

Review: Designing the Obvious

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Designing the Obvious, A Common Sense Approach to Web Application Design by Robert Hoekman Jr.

There are thousands, no, millions of websites out in the internet, and we just cannot visit them. When we sit in front of our browser, what matters to us is what we want to do - are we just visiting our favourite sites to see what is new, are we going somewhere to be entertained, or are we searching for something. If the websites we access don't satisfy OUR priority, then we will just go somewhere else.



If you are involved in creating a website - for your business or hobby perhaps, and you want people to visit your site and make use of the information or service that you are providing, the worst thing that can happen is that you give the visitor a reason to go to a competitor's site - you need to at least provide what your visitor is expecting to see. The book, *Designing the Obvious, A Common Sense Approach to Web Application Design*, by Robert Hoekman Jr. is an essential read to guide you through every step of designing and implementing your website. The book is significant in what it doesn't tell you, and in what it tells you not to do - the premise of the book is that this is

more important than what you do do. What's more, the basic ideas actually apply to many activities other than websites.

Designing the Obvious explains why and how to design web applications that are so easy to use that they look like plain and pure common sense - much like an Apple product, eh? This book is an excellent example of the KISS (Keep It Simple, Stupid) principle, where you can keep your focus on the actual vision. It enables you to strip out extraneous bells and whistles that may look nice, but which in reality add nothing, and annoy many users.

The book is laid out in 9 chapters, leading you from the basic concepts through to the finished product, and including many examples to illustrate how to do it correctly, and what happens when you don't. What is perhaps special is that much of the focus is to think about the user - understanding the user, and working with the user's mental model. The techniques illustrate a straight-forward method to allow you to build a web application as good or better than most websites you visit from day to day.

Not only should the book be required reading for anyone involved in designing web applications - developers, project managers, interface designers, business analysts - but it would be useful for anyone who designs, writes, edits, critiques or reviews ... anything.

Robert Hoekman, Jr. is a professional Interaction Designer and Usability Specialist. His book is published by New Riders and available from Peachpit Press for us\$31.99 (or us\$25.59 as a PDF file). (User Group discount is available)