
THE Interface

NEWSLETTER OF THE
HUMAN FACTORS &
ERGONOMICS SOCIETY
SOUTH JERSEY
CHAPTER

DECEMBER 2004

2004 Year End Issue

Farewell to the Allendoerfer Administration, Welcome to the Yuditsky Administration and Holiday Party on December 22. !

President's Column: Thanks and No Thanks

By **Kenneth Allendoerfer**



Before I begin my final curmudgeonly column, let me first thank the 2004 Executive Council for their contributions to

the chapter throughout 2004. Eddie Sierra and Pam Della Rocco are completing two-year stints as program chair and membership chair this year; Bonnie Kudrick and Mark Hale are completing 1-year stints as secretary and treasurer. Carolina Zingale and Shantanu Pai will remain as nominations and publications chairs for 2005. Tanya Yuditsky will be getting a promotion to President. Thank you everyone, I couldn't have asked for a better group, and good luck to the 2005 council.

In addition, we have started two major activities this year that will be

completed during the Yuditsky Administration. First, our mini-conference will occur in April 2005. Special thanks to Bonnie Kudrick and the rest of the mini-conference committee for taking on a project of this magnitude. Second, our community outreach project will bring human factors to Rowan University in January 2005. Thanks to Mark Hale for coordinating with Rowan to make the arrangements and to the volunteers who will participate. I think both projects will be big successes due to these folks' efforts.

And now, for the curmudgeonly stuff you've been waiting for. Previous South Jersey chapter president J.F. D'Arcy used to write a column called "The Conspiracy of Everyday Things," in the spirit of Don Norman, and discussed the big and small human factors issues in typical consumer products. I've resisted this sort of thing so far, but since it's my last column, I think I'll let loose on one product that makes my life harder every day. My brand new Dell computer is very highly rated by every magazine and has a blazingly fast processor and graphics performance. It also has much more hard drive storage than I'll ever need. It's a great machine.

It also has USB slots on the front

and the back of the CPU. The ports on the front are for attaching devices that you plug and unplug frequently; stuff you plug in once and forget about goes in the back. Providing ports on the front and the back is a great idea, pioneered by the consumer electronics industry who realized that people hated pulling out their VCRs just to attach a camcorder. Most PC manufacturers offer this today as standard design. However, no PC manufacturer I know has adopted a design as bad as this model Dell. The USB ports are "protected" by a large plastic door that flips up. I call this The Evil Door (not to be confused with an Evil Do-er, though the Evil Door is that too...). The Evil Door completely blocks my view of the USB ports so I have to insert the plugs "blind." To make matters worse, the orientation of the ports require that the plugs be inserted vertically rather than horizontally. If they were horizontal, I could just roll back in my chair by a few inches and see which way the plugs go. But, oh yeah, the labels are black on black. So, every day at 8:30am and 5:00pm, you'll find me literally crawling on the floor of my cube pulling to insert and remove my thumb drive. No amount of experience or training makes it better. It's just something I get to do now, thanks to Dell. See Figure 1.

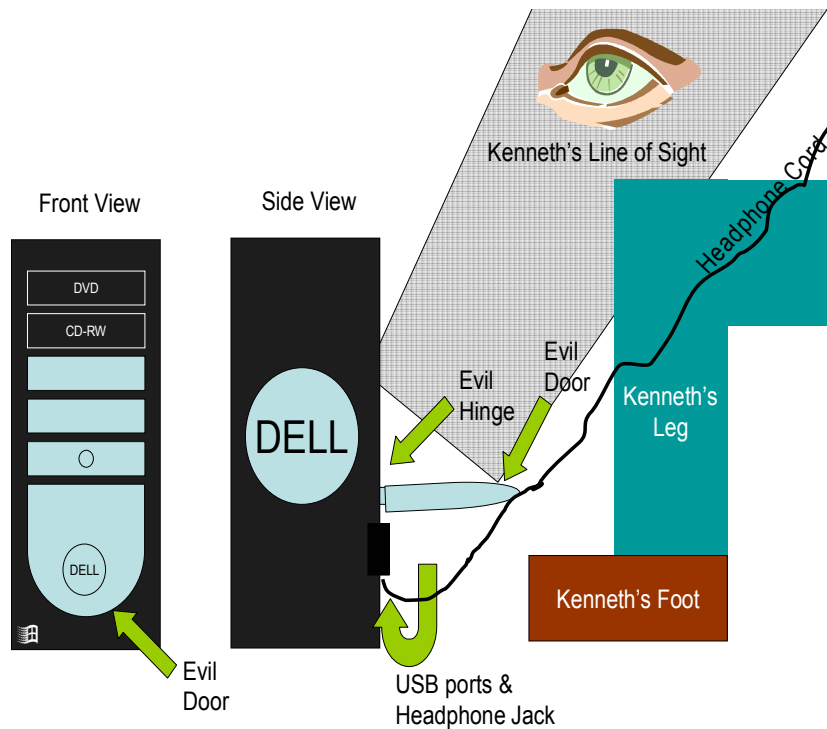


Figure 1. How Dell Makes My Life Worse

President's Column *continued from page 1*

In addition, the Evil Door blocks the headphone jack so my headphone cable loses about 6 inches of length, making it too tight on my head to wear. So, to continue to listen to audio by headphone, I'll need to buy a cable extender for my perfectly adequate headphones. And removing the Evil Door isn't an option because my employer thoughtfully placed a property tracking sticker on the door. I suppose I could move the CPU onto the desktop but I bought a tower model specifically so I didn't have to do that. J.F. was right, it is a conspiracy!

