Leonardo's Laptop: Human Needs and the New Computing Technologies (MIT Press)

By Ben Shneiderman

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Ben Shneiderman's book dramatically raises computer users' expectations of what they should get from technology. He opens their eyes to new possibilities and invites them to think freshly about future technology. He challenges developers to build products that better support human needs and that are usable at any bandwidth. Shneiderman proposes Leonardo da Vinci as an inspirational muse for the "new computing." He wonders how Leonardo would use a laptop and what applications he would create.

Shneiderman shifts the focus from what computers can do to what users can do. A key transformation is to what he calls "universal usability," enabling participation by young and old, novice and expert, able and disabled. This transformation would empower those yearning for literacy or coping with their limitations. Shneiderman proposes new computing applications in education, medicine, business, and government. He envisions a World Wide Med that delivers secure patient histories in local languages at any emergency room and thriving million-person communities for e-commerce and e-government. Raising larger questions about human relationships and society, he explores the computer's potential to support creativity, consensus-seeking, and conflict resolution. Each chapter ends with a Skeptic's Corner that challenges assumptions about trust, privacy, and digital divides.

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Editorial Review

Review

[A] very useful book...

(*First Monday Reviews*)

[I]t's easy...to get caught up in the author's techno-Utopian vision of a world hotwired to serve its populace.

(*ComputerUser.com*)

...Schneiderman is blessed with an engaging writing style and the ability to make this material interesting and lively.

(*Modbee.com*)

This book is an inspiration, a must read.

(*International Journal of Human Computer Interaction*)

This book will change the way you think about web design.

(*Web Reference*)

This is an eloquently written and visionary book.

(*The Rational Edge*)

Who should read *Leonardo's Laptop*? Everyone who cares about mankind, technology, and the future.

(*SAP Design Guild*)

My favourite sentence in this book is 'easy to say, but tough to do.' Ben Shneiderman addresses many of the key issues in creating powerful tools that empower and liberate users. By comparison with a bygone age, and a true polymath (Leonardo), Ben puts his finger on how specialised and compartmentalised our thinking has become. I can't help feeling that if everyone were to read this book we would have a lot less technology and interface induced grief. Definitely one for the pocket and desk and not the bookshelf.

(Peter Cochrane, Co-Founder, ConceptLabs California)

A lot of people talk about a new wave of innovation driven by human need, rather than by technology, but Ben Shneiderman is actually doing the innovating. This timely book is about the new ways technology will help us mobilise human agency, not replace it.

(John Thackara, First Perceptron, Doors of Perception)

About the Author
Ben Shneiderman is Professor of Computer Science and Founding Director (1983--2000) of the Human-Computer Interaction Laboratory at the University of Maryland, College Park.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Mary Manzo:

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Ronnie Correa:

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