

Desktop Top!

DESIGN & DIGITAL CULTURE

266

www.desktopmag.com.au

Desktop
Issue #266
November 10
\$1.25
\$10.95

AS EASY AS XY

The art of creating the perfect T



UX AUSTRALIA 2010

NEIL SIMPSON reviews UX Australia 2010.

STRATEGY, DESIGN AND STAKEHOLDERS

As expected, the conference was rich in presentations about how user experience practitioners go about their work, covering research, strategy, design approaches and dealing with clients. Anthony Colfelt, creative director at Different, Australia's largest experience design firm, spoke about how important it is to back up design with a solid strategy and that the designer should become protagonist.

Westpac UX consultant Stephen Cox then spoke about how he mines old data to look for new customer behaviour patterns to strengthen strategies.

An interesting presentation by Shane Morris, Toby Cumming and Jane Cockburn gave an account of the UX process used to support hearing restoration software for Cochlear. Cumming revealed Cochlear does not have a preferred prototyping tool and uses multiple tools to best fit a project's needs.

Still on the subject of prototyping, Todd Zaki Warfel, founder and principal at US-based Message First, showed his entire UX process in a four-minute video. Starting with rapid research, his approach uses client workshops that involve a quick-fire pitch and technique process. Prototyping is done either in Fireworks or directly into development using html5. While the presentation was impressive, it raised questions as to how this works with a content strategy and what happens if you can't get all the stakeholders together.

Darren Menachemson talked about 'design wide' government projects – highly complex medical, educational or political projects that have an impact on society. Menachemson takes a collaborative service design approach that focuses on the users' touch points throughout their journey.

Iain Barker, co-founder of Sydney's Meld Studios, explored the void between the terms 'design thinking' (a process often found in the management ranks of corporations and organisations) and 'user experience design' (a design-driven philosophy). It seems that there are design principles that business types do not get, and business fundamentals that designers don't get. Interestingly, Barker pointed out that recently shares in design-led organisations outperformed others in stock-led indices by 200 percent.

How to get a better working relationship with the client was also a common theme at the conference. UX designer Michelle Gilmore and client-side project manager Wendy Barnao talked through the process of a complex project that highlighted the importance of client/designer collaboration.

Daniel Szuc from Hong Kong-based Apogee gave a presentation titled 'The Value of Asking Why', urging designers to question and think about what they are doing. Szuc finished

AN IMPORTANT DATE in any user experience (UX) professional's diary is the annual UX Australia conference. Held over three days at the end of August on Melbourne's Southbank this year's event brought together 300 people, including some of the most innovative minds in the digital and service design industries.

THE WORKSHOPS

Day one started with a number of workshops aimed at honing UX skills. These ranged from designing for content rich sites and accessible user experiences, to collaborative analysis techniques for user research, mobile UX essentials, practical prototyping, user-centred design and drawing skills.

THE DAWNING OF THE AGE OF EXPERIENCE

Kicking off the conference was Jared Spool, a popular international speaker and owner of Massachusetts-based research company, User Interface Engineering. Spool gave an animated and diverse talk, pointing out that in today's business environment digital projects require a multidisciplinary team to cover technical, business and user requirements. Looking at why the iPod has been so successful compared to its competitors, Spool believes it's down to Apple's attention to service and branding. Summarising, Spool explained that successful UX design integrates the user and the business, is learned but not open to introspection, is invisible, cultural and is multidisciplinary.



with a quote from Joshua Porter saying: "Creating long-lasting value does not happen by accident. It is the purposeful application of sensible design for real people."

A popular presentation was given by Ian Muir and Ean van Vuuren from Westpac. Titled 'Activating Customer Centric Culture', the talk took the audience through the bank's transition to a customer-centric organisation. Westpac's iPhone app has done \$1.1 billion worth of transactions with over 300,000 customers since March 2010. The success of its app was due to a process revolving around a robust strategy that withstood a tough internal examination.

Another interesting insight for interaction designers was how supermarkets like Tesco and Coles go about designing their stores. Richard Beaumont – ex global format director of Tesco and general manager of Design and Format Development for Coles – revealed that Tesco's tried and tested strategy is based on consistency, the best people, plans, objectives, projects, succession and shared insights.

