

Combining software vendor quality declarations with user questionnaires and interviews – the UsersAward experience

Aake Walldius, aakew@csc.kth.se

HCI-group, School of Computer Science and Communication, KTH

The UsersAward research and development project started in 1998 as a joint initiative of LO (Swedish Trade Union Confederation), TCO (Swedish Confederation for Professional Employees), KTH (Royal Institute of Technology), Universities of Uppsala and Gävle to enhance the quality of workplace software and to increase the awareness of the effects of good software on the work environment and the economic performance of the organisation.

UsersAward has launched a number of initiatives which can be seen as experiments in influencing the quality and the functioning of markets for software packages. These initiatives focus on different actors (software vendors and buyers) and have different scope, but all emphasize the roles of the employees actually handling the software. Inspired by the success of the *TCO'92 – TCO'07* quality and environmental labelling programme for computer hardware (<http://www.tcodevelopment.com>), UsersAward has:

- awarded seven *User Certified 2002* and *2006* certificates to software providers for software packages that have met and exceeded the expectations of work place users who have used the packages for at least one year
- arranged yearly *ICT Users Prize Contests* since 2000 in which end users (employees) from industry, the service and health care sectors are invited to nominate their favourite workplace ICT system. Five among these, screened by an evaluation team and ranked by a jury of well known and respected decision makers from the field, are presented at the yearly *Users' Day* event
- performed four comprehensive national surveys, *IT Maps*, of satisfaction of users working in manufacturing, health care and banking
- performed a series of *internal user satisfaction surveys*, particularly among employees in the health care and utilities sector

In 2003, the UsersAward development company was formed to manage Prize Contests, surveys and the certification programme (<http://www.usersaward.se>), supported by a panel of leading Swedish academic researchers. In 2005 and 2007 the research panel arranged the international research workshops UITQ 2005 and 2007 (User-driven IT Design and Quality Assurance) which convened practitioners and researchers for critical discussions on issues such as methods for user-driven design, deployment and evaluation; standardisation; and procurement processes (<http://hci.csc.kth.se/projectView.jsp?name=UsersAward>).

All user satisfaction assessments are based on a *questionnaire* aimed at capturing the experiences of representative samples of all major user categories who have worked with the system for at least one year. It provides the basis for *qualitative user interviews*. Based on approximately 30 items covering use value, deployment process, interaction design, support for work tasks, communication and quality follow-up, user quality experiences are assessed quantitatively and qualitatively against quality claims made in *vendor quality declarations*.

An essential aim of the UsersAward instruments is to convey a comprehensive and nuanced account of user experiences of software that other, prospective users and buyers, find useful. The notion of positive and negative experience is based on the concept of “satisfaction” which takes on different connotations depending on context (e.g. “engaging and fun to use” or “easy to learn”). The instruments aim to complement market mechanisms such as advertising and media critique with a channel for “users’ thumbs up”. In addition, the quotes from users convey rich insights into the interplay between work organisation and software quality in different sectors and branches of industry. Much of this richness is due to the unique combination of methods – user questionnaires and interviews matched against claims made in vendor quality self declarations.