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Visual Thinking: For Design

Chapter · April 2008

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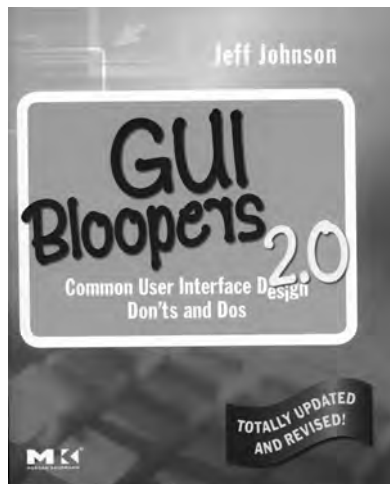


Colin Ware

University of New Hampshire

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(from products, sites, or applications), and explains the reason for the blooper. He then gives solid advice for avoiding the blooper, including examples of corrected design. Each example is clearly captioned (lack of captions was a major criticism of the first edition) and tied into the discussion.

An aspect of the book that I find especially valuable is that Johnson does not nitpick. Rather, he brings forth the bad examples as a springboard for discussing design and use of GUIs and serves as a guide and tutor for UI designers—both new and experienced.

The book targets three primary audiences: developers who develop software or Web sites with little guidance from UI professionals, managers of software development teams, and UI designers—especially those who are new to the profession. To the audiences that Johnson identifies, I would add: experienced UI designers who could use a brief refresher of the basics; technical communicators who are involved in designing, testing, or describing UIs; and academics who teach undergraduate courses in UI design or usability. All would find much of value in the book.

Johnson also offers a supplemental Web site, www.gui-bloopers.com, that provides additional information: a bloopers checklist, an appendix of color bloopers (the book itself is printed in black and white), additional bloopers, and additional content.

Roger A. Grice

ROGER A. GRICE is a clinical professor of Human-Computer Interaction and member of the Information Technology faculty at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, NY. He is an STC fellow and recipient of the Jay R. Gould Award for Excellence in Teaching Technical Communication.

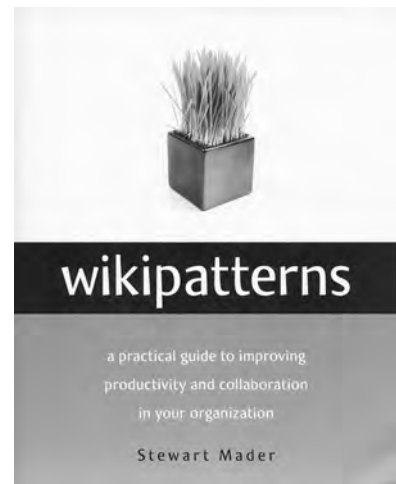
Wikipatterns

Stewart Mader. 2008. Indianapolis, IN: Wiley Publishing. [ISBN 978-0-470-22362-8. 167 pages, including index. \$29.99 USD (softcover).]

Stewart Mader's *Wikipatterns* provides a fresh, simple approach to building a successful business case for building a wiki in any organization, large or small. Mader, a dedicated Wiki evangelist for Atlasian Software Systems, focuses on growing vibrant collaborative communities within business, academic, and nonprofit organizations.

Wikipatterns began as a wiki and, as such, the language is easy to read, and you'll make your way through the book in a short time. Case studies included at the end of each chapter build excitement and you'll discover many ways to use the collaborative power of a wiki. Undoubtedly, you'll want to jump right in to using a wiki for your collaborative endeavors.

Mader promises that the book "is as much a how-to guide for using a wiki as it is a how-to guide for making change happen" (xxxiii). *Wikipatterns* does indeed guide you



through defining what a wiki is, the high points of creating a wiki, and achieving buy-in from all parts of an organization. He misses the mark, however, in the "how-to use a wiki" arena by providing fewer than 20 pages of how to actually use a wiki. This is an unfortunate omission, because novice adopters have no choice but to go elsewhere to learn the basics to guide their organization in adopting the use of a wiki.

Beyond giving a definition of a wiki, Mader gives us an in-depth look at the psychological interaction you can expect within your organization by defining the personas—WikiChampion, OverOrganizer, WikiTroll, and Wikiphobia, along with others—of your potential users that can provide obstacles to or facilitate your organization's adoption of a wiki. More importantly, he provides a step-by-step approach to driving large-scale adoption in your organization. He cautions you to venture forth with a pilot adoption that is composed of select people, those who "will benefit most from early wiki use . . . that are motivated to use new tools, and make excellent, representative examples of wiki use" (87).