These mistakes could have been caught in the first 5 minutes of a usability test. So, either a usability test wasn't run or the human factors en-

gineer at Dell lost the argument to the marketers or industrial designers who wanted the face of the machine to look cool. This shows us where human factors issues rate on the list of priorities, even for the largest, most profitable desktop computer manufacturer in the country. This particular usability error, I understand, has been fixed on more recent Dell models but that doesn't help me for the next 3 years. I'm really not singling Dell out; customers of Gateway, HP, and even my beloved Apple all have dumb problems like this.

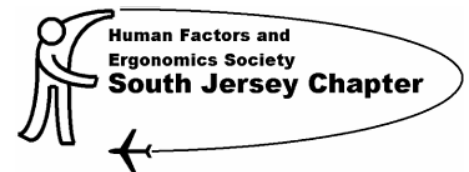
One way to help this is for consumers to hold the manufacturers more accountable. When you're buying a new machine, the MHz and GBs shouldn't be your only purchasing criteria. If you buy from a store, you have more opportunity to play with the equipment and make sure it has usability attributes you like.

You might pay marginally more or have fewer custom configurations to choose from but you'll be more likely to know what you're getting. When you're ordering online or over the phone, you might see a photo of the machine but that's not really enough to assess issues like this. My Dell looked cool on the website!

What's also needed is for the computer industry press who write product reviews (PC Magazine, cNet, Government Computer News, etc.) need to start including standardized usability metrics in their reviews. These organizations tout their systematic, reliable measures of hardware performance but they do not have equivalent metrics or procedures for usability. If the press could provide this to consumers, we could make better-informed decisions.

And we wouldn't buy equipment that makes us crawl on the floor.

**Happy holidays and
best wishes for 2005,
Kenneth**



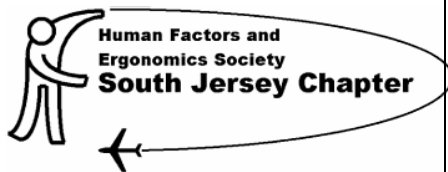
2005 Annual Membership Drive

By Anton Koros

Please renew your membership in the South Jersey Chapter of the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society (HFES). Membership fee is still just \$10 per year.

Membership is open to anyone with an interest in human factors. You do not need to be a member of the national HFES to join. The benefits include a newsletter, hearing guest speakers, touring facilities with human factors programs or issues, sharing information and networking with colleagues, video presentations...and, of course, the good company. The program committee is already working on an interesting set of activities for 2005.

If you've never joined or are new to the area, please join us. To join or renew your dues for 2005, please complete the form in this newsletter and/or contact Anton Koros at extension 5609 or at Anton.ctr.Koros@faa.gov



Update on Recent Executive Council Meetings

By Bonnie Kudrick

Kenneth Allendoerfer
Tanya Yuditsky
Bonnie Kudrick
Carolina Zingale
Shantanu Pai

Last meetings minutes had one correction, the amount of \$ raised at the egg FR was \$57.00, not \$79.00.

Treasurer's Report

Mark reported that there is \$770.32 in savings, \$189.51 in checking and \$23.00 in petty cash.

Activity Report

December holiday party/meeting on December 22 will just be a social event. No formal speaker or meeting will take place. Pizza will also be offered at this event. The charge will be \$2.00 per slice. Upcoming events for 2005 include the Rowan Outreach event and the Mini-conference on April 28-29.

Mini-conference report

The miniconference committee continues to work and plan for the conference on April 28-29, 2005. There have been adhoc committees created and the heads of the adhoc committees will need people to help them.

If you are interested in helping coordinate this exciting event, please

contact Bonnie Kudrick at bonnie.Kudrick@titan.com or ext 5780.

For more information on the conference, go to www.sjhfes.org

Nomination report

The ballots have been counted! The official report for the 2005 Executive Council is as follows:

President

Tanya Yuditsky

President-Elect

Pam Della Rocco

Secretary

Bonnie Kudrick

Treasurer

Edmundo Sierra

Program Chair

Gulshan Panjwani

Membership Chair

Anton Koros

Nominations and Elections Chair

Carolina Zingale

Publications Chair

Shantanu Pai

Thank you to all who participated in our election process and Congratulations to the New Executive Council!

Revised Date for submissions for Miniconference

**Submissions will be accepted
until February 14, 2005 at
submission@sjhfes.org**

The mini-conference committee is seeking submissions for presentations and posters that would be of interest to human factors researchers and practitioners, as well as others interested in behavioral science, engineering, and management. Papers should focus on domains that involve multiple users with different knowledge levels, abilities, and task needs, who interact with complex tools and with one another. We are especially interested in papers related to but not limited to domains with substantial safety, security, or economic implications, such as: aviation, air traffic control, military, law enforcement, Homeland Security, emergency management, medical process control, finance, and securities trading. We encourage submissions discussing works in progress as well as submissions from students seeking an opportunity to present their work.

A Personal Note from the Executive Council & Current Members

We want to thank Kenneth for all of his hard work and endless energy in his reign as President of our chapter. Even though his term as president is ending, his work with our chapter will continue.



**HOLIDAY PARTY
DECEMBER 22, NOON
RDHFL**

(Don't bring your skates. It's just a cute picture, okay?)

South Jersey HFES Chapter Membership and Renewal Application

For the Year 2005

Applicant Name: _____

New Member (*complete all fields*)

Renewal (*complete this section only*)

I am (a Fellow / a Full Member / an Associate Member / Not a Member) of the National HFES (*circle one*)

Organization/Company: _____

Mailing address: _____

Daytime phone: () -

Evening phone: () -

Fax number: () -

E-mail address: _____

Endorsing SJC-HFES Member: _____

SJC HFES dues for 2005 are \$10. Make checks payable to the "Human Factors Society." Submit applications and checks to:

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Atlantic City Int'l Airport, NJ 08405