

Designing for Services - Multidisciplinary Perspectives:
Proceedings from the Exploratory Project on Designing
for Services in Science and Technology-based Enterprises,
Saïd Business School

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University of Oxford 2008



Cameraman Mike Yorke from the Oxford Academy of Documentary Film filming a visit by Pablo Toledo of g-Nostics with designers Ben Reason and Paul Sims of live|work to a pharmacy where the Nicotest service was being trialed, demonstrated by assistant Cherry Osborne

Designing for services: videos as research outputs

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This publication is one of the outputs of the Designing for Services in Science and Technology-based Enterprises (D4S) exploratory research project. Another primary output is a series of short videos available via a web archive, which also includes some of the artefacts produced during the project. They are designed to be complementary. The publication gathers a number of short essays that offer perspectives from different academic disciplines about the D4S project. The videos also offer perspectives, but do so by using edited footage both from the paired projects between the service design consultancies and the science enterprises as well as from the five events held at Oxford.

How can video function as an exploratory research output? There is, of course, a tradition of using film or video as a way of communicating findings in anthropology and other social science disciplines that draws on documentary formats and the notion of the film essay. In anthropology, making a video offers one way of producing a “thick description” (Geertz 1973) of human behaviour that places it within a local cultural context. In the social sciences, video is also increasingly used to record the research process. As John Law (2004) has argued, researchers should be attentive to the ways methods craft realities and should acknowledge the messiness of research practice. The use of video provides a way of capturing some sense of this messiness.

Within design disciplines, video has also become a tool for doing research and, to a lesser extent, a means for making public its results. Moreover, some design researchers have recently argued that documentaries are a valuable resource not just for recording what goes on but also as a means through which to explore, understand and present research, using film’s capabilities to preserve ambiguities and paradoxes (Raijmakers, Gaver and Bishay 2006).

The videos produced for the D4S project draw on these discussions by offering a series of short audiovisual assemblages that describe some aspects of the process of the D4S project. Drawing on design theory and design management research, they are intended to direct the viewer’s attention to what the director or researcher considers are the key moments in the designing of services enacted during the project. Through disseminating them on the web, the director/researcher acknowledges that they will play a role not just in contributing to a discussion about the designing of services but also about how to do research into the designing of services. On a more pragmatic level, they also serve to show how some of the service designers, entrepreneurs and academics involved in D4S went about understanding the designing of services, and what themes and vocabulary emerged during the process.

The D4S videos therefore contribute to the project in these ways:

- prototyping a way of doing and disseminating interdisciplinary research
- making public perspectives about the designing of services by showing it happening in context
- reaching audiences who are unlikely to access academic journals, including design practitioners and science and technology entrepreneurs.

Like the essays in these pages, the videos should be understood as offering perspectives and observations. They are tentative rather than definitive and – in the tradition of some design research – produced with the aim of inspiring others and opening up questions that might lead to a better understanding of designing for services.

The videos will become available during 2008 on the D4S web archive <http://www.sbs.ox.ac.uk/D4S>.

References

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Designing for Services is supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). The AHRC funds research in the arts and humanities, from archaeology and English literature to design and dance. AHRC Research Centres provide a focus for collaborative research in areas of strategic importance. For further information on the AHRC, please see www.ahrc.ac.uk



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