

## HANG ON TO THIS ...

... IT could be worth something one day! It is a first edition! The first edition of *The Beano* (yes, there really is a comic book called The Beano!) recently sold for \$22,000. From time to time we will highlight important usability and product design issues, hot topics in user research, news and views, and just plain interesting ... stuff!

## USABILITY IS ...

COMPETITIVE advantage! In most product categories the technology playing field has levelled out. Leadership in the "easiest to use" race, however, is still up for grabs! Now companies are turning to human factors and usability specialists to ensure that they do not get left behind in this new race for the "whole customer experience". As a *Forrester Report* recently put it: "Time-to-market pressure will yield to user-experience demands. Firms that continue to rush online with features and functions that don't serve user needs will fly headlong into failure. Unsatisfied users will flock to, and stick with, competitors offering a better user experience."

## TIME FOR A USABILITY HEALTH CHECK?

EVALUATING a product for usability doesn't always mean running a formal lab test. Sometimes - especially early in the design process - an expert inspection can reveal a large percentage of potential problems. A usability expert applies a number of check points to a product, a prototype, or even to storyboards to quickly locate usability issues. *Blueprint's Usability Health Check* follows ISO design guidelines and runs your product or interface through more than 200 check points (depending on its potential complexity). The inspection gives you an actionable report and a visual breakdown of

key interaction areas with detailed metrics so that you can see how much improvement may be needed. The inspection can be turned around in a few days, and this means that redesigns can be carried out with minimal loss of time.

## HAPPY HIPPO!

PRODUCTS bring the greatest value when they solve a real and clearly defined user problem. Here is a perfect example of this principle being applied in regions of Africa. *Problem:* How to transport many gallons of water over ten miles without the use of a vehicle. The current solution is for women to carry a 4 gallon bucket on their heads. *Solution:* The Hippo Roller. Fill it with 40 gallons and roll it home. No user manual



needed. *Suddenly the chore itself became fun!* Now everyone wants to fetch the water!

## MIGHTIER THAN THE WORD?

LANGUAGES evolve constantly, but nothing like the SMS revolution has had such a dramatic impact in such a short time period on the way people communicate. 'Texting' allows the user just 160 characters, and has given rise to such previously impossibly phrases as "Text me!" and "I think I've just been texted!" The phenomenon has been powered by a fundamental cultural change that has had unexpected consequences. When a 13-year-old Scottish girl handed in an essay recently, written entirely in texting

shorthand, she explained to her stunned teacher that it was easier than writing standard English. In her essay she



wrote: "My smmr hols wr CWOT. B4, we used 2go2 NY 2C my bro, his GF & thr 3 :- kids FTF. ILNY, it's a gr8 plc." (In translation: "My summer holidays were a complete waste of time. Before, we used to go to New York to see my brother, his girlfriend and their three screaming kids face to face. I love New York. It's a great place."). How far can texting go? Well, plans are afoot to translate the works of Shakespeare; and a recent competition to write the Lord's Prayer in less than 160 characters resulted in this winning gem: "dad@hvn, ur spshl. we want wot u want & urth2b like hvn. giv us food & 4giv r sins lyk we 4giv uvaz. don't test us! save us! bcos we kno ur boss, ur tuf & ur cool 4 eva! ok?"

## CHEWING GUM IMPROVES MEMORY!

PEOPLE who chew gum during tests of memory score significantly higher than those who don't (when variables such as reaction time and attention are factored out). Findings presented recently to the *British Psychological Society* underline earlier findings that hippocampal activity, important for memory, increases when people chew.

## NOTABLE QUOTABLES

"I know you have a thousand ideas for all the cool features *iTunes* could have. So do we. But we don't want a thousand features. That would be ugly. Innovation is not about saying 'Yes' to everything. It's about saying 'No' to all but the most crucial features." – Steve Jobs, CEO, *Apple Computer*.

## "NOT MANY PEOPLE KNOW THAT!"

- ◆ Mark Twain was the first author to submit a type-written manuscript for publication (Tom Sawyer in 1876). He bought a Remington typewriter in 1874 and wrote this early usability report to his brother: "I am trying to get the hang of this new fangled writing machine, but I am not making a shining success of it. However, this is the first attempt I have ever made and yet I perceive I shall soon and easily acquire a fine facility in its use. The machine has several virtues. I believe it will print faster than I can write. One may lean back in his chair and work it. It piles an awful lot of words on one page. It don't mess things or scatter ink blots around."
- ◆ "Not many people know that!" is a catchphrase made famous by the actor Michael Caine. Not many people know that!

## BOOKSHELF

### Why We Buy: The Science of Shopping. Paco Underhill (2000).

We all know that there is more to making a purchase than product value and having money in your pocket. We know that we are often "psyched" into making purchases. But do you know how? Find out how a strategically placed mirror can increase sales and how the "butt-brush factor" can cause sales to plummet!