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Warning: Abandon hope of finding a logical flow through the thoughts that follow. They are a collection of observations with little connection among them. As always, I welcome both e-mail about them and letters to the editor (for publication in a future issue).

Thoughts about CHI 2002.
You know, there was something very nice about not just the size of CHI 2002, but the people who came. Early reports suggest that almost all attendees were "repeaters." My own subjective experience confirms that. Despite, or perhaps because of, the smaller number of people, I kept running into people I knew and people I wanted to meet. Perhaps the first-timers were kept away by economic or security concerns, but the CHI regulars seemed to come in force!

After the opening plenary I had an interesting conversation with a student volunteer at an information booth. The question: is more transparency really the way to protect our privacy? Is it enough to be able to watch a stalker stalking me? What kinds of automated tools would be needed to help alert me (or the police) quickly if someone takes an "unhealthy interest" in my personal data? What kinds of counter-tools will the criminals develop? Do we reach a peaceful and safe fixed point, or an ever-escalating spy-vs.-spy scenario?

Yes, I could have done without the first 20 minutes of the closing plenary (Stelarc's video's of "the body, suspended"). Certainly the local restaurants would have done better without such appetizing images. But they did have a point, I think. Perhaps the goal was to inoculate us from shock, so that when we started to see electrode-based remote control of "the body," we wouldn't say "ick" but rather "hey, that's cool!"

It is fun, but very tiring, having CHI in your back yard. Everyone should try it, so I strongly encourage you all to move to Fort Lauderdale, Vienna, or Portland. Or not.

Thoughts about SIGCHI
Is it a sign of strength, or of weakness, that SIGCHI is a large and successful organization? From the Computer Science perspective, would we be better off if only a few specialists would consider "joining" an HCI organization, but nobody could imagine not learning about humans and HCI? How many of you computer scientists out there want to join "SIG-Data-Structures" or "SIG-Debugging"?

It has taken a while to crystallize, but I really like the idea of SIGCHI (and this field's) key strength being its interdisciplinary.

Thoughts about this issue of the Bulletin
It is rare, even as an editor, for a whole set of articles to trigger the response "hey! I was thinking about that." Yet I feel that way about this issue of the bulletin. I hope you do too.

Allison Druin's article reminded me of my surprise at the men's rooms in the convention center. Here, flushing is manual, but the lights are automatic. It brings back my first experience with motion-detector lighting in restrooms (in Evans Hall on the Berkeley campus). Though I was never left "in the dark," I couldn't stop thinking that anytime someone would be in the restroom long enough to risk lights-out was probably just the time not to add to their stress.

Lon Barfield's article about forms reminded me of how often we fail to practice what we preach. Even the CHI conference survey asks a bunch of questions that couldn't possibly mean what I read. Do they really expect me to re-list which magazines I read every year -- and do they care about the New Yorker, when their list is all technical stuff? It also brought back memories of a tax-form disaster where even my tax form software couldn't help. Yes, there are tax situations in the U.S. where the instructions indicate to go back and recompute last year's taxes, in total, to figure out whether something is taxable this year. Worse yet, if the amount changes, try some binary search strategies (recomputing taxes at each step) to figure out how much is taxable. Estimated time: more than it could possibly be worth! And isn't this what computers are for? Or mathematics?

Until next time ...
CHI: Reflecting and Looking Forward

As I write this, I've just returned from CHI 2002 in Minneapolis - a great conference by any measure. I would like to thank Loren Terveen, Dennis Wixon, and the rest of the CHI 2002 committee for an outstanding job. In Minneapolis we celebrated the 20th anniversary of CHI, and it was an opportune moment to reflect on how far we've come, and how far we still have to go.

CHI maintains its legacy as the premiere research conference in human-computer interaction, but it has grown into much more than that. It is now a gathering that reflects a core value of our field: that human-computer interaction design is an interdisciplinary activity requiring a broad set of expertise. But that also raises a challenge: how to design a conference that meets the needs of such a diverse set of HCI professionals.

I have asked the volunteer leadership of SIGCHI to step up to the challenge of building a roadmap for the next decade of the CHI conference. We are now creating a vision for what CHI should be in the year 2010, and establishing specific goals that will move us in that direction. Some of the goals are obvious: we clearly want to maintain, and indeed strengthen, the legacy of the CHI papers program. Others are more complex, such as identifying outside groups that we need to educate and influence - a great example being the executives and "business decision makers" that are determining the staffing requirements for the next generation of product development teams. And I think one of the most important goals of all is to help to provide a clearer "roadmap" for the field of HCI itself, to provide better guidance on their own continuing education and to give more visible structure to the CHI tutorials program as well as the main conference.

Of course, the devil is in the details and these changes will not happen overnight. We want to be thoughtful and deliberate to ensure that in evolving the conference forward we preserve all that is good about CHI today. But a great many people are hard at work on this, and I think you will like the results. Your thoughts are always appreciated.

From the Chair
Kevin Schofield
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Local SIGs, continued from page 5

them, neither is it clear where to go to find this information. Some leaders have raised the possibility of having as a benefit to Local SIGs a discount for their members in the CHI conference registration fee. Jan Gulliksen (STIMDI) has agreed to draft a proposal to be discussed with other Local SIGs leaders and then submitted to the SIGCHI Executive Committee.

Whenever measuring benefits of a proposal, one has to consider the costs involved as well. Some of the Local SIG representatives from chapters that are outside the US and that often represent a whole country have raised some issues that they have to deal with and that end up raising the costs of becoming a SIGCHI Local Chapter. The first point raised was that it is difficult to accommodate some country related aspects into ACM’s standard set of Local SIG bylaws. The other point was that ACM is an American organization and being part of SIGCHI/ACM may at times be in conflict with being perceived as an independent national HCI community. A proposed solution to this problem would be to have possibilities of being associated to SIGCHI, other than as a Local SIG or cooperating society. Morten Borup Harning (SIGCHI.DK) has agreed to draft a proposal to be discussed by the chairs of national Local SIGs and then submitted to the SIGCHI Executive Committee.

