



TeraTech News

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September 2003
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Usability - Why bother?

By Michael Smith

Check out Steve Krug's "Don't Make Me Think: A Common Sense Approach to Web Usability." (New Riders Publishing, 2000.)

It's really a must-read for anyone designing, planning, or writing web sites. The writing is concise and humorous, but full of great insights and pearls of wisdom. Krug's style and humor go much farther than Jakob Nielsen's earnestness. Here is what Steve has to say about why we should bother to do usability:

"Usability is like dieting; most people think it's a good idea in the abstract, but most of us don't really want to pay the price. And if you get people to take the leap, they're almost inevitably glad they did."

Fusebox 4 Layouts (Fusebox Conference)

By Sean A Corfield

The Fusebox Conference was held over the Labor Day weekend and [FB 4 Layouts] was probably the best session: not only did it cover the whole layout mechanism in detail but it also talked about standards compliance and accessibility. Very important topics!

Sandy Clark started out with an overview of layouts in general and drew a distinction between the application level (global

navigation, site consistency) and the circuit level (side navigation etc). She showed how these could be implemented in Fusebox 4: application level layout can use global fuseactions (preprocess / postprocess) that invoke fuseactions in a layout circuit; circuit level layout can either use a plugin (which must check which circuit is active) or a circuit's prefuseaction (which requires clearly separating fuseactions into public and private circuits). Her presentation was very clear, with good code examples as well as good screen examples to illustrate each type of layout.



In the second half of her session, she focused on accessibility and standards compliance and used a free 'screen reader' application to dramatically effect to show how a site that uses HTML for layout (tables) instead of just for structural markup can be almost impossible to navigate for disabled users. She said we should use XHTML and CSS to separate structural markup from positioning and visual styling - to assist the "15-30% of the general population that have functional limitations that can affect their ability to use technology products" (from the Internet Society briefing on design). Having gotten our attention with this, she showed how Fusebox 4's 'content variables' help us keep content separate from presentation, allowing us to produce accessible websites much more easily. As a final example, Sandy worked through the entire process of implementing a breadcrumb trail navigation element in Fusebox 4. All in all, a high-content, high-value presentation and the highlight of the conference for me!

To view more articles like this one, go to:
http://www.corfield.org/blog/past/2003_09.html - 000096

Information about the Fusebox 2003 Conference, go to:
<http://www.cfconf.org/fusebox2003/>



Creating/Changing Your Culture

By Miki Saxon
(Part 4 Continued)

4. **Be aware of the cost of change:** Changing culture often results in turnover and turnover can be costly no matter the condition of the labor market. People join companies because they feel comfortable and change is rarely comfortable. If they don't like the end result (or the direction it's heading) they are likely to start looking. If the manager is aware and prepared that isn't always a bad thing; cultural changes can't happen without changing employee mindset and some people won't change, worse, they will make every effort to sabotage the changes. By being prepared you can not only circumvent that, but often turn the saboteur into a new culture evangelist.
5. **Don't assume:** The human race functions to a great extent on various sets of unconscious assumptions. In the workplace people tend to assume that people with similar educations, experience levels, positions, etc., have similar philosophies and attitudes, and, based on those similarities, would create similar cultures thereby guaranteeing their willingness to buy into their vision. Predicating acceptance of change on the assumption of deep, unproven commonality is a recipe for disaster.
6. **Don't overwhelm the troops:** Whether you are changing an entire corporation (Gerstner and IBM), creating a culture for your startup, tweaking it within your department or group, or revamping it in your small business, recognize that you can't just come in, make an announcement, and expect people to buy into the vision. Present it in small bite-size pieces and such a way that people feel they have input in the process and creates a feeling of ownership.
7. **Communicate and sell—don't order and tell!** Even if your goal is a truly collaborative, nurturing culture that challenges and then helps people to realize their full potential you can't just walk in on Monday and announce that that's the way it will be from then on. First, it's unlikely that anybody will believe you (talk's cheap); second, if you're new it's unlikely that they'll trust you (no track record *with them*); third, whether you're proposing a radically different culture or just fine tuning the current one they have no reason to get on the bandwagon (people hate change).

In the final analysis what you *do* will carry far more weight than anything you *say* about your culture. It boils down to your having the courage to walk your talk.

RampUp Solutions is the manager's mentor for culture creation/infrastructure, retention, and hiring—all on a shoestring budget.

For more information, or permission to reprint this article, visit us at <http://www.RampUpSolutions.com> or write miki@RampUpSolutions.com

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Building Community on the Web

By Beth Barnett

4. Environments and Website Design

Keeping content fresh

It is no good collecting customers to browse your website if the content never changes. They will stop coming back!

We find that the biggest obstacle to keeping content fresh and up-to-date is the availability of time to update the website. Content management systems that make it possible to delegate the responsibility are key to the success of a website. There are basically two content management strategies. One is to wrap the whole website in a content manager, so that all pages are managed through one system. The other is to manage certain areas of the website through a customized content management system. For example, posting press releases to a website can be managed through a content management tool that uses the text from the word processing document used to generate the printed press release.



Often there is a review process before content is posted to the website. Content management systems can be designed with workflow features, so that the content must get the proper authorizations before it is published.

In summary

Internet technology provides an exciting venue for building community. Visitors can participate through discussion lists and web forums. Tools for collaborative work are whiteboarding and document sharing. The right website environment is needed to have an effective community building website. This starts with a home page, which is organized by audience. The menus are understandable and easy to follow. A good search tool is essential to a friendly website. Current and relevant content keeps visitors coming back. Content management tools play a critical role in making it possible to keep content up-to-date.

You can email Beth Barnett at beth@teratech.com

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