

Intuitive user interface for optimal security

We can hardly imagine a day without smartphones and tablets. Whether to find information, exchange messages or shop online, mobile devices are well-established, practical tools that permeate our lives. First and foremost, their success lies in their ease of use. The trend towards greater user-friendliness is also making major inroads into the business world, including the security industry. Here, especially, intuitive operation has major advantages. Response times to events can be shortened and learning to control even the most complex systems is possible without extensive training.

Werner Braun, Head Portfolio Lifecycle Management, Siemens Building Technologies

The use of mobile devices is growing both in frequency and scope. In Germany, for example, one out of every two persons has a smartphone – that is a 25% increase between 2013 and 2014, according to a study by the Bundesverband Digitale Wirtschaft (German association for the digital economy). Smartphones and tablets are being used in many different ways: as televisions, cameras, calendars, travel guides, and so much more.

For all their multiple talents, one stands out: ease of use. It usually takes just a glance to identify the functionality behind the unique icons. The device is easy to control via the touchscreen with a few simple gestures, such as swiping, tapping or pinching. It practically operates itself, and even new or unfamiliar functions are often easy to learn simply by trying them out, making lengthy operating instructions unnecessary. Moreover, manufacturers are continuously honing the devices for even greater simplicity.

The buzz word is usability, the highest possible degree of user-friendliness. The term describes the user's experience when interacting with a system. The European ISO 9241 standard, which covers the guidelines for human-computer interaction, offers a somewhat technocratic definition of the term: "The extent to which a product can be used by specified users to achieve specified goals with effectiveness, efficiency and satisfaction in a specified context of use."

Users appreciate the high degree of usability of tablets and smartphones in the private sphere, hence their increasingly popularity in the professional world. This is also true for software solutions in the security industry. More and more users place great value on usability and modern, visually attractive user interfaces. In the security industry, therefore, usability has become an important differentiator.

Intuitive operation supports swift response

Software ergonomics is key to developing a usable software solution. The design of the software must fit the abilities and needs of those working with it – not the other way around. If the user is forced to let the machine dictate how the interface is used, the mental demands may be too great, which virtually invites mistakes. Software ergonomics is also much more than an aesthetically pleasing interface design. Clear structures, familiar design elements and transparent navigation simplify how information is perceived and evaluated. That is precisely why optimal ergonomics and the intuitive use it promotes are especially important in the security industry. These two factors ensure stress-free operation and fast response times even in complex deployment situations.

Ergonomics also implies giving the user a good deal of flexibility in operating the software. Web-based applications ideally run on all the modern Web browsers such as Chrome, Firefox, Internet Explorer and Safari. That way users can operate the system from a desktop or tablet with a choice of interaction modalities: traditional mouse and keyboard or modern touch control, depending on preference. Modern, user-centric systems have another distinct advantage over conventional solutions when it comes to ease of operation. Intuitive operation cuts down on training and ramp-up time for the operators. This is especially important at sites that use external security personnel with high staff turnover.

Consistent base for different solutions

Siemens recognized the value of usability long ago. Since 2006 the company has organized an annual employee conference to discuss the latest trends in usability and to exchange knowledge. The 2015 conference brought a new development to light: the SiShell framework for the Siveillance security portfolio from Siemens. The new UI (user interface) framework has a well-organized homepage, an intuitive operating concept and a modern design, and it supports different end devices. User requirements came from comprehensive user analyses and were built into the framework from its inception.

Siport is the first product from the Siveillance solution portfolio to use the SiShell framework. Siport is a modular system for access control and time recording that can be used to manage cardholder and building data in real time. Thanks to SiShell, the new Web applications in Siport 3.0 sport an easy-to-use interface that can be accessed from any current browser. The operator has quick and straightforward access to the extensive system functions from the clearly arranged homepage. Customized applications are available for specific use cases, thus greatly reducing complexity. Even day-to-day tasks like access authorizations, user administration and door and room management are noticeably easier.

Users can also customize operation to their individual needs. One of the options is selecting from among various input methods. Another allows different users to log into the same workstation in their preferred language and thereby work effectively. Multilingual login is available in German, English, and French. Integrating other languages is possible. Messages can also be output bilingually, such as in English and Arabic. This is especially beneficial for international enterprises and companies whose employees come from many different countries.

All the functions of the new SiShell framework will also be available in any future new applications of the Siveillance product family. The goal is to create a consistent, cross-product operating concept and a uniform look and feel to facilitate faster response times and reduce the need for training.

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