Selling Usability to Organisations

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ABSTRACT Usability is now practiced by a large number of software developers, but has yet to gain wide acceptance. In order to get usability off the ground in an organisation, its value must be communicated across multiple stakeholder groups, which requires speaking several “languages”. This practical, hands-on tutorial will cover techniques for convincing management or potential clients of the value of usability, in terms each group understands. It will examine what is required to develop a usability strategy for a whole organisation, as well as how to find data to convince stakeholders of the value of a single usability activity.

Key Words Strategic usability, usability strategies, cost-justification, communicating usability data.

1. COURSE OVERVIEW

It is an ongoing source of frustration for usability professionals to continuously have to justify the value of their activities. Usability has yet to gain wide acceptance in software development practices.

Communicating the value of usability across multiple levels of an organisation requires speaking several “languages”. IT departments, business areas and users each have different, often seemingly conflicting, agendas. They are measured differently, focus on different objectives and view the organisation from different perspectives. If they are to accept usability as having value, each area must be targeted and the benefits of usability clearly presented in terms they understand.

Usability is successfully integrated into an organisation when a strategy is developed which leads to key usability benefits and supports overall business objectives. Strategic usability looks at people, processes and tools across an organisation, analysing strategic

needs, business objectives and culture. This information reveals barriers and opportunities which can hinder or facilitate usability acceptance. From this knowledge, an appropriate usability strategy can be determined.

A business objective may be to reduce overall costs, increase sales, or simply to provide better customer service. Taking a high level view, strategic usability aims to make software tools work for the whole business by assessing the usability of individual systems in the context of other systems, processes and people. It not only aligns usability goals to the needs of the users, but also to the needs of the IT department and the business through the development of a ‘total business’ strategy.

This tutorial will cover techniques for convincing management or potential clients of the value of usability. The key is to understand your organisation in terms of where usability can make a difference, and to present those opportunities in terms understood by each target audience. Using actual case studies and exercises, this

tutorial will show how to identify key organisational opportunities, as well as barriers. We will look at where to collect data to support the usability initiative, such as benchmarking, leveraging other initiatives (such as total quality, reduced training costs etc.), cost-justification, and corporate strategies, to develop a strong message for communicating the value of usability specific to organisations.

This is an intermediate-level, full day tutorial.

2. AUDIENCE

Experienced usability professionals, user interface designers, developers and managers who are working to improve the acceptance of usability activities within their organisations, whether for in-house or commercial software development; consultants who wish to convince potential clients.

3. TUTORIAL METHOD

This tutorial takes a case study, hands-on approach. A variety of practical and achievable techniques will be presented, enabling participants to take away those appropriate to their own situation and company. A mock organisation, Red Rock Insurance, has been created and profiled to give participants an opportunity to analyse and identify potential barriers and opportunities which can hinder or support usability initiatives respectively.

Based on the barriers and opportunities found, the groups will examine and discuss ways to talk to management or developers in terms they understand. Using information from benchmarking, field studies and creating cost-justification analyses to build a case; identifying and interviewing stakeholders; developing a communications strategy and finding usability allies; developing the most effective tools and techniques for a specific organisation; cross-training for developers and users of other technology such as the intranet to convey usability information.

4. INSTRUCTORS

Rachel Croft is a usability consultant at The Hiser Group, responsible for defining strategic usability methodologies. With over 5 years experience in the field of HCI in Australia and the UK, Rachel brings experience in organisational analysis and change management to strategic usability. Rachel has developed

two corporate usability strategies and supported several others.

Sarah Bloomer is co-founder and director of The Hiser Group. Sarah has 9 years experience consulting in user interface design and usability in both the USA and Australia. In addition to consulting in user interface design, usability training and style guide development, Sarah has been leading Hiser's strategic usability projects and initiatives since 1994.

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