per year so residents should try to avoid placing green waste in the wheelie bin.

How to Prevent Offensive Odours in Your Wheelie Bin

Wrap kitchen scraps in paper and place in a tightly sealed plastic bag such as your supermarket bag before placing in your bin.

You can freeze waste foods (particularly meat & fish) and place them in the bin just before collection. This slows down the bacteria that break food down and cause odours.

Ensure that your bin is not over full and that the fly proof lid is properly closed.

Keep your bin in a cool, shady area.

Use your home compost bin or worm farm for materials that decay.

Collection Days

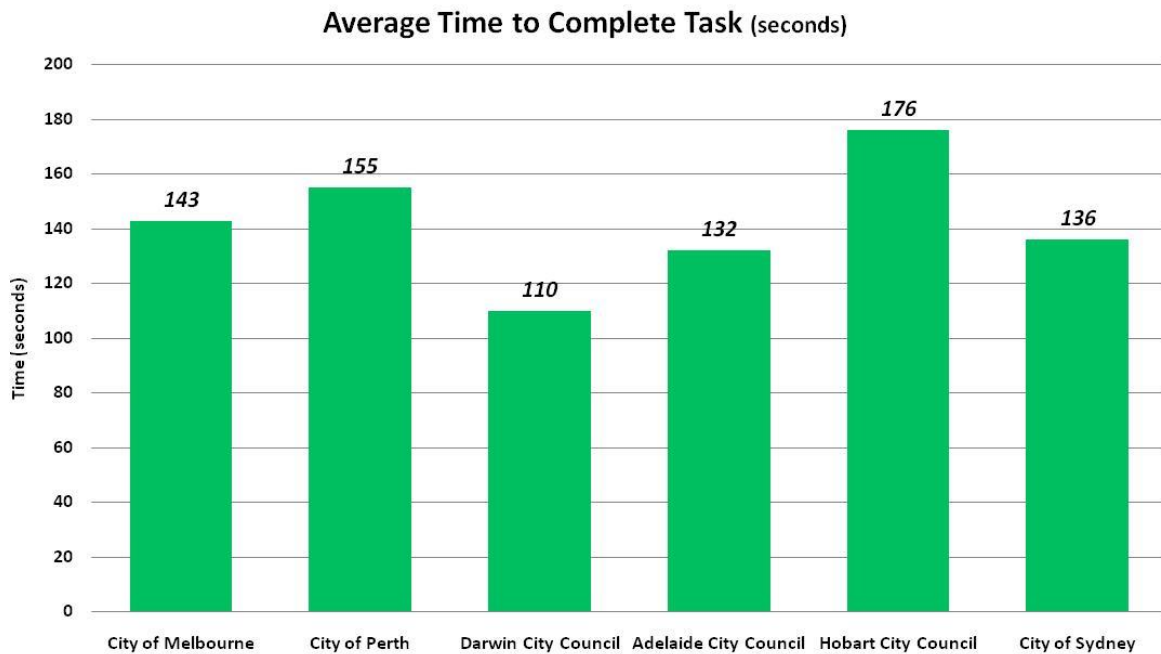
To find out your refuse & recycling collection day please select the link below to search a list in PDF format or alternatively phone Council on (03) 6238 2966.

[Collection days](#)

It should perhaps come as no surprise that so many people had difficulty locating this information on their website.

Average Time to Complete Task:

