Google wave Usability

New wave ▼ | in:Usability 🔍

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Introduction:

- After research comparing Google Wave to other group collaboration tools we found that Google Wave was severly lacking in usability.
- To find out just where the problems with usability resided we had 20 users complete 5 "simple" tasks in Google Wave.

	Google Wave	Wiki	Email
Real Time	Yes	No	Medium
Information Archiving	Yes	Yes	Yes
Resource Sharing	Yes	Medium	Yes
Usability	Poor	Medium	Strong
Group Conversation	Strong	Weak	Medium

This is a chart with our results from comparing Google Wave to Wikipages and E-mail. As shown here, Wave is very feature-rich; it contains many features that are important to group work. Unfortunately, it is held back by its design, whereas Wikis and email systems have had longer time to evolve and therefore are more user-friendly.

Improvements:

Message Notification
- Replace the small green dot that is now used to tell the user when the wave has been updated with highlight the updated message in your inbox and in the actual wave. This will make it easier for the user to notice.

Users Involved
- Currently only the icon of each user is shown as to who is involved with the wave. This can be confusing as an icon isn't even required and can be the default icon, resulting in no identification of those involved. Further research is needed to figure out a proper solution to this.

Tasks:

1 Add a contact to your contacts list

2 Open a message conversation with someone on your contacts list

3 Open a group message with three or more people from your contacts list

4 Open a message and attach a file to it

5 Open an unread message and reply to it

Task #	Average Time (seconds)	Average Rating (out of 5)	Minimum Steps required	Average Number of Steps of user
1	48s	2.7	3	6
2	24s	1.9	3	4
3	76s	3	5	8
4	57s	2.5	5	5
5	24.6s	2.8	3	3

After asking 20 people to complete 5 tasks in Google Wave we found the average time it took for each step, the average rating of how hard the task was, and the average number of steps it took for the user to complete each task.

Ease of learning	Efficiency of use	Learning Curve	Error frequency and severity	Subjective satisfaction
59	74	81	90	75.2

Ease of Learning
This was scored by the participant's ability to learn repeated tasks such as open a new wave (which was seen in 4 of the 5 tasks).

Efficiency of use
This was measured by looking at the number of errors per task

Learning Curve
This was looked at by comparing first round test to second round test by the same users three weeks apart. This gave us the ability to see what the participants were able to remember after a few weeks away from the system

Error Frequency
This was measured by the amount of failures found in the tests

Subjective Satisfaction
This score was found by user ratings on the system itself

Conclusion:

Although Google Wave has greatly advanced group collaboration tools, if the usability is not changed soon it could soon fall into the black hole of internet failures.