This last proposal would also serve other purposes besides the one I have just described. Some times Local SIGs collaborate to organize a joint event. In some cases, chapters would like to make this a long term relationship and have a formal organization responsible for it. Having other forms of association to SIGCHI could be a way to allow for structured organization within SIGCHI, such as allowing some of our chapters to have "sections" or to join their efforts and create a "regional" chapter that influences the local chapters.

In order to implement some of the ideas that came up at the workshop we need volunteers to be in charge of them. Thus, the idea is to create a Local SIGs committee, whose role will be to support the Vice Chair for Chapters, follow up on the points discussed at the workshop and make things happen. If you would like to be a volunteer and work in any of the ideas presented here, please let me know.
Changing Local SIGs at CHI 2002

For the last 5 years a meeting for Local SIGs representatives has been organized at the CHI conference. The Local SIGs workshop’s main goals are to give Local SIGs representatives a chance to meet and share their experiences and also talk about the Local SIGs/SIGCHI relationship. Although chapters have different goals, constituencies, activities and represent geographical areas varying from cities to a whole country, the chance to exchange experiences and ideas is very fruitful and can help leaders in coordinating their local groups. CHI Local SIGs are an important part of SIGCHI/ACM and the workshop allows Local SIGs to bring forward their needs, priorities, expectations and discuss their relationship to SIGCHI.

At the workshop there were 26 CHI Local SIGs chapters represented. Participants came from 14 countries on 5 continents. We invited some guests to participate in the workshop: Richard Anderson (past chair for Local SIGs, and representing a possible proposal for a domain chapter), John Karat (IFIP/SIGCHI), Kristina Höök and Martin Svensson (chairs of CHIplace in CHI 2003), and Andreas Gustavsson (also working in CHIplace for CHI 2003). At the workshop, I introduced myself and the goals of the workshop, then each participant briefly introduced himself/herself and their chapter, I then presented the issues that had been raised in the chapters’ applications. In subgroups representatives discussed the issues, their priorities, and ideas of how to go about them. They also discussed what features of CHIplace Local SIGs would be interested in using and how.

One issue that was greatly discussed at the workshop was the possibilities for collaboration among Local SIGs. In spite of the diversity among chapters, they have a lot in common. Representatives identified that the sharing of resources and experiences could benefit Local SIGs. Many of the resources that have been developed or collected by a Local SIG could be of interest to other chapters. Thus, it would be great to have a way of sharing them. Some of the resources that would be of interest to share are: software developed to support local activities and/or control membership; descriptions of executive committee and officer duties, and material such as video presentations (with presenter agreement).

Running a Local SIG requires a great amount of effort and time from the volunteers. There are always new challenges to face, new aspects to deal with and the need for new ideas and solutions. Often some of the issues being dealt with at a Local Chapter have been experienced by other Local Chapters. Thus, having the opportunity to talk to others that went through similar situations can be of great help. Finding out the context in which others faced an issue, the decision made, and learning about what worked and what didn't work can be an important assistance in deciding on the next steps to be taken. Thus having a "Frequently Faced Challenges" (FFC) central repository where people could learn about other Local SIGs experiences could be useful to all Local SIGs. Just to illustrate, some FFCs Local SIGs leaders often deal with are: How to get members to become volunteers? How to balance the chapter's programs to guarantee it interests distinct member profiles? What are the benefits and costs of having meetings always at the same places, or always at different places? How to attract outside speakers to meetings? And so on.

In order to collaborate more closely, Local SIGs leaders would need to identify chapters that could be potential partners, that is, those that have similar contexts or goals. However, there is no information on other Local SIGs available to members or leaders. As a first step in the direction of learning more about other chapters, Joe Haschart (Gateway CHI), prepared and passed out a survey at the workshop. He has volunteered to analyze the results and make them available to other Local SIGs leaders.

CHI 2002 brought to SIGCHI community a new idea, which is a way for the community to have a more active participation in the conference and strengthen community ties: CHIplace. CHIplace will be continued in CHI 2003 and the co-chairs Kristina Höök and Martin Svensson would like to broaden the support offered to Local SIGs. At the workshop, representatives discussed options and tried to come up with some ideas of how CHIplace could support the chapters. Some of the ideas presented were to include Local SIGs membership in people's profile and then be able to find members of a specific Local SIG, have a Local SIG finder which would enable people to find a Local SIG chapter based on some of its characteristics. Finally, people reported the need for having software to match speakers to Local SIGs, and then before traveling people could find out about Local SIGs events in the places where they were going and either ask to attend a meeting or offer to be a speaker. All of these would help Local SIGs become more visible to the community as well as involve more people in their activities.

One of SIGCHI’s goals is to further the field of HCI throughout the world. Many CHI Local SIGs are doing exactly that by creating new communities and teaching colleagues in the Universities or Industries about what HCI is. Many leaders reported that one of the challenges they have is offering people introductory material on HCI, so they can learn what the field is about. One idea that came up was for SIGCHI to support (not financially, but by finding volunteers) the development of such material and make it available to members and Local SIGs. Jacques Hugo (CHI-SA) has agreed to work with SIGCHI leaders in this effort.

The Local SIGs/SIGCHI relationship was discussed and Local SIGs raised some of their needs and concerns. One of the questions raised was: "What are the benefits of being a CHI Local SIG chapter?". Different chapters may perceive or value different benefits, so distinct issues regarding the possible benefits were raised. First of all, one aspect that is perceived as a benefit by some chapters is the association with SIGCHI per se. Being associated to an organization such as SIGCHI/ACM brings weight to their local communities. Next, once a chapter is chartered there are some ACM and SIGCHI resources that become available to them. It seems that it is not clear for most Local SIGs leaders what resources are these and how to get access to them.

continued on page 4
I just came back from this year's CHI conference. There were many interesting technologies for children that were presented and discussed, from talking dolls to wireless mobile technologies for children. Unfortunately, for the first few days of the conference I just couldn't keep my mind on much except my poor frightened three-year old daughter. (Warning: what follows in this column will contain discussions of toilets and what children do in them, so the squeamish-at-heart may want to turn the page.)

