

Design for user experience

method lessons from a design student workshop

Katja Battarbee, Tuuli Mattelmäki
Department of Product and Strategic Design
University of Art and Design Helsinki
Hämeentie 135 C
00560 Helsinki
Finland
+358 9 75630 556
kbattar@uiah.fi, tuuli@uiah.fi

Anu Mäkelä
Human Factors Researcher
Helsinki University of Technology
P.O. Box 5400
FIN-02015 HUT
Finland
ahmakela@cc.hut.fi

1. INTRODUCTION

What should the product be? Finding an excellent answer to a loosely defined question in a vast scope of possibilities is difficult. Empathic design methods can be applied to give directions and material for intuition and innovation (Black, 1998, Leonard et al. 1997). This involves conducting qualitative field studies with real users, gathering rich and vivid information, creating feelings of empathy and understanding within the design team, and following an iterative design process.

The topic for the workshop was creating and sharing stories. People tell stories on the most trivial and everyday topics to develop and share their identity and culture. This communication has the also the potential of becoming increasingly digital (Mäkelä et al. 2000). Creating and sharing stories was studied by students in different age groups (child, young parent, grandparent), events (travelling, holiday) hobbies (fly fishing), and a mobile work place (taxi). The aim was to find out what is a rewarding interaction and satisfying experience for the users and to design a concept to support storytelling in such a way.

The four-day workshop took place in April 2000. The participants were 20 mostly design students and 10 teachers and researchers from five Nordic countries. The guest speakers Dr Patrick Jordan from Philips Design and professor Jodi Forlizzi from Carnegie Mellon University also took part in tutoring the student teams.

2. THE PROCESS

The field user studies were conducted by students before the workshop and the analysis and design was conducted

in teams at the workshop. Each team had its own tutor and the other tutors went from group to group.

2.1 Dispersed user studies

The user studies were conducted in different countries by individual students. After a one-week diary on everyday storytelling activities, the people were interviewed about their values, dreams and fears, expectations, current product environment, and other relevant issues. Students collected also visual material to provide rich and empathic data. The key findings were presented on illustrated presentation boards.

2.2 Analysing user data

First each student presented their boards to their team. Others wrote down arising issues on stickies at the same time. Then all the stickies were rearranged into categories (Beyer et al. 1998), helping to create an overview of the users while keeping the details still visible. The result was an overview of the user group.

2.3 Mapping social communication

Map-like drawings of social connections and locations were also used to visualise where and how people created and shared stories with others. This helped to identify different kinds of experiences and contexts and find the ones with most design opportunity in them.

2.4 Creating the design opportunity vision

The design opportunity vision was created to identify and describe which experience would be most desirable to support and enhance. This was difficult because of the amounts of issues and details in the user study analysis.

With most teams this meant reformulating the topic of the study – what is sharing stories for these people. For example, for young girls it was more about keeping secrets and fantasising with a best friend. For taxi drivers the small talk conversation was a tool for creating a feeling of trust. After defining the vision, the teams proceeded to develop a concept.

2.5 Presenting the user experience

The final presentations consisted of presenting the process and acting the use of the concept. The use scenario was supported with props and possibly a simple mock-up.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The process was very intensive, and required a good team spirit to come up with a good concept. Teams should ideally consist of different disciplines rather than designers alone.

The user study methods should be adapted to fit the needs of each user group. This requires more work and tutoring before conducting the user studies.

Analysing the user data was hard work. Therefore, the creation of the design opportunity vision should be a moment of reflection, a time to look back at the results and to redefine what the topic really is about and which experiences should be supported.

In the presentations the acted use scenarios helped to keep the focus on the interaction and experiences rather than on a physical product and its appearance. The scenarios were also fun for all and helped to keep up a playful, creative mood.

The workshop was considered a success by all the teachers as well as visitors from universities and industry attending the final presentations and most students (some beginners found it unclear). One student has begun to apply the approach in software development work. Further evaluations will be conducted as terms begin in Autumn 2000.

4. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Academy of Finland. Thanks Simo Säde for comments, Aila Laakso for organising. Finally, thanks to all the participants for an interesting and successful workshop.

5. REFERENCES

- Beyer, H., Holtzblatt, K. (1998) Contextual Design, Defining Customer-Centred Systems. Morgan Kaufmann, 472 pages.
- Black, A. (1998) Empathic Design – User focused strategies for innovation. In: Proceedings of New Product Development, IBC Conferences.
- Leonard, D., Rayport, J.F. (1997) Spark innovation through empathic design. In: Harvard Business Review, Nov-Dec 1997. pp. 102-113
- Mäkelä, A., Giller, V., Tscheligi, M., Sefelin, R. (2000) Joking, storytelling, artsharing expressing affection: A field trial of how children and their social network communicate with digital images in leisure time. In: CHI 2000 Conference Proceedings, pp 458-555.