In the appendix, Mader answers the most frequently asked questions

by those who are new to using wikis. For readers who will be leading the change in their organization, the appendix is required reading as it is a laundry list of questions management will ask prior to supporting adoption.

Since the book's publication, its founding wiki, www.wikipatterns.com, has continued growing and provides users a much more in-depth exploration of uses and personas than the book gives. What you won't find on the Web site are the case studies that make up just under one third of the book. And while there is no doubt that you'll want to start using a wiki after reading *Wikipatterns*, the Web site provides the key information you'll need without the expense of purchasing the book.

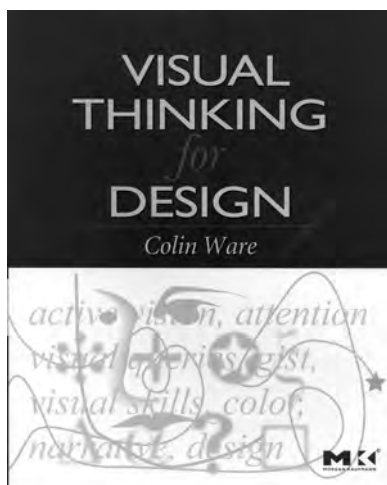
Louellen S. Coker

LOUELLEN S. COKER has more than 15 years of experience in public relations, instructional design, Web design, technical writing, and editing. With a technical communication MA, she is president of Content Solutions, an STC senior member, and a past Lone Star Community president. She has taught technical communication and presented workshops.

Visual Thinking for Design

Colin Ware. 2008. Burlington, MA: Morgan Kaufmann. [ISBN 978-0-12-370896-0. 197 pages, including index. \$39.95 USD (softcover).]

Colin Ware offers an overview of the neurophysiological underpinnings of visual thinking, which he defines as "a series of acts of attention, driving eye movements and tuning our pattern-finding circuits" (3). By "thinking," Ware is referring to the actual physiological and psychological events that comprise active vision. He argues that effective design should support quick and ac-



curate processing of these visual queries; thus, better understanding of these queries can lead to better design. Although Ware's definition and terminology may feel somewhat alien—and intimidating—to those of us in technical communication, he actually offers an accessible and practical introduction to the physiological "why" behind the principles of design.

He begins with an overview of the basics of visual perception that lays the groundwork for chapters dedicated to more specific aspects of visual thinking. For example, he focuses on forms of contrast—color, shape, size, figure-ground—and discusses visual search strategies and then broadens the discussion to recognizing patterns in two-dimensional space. Later chapters extend this to three-dimensional patterns and the cognitive costs—the time and effort involved—of accessing information. Ware argues that complex objects and scenes are "patterns of patterns" (109) and emphasizes that our recognition of such patterns relies on a network of pathways in the brain that allow us to connect what we see to what we know.

Discussing color, Ware helpfully applies opponent process theory to design, providing you with not only

an understanding of color channels but also practical tips for applying the theory to design.

Likewise, the chapter "Visual and verbal narrative" will be particularly interesting to technical communicators. Ware reiterates that pattern perception is "the basis of visual thinking" and that, unlike the learned symbols of verbal language, this basis is neither arbitrary nor socially learned. His purpose is to delineate verbal and visual language to demonstrate the strengths of each, reminding you that "Good design is not about pictures *versus* words" (129).

The chapter "Creative meta-seeing" focuses on the *process* of design. Although this may seem an odd inclusion, the chapter elucidates the ways in which the designer relies on visual thinking in the creative process.

Throughout, Ware offers numerous practical suggestions, although they could be placed more consistently within the chapters. Additionally, he includes intriguing tidbits of information. For example, "as a rule of thumb a thirty-degree orientation difference is needed for a feature to stand out" (31). However, the greatest value of the book lies not in its pragmatic advice, but in its presentation of what could easily be overwhelmingly technical material. Ware makes information tangible through concrete visual examples, and his verbal and visual tone is as welcoming as it is informative. The result is a book that will be of interest to anyone curious about the scientific foundations of design work.

Eva Brumberger

EVA BRUMBERGER teaches professional communication at Virginia Tech. She has also worked as a technical writer/editor on both a full-time and a freelance basis. Her research interests include visual communication, international communication, and pedagogy. She is a