

## Immersion

A variation on taking just one or a few user trips is to *immerse* yourself in the use of a product over an extended period of time.

The use of immersion to assist the understanding of user needs is described here by the human factors specialist Patrick Jordan in an extract from his book *Designing Pleasurable Products*.

Usually, immersion will involve the investigator experiencing a finished product over a period of time. If, for example the product under investigation were a vacuum cleaner, then the investigator might use this in his or her home. Each time he or she used it, the investigator would record his or her experiences and the opinions that he or she has about the product. He or she might also record his or her impressions when he or she first saw the product and the reactions of others to the product.

If, for example, the product under investigation were a mobile telephone, the investigator might begin by going to an electrical or electronics retailer and looking at the product on the shelf next to other mobile phones. He or she might make observations about how this phone compares with others on display and what his or her reaction to the product was when first seeing it. Would it be the product that he or she would have chosen to buy? If so, why? If not, why not? In what way does his or her reaction to this product differ from his or her reactions to the other phones? Does the design of the phone under evaluation seem more or less sophisticated than the others on display? Does it look like a high-status product or does it look 'cheap and cheerful' or even 'cheap and nasty'? These are examples of the sorts of judgements the investigator may make.

The investigator might then record his or her impressions on first picking up the phone. Examples of the issues to be addressed might

include the feel of the phone in the hand – is it pleasant to hold, and does the feeling of the phone radiate an impression of high quality? Do the buttons feel pleasant to the touch?

When they are pressed do they give clear and reassuring tactile feedback? Does the phone fit easily into the pocket of the investigator's jacket? Is it comfortable to walk around with it in the pocket?

Next, the investigator might look at some of the usability aspects of the phone. He or she might begin by trying a few basic tasks – making a phone call, receiving a phone call, putting a number into the memory or selecting a number from those stored in the memory. After this, he or she might go 'out and about' with the phone – using it on the street, in the train, in the home, in restaurants and bars or in the workplace. How does he or she feel when using the phone in these situations – embarrassed, proud, important or idiotic? What role does the design of the phone have in affecting the way the investigator feels?

Perhaps the investigator might try using the phone under more 'extreme' circumstances – during a hike in the countryside, or at a football game ... Are there any particular aspects of the design of the phone that affect how pleasurable it is in such circumstances? What happens if the phone is dropped? If it is chipped or scratched does this spoil the appearance of the phone, or does it 'wear well' – retaining its appeal despite sustaining wear or damage?

After a period of experience with the phone, the investigator will then make a judgement about how well the phone performs against the criteria by which its pleasurability is to be judged. In the case of a particular phone, for example, these could be as listed below.

The phone should be guessable. It should be usable at the first or second time of trying for the most basic tasks.

The phone should be sensorially pleasing in terms of its tactile aspects.  
It should be pleasant to hold in the hand and buttons on the keypad should feel pleasant to the touch.

The phone should be a status symbol. The person using the phone should feel that being seen with it enhances his or her status, and others should respond positively when seeing it or when remarking upon it.

The phone should be easily portable. It should fit nicely into a jacket pocket, handbag or briefcase.

(Jordan, 2000)