GETTING IT BUILT

Another recurring theme at the conference was how to create specifications that developers want to see, Joe Sokohl and Matt Morphett both emphasised the importance of delivering the right amount of documentation and accuracy by way of detailed specifications for developers to build from – minimising the gaps that the developers need to fill in themselves.

AUGMENTED REALITY

Alex Young, co-founder of MOB, a research and development company in Sydney, gave a presentation about augmented reality, adding computer vision and object recognition, so that the information about the surrounding

TOUCHSCREEN EXPERIENCES

Oliver Weidlich from Mobile Experience talked about designing for the touch screen, something that is becoming increasingly popular. Weidlich suggested keeping three key questions in mind – screen size, screen distance and the attention time-span of the user before they get distracted. His tips included to avoid outer positions, minimise scrolling to help relax muscles, optimise the interface for taps rather than swipes or dragging, use touch interaction guidelines available on the web, make visual feedback clear, and optimise for one finger, but bear in mind multiple fingers.

A WORD WITH THE ORGANISERS

The success of UX Australia 2010 was largely down to the way it was put together. Its organisers, Steve Baty and Donna Spencer, are both seasoned UX professionals, Baty runs Sydney-based Meld Studios, is vice president of the IxDA (Interaction Design Association) and founder of the UX Book Club. His reasons for co-organising UX Australia? "I had attended conferences in Australia and been increasingly



"CREATING LONG-LASTING VALUE DOES NOT HAPPEN BY ACCIDENT. IT IS THE PURPOSEFUL APPLICATION OF SENSIBLE DESIGN FOR REAL PEOPLE." – JOSHUA PORTER

real world of the user becomes interactive and digitally usable. One of Young's key points was that technology should not drive the solution, but rather enhance it and provide a real reason to use it.

CREATING MOBILE EXPERIENCES THAT MATTER

Rod Farmer and Anton Sher presented a case study for their award-winning 3 Mobile iPortal. With mobile user needs varying from web design, Farmer and Sher offered some useful insights: focus on context over features, always design at scale and use situational planning to factor in that mobile experiences unfold over time with people snacking, stopping, starting, changing and getting distracted.

dissatisfied with what they offered to UX professionals in this country, and the distinct lack of any sense of a coherent Australian community. We'd explored options, but finally decided the best thing for us to do was create our own conference that provided what we thought was needed," he says.

Fittingly, the conference is structured using UX/service design processes. "One of the first things we did was to articulate a set of principles that describe not only the experience, but the philosophy of the conference," Baty says. "We involve our 'users' throughout the process, and test ideas with them along the way," adds Spencer, author and owner of UX consultancy Maadmob. "We figure out how we want the conference to flow and what the experience should be, then work out how to achieve it. It's a really important balance between the vision and the nitty-gritty work of actually pulling it off."

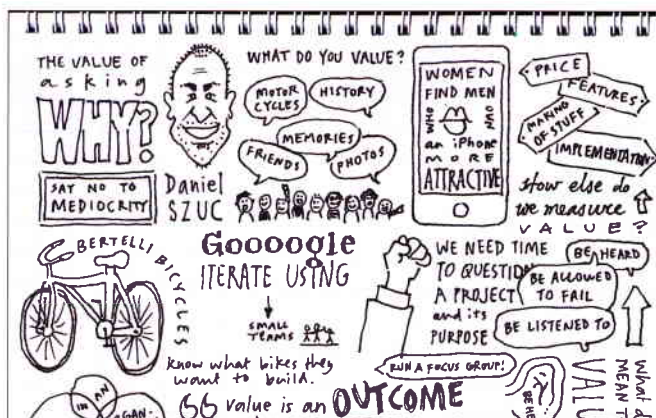
UX AUSTRALIA 2011

As experience design continues to grow as an industry, this event showcases the growing UX community and next year's conference in Sydney will be well worth attending. Look out for UX Australia workshops held in addition to the conference dates. **DT**

USEFUL LINK

Videos and presentations
www.uxaustralia.com.au/conference-2010/program/main-conference

Neil Simpson is an interaction designer, digital strategist, writer and principal of a Melbourne-based experience design consultancy (www.sixeightdigital.com). He can be found on twitter @neil_simpson.



this page:
above right:
Image courtesy
Steve Baty
right:
Image courtesy
Matthew Magain
opposite page:
Image courtesy
Ruth Ellison