User Profile

Computer scientists create 'user profiles' to describe the characteristics of a user in terms the computer can handle. For example, a user profile might include the person's name, address and phone number, but also the user's preferences and buying habits. User profiles provide a digital representation of a person's identity.

We are interested in a less formal type of user profile, that identifies the general characteristics of a class of users. For example, if we are interested in developing technologies for the elderly, we can identify a set of characteristics that help to restrict the set of users. We might specify age (70-90+), gender (male and female), living status (independent, living alone), physical health (reduced eyesight, memory and mobility, but otherwise healthy), and family situation (family members living not local). Target a particular subgroup first; if you create a compelling design that solves a new, unexplored need, chances are good that it will serve a wider audience later.

A user profile is derived partly from your own interviews and observations, as you learn more about your target audience, partly from the design brief, and partly from your own choices with respect to your own interests, skills and the design opportunities that present themselves. Design is opportunistic: you may begin with one set of users in mind but come across an unexpected situation that causes you to shift direction. That's fine: take advantage of serendipity. Also, you may arrive with certain preconceived ideas about the user group, which change as a result of your interviews and observations. For example, you may discover that the elderly population you are designing for is significantly healthier than you expected, or that they have additional skills and capabilities that you want to enhance, rather than simply thinking about problems that need to be solved.

The user profile provides a factual, top-down description of the key characteristics of the target audience, including their needs and wants. You can develop the user profile by answering the following questions:

Who is the audience for the system you are designing? (Avoid general categories, such as mobile phone users.)
> What did you discover from your studies of users?
>> (Did you uncover any surprising breakdowns or user innovations?)

> What are the key problems to solve?
>> (What are their specific wants and needs?)

> What are the user's most important, relevant characteristics?
>> (Use Grounded Theory categories)

> Which user needs will you address?
>> (Forms the basis for your system design)

Draw from the design brief, if you have one, as well as the results of interviews, observations, questionnaires and other user studies. Include obvious characteristics such as age range, gender, and profession, if they are relevant. Also consider aspects more specific to the design problem: what technologies do they already use and for what purpose? What is their level of experience? Are there any unique problems that this audience faces? Do they have any particular strengths and weaknesses with respect to this technology?

User Profile

Group: _____

List the key characteristics of the target audience: (Please provide a typed version at the end)