The Politics of Usability

Overcoming Objections and
Creating a Usability Culture

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About Andrea

- Technical communicator since 1983
- Online information presentation focus since 1989
- Consultant since 1995
  - User-centered design and development process and start-to-finish usability—analysis, design, testing
  - Focus primarily on software product user interfaces and interactive information systems, including Web
- Coordinator of two University of California, Santa Cruz, Extension technical communication certificates
- Society for Technical Communication Board of Directors
Discussion Topics

- Understanding usability
  - Usability overview
  - Achieving usability through UCD&D
  - The typical usability adoption process
- Creating a usability culture
  - Characteristics
  - Skills and knowledge you’ll need
- Objections and countering them
- Resources

Understanding Usability

- What is usability?
- What *isn’t* it?
The Problem: Products Are Hard to Use

- Emphasis on products and selling, not end users—product buyer may not be user
- Design? What design? Designing usable products is difficult due to the human factor—need to understand users’ mental models
- Development organizations have little to no process—forget user-centered!
- Information development processes are at the mercy of product development—typically not integrated

How Usability Issues Affect Documentation

- Compensation for unusable products
- Documentation is a finger in the eroding dam of an unusable product
- We’re losing the battle, because traditional documentation deliverables are not working
The Solution: Usability

- One of many product characteristics—includes
  - Usefulness
  - Intuitive or intuitable
    - Ease of use (aka usability)
    - Ease of learning
  - Likeability
- A result of an iterative, user-centered design and development process

Additional Product Characteristics That Affect Usability

- High-performance
- Maintainable
- Reliable
- Manufacture-able
- Functional
- Compatible
- Portable
- Localize-able/internationalize-able
Usability Is Not...

- *Only* usability testing
- *Just* a back-end attempt to rectify design problems
- Occurring *only* late in the design/development process
They’re Doing It Backward!

1. Validation
2. Design (barely)
3. Analysis (maybe)

Creating a Usability Culture

- What is a usability culture?
- Why is it important?
Your Goal: Attributes of Usability Organizations

- Phased approach to development that includes user input and feedback at all critical points
- Multidisciplinary team approach—especially to design
- Concerned, supportive management
- Individual contributors who are bought in and take responsibility for usability of product
- It’s not one person’s/group’s job (e.g., human factors)—it’s everyone’s job!

Objections to Usability…

State some objections you’ve heard (or imagine you’d hear) about:

1. Adopting validation in your organization
2. Adopting design in your organization
3. Adopting audience analysis in your organization
### Politics of Usability

#### Objections

**…and Countering Them**

1. Pick two objections.
2. Develop responses to those two objections.
3. Share your responses with the group.

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**We Can’t Do That!**

- Not enough time—takes too long
- No budget
- That’s not how MS does it
- Should look just like the old one
- We’re too late in the process to have any affect
- “Yes, we do usability” (not)
- Executives and management do design—and of COURSE it’s intuitive
Politics of Usability > Objections

No. Absolutely Not.

- We’re too geographically dispersed to do usability
- No, you can’t talk to my users (typically, from sales or marketing)
- Perfectionism—we can’t show any of it ‘til it’s all working/done

Politics of Usability > Strategies and Tactics

Build a Business Case

- Ask your organization:
  - How much does your product currently cost?
  - How much will your usability techniques cost?
  - How much will you save as a result of usability?
  - How much money is spent on support costs (when testing could find problems customer support representatives are solving on the phone)?
  - How much productivity is lost by users asking colleagues how to use product—or hunting in documentation—vs. doing their work?
- You need to understand your business!
Politics of Usability

Some Statistics
(Karat, IBM, 1992)
- Small product, used by a few thousand people
  - Usability cost $20,700
  - Benefit $41,700
- Larger product, used by over 200,000 people
  - Usability cost $68,000
  - Benefit (during first year of implementation) $6,800,000

Cost Arguments:
Costs of Usability
(Dumas and Redish)
Costs of usability
- Build usability into product from beginning
- Test and fix iteratively before release
Cost Arguments: Costs *without* Usability
(Dumas and Redish)

- Spend money later on:
  - Fixing problems
  - Support calls
  - Training
- Spend more money now on documentation
- Get poor reviews
- Deal with unhappy/ unproductive customers and employees
- Lose customers and employees

Cost vs. Benefit: Measuring Benefits

- Measuring costs is fairly easy
- Measuring benefits is harder
  1. Conduct iterative usability tests with the same tasks
  2. After each test, improve product based on test results
  3. Assume any improvement is result of improvement based on test results
  
  Thus, attribute any improvement in users’ productivity to usability
Start Small, Measure, and Justify

- Do a little bit—shoestring tactics
- Measure, measure, measure!
  - What did it cost before? How long did it take?
  - How much did it cost to implement usability? How long did it take?
  - What did it cost after? How long did it take?
- Usability test to “prove”/justify going forward
- Document everything, including the process

Adopt a Demeanor to Earn Respect

- Act like a consultant
  - Speak the language of your objectors
  - Think strategically—outside the box
  - Provide alternatives, options, data—enable decision makers to make informed decisions
- Educate others
  - Start a usability interest group
  - Present at a brown-bag lunch
Do a Little Politicking—Don’t Be a Lamb; Become (at least) a Survivor!

- Address each objector individually and gather their objections so you can address specifics; get details
  - What did they try, and why do they think it failed?
  - How do they think it might be made successful?
- Develop relationships with tech support, customer service, marketing, engineering to collect data and other support

Communicate, Communicate, Communicate!

- *Communicate* throughout the project—get buy in, help, and ownership for usability
- Clearly present trade-offs and options in reports and other documents
Implementing Changes After Testing

- Changing the product
- Changing the process

Changing the Product

- Ensure everyone understands implications of *not* changing the product
- State these in report
- Make business case by comparing cost of changes before release with costs incurred by company due to unchanged product after release
  - Customer support
  - Lost revenue and market share
  - Lost work time
  - Lost reputation
Changing the Product-Development Process

- Change attitudes about usability: Educate and seek support informally
- Change the design process: Try to determine if problems are related and generalize recommendations from specific problem to more global cause

Finding Out More

- Bias, Randolph and Deborah Mayhew, *Cost-Justifying Usability*
- Carrol, John, *The Nurnberg Funnel*
Finding Out More (cont.)

- Constantine, Larry and Lucy Lockwood, *Software for Use: A Practical Guide to the Models and Methods of Usage-Centered Design*
- Cooper, Alan *The Inmates Are Running the Asylum*
- Dumas, Joseph and Janice (Ginny) Redish, *A Practical Guide to Usability Testing*
- Hackos, JoAnn and Janice (Ginny) Redish, *User and Task Analysis for Interface Design*

Finding Out More (cont.)

- Nielsen, Jakob, *Usability Engineering*
- Rubin, Jeffrey, *Handbook of Usability Testing*
- Velotta, Chris, ed.: *Practical Approaches to Usability Testing for Technical Documentation* (STC)
Finding Out More (cont.)

- uidesign.net Interaction Design Webzine: [www.uidesign.net](http://www.uidesign.net)
- Usable Web: [www.usableweb.com](http://www.usableweb.com)
- Jakob Nielsen’s site: [www.useit.com](http://www.useit.com)
- Ask Tog: [www.asktog.com](http://www.asktog.com)

Finding Out More (cont.)

- Usability Professionals’ Association ([www.upassoc.org](http://www.upassoc.org))
- STC’s Usability SIG ([www.stc.org/pics/usability/](http://www.stc.org/pics/usability/))
- ACM’s SIGCHI ([www.acm.org/chi/](http://www.acm.org/chi/))
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