Stanford eCorner

Learning from Demonstrated Product Engagement

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February 21, 2009

Video URL: http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/2157/Learning-from-Demonstrated-Product-Engagement

There is no substitute for actually watching your users use the products, proclaims Cooliris Product Manager Josh Schwarzapel. Viewing your web tools across multiple platforms with a multitude of configurations is an indispensable component of product research. And, adds Schwarzapel, developers and staffers who live and breathe product development in-house often become blind to its intricacies, and only a fresh set of eyes can provide the kind of clarity necessary for forward vision.

Transcript

And one lesson I would say, and this is something that we've learned tremendously over the last, I would say, six months. There is no substitute for going out and actually watching your users use the product. I would say, at least on a personal level, this has been one of the things that's been the most illuminating to me. For instance, to give you a very concrete example of this, we have a search box on the top right hand corner of our product. And we found people aren't using this feature that much a while back, and we said, "I wonder why this could be. It's so powerful. People are asking for it." And we actually found out that of the people in our office, we have mostly these bright screen Macintoshes. And then when you and you look at it on a low end PC you actually don't see the search box because it was a little bit dimmer than you'd see it on a Mac. And there's all these things that it's impossible to overcome the biases that you have when you're actually looking at your own product. And it's really cool when you actually go out and see people with fresh eyes take a look.

There's really no substitute for it. So that's been one very illuminating thing for us as far as product development. So if you are developing products absolutely do it. Do it every week. Go out and talk to users.