

# USINET Newsletter

issue 2 (4) 2006

*Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!*

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December 2006

**In this issue:**

*Dear USI friends and colleagues,*

*Sinterklaas and Santa Claus are sneaking up on us again. It is almost time to close the business for the upcoming holidays, but before that we hope you will enjoy this issue of the USI net newsletter.*

*We are happy to present two exclusive interviews given for USINET, with exUSI Madhu Marur, and with Dr. Dr. Streitz who are both active in the HCI field. You will also have the opportunity to learn about the design cases of the current USI generation 2005 and about the latest USIvents.*

*We wish you a wonderful holiday and a happy new year!*



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# USIvents 2006

Picture by Angeique Kessels



- Qarin Hjortzberg-Nordlund, December 2006 -

The USI programme introduced a new module this year with interaction designer and human factors engineer Bill Verplank as lecturer. During his stay in Eindhoven in the beginning of July he gave an exclusive talk for the USInet members. Bill has studied and taught at MIT and Stanford, tested and designed at Xerox and IDEO, and researched at Interval. In his talk he showed us examples from his experiments at Interval Research making interfaces more tangible including active force feedback (haptics) and examples from his course at Stanford focused on input devices for making music. After



Picture by Angeique Kessels

the talk the weather allowed us to enjoy a very nice BBQ in the IPO garden, organized by the USI programme.

The next event took place the day after the previous USI generation graduated, October 13th.

Picture by Angeique Kessels



Two of our USInet team members, Aga Matysiak and Olha Bondarenko participated in a panel discussion regarding their PhD projects in the field of interruptions and task switching of information workers. Mary Czerwinsky, a senior researcher and

manager of the Visualization and Interaction Research group at Microsoft Research, was taking part in the panel discussions. Later in the evening she also gave a presentation exclusively for USINET. The title of the talk was

Picture by Metaxas



“User Interface Support for Today’s Crazy Information Worker: From Scatterbrained to Focused”.

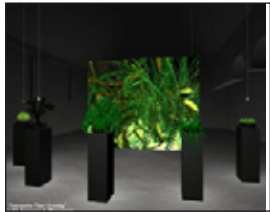
In the talk Mary described how various technological trends may be used to ensure that the designed tools improve productivity, insight, and an overall sense of user control.

Mary discussed her research group’s approach to the user-centered design of advanced user interfaces and described a few of their research projects. A number of recently developed tools were presented. Those of you who missed her talk may download the slides at [www.usinet.nl](http://www.usinet.nl). After the presentation we went for a dinner in a Greek Restaurant and continued for some delicious cocktails in café Mundial.

At the moment of writing we are planning a very nice event – this time we are arranging a visit to the Night Garden exhibition in Amsterdam. For those of you who live in the ‘Randstad’ and miss all Eindhoven events – here is your chance! On Friday, 15th of December 2006 we will visit the Night Garden, a sub-technical indoor garden that links new technology, next nature, contemporary art and its consumption.

For the upcoming year we are already making plans for the annual meeting and some very interesting evening talks in the HCI field. If you have some good ideas about fun USIvents and activities, do not hesitate to contact us!

**We thank J.F. Schouten School for User-System Interaction Research for sponsoring our events this year.**



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**Dr. Dr. Streitz:**

**The human should be in the loop**

- Javed Khan, July 2006, Athens -

*Dr. Dr. Norbert A. Streitz (Ph.D. in physics, Ph.D. in psychology) is a Senior Scientist and Strategic Advisor with more than 20 years of experience. Until recently, he was the head of the research division "AMBIENTE – Smart Environments of the Future" at the Fraunhofer institute IPSI in Darmstadt, Germany, where he is still affiliated. He also teaches at the Department of Computer Science of the Technical University Darmstadt.*

*It was the last day of the conference Intelligent Environments 2006 (IE'06) which took place in Athens, Greece. I had already contacted Dr. Dr. Streitz for the interview and had in mind the questions I wanted to ask but his keynote speech the previous day inspired me for a different interview... Although Dr. Dr. Streitz had a busy*

*schedule he was very welcome and we had a very nice discussion about several topics...*

