Hall of Fame AND Shame (Individual)

Due: Thursday, Oct 12, 2006

Overview

The goal of this assignment is to identify and critique both good and bad user interfaces.

Background

Read *Ten Usability Heuristics* by Jakob Nielsen, attached at the end of the assignment. You will use the heuristics to provide support for your Hall of Fame and Hall of Shame entries.

Deliverable

You will turn in a short printed & web-accessible (give us the URL on the print-out) write-up describing a I) good user interface for the "Hall of Fame" and II) a bad user interface for the "Hall of Shame".

Each example should include:

1. A screenshot or photo (for physical objects) of the interface

2. A short description of the interface and where it comes from (URL if from the web.)

3. A short justification (i.e., three concise bullet points) for why it belongs in the "Hall of Shame" or "Hall of Fame". Use Nielson's heuristics as evidence.

Note that you need to find the interface on your own, not rely on a Google search of someone else's complaint about an interface or a site that aggregates bad interfaces.

Ten Usability Heuristics by Jakob Nielsen

These are ten general principles for user interface design. They are called "heuristics" because they are more in the nature of rules of thumb than specific usability guidelines.

1. Visibility of system status

The system should always keep users informed about what is going on, through appropriate feedback within reasonable time.

2. Match between system and the real world

The system should speak the users' language, with words, phrases and concepts familiar to the user, rather than system-oriented terms. Follow real-world conventions, making information appear in a natural and logical order.

3. User control and freedom

Users often choose system functions by mistake and will need a clearly marked "emergency exit" to leave the unwanted state without having to go through an extended dialogue. Support undo and redo.

4. Consistency and standards

Users should not have to wonder whether different words, situations, or actions mean the same thing. Follow platform conventions.

5. Error prevention

Even better than good error messages is a careful design which prevents a problem from occurring in the first place. Either eliminate error-prone conditions or check for them and present users with a confirmation option before they commit to the action.

6. Recognition rather than recall

Minimize the user's memory load by making objects, actions, and options visible. The user should not have to remember information from one part of the dialogue to another. Instructions for use of the system should be visible or easily retrievable when appropriate.

7. Flexibility and efficiency of use

Accelerators -- unseen by the novice user -- may often speed up the interaction for the expert user such that the system can cater to both inexperienced and experienced users. Allow users to tailor frequent actions.

8. Aesthetic and minimalist design

Dialogues should not contain information which is irrelevant or rarely needed. Every extra unit of information in a dialogue competes with the relevant units of information and diminishes their relative visibility.

9. Help users recognize, diagnose, and recover from errors

Error messages should be expressed in plain language (no codes), precisely indicate the problem, and constructively suggest a solution.

10. Help and documentation

Even though it is better if the system can be used without documentation, it may be necessary to provide help and documentation. Any such information should be easy to search, focused on the user's task, list concrete steps to be carried out, and not be too large.