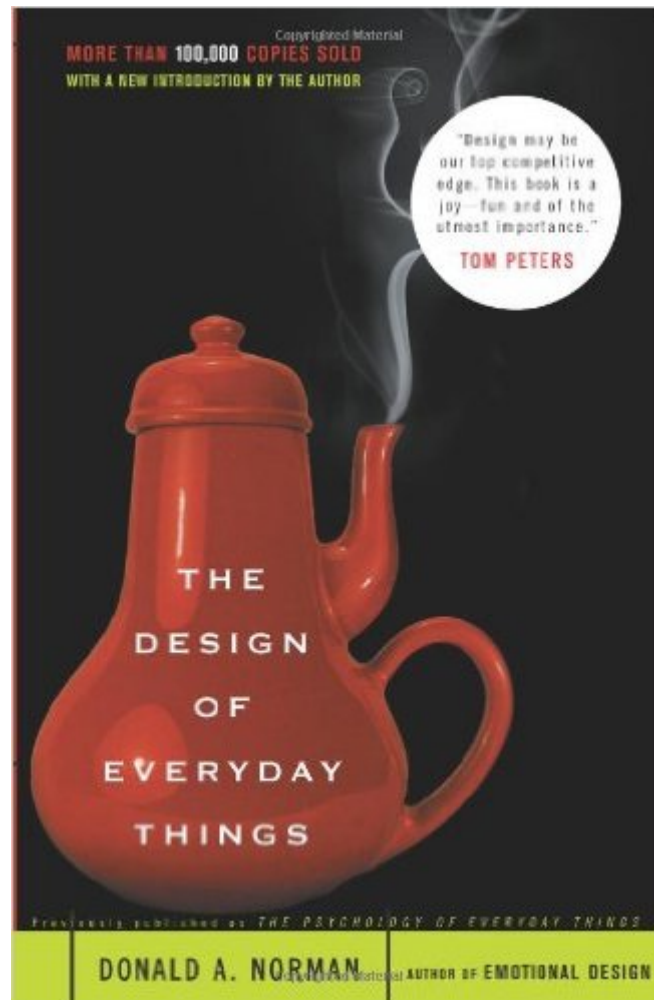# The Design Of Everyday Things

Synopsis

First, businesses discovered quality as a key competitive edge; next came service. Now, Donald A. Norman, former Director of the Institute for Cognitive Science at the University of California, reveals how smart design is the new competitive frontier. The Design of Everyday Things is a powerful primer on how--and why--some products satisfy customers while others only frustrate them.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Although this book is a product of the 1980's, its essential premise is not dated nor obsolete. Dr. Norman vividly illustrates the good and bad of design, and provides an excellent guidebook for the understanding of basic user-centric design in products, fixtures, software, and the everyday things that make up our world.I highly recommend this book for anyone interested in the design and creation of software, architecture, or consumer products. You will find some dated, quaint information within its pages, such as the descriptions of the "computer notepad" and hypertext (both of which came to fruition with Palm Computers and the Web), but, as a whole, the book is a collection of relevant, interesting material. It is an excellent starting point for the study of design.For those interested in additional study on software and user interface design (programmers, such as I), I recommend Alan Cooper's books on user interface design, and ANY of Jakob Nielsen's books. In addition, the Edward Tufte trilogy on visual representations is extremely good, although not software-specific.

This is one of the seminal works in the field of User Centered Design. Norman wrote this book well before the Windows operating system was as familiar as the Golden Arches--which only reinforces the idea that certain basic usability principles transcend all forms of objects--from glass doors to Windows Explorer.Norman does a great job of describing why and how we successfully and unsuccessfully use everyday objects with relevant anecdotes. His stories are usually accompanied with lists of principles that explain good design and account for human behavior. For example, the fundamental principals of designing for people are to: Provide a good conceptual model, make controls visible and to constantly provide feedback to the user.So how does one employ good user-centered design? Norman recapitulates his points at the end of the book by listing the seven UCD principles for transforming difficult tasks into easy ones:1. Use both knowledge in the world and in the head2. Simplify the structure of tasks3. Make things visible4. Get the mappings right5. Exploit the powers of constraints-Natural & Artificial6. Design for Error7. When all else fails, standardizeIt's mandatory reading for any usability software engineer but also an interesting and well written book for anyone who's ever pushed a "pull door" or scalded themselves in the shower (which is all of us).