This year my husband and I decided to take our little girl, Dana to the CHI conference. She had gone in years past and had a wonderful time. But that's not what had her so frightened on our trip. It was the airport's automated toilets! The offending technology accidentally flushed on her while she was still sitting on the toilet doing her business (I know my daughter in later years will probably kill me for even writing this column about her, but in the interest of technology and children I'm hoping some day she will understand ;). In any case, I tried to explain to Dana that the toilet was not going to "pull her in" while she was still on it, but this did not appease her. I tried to explain to her how sensors worked and that when I covered "the eyes of the toilet" it would flush—but this only made things even worse. My poor little three-year old just did not want to believe that we humans could control the whims of toilets with eyes.

Before our trip, my daughter had finally graduated out of diapers and was essentially self-sufficient in areas of the bathroom. But this airport incident set her back months. Thanks to the addition of technology to toilets, my child would not go near anything that flushed. What finally worked was the purchasing of a little plastic portable "potty" that she could sit on and empty out into a regular toilet. This made me so mad, not just as a mother who struggled through glamorous potty-training experiences with her child, but as a researcher who thinks about HCI and children. What this situation showed me all too well was how technology can serve adults, yet hurt children in the process. I remember thinking when I first saw an automated toilet, "How wonderful! I won't have to get my hands dirty touching a flushing mechanism." But what I forgot was how imprecise the sensors for such a toilet can be. I also forgot that even this imprecision can mean less to me as an adult (who knows I won't get pulled into a toilet if it flushes on me), than what it can do to a child's self-confidence in matters of the toilet. This is a perfect example of how we as adults have asked our children to use a technology-enriched experience that was clearly not created for them. This technology took the control out of the users' hands and made a decision of when the experience should be over. Imagine how outraged we would be if the same control were taken away from a child when using a storytelling program. Imagine if the application quit and saved every time a sensor detected that a child had gone away from the computer. Imagine if it were as accurate as automated toilet-flushing?

I wish automated toilets were the only technologies that do not fully support the needs of children, but it is not the case: there are mice that are too big for little hands to maneuver; there are interfaces that depend on typing for young children who can barely spell let alone find all the keys on the keyboard. In fact, we have to remember even when we specifically create media for the needs of children, it can still scare them when we least expect it. As it happens, I am now typing this column at 5:30am in the morning because my little girl woke up crying from a nightmare at pre-dawn hours. When I asked her what she was so upset about, she told me that she dreamed about Sesame Street (her favorite television show). When I asked her what could be wrong with that, she explained that she dreamed that Telly (a furry monster who is on the show) was looking for Little Bo Peep's sheep. And the sheep made lots of "baaaa" sounds and it woke her up because it was scary.

So what is the answer? Obviously, the more we consider the needs of children, even in the design of technology for toilets, the more our children can benefit from new technologies. However, no matter how hard we try, there may always be something that wakes them up at night. This is the challenge we face as designers of new technologies for children.
In a few weeks I'll be going to Singapore to address an educational convention at Singapore Polytechnic. As part of my visit I'm also meeting with a group of primary and secondary school principals and teachers. Both engagements awe me somewhat as I'm stepping outside the comfortable world of HCI and computing.

So I've been doing my homework, reading the Ministry of Education's web site, which includes detailed lists of expected outcomes at all levels of education. When I started to read these I expected to see something like the attainment targets in the UK National Curriculum: abilities in language, numeracy, etc. In fact the closest the Singaporean outcomes come to pure academic statements are things like "seek, process and apply knowledge" or "have a lively curiosity about things".

Instead, the Singaporean outcomes focus on growth of personal character, tolerance and patriotism: "have moral integrity," "be culturally rooted yet understanding and respecting differences," "have compassion towards others," "love Singapore".

Now in my teaching, public speaking and indeed this column, I often highlight ethical issues. Within a UK educational setting even to discuss morality is treading the borders of propriety and good taste (not done old boy), but to go so far as patriotism would be risible.

Where is this difference in national attitude? Is it simply Western individualism? Clearly not: one of the things Europeans find surprising, and sometimes shocking, when visiting the US is the ubiquity of the flag and emphasis on being 'American'. Possibly it is lingering memories of extreme nationalism, but recent French protest marches after Le Pen's election success show that the majority in France regard it as a matter of national pride to denounce racism. Perhaps we are simply being 'British'?

One of the things I'll be talking about in Singapore is teaching innovation and creativity. I've mentioned this before in this column and I believe it is particularly important in a technological design area like HCI. Recently with my own students I was dealing with this material and with more general research methods. For literature searching, the two sites I most strongly recommend are the ACM digital library and CiteSeer (NEC ResearchIndex).

For those of you who haven't come across the latter I must rave. CiteSeer deals only with online material. It trawls the web for publications and performs textual analysis to find the bibliographic details of the paper itself and its reference list. This is used to build an increasingly comprehensive citation index of online material (and papers referred to from online sources) including links to the online sources. Although it has the occasional glitch the citation analysis seems at least as good as the best available manual citation indices in computing.

The ACM digital library I love! Not only is the text available to subscribers, but the abstracts citations, etc., are all publicly available. Whereas I never link to subscriber-only sites, I do link extensively to DL pages as they are of (different) value to both subscriber and non-subscriber - an excellent web model from both an information and business perspective.

Perhaps I should say I used to love the ACM DL and link extensively to it.

As an academic I wish that the breadth of coverage of CiteSeer could interface more effectively with the authoritative referencing in proprietary digital libraries such as ACM and IEEE. This would pose technical challenges and more problematic the design of effective business models, but surely must be the way ahead for a richer web.

However, it seems that the real barriers lie deeper than technology or economics. I was deeply shocked recently when I found the vision statement on the ACM DL site: "about the ACM Portal". In this I read "...it is a reasonable presumption that if not one of ACM's many authors ever cited a given work, that work is likely to lie beyond the periphery of core computing literature." In other words, if work isn't in or cited by the ACM it is no good and there is clearly no need to create alliances of knowledge when ACM has the monopoly.

