Selling usability

The importance of usability and tailoring your application to have user friendliness to it has been documented and talked about many times over. However there are times when even before spending a minute/dollar of effort in usability designing/engineering you are daunted with the task of convincing the stake holders about the importance of such a step. That is where 'selling usability' comes into picture. You need to market/sell the importance and benefits of usability by sharing the benefits, potential impact on business of an unfriendly product design, and the resultant bad publicity that comes along with a failed product.

Usability needs to be sold both within and outside the organization. Inside the organization some of the critical stake-holders who need to be convinced of the impact of usability engineering are your **product/project manager**, the **sales/marketing team**, and last but not the least the **development/testing team**.

David Travis has written an article about **selling usability to your manager**. An alternative approach to a cost-benefit argument is to tailor your argument based on your manager's MBTI (Myers-Briggs Type Indicator) personality type. It usually is that if you come up with something personal, it gets more attention. And to be honest the cost-benefit –approach is a bit of an old fashioned way that doesn't really seem to convince enough.

On his article, David Travis offers three steps to personalize your arguments:

- **Assemble** the benefits of usability: higher revenues, loyal customers, improved brand value, process improvement

"Nothing can speak more then actual figures", if you can gather some concrete data-points/facts to demonstrate the advantages along with some potential business impact that would make the most impact in convincing your manager of the importance of usability. Also important would be to take actual live cases if you can have some to draw up some sort of comparisons/analogies to prove your point that a good UI/usability product sells/satisfies more then one with bad user experience even if the latter was more features loaded.

From a process stand point it also makes a lot of sense to do a thorough usability design/engineering implementation, as more often then not a solution that is designed keeping in mind the end user, has lesser after sales/maintenance overheads something which should definitely please the product/account manager.

- **"Type"** your manager: sensing vs. intuition, thinking vs. feeling

An argument/discussion is won with consensus and not with dissention hence it is very important to gauge the feeling of the other party in this case your manager. You should understand the psyche of your manager, how s/he perceives the development process and the usability aspects of it before even entering into a discussion with them about the same. It would also pay if you analyze the thought process of your manager, infer from past experiences with them about their ideas on the overall engineering process, what did they focus/budget more for and whether it was worth it in the end. You can use that as further data points to support your case.

- **Tailor** your argument: state or personalize the facts or the possibilities

As detailed earlier nothing goes better then numbers/figures/facts that can not be refuted and of something which you have tangible proofs. It often pays to personalize the facts to make them more relevant to the person concerned, give examples from day to day life things which s/he is bound to use and employ them in turn to draw analogies with the product usability aspects and see if they hit a chord.

This article with more clarification can be found at Selling Usability.

Selling usability to the sales/marketing team, they are the people who are going to market the end product and hence they need to be absolutely convinced that the product being created/developed is indeed user ready/friendly. Also if you give them enough proof especially with comparison with the competitors that would please them no end. They can possibly use that as fodder preparing their marketing pitch. Also if they are convinced about the positive impact a solution which scores high on usability they would be ready to give you a buy in for the increased project timeline/cost. Time to market is very critical in a competitive environment but at the same time they would not want to market a half baked solution or one which could be tough to use for the end user.

Selling usability to the development/testing team, it could so happen that some members of the team are already well versed with the impact of usability, you can use their help to convince/emphasize about the importance of designing/creating a highly user friendly solution. More often then not a product with high usability figures are bound to have lesser maintenance and after sales which could in turn mean that the development team's work has gone well. It also reduces the re-work/customization efforts as a solution which has been developed keeping usability in mind would have lesser glitches and change requests.

It is very important for the testing team to understand the importance and impact of usability as they are the ones who would be writing the usability test cases and also interfacing with the development team to get those changes into the product. Usability testing should be conducted with the help of end users as well so that more real picture/inputs can be gained.

Selling usability to the end user

Well this really is the easiest part, as no end user wants to have a complicated/hard to understand product in their hands. The lesser the time taken to understand the features of the product and the easier it is to start using them, more are the chances of a satisfied customer, whereas the contrary is definitely not good news. Don't they say "one bad review is far more damaging then ten good reviews", because people find it hard to appreciate a job well done but very convenient to lambaste something which doesn't live up to their expectations. A satisfied customer would refer your company to one more prospect but a disgruntled customer would ensure you lose ten more prospective buyers/customers.

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