Let me start by acknowledging that the book is not perfect. The end notes are annoying and Norman can have a tendancy to ramble and I guess that not everyone would find that charming. However, I assert that the strengths of the book more than make up for its weaknesses-- it is an important book, and one that anyone engaged in designing things for other people should read.The central point is simple-- the needs of the user are different from the needs of the designer. The designer might want everyone's actions with his system to be precise, the user might need to have a "good enough" range of precision approximation. The designer wants to make the knobs the same so they look good together, the user wants to be able to tell quickly which knob applies to which function. It's a basic concept that can't (particularly on the Internet today) be repeated often enough.Norman looks at the kinds of errors people make in usage and discusses how designers can plan to prevent these kind of errors. He discusses some of the basic things that users find valuable and walks the reader through some classic (and often funny, because so recognizable) design errors.The writing is clean and (with the exception of the aforementioned rambling) very clear. Norman's voice is full of humor and a real passion for the subject, and that voice is conveyed very well by the book.

When I started my first job out of college I was given a copy of this book by my boss. Since then,

I've had a chance to do GUI design for the web as well as client/server applications. This book has proven invaluable. It completely changed the way I thought about design and usability. The examples given show how everything can (and should) be made more usable... every time I turn on the wrong burner on my stove, or pull on a door I should be pushing I curse the designer who should have read this. The examples may not be specifically about computer user interface design, but the lessons learned are directly applicable.

I agree with another reviewer who said that he found the material rather dated. It is.However, I found some of that dated material fascinating -- the author's discussion of hypertext systems before the Web ever existed, the author's predictions/descriptions of handheld computers before the Palm organizers ever existed, etc.Also, many of the "boring everyday examples" that another reviewer hated (such as doors, legos, stoves, faucets, and so on) were exactly what I needed. For example, a discussion of an ice cream menu helped me immensely with a corporate Web site I maintain. That's because the author went into detail about "decision trees" and how people handle lists of information.In chapter 5, the discussion about the differences between "slips" and "mistakes" (which I thought were the same) will help me build better user interfaces, because I now know why people have problems with some interfaces, and how to resolve those problems.I had also never heard of "forcing functions." I've used forcing functions, but I didn't know I was using them, and I didn't have the concepts clear enough to make them effective.In summary, the book is dated but good. Couple this book with a book like "Information Architecture For The World Wide Web" or "Web Site Usability" and an average Web designer could become an excellent Web designer.

How to Use Graphic Design to Sell Things, Explain Things, Make Things Look Better, Make People Laugh, Make People Cry, and (Every Once in a While) Change the WorldÂ The Design of Everyday Things: Revised and Expanded Edition The Design of Everyday Things Renaissance: Everyday Life (Everyday Life (Good Year Books)) The Everyday Life Bible: The Power of God's Word for Everyday Living Dirty Greek: Everyday Slang from "What's Up?" to "F*%# Off!" (Dirty Everyday Slang) The Renaissance and the New World (History of Everyday Things) The Renaissance and the New World (History of Everyday Things series) Panati's Extraordinary Origins of Everyday Things The Evolution of Useful Things: How Everyday Artifacts-From Forks and Pins to Paper Clips and Zippers-Came to be as They are 1001 Wizard Things to Spot (1001 Things to Spot) Things That Float and Things That Don’t 23 Things To Do Before You are 11 1/2: A practical step-by-step guide for things to make in your backyard Learning Perl: Making Easy Things Easy

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