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Notes on Innovation

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Accessing Data via Your Glasses

Probably everyone reading this has read a science fiction novel or seen a movie where some of the characters accessed information that was projected on the inner face of their glasses or a face protector of some sort. Today, Google is preparing to release glasses that will turn that fiction into a reality.

To achieve this, Google has created a minor miracle of miniaturization – a thick stem for a pair of glasses that incorporates batteries, a GPS unit, wireless internet access, a phone that responds to voice commands, a camera, and a computer that can project a browser page on the inner surface of a pair of glasses. The photo below is taken from a Google press release.

If you would like a rather dramatic introduction to what the young man might be seeing as he walks around town, check out this video from a *Washington Post* story on Google's upcoming product release:

http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/google-glasses-a-preview-from-project-glass/2012/04/04/gIQAhIAXvS_gallery.html#photo=5

With adjustments for the nature of the "screen", you can access any information you might access via your Google browser. And, if the video is to be believed, you can use voice commands to access information, store information and make phone calls. In other words, Google has managed to cram a smart phone into one stem of a pair of glasses.

Once you realize that the Google glasses are a smart phone that is constantly keeping track of your geographical location, you realize that the basic technology isn't new – it is just incredibly small, and very convenient.

Think of all the ways that a laptop, iPad or smart phone can be used to help improve a business process. It facilitates access to information from almost any location, at any time. It also makes it possible for the individual to update databases and communicate with colleagues, as needed. Now, imagine it done without the use of a keyboard, or your thumbs.

One of the best Sci Fi novels that incorporated this concept assumed that UK police officers wore glasses linked to a national police database. As an officer walked through the city he saw information projected over actual objects in his or her view. In this case, the glasses also scanned the wearer's iris and could observe where the officer looked. Background scanning would alert the officer if he happened to glance at a wanted criminal or stolen car and when he approached a building, a variety of schematics would be available such as fire evacuation routes or power lines. (In the novel, the plot involved a gang crashing the police internet in an effort to pull off a major heist.) You can easily imagine how having access to this kind of information would dramatically alter police work.

No doubt there will be bugs to work out. Will it really be easy to read data on the surface of glasses in bright sunlight? What will the download speed be like? How heavy will that glass stem be? But, whatever the bugs are, we are confident that they will be worked out in the course of a year or two, just as they were with the ipad and the smartphone.

So what does this mean to a process redesigner?

Start by thinking of all the scenarios in which a user can improve their performance by having an iPad or a smartphone. To use either an iPad or a smartphone, however, most people will use one or both hands. To use the eyeglasses one can work hands-free while the information remains constantly available. There are, already, tasks like this where a computer screen is suspended above the work area and the practitioner uses his or her hands while occasionally glancing at the computer screen. So, to focus even more sharply, imagine processes where the individual needs to be hands free and mobile. Off the top of the head, one thinks of sales and service situations. But, one might as easily imagine executives in meetings involving complex negotiations, or a speaker at a conference who wanted to talk from her slides, but didn't want to project the slides.

Consider a different scenario. Someone has taken a class and you want to get them on-the-job as soon as possible. Memorization is hard and we forget almost as fast as we learn. Expecting someone to sit through a week long class and then be able to recall and perform is expecting a lot. Modern approaches put an emphasis on just-in-time training and on providing some kind of job aid – a checklist or a lookup device – that can help the person work through the first few cases they encounter on the job. Atul Gawande recently wrote an excellent book on this titled *The Checklist Manifesto*, which discusses the power of checklists in medical situations. If the task is especially complex, then the job aid of choice is usually a computer that can not only present lots of information, but can shift rapidly between pictures and diagrams. Adding a camera so that the computer can match the object being observed and then bring up relevant information is an even more powerful tool. Once again, the glasses don't really add anything to what can be done with an iPad or a smartphone, but they provide a delivery vehicle that allows the performer to take advantage of the power of computing while having complete mobility and having his or her hands free.

Obviously, these glasses will be expensive and you will probably not want to design a process that depends upon glasses that can as easily

depend on a smartphone – but for those processes with tasks demanding information a user can access as he or she moves about, interacts with people and uses his or her hands, this is a very viable option.

Then, too, new technology tends to create its own uses. One newspaper reviewer suggested that a crowd of people, equipped with these glasses, could provide information that could be integrated to provide an entirely different perspective. Imagine a team moving about an airplane crash site, each reporting what they are observing to a central server or manager. It might considerably improve the way on site analysis work is done. Clearly, people will learn new ways to do their jobs once these glasses become available.

Meantime, process practitioners ought to add digital glasses to their list of new technologies to consider when brainstorming a break though in a process design or redesign project.

'Til next time,

Paul Harmon

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