Book review: Interface Design & Document Design

Westendorp, Piet; Jansen, Carel; Punselie, Rob (Hrgs.): Interface Design & Document Design, Rodopi: 2000, Amsterdam

Review by Jens Hasler, originally published in tc world, 2001

In this book, the editors make an in-depth discussion of the development of the integration of product documentation, e.g. the online-help of the products. The mention of online-help should reveal that the main theme of this book lies within the area of software.

The book documents a conference on "Interface Design & Document Design," which took place on the 28th and 29th of May, 1998 in Eindhoven, Holland, and contains speakers' comments and lectures.

In their speeches, Westendorp, Jansen and Punselie make it clear that a product should be understood as a sum of the product itself and the documentation of that product. This they have determined through an investigation of the software and its documentation in view of the user's mental processes.

The contents of the other speeches handle other aspects much closer to the development of On-line Documentation on a basis of user investigation. Two speeches describe different ways to create on-line help:

• Development of the Online-Help to Microsoft Office.
• Development of the Online-Help to MacOS 8.5.

Another speech describes the so called "Assistants", that represent another form of the usual documentation:

• Description of the "Assistants" from MacOS

The other speeches handle the development of a user interface and it's effect on a certain user group, as well as a general view of the themes:

• Development of a user interface considering older users.
• Effects of the design on the physical, cognitive and emotional needs of older users.
• General considerations towards the development of user interfaces and documentation, as well as the final arguments for future development in this area.

The book handles quite deeply all aspects which are important to the design of user interfaces and writing of software documentation. All of the authors' comments are based on well-researched and thorough investigations.

Although the conference "Interface Design & Document Design" occurred a few years ago, the content of the discussed theme is still just as important now as it was then.

The book addresses not only technical authors, who are the ones responsible for the creation of the necessary documentation, but also developers who could profit from taking a look at this book.