

MAKING SURE IT WILL FLY

Industrial designers create models, architects build cardboard mock-ups, and even the engineers who built Concorde began by making these paper airplanes



during their lunch breaks! The reason is obvious - it is easier, quicker, cheaper and less risky to make design changes with early throw-away prototypes than it is to make changes once the metal has been fabricated or the concrete has been poured. The same applies to software applications and web sites. Design teams are increasingly using low-fidelity paper prototypes to mock up early designs and test them with users before ever writing a line of code. With a tool-kit of little more than paper, pens, tape, post-its, and scissors you can make testable interactive simulations of your interface and detect a wide variety of potential problems, including many of the most serious ones that concern the underlying information architecture and navigation. You can test for functionality, terminology, navigation and page or screen layout. You can tease out user requirements and help the design team to get focused on what matters to the customer. Paper prototyping engages the whole team, encourages creativity, reduces design iterations, allows for inexpensive design changes, speeds up development time ... and all with zero coding effort.

SEEING RED

Referees of sporting events that involve combat show a favourable bias towards competitors wearing red, according to research carried out at the University of Munster, Germany, and reported in the latest issue of *Psychological Science*. 42 experienced referees were shown 22 randomly presented video clips of Tae Kwon Do rounds and asked to award points. In one set of 11 clips one competitor wore red



and the other wore blue protective gear. The other 11 clips were identical to the first, but the colors were digitally reversed. In both sets of clips the red competitors were awarded an average of 13% more points. The results suggest that simply wearing red can bias referees into awarding more points even when performances are identical.

NOT SEEING RED

If you grew up on a diet of black and white TV you are more likely to dream in grayscale than people raised with color TV. Research from the University of Dundee, UK, reported in *Consciousness and Cognition*, suggests a critical period in childhood when watching TV impacts the way our dreams are formed.

LOST IN TRANSLATION

Thinking of translating your interface, user instructions or user manuals? Be sure to have the work back-translated into the original language. Otherwise this can happen:



In Wales (UK) all road signs must be in both English and Welsh. When Swansea Council sent the English text of a road sign to their translation company they simply took the e-mailed reply as the Welsh translation. Unfortunately the Welsh reply - duly added to the sign above - said "I am not in the office at the moment. Please send any work to be translated."

HOW TO MAKE AN EXTRA \$13.8 BILLION

According to consulting firm Accenture, 95% of consumer electronics products returned to retailers "because they are broken" are not faulty. These returns cost the US electronics industry \$13.8 billion in 2007. In 68% of cases Accenture identified two main reasons for product returns: 1) Poor understanding of customer needs, resulting in a mismatch between what people really needed and what the product delivered, and 2) Products that were simply too difficult to use or too difficult to set up. Accenture believes that the return rates would decline significantly if

companies invested more in making products easier to set up and use, and in better educating potential customers.

USABILITY TRAINING - NOW BOOKING

How to carry out an Expert Review. Jan 16 2009, Chicago.

For people in design teams who need to spot usability problems in prototypes and finished products this seminar teaches delegates cost-effective methods to evaluate designs. 1-day course: \$750. Book your place here: <http://www.blueprintusability.com/training/revjew.html>

NOTABLE QUOTABLES

"Focus on the user and all else will follow."
- Google

"NOT MANY PEOPLE KNOW THAT!"

- ◆ 70% of cell phone calls in the US originate from within a vehicle. In addition to DC, only 5 US states (CA, CT, NJ, NY, WA) ban cell phone use while driving.
- ◆ A recent list of the "Best 500 songs of all time" (voted on by musicians, critics and music industry figures) puts Bob Dylan's "Like a Rolling Stone" at #1, and "Can't get no satisfaction" by The Rolling Stones at #2. The oldest song in the list is Muddy Waters' "Rollin' Stone". The survey was carried out by Rolling Stone magazine.
- ◆ 33 Liberty Street, Manhattan is arguably the world's most valuable address. In a vault 85 feet below sea level, sitting on the Manhattan bedrock, is 25% of the world's gold bullion - more than is held in Fort Knox.
- ◆ <http://www.havenworks.com> has been nominated as the world's most poorly designed web site.