Marketing Communication Support for Global Software Sales

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OVERVIEW: The Hitachi IT Operations series is an operations management software package for small and medium-sized businesses. Hitachi information technology sales company in the USA has been selling this software package worldwide through a network of partners. Global marketing of the software is mainly carried out through a website. To provide a superior user experience, it is important to design a product on the basis of not only when it will be used but also in terms of how it connects with overall purchasing behavior. This was done by visualizing the user's total experience (the series of events from the user's initial purchase through to the use and subsequent upgrading of the software) on a chart. This chart was then used to analyze the user's experience in detail and to determine the points needing improvement. This resulted in the identification of three key touchpoints: a promotional product movie, the product website, and sales promotion media that convey a consistent image.

INTRODUCTION

THE Hitachi IT Operations series is an operations management software package for small and medium-sized businesses. The Hitachi information technology sales company in the USA markets this software package globally through reseller partners.

The graphical user interface (GUI) for this product was developed based on human-centered design processes[1], producing a rich, web-based user interface with excellent operability. The design of this GUI has been highly acclaimed, including winning a Good Design Award 2010 from the Japan Institute of Design Promotion, a public interest incorporated foundation. In addition, Hitachi IT Operations Analyzer won a silver medal at the Interactive Product Experiences category of the 2010 International Design Excellence Awards (IDEA). These awards are sponsored by the Industrial Designers Society of America (IDSA) in the USA. The quality of this product in use has been highly rated worldwide (see Fig. 1).

To provide a high-quality experience to the user, it is important not only that touchpoints be designed for the times a customer uses the product but that they be designed so that they work together smoothly, from when the user becomes aware of the product until the user begins using it.

The marketing communication support team has focused on providing users with experiences of consistently high quality, from sales promotion to finished product delivery. While getting an overview of user touchpoints, especially on the website, the team analyzed website interactions and identified points for improvement. This article describes this work together with examples of its application in specific design projects, including a proposal for unifying the product image, improvements in the design of a website offering product information and trial downloads, and the creation of a promotional movie for the product.
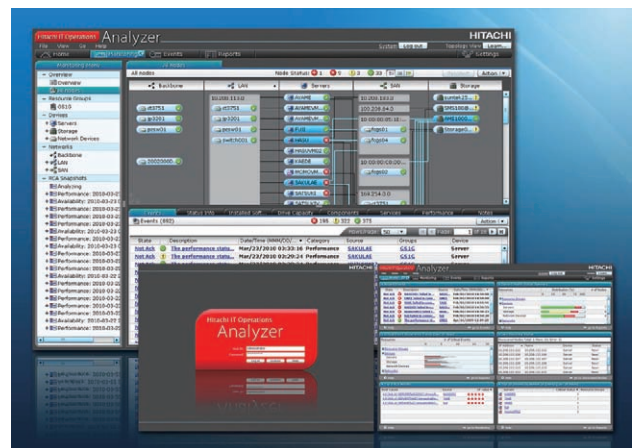

Fig. 1—GUI Screen from Hitachi IT Operations Analyzer. The GUI for this software received the Good Design Award 2010 sponsored by the Japan Institute of Design Promotion, a public interest incorporated foundation. It also won a Silver 2010 International Design Excellence Awards (IDEA) in the Interactive Product Experiences category. The IDEA awards are sponsored by the Industrial Designers Society of America (IDSA). Users worldwide have not only praised the software's GUI design but have also rated its quality in use highly.

VISUALIZATION OF USER'S TOTAL EXPERIENCE

First, to share and understand current touchpoints, the user's total experience was visualized by relevant staff in Japan and the USA working in a workshop format. The result was used to identify points for improvement in the sequence of steps leading up to product purchase.

At the workshop, the characteristics of the US market as seen from the marketing division in Japan, which is close to product development, were compared with the characteristics as seen from the marketing division in the USA, which is close to the actual market. The starting point was the clarification of differences in awareness between the two viewpoints.

