

# THINK TOTAL USER EXPERIENCE

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People buy products to accomplish a personal objective. They purchase a razor to look better, a car to transport them on demand, or a hand held computer to track daily activities. The companies that develop successful razors, cars, and PDAs help people accomplish their objectives in a compelling and easy way. But those companies must do more to be truly successful in the long run. They must address the big picture. The big picture is the perspective that makes the customer glad they bought the product and compels them to be a repeat customer and an ambassador for the product. The big picture is a challenge to create.

Some companies approach the challenge by loading their product with features...at least one more than on their competitor's product. This will attract customers to the product and that's the necessary first step to a sale. A recent study (Rust et al, 2006) has shown that, in fact, peoples' buy decisions are highly influenced by product features. Based on the results of an experiment simulating an in-store experience, the authors concluded, "Consumers know that products with more features are harder to use, but before they purchase a product they value its capability more than its usability". The results of a related study in which participants performed typical tasks using working models of two products led them to conclude, "Once consumers have used a product, their preferences change. Suddenly, usability matters very much". The authors offer several ways for developers to address the contradiction between more features and usability. All of them are aimed at finding a happy medium between the two.

While this was a useful study that confirmed what many already know anecdotally, I contend there is much more to the big picture. Feature bloat that influences purchase behavior must be balanced with the whole experience of ownership after purchase. Performing typical tasks is only one piece of that entire experience.

The real challenge for product developers is to consider the TOTAL USER EXPERIENCE (TUE) when developing a product. The total user experience encompasses all encounters the customer will have with the product. For consumer and business products which are comprised of hardware and/or software, my model of total user experience has six components.

- 1. Acquire** (all customer touch points prior to and including acquisition that affect customer perceptions)  
*Examples: demo, trial, product literature, payment, advertisement, order, wait, subscribe, negotiate*
- 2. Prepare to use** (all out-of-box activities prior to the start of learning to perform intended tasks)  
*Examples: open package, remove, read instructions, assemble, set up, download, install, get situated, store*
- 3. Use** (ease of learning and use, pride of ownership)  
*Examples: appearance, affordances, instructions, productivity aids, navigation, terminology, carry, transport, clean, replenishment/replacement*
- 4. Maintain** (performing unplanned activities to keep product working properly)

*Examples: troubleshoot, repair, update, clean*

**5. Get Support** (acquiring knowledge needed to maintain product)

*Examples: help line, training, web site, service*

**6. Terminate** (properly ending ownership when no longer intending to use product)

*Examples: disposal, uninstall, store*

Unfortunately, most companies have a fragmented approach to dealing with user experience. Different components are handled by different areas of the company and are not coordinated into a big picture approach to the total user experience. Earlier this year, I conducted a benchmarking study of Human Factors organizations in six Fortune 500 companies. As part of the study, each interviewee, a manager responsible for the company's Human Factors function, gave self-ratings of their function's contribution to each TUE component (see Table 1). I found their contribution to development of the user experience for the companies' primary products was strong for the Use component as expected for a usability function. Unexpected was their weaker contribution to the other components. Only Company 4 Human Factors has a high or medium contribution for all components. In contrast, Company 2 Human Factors makes no contribution at all to four of the components.

**Table 1: Contribution to Total User Experience**

TOTAL USER EXPERIENCE COMPONENT	RATING OF HUMAN FACTORS CONTRIBUTION			
	High	Med	Low	None
1. Acquire	4,5	1	6	2,3
2. Prepare to Use	4	1,2,3,6	5	
3. Use	1,2,3,4,5,6			
4. Maintain	3,4	1	5,6	2
5. Get support		4,5	1	2,3,6
6. Terminate		4		1,2,3,5,6

In the best scenario, other company organizations fill the voids by paying attention to the user experience components not addressed by the Human Factors function. For instance, Marketing is accountable for Acquire, Customer Service is accountable for Get Support, etc. However, since usability is not their primary concern, they may not develop their components with the same foresight and passion for creating a positive user experience as the Human Factors people would do. Secondly, although the components are interdependent, their individual development may not receive adequate coordination.

Enter the User Experience Czar. S/he is accountable for ensuring the company's products will give customers a superior total user experience. At this point in time for most companies, the Czar is a fictional character. Companies I have talked to think such a role would be effective, but proclaim it would be hard to implement. It would require a significant change in company organization and way of thinking.

Change is a way of corporate life now. Is your company ready for a User Experience Czar?

## REFERENCES

Rust, Roland T., Thompson, Debora Viana, and Hamilton, Rebecca W., Defeating Feature Fatigue, *Harvard Business Review*, February, 2006.