

PREFACE TO THE PAPERBACK EDITION

The Hidden Frustrations of Everyday Things

We are surrounded by large numbers of manufactured items, most intended to make our lives easier and more pleasant. In the office we have computers, copying machines, telephone systems, voice mail, and fax machines. In the home we have television sets, VCRs, automated kitchen appliances, answering machines, and home computers.

All these wonderful devices are supposed to help us save time and produce faster, superior results. But wait a minute—if these new devices are so wonderful, why do we need special dedicated staff members to make them work—"power users" or "key operators"? Why do we need manuals or special instructions to use the typical business telephone? Why do so many features go unused? And why do these devices add to the stresses of life rather than reduce them?

This book is intended to make you aware of the problems of design and interested in improving things. Many readers have told me that it has changed their lives, making them more sensitive to the problems of life and to the needs of people.

The examples in this book come mostly from Europe and the United States, but the same problems exist all over the world. Modern industry and manufacturing techniques have made high technology available to large numbers of nations and industries. Modern technology knows no national boundaries, and a company's services, design teams, and manufacturing plants may span the world.

Business exists to serve people, a point that successful businesses understand and practice. But so too must the products of business be designed and manufactured to serve the needs and capabilities of the people who are its clients and customers.

Since the original publication of the book, I have found considerable interest in the business and industrial community. Companies have ordered copies for their staffs. I have been asked to speak at conferences, to business executives, and to research and development organizations in the United States, Europe, and Japan, along with innumerable radio talk shows. Hurrah! Not for me, but for the positive signs of increased concern for the customer-user.

The problems illustrated in this book result from a lack of concern and knowledge about how design affects the users of products. Moreover, in this day of increased legal liability for the way products are used, it is in everyone's best interest to make designs simple to use, simple to understand, yet still powerful enough for the job. Bad design cannot be patched up with labels, instruction manuals, or training courses.

Business and industry have learned that their products ought to be aesthetically pleasing. A large community of designers exists to help improve appearances. But appearances are only part of the story: usability and understandability are more important, for if a product can't be used easily and safely, how valuable is its attractiveness? Usable design and aesthetics should go hand in hand: aesthetics need not be sacrificed for usability, which can be designed in from the first conceptualization of the product.

Usable Design: The Next Competitive Frontier

Modern industry must distinguish itself through its consideration of the needs of its customers. This message has already been stated—and heard—in regard to interaction with the customer, service, and quality. Industry has learned that quality has to be designed into a product: insisting on proper design and manufacturing techniques from the very beginning is far more effective than attempts to discover and repair ill-made goods on the production line.

The same story applies to the usability and understandability of prod-

ucts. Human error is the leading cause of industrial accident and a major cost factor in the office. Humans do make mistakes, but with proper design, the incidence of error and its effects can be minimized. Warning labels and large instruction manuals are signs of failures, attempts to patch up problems that should have been avoided by proper design in the first place.

As companies design more for usability and understanding, they will discover a competitive edge, for these principles save customers time and money while increasing morale. As this message spreads, more and more customers will reject the products that are unusable or that lead to frequent error and frustration.

The Book Title: A Lesson in Design

In this book I urge designers to study people, to take their needs and interests into account. I also examine the failures of design and show why even the best-trained and best-motivated designers can go wrong when they listen to their instincts instead of testing their ideas on actual users. Designers know too much about their product to be objective judges: the features they have come to love and prefer may not be understood or preferred by the future customers.

The title of this book is a case history of design. A writer is also a designer, a designer of words rather than of things. I liked the original title, *The Psychology of Everyday Things*, both for the cleverness with which it suggested that inanimate objects had a psychology and for the clever acronym created by the first letters of the words: POET. Rule of thumb: if you think something is clever and sophisticated, beware—it is probably self-indulgence.

When Doubleday/Currency approached me about publishing the paperback version of this book, the editors also said, "But of course the title will have to be changed." Title changed? I was horrified. But I decided to follow my own advice and do some research on readers. I discovered that while the academic community liked the title and its cleverness, the business community did not. In fact, business often ignored the book because the title sent the wrong message. Bookstores placed the book in their psychology sections (along with books on sex, love, and self-help). The final nail in the title's coffin came when I was asked to talk to a group of senior executives of a leading manufacturing company. The person who introduced me to the audience praised the book, damned the title, and asked his colleagues to read the book *despite* the title.

Clearly the title had to be redone. Alas, the so-called "installed base

problem" raised its head: the new title had to have some relation to the old. In Japan, things were easier, for the phrase "everyday things" is not easily translated, and "psychology" is not a popular subject: The Japanese title became *Design for Usability: The Psychology of Everyday Tools*. In English we had to keep compatibility with the original title. So here it is, the paperback edition, newly entitled *The Design of Everyday Things*.

—Donald A. Norman
Del Mar, California
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