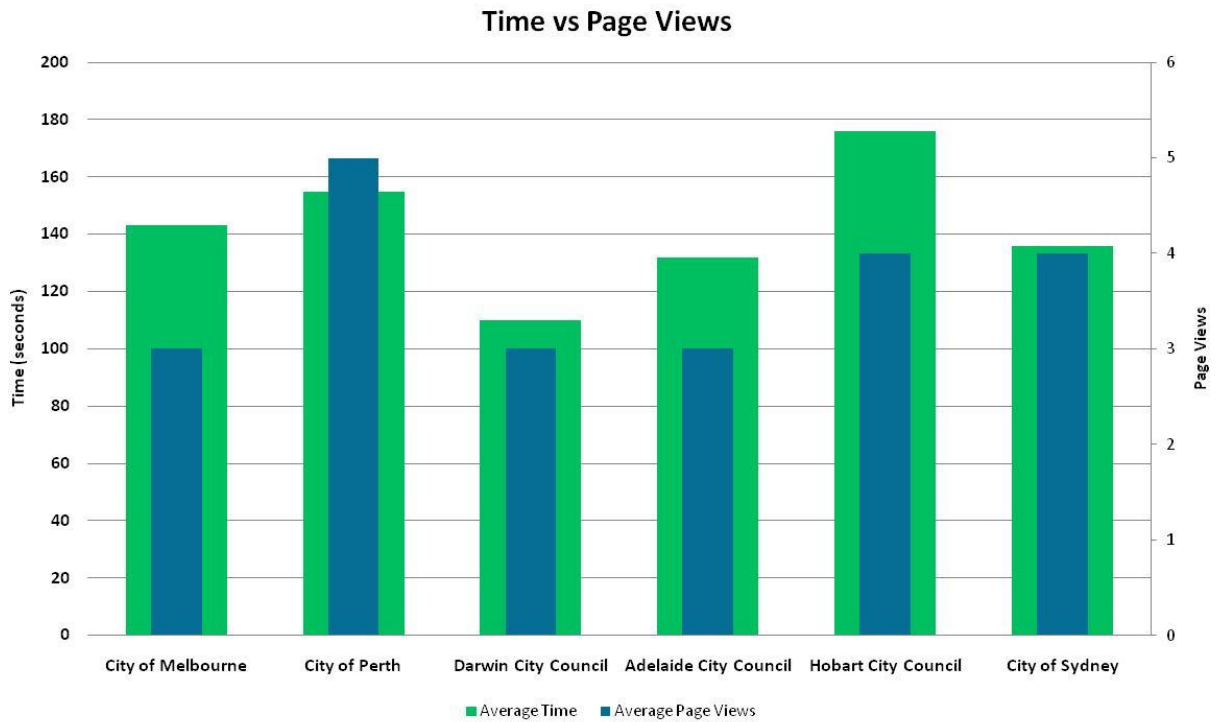
The average time taken to complete the task on each of the websites was between 2 and 3 minutes, with no standout performer. Darwin had the fastest task completion time with 110 seconds while Hobart had the slowest time with an average of 176 seconds.



This is a perfect example of why one should not rely solely on average task completion times to evaluate the usability of their website. We indicated earlier that Hobart’s website had the lowest task completion and abandonment rates, yet had the highest failure rates. This is attributed to the fact that their waste collection information is a downloadable PDF located at the bottom of a page.

Average Page Views to Complete Task:

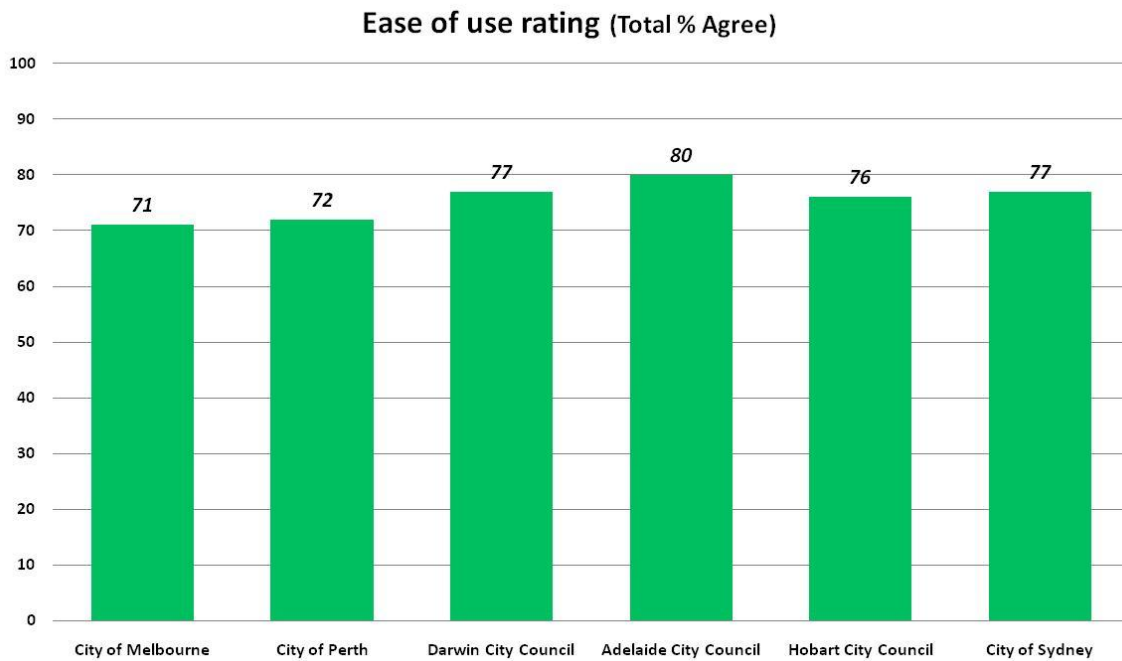
Comparing the average number of page views it took participants to complete the task shows that there is a general correlation between the average time to complete the task and the average number of page views per task.



