

## Useful Usability Studies

I recently joined the IEEE as a student and want to say how much I appreciated Roy Want's recent columns ("People First, Computers Second," Jan.–Mar. 2007 and "Carry Small, Live Large," July–Sept. 2007).

Because of my background as a school psychologist and my earlier training in social science, I found Want's topics right up my alley. I've been on the receiving end of user-unfriendly technology my entire life, which is one reason why I enrolled in computer courses mid-life.

Jose Bravo's response to Want's "People First, Computers Second" column noted how new technologies might be useful for nurses and related professionals in hospitals (July–Sept. 07). Bravo thinks the technology is very easy to use, yet his wife, a nurse, continues to be frustrated with technology. As a student, I've spent some time brainstorming how to implement meaningful and useful usability studies. Over 100,000 nurses have participated in longitudinal studies regarding women's health. Wouldn't it be great to tap into this wealth of minds for usability studies?

Teachers, like nurses, are ideal participants for usability studies. I've spent most of my career working in public schools, and I've often wondered why many teachers haven't effectively integrated technology into the classroom. One reason is that much of the productivity and educational software available in schools isn't teacher or stu-

dent friendly. Teachers who are frustrated with technology are likely to assume they're to blame and are less likely to embrace new technologies. As a consequence, students have limited



opportunities to see work- or school-related technology as something that's enjoyable or easy to use. Many teachers try but then blame themselves for not understanding how to use poorly designed applications. Perhaps if teachers had the means to employ—and enjoy—usable innovative technologies, they could generate more widespread interest in computer science and related technologies and consequently help broaden the field's demographics.

I think we could improve the situation by exploiting our public library system to conduct usability studies. I know my local public library has a director of emerging technologies, and I assume

other libraries have or are considering similar positions. Most teachers are comfortable in a library setting and would probably participate in usability studies if they knew their efforts could translate into better-educated students and into useful software that better supports their work and daily activities. In the spirit of pervasive computing, why not consider harnessing the power of our community libraries to further the cause?

I also want to say that I appreciated reading about the Carry Small, Live Large concept, because this is something I've been thinking about for quite some time. Last semester, I was busy with projects using large interactive touch-screen displays for my HCI and ubiquitous computing classes. I'm currently preparing a paper on large-screen displays and interoperability for an upcoming interdisciplinary conference, and I'll be quoting Want in my paper. Thanks! ■

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