Now am I being terribly 'British' here or do these words send a chill into the hearts of all academics? To voice such sentiments in private would seem like overarching pride, to publish them is either extreme arrogance or ignorance.

Again from a European perspective, coming from smaller countries where the national boundaries are physically and conceptually closer, we are used to watching with wry amusement the apparent parochialism evident when visiting the US, especially on the television. This was perhaps reasonable in a country of such cultural and geographic diversity that many citizens never leave American soil, and of such economic and military strength that the rest of the world seemed hardly to impinge on everyday life. However, in the current situation, reading such sentiments from the organ of the computing industry does not admit excuse so easily.

Whilst promoting critical thinking and appreciation of diversity to my students can I continue to direct them towards ACM DL?

At a recent UK HCI community meeting in London it was clear from various points that our focus on real people doing real things gives HCI practitioners a special viewpoint and responsibility within our field. HCI is the conscience of computing. In a period that has seen the best and the worst of national pride, perhaps it is time for SIGCHI to be the conscience of ACM.

For links to CiteSeer, "About ACM Portal" and Singaporean educational objectives please see: www.hcibook.com/alain/hci-education/
Scientific American has collected together a number of printed articles for one of their new online editions (URL below) entitled "The Future of the Web". While some of the content has dated considerably since its first appearance, Tim Berners-Lee, James Hendler and Ora Lassila's article on the semantic web still provides much interest and promise. Unfortunately, this is mostly due to the almost complete lack of effect that XML - the primary mechanism for producing a semantic web - has had on end users.

The original idea was that the extensible markup language would be used to describe content so that searching could be done much more intelligently. Also, by using ontologies that meaningfully relate XML tags, software agents would be able to draw inferences which would previously only have been possible by knowledgeable users. An example given in the Berners-Lee, Hendler and Lassila article is that a program could readily deduce that a Cornell University address, being in Ithaca, must be in New York State and therefore should be formatted according to U.S. standards.

While this does indeed sound very enticing, the semantic web relies considerably on the kind of cooperation relatively unknown to commercial organizations. XML is being used as a technical solution to simple business-to-business communication problems, but there does not seem to be a sound motivational model for the large-scale use of XML and shared ontologies. Why should struggling .com's bother? Aside from slightly better hit rates from search engines like Google (that are already doing a pretty good job using other approaches), there is not likely to be much return on investment, certainly in the short term.

The ontological approach also harbors some potential pitfalls for the semantic web. Much in the same way that relational databases force a very specific approach to data modeling, much to the chagrin of user interface designers, the predominant approach taken with ontologies is that of taxonomic hierarchies. That is to say they describe what things are, but not necessarily what they are for. This information of use is implicit in many everyday objects - we need say nothing further about what a potato peeler does, for example. But for many specialist areas, taxonomic hierarchies simply are not enough to help us reach our objectives. As well as a semantic web, we need an objective web - one that helps us to reach our goals, typically in the form of finding solutions to problems. Happily, we do not have to wait for the semantic web to take form to achieve this. All we need to do is to apply some lateral thinking to the way that we use hierarchies in web design. As well as taxonomic hierarchies, we could also provide users with objective hierarchies. So in addition to a product hierarchy organized by some notion of type (e.g. sweet potatoes would be listed under potato or root vegetables) we would also have hierarchies by application and other categories of more direct relevance to users' poorly-formed goals. Returning to the sweet potato example, we might find them listed not only as vegetables under various methods of preparation, but also under puddings and pies.

This approach can be implemented now by any web site wanting to increase its conversion rate. In fact, Amazon.com already uses a similar approach when it comes to buying gifts. Several objective hierarchies are offered, including "by recipient," "by event," and "by price". Other web sites (less successfully) present hierarchies organized by type of user such as home, small business, large business, etc. Where these fail is in choosing discriminators which are not directly meaningful to users. A web site visitor may work for a very large company, but want a solution to a problem in a small branch or home office.

Taxonomies and ontologies are now getting a lot of attention, but we need to try to get these to work for users. When the semantic web does finally catch up, the stage will already be set for intelligent solutions that add real value to our current feeble attempts to mimic printed catalogs online.

Scientific American Special Online Issues: http://www.sciam.com/special/
Identification Technologies: Can they make us more secure?
by Jean Scholtz and Jeff Johnson

In the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the CHI 2002 program was expanded to include an invited discussion on identification technologies. ID technologies have been proposed as one way to guard against future terrorist attacks.

The session was organized by Jeff Johnson and Jean Scholtz. Alan Wexelblat, MIT Media Lab, moderated. The discussants were: Dr. Ben Shneiderman, University of Maryland; Dr. Jonathon Phillips, National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) and The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA); and Peter Hope-Tindall, dataPrivacy Partners Ltd., Canada.

Ben Shneiderman posed several questions that arise when considering the use of ID systems:

- Are they a good investment?
- Do they actually enhance security or do they just make people feel more secure?
- How easily can they be compromised?
- How are data collection, verification, and maintenance handled?
- What training and expertise will users of ID systems need?
- Can people find out who has accessed their records?

He encouraged SIGCHI members and SIGCHI as a whole to get involved in government policy issues, such as whether the U.S. will adopt a national ID card.

Peter Hope-Tindall described ID systems based on biometrics measurements such as fingerprints and retina scans. Biometric ID systems include mechanisms for: collecting biometrics data from individuals and searching for matching records in a database.

Peter pointed out that any biometrics-based ID system exhibits three kinds of failure: false acceptance, false rejection, and failure to enroll. False acceptance is incorrectly authenticating someone. False rejection is the failure to authenticate someone who should have been. Failure to enroll is when a person does not possess the biometrics data needed for identification. For example, people without hands cannot provide fingerprints, and many elderly people have such thin skin that their fingerprints don't register. Error rates of ID systems are not fixed but can be adjusted depending on the security desired and the cost of the various types of errors.