*Dr. Dr. Streitz thank you for giving USINET this interview. Since I am a Ph.D. student myself and you are the only person I know who has 2 Ph.D.s in such diverse areas such as physics and psychology, I would like to begin this interview by asking you what are the challenges, common points and pitfalls you found in these Ph.D.s?*

It is very difficult to cover all the aspects that play a role when completing two Ph.D.s. Let me start by commenting on my first one in physics. My doctoral thesis was in the area of theoretical physics, especially on elementary particles, Einstein's general relativity theory and the implications for the type of physical world we live in. It was very challenging and interesting because it required to deal with different mathematical approaches and to develop new concepts. Towards the end of completing my Ph.D. in physics, I also became interested in the philosophy of science because philosophical issues as, for example, the direction of time were raised in the broader context. There were numerous implications for the way we can communicate our concepts

of space and time, and what kind of mathematical representations are appropriate to capture them. Actually, the role of "representations" became something like a central thread (or "roter Faden" as we say in German) in my scientific life as you will see later on.

During that time, I was also teaching physics students. Thus, I became interested in the psychology of learning and problem solving, in the cognitive processes that enable us to develop and complete a mathematical proof or to solve a complex physics problem. This interest of mine had implications for my future life, because after my Ph.D. in physics I got a scholarship from the German government to go to the University of California in Berkeley where I joined an interdisciplinary group of physicists, mathematicians, psychologists, educators, etc. They investigated cognitive and motivational processes of human problem solving, especially in the natural sciences and mathematics. I participated in their research, e.g., in the "thinking aloud" experiments where we compared how experts and novices are solving problems. We were privileged to have UC Berkeley professors, including some Nobel laureates, as our expert subjects while the novices were UC Berkeley students. Again "representations", here now as

knowledge “representations”, played a major role in interpreting the results and for doing at that time still simple simulations of the cognitive processes. This work somehow formed the basis for my continued interest in cognitive psychology and later on in human-computer interaction.

***This is actually part of my next question: how did you get attracted to HCI?***

After returning from Berkeley to Germany, I had to decide what to do and, of course, to look for a job. It turned out that I was not so much interested anymore in theoretical physics. One reason was that there were not so many people working in this specific area of general relativity theory and therefore not so many people you could talk to. Another reason was that I got more and more interested in how people interact and communicate with each other, how they relate to and represent the world around them, also by applying physics models but other aspects became more important. Due to my interest in this interdisciplinary area, I gave a talk at an international workshop and as a result I got a job offer. It was the position of an assistant professor in psychology in Aachen at the Technical University (RWTH) although (at that time) I did not have

a Ph.D. in psychology. In Aachen, I conducted cognitive science oriented research in human problem solving this time doing simulations of complex domains, e.g., how to run a small factory. I attended also the first Cognitive Science conference 1979 in La Jolla (near San Diego) where Don Norman, Roger Schank, Allan Newell, Herb Simon, Marvin Minsky, all the big names in the field gathered. These were exciting times. Back home in Aachen, people said to me that if I wanted to have a career in psychology, I would need another Ph.D. So, I did another one in psychology on knowledge representations, text understanding, and cognitive processes in human problem solving. Towards the end of this activity, I also became interested in how people solve problems using computers. This was in 1983 and it was triggered by being in touch with researchers in the US and observing what was going on there. One of them was Don Norman starting his “user-centered system design” activities. As a side remark, did you know or notice that the name of his book “User-Centered System Design” has the same abbreviation (UCSD) as his university, the University of California, San Diego (UCSD)? I engaged in the study of mental models that users and design-

ers have about the systems the use, resp. design and the models system designers have about the users’ models, etc. As you see, it’s again about the issue of “representations”. I started to make these ideas (about HCI) popular in Germany and initiated – as a psychologist – together with people from computer science the special interest group (SIG) on “Software-Ergonomics” (as we called it then) in the German Society for Informatics (GI), being also its first elected chair in 1985. In addition, I became also one of the founding members of the European Association on Cognitive Ergonomics (EACE). This is – in short – how I got into the field of human-computer interaction.

