BEST PRACTICE IN USER-CENTRED PRODUCT CREATION AND USER VALIDATION

Advances in interactive electronic publishing are the focus of many R&D projects in the IST programme of the European Union.

A 'user-friendly information society' demands that the needs of users and customers are taken into account from the start of a development project. User validation must show that new applications offer advantages in terms of benefits for the customers and quality for the users.

The VNET5 Project provides support for best practice in user-centred product creation and user validation.

Customer and user involvement extends from market research and product strategy to user interface design and system integration, and to market feedback and audience responses.

PRODUCT LIFECYCLE AND THE PRODUCT CREATION PROCESS

The product lifecycle and the product creation process for electronic publishing products varies widely.

Planning user validation must start from an understanding of the project objectives, business goals and success criteria, users and customers, and the context of use.

User validation is tailored to the needs of the project, and to constraints such as timing, available resources, access to users and competencies in the project team.

The development of a user validation plan has been identified as the most crucial step where new projects often need support from experienced practitioners.

Competence development is key. It takes time to develop the required knowledge, skills and experience in-house. Early investment in the right competence development makes a big difference to the product creation process.

VNET5 is a Thematic Network. It serves as a forum to help develop competence and exchange experiences about user- and customer-centred product creation in the electronic publishing domain.

The VNET5 common approach to user-centred product creation provides guidance throughout the process.

User-centred product creation process
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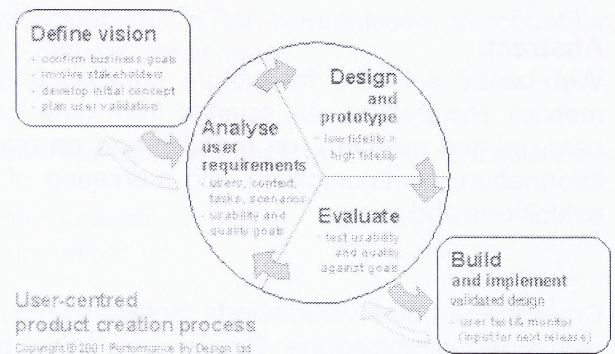
HOW DO YOU ACHIEVE BEST PRACTICE IN USER-CENTRED PRODUCT CREATION ?

Key requirements are

- Quality awareness throughout the organisation
- Allocation of sufficient resources to quality oriented activities
- Effective use of feedback from users and customers in all phases of the product lifecycle
- Competence to carry out all key processes at a compatible level.

The benefit of a mature customer- and user-oriented product creation process is a high success rate of new products.

MATURITY CHECK

Does your organisation have the right things in place to achieve successful user-centred product creation and user validation?

A short VNET5 maturity self-check allows organisations to review how they stand, and to determine which kinds of further activity are appropriate:

- choice of approaches, methods and tools

- competence development in-house
- cooperation with VNET5 partners who can help provide needed competences.

VNET5 MEMBERSHIP

Register as a VNET5 member at

www.vnet5.org

and benefit from access to the VNET resources and from VNET5 support. **Membership is free of charge.**

Active participation of VNET5 members will help to evolve approaches to user-centred product creation, to understand generic user requirements for electronic publishing applications, and to provide maximum benefit for all VNET5 members.

VNET RESOURCES

VNET resources give access to an unbiased view of how to approach user-oriented product creation for an individual project. Methods and tools are described in terms of cost, constraints and results.

The **Resource Finder** helps people find the resources corresponding to their success and quality criteria and project constraints.

Method Maps help show how methods and tools fit in.

Both Resource Finder and Method Maps facilitate the comparison of methods and metrics for user validation.

Teams are able to select the approach which is right for their project and for their level of competence.

WORKSHOPS AND INDIVIDUAL COACHING

VNET5 provides workshops and coaching for project teams and organisations who want to strengthen their competence in user-centred design and validation.

Themes are:

- **Introduction to User-Centred Product Creation and User Validation** for projects that have just started: Raising understanding of user-centred best practice, roles and responsibilities, and getting started in user validation.

- **Developing a User Validation Plan** (for projects which are further advanced)

- **User Validation Clinic** (for projects which have already produced prototypes or a product).

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