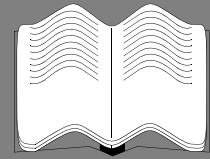


Book Review

Gerard Torenvliet, Editor
chi-Bulletin-Pubs@acm.org



Review of: **Usability for the Web: Designing Web Sites that Work** by Tom Brinck, Darren Gergle, and Scott D. Wood

Review by Sri Hastuti Kurniawan and Panayiotis Zaphirs

Tom Brinck, Darren Gergle, and Scott D. Wood (2001). Usability for the Web: Designing Web Sites that Work. Morgan Kaufmann, ISBN: 1-55860-658-0, US\$49.95

With their new book, Tom Brinck, Darren Gergle and Scott Wood have added one more entry to the emerging library of web usability related books. Although the book is primarily written for web designers and web project managers, we believe it can be a good supplementary reference for courses teaching topics related to web usability.

The main advantage of the book is that the readers can be sure that the authors practice what they advocate. The authors present the fruit of expertise gained through years of web usability and web design projects and practices. The direct and practical involvement of the authors in usability area is evident throughout the book, where practical tips and advice are given prime focus and attention. However, though the discussions on usability practices are both thorough and comprehensive, the book does not seem to pay too much attention to the theoretical aspects of usability.

The main theme of their book is what the authors call pervasive usability. In pervasive usability, usability is factored into every stage of the web site design process. This well known concept - which is unfortunately rarely practiced - can achieve a balance between commercial requirements and usability benchmarks.

They break down the book in a chapter for each of the steps of their systematic/iterative web site design process. This iterative web site design process has six main steps:

1. Requirements Analysis
2. Conceptual Design
3. Mockups and Prototypes
4. Production
5. Launch
6. Evaluation

The authors not only describe each of these steps in depth (with practical suggestions on how to avoid pitfalls) but they also manage to touch on issues often overlooked in other similar books. Topics of information architecture and navigation are given extensive exposure and their critical importance in achieving usable web site design is emphasized.

The most important part of this book, that we think every web designer will find useful, is the inclusion of forms, checklists, and practical techniques that can easily be used in new projects. The book distills the necessary information into logical, reasoned, and structured practical guidelines. This makes it easier for web designers to adopt the information directly without putting too much effort to translate "philosophical" advice into design guidelines, a weakness of many other usability books.

The book also discusses about how to manage a web site design project from start to finish, covering a vast range of topics from budget, time, usability method selections, etc, which we believe is useful for every design team.

In summary, we believe that this book has a place on every designer's bookshelf. Through its practical direction and easy to follow advice it can help in creating a usability culture among the web design community. It is also a good book as a quick reference when designing a web site.