THE UIGARDEN PROJECT: A BILINGUAL WEBZINE

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http://www.uigarden.net

Abstract (EN)

uiGarden is a bilingual on-line magazine that provides an opportunity for researchers and practitioners who work in the user interface design (including user experience, information architecture, GUI, and usability) field in the Chinese and the English speaking worlds to exchange views and deepen each other's knowledge in the field.

Keywords: bilingual, Chinese, English, user-centered, usability, practitioners, specialists, web design, China , Asia, east, webzine

I. THE WEBZINE

Initiated by Christina Li, uiGarden Project is **a** bilingual on-line magazine which soon attracted many volunteers around the world who share the same vision and passion to establish a collaborative team. The team's goal is to provide swift and abundant information exchange and communication between the Chinese and western design communities, and to create a project that will mutually benefit both sides eventually. In January 2005, a monthly bilingual webzine (www.uigarden.net Figure 1) was launched as the first step towards that goal. The *raison d'être* of the webzine is the passion of its originating force, Christina Li, to promote user-centred design. The webzine hopes to build a bridge and link the west and the east (China) to promote universal design for mutual benefit, thereby also facilitating the design of a new generation of interactive systems for a global community. There's much potential to explore the Chinese market - nearly one fourth of the world's population and there is also the need to bring the newest research and development in the west to China, in order to help Chinese designers and usability practitioners to keep up with new developments and be compliant with world web standards.

For western practitioners, it is an effective way of communicating and exchanging viewpoints with other professionals on issues particular to the region. The site will also act as a window on the user interface design industry in the Far East, giving insights into this increasingly important market as well as opening up opportunities for western communities to establish contacts and collaborate with the fast growing Chinese communities.

For Chinese practitioners, the website will give access to the latest developments in the West, featuring articles from leading Western experts translated into the Chinese language and providing discussion boards which discuss the merits of each article.

Figure 1. The portal page to get into the site with different languages

http://www.uigarden.net

uiGarden was conceived out of the collaborating team's passion for user-centred design. We recognise the need for a free flow of exchange between the Western and Eastern usability practitioners. We see the uiGarden to become an open platform, a potential for swift and free information exchanges between professional people who might not otherwise have the occasion to meet. There are undoubtedly cultural differences and, there are partly due to the language issues but not entirely so. uiGarden is in the unique position of being able to discuss, explore and perhaps, resolve some of these differences. It can act as a catalyst to highlight the diversity of the websites between the West and the East.

The geographical world is shrinking virtually everyday. People encounter different cultures as a matter of course in their daily lives. As web designers who have worked both in the east and in the west, we would like to help weave usability and cultures together. There's much potential to explore the Chinese market, - nearly one forth of the world's population. On the other hand, we also want to bring the newest research and development in the west to China, in order to help the Chinese design and usability industry to keep up with the world.

The clamour is for rapid information access and exchange. Consumers are click happy and they expect instant feedback. Savvy web users, no matter where their geographical locations are, have no patience when it comes to net access. Even so, it is essential in designing for other cultures to understand their customs, habits and taboos. It is imperative to be aware of the particularities of the targeted community. There's also a demand for sharing experience with others. There is a plethora of on-line communities; discussion boards and mailing lists for exchanging ideas and thoughts. However, language barriers make it still difficult on exchanging information and experiences with the Far East. For example, at the Interaction Designers discussion group, many list members have complained that there's not enough research on other cultures and people make mistakes when developing product to the Far East market. Designers need to communicate with peers from other cultures.

