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Six Degrees of Separation

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Executive Summary

AM+A presents its approach to user-experience development.

The View from Here

Six Degrees of Separation

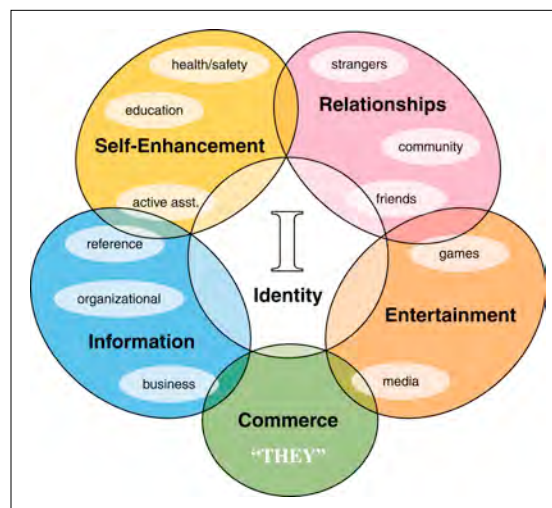
By Aaron Marcus

Defining the dimensions that underlie user-experience spaces

Ask three people in our profession to define “user experience” and you will get at least four answers. Why is the concept so hard to pin down? If we could agree on the dimensions that underlie user experiences we could do a better job of planning, analyzing, designing, implementing, evaluating, and documenting them. Turning the abstraction of “user experience” into something more specific would help us ask the right questions and communicate better with key stakeholders by making “user experience” more understandable to them.

I’ve been exploring a concept called “user experience spaces” as a way to understand user experiences. I’ve defined six spaces: I-ware, You-ware, Know-ware, Be-ware, Fun-ware and Buy-ware. Each is characterized by a particular set of needs around communication and interaction. The six spaces are not perfectly distinct but naturally overlap. For any particular product or application – Web sites, games, vehicles, wrist-top devices, smart clothing – each contributes to the overall user experience.

The six user experience spaces



I-ware: Is about my personal identity – things that are knowable about me. Examples include my personal ID, my passwords, my contact data, how much money is in my bank accounts, my credit-rating and my personal preferences. A user’s experience around I-ware may center on such questions as:

1. Is the information you have about me accurate? Do you understand who I am?
2. Do I trust you to make fair use of my personal information? Will you protect my privacy and security? Can I correct errors?
3. Am I willing to give you more information if you ask?

You-ware: Connects me to others and ad-hoc or persistent communities. Examples range from the family, friends, colleagues and vendors in my contact list to potential dating partners, people in chat rooms and those with whom I exchange various types of messages. The user's experience may involve such questions as:

1. Who are the people with whom I am interacting? Are you describing them accurately to me? Are you describing me accurately to them (this touches on the I-ware space). Do I feel safe interacting with them?
2. How are you protecting and promoting my relationships?
3. Are you treating my "others" with the proper respect? If, for example, I send an electronic greeting card to someone would you misuse the email I gave you?

Know-ware: Connects me with knowledge and data. Examples might include Google, AskJeeves, corporate or personal databases, and collections of documents in any media. The user's experience may focus on such questions as:

1. Am I getting the information I need? Can I find related information easily? Can I compare items when I need to?
2. Is it couched in terms I can understand?
3. Can I use the information in the way I want?

Be-ware: Relates to the elements of experiences involved with improving myself physically, emotionally, cognitively, psychologically, or spiritually. Examples might include interactions around my health, nutrition, feelings, behaviors, and skills. The user's experience may pivot on such questions as:

1. Do you know who I am or could be?
2. Am I on the path to becoming the person I want to be?
3. Am I being offered the right choices and receiving guidance in making them?

Fun-ware: Brings me in contact with the elements of the experience that create pleasure. Examples might include playing games on-line, downloading MP3 music, and selecting ringtones for my cell phone. The user's experience may involve such questions as:

1. Am I enjoying the experience? Am I frustrated?
2. Is the experience novel? Is it appropriate? Is it useful to me?

Buy-ware: Connects me with various forms of commerce. Examples here could include purchasing online and at auctions. The user's experience may concentrate on such questions as:

1. Am I getting the best deal?
2. Can I trust your promises?
3. Have I made the right decision?

Because our goal is to optimize the user experience, we need to find ways to describe it. I've found these six user experience spaces a useful tool.

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