A Collaborative Approach to Developing Style Guides
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ABSTRACT

- A vital element in exploiting the benefits of Graphical User Interfaces (GUIs) is the use of an appropriate Style Guide.

- This paper outlines a collaborative approach to the development of Style Guides and highlights the associated benefits and pitfalls.
Keywords

- Keywords Style Guides, Graphical User Interfaces, User Interface Design, Standards
INTRODUCTION

- Shortly after the introduction of the first GUIs, the relevant manufacturers started producing Style Guides.
- Style Guides have become critical in exploiting the business benefits of GUIs.
- Colour displays, windowing systems, mice, and icons offer application developers tremendous design freedom.
- The proliferation of different GUI platforms and development tools has increased the risk of inconsistent user interfaces dramatically.
STYLE GUIDES

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What is a Style Guide?

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- Compliance with a low level Style Guide will ensure consistency.
- As the body of knowledge of user interface design expands Style Guides will evolve.
- The objectives of a Style Guide are to: Promote visual and functional consistency within and between different applications; Promote good design practice; Reinforce company branding or an organisation’s public image.
USER INTERFACE COMPONENTS Buttons Text boxes Fields and Field labels Scroll bars Option buttons ..... INTERNATIONALISATION Language Considerations GUI Considerations COMPATIBILITY WITH OTHER STYLE GUIDES Microsoft - Windows 3.1 standards - Microsoft Office Compliance - Migrating to Windows 95 IBM - Common User Access 91 - Common User Access 93 Motif TERMINOLOGY COMPLIANCE CHECK LIST RESPONSE FORM Your comments How to ensure you get the latest release Where to get help

TABLE OF CONTENTS About this document Who should use this Style Guide When to use this Style Guide How to use this Style Guide DESIGN PRINCIPLES What is usability Why usability is important Developing appropriate functionality Strive for consistency Aim for flexibility Ensure visual clarity Use colour effectively Allow reversible actions ... BUILDING
Benefits

- From the IT developers’ perspective, Style Guides may have the following benefits: Maintain control over look and feel; Control 3rd parties during the tendering and implementation phases; Reduce arbitrary design decisions and re-invention; Capitalise on learning/iteration; Enable production of re-usable software; Reduce development time.

- From the Business perspective, there are a number of potential benefits: Produce usable systems enhancing customer service/satisfaction; Increase market awareness; Increase product awareness; Reduce training costs; Facilitate helpline support; Improve staff retention; Increase user acceptance of new systems.

- Benefits As with many activities in user interface design the objectives are relatively straightforward, however, there are a wide variety of benefits.
Often the use of the Style Guide alone is perceived to solve the "usability problem".

Obviously different Style Guides fail for different reasons.

The material becomes difficult to use and read.

The guide attempts to be too prescriptive and tackle too many application domains or different types of end users.
Section: 1.5

AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH

- Our approach has been to develop the Style Guide alongside a development team and immerse ourselves in a real development project.
- The result is a Style Guide that is impractical and frequently un-implementable in the chosen development environment.
- Including management in this awareness raising process often pays dividends later on.
- Developed alongside a development team Often Style Guides are developed in isolation from "real" projects.
DISCUSSION

- Make sure developers feel involved throughout the lifecycle.
- Style Guides also raise the issue of the difference between analysis and design and the difference in the skill sets required.
- This again raises the issue of the difference between analysis and design.
- Appropriate development methodologies for GUIs are still emerging.
CONCLUSION

- This paper outlines a collaborative approach to developing Style Guides.
- This approach has been used successfully with a number of different commercial organisations.
- We have used the term collaborative because if the Style Guide is to be successful then it must be developed in conjunction with the software developers and end users.
- CONCLUSION The most effective Style Guides are not those that are imposed on developers by senior management, but those that have been developed with the developers themselves so that they perceive the Style Guide as being "theirs."
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REFERENCES