

## The digital handle

### abstract

The purpose of this paper is to purvey the process I and my group have gone through, toward what finally became our design concept aka. 'The Digital Handle'. This process and its stages correlates to the subject taught throughout the course; introduction to interaction design.

The subject at hand, the digital handle, to me, does not consist a readymade concept ripe for production. Nor does it solve the objective. It simply represents what came to be the result of our guided process.

This particular essay reports is a series of attempts to solve the stated design goal, a journey through various methods of exploratory idea generation.

In this report I will take you through the different approaches of exploration, the different ideas or concepts that arose, most of which was discarded, and i will attempt to give my insights upon what went on during the design process.

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## Stated design goal

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Design something that will/can/could increase social interaction among seniors aged 60+

## Our vision

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was to make something simple and easy to use. From this point onward the direction goes in all directions. The only common focal point for all of our collective ideas right from the start, was to grab the opportunity for people to meet when already outdoors.

Be it a club, a game, a bag, a cozy corner, or even a bus! we wanted to get people out of their homes and/or seize the opportunity when it presented itself naturally in daily life.

To start of with we were, perhaps unknowingly, trying to grasp what would actually constitute social interaction. This led to the conclusion, that if people had the time and energy to meet, this would be enough to call it a success.

If a gadget could fit into their daily lives and habits it could perhaps also fit the description of 'actually being used' rather than being put in the drawer and forgot.

## Our concept

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could be described as a preconfigured social network, sans ordinateur, based on habits and reality rather than interests and community.

The device is to given to elderly people that are susceptible to the idea or perhaps in need of what it will service them. Thus it is not necessarily a market driven product, but one offered as a part of social services.

A simple on/off function and a single button to indicate intent to go out or an indication of a wish to meet during the daily shopping.

Coordination with people you do not know beforehand is an almost impossible task, and in so doing they are presented with choice. A choice that will also entail elimination options after judging them. This is exactly the scenario that our product will try to alter.

If a small physical appendix to, say, a shopping bag, are given to a person. It reaches out in the immediate locality a can be configured to also incorporate a limited number of people that the user knows.

This simplifies the task of taking initiative and also adds a small amount of adventure to an everyday tedious task, like shopping. The use of a digital shopping handle lowers the barriers of coordination. It connects people that are using one, giving them something to have in common, and makes it easy to meet people you wouldn't otherwise meet. It may also alleviate shy feelings or timidity because it makes the agreement to meet based on a social experiment embodied in the handle. As a user you don't have to feel responsible for success or let-downs, you are given a slight nudge by the handle and don't have any social or personal investment in the meet beforehand.

Thus, it simply facilitates people to meet, lowering the barriers to talk to a stranger. If you have nothing else to talk about there is always the subject of the handle.

## Actual use Scenario

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We have based the product on a scenario where the user either needs help or feels loneliness creeping into their daily life. Our thinking is based upon the idea that it will not take much more than a simple casual conversation for someone that feels lonely to not feel left alone anymore. Further, when social ties to friends and family is naturally lost because of the causalities of life, it is not always easy to make new friends. Establishing new social ties are hard when you don't get out much, or you don't have lush initiative or drive. This is natural.

What is also natural is the need to talk to other people and wanting to help other if you can. We saw the most natural opportunity in the locally situated and habitual chores. Like shopping for groceries.

The start of our usage scenario is when somebody observes the need for increased social interaction in someone's life arise. This might be the actual user, a caregiver or a family member. Then our product comes into play as a helpful artifact. A mean to actually increase opportunity for social interaction.

## End User Social Agreement

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Upon receiving a digital handle the user is briefed about how to use. This will go along the lines of; 'simply read the display to know who are also on their way out, or push the button to indicate that you yourself or going to the store.'

The handle appends a bag or trolley and will be visible to others. Others who also have acquired a digital handle will be able to recognize it and will know that they can approach you, because of the common situation of having a digital handle with them.

## Our product

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We were very late in the process of this project when we finally came up with our product, and thus our exploration of possibilities within these confines were limited. We did however discuss some of the options.