***Another question about the Ph.D. In your perspective, what is a successful Ph.D.?***

Well, this is not an easy question because what does “successful” mean in this context? It is different for different people in different fields. It also depends very much on your own personal career goals. Of course, there is a generic goal for every Ph.D., that is, to do original research using innovative scientific methods and achieve results that are unique. Your research results should advance the state of the art in a giv-

en domain in a substantial way. One could say that they should “surprise” people because you found something people did not know or could not do before. How does this relate now to “successful”? That depends on your goal, on what you want to do after your Ph.D. If you want to start a scientific and academic career, then, of course, you want to be read and referenced a lot by other researchers. Other motivations to get a Ph.D. and therefore determining the criteria of being “successful” are given by the fact that in certain fields the Ph.D. is just a prerequisite for a professional career even you do not intend to follow a scientific career. In these cases, the title is more important than the content of your thesis.

***Hearing your talk yesterday, I must say I was caught by surprise by you talking about the “myth” of Intelligent Environments (IE). What are your fears of intelligent environments?***

It is not so much about fear but being careful and looking ahead taking into account the potential problems in an early stage. I observe that many people are developing intelligent environments in a very straightforward way. I don’t want to offend anybody but I don’t think that a unidirectional, not looking

left or right engineering approach is what we need. This could be characterized in an abbreviated form as follows: “there is a problem, let’s find a solution, let’s use sensors to detect what people are doing and provide support in an automatic way so that people don’t have to think about it”. Of course, this statement does not apply to all engineers but quite a number of companies are following this route. They are more interested in making things work and less in thinking about the social implications, the personal implications and how this technology will also change the activities they want to support. And then there are, of course, the numerous issues and implications of collecting all these data, for example, the most relevant privacy issue. As I said in my keynote, there is this tricky trade-off we have to deal with. On the one hand, you want that the system supports you and for this the system needs to have as many data as possible about you, the environment, the history of activities, etc. On the other hand, the more data are needed in order to provide situation-aware, personalized intelligent services, the danger is getting higher that these data are being used in a way you, as the original owner, are not interested in and actually reject further

use of them. I believe that we have to address this trade-off by giving each user the opportunity to decide on their own what level of support they need and want and what kind of data they are willing to provide. I called this the “people-oriented, empowering smartness” that places the empowering function in the foreground so that “smart spaces make people smarter.” Users should be able to make flexible decisions, also on how much privacy you would like to have. A standard user profile on privacy serves only partially because it might be the case that in a safety-critical situation you are willing to provide all your data in order to save you and your family not caring about privacy at that point. Imagine you have a very restrictive profile and the system cannot help you. That is not what you want. The human should be in the loop.

*As far as I saw from your talk you mainly worked on the past on office environments and currently you are busy with home environments. What are the differences and similarities you see between an office and a home environment in the application of Ambient Intelligence?*

There are many differences but also some similarities. One major difference is the type of tasks people are

engaged in. Most of the activities in the office are productivity-oriented depending, of course, also on the type of company or organization. We investigated especially knowledge workers where a large amount of their time is spent on preparing and processing documents, planning projects, being busy with brainstorming, etc. But you can’t look at the office worker only as a productive individual. You have to include the social context, the communication structures, etc. Companies and organizations tend to be hierarchical resulting in a number of social rules and structures, although this is changing in some places to more project-oriented, on-demand team structures. In this context, informal communication and awareness about each other’s activities becomes very important. Teams have to build up a common



mental model of the project and the tasks to be done. Studies show that these soft factors have implications for the overall productivity of teams.

Looking at home environments, one can state that usually the type of building, the physical envelope, is very different. The social structures are different, although also in families you have certain hierarchical structures between parents and children, husband and wife etc. But

in general, the structures in a home tend to be more informal than in an office environment. The main difference is that the overall goal of the activities in a household is different from that in an office.

At the same time, you have some similarities. Let’s take the example of connecting two remote homes where distributed family members (older parents and their now adult children and grandchildren) want to be aware of what is going on. In

the Ambient Agoras project, we did some work on awareness for distributed teams in remote locations of an organization. Now, in the Amigo project on networked home environments, we can use some of the results and insights we had. Of course, the realizations require modifications but some generic aspects are the same. For example, you have to detect the type of activities in one place, interpret these data and map them on a smart artifact and service that communicates awareness and information to the other place.

