

Online Applications

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Introduction

- User demand, fast pace of life
 - Information at user fingertips
 - Ease of use
 - Immediate access from screen
- Economic advantages
 - Distribution costs (store, ship (CDs, www))
 - Currency (out of date)
 - Accessibility (global audiences)
- Similarities & differences (soft/hard-copy)
 - Think differently
 - Structure of information
 - Multiple users
- Online help, hypermedia documents, and www
 - Get help
 - Search a manual
 - Browse internet

Online Help

- Goal: Saving valuable time
- Overlay help
- Effective help
 - Anticipating user's questions
 - Keeping information concise
- Scrolling too many pages
- Browsing dense documents
- Min no. Of screens for a single topic
- Designing screen (icons, buttons, drop down menus, ...)
- Designing GUI (collaboration between designer and writer)
- User's thoughts
- Alternative paths/ways for search/search strategies

Hypertext

- Non-hierarchical, nonlinear information
- Stack of screens (text, image, sound, video, ...) and a link
- Incredible easy for user to manipulate information
- Buttons pointing to screens, graphics, voice, music, animation, video, ...
- Navigation based on user's decision
- Different paths for navigation
- Different users
- Endless possibilities of applications

Internet & WWW

- Internet: network of networks
- Hyper text – hypermedia system
- Non-linear steps
- Global users
- URL pointing to home page
 - Companies: info about company, product, online order
- Links through certain texts, images, icons, ...
- Rules for developing web pages
 - Technical
 - Artistics
- Update date (very important)
- Huge no. of people, huge no. of resources

Online Applications

- No beginning, middle, or end of documents
- Multidimensional document
- User's decision on paths through information, text sequence
- Goals:
 - Defining inner structure of the documents
 - Helping users to find the information
 - Creating the links they need

Planning & Research

1. Thinking about users

 Their questions, first to know, links needed

2. Exploring the design of existing online applications

3. Gathering information about cognition (learning process), how people understand visual material

Guide for GUI

- Each screen, necessary equipment to call up the help files
- Understandable to users
- Design: writer/SW developer meeting
- Standard design, usable, consistent, intuitive for users

Guide for GUI

- Define the Guidelines
 - Preparing a checklist (user interview, need analysis, production process, who, when, what)
 - Creating a template (consistent look and feel, place of buttons, colors, number of items on screen, fonts)
 - Determining writing principle (active/passive, past/present, concise wording, consistent terminology, consistent design (how many levels of secondary windows))
 - Stating the assumptions (who users are, circumstances they use the document)

Guide for GUI

- Defining what you try to do
- Gathering data about users, task flow, work environment, ...
- Establishing standards (type of menu, browsers, forms, toolbars, ...)
- Defining the screen types
- Prototyping
- Refining the design standards
- Writing the standard guide
- Adding sections on general interface issues (keys, color, icons, ...)
- Reviewing the guide and revising it if necessary
- Distributing it for review

Using Internet & WWW

- Planning web pages
 - Thinking of the structure rather than the design
- Role of user's browser
- Less different fonts & formats -> more useable
- Potential limitations
 - Bright colors for big screens but for laptops!
 - Dialup/ADSL
- Think of your audiences, the context you want to convey, the purpose of page

Using Internet & WWW

- Standards in company/institution
 - Graphic size
 - Graphic resolution
 - Graphic & text of corporate identity
 - Copyright statements & other legal obligations
 - Marking links
 - HTML level
 - Tags to use
 - Writing style

Goals Up to Here

- What to say
- Audience needs and their questions
- Links to other texts
- Agreed standards

Organizing

- Putting most important things first
- Providing ways to users to find their paths to other material
- Fundamental principle: users are in hurry
 - Help: fast answers
 - Online documents: a little more time
 - Search functions: finding references about a topic
 - Surfing the web: fun

Online Help & Documents

- General Rules:
 - Help files: hierarchical
 - Drawing flow chart
 - Length of topic, ideal length?
 - Just on screen, no scroll
 - But hard to format, hard to update, hard to translate, sometimes impossible!
 - Multiple windows -> wordiness, distraction
 - 65% one screen
 - 33% two-five screens
 - 2% more than five screens
 - As long as necessary, as short as possible

Closed Hyperdocuments

- Closed=finite navigation paths, Opened=on internet, linking it to other systems
- Example: store catalogue
- Less sequential, more modular
- Not all of it is supposed to be read
- Independent topics
- Assume the worst, neither preceding nor following materials are read
- TOC
- Links among the information modules
- Going back to the main level with one click

Web Pages

- Audience and their intension not known
- Organizing:
 - Your purpose?
 - Which information?
 - What impression?
 - how to keep surfer's attention?
 - Which other links?

Web page, A Marketing Tool

- Clear purpose, easy to locate (title, opening)
- Easy to reach you (email dialog box)
- Easy to navigate (consistent, obvious, not more than 3 levels deep)
- Easy to find the page (search engine)
- Overdoing graphics!
- Just enough information
- Using humour
- Benefit-feature-benefit sandwich
- Links to other similar sites
- Stale website

Other Rules/Tips

- General topics first followed by more specific ones
- Using TOC for long documents
- Using informative headings
- Using lists
- Providing contact information

Editing

- Hard-copy: grammar + punctuation
- Soft-copy: viewing it online + hard-copy
- Changing an authors text without telling them
- Being concise, brutal on wordiness
- Choosing right media to enhance the message (animation, sound effects, music, voice, video, ...)
- Choosing clear navigational aids, not puzzles
- Using frequent/effective lists
- Setting right tone, professional, not a used car dealer
- Using appropriate acronyms/abbreviations

Designing

- Different than hard-copy
 - Seeing one screen at a time
 - Reading text on screen
 - Strain on eyes specially with bad background
 - Not as patient as with paper documents. Be fast!
 - Tips:
 - Concise text
 - Use effective color/graphics

Online Documents

- Good design of GUI as a helpful tool
- Tools easily accessible, clearly marked, and intuitive (use what people already know)
- Using graphics
 - Can explain difficult concepts
 - Can make a page more appealing
 - Takes too long to download!

Tips

- Graphics correspond clearly to the surrounding text
- Graphics with consistent size/color
- Audio or video to set the tone or explain a concept
- Manageable media, quick upload/download
- Darker colors
- Flashing/blinking text annoying

International Tips

- Translation from English to other languages -> 30-50% increase in word count
- Links: translatable key words
- Translation of GUI!