

6 octobre 2008

4UID

About 4UID

4UID is the agency of Fransiska Groenland, user interface designer. She designs user interfaces for applications and web sites on mobile devices.

After the summer holidays, 4UID has started the year with attending a conference about Mobile Human Computer Interaction. And what better than to share the learnings with clients, potential clients and colleagues.



It's all about kairos and mini crummy trials

Report on the Mobile HCI conference in Amsterdam

By Fransiska Groenland

The Mobile HCI (Human Computer Interaction) conference took place for the 10th time, of which I already attended to five. This year I have learnt a few new (for me) methods and learnt the real difference between the web 2.0 and the mobile world.

And the difference is.... Kairos

Kairos is greek for "the right or opportune moment" and it is the substantial difference between desktop and mobile devices and applications. Mobiles and smartphones are becoming as powerful and connected as desktop pcs, but on the contrary to desktops, they are used in the real life of the user. Anyway, nobody wants to say that his real life is behind a desktop, right? The new generation of mobile devices use applications that come from the desktop world, but now with this contextual aspect to it: google maps knows where you are on the map, and can give you weather, directions and traffic info when you need it. Or:

contacts can be updated in real time: take a picture of your friend with the handset, it can be saved with his contact information immediately.

To get to the desired target behaviour of our users (i.e. paying for, using or buying your stuff), according to Dr. BJ Fogg, from Stanford University, you need *persuasion*. Persuasion happens when three things collide: *motivation, ability and trigger*. How does this work in the mobile environment: first, motivation can be provided in the web2.0 world and the normal world by the social network, high level values as sense of belonging and pleasure take care of that. Ability is provided by the *user interface* on the mobile device that make it easy and intuitive to complete the desired task. And trigger is the thing that makes mobile so powerful. People always have their device with them, so during the day, when a need or desire comes up, just by living a

normal life, the device is always at hand. When going shopping, the user can compare prices on his own device, as to make sure he buys at the right price; when with friends the user can take pictures and order the t-shirt just in the heat of the action. Things that up until today we used the desktop for, if we remembered to order the t-shirt...

Next to the psychology of mobile usage, some more practical knowledge that can be used in product development:

"Mini-crummy-trials-are-better-than-hard-thinking", which is not completely new of course, in user centered design it is common to prototype in the early phases, even using pieces of paper to represent screens. The new part here is : since a lot of new applications are web-based and since web-based equals quick development, now it is possible to send applications out in the wild, as a beta version, and to have real

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users use it, with all bugs that it may have. Key is to:

- apologize to the users/testers in advance, they **will** forgive you, and actually, if the application is cool, they will even wait in line to become a beta-tester/early user.
- listen to the users feedback, it's free and it allows for quick improvements in the application. A usability study can follow up on particular issues in order to come up with a re-design.
- keep it simple. When the big fear with web sites was that the user navigates away from the page, mobile users will just stop using it and get on with their life if the application takes to much thinking. Then the advantage of mini-crummy trials is that product development time goes down drastically and more than one option can be tested. And if renowned brands are hesitant in front of this approach, a division called *Brand name* Labs can be created, and all try outs can go there.

After these new insights and methods, some applications of new technology raised my interest. Most spectacular was the projector phone: a mobile phone with in-built wall projector, with it's inherent usability issues: when projecting on the wall, the device has to be held still when tapping the keys, and the user has to look up and back to the phone, depending on the type of user interface that has been used. And much attention was given to "social" applications: where users share music, photos, video footage and for example tourist info in real time on their mobile devices.

Re-occurring usability themes and always interesting: using maps on a mobile device, where "north up" maps help the user gain situation awareness and where a "head up" map helps the user navigate quickly. However this still does not count for pedestrian navigation, since the map and GPS device still do not react as quickly as they should. How to design zooming and panning controls for miniature mobile maps. That a basic car GPS system suppresses the cognitive map development (and thus the user becomes dependent of his navigation system), but that, when adding extra features, the user can memorize his route better and build a cognitive map of the area. The features that are necessary for the learning are: landmarks, compass bearings and a history of previously drive routes, like abreadcrum trail. And of course there were the small bits of very practical info that I could take home and use in my work straight away: ideal touch key size, icon recognition and sensible feedback on a touch screen, new uses of sound feedback (earcons), and many other things.

Conclusion of the conference was that mobile devices are becoming the most important platform for communicating and for changing human behavior. That there is still a lot to learn about how users use, share and live with these devices. And that being a designer in this area at this moment is very challenging and interesting....

Feel free to contact 4UID for a presentation of the services that might be interesting for your product development.

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