

VIDSIA Annual Meeting at CHI '94

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The Visual Interaction Design Special Interest Area met at CHI '94 on Wednesday, April 27 from 9:00 to 10:30 a.m. The meeting was run by me and Peter Vanags of U dot I, Inc. (with thanks to co-organizer Andy Cargile of IIT, who unfortunately, was not able to attend). About fifty people attended to discuss an agenda that focused on the visual interaction design community's participation within CHI. Topics included the following:

- What is the extent of our current participation?
- What opportunities exist?
- What obstacles exist?
- What experiences have we had?
- What kind of support can we take advantage of?

A summary of the discussion follows. If I've overlooked your input, my apologies. (It's hard to run a meeting and retain a clear impression of it months after the fact!)

Current Participation

Visual design participation has been most successful in the area of tutorials. This year, tutorials were offered by Suzanne Watzman of Watzman Information Design (along with Virginia Howlett of Microsoft and Dan Boyarski of Carnegie Mellon) and Kevin Mullet (Macromedia) and Darrell Sano (SunSoft). Suzanne mentioned that the attendance of her tutorial far exceeded the maximum she had planned for. And in past years, design tutorials by Aaron Marcus, Kevin Mullet, and Paulien Strijland of Apple (among others) have also met with wide attendance. The success of design tutorials is certainly evidence that the CHI Conference attendees value design training. Nonetheless,

because of the competitive nature in which tutorials are submitted and selected, not all design submissions find a place in the final program.

While the tutorials program has been the most prominent venue for visual interaction design at CHI, evidence of participation was also felt in the Interactive Experience and Poster sessions. At a kiosk in the Interactive Experience area, Alben + Farris presented the design development process for their recent venture with Apple, *Making It Macintosh*. Posters on techniques for developing visual design strategies included presentations by Ev Shafir and Jafar Nabkel of Hewlett Packard (*Visual Access to Hyper-Information: Using Multiple Metaphors with Graphic Affordances*) and Francois Bodart and Jean Vanderdonck of the Université de Namur (*Visual Layout Techniques in Multimedia Applications*).

Obstacles

Discussion in this area focused on the difficulty of presenting visual design activity within some of the current conference formats, particularly in the papers area. Some attendees expressed the need for the visual design community to "speak the language" of its more-or-less technical audience, while others were opposed to this approach, feeling that the techniques of the design studio did not require quasi-scientific rationalization. I mentioned my own experience in the papers area in my July article, I won't restate it here. However, others, including Raghu Kolli of Delft University of Technology mentioned unsuccessful efforts at paper submissions.

As mentioned above, certain presentation formats—like tutorials—are

extremely competitive. Deanna Thomas of Claris had submitted a proposal two years ago for an introductory visual design tutorial for engineers that was not accepted. In light of the number of tutorial submissions, reviewers chose to limit the total number of visual design-oriented tutorials in an effort to balance the overall tutorial program.

While papers were felt to be the most problematic area for the visual interaction design community, other areas (in addition to tutorials) seem ripe for participation and are discussed below.

Opportunities

While most conference attendees presume the same set of presentation formats year after year, CHI actually makes modifications to the conference format in an effort to accommodate requests for more diverse presentation styles. At INTERCHI '93, paper formats were developed to support predominantly visual vs. predominantly textual presentations. For CHI '95, another innovative format is being introduced that should be of particular interest to the visual interaction design community: the Design Briefing. Design Briefings provide an opportunity to demonstrate the design development process from initial concept through sketch form to final.

In addition to the Design Briefings, CHI '95 will also support the more traditional formats we've seen in the past: Papers, Panels, Videos, Tutorials, Workshops, Demonstrations, the Interactive Experience, Organization Overviews, Posters, and SIGs. For more information, see the Call for Participation, which you can receive electronically by sending a message containing the line

"send call" to chi95-call@sigchi.acm.org (you can request a paper version by contacting the CHI '95 conference office at +1 410 263 5382, email chi95-office@sigchi.acm.org).

In addition to submission opportunities, the CHI Conference Planning Committee also provides an opportunity to help shape the larger structure of the Conference.

For the Future...

A segment of the discussion focused on specific possibilities for next year and beyond. Mention was made of promoting CHI's presence to other professional design organizations, including the AIGA (American Institute of Graphic Arts) and IDSA (Industrial Designers' Society of America). Raghu Kolli expressed interest in compiling a videotape of design projects, while Peter Spreenbergh of IDEO expressed interest in a "design annual" and accompanying exhibition in conjunction with Interactions (an idea John Rheinfank of Interactions had mentioned at the Executive Committee meeting the day before.)

While much of the discussion focused on ways in which the visual design community could communicate to "other" members of the CHI community, Dan Boyarski stated the importance of communicating among ourselves to share our experiences and broaden our expertise. Workshops were mentioned as an especially suitable forum for sharing ideas among a small group of contributors.

Another idea that has been mentioned at previous conferences was that of an interactive "design studio," within the Interactive Experience area. This would be an ongoing, "staffed," equipped studio of designers willing to critique, review, or revise work brought by conference attendees. It would convey the spirit and process of iterative design within a studio setting, something new to many CHI attendees.

Requests have also been made for a name/address database of VIDSIA attendees. Anyone who might be willing to coordinate the creation and distribution of such a database I'm sure would be much appreciated! (The creation of

VISUAL-L actually sprang from a similar request a few years ago.)

Post Conference Follow-Up

After discussing the possibility of compiling a videotape, Raghu concluded that confidentiality was a major obstacle in presenting significant industry work under development. After a talk with Dan Boyarski, he decided to look into funding possibilities for compiling student work on videotape. (No specific deadline has been set for this investigation.) In addition, he is willing to edit a tape of academic/industry work if there are sufficient contributions (though there are no definite plans for a CHI '95 submission). If you have work you'd like to suggest for inclusion, contact Raghu at r.kolli@io.tudelft.nl.

Peter Spreenbergh and I talked more about two possibilities: the design annual and exhibition in conjunction with Interactions magazine, and the interactive design studio. Since both prospects require extensive planning, coordination, and commitment, we concluded that it is more viable for CHI '96 than next year. I agreed to serve as the contact point for further discussion about both projects. If you have specific suggestions or would like to volunteer to help, please contact me at udoti@aol.com. Or better yet, upload your thoughts for group discussion on VISUAL-L!

In Closing...

You're encouraged to participate in CHI '95 by submitting proposals as specified in the official call for participation. If you do submit a proposal, please let me know. I'll make an effort to keep track of the submissions for next year, along with their outcomes, which I'll report next year.

If you were able to participate in this year's meeting, thanks for attending. I look forward to seeing you next year!

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Visual Interaction Design is a Special Interest Area of SIGCHI focusing on the visual aspects of interaction in interface design. The goals of the Visual Interaction Design Special Interest Area are to act as a focal point for visual interaction design interest within SIGCHI, to advance visual interaction design as an integral component of HCI, and to integrate visual interaction design with the rest of SIGCHI.

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