Two issues in ID systems are: a) which biometrics to use, and b) does the system include a centralized database. Peter advocates the use of a "smart" ID card carrying a person's biometrics data, with no central database. A person's identity can be verified by comparing new biometrics scans with the data on the card. This scheme gives individuals more control over their own data and prevents misuse of ID databases, but cannot indicate whether the card-holder is on a watch-list.


He noted that ID systems are decision-support systems that help security personnel answer these questions:

- Is the person who they claim to be?
- Is the person on a watch list?
- Is the person known by another name?
- Should the person be interrogated further?

Jonathon suggested that the CHI community can help develop user interfaces for ID systems that improve the speed and accuracy of security personnel in making the necessary decisions. Important issues to address in the user interface include:

- How to portray uncertainty,
- How to help users maintain vigilance,
- How to divide responsibilities between users and the system to maximize the expertise of each.

One issue raised in the discussion was interoperability between countries. Is it possible to determine whether a person crossing a border is on a watch list in another country? It was pointed out that the U.S. and Canada have an information-sharing policy for finger print data. Concern was expressed that to prevent abuse, only essential data should be shared. There is a proposal in the U.S. for state motor vehicle programs to share data and standardize cards.

The CHI community understands system design and evaluation. It was suggested that CHI members could help ensure that systems are designed to solve specific problems, such as identifying suspicious individuals at border crossings. CHI members can also help ensure that ID systems are adequately tested to determine their effectiveness at solving their target problem. This will allow informed decisions to be made about the costs and benefits of ID systems.

More background information on ID technologies is located at http://www.hcibib.org/preventterror/. Additional information from the CHI 2002 invited discussion is available at http://www.chiplace.org/.
Visual Interaction Usability

Early last year I volunteered to serve on a committee tasked with creating a web site for a local nonprofit group. The committee members included, among others, an architect and a graphic designer. Given my background in human-computer interaction, I was pleased to have a cross section of individuals that could each bring their unique talents to the project. After several initial planning meetings in which we discussed the basic look and feel of the web site, I suggested that we make a simple prototype of the design and recruit representative users to attempt carrying out some typical tasks in order to evaluate the site's usability. Much to my surprise, both the architect and graphic designer were vehemently opposed to this idea. Both felt, for slightly different reasons, that the training, knowledge and experience they possessed was a far better metric of the effectiveness of the design than could be obtained by "asking the opinion" of some uninformed potential users.

I explained to them that the usability testing I had in mind involved more than collecting individuals' likes and dislikes and provided them with examples of previous projects where I successfully applied such a process, all to no avail. My initial reaction was that I was dealing with prima donnas who believed that their designs emerged as perfect works of art and only a philistine would consider tinkering in any way with such masterpieces. While I have worked on projects where such was the case, upon further inquiry I found that their beliefs came not from arrogance but rather from a viewpoint I had never truly conceived of, yet alone considered.

In their view, design was a process that involved application of a set of skills based on an almost universal set of design principles that resulted from centuries of experience across a variety of fields. These principles were seen as embodying the essence of effective design, and no amount of outside input could improve on their application. While the notion of universal design has been a topic of a previous VID column, I never considered it both necessary and sufficient, nor thought that it was in anyway diametrically opposed to the application of usability principles. While mulling over the implications of these concepts, a subject thread appeared on the InfoDesign Café mailing list (http://list.InformationDesign.org/mailman/listinfo/infodesign-cafe) in which a debate ensued regarding whether usability testing could make a significant difference in the effectiveness of form design. One school of thought held that for a given set of items, a well-trained graphic designer could create a form equivalent to that of a designer employing user testing in terms of number of errors generated and subjective user satisfaction. A test of this hypothesis was proposed but has yet to be carried out. Regardless of the outcome - although as a human factors engineer I must confess a bias toward the user testing approach - I was intrigued by the notion that a high degree of usability might be achieved solely through the application of good design principles.

I'm aware of the myriad of guidelines that exist for good usability and good design, as well as the combination of both in terms of concepts such as heuristic design. Of the guidelines that I've reviewed I've often seen a great deal of overlap in the principles they propose. But I'm unaware of any efforts that have explicitly examined the degree to which the basic principles of good design implicitly embed the elements of effective usability. Can there be a basic set of premises that lead to both aesthetic and usability perfection?

While the topic intrigues me and I continue to investigate the possibility, I haven't given up usability testing. Although my web site design colleagues were against my use of testing, I went forward on my own. While I managed to discover a few elements of potential user confusion, for the relatively simple site we created my findings were not particularly significant. Sharing my clandestine testing results with them confirmed their initial thoughts; although they consented that there might be instances where some additional information might be gained from such testing. Even though my findings were by no means a benchmark of the process, I'm still a firm believer in the need for empirical verification of designs.

So once again, I look to the readers of this column for their thoughts: Visual Interaction Design or Visual Interaction Usability? Or are they merely synonyms?

Co-Editor Sought

The SIGCHI Bulletin Visual Interaction Design column is seeking a co-editor. Duties include solicitation of articles as well as providing original contributions. Please contact Frank Marchak (fmarchak@veridicalresearch.com) with questions or interest.
Review of: Usability for the Web: Designing Web Sites that Work
by Tom Brinck, Darren Gergle, and Scott D. Wood

Review by Sri Hastuti Kurniawan and Panayiotis Zaphirs


With their new book, Tom Brinck, Darren Gergle and Scott Wood have added one more entry to the emerging library of web usability related books. Although the book is primarily written for web designers and web project managers, we believe it can be a good supplementary reference for courses teaching topics related to web usability.

The main advantage of the book is that the readers can be sure that the authors practice what they advocate. The authors present the fruit of expertise gained through years of web usability and web design projects and practices. The direct and practical involvement of the authors in usability area is evident throughout the book, where practical tips and advice are given prime focus and attention. However, though the discussions on usability practices are both thorough and comprehensive, the book does not seem to pay too much attention to the theoretical aspects of usability.