***A final question: suppose we have this IE, what is next? What are the challenges of HCI?***

I think one of the main challenges for HCI is that there will be no visible computer devices any more. It is the vision of the “disappearing computer” that we are propagating. The challenge is: how can you interact with something you don’t see? For example, if you have an intelligent wall in an intelligent room. How can you be informed about the kind of interaction opportunities you have here? The idea is to hide the technology and integrate it in the environment. For example, for the Amigo project we did a flyer and we wanted to show a picture of the future home environment but then what kind of

picture do you show to the people if you want to hide the technology? So, we took a picture of a nice living room but we did not put any screens, etc. in it. We just added some kind of “light beams” connecting different objects in order to show that these objects are communicating with each other. This example of the difficulties of creating the picture for the flyer shows at the same time the difficulties of communicating to users of such a home what kind of interaction possibilities they will have.

I think one important aspect is to use the notion of affordances, a concept which is very valuable for designing affordances that trigger certain actions in the environment. Another aspect is, of course, how to deal with malfunctioning and situations when the system is down? How do you communicate that to people living in such spaces? Let’s assume a user who makes a gesture to the interactive wall but the wall does not react. How do you interpret this? You might think that it was the wrong gesture or maybe because the wall is “down”. What does it really mean that the wall is “down” or the table and the chair are “down”. There is not really a good understanding of an appropriate concept for this. I think there are a lot of challenges and opportunities for research for HCI in this area. Of

course, I would not call it “HCI” any more, because - as I also said in my keynote - I call it human-information interaction or human-content domain interaction. You do not interact with the computer any more but with the content domain. Interestingly enough, from a historical perspective, this was one of the first problems I encountered when I got involved in human-computer interaction. In the mid 80ies, I wrote an article on cognitive ergonomics and distinguished between what I called the “content problem” and the “interaction problem”. The content problem reflects what you want to do, your activity, and the interaction problem is how you have to do it using the computer. The goal is to minimize the interaction problem. Today, I would say it means to make the computer disappear, at least for the perception of the user.

***On the same issue, I am wondering, is it a human-content interaction problem or is it a human-object interaction? So I am wondering if we are replacing a computer with an object?***

In some articles, I have written human-artifact interaction which is similar to what you have said. But then I revised it because I want to interact with the artifact only

to achieve some goal dealing with information or other people so the table or the wall itself is not a goal for interaction. It is more what is in the table or in the wall. When you say you are reading a book, you have a human-book interaction. Of course, you can appreciate the book as an object but usually it is more about interacting with the content in the book. I don’t want to deny that the way the artifact (here the book) is designed helps you to interact with the content but your primary goal is to interact with the content domain.

Another dimension of the challenges we face in HCI is reflected in an article we published last year in a special issue on Ambient Intelligence in the ACM “interactions” journal. Its title is “From information design to experience design”. I think it implies a very important rethinking of what your design goals are. You can also relate it to the office-home differences we were talking about earlier. I think this is another relevant aspect of future research in HCI: the shift from information design to experience design.

***Dr. Dr. Streitz thank you very much for giving to USINET this interview.***

# Design Cases

# 2006

- collected by Roel Voessen, December 2006 -

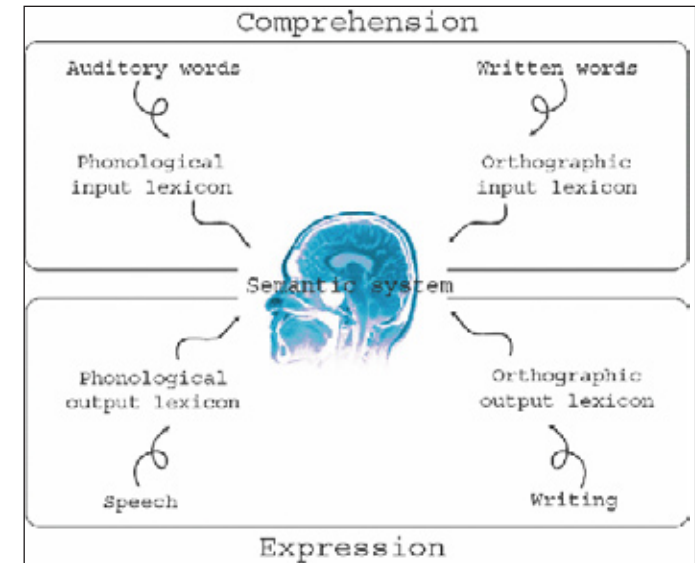
*As always before the Christmas holidays the current USI generation 2005 is struggling to finalize their design case projects. On the 20th of December they will give their final presentations and as usual all current and ex-USI's are invited. To trigger us to come they are giving us a short introduction to their different projects.*

