Guided Tour

Introduction

As mobile phone applications comes packed in with more features as days go by, the usage of those applications becomes even more tougher from a user's perspective. Specially in case of applications which require lot of settings/information etc to be entered by the user, sometimes the user ends up being more confused and at sea rather than being able to make sense of what is expected of them to make full use of the potentials of the application. With complex applications, the user has no choice but to learn how to use the application and sometimes given the technical know-how of the user, the learning efforts are huge as well.

What is a guided tour

In such cases as mentioned above, where the application has lot of uncommon or tough to use/understand features, unless the users are shown how it's done, it makes a lot of business and usability sense to have some sort of a genie at large to help the user. This genie at large so to speak, is known as **Guided Tour** in technical parlance. A guided tour is a wizard if you please which guides the user through the common steps involved in setting up the application, the feature set available with the application. The guided tour does pretty much what a guide does at a museum, taking you through the various parts/artefacts/collections at the museum, giving you details about what they are, their importance etc, so that as a layman you don't miss out on anything on display at the museum.

Use when

Where from a business/end user perspective you feel that you are providing lot of functionalities in the application, some of which might test the knowhow of the end user, it is a good idea to *hold their hands*, till they are comfortable using the application. The guided tour would quickly familiarize the user with the offerings of the product, their workings; probably give them an understanding of what all is expected of them while they are using the application, the typical/recommended settings to be done if any in the application etc.

Usability Tips

- Think like the user

It is imperative to remember the guided tour has been created to help the user and not to be a technical bravado exercise on your part. Keep the contents of the tour simple, easy to follow and understand, do not bombard the user with too complicated terminologies or information that they might not be able to digest.

- Provide interaction mechanisms

Wherever it is possible provide some way for the user to interact with the guided tour itself in terms of choosing what path they want to take, one can also think of letting them enter some information etc to get familiar with the overall workings of the application. This interaction would simulate almost real use cases and would give the user a sense of comfort which would come handy while they try to use the actual application.

- Let the user decide

The user is the boss, as it were and should have the decision making capabilities in terms of what they want to see in the guided tour, whether they want to continue, stop, come back etc. This way the user would not have to go through the entire guided tour even if they are not interested in it. There are lot of times that the user is interested in just some particular features in those cases they can skip the parts that don't make sense for them.

- Memorize user choices

For the guided tour it is imperative not to show it every time the application starts, one can possibly think of a run only the first time mechanism where it is shown only when the application is run the first time. In other cases you can let the user chose when/what they want to see on the guided tour so that next time the application starts you can use those settings to show the tour customized from the user's perspective.

- Proper tour planning

The guided tour should be short and hence should concentrate on the most important/complicated features of the application. You don't want to bore the user with too many trivialities, especially with things that the user would most likely know already. Try to plan the tour in a logical fashion, so that the user doesn't get lost, if you take too many unexpected turns by covering functionalities which might not be logically related/interlinked.

Example

Guided tour of Apple iPhone

Vista Guided tour

--- Added by Mayank on 28/06/2009 ---

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