Online shopping over the World-Wide Web has become a major commercial application in 1998 and volume is rapidly growing. At the same time usability of these sites is a serious problem as significant numbers of users (1/2 - 2/3, depending on study) fail to find what they are looking for. A number of HCI techniques, tools, and methods are used to design, realize, and evaluate new forms of interaction to address this problem. Electronic Product Catalog (EPC) Interfaces are an interesting application area for a wide range of HCI research, including human searching and browsing in complex hypermedia spaces, information visualization, virtual reality, agent support, user modeling, and group-oriented work such as recommender systems.

The SIG served as an outlet to bring together people with interest in this topic. We solicited 10-Minute contributions on the CHI-WEB discussion list prior to CHI for a more structured SIG given its expected size. Indeed, over 80 participants took part. About 80% of SIG participants came from the U.S. and 20% represented European entities. Over 90% came from commercial organizations ranging from small consulting firms to large multinational corporations. Designers, usability specialists within a corporation, and consultants where about equally represented.

The SIG started with the presentations followed by short Q&A periods. Markus Stolze positioned the SIG theme in the general context of e-commerce systems, summarizing results from the CHI 98 workshop [1]. Next, Roger Tilson from the IBM Ease of Use Group in Austin presented results from a usability evaluation of four e-commerce sites and discussed how usability principles can be applied to the design and evaluation of shopping sites[2]. Tim Gasperak of HumanCode discussed the rationale behind their design decisions for the garden.com site [3]. Arnold (Arnie) Lund presented lessons learned from the design of the US West Product and Services Catalog. Hans-Juergen Hoffmann (TU Darmstadt) sketched the EPKfix research project which had the goal to derive an implementation of an electronic catalog from a formal specification. Three short demonstrations followed: Markus Stolze showed a system prototype and interface for product selection based on interactive feature scoring [4], Jürgen Koenemann showed InfoZoom, a new commercial tool (from humanIT) for interactive product feature visualization and selection that combines a table metaphor with a zooming interface[5], and Peter Jan Stappers (TU Delft) presented an interactive 2D-visualization of a product space based on similarity scaling [6]. The final 20 minutes where spent on discussion. The overall reaction to the SIG was very positive and the main complaint was a lack of time to deepen discussions.

The website maintained by Stolze[7] continues to collect material on this topic. It was decided to continue discussions on the CHI-WEB list rather than to form a new mailing list. Koenemann, Stolze et al. submitted a proposal for a workshop at CHI 2000 that will continue this topic thread, look (hopefully) for a CFP.

About the Organizers

Markus Stolze is researcher in the e-business group at the IBM Research Laboratory in Zurich, Switzerland. mrs@zurich.ibm.com

Jürgen Koenemann, is a Researcher at GMD German
National Research Center for Information Technology and
Senior Consultant for humanIT Human Information
Technologies GmbH, Germany.
Juergen.Koenemann@gmd.de

References