

RED ROUTE USABILITY

Introducing a new term for your design vocabulary. The term "Red Routes" is borrowed from a new traffic system in London where red lines have been painted on the roads. On these routes parking or stopping is banned and the transport authority does everything possible to make sure passenger journeys are completed smoothly and quickly. In a recent article, Blueprint usability associate David Travis draws an analogy between easy traffic flow and navigation, and effective web site and interface design. Think of Red Routes as the



critical task pathways along which your system's users move in order to complete tasks easily and quickly. By eliminating obstacles and distractions and clearly signalling the steps to task completion you can create Red Routes for your system's. You can read the full article at this link: <http://tinyurl.com/38xgfn>

RIGHT TURN AHEAD

Research from the University of Arizona, reported in the journal *Human Factors*, shows that handedness and the side of the road on which people drive are strong predictors of the direction a person will turn when first entering a building. The research

showed that almost 70% of Americans turn to the right when entering a building with which they are unfamiliar. This confirmed findings from an earlier study showing that even signs directing people to turn left don't override this effect.

RESPONSE BIASES START EARLY!

Two-year olds show a consistent tendency to answer "Yes" to yes-no questions irrespective of whether they are familiar with the topic or understand the question. By the age of 4, however, the bias switches to a tendency to respond "No". Researchers at Queen's University, Canada, and University of California, asked 395 children aged 2-5 years a range of yes-no questions to do with familiar and unfamiliar objects. The three-year olds showed mixed results suggesting that they may be at a developmental transition stage. The findings, published in *Child Development*, have important implications for the design of developmental studies, as well as for market research and forensic interviews of children.

HOW TO CHOOSE A USABILITY SUPPLIER

How do you know if your usability supplier really knows what it's doing? The Usability Professional's Association has provided a set of guidelines and checkpoints to help companies choose a usability agency and verify the quality of their work. UPA recommends that you ask your usability supplier these questions:

- What methods are right for my project?
- What standards will you follow?
- What measurements will you take?
- What users will you test?
- Will I get helpful and accurate answers?
- How usable will your deliverables be?

You can download the full list of UPA checkpoints (including what your supplier should reply) at this link: <http://tinyurl.com/35fk6g> (PDF)

LEFT EAR ADVANTAGE

Speech scientists have long known about Right Ear Advantage, a small but reliable phenomenon, by which we are more accurate in reporting words spoken into our right ear than into our left ear. However, new research at Sam Houston State University in Texas has shown a left-ear advantage for emotional words such as "love", "kiss", "passion" and so on, when articulated in a neutral tone. Test accuracy for emotional words was 70% in the left ear, but just 58%



in the right. Now you know which side of your partner to sit on when whispering sweet nothings.

GOODBYE TO HELLO

Some basic English language greetings are starting to drop out of common usage. A new report suggests that the greetings "hello" and "goodbye" are being rapidly replaced by such terms as "hey" "g'day" and "yo" and by "laters" "ciao" and "hasta la vista" and may actually be approaching extinction. Hello and Goodbye could be

obsolete within a generation as "globespeak" and text-messaging spread worldwide, says Lexicographer Jonathon Green.

NOTABLE QUOTABLES

"You can use an eraser on the drafting table, or a sledge hammer on the construction site."

Frank Lloyd Wright

"NOT MANY PEOPLE KNOW THAT!"

- ◆ Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair is related (through his wife Cherie Booth) to John Wilkes Booth, the actor who assassinated President Lincoln.
- ◆ About 430,000 typewriters are bought in America each year.
- ◆ Ergophobia is the fear of work.
- ◆ "Guitar groups are on their way out, Mr. Epstein." So said Decca talent scout Dick Rowe as he famously let the Beatles slip through his fingers. But George Harrison encouraged Rowe to sign up another band from London instead, and this time he got it right. He signed The Rolling Stones.

Why do buses come in threes?

Rob Eastaway & Jeremy Wyndham. (2002)

If you've been waiting your whole life to learn the "Ham Sandwich Theorem", then this is your book! The authors ask whether running faster in the rain keeps you drier; show how to cut oddly shaped cakes into equal parts; tell why it is so hard to find a four-leafed clover, and why coins that are not round must have an odd number of sides; and explain why we always get stuck in traffic jams.