This visualization was done using a chart in which the vertical axis represented the various stakeholders and the horizontal axis represented time. The chart presented each stakeholder's "behavior," "the user's feeling at that time," and the "issues at that point" in a format that could be viewed at a glance. The time axis was based on the attention, interest, desire, memory, action (AIDMA) model, which is a consumer psychological process model that covers the processes from a consumer becoming aware of a product through to its purchase. For this product, additional "trial" and "operation" phases were also added. The result was an overview of the user's experience that was easy to understand (see Fig. 2).

Developing an overview of the series of experiences of each stakeholder in this way made it easy to understand the actual relationships and the cause and effect relationships for each issue. It thereby became possible to clarify issues from an overall, optimized standpoint.

These efforts clarified two main points for improving the user's experience: "strong brand appeal to potential customers" and "strong inducement to trial the product." Both the Japanese and US workshop participants brought up these points. These two points were developed into the measures described below for unifying the product image and strengthening cross-media sales promotion.

PROPOSAL FOR UNIFYING PRODUCT IMAGE

A user's image of a product is created not only from words but also from visual elements. Unification of these visual elements creates a consistent image of the various aspects of the product or service and establishes its brand identity, which can create feelings of security and trust.
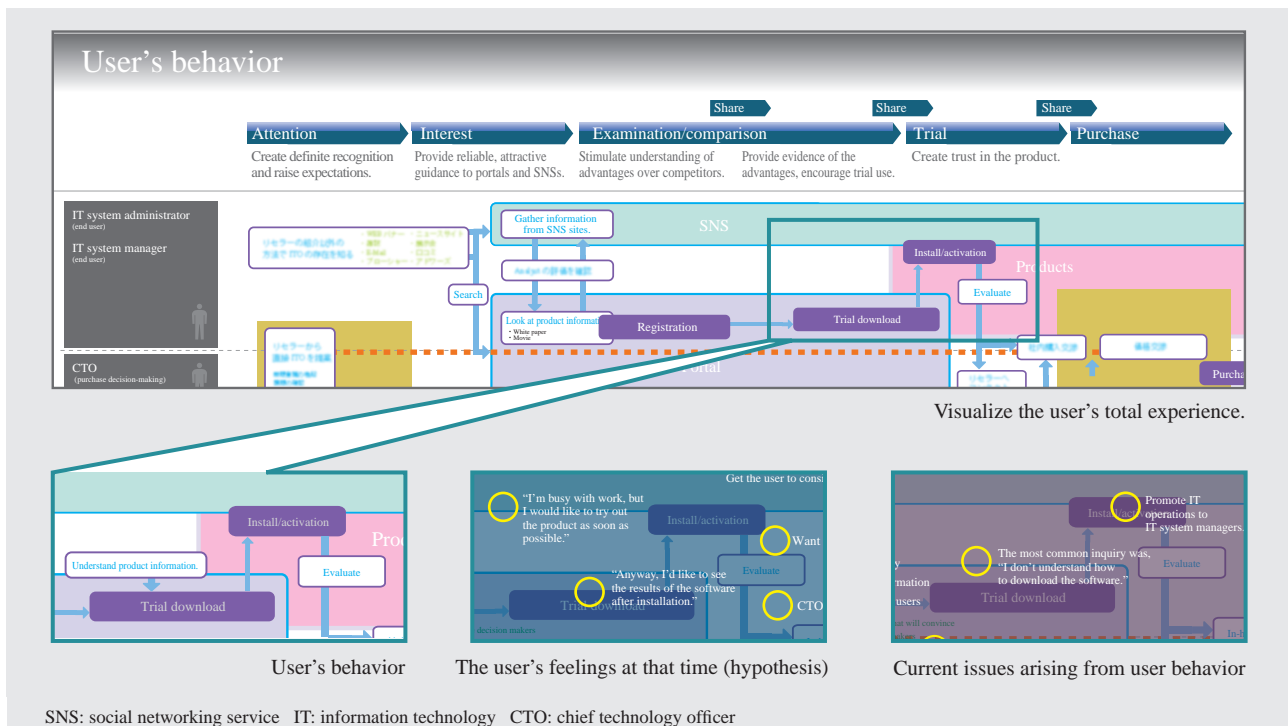

