



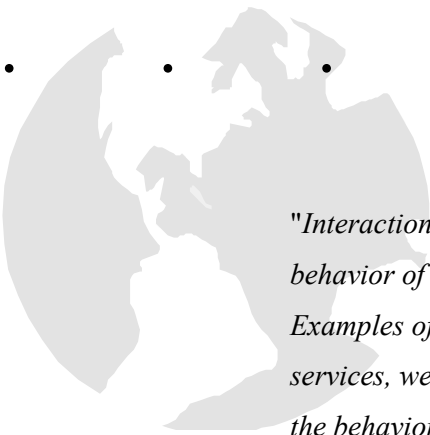
Usability Considerations in Interaction Design



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Usability Considerations in Interaction Design



"Interaction Design (IxD or IaD) is the discipline of defining and creating the behavior of technical, biological, environmental and organizational systems. Examples of these systems are software, products, mobile devices, environments, services, wearables, and even organizations themselves. Interaction design defines the behavior (the "interaction") of an artifact or system in response to its users over time." (Wikipedia)

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Over the past 15 years web presence development specialists have begun to study the dynamics of human factors related to accomplishing tasks online which has resulted in the emergence of a professional discipline sometimes know as online usability engineering or interaction design. Currently there is a debate in the online business world regarding whether a “one-size-fits-all” usability methodology is too simplistic and pretentious. Regardless of whether web development specialists follow a structured usability-centric interaction design methodology or adopt an improvised common sense approach, they must strive to understand their prospective users, the tasks they need to perform, and design the interactivity and visual elements of their web presences accordingly.

“Often, new technologies are complex to their intended users. Interaction design aims to minimize the learning curve and increase the accuracy and efficiency of task completion, without diminishing the value a product's useful functionality. This can lead to less frustration, higher productivity, and higher satisfaction for users.”

(Wikipedia)

Similarly to the advertising industry which for years has attempted to study the viewing and interpretation tendencies of hundreds of different prospective customer profiles spanning thousands of industries across the globe usability experts research online web usage patterns so as to best advise companies how to build better web presences. Jacob Nielsen is considered by many as the main pioneer in this emerging field and wrote a variety of books that attempted to present universal rules on what constitutes bad web design practices.

However, critics of Jacob Nielsen state that he is very vague in specifically defining universally good web design. After visiting web sites like <http://www.Useit.com> and <http://www.usability.gov> one can only imagine that the conception of good web design among usability proponents like Nielsen consists of plain text web sites with minimal formatting and color differentiation.

"Caution: usability myopia does not work. It is impossible to apply all the usability rules at once without retreating back to the Stone Age in terms of information architecture, interaction design, visual design, and web marketing techniques."

(Donovan)

UseIt.com and Usability.gov the web sites where one would expect to find examples on how to incorporate usability in web design are nothing more than glorified text files. There is no attempt to engage the user visually. There is not attempt at information architecture. All the links are laid out and are overwhelming to a casual visitor who does not have a compelling reason to visit these sites. The sites do not even follow standard eye-tracking downwards rightwards progression scenarios and assumes that a first time user will scroll the long pages in the hope of finding a viable link.

This is not to say that usability specialists cannot be helpful in generating a useful dialogue regarding on how to improve a web presence. However, unless they had a particularity strong track record in improving performance among a group of web presence within a certain sector and demographic the probability of their showing up to a new client and instantly coming up with answers to their problems would be as probable as an ad executive approaching a new client and dictating advertising design by quoting passages from David Ogilvy's (Ogilvy and Mather) book "Ogilvy on Advertising".

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Designing functional high performance web presences require careful study of target audience demographics, process engineering according to audience needs, and a lot of time consuming experimentation. Although there are some sets of rules based on universal dynamics each web presence should be an honest attempt to appeal to a certain group of people. A single web presence will not satisfy everybody. The interaction design process is not too different from the way automotive companies diversify and engineer different types of cars. It is obvious that the ideal customer of a semi truck has different needs than the ideal customer of a Ferrari. The customer who wants to drive a Ferrari would consider the semi truck poorly designed and vice-versa.

Two web sites that have been around for many years that have incorporated usability in their interaction design involving multimedia, graphics, video, text, information architecture, multiple product lines, and multiple localized web presences are <http://www.microsoft.com> and <http://www.dell.com> . Unlike the previous web sites we observed above, while having thousands more content pages needed to market and sell their products they do not overwhelm the user with text and are very graphic oriented on the home page. Clearly these web sites have adopted a long-term approach in designing their information architecture. Unlike most sites they have not made radical departures from previous designs. Both these companies have invested many resources via focus groups, customer feedback sessions, and experimentation in an attempt to continuously refine their web presence. They have learned through daily experimentation by monitoring how even minimal information architecture and design changes affect the daily bottom line as opposed to theorizing what bad design is.

“Coordinating your information architecture, interaction design, visual design, and usability objectives into a long-term scalable deployment strategy presents numerous advantages.” (Donovan)

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