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Cost justifying ease of use

Complex solutions are problems

At any instant, millions of people around the world are trying to use or do something that is difficult or confusing. They may be trying to find a product, trying to figure out how a product works, trying to get service for a product, or trying to replace it. Eventually and inevitably, they will begin to lose time and patience. And, no matter what particular answer they are looking for, the question they pose will be the same: "Why would anyone make something this confusing?"

It's a good question. At IBM, we wonder the same thing ourselves. We know consumers benefit greatly from ease of use; we know making a product easy makes it easier on the customer. We know that making it easier on the customer increases customer loyalty. Products that are easy to use lead to increased customer satisfaction, and satisfied customers return again and again. So ease of use actually increases business.

On the other hand, we're also aware that consumers aren't the only ones who reap rewards from usable products. Companies that invest in ease of use enjoy benefits of their own. Around the globe, across a range of industries, studies have proven it time and again. Whether you are in the business of producing products, or purchasing product for your employees, usability equals profitability. And, that's the bottom line.

Making it easy

For developers and manufacturers, the advantages of creating usable products far outweigh the costs. The rule of thumb: every dollar invested in ease of use returns \$10 to \$100.

In today's market, usable products are desirable products. Ease of use differentiates them in a highly competitive market place. Ease of use brings an added value that culminates in a higher degree of customer satisfaction, continued business and higher revenues. In fact, studies conducted by usability expert Dr. Clare-Marie Karat show that companies committed to ease of use do more than meet customer expectations, they can actually exceed anticipated earnings.

An ounce of prevention

At the same time, incorporating ease of use into your products actually saves money. Reports have shown it is far more economical to consider user needs in the early stages of design, than it is to solve them later. For example, in *Software Engineering: A Practitioner's Approach*, author Robert Pressman shows that for every dollar spent to resolve a problem during product design, \$10 would be spent on the same problem during development, and multiply to \$100 or more if the problem had to be solved after the product's release. Simply stated, the lesson is clear: It is far less expensive to prevent a problem occurring in the first place than to fix it later. And one of the best ways to prevent problems from occurring, and to protect your development investment at the same time, is to keep your users/customers involved through the entire development cycle.

Overlooking customer expectations doesn't just waste money, it wastes time. As a matter of fact, Dr. Karat has demonstrated that focussing on ease of use can actually advance a product's release date. Equally compelling is the fact that those who skip ease of use in the design phase can end up spending 80% of their service costs on unforeseen user requirements down the road.

Overall, pursuing ease of use is found to be a great investment when you consider the likely payoff. By making it a priority you not only satisfy your customer, you streamline the operation by improving product design and development, you save costs by reducing development time, training and maintenance expenses, and you

succeed in getting your product - a better product - to the market sooner.

Finding it easy

Organizations that develop easy-to-use products are not alone in making gains. Companies that purchase or produce usable systems for their employees also see impressive returns on their investment.

When you buy into the concept of ease of use, business benefits. Organizations that ensure their employees are furnished with easy-to-use products see dramatic reductions in training time and, subsequently, great reductions in training cost. In certain cases, training sessions have been shortened from one week to a day or an hour, saving the companies thousands or even millions of dollars. Significant savings of help-desk calls and service costs are another added bonus when products are made to meet user needs.


In this case, usability translates into productivity. When business processes are based on ease of use, according to Dr. Karat's findings, there is an increase in employee satisfaction. What's more, easy-to-use, intuitive systems have proven to cut transaction time in half - which, companies report, results in improved productiveness, and enough savings to cover the cost of the new system in the first year alone.

Still, that's not all ease of use has to offer. By creating a higher rate of employee satisfaction along with improved performance, it produces a chain reaction that leads directly, and ultimately, to more satisfied customers. And satisfied customers provide the base for business growth and competitive success.

In the end, easy does it. It makes business effective. It makes business efficient. It makes business sense.

Related Studies:

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