The choice of material, the exterior form and functionality and the capabilities of the handle could derive from a plethora of options. There were a certain amount of affinity towards rubber, since this is a material that offers many options both regarding physical appearance and possibilities for intelligence in the not-so-distant future.

One could imagine malleable shape-shifting, advanced sensory capabilities and inherent housing of the intelligence needed. Also

## A winding road

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First method of ideation was the classic brainstorm. This brought about a wealth of ideas of how to engage people in social interaction.

When considering the product that we ended up with it is my opinion that many our discarded ideas are a lot more interesting. This is my most important lesson. The steering of the process is quintessential to making a good product. What ideas to stick with and which to discard, must be considered carefully.

## Very tangerine

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Embedding social interaction into the design of something is not an easy feat. We have dreamt up a gadget that help facilitate this end, but whether or not the product and its design embodies this, can be debated.

Paul Dourish has written a whole book about embodied interaction. Our product might be considered a phicon, that embodies the action of grabbing the handle. This embodied interaction will not require any new skill or acquisition thereof, by the user. The instance of grabbing the handle will be enough to initiate the computational task at hand and the options of giving the user feedback are many, but we imagined that communicating the result via auditory feedback and/or text would suffice given the narrow purpose of the device.

## Feeling the Funnel

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many people have theorized the design process, recognizing that there is a process going on. Not surprisingly the process of sorting many ideas and sketches, straining out the pulp and leaving those worth further exploration seems to leave fewer at the end than in the beginning. This iterative process is oft illustrated as form of moving toward and end goal.

This is where it becomes tricky. The most apt and oft-used metaphor for this is what Bill Buxton refers to as a funnel. A funnel embodies the flow and or direction that is attempted to be illustrated.

However, when exploring and opening up to new possibilities sketches multiply and propagate and thus it would seem that the funnel metaphor is upside down.

The ingenious solution for illustrating both elaboration and reduction, at the same time was introduced to us as figure 54 in Bill Buxton, 2007. This is a figure taken from Pugh 1990;p.75 and it resembles a christmas tree lying down.

This model shows concepts converging, being added to, further reduced and so on. This model exemplifies our process. Pugh's model is littered with acronym such as PDS, CC, CG, FR, FA and there are probably more. However it illustrates quite well that is is a process that cannot and should not be split into silos, and I have attempted to hang our concepts on the christmas tree in figure 1 in the appendices.

Discarding ideas have been done in counsel with teaching assistant as to keep an eye on the objective to try to dream up something within the confines of tangible and social computing. The ideas left behind are, in my oppinion, worth revisiting.

## Various findings

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While performing observation, sketching and enactment I wass quite surprised at how many things we come to take for granted. Dramatization of the usage scenario was also an eye opener towards what actually works and what does not and the limitations inherent in our design.

Presenting the product to an audience revealed, to some extent, the fallability og our concept and both known and new problems presented themselves upon closer examination and thinking of our dreamt up usage scenario. Simple things, like how to know if the device is active, or turned of, how communication between handles will occur etc. will require additional work on the handle.

Ideation and democracy will never have beautiful babies

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Final reflections on the digital handle, on my part, is that the product suffers from being the last in a long chain of eliminations. We ended up agreeing to go with this product, but I imagine that chasing some of our ideas a bit further might have taken us in a lot more interesting directions.

Democratizing innovative ideas seem to not be a fertile way to go, unless you are acting as a closely bonded team pulling their minds together instead of a group of individual trying to grasp each others ideas and agreeing on what to pursue.

## Litteratur

Buxton, B. (2007). Sketching User Experiences.  
Dourish, P. (2004). Where the Action Is – The Foundations of Embodied Interaction.

## Bilag / appendices

<http://www.konstiktakt.com/biid/bilag/index.html>

Eller

<http://www.konstiktakt.com/wordpress/2011/12/bilag-til-biid-opgave/>

Above links contain the following:

Vision  
Foto observation  
Informanter, noter og billeder  
Christmas tree funnel illustration of design process  
Den gode dag, diagram-plakat  
Observation, når evnerne svigter  
Personas, gunner  
Video enactment, scenarie