The main theme of their book is what the authors call pervasive usability. In pervasive usability, usability is factored into every stage of the web site design process. This well known concept - which is unfortunately rarely practiced - can achieve a balance between commercial requirements and usability benchmarks.

They break down the book in a chapter for each of the steps of their systematic/iterative web site design process. This iterative web site design process has six main steps:

1. Requirements Analysis
2. Conceptual Design
3. Mockups and Prototypes
4. Production
5. Launch
6. Evaluation

The authors not only describe each of these steps in depth (with practical suggestions on how to avoid pitfalls) but they also manage to touch on issues often overlooked in other similar books. Topics of information architecture and navigation are given extensive exposure and their critical importance in achieving usable web site design is emphasized.

The most important part of this book, that we think every web designer will find useful, is the inclusion of forms, checklists, and practical techniques that can easily be used in new projects. The book distills the necessary information into logical, reasoned, and structured practical guidelines. This makes it easier for web designers to adopt the information directly without putting too much effort to translate "philosophical" advice into design guidelines, a weakness of many other usability books.

The book also discusses about how to manage a web site design project from start to finish, covering a vast range of topics from budget, time, usability method selections, etc, which we believe is useful for every design team.

In summary, we believe that this book has a place on every designer's bookshelf. Through its practical direction and easy to follow advice it can help in creating a usability culture among the web design community. It is also a good book as a quick reference when designing a web site.
Meeting of the SIGCHI Executive Committee
February 12, 2003 (conference call meeting)

CHI 2002 TMRF. Michael Tauber presented the revised budget for CHI 2002 for approval. This budget reflects a projection of significantly reduced conference attendance due to both September 11th and the economy. The budget tried to keep expenses as low as possible; no food at breaks and not much decorating in the Commons. Sponsorship contributions to date are just under $97K. A motion to approve the TMRF passed 5-0.

Reviewing Software Update. Task force worked out spec, sent RFP to ACM for comments, and it should be out soon (bids are already being received). Goal is to have software in place for all CHI 2003 reviewing activities.

Reviewing Policy Update. Draft is being circulated around the Pubs Board, and William Newman (as liaison between Pubs Board and CMC) is working with papers chairs to address difficult issues such as reviewer selection.

Branding Update. Design of branded collateral almost complete, and we should see results in a couple of weeks.

Service Award. Committee was proposed and approved 5-0-0. The EC discussed the issue of "founders" awards or recognition. Some concern was raised that each time we re-honor people, it is as if we forgot the past awards and devalue them. Suggestions ranged from starting with a clean slate to building a gallery of past award recipients. Committee was asked to bring a proposal for founder recognition to the March EC meeting.

Other Business. The EC confirmed an earlier e-mail vote, 5-0-0, to accept the committee that is selecting the lifetime achievement awardee. Ben Shneiderman raised this issue of the digital divide, encouraging SIGCHI to make a public statement about this jointly with ACM and other third parties. The EC discussed the issue of how to balance US policy statements with being international. One idea is to have SIGCHI and USACM make a statement for US-only, but for SIGCHI to also pursue a global statement. There was consensus that a statement would be appropriate and Kevin will work with Erica to make advance this item.

Meeting of the SIGCHI Executive Committee
March 28, 2003 (conference call meeting)

Budget. CHI 2002 registrations and tutorials are down even more than expected. In response, Rob sent out a new, more austere budget for the EC to review.

Discussion focused on two areas: mechanics and priorities. The mechanics of SIGCHI budgeting are "bottom-line" budgets. Approved FY02 expenditures can be carried into FY03, and any unspent funds (or reduction in budgeted amounts) can both increase available funds and reduce the required fund balance level.

Priorities start with the operational and external commitments SIGCHI has made. Concern was raised that a number of projects underway that have a potentially large impact are not funded in this budget, including web site redesign and conference reengineering. Both of these have FY02 budgets that can still be spent, but were encouraged to minimize expenditures. Once the financial results of CHI 2002 are known, the EC can revisit investment priorities.

The revised budget was approved by a vote of 6-0-1.

CHI Conference Issues. The EC spent the rest of this meeting brainstorming about the CHI conference and its future. Discussion included such issues as whether CHI is becoming too broad, how to balance research, training, and other conference goals, the relationship between SIGCHI as an organization and the CHI conference, and the PR role of the conference.

Kevin raised the idea of thinking of CHI as the annual meeting of the members of SIGCHI. Joe asked whether SIGCHI membership was suffering because it is too easy to be a member—the organization doesn’t demand anything of its membership. Discussion also turned to the question of whether and how CHI is different from the collection of specialized conferences, and whether and how CHI serves people new to the community who want to get oriented.

This discussion will continue at the April meeting (with the distinguished advisors) and through the year.

Note: These are summaries and highlights of the SIGCHI EC minutes. Complete minutes can be found online at:
http://www.sigchi.org/documents
As SIGCHI's new vice chair for finance, I'd like to use this opportunity to share what I've learned about how our budget works and what's happening with it this year. We are currently planning our fiscal year 2003 budget, which begins on July 1, 2003, and it is shown here. SIGCHI (the organization) has a variety of functions, one of which is to run our annual CHI conference. Our organization budget, excluding the conference, is about $300K per year. Your dues are about $200K, and income from other subscriptions, sales, and interest add another $100K. But, while our annual operational budget is about $300K, we sponsor a $2500K event every year (the CHI conference). So even a small, 10 or 20% perturbation in the CHI conference finances could wipe out its parent organization (SIGCHI).

Because of this, we maintain a substantial insurance fund. ACM requires us to maintain about $700K in it, but we have reached about twice that amount recently. Until the last year or so, this fund had been growing steadily, as each year's CHI conference added part of its surplus to the fund. This year, however, attendance was down considerably and it looks like the conference will lose a significant amount of money. Without our insurance fund, a loss like that could have bankrupted us, but we can draw on the fund to cover it. In the past, maintaining this fund sometimes seemed unnecessarily conservative, but now it suddenly seems like a very good idea!

