Experiences with Usability Labs

INTERACT 2003 Workshop

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Abstract: This workshop is targeted at people who are interested in exchanging experiences with other users of usability labs, or in establishing their own usability labs. It is intended to bring together experienced users interested in improving their methods, processes and techniques, and novice users, whose main interest may be in finding out what problems others had to deal with. Its target clientele will come from companies and other organizations with in-house usability labs, organizations that provide usability evaluation services, research institutions conducting usability research, and educational institutions training novices in usability techniques.

Keywords: Usability lab, usability evaluation, best practices

1   Workshop Objectives

The workshop has the following main objectives:
- to provide an opportunity for experienced usability lab users to exchange information;
- to prepare participants interested in establishing usability labs for some issues they will face in practice;
- to offer information on "best practices", augmented by approaches that are not advisable, or of limited use.

2   Content

Topics of interest include, but are not limited to:
- lab setup (equipment, software, physical layout)
- personnel
- recruitment of participants
- data collection and analysis techniques - automated vs. manual
- liaison/reporting techniques with clients
- research (e.g. novel methods/tools)
- funding and/or pricing issues
- support within the organization
- good practices: what works well, what is still a challenge
- distributed setups (e.g. observation via videoconferencing)
- portable and mobile usability labs
- psychological aspects (e.g. familiarity with the environment, motivation, emotion)

3   Format

The workshop is intended to last one day, and will take place on one of the two days preceding the Interact 2003 conference. The workshop will consist of
- invited talks and presentations by recognized researchers and practitioners with experience in designing, using, and evaluating usability labs;
- panel discussions on practical aspects of establishing and running usability labs;
- discussion groups, based on position statements submitted by the participants.

4 Schedule

We are planning to follow the schedule outlined below, but it may be subject to some modifications.

9:00	**Welcome**
9:15 - 10:15	**Session 1: Invited Speakers** This session will feature speakers with experience in establishing and running usability labs, with an emphasis on labs in larger organizations, or established by consortia. They will give overviews of their activities, serving also as an introduction for workshop participants who are interested in establishing their own usability labs.
10:45 - 12:00	**Session 2: Invited Speakers** The presentations for this session will concentrate on smaller labs within departments or groups, or run as independent entrepreneurial activities.
1:30 -2:45	**Session 3: Panel on Hardware and Software Issues** This panel will consist of speakers with experience on practical aspects of putting together usability labs, with an emphasis on the hardware and software required.
3:15 -4:30	**Session 4: Discussions** For this session, we are planning to conduct discussions in break-out groups dedicated to specific topics, possibly followed by a general discussion period.
4:30	**Wrap-Up**

In order to increase participation by all attendants, we will

- request a position statement from participants, indicating their background, experience, and interest in the topic
- prepare a set of discussion topics for the general discussions
- initiate the publication of selected contributions, e.g. via a special issue in a journal

Workshop materials will be made available to participants prior to the workshop through the Workshop Web page at
http://www.csc.calpoly.edu/~fkurfess/Events/Interact-2003/Workshop.shtml.

5 Potential Attendees

It is our intention to attract participants with the following backgrounds:

- people involved with usability labs which are "internal" to companies or organizations (e.g., IBM, Sun, Microsoft, Yahoo, etc.)
- people involved in commercial usability labs which do contract work for others
- researchers in the field of Human-Computer Interaction
- people interested in establishing a usability lab
- people considering the use of usability services for their systems or products
- instructors teaching courses in Human-Computer Interaction and related fields

Of course, people with other backgrounds interested in experiences with usability labs are also welcome.

6 Workshop Contributions

The format of the workshop consists mostly of invited presentations, panels, and discussion groups. Participants are expected to submit a position statement. We are planning to make these statements available in advance through the workshop Web page.

We are particularly interested in contributions from people who are willing to share their practical experiences with the establishment, use, and evaluation of usability labs. Contributions describing new methods or tools applicable in usability lab settings are also welcome. If you have material that might be of interest to other participants, send us an electronic copy, or the URL, and we will put it on the workshop Web page.

The most recent information on the workshop is available at the workshop Web page http://www.csc.calpoly.edu/~fkurfess/Events/Interact-2003/Workshop.shtml.