II. THE CONTENTS

Main contents are categorised such: *Opinion, Methods, Case studies* and *Reviews and Interviews*. The articles focus on:

- exploring theories and concepts that reflect current industrial practice
- cutting edge articles that address the challenges faced by the discipline
- articles relating to the teaching of user-centred techniques and methodologies
- case studies from projects demonstrating the application of user-centred techniques internationally
- reviews of books, conferences, sites, software, tools and interactive projects
- interviews with leading experts in the field expressing their points of view on professional issues

Articles in this journal are featured in two languages, English and Chinese (Figure 2 and Figure 3). A discussion board at the end of each article provides readers a chance to communicate with the author. Discussions will also be translated to the other language in order to give readers from the other community opportunities to communicate with the author. This allows a good opportunity for authors to gain readers elsewhere where they might not have had any contact before.
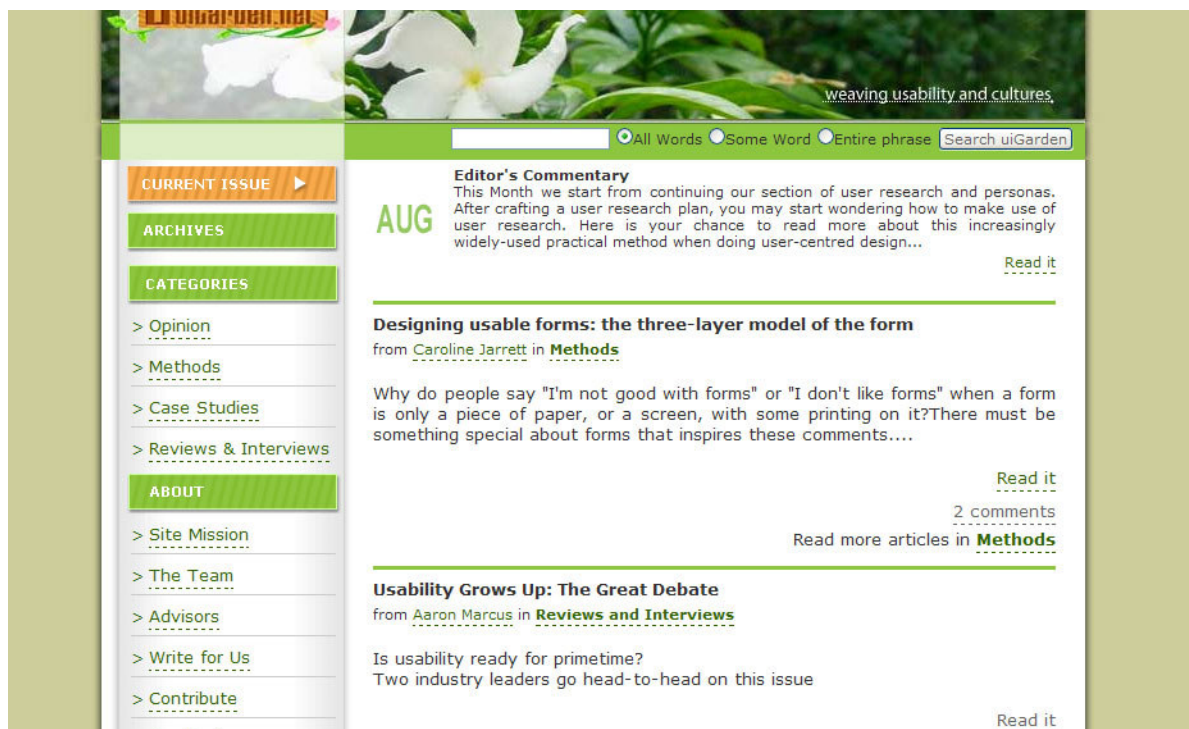

