

Wizard of Oz

Class Activity - Create a Wake-Up Service for a mobile device

This exercise introduces the “wizard-of-oz” technique for rapid prototyping. A human “behind the curtain” plays the role of computer: presenting to and responding to a test user. The technique was introduced in the days of teletype dialogs where commands were typed by the user and responses typed by the “computer”. The advantages are more open-ended collection of user responses and improvisational evolution of interface designs.

Task: Design an automated voice-response system for use on a mobile device to provide a wakeup service.

The service should allow the user to:

1. Set wakeup time. E.g. “Give me a wakeup call at 7:30 tomorrow morning.”
2. Adjust wakeup time. E.g. “Change that to 6:30.”
3. Cancel wakeup. E.g. “Cancel that.”

Spend about 5 minutes on each of the following steps:

1. Prepare a dialog tree showing what responses are to be given by the “wizard”.
2. Try your “Wake-up Wizard” on at least two “users”
3. Revise to fix the problems
4. Test again
5. Reflect and note what you learned, both about the specific design and the technique.

Start with a simple design and see how it works. What assumptions are made about voice-recognition? What happens if the Wizard doesn't “understand” a query? How do you set the user's expectations? Collect ideas for other services that might be added to the minimum three above.

Reflect on advantages and disadvantages of the WOz technique. Are your designs realistic? Could they be implemented? How dependent are your results on the range of people tested? As your designs evolved, did the “users” get better at challenging them? Are your “users” satisfied?