

Usability Test Facilitation: Lessons From the Trenches

UPA Boston

April 23, 2008

Carolyn Snyder

csnyder@snyderconsulting.net

Priorities of the Facilitator

- Flight Attendant
 - Responsible for safety & comfort of the users
- Sportscaster
 - Maximizes the flow of info to observers
 - Probes issues, verbally reinforces the action
- Scientist
 - Records issues
 - Maintains the integrity of the data
 - Eliminates bias when possible, notes it when not

Tips for Eliciting Information

- The recap: “A minute ago you said you’d try X – how’d it work?”
- The generic: “Tell me more”
- The incomplete: “So now you’re going to...”
- The mirror
 - Restate what the user said, in his/her words
 - Probe non-specific utterances, body language
 - “Huh’ what?”
 - “You’re frowning”
- The small child: “Why is that important?”

Getting the Cork Back In

- Let them know they've been heard
 - "Thank you, I have that in my notes."
- Avoid referring to anything the user went on about
- Get them to act, not talk
 - "So can you show me what you'd do next?"
- Distract them
 - "There are some other things we'd like your opinion on..."
- Pull rank
 - "Thank you for your feedback on this, but in the interest of time, we need to move on."

Providing Reassurance

- It's not just you – someone last week ran into the same thing.
- Wow, we've made this harder than it needs to be. Thanks for showing us that.
- The people who developed this know it from the inside, so your perspective is very valuable.
- I know this is tough, but you're doing exactly what we need you to do.
- Oops, we never explained X, did we? I guess it's not fair to expect someone to do this without having been told about X.

How to Give Hints

□ General to specific

- What are you trying to do right now?
- What do you think the next step is?
- Do you see anything on the screen that might help you?
- How about in the lower left corner?
- What do you think this button does?

Would You Help?

- User is assembling something and has stuff spread out all over the table. He can't find the instructions he had a minute ago. You can see a corner of them underneath some other papers from the installation kit.

Group Discussions

- Prepared cases or your own
- 5 minutes per case
 - Timekeeper, scribe
- What are the things you could do?
 - What consequences might they have?
- Report back the most interesting or controversial things you discussed

Final Thoughts

- Any method that lets you learn without stressing users is a good one
 - Different facilitators evolve their own styles
- You can't prepare for every situation
 - If feasible, pause the session to confer with someone else, or discuss after
 - Judgment comes with experience, but we all still make mistakes