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The End of Users?

*Supporting nonprogrammers who build software
for their own purposes*

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Abstract

For more than 25 years, user interface designers and usability engineers have studied and refined human-computer interaction techniques, hoping to improve human productivity and experience. But the target of these efforts, “the end-user,” is fast becoming a thing of the past. Computer users now build many kinds of digital artifacts for their own purposes - from email spam filters to spreadsheet simulations to interactive web applications. These individuals are end-user programmers: they build ad hoc solutions to everyday computing needs, and the amount and variety of information and computational tools available to them has been expanding at a rapid pace. The bright side of this phenomena is that users can obtain computational support for their tasks in a more timely fashion, and professional software developers can turn their attention to software requirements that are complex or safety-critical. The dark side is that any code created by nonprogrammers will almost certainly be less robust, less reusable, more difficult to maintain, and so on – all the characteristics that software engineering is intended to enhance. A less obvious dark side is that a new variation of digital divide may be emerging, if only some segments of the nonprogrammer population are able or willing to engage in end-user programming. In this talk I will survey recent initiatives in support for end-user programmers and discuss the implications and open research issues raised by the goal to promote software development by nonprogrammers.

Bio

Mary Beth Rosson is Professor of Information Sciences and Technology at The Pennsylvania State University; she is currently a sabbatical visitor in the DEI Lab at Universidad Carlos III de Madrid. She received a PhD in experimental psychology in 1982 from the University of Texas. Prior to joining the College of Information Sciences and Technology at Penn State in 2003, she was professor of computer science at Virginia Tech for 10 years and research staff member at IBM T. J. Watson Research Center for 11 years. Rosson was a pioneer in the study of psychological issues in object-oriented design, and spent many years developing and evaluating object-oriented tools and training for professional programmers. An abiding interest has been the interplay between human-computer interaction and software engineering. Recently she has been studying the tools and practices of informal software development. Rosson has a long history of professional service in ACM and IEEE, including general chair of OOPSLA 2000, CHI 2007, and VL/HCC 2010. She is an ACM Distinguished Scientist and a member of the CHI Academy. She is author of *Usability Engineering: Scenario-Based Development of Human-Computer Interaction* (Morgan Kaufmann, 2002) and numerous articles, book chapters, and professional short courses. More details are available at <http://mrosson.ist.psu.edu>.