SNS: social networking service   IT: information technology   CTO: chief technology officer

Fig. 2—Visualization of User's Total Experience (Excerpts).
The vertical axis represents stakeholders (mainly users) and the horizontal axis represents the sequence of user experiences. This visualization has been highly effective in clarifying relationships among various factors and identifying points for improvement.
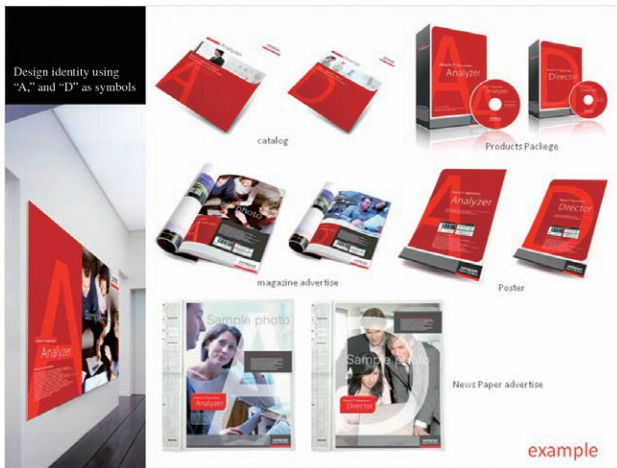
Fig. 3—Prototypes of Advanced Visual Designs for Unifying Product Image.
A unified product image helps create a common awareness among stakeholders.

CD-ROM: compact disk read-only memory

Fig. 4—Development from Prototype of Various Packages to Convey Unified Image in Japan.
The product materials include software packaging, CD-ROMs, CD-ROM cases, and L-size folders.

With this approach in mind, the media to be used in sales promotion (catalog covers, magazine advertisements, posters, and product packaging) were selected, and prototypes of visual designs were created (see Fig. 3). For each type of media, red was used as the key color for all products, and a design was created using this color to give the impression of a suite of products. Key visuals from the product were used as accents, making it possible to appeal to end users in terms of both color and form.

With this idea as a starting point, the direction of visual design was shared among the staff in Japan and the USA, and various media designs were made in Japan on the basis of the prototypes (see Fig. 4).

CROSS-MEDIA PROMOTION

Efforts were also made to strengthen cross-media sales promotion.

Website

Since the user can download a trial version of the product from the website, a key feature of the product presentation is that the flow (sequence of steps) from recognizing and obtaining product information to its actual use is uninterrupted. The two issues here are how to get a user who has shown an interest in the product to download a trial version and how to get the user to recognize the quality of the product at an early stage. We accordingly set two objectives: to provide strong inducements to download the trial version, and to present the feelings and images associated with the product.

The experience of using the trial version was designed to provide the same quality as the actual product. Several use cases were described in the process as they were during product development, and the website architecture and page information structure were developed on the basis of these use cases.

In constructing the website architecture, we emphasized our visualization of the end-users' feelings. That is, "If they like it, they'll want to download it right away." Therefore, we set up links to the trial download page on every page of the website. We made sure that the trial download page could be reached from any page, thereby reducing barriers to the trial download. We also set up a page that explained the process from download to installation in easy-to-understand terms.

We also paid attention during the design stage to making the software user-friendly and making the website appealing by enabling users to directly access the pages of most interest.

We also focused on using product branding that was consistent with our other sales material in terms of the images presented, and on ensuring that we communicated the feelings and images associated with IT Operations Suite[2] to users (see Fig. 5).

The US marketing staff reported that the improved website design had increased both the number of trial download registrations and the actual number of trial version downloads. This approach was also put to good use in the design of the website for the Japanese version of this product[3].

