

THE \$300 MILLION BUTTON

Customers often resent having to register with a company. Explicit registration is often a barrier to exploring a web site, buying products or doing business with a company. Usability guru Jared Spool recently reported an instance of an e-commerce company who shifted the registration step so that it came *after* the checkout steps. He reports that the designers "... took away the Register button. In its place, they put a Continue button with a simple message: "You do not need to create an account to make purchases on our site. Simply click Continue to proceed to checkout. To make your future purchases even faster, you can create an account during checkout."



The result? The number of customers completing purchases increased by 45% resulting in an extra \$15 million the first month and an extra \$300 million in the first year. Try it. One button. One simple design change. Now that's a return on your usability investment!

BRAIN DRAIN

Men who spend just a few minutes in the company of attractive women perform poorly in tests that measure brain function, compared to men who chat to someone they don't find attractive. Psychologists at Radboud University in The Netherlands, suggest that men use so much of their 'cognitive resources' trying to impress beautiful women, that there is not enough

left for other tasks. The findings, suggest the researchers, may have implications for workplace performance and even for exam results in mixed-sex schools. Women, it should be noted, were unaffected by chatting to handsome men. One of the psychologists got the idea for the study when he was so focused on impressing an attractive woman that he could not remember his address when she asked him where he lived.

ORDER EFFECTS AFFECT ORDERS

Online customers are 2.5 times more likely to purchase the first item in a list or array of products than they are to purchase any of the other items. Replicating the well-known primacy effect, researchers at Klagenfurt University in Austria investigated the online purchasing behavior of people buying camping tents by presenting four choices arranged in a horizontal row. In spite of the differing product features, the most critical variable in the selection process was presentation order. Typical of participants in such situations, the 'buyers' all rationalized their irrational decision (saying that they chose the best value, the most waterproof etc). When we try to explain our unconscious behavior, our reasons may seem convincing but are often bogus.

WRITE TASK SCENARIOS

Here's an easy, quick and free test that every development team should carry out. Whatever your product concept is, you should be able to easily write a handful of task scenarios that are plausible and realistic. What is a task scenario? David Travis of Userfocus describes them as "Narrative descriptions of what the user wants to do with your product or web site,

phrased in the language of the user." Here's an example. Imagine you need to test the usability of a GPS navigation device: "*Brad has an important meeting with a new client in Illinois and needs a route to drive from his home in South Bend to the client's office in Highland Park, then from there to a lunch appointment in Northbrook Mall. He wants to take the fastest route but needs to avoid the usual traffic hold-ups on I-94 near Hammond.*" Notice that a task scenario does not describe how to do a task, but makes



clear what the user's goal is. Write task scenarios early in the development program. Why? Because if you can't easily write believable task scenarios for your concept, or if you feel you are adapting the scenarios to what the system can do, rather than describing what customers want to do, then you are probably building the wrong product.

WHATEVER

The never-ending flood of 24-hour rolling news is taxing us to the point where we can no longer think wisely or empathise with others, claim researchers at the University of California, San Diego. Two new studies indicate that streaming digital news may

now run faster than our ability to make moral judgments about what we hear. "Rapid info-bursts of disasters, murders, suffering, eco-threats and war are consumed on a "yes-blah" level but don't make us indignant, compassionate or inspired," comments journalist, John Naish in an article for The Times. The research suggests that the quicker we know of events, the less we care.

2010 BLUEPRINT TRAINING

In 2010 we are offering two new courses in San Francisco - *How to carry out Implicit Research*, and *Data Analysis for Researchers*. In Chicago, we are again offering our *Morae Essentials* training course, our comprehensive Web Usability course, and our *Expert Usability Review* course. Get more details and reserve your place at: <http://www.blueprintusability.com/training>

BLUEPRINTWITTER

For usability news, tips and updates, follow @bpusability on Twitter: <http://twitter.com/bpusability>

NOTABLE QUOTABLES

"I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work."

- Thomas Edison

"NOT MANY PEOPLE KNOW THAT!"

- ◆ A lost wallet is more likely to be returned if it contains a photo of a baby.
- ◆ Once interrupted by email, it takes people 24 minutes, on average, to return to the suspended task.
- ◆ Champagne was invented by an Englishman.