Why did the conference lose money? Attendance was down considerably from recent years, most likely due to the recession in the technology world. Why couldn't we do anything about it? Conference planning is very asymmetrical with respect to income and expenses. You must commit to most of your expenses years in advance, but you don't know your income (attendance) until a few weeks before the conference. For example, convention centers are typically booked 5 years in advance; contracts for professional services must be signed before the work begins, often a year or two ahead for CHI. For CHI 2002, at the time we were planning these things a couple of years ago, the prospects looked very bright; by the time we saw the downturn, many of our expenses were already contracted. Food is one of the only expense items that can be altered at the last minute, once you know the actual attendance. That's why the coffee breaks were scaled back for CHI 2002, it's the largest expense item that wasn't already committed.

In response to this, the CHI 2003 committee is trying to cut back its budgeted expenses, though even now some of its contracts and commitments are already in place. Our FY 03 budget, shown here, includes the expected surplus or loss from CHI 2002. At the time we submitted it to ACM, we made the conservative assumption that CHI 2002 would not be able to cut its budget at the last minute, hence the $500K loss. In fact deleting the food from the coffee breaks and other last minute changes has reduced that figure, but we don't have the final total yet.

The upshot is that SIGCHI has just weathered a significant financial storm. Our past conservatism in building up our insurance fund has paid off. We are still in solid financial shape -- but this is not a good time to propose expensive new initiatives!

SIGCHI FY03 Budget Summary

**Income**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SIG dues</td>
<td>189,648</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non member subscriptions</td>
<td>8,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member Value Plus Packages</td>
<td>12,095</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other subscription income</td>
<td>13,613</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proceedings sales</td>
<td>15,960</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interest income</td>
<td>55,396</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expedited service</td>
<td>2,005</td>
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<tr>
<td>2002 confs net income/loss</td>
<td>-554,423</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Income:</strong></td>
<td><strong>-257,707</strong></td>
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**Expenses**

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interactions</td>
<td>132,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>SIGCHI Bulletin</td>
<td>13,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACM and SIGBoard Allocs</td>
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<td>VC Local SIGS</td>
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<td>VC Publications / Pubs Board</td>
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<td>Awards</td>
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<td><strong>Total Expenses:</strong></td>
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**Fund Balance**

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<tr>
<td>Fund balance, start FY03</td>
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<td>Project balance, end FY03</td>
<td>850,680</td>
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<td>Min required fund balance</td>
<td>671,396</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projected excess fund balance</td>
<td>179,285</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The upshot is that SIGCHI has just weathered a significant financial storm. Our past conservatism in building up our insurance fund has paid off. We are still in solid financial shape -- but this is not a good time to propose expensive new initiatives!
Upcoming Conferences

July 8 – 10, 2002
Assets: Conference on Assistive Technologies
ACM SIGCAPH conference about computer-based systems designed to address the special needs of people with disabilities.
Edinburgh, Scotland
http://www.acm.org/sigcaph/assets02/

July 8 – 12, 2002
Usability Professionals Association
Annual conference focused on exchange of ideas among usability professionals.
Orlando, Florida, USA
http://www.upassoc.org

July 21 – 26, 2002
ACM SIGGRAPH
Conference showcasing the latest developments in computer graphics and interactive techniques.
San Antonio, Texas, USA
http://www.siggraph.org/s2002/

August 25 – 30, 2002
IFIP World Computer Congress
Conference with special streams in telelearning, e-business, intelligent information systems, computers and society, and usability.
Montreal, Quebec, Canada
http://www.wcc2002.org/

September 2 – 6, 2002
HCI 2002
Conference by the British HCI Group covering all aspects of HCI. (Jointly with EUPA 2002)
London, England
http://cise.sbu.ac.uk/hci2002/

September 2 – 6, 2002
EUPA: European Usability Professionals Association
Conference by the European UPA emphasizing usability issues and methods. (Jointly with HCI 2002)
London, England
http://cise.sbu.ac.uk/hci2002/

September 18 – 20, 2002
Mobile HCI
Symposium on creating effective interaction with mobile devices.
Pisa, Italy
http://giove.cnuce.cnr.it/mobilehci02.html

September 29 – October 1, 2002
UbiComp: Ubiquitous Computing
Conference on design, implementation, application and evaluation of ubiquitous computing technologies.
Göteborg, Sweden
http://www.viktoria.se/ubicomp/

September 30 – October 4, 2002
Human Factors and Ergonomics Society Conference
Conference that brings together research by human factors, ergonomics, and HCI practitioners.
Baltimore, Maryland, USA
http://www.hfes.org

October 6 – 9, 2002
IEEE Systems, Man, and Cybernetics Conference
Conference with emphasis on systems engineering, human systems, and cybernetics in an HCI context.
Hammamet, Tunisia
http://smc02.ec-lille.fr/home.html

October 19 – 23, 2002
NordiCHI 2002
Conference highlighting Scandinavian contributions to HCI, which a particular emphasis on design.
Aarhus, Denmark
http://www.nordichi.org

October 27 – 30, 2002
UIST: User Interface Software and Technology
Conference on techniques, tools, and technology for developing human-computer interfaces.
Paris, France
http://www.acm.org/uist/

November 16-20, 2002
CSCW: Computer Supported Cooperative Work
Conference on all aspects of computer supported group activity, including systems and studies of group behavior.
New Orleans, Louisiana, USA
http://www.acm.org/cscw2002/

November 25 – 27, 2002
Human Factors 2002
International conference on all aspects of human factors and computer-human interaction, with a particular emphasis on research in Australia and New Zealand.
Melbourne, Australia
http://www.iceaustralia.com/HR2002/

April 5 – 10, 2003
CHI: Human Factors in Computing Systems
ACM SIGCHI’s annual conference on all aspects of computer-human interaction.
Fort Lauderdale, Florida, USA
http://www.sigchi.org/chi2003/
http://www.chiplace.org

To submit an event listing, send email to:
CHI-Bulletin-Events@acm.org
For me, and many other people, the filling in of forms is one of the most gut-wrenchingly difficult tasks that there is. Tax forms make me cringe, and forms connected with nasty things like car insurance claims are frightening. Often the problems associated with form filling have to do with how well they cater for your particular situation. If they match well you can just get on with it, if they match badly you spend all your time filling things in and crossing them out; ‘do they mean this or do they mean that?’

