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intro

In the 2010 edition of Rich Insights! the participating companies varied from large international companies to small and medium sized enterprises. These clients differ on many aspects: for example on how they usually conduct research, involve their users, innovate internally or involve externals, on budget available for innovation, and many more things. All the student groups that were connected to different companies, compared their experiences from working with their specific client. Here are a few conclusions.

title

LEs versus SMEs: Conclusions!

body

Many companies, large and small, have realized that it is important to understand their users, know about their needs and ideally involve them in the design process. Additionally, many of them realized that studying the user goes further than usability aspects, and understanding their experiences using products serves innovation (Sleeswijk Visser, Stappers, 2007). Large international companies have taken the lead in developing and applying user-centered design techniques in their innovation processes (de Lille, Stappers, van der Lugt, 2009), whereas the majority of product development companies also recognize this need for user studies but have little means to execute them.

Differences were observed by the students during the user study, and steered the teams in different directions concerning the level of planning, communication en interactivity.

Involvement during the project

The students noticed that the involvement of their client was one of the main differences: entrepreneurs of smaller companies were highly involved in every step of the process; they were a part of the team, and communication was very direct and frequently. Larger companies were less involved during the process; the moments of contact were at the kick off and the end where the students showed the results to representatives of the company in an interactive way to inspire them.

People and departments involved

In larger companies, different departments, such as R&D, Marketing and Sales, often segment design processes. This makes communication of user experiences harder, since these insights are related to all aspects of the design process. This is not the case in smaller companies, where departments hardly exist and the entrepreneur wants to be involved in all the activities anyway. Therefore the students experienced it was harder for them to postpone the practical consequences of the outcomes and think out of the box.

Desired outcomes of this project

Another important difference that affected the students in their way of working is the way in which results are communicated best to the client. Different (type of) companies need different outcomes and results. A small company prefers concrete results, for example by means of design guidelines or directions for ideas and concepts. Large companies, on the other hand, would like to receive more general results, that could be used in different departments of their organization. Therefore it is very important to consider the way of communication well: how to present the results to the company? A good example of communication results to small companies was provided during this edition of Rich Insights!: a brainstorm session was organized, in which the results of the study were translated into practical guidelines and design directions, like with Kenneth Veenenbos. Interactive presentations work well for large companies, in which employees get to know how they can work with the data, as shown at Akzo Nobel | Flexa and Wacom.

What is next?

On the reserve, larger companies have the ability to enlarge the effect of the results by acting upon it on a large scale. On the other hand, smaller companies have the ability to quickly adapt to changes and latent needs as a result.

'How contextmapping works' for larger and smaller companies is very interesting. The differences in desired results, ways of communication and useful input for follow-up projects are remarkable. It confirms the assumption that contextmapping is a method that is applicable and useful for a large variety of companies and organizations, provided that there is a clear understanding of the type of company, the preferred results, and how the company wants to continue with the results.

