



User Interface Design for Programmers

By Avram Joel Spolsky



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Most programmers' fear of user interface (UI) programming comes from their fear of doing UI design. They think that UI design is like graphic design?the mysterious process by which creative, latte-drinking, all-black-wearing people produce cool-looking, artistic pieces. Most programmers see themselves as analytic, logical thinkers instead?strong at reasoning, weak on artistic judgment, and incapable of doing UI design.

In this brilliantly readable book, author **Joel Spolsky** proposes simple, logical rules that can be applied without any artistic talent to improve any user interface, from traditional GUI applications to websites to consumer electronics. Spolsky's primary axiom, the importance of bringing the program model in line with the user model, is both rational and simple.

In a fun and entertaining way, Spolsky makes user interface design easy for programmers to grasp. After reading *User Interface Design for Programmers*, you'll know how to design interfaces with the user in mind. You'll learn the important principles that underlie all good UI design, and you'll learn how to perform usability testing that works.

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Editorial Review

Review

From the reviews:

"He picks apart commercial products from big companies, showing their UI mistakes. I love that."
Dr. Dobb's Journal

"The author of a popular independent website gives you a book about what programmers need to know about user interface design. Spolsky concentrates especially on the common mistakes that too many programs exhibit. Most programmers dislike user interface programming, but this book makes it easy, straightforward, and fun. It is written with an audience of programmers in mind, but does not assume any prior programming knowledge nor any specific programming language." (Amazon.co.uk, April, 2001)

"This book offers many useful pointers on designing user interfaces which even experienced programmers should need. The 18 chapters cover topics ranging from effective use of colour to metaphors and usability testing. Underlined throughout is the most fundamental principle that 'a user interface is well designed when the program behaves how the user thought it would'. The style is informal, humorous and anecdotal. There are numerous examples of design at its worst, each with an explanation of why the design is poor." (Richard Avery, The Computer Bulletin, March, 2002)

About the Author

Joel Spolsky is a globally recognized expert on the software development process. His web site Joel on Software (JoelonSoftware.com) is popular with software developers around the world and has been translated into over 30 languages. As the founder of Fog Creek Software in New York City, he created FogBugz, a popular project management system for software teams. Joel has worked at Microsoft, where he designed Visual Basic for Applications as a member of the Excel team, and at Juno Online Services, developing an Internet client used by millions. He has written two books: *User Interface Design for Programmers* (Apress, 2001) and *Joel on Software* (Apress, 2004). Joel holds a bachelor's of science degree in computer science from Yale University. Before college, he served in the Israeli Defense Forces as a paratrooper, and he was one of the founders of Kibbutz Hanaton.

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Most of the hard-core programmers I know hate user interface programming. This surprises me, because I find UI programming to be quintessentially easy, straightforward, and fun.

It's easy because you usually don't need algorithms more sophisticated than how to center one rectangle in another. It's straightforward because when you make a mistake, you immediately see it and can correct it. It's fun, because the results of your work are immediately visible. You feel like you are sculpting the program directly.

I think most programmers' fear of UI programming comes from their fear of doing UI design. They think that UI design is like graphics design: the mysterious process by which creative, latte-drinking, all-dressed-in-black people with interesting piercings produce cool looking artistic stuff. Programmers see themselves as analytic, logical thinkers: strong at reasoning, weak on artistic judgment. So they think they can't do UI design.

Actually, I've found UI design to be quite easy and quite rational. It's not a mysterious matter that requires a degree from an art school and a penchant for neon-purple hair. There is a rational way to think about user interfaces with some simple, logical rules that you can apply anywhere to improve the interfaces of the programs you work on.

This book is not 'Zen and the Art of UI Design.' It's not art, it's not Buddhism, it's just a set of rules. A way of thinking rationally and methodically. This book is designed for programmers. I assume you don't need instructions for how to make a menu bar; rather, you need to think about what to put in your menu bar (or whether to have one at all). You'll learn the one primary axiom that guides all good UI design, and some of the corollaries. We'll look at some examples from real life, modern GUI programs. When you're done, you'll know about 85% of what it takes to be a significantly better user interface designer.

-Joel Spolsky

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Steven Whitney:

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Bernadine Parker:

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