

Network Magic User Test Findings

Strengths: parental controls, sharing printers, repairing lost connections

Weaknesses: everything else



About this user research: On February 25 and 26, 2008, 10 users were asked to use Network Magic to manage computers on a simulated home network environment. The research was conducted by Eddie James, David Sutton, and Amy Wassum in the Guideworks lab in Radnor, PA.

Video of all sessions were recorded and can be seen by contacting Eddie James at x4883.

How customers view home networking

The term "home networking" means something different to almost every user. Even after understanding what home networking is, the value wasn't seen by users.

Sharing files via a network wasn't seen as valuable by users since they could easily email files, use websites to store and share, or simply call someone over to their computer to see photos. In users' minds sharing means sending, which email and websites already offer.

Sharing printers was viewed as very valuable since not every computer in a house is attached to a printer.

Computers are seen as private and most of the content on computers is not seen as something to share. Since many households share computers, sharing files wasn't really seen as a problem.

How customers used the software

It was often difficult for users to tell which computer on the network an alert of task was for. Often users would complete a task and not know exactly what was done to which computer.

Users had trouble with multiple passwords for each computer on the network. It would be easier if there was a master password that an administrator of the network could use.

The Default screen "Tasks" was overwhelming and confusing to users. There were too many choices and often the choices seemed too similar to make a choice. Users had trouble figuring out which tasks controlled the network verses the computers on the network.

The Map screen was very helpful because it showed the user exactly what the network was and offered ways of working on each computer connected to the network. The icons proved difficult to grasp for some users (dotted lines vs solid, laptop vs desktop) and when the network got too big, the left/right scrolling was a problem. User were confused when unknown devices joined the network.

The text often contained jargon that was difficult for users to understand. (Ex: words like restricted, lost, and device didn't always mean anything when users read warnings containing them).

Sharing files was easily accomplished by users (although the value of shared folders was considered low), but finding the shared folders and files proved problematic since the software doesn't notify the other computers on the network or permanently display the shared folders on the software's homepage.

Users always looked to the center of the screen for items, so items listed in the top portion (buttons, My Network) were largely ignored. This could be because the background of the top was so similar to the rest of the page.

Protecting young children was seen as the major strength of Network Magic, but the features provided didn't do what most parents wanted. They wanted to control access to certain websites, not shut off internet access.

Users expected Alerts to fix problems, but often this wasn't the case. Ex: Alerts for out-dated anti-virus software didn't update software.

Most users shared a printer with no problem, but were not certain what was shared with what computer (do all computers now have access to the printer?).

The Advisor page was expected to be a proactive wizard that solved problems. They didn't expect a help section or links to external sites.

Fixing their internet connection was easy for most users and they liked that Network Magic made it easy, but they often missed the red alert at the top of the page.