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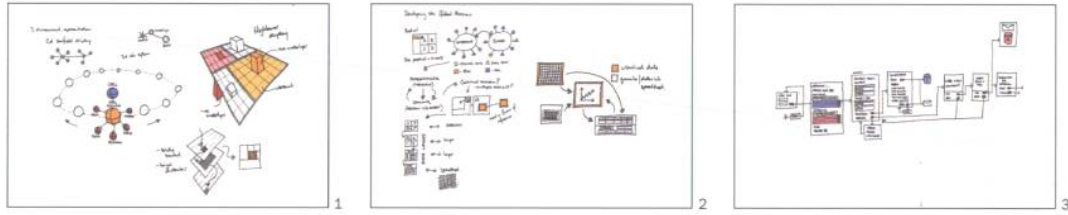
to support the increasingly demanding presentation layer or user interface: engineers need to be involved and be a part of the design process too. A common language is needed to enable multidisciplinary design teams to work together, effectively sharing insights, ideas and vision.

The first step for many companies is to look at their existing website with a view to understanding what is broken and then identify things that could be fixed easily which would increase user value and then in turn make profits. This evolution is what is needed to ensure that the products and services offered on the internet at least provide some basic value for users.

As we move forward, designers will play an increasingly important role, focusing on the intersection where business and user value meet. As the delivery channels for interactive media become increasingly ubiquitous and pervasive, experience designers will need to get used to using non-visual design clues to build trust and establish experience architectures that can work across multiple devices and provide consistency to meet increasingly complex user needs. Experiences that create value will prevail and become more sophisticated as increased investment in product development will lead to "maturity" through iterative evolutions and measurement. This in turn should go some way towards helping users to adopt these experiences and to incorporate them in meaningful ways into their lives.

Experience designers have a challenging future and will need to incorporate conflicting views and inputs into their solutions, blending user needs with a vision to create something that is compelling enough to cut through the cluttered digital landscape to deliver value.

Darryl Feldman is director of user experience at Sapient



THE WEB ISN'T WORKING DARRYL FELDMAN, SAPIENT

Ninety per cent of websites don't work. We've all seen the dry statistics from the so-called "usability experts" and probably have experienced our own personal disappointments from the internet.

It's true that, having spent hours interacting with highly branded yet meaningless functionality and poor quality content, many users are seeking increased value from precious time spent online. Clearly the processes that have been used and the environments in which these websites have been created have been far from ideal.

In the volatile "dot com" era, many designers were focused on trying to redefine a new graphic design paradigm rather than just use simple design best practices to engineer experiences that people actually wanted or could figure out how to use. This is also related to the fact that in many cases websites were designed and built with very little in terms of meaningful business objectives and user context on which to base the solution. Instead, they relied on communication design principles to create marketing based solutions with low levels of useful

interaction rather than a product design approach, delivering something valid based on user needs.

It's time to fix it. Things have moved on and now both clients and designers are far more aware of the importance of user-centric design. An approach has evolved which incorporates techniques from a more product design based approach to problem solving – where the user is placed in the centre of the experience design process. Researchers and designers should work together to design experiences – knowing what questions to ask to enable the appropriate solution and mapping this back to the business objectives.

This is difficult to get right in reality and, if the process is not well-managed, could lead to research findings not being integrated into the final design solution. Once the right context has been developed, an iterative design process should be adopted which allows users to interact and test out prototypes depicting key scenarios. Commonly, brand damage is created when back-end processes and systems don't provide adequate stability

"An approach has evolved which incorporates techniques from a more product design based approach to problem solving – where the user is placed in the centre of the experience design process," says Feldman. At his company, Sapient, much initial work on websites is done by sketching out user behaviours and levels of information (1-3)