playing,  
shopping,  
storytelling,  
doing statistics...

USI Live

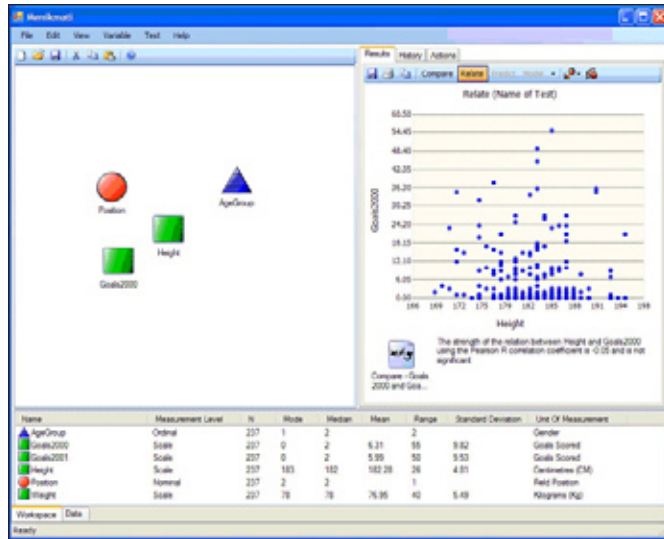
## Aphasia Group

Pinar Erik Paker  
Ying Li  
Jia Du  
Elke Daemen  
Pavan Dadlani



The goal of the Aphasia-group is to design a portable communicating device for freestyle, indirect, and interactive storytelling for people with aphasia. An aphasic person loses the ability to transfer his or her thoughts into words and sentences due to brain damage. Someone suffering from aphasia may be able to speak but not write or vice versa, understand more complex sentences than he or she can produce, or display any of a wide variety of other impairments in reading, writing, and comprehension. The design case made communicating with your colleagues seem easier, all of a sudden.

# Menikmati



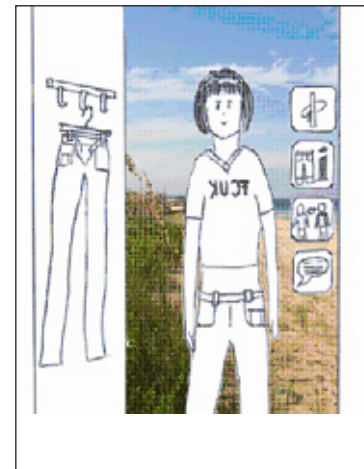
Maurits Kaptein  
Oliver Moran  
Katie Hurskaya

Well finally someone is tending to the needs of the USI's! The Menikmati group is engineering an application for easy and confident analysis and presentation of quantitative data by businesses and graduate students. Basically we know our research question very well, but what test did we need for that one... Resulting from this inexperience and uncertainty is the trust we put in our conclusions.

Behind this noble design goal stands a team consisting of a psychologist with considerable experience in teaching statistics, a mathematician and a sociologist is very able to crawl into the skin of their target users. Though they have a lot to live up to with the software already out there, results seem very promising so far.

# ESE Shopper

Jane Cheng  
Serena Magdalena  
Roel Vossen



Inspired by the recent advances at the Shoplab at Philips, two girls decided to turn their hobby into a design case. Together with a psychologist, they created a design concept to take care of every clothing shoppers' nightmare: getting in line in front of the dressing room with clothing items you are not completely sure of. Their concept sets out to design a platform that allows users to evaluate a clothing item before they have to go into the dressing room. By providing a virtual mannequin, which resembles themselves they can next to the pre-evaluation, compare the item with other clothing items, see the item with another environment than the store, and get other information.

