

10-Minute Talks: Tips and Techniques for Usability Practitioners

Abstract

Five practitioners will present 10-minute talks that highlight best practices on topics that include: role playing and experience prototyping, integrating user experience teams into business models, using difficult personas to train moderators, portable and remote usability, and using chat to conduct virtual focus groups with deaf users.

Goals of the Session

The goals of this session are to:

1. Provide easily digestible nuggets of practical usability advice that audience members will find memorable.
2. Employ a presentation format that allows a number of different points of view and topics in a single session. This technique was used for a UPA chapter meeting and was the most popular session of the year. Reports from other conferences that have tried shorter presentations have been quite positive.
3. Provide a forum where speakers must eliminate all fluff (long introductions for example) from the presentations and focus on key points.
4. Experiment with a format style that can involve more people and get those who are not ready for a long presentation some speaking experience.

Audience Participation

After each 10 minute talk, there will be 5 minutes for questions and comments and 10 minutes for general questions at the end of the session. In line with the theme of efficiency, the lead presenter will, during the introduction to the 10-minute talk session, ask that questions and comments be brief and to the point.

Session Materials

Each presenter will be required to put together a 1-2 page summary of his/her 10-minute talk. We will make 100 copies for the presentation and hand them out as people enter the room. A note-taker will record comments and questions from the audience and we will post those on a UPA Chapter intranet site and on the UPA conference materials Web page. Our plan is to post the results within a week. A bibliography will also be included with relevant references for each 10-minute talk.

Prior Presentation of Material

This material has not been presented at the International UPA meetings before.

Biographies of Speakers

Moderator

The moderator is a senior user experience consultant and part-time professor with 20 years of usability/HCI experience. The moderator has worked as a product line development manager and has been a human-computer interaction (HCI) architect and usability engineer for consulting companies, small corporations, and Fortune 1000 companies. The moderator has written extensively and is a member of STC, UPA, IEEE, HFES, and ACM.

Speaker 1

Speaker 1 is Director of a User Experience group at a company that deals with taxation and financial software. The group oversees design and usability testing of the software and online tax preparation programs, and they recently expanded the group to include the company's tax web sites. Speaker 1 began working as a technical writer for consumer products and then moved into the usability profession while at his current company where he established a User Experience team. He has also worked as a consultant for a web consultancy group. Speaker 1 holds a Masters in Human Factors in Information Design from Bentley College.

Speaker 2

Speaker 2 is a human factors professional at a behavioral sciences research company where he specializes in usability and consumer research for Web and software clients. He has directed numerous studies involving websites, software and consumer products, and conducts accessibility evaluations to ensure that Web-based products meet Federal accessibility standards. He created an Accessibility Initiative in 2002 to expressly incorporate persons with limiting conditions into his organization's research activities.

Speaker 3

Speaker 3 is a human factors and communications professional with more than eight years of experience in writing and editing for software and Internet technology. The speaker's industry experience includes information architecture, interaction design, usability testing, HTML programming, small project management, Web and print writing and editing, content design and management, and Web site design and maintenance. Speaker 3 serves as a User Interface Designer and Usability Specialist at a financial investment firm, where she designs the information architecture for websites serving Investments advisors and shareholders. She also conducts usability testing of financial websites. Speaker 3 has a Master of Science degree in Human Factors in Information Design and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Journalism.

Speaker 4

Speaker 4 is an independent user experience consultant. She has worked for more than ten years to help users understand technology and technical people understand user needs. Her most recent project involved field research for a major retailer to design a new call center application. Before that, Speaker 4 was director of information architecture and design for a web consultancy. Her previous roles have included product management, project management, training and course development, consulting, technical support, and technical writing. Speaker 1's technology focus is electronic publishing from XML and SGML sources, and she has contributed to two books on XML. Her usability interests include field research methods and paper prototyping. Speaker 4 holds a MS in Human Factors in Information Design and a BA in Cognitive Science.