Figure 2. The webzine in English

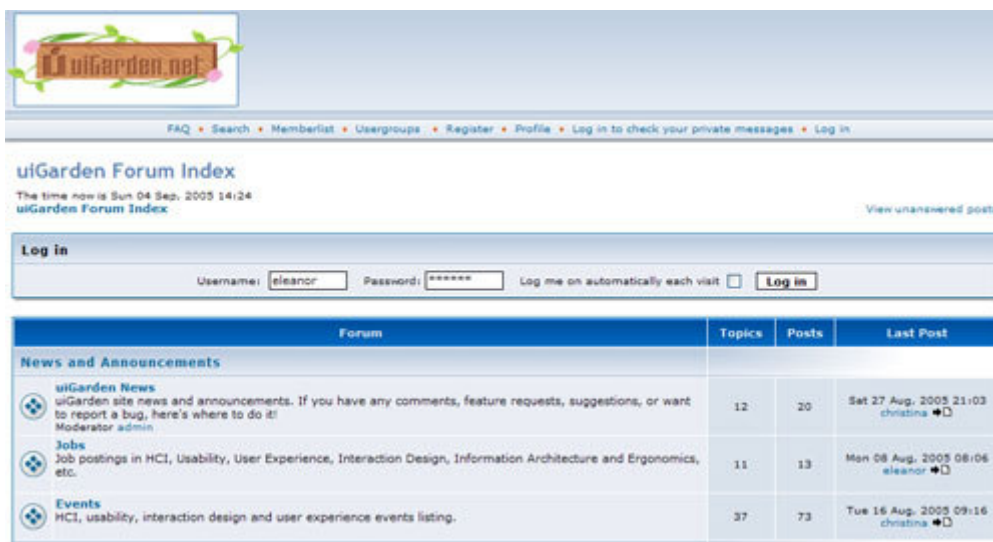**Figure 3.** The webzine in Chinese

Figure 4. The English discussion forum

Besides the direct communication on the articles with their authors, the webzine provides forums (Figure 4) in both languages for casual discussion, which focuses on various topics, not limited to one article. Hot topics will also be translated to another part, so participators will know what the hot and popular issues are the most concerned by peers in the other community. In the future, we also expect to have personal columns of famous writers in this field. Effective search and archive as pdf documents will also be provided.

III FINDINGS

User-centred methodology is used in developing this project from the very start. As is expected, there are a numbers of differences as well as similarities between the English speaking and Chinese audiences.

The English speaking audience in the west is far more interested in discussing practicing experiences in the industry and exchanging views on newly developed products, while Chinese audiences need more basic instructions and techniques on how to apply usability technology in their product development cycle. In addition, for the moment in China, information architecture, user experience, and graphical user interface designs are usually being taken by the single user interface designer. Responsibilities overlap. People tend to discuss issues by the type of different products, i.e. software, website, etc. Therefore, we designed different categories for the two forums. At the English forum, threads are divided by their related topics in information architecture, user experience design, usability testing, etc. On the Chinese side, they are divided into different product lines. A special category is designed, 'Basic knowledge' of usability for users to discuss definition of general UI terms and workflows of a user-centred design process for the Chinese audience. And this has quickly becomes the most visited category at the Chinese forum.

Although communication with users has been assigned high priority, Chinese enterprises rely mainly on accumulation of experience rather than well-disciplined methods for this purpose. Usability practitioners find it difficult to persuade their managing directors that improving the process to make it more user-centred could solve the problem. Designers have not only to learn new theories and methods from the west but also to propagate them to their business leaders. They require more research result in the ROI and more instructions of how to sell the usability concept. Effective methods of how to find a common ground while working with programmers are problems faced by designers both in the west and the east. Therefore, this is a favourite topic at the two forums. People are curious at to find useful suggestions from the other community. One important issue in considering design for the Chinese user we found is that Chinese people have a tendency to think that web elements on the left is for confirmation while those on the right is for cancellation. This has been an important issue to keep in mind throughout the whole process of designing the layout of the uiGarden interface.

CONCLUSION

These are still early days and preliminary findings. With more effective communication, western designers will gain more ideas when designing for global products. On the other hand, the opportunity of learning about usability theories and methods without having to struggle with the language barrier will also bring more people in China to understand and accept the user-centered concept and enable the Chinese usability and design industries to be on an equal footing with the rest of the world in their field. As usability becomes a better known field in China and western practitioners get more cognizant with the enormous potential of eastern practitioners, uiGarden serves its purpose in providing a unique channel of communication where usability specialists can discuss user centered issues specific to the region.