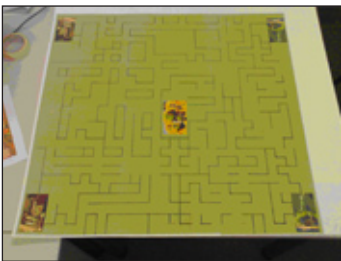
# Design Case... Childs Play!



*Play session with Ludo*



*Interviewing by card sorting*



*The board for SMS*

**Abdullah Al Mahmud  
Omar Mubin,  
Johanna Renny Octavia  
Suleman Shahid  
Yeo LeeChin**

The title above sounds like this group is very confident about themselves. That is exactly what their design case is all about. Different game platforms have different capacities for engaging players according to various aspects. Computer games can provide for strong mental (AI, complex simulation) and emotional (compelling presentation of game content) experiences, but have drawbacks in physical (limited interfaces) and social engagement (mediated communications). In this regard, pervasive games are more active and involve the world outside the bedroom. Our goal is to design a pervasive game for children that provides an engaging experience for them and supports social interaction by using bluff and biofeedback.





## Madhusudhan (Madhu) Marur:

The usability domain  
is gaining  
currency...

- Aga Matysiak, November 2006 -

*Madhu Marur (USI 2000) was awarded by his colleagues for being the most 'Europeanized' person in the generation. These are, however, memories of his warm, friendly and cheerful personality that still make his former colleagues as well as the teachers smile when they hear Madhu's name. Not less importantly, his excellent command of English and non-traditional for a USI student background in journalism were making him even more popular at the times of writing reports. Today Madhu is telling to his former group-mate Aga Matysiak about life during and after USI.*

### *The USI times*

***The first question is traditional:  
How did you get to the USI pro-  
gramme?***

I studied Psychology and Communication & Journalism and there were not many career prospects for people without professional education like Engineering, Medicine, Management etc in India (at that point of time). To pursue a challenging career without having to switch over to technical disciplines, I decided to study HCI in the US. After securing admission in a US university and while waiting for the paperwork to be completed, I happened to see USI advertisement through one of the internet mailing lists. USI program's hands-on approach and working with multidisciplinary teams appealed to me as much as the salary. Thanks to Maddy! I was invited for the interview though I sent my application quite late (June 10, 2000). I was quite impressed with the openness and scholarship of Jacques Terken and Dick Hermes during the interview. After speaking with a few USI's from the first and second generations, I thought that IPO might be a good place for me to explore and learn new things.

***What made you leave India and seek luck in Europe?***

As mentioned earlier, I was about to pack my stuff to go the US (the ultimate destination as I felt at that point of time like any other educated Indian youth). USI offer put me in a dilemma and I turned for advice to one of my cousins working in Eindhoven and my brother in the US (who had spent some time in Germany). They both asked me if I was interested in money or quality of life, I replied that I prefer 'Quality of Life' and the unanimous advise was – 'Go to Europe'. And that's how I landed in Eindhoven and I am very glad that I took that decision.

***Do you still remember your first impressions at the program? All those cultural differences you had to get to know?***

One of the first cultural shocks was seeing Heineken beer in the USI pantry refrigerator and relatively quiet canteen (with full of people) at IPO. I was in a state of daze during the first few weeks in Eindhoven trying to understand things around me. USIans (USI people) being such a heterogeneous group, I was not sure what and how to talk with whom. I tried hard not to look foolish/stupid with my behaviour and most of the times I ended up the way I did not want to. As the days went by I began to realize that people are the same



Madhu and his family

(at the core) albeit their cultural and personal idiosyncrasies and helped me to be my self and build meaningful relationship with fellow USI's.

***Do you know that we all said that you became the most 'Europeanized' person in our generation?***

Thank you for the compliment (I presume that it is). My assimilation into the European milieu would have not been possible but for the understanding of people I interacted at IPO. My first teacher in 'Europeanization' course was Aga Matysiak,

for the good dressing down she gave me when I unintentionally rubbed the team on the wrong side during one of the course exercises.

***From what you've learned during the USI programme, what was the most useful course or discipline?***

Though I liked many of them, the most useful courses have been Prototyping, Research Methodology and User Research.