Speaker 5

Speaker 5 is a candidate for a MS in Human Factors in Information Design. He is also a Testing Associate at a major usability and design center. Before entering the program, Speaker 5 worked as Senior Art Director at a number of the leading Interactive agencies in the country as well as founding his own successful interactive consulting firm. His past clients include: IBM, EMC, Nokia, Exxon-Mobil, Staples, Ziff-Davis, CIBC, CompUSA, FedEx, Unilever, PTC and Kraftfoods.

Schedule of Events

Activity	Time
Introductions: Moderator	5 minutes
Speaker 1 talk and questions	15 minutes (10 minutes for talk and 5 for questions)
Speaker 2 talk and questions	15 minutes (10 for talk and 5 for questions)
Speaker 3 talk and questions	15 minutes (10 for talk and 5 for questions)
Speaker 4 talk and questions	15 minutes (10 for talk and 5 for questions)
Speaker 5 talk and questions	15 minutes (10 for talk and 5 for questions)
Wrap-up and General Questions	10 minutes
TOTAL	90 minutes

Proposed Topics for the 10-Minute Talks

Integrating a User Experience Group into Business and Engineering Teams

As our User Experience group has grown, we have had to insert and integrate ourselves into the business and engineering teams' current product and development process. Often we run into change resistance and ownership issues. My short talk will highlight some of the key issues and the way in which we've worked to address the issues. This talk will focus on specific, concrete examples.

Participant Personas and Training New Usability Test Moderators

Currently there is not a lot of literature about how to train new moderators. At our usability testing lab we have developed a number of "Participant Personas" which we use in mock tests to train new moderators. These "Participant Personas" each represent a prototypical difficult participant such as the "Cold Fish", the "Blabber", and the "Blamer". We record each of the sessions and play them back with the new moderators. These critiques help to point out strengths and weaknesses in his or her moderating style. We believe this is an effective way to acclimate new moderators to a variety of potential participants while honing their abilities.

Remote and Portable Usability Best Practices for Long Distance Relationships

Because our company faces unique challenges in convincing one of our user groups to participate in on-site usability studies at our headquarters or a Boston-area usability lab, we have incorporated various portable usability methods into our usability practice. Portable usability is a solution to a variety of logistical issues related to usability evaluations. My presentation will briefly describe how portable usability methods can help solve some of the top problems, and then describe two of these methods. The two methods are using a portable usability lab to bring usability evaluations to users and remote evaluation methods that allow evaluation facilitators, observers, and participants to interact while they are located in different geographic areas.

Experience Prototyping in the Home

Family Management System (FMS) is a ubiquitous, family-oriented digital assistant that provides typical PDA capabilities such as calendaring, notes, and to-do lists. It also tracks family members and items they need to bring with them for various activities using RFID technology. Components include the Smart bin, a stationary device for family-wide organizing and storage, the Smart bag, for individuals to carry their PDA and belongings together, and RFID tags for people and belongings.

FMS was designed using various user-centered techniques including personas, scenarios, rich picture, storyboards, ethnography, and experience prototyping. In this ten-minute

talk, I will discuss why experience prototyping is ideal for evaluating ubiquitous computing systems, the experience prototyping method as applied to FMS, and some of the usability findings. I will provide references to articles that describe other experience prototyping projects.

Using Instant Message Software to Conduct Virtual Focus Groups with Deaf Participants

This presentation illustrates the practical challenges and successes my research team encountered when using off-the-shelf instant message software to conduct “virtual” focus groups with deaf college students. I’ll describe the beneficial economies of time, costs and geographic reach this approach afforded. Additionally, I will detail the practical limitations of this technique as an integral part of a research study. By presenting this real-world example of academic research design intersecting real-world practice, I hope to initiate dialogue among attendees about the pros and cons of using freely available and increasingly ubiquitous instant message software to support usability-related research studies.