

Storytelling as an Information Design Technique

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Opening Exercise

For the application described in the Application Briefing, work in groups to prepare a high-level design for the user support materials.

Why Use Storytelling Techniques?



Why Use Storytelling Techniques?

In research:

- More complete information
- Helpful technique for interviews

Why Use Storytelling Techniques?

In design:

- Emotionally connect with users
- Provide appropriate content and motivational material

Why Use Storytelling Techniques?

For presenting technical content:

- Create a more user-centric environment
- Increase the “fun factor”

Which Storytelling Techniques Can You Use?

- For research
- For design
- For presenting technical content

Storytelling for Research: A Day in the Life

- From Human-Computer Interaction (HCI)
- Information designer follows someone for an entire day.

Chauncey Wilson

How to Conduct Day-in-the Life Research

- Observe a prospective user for a day
- Record observations
 - Observed behavior (not just online, but also offline)
 - What the user said
 - Your impressions
- Note significant patterns in the data

Storytelling for Research: Cognitive Task Analysis

- From instructional design
- Do the following:
 - Ask expert to explain how to perform a process
 - Give expert a situation and ask how s/he would handle it
 - Resolve inconsistencies among the 2 versions

Example of a Cognitive Task Analysis



Storytelling for Research: Oral Histories

- From other branches of social science research (such as history and human resource development)
- Receive first hand-accounts from experts, usually emerging from pivotal stories in the informant's life

How to Conduct Oral Histories

- Interview people with long institutional histories
- Ask for significant stories
- Videotape or audiotape the interview



Storytelling for Design: Scenarios of Use

- From Human-Computer Interaction
- Provide one or more of the following:
 - “Backstory” that drives users into an application, tutorial, or help.
 - Context in which user performs a task
- Use the scenarios to provide the “hooks” on which a designer can better relate content to users.

Storytelling for Design: Archetypes

- Also called character sketches
- In addition to demographics, prepare character sketches of three users:
 - Low maintenance
 - Typical
 - High maintenance
- Although demographics tell “how big,” archetypes tell “who is”

Alan Cooper

Storytelling in Presenting Technical Content: Personal Accounts

- Report experiences from a real user
- Either direct quotes or news story style
- Serves to:
 - Motivate apprehensive users (sales)
 - Share expertise approach (Xerox service representatives)

Storytelling in Presenting Technical Content: Simulations

- Place users in a situation that models a real world situation
- Let them experience benefits and consequences of their decisions
- Lets users practice emotionally or physically dangerous tasks in a “safe” environment

Cathy Greenblat, Marc Prensky

Storytelling in Presenting Technical Content: Case Studies

- Explain how organizations handled a particular business or technical challenge
- Used for systems design, customization, complex troubleshooting (Level 3), and business problems
- Helps readers anticipate issues that might not be evident in procedures, references, or even tutorial sessions.
- Harvard Business School

Storytelling in Presenting Technical Content: Narrative Interfaces

- Lead “conversations” with users to identify their goals, and match goals with capabilities of the software
- Communicate through speech recognition, avatars, and veepers
- Also makes use of intelligent agents
- Applies artificial intelligence
- Not practical at this time for most commercial enterprises

Challenges in Using Storytelling

- Antithesis of the engineering approach
- No standards, nor should ones exist
- Business benefit difficult to quantify directly (can only compare two similar applications developed with and without these approaches)

How Would You Apply Storytelling in Your Work?



Learn More about It

SAP

http://www.sapdesignguild.org/community/design/narrative_interfaces.asp

Whitney Quesenbery

<http://www.wqusability.com/handouts/storytelling.pdf>

(resources courtesy of Craig Marion, www.chesco.com/~cmarion)