Simple and Usable

web, mobile, and interaction design

Giles Colborne

Simple and Usable

web, mobile, and interaction design

Giles Colborne

New Riders

VOICES THAT MATTER™

Share it

In 2002, Alan Colville was a product manager at Telewest, a British cable TV company. He'd been charged with upgrading the set top box software, a job that touched on every part of the company's workforce, from software developers to call centers. As he described it:

> People at the company were pretty cynical about new projects and change was seen as a bad thing. Everything we'd done before was too complex, had needed fixing after it was released, and was irritatingly slow. We needed to show people that this project was going to be different in that it focused on our typical customers and their needs. Bringing this new focus, we wanted to deliver something that was the opposite of what we'd done in the past by being simple, stable, and fast.

Colville started putting up posters around the company, promising that the project was going to make the set top box "simple, stable, fast."

Those three words became the guiding principles for every decision: "Will it make the experience simpler, stabler, faster?" was a question that he asked at every meeting. Colville remembers:

> I knew it was working when I was on a conference call and a project manager was telling me about an idea that had been dropped. She told me, "It would have made it simpler and stabler, but not faster—so we're not going ahead with it."

> The stress just fell away and the design started to go right. Normally the company would hemorrhage money to customer support whenever there was a new software release. This time, when we released the software, our support call volume was negligible. We saved £3million on that alone.

Sharing your vision means that the right decisions get made even when you're not there. It means your stakeholders can tell the difference between good decisions and bad decisions.

Making your core statement visible reminds people how important it is. Using it all the time makes it second nature to them. Putting it in the public eye means everyone on the team knows they have to deliver what's expected of them.

Once you have found and begun sharing your vision, you're ready to design.

Repeat your story to everyone involved with the project, every time you meet them. Don't stop retelling your story. When you're getting bored of it, the message is just starting to get through.

Tell your story.

This page intentionally left blank

Part 3

Four strategies for simplicity

Simplify this

Whenever I invite someone for a job interview as a designer, I ask them to show me how they'd take something that seems unnecessarily complicated and simplify it.

For a long time, I've been giving people the task of simplifying a DVD remote control, because most people have one at home and because, as we'll see, it presents some tricky problems.

Typically, a DVD remote control has over forty buttons; many have more than fifty. That seems excessive for a device that's used to play and pause movies.

When something is that complicated, there should be plenty of scope for simplifying it. But the task turns out to be harder than you'd imagine.

Try it now: you can refer to your own DVD remote or use the template on the following page. You may find it helps to discuss the problem with a friend, but I wouldn't do this while they're trying to watch a DVD.

On/Off
Quick OSD (On-screen display menu)
FL Select (Change the display on DVD player)
Open/Close (Eject DVD)
Advanced Disc Review (Review playlist)
AV Enhancer (Adjust audio and video)
Repeat (Repeat play)
Multi Re-Master (Improve audio quality)
Numeric Keypad
Depth Enhancer (Reduce picture 'noise')
Manual Skip (Skip 30 seconds forward)
Quick Replay (Skip back a few seconds)
Cancel
Skip Forward
Skip Back
Slow Forward
Slow Back
Stop
Pause
Play
Direct Navigator/Top Menu (Main menu)
Play List/Menu (Show a disk menu or play list)
Functions (Change on-screen menu)
Return (Return to previous menu)
Up Arrow
Down Arrow
Left Arrow
Right Arrow
Enter
Subtitle
Audio (Change soundtracks)
Angle/Page (Change angle/advance still pictures)
Setup (Quick setup menu)
Play Mode (All/group/random play)
Play Speed (Change play speed)
Zoom
Group (Selects groups of items to play)