A small part of good form design, be they paper or online forms, involves guiding the user through the filling-in of the form; only asking them questions that are relevant and hiding information that is not relevant. However a deeper part of form design is the building blocks at the foundation of the very system that the form is a part of. This is the aspect I want to concentrate on here; forms as an indication of how closely systems match reality. A form that needs to be filled in is not just a means of gathering data, it is an embodiment of assumptions made by the system (and the system’s designer) about who the user is and what they are doing. Forms are the ‘skin’ of underlying systems, and systems are often set in old ways of doing things and old ways of classifying people that don't match the real world.

Here is a common example; although a huge proportion of long-term, stable relationships do not involve marriage, there is still very little recognition of this in forms and processes. For men they must either tick ‘Single’ or ‘Married’, there is no box for ‘Actually living with someone for the last twenty years and fathering their kids and probably going to be with them a good sight longer’. For women it’s even worse, if they have already been married and then got divorced before settling down without marrying, then for the rest of eternity there is only one thing they can choose when faced with the choice; ‘Married, Single or Divorced’.

Even the simple, multiple-choice questions I've been working on recently for an on-line, user survey have had to be adjusted to take all the user’s eventualities into consideration. As well as the five optional choices, two extra options have been added. An ‘other’ option in case they have an answer different to the five choices presented and an ‘absolutely no idea’ option just in case they really don't have any idea what the question is getting at.

The bottom line is that it's difficult to design a form or a system to cater for every user situation; you just have to make sure that you cater for the greatest percentage and have a way for users outside this group to also express something. The more loose and un-rigourous a particular business processes is, the more there needs to be scope for the user to express their situation in a way not captured by the structured interface of the form. In these situations paper forms come with plenty of white space for additional information and interactive systems need plenty of event logging with accompanying free-text comment fields to catch non-rigourous, user eventualities.

By far the best example of a 'non-rigourous, user eventuality' was Jane's dad's car crash. His car had a problem so he left it with his cousin who was a car mechanic (and scrap dealer!). At the weekend him and his family were watching the ‘Late, late, breakfast show’ on TV and the TV company were filming a live stunt at a scrap yard. The stunt involved dropping one scrap car from a crane onto another scrap car. Suddenly it dawned on Jane's dad that the scrap yard was his cousin's, and that for the shoot the TV crew had chosen two of the best scrap cars that were there, and one of them wasn't scrap at all it was Jane's dad's Ford. While he tried desperately to phone his cousin at home and the TV company, his family shouted a running commentary from the lounge as the scrap car was hoisted up and dropped from the crane onto his trusty Ford.

Looking back he can now laugh about it, he says, but the funniest thing was filling out the car insurance forms. A true indication of how forms and business processes can never capture every single user eventuality and, probably the only time someone has had a laugh filling out an insurance form!

How fast was your car travelling? Stationary. How fast was the other car travelling? Several hundred miles and hour. How many occupants were in your car at the time? None. How many occupants were in the other car? None. From what direction did the impact occur? From above. How many witnesses were there to the accident? About 5 million. What are their names and addresses?...?
SIGCHI at a Glance

ABOUT ACM SIGCHI ([http://www.acm.org/sigchi](http://www.acm.org/sigchi))

Scope. ACM SIGCHI embraces work on the hardware and software engineering of interactive systems, the structure of communication between human and machine, characterization of the use and contexts of use for interactive systems, methodology of design, and new designs themselves. SIGCHI serves as an international venue for specialists in human-computer interaction, education, usability, interaction design, computer-supported cooperative work, and other related areas.

Membership. You are invited to join and participate in SIGCHI functions. Membership in SIGCHI, which includes subscriptions to interactions magazine and the SIGCHI Bulletin, is open to ACM members and non-members. A membership form and contact information appear on page 18 of the March/April issue.

Future CHI conferences. ([http://www.acm.org/sigchi/conferences](http://www.acm.org/sigchi/conferences))

- CHI 2005 — Portland, Oregon, USA — April 2-7, 2005
- CHI 2004 — Vienna, Austria — April 24-29, 2004
- CHI 2003 — Fort Lauderdale, Florida, USA — April 5-10, 2003
- CHI 2002 — Washington, DC, USA — April 26-30, 2002

E-mail Discussion Lists. ([http://www.acm.org/sigchi/listserv](http://www.acm.org/sigchi/listserv))

Several discussion lists are maintained by SIGCHI on topics ranging from education to social action to the web. The moderated chi-Announcements list is used to reach the broader HCI community. Information on joining the mailing lists is found at the listed URL.

Local SIGs. ([http://www.acm.org/sigchi/local-sigs](http://www.acm.org/sigchi/local-sigs))

SIGCHI has more than fifty local chapters. Contact information can be found on the local-sigs web page (above). Locations of chartered and prospective, professional and student local SIGs include:

- **AFRICA**
  - South Africa
  - Israel
  - South Africa

- **AMERICAS**
  - Brazil
  - Canada
  - China
  - Mexico
  - South America
  - United States
  - Canada
  - Latin America

- **ASIA/PACIFIC**
  - India
  - Bangladesh
  - China
  - New Zealand
  - Philippines
  - Australia

- **EUROPE**
  - Austria
  - Belgium
  - Bulgaria
  - Czech Republic
  - Denmark
  - Finland
  - France
  - Germany
  - Italy
  - Netherlands
  - Norway
  - Poland
  - Portugal
  - Romania
  - Russia
  - Spain
  - Sweden
  - Switzerland

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  - Jordan
  - Israel
  - United Arab Emirates

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**Printed in the USA**

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**SIGCHI Bulletin**

July/August 2002