Another interesting point is the fact that Sydney and Hobart had same number of page views per task, yet it took almost 40 seconds longer to complete the task on Hobart’s website. This can again be attributed to the fact that the waste collection information is in a downloadable PDF at the bottom of the page on Hobart’s website.

Ease of Use Rating:

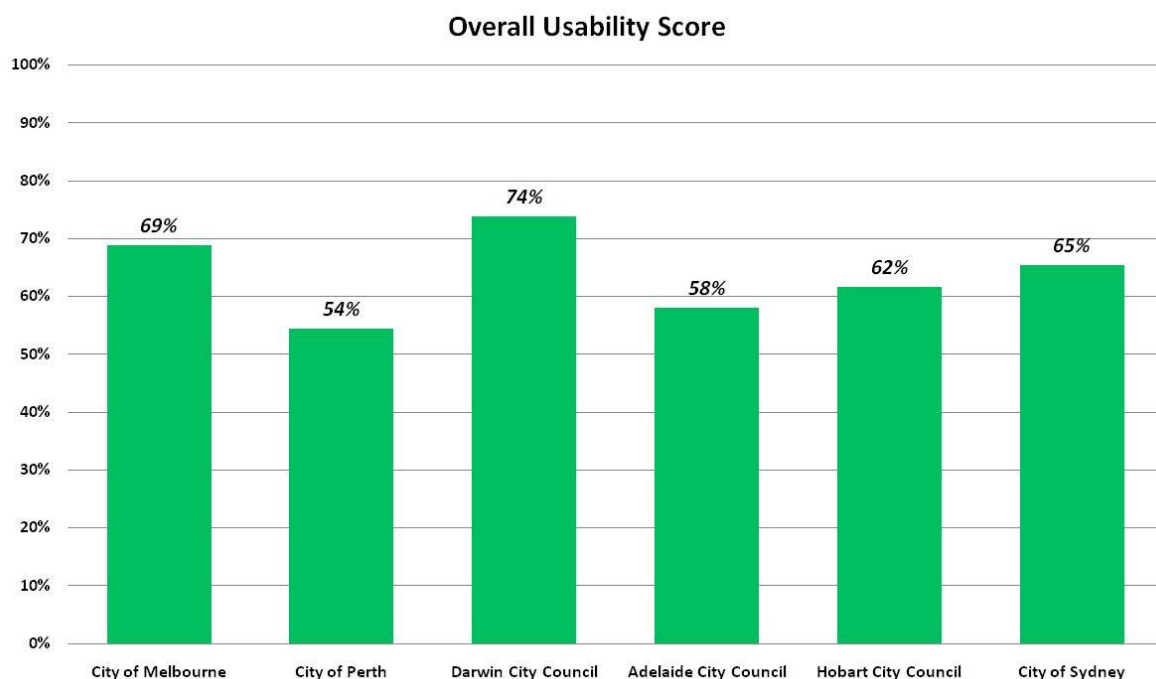
One of the follow-up questions for participants after completing the task was to rate on a 5-point scale how easy it was to use the website. There was much less variation in these results, which we don't find surprising. In face-to-face, lab-based user testing we frequently encounter participants who have a terrible time navigating a website but still comment on how easy the website was to use! We always felt this was the *moderator effect*, but perhaps this extends to unmoderated user testing too!



Overall Usability Score:

To directly compare the usability of one website to another we followed the ISO definition of usability. [ISO 9241-11](#) defines usability as the "Extent to which a product can be used by specified users to achieve specified goals with effectiveness, efficiency and satisfaction in a specified context of use." This gives us three areas to focus on: effectiveness, efficiency and satisfaction.

Combining the scores for the task completion rate (effectiveness), the average time taken to complete the task (efficiency) and the ease of use rating (satisfaction) we can establish an overall score for each of the Council websites, which are shown below.



Darwin City Council had the best score with 74% (The only website to score over 70%). Perth and Adelaide Council had the lowest scores with 54% and 58%, respectively. There was little difference between the remaining three websites with only 7% margin separating them.

Surprisingly, Hobart City Council did not come in last. Despite the lowest task completion rates and longest average time per task Hobart was saved by a good "ease of use rating". But clearly there's a lot more work to be done by Council websites to help people navigate efficiently and find the appropriate information, especially by the Perth and Adelaide Councils.



Tested with Loop¹¹

This report was generated entirely from results obtained through running a usability study with Loop¹¹. Loop¹¹ allows you to conduct usability studies on any website without the need to insert code. The real-time reporting provides the following quantitative usability metrics:

- Task completion rate
- Time per task
- Most common success page
- Most common fail page
- Most common first click
- Most common navigation path
- Detailed participant path analysis
- Number of page views to complete tasks

You too can assess your website's usability with Loop11. [Sign up](#) and you'll get your first project for free.