

LEADERS ARE NOT ALWAYS FIRST

Speed of delivery and "first to market" is a key objective of many start-up companies. But is the old adage "It is better to be first than it is to be better" really the key to success? By focusing on shipping deadlines rather than on the eventual customer experience, are some companies rewarding the wrong behavior? Or do many companies miss the distinction between "first to market" and "market leader"? Clearly, they are not the same thing. Google, for example, entered the search engine market much later than companies like Alta Vista and Yahoo but is now the market leader because of their focus on the user experience. Apple, noted for their easy to use products, were not first into the mp3 player market with their iPod, but who these days has heard of the first entrant, Saehan's MPMan? And with its focus on the BlackBerry experience, RIM has overtaken Palm and is now the industry leader in the smartphone market. These companies did not achieve leadership by being first, they achieved it by being best, and they became best by paying attention to usability and the user experience. Forrester Research predicts that *"Time-to-market pressure will yield to user-experience demands. Firms that continue to rush ahead with features and functions that don't serve user needs will fly headlong into failure."* Most consumers simply don't care what date a company ships a product, and with their hard earned dollars at stake, most would agree that it's better to be better than it is to be first.

DO YOU LOOK LIKE YOUR DOG?

If you own a purebred dog, it is possible that you and your pet resemble each other. But research from UC San Diego, found no

evidence to support the notion that people actually grow to look like their dogs over time. Observers matching photos of people and dogs could reliably match only pure-bred dogs to their true owners. No effect of duration of ownership was found. Instead, the findings supported a selection explanation. When people choose a dog,



they may select one that, at some level, has characteristics that resemble their own, and when they buy a purebred they get exactly the dog they want.

HARD TO READ MEANS HARD TO USE

New research from the University of Michigan, shows that people confound the ease of reading instructions with the ease of carrying out the task being described. Instructions written in difficult to read font (Brush or Mistral) resulted in readers concluding a task would take more time and effort, feel less natural and require more skill, and they were less likely to engage in it, compared to instructions written in an easy to read font (Arial). For more on how to write instructions check this article: <http://www.blueprintusability.com/topics/articleusermanuals.html>

JUST IN TIME USABILITY SUPPORT

Designers, engineers and project leaders sometimes just want to be able to pick up the phone and get some immediate,



independent, expert usability support or advice. Now you can do just that. If you do not have in-house usability staff, but need access to a usability expert from time to time, we can help you plug the gap. Check this link and pick the support package that best fits your needs and budget. <http://www.blueprintusability.com/services/uxsupport.html>

CELL PHONE USERS ARE STILL BAFLED

The complexity of cell phones is still leaving users frustrated and angry according to a new poll by Mformation. 85% of respondents reported frustration at getting a new phone up and running; 61% said setting up a new phone was as challenging as changing a bank account, and the same number said they stopped using a feature if they could not get it to work straight away. But here's the big opportunity: a staggering 95% said they would try more new services if the technology were easier to set up. Clearly, most products are still reaching the customer with substantial usability problems, and it is costing companies millions of dollars in lost revenue. Why is this happening? Of the four approaches to

usability that we see in most companies, three don't work. Launching without usability testing; trying to evaluate usability by conducting focus groups and surveys instead of behavioral usability tests; and testing so late in the development cycle that there is no time to effect change, all end up with the same end result - frustrated users trying to figure things out for themselves. To appeal to the 95% of customers "willing to try new services" here's what to do: *Test for usability early in the design cycle with real customers using low-fidelity prototypes, then redesign and retest until pre-agreed user-performance indicators are met.* Then launch.

NOTABLE QUOTABLES

"Customer focus is critical in a world no longer marked by a shortage of goods, but by a shortage of customers."

- Philip Kotler

"NOT MANY PEOPLE KNOW THAT!"

- ◆ Shakespeare invented over 10% of all the words he wrote. Of the 17,677 different words that appear in his writings, about 1,700 were neologisms. Among the words he created are: *critical, monumental, majestic, obscene, radiance, frugal, submerge, hurry, lonely, and excellent.*
- ◆ In 1935, as a result of attending to an injured motorcyclist, who subsequently died from head injuries, Oxford neurosurgeon Hugh Cairns revolutionized the design of crash helmets for both military and civilian motorcyclists. His work led to legislation that has since saved countless lives. The motorcyclist he attended to was T. E. Lawrence, a.k.a. Lawrence of Arabia.
- ◆ The actual duration of a 'moment' is 90 seconds.