In realizing and describing experiences in the global market, it is not easy to understand what people in each country and region see as valuable and what captures their interest. It is also not easy to identify
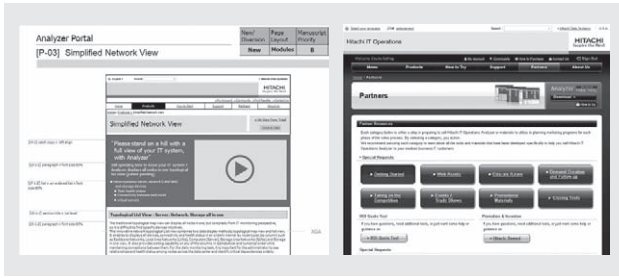
Fig. 5—Examples Used in Study of Website Screen Operability and Visual Expression.
In constructing the website, drawings were used to investigate the information needed for the screens and their configurations, and to present the sequence of operation. Also, visual elements that were as close as possible to the final form were repeatedly reviewed with US staff.

Fig. 6—Promotional Product Movie on Website.
A storyboard (left) and a scene from the movie (right) are shown. The visual imagery in the movie was designed to look as if it had originated in the USA.

the points that should be optimized. Therefore, a new approach was adopted for this project whereby the designers from Japan spent two months working with the marketing division in the USA, including building prototypes, conducting reviews, and making improvements. This approach was an effective way for Japanese designers to share values and viewpoints with staff in the region, who have a more thorough knowledge of its market. It also helped develop in a short time a common awareness transcending language and cultural barriers, enabling the designer's visualization skills to be displayed at their best and the designer to propose ideas on the spot.

Promotional Movie

The product is targeted at people who are highly literate in the use of information technology (IT) products. These people have demanding expectations for collecting information from the Internet using a variety of methods, covering both static and dynamic formats.

The availability of services such as YouTube* means that the USA has a well-developed infrastructure for video distribution, with few barriers to viewing video on the web. Therefore, we focused on creating a movie that would create a strong, lasting impression of the product, while also making the gathering of information an enjoyable and absorbing experience. In the scenario for the Japanese version of the movie, there were many lines such as, "problem points are clarified, and this product solves them." The resulting movie had a positive scenario in which the user (an IT manager) effectively handles problems that arise

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* YouTube is a trademark of Google Inc.

and becomes a hero. This scenario came about from a comment by an end-user during the experience visualization who wanted to be able to use state-of-the-art tools for dealing with IT operations problems in ways that suited him.

The movie needs to hold the interest of the viewer until the end in order to communicate the message effectively. To achieve this goal, the producers focused on language and scenes that could be understood immediately. They also incorporated devices to hold the interest of the viewer, such as the depiction of sharp facial features like those in American comics, the use of the dynamic scene changes that are possible with animation, and strong changes of expression.

Also sound effects such as a door closing would clearly differ between Japanese and European or US viewers. Therefore, the background music and narration were prepared in collaboration with a US production company (see Fig. 6).

The completed movie was shown on the web and at exhibitions. The content itself was expanded to other touchpoints, and progress was achieved in providing users with a consistent understanding of the product, both in the real world and the online world.

CONCLUSIONS

In order to provide users with an experience of consistently high quality from sales promotion to product purchase, the marketing communication support team strived to acquire an overview of user touchpoints, especially on the website. They also analyzed interactions on the website and identified points for improvement. This article has described this work together with examples of its application in specific design projects, including a proposal for unifying the product image, improvements in the design of a website offering product information and trial downloads, and the creation of a promotional movie for the product.

To offer a high-quality experience to the user, the various situations in which a user would come into contact with the product were imagined. Important points were to make sure to always consider the feelings of the user at these times and to convey a consistent message and image in user contacts with the product.

Hitachi plans to carry out similar activities in global markets other than the USA, and to contribute to realizing the concept of user experience to get much closer to users' true feelings.

REFERENCES

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