

# Rage Against the Machine is now... Power to the People!

Optimal Usability is all about that part of the digital world often forgotten ...everyday users of technology

*What's Usability? It's making sure something works well.*

*Trent Mankelow*

*Usability... is the measure of the quality of the experience when interacting with something*

*Jakob Nielsen, the father of the science of Usability*

*Internet start-ups typically spend 300 times more on advertising as they spend on usability*

*Jakob Nielsen*



Trent Mankelow,  
Director of  
Optimal Usability

**Trent Mankelow, Director of Optimal Usability** is leading the charge on behalf of all those wary foot soldiers; us - the users of everyday technology.

Trent introduced us to the new world of 'usability' at the recent Jericho Brainy Breakfast Series 2006.

In Trent's words, "the world is a messy, noisy, complex place where, in the rush to design technology, all thought about the customer experience with that technology is simply overlooked."

The Outcome?

Lost business via utter customer frustration.

**Horror Example Number One:** One lady when asked what she regularly does when the kids aren't around to help her out of a dead end spot on an Internet site is to simply turn the whole problem off...at the wall!

**Horror Example Number Two:** Australian billionaire Kerry Packer's solution when faced by the super-computer in his BMW with several hundred functions he couldn't fathom - was to take a shoe off and bash the unit to death and promptly return the car to his dealers saying...'it's broken'.

These kinds of anecdotes are backed up by reported research stating consumers damage 10% of all high tech gadgets and even more staggeringly, 50% of all new electronics products returned to retailers work perfectly well.

Trent and his team at Optimal Usability work with companies both in New Zealand and Australia, to stalk those places where an organisation's technology and their customers meet and either clash or have a beautiful relationship.

A perfect example of a usability project is Optimal Usability's work with the University of Canterbury. The project involved rigging up a PC with cameras from several angles and then inviting a student to search for courses online.

"It doesn't take long for the participant to forget we are there recording all his scowls, glares as well as his every mouse and page browsing movement as he either skims through or comes to a bewildering dead end in a digital cul-de-sac," says Trent.

Another methodology used is to create a variety of 'personas'.

"With the Department of Conservation, to study how we could up the rate of its Internet site use, we invented four strong personas or different likely users - including Darryl who is 36, married, self, employed, likes tramping, has little interest in learning about conservation - but wants to go bush," says Trent.

At the end of the project, much debate was in terms of 'so what would Darryl do here, would he print this material etc.'

By using personas the end user is back in the picture.

At the heart of the science of optimizing usability is 'user testing' which Trent says can be carried out in a variety of effective ways:

In essence, usability testing is about observing the touch-points with clients. Various methodologies used include anything from one-on-one and group user sessions to sifting through 2 million or so visits to a web site looking for usage clues.

"What we want to see in technology and internet design for users is akin to the first step in the design of a chair - first you understand the average height of the person who is going to sit on it," says Trent.

**Horror Example Number Three:** An insurance company that spent several thousand dollars on developing a website to sell insurance policies. The process was so frustrating to complete a transaction the site sold only four policies before it was canned.

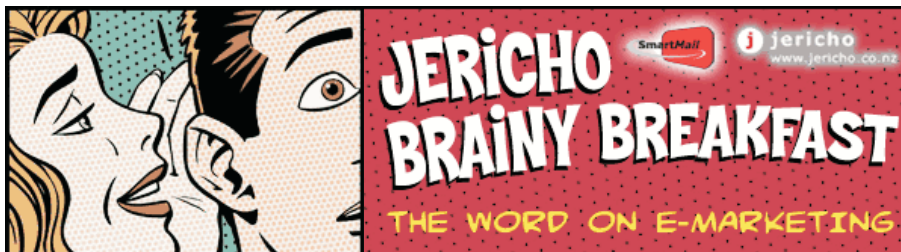
Another project was to re-design the XtraMSN home page to increase both site visits and where they browsed.

This project involved testing 15 participants of varying ages, backgrounds and computer skills.

The end result was to clean up confusion for many users on what parts of the page to 'click' and by making it more obvious how to use the rotating images at the top of the page.

Trent Mankelov closed his presentation by quoting research from a report by Creative Good, a New York-based customer experience consultancy that found that \$1 spent on advertising produces \$5 in total revenue, while \$1 spent on customer experience improves yields by more than \$60.

Directly following the presentation many from the Brainy Breakfast had instant first hand experience of that loud, complicated and messy world Trent alluded to with having to grapple in utter frustration with auto-pay parking machine in the foyer of the hotel. Where are you Trent!



For more information on how Jericho can benefit your business contact the team at Jericho, or visit [www.jericho.co.nz](http://www.jericho.co.nz) or PH: 0800 MAIL4U (624548) or PH: 09 360 6463 or Email: [web@jericho.co.nz](mailto:web@jericho.co.nz)

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