***Was there something that you did not like during the USI programme times?***

During the initial stages, I was not able to relate different courses we were doing and how I can put the knowledge to use in real life and under what conditions. I was not sure as to what kind of career path the knowledge I gained would lead me to (I felt that most of my fellow USIs were facing the same dilemma). Things, to some extent, fell in place after I clarified my doubts with Matthias Rauterberg. In retrospect, I feel that we could have avoided the mental turmoil by proactively seeking advice and clarifications from the faculty and other researchers at IPO.

***You fought for your final project to get in Siemens... Why there? How was it?***

Well it was not that difficult for me to get the project. I wanted to do a project in USA in a company that was doing pioneering work in HCI/Usability like Microsoft, Oracle etc and also to see and learn more about the US (the US bug was still ticking in the background). I started mailing to different companies seeking project in the US as early as Feb 2001 and Siemens Corporate Research,

New Jersey was one of them. In Late April I received a mail from Siemens Corporate Technology's User Interface Design Competence Center stating that they had a project in their Munich office and the rest is history.

My project was about Mobile Interaction Design in Process Control & Maintenance. Additionally I was supposed to come up with a UI pattern language in the same domain. Initially I did not have a clue as to



The tough times of "Europeization" during USI programme

how to go about my work and had difficulty in adjusting to the cold climate of Munich (-20C). Things fell in place after Panos' timely intervention and active support of my supervisor, Dr. Carsten Wittenberg and a few other colleagues at Siemens. Apart from learning great many things, I was able to meet with

people from different countries and strike a few good friendships at Siemens. Overall, it was quite a fulfilling experience both professionally and personally.

#### *After USI*

***After the final project you returned to India. Where did you start working then? Was it a job in the usability domain?***

Initially it was a little difficult to find companies that employed usability/HCI professionals. After some searching, I joined as a UI Designer in an IT services company, Infosys Technologies ([www.infosys.com](http://www.infosys.com)).

***How is the usability domain recognized in India?***

The usability domain is gaining currency, but is still in a nascent stage compared to Europe or US and HCI research is almost non-existent. The UCD processes have not matured and most of the organizations concentrate predominantly on UI (screen) design than the other UCD activities for different reasons (lack awareness, cost cutting, business practices etc). A few companies are trying to bring UCD into mainstream. Most of the usability professionals in India are from Industrial Design or Visual/Graphic Design,

so it's another challenge to convince these designers about the necessity and importance of contribution of multidisciplinary approach to design of user friendly systems.

***Is it easy to find a usability job in India?***

Yes, it is relatively easy to find 'Usability' job here but predominantly in IT Services companies. Most companies that are sensitive to usability employ UI Designers. The general expectation from a UI Designer is that he/she should be able to do a little bit of everything (User research, UI Design, Visual Design, and Usability Evaluation) and the typical duration of a project can be anything between 2 weeks to 2 months. Specializations like User Research, UI Design, Usability Testing with in the Usability domain have not emerged to the fore though one or two product development companies are trying to move in that direction.

***You have changed a job recently. How is your career now?***

I have joined ABB Corporate Research in Bangalore and still coming to grips with my work. I am supposed to do research and come up with HCI concepts for new products

and services keeping in mind the technology trends. Some of my time goes into evangelizing UCD and providing Usability and UI design support to different software development teams in the organization.

I wish to pursue career in either applied research or business consulting and would be happy to get back to Europe.

***Any wishes or suggestions for the future USI professionals?***



**Generation 2000: ready for departure**

Over all I am quite happy with my job for I have good colleagues and most importantly a very nice manager and the work place is within 10 minutes driving distance from my home.

***What are your future plans?***

The USI program is unique that one gets to work & learn from and with people of different backgrounds (education, culture, nationality etc) and I believe it's a great learning opportunity – make the most out of it.



# Usability as a key selling point

**Whatever the input.** When you face tight deadlines, we designed the Océ VarioPrint 2062/2075 with a ground breaking concept for maximising ease of use by means of your fingerprint. The Océ Touch To Print technology requires one touch to recognise you and to start printing whatever you send. Fast, personal and no messy stacks of printed documents of other users.

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