

Interview with Peter Schnaebele on “User Experience”

Dr. Peter Schnaebele established the Bosch-wide User Experience group, located in Stuttgart, Palo Alto (USA), Shanghai (China), and Bangalore (India). He holds a degree in Business Administration and in 1997 he received his Ph.D. with focus on the topic of “Mass Customization”. After working as a management consultant, Dr. Schnaebele started his Bosch career in the Bosch Power Tools division as Head of Strategic Business Development & Market Research in 2001. Later, he took over the assignment as Vice President Marketing in the Car Multimedia division, before founding the User Experience Department in 2010. Since October 2014, as Senior Vice President, he is heading the Bosch Smart Home unit.

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Dr. Peter Schnaebele
Robert Bosch GmbH
70049 Stuttgart
Germany

Interview by

Prof. Dr. Alexander Mädche (✉)
Chair of Information Systems IV and
Institute for Enterprise Systems
University of Mannheim
Schloss
68131 Mannheim
Germany
maedche@es.uni-mannheim.de

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BISE: Dr. Schnaebele, the following quote from Dr. Volkmar Denner, Chairman of Board of Management Robert Bosch GmbH is published on <http://www.bosch.com>: “Customer satisfaction is no longer enough: we have to excite and fascinate our customers!”. For an established German engineering company this is rather surprising. What were the drivers for this new perspective?

Schnaebele: During the last 128 years, many of our products lead to satisfied customers. At the same time, customer satisfaction is fleeting; as soon as a new, slightly better product is available in the market, customers are normally willing to move to the new product. We have learned that a satisfied customer is not

enough. We want to bind our customers emotionally to Bosch and its products, exceed their expectations, and enthruse them with our offerings. This reasoning has led us to augment our traditional clear focus on technology with the topic User Experience (UX). UX has quickly come to the forefront as a key success factor for Bosch going forward in all of our divisions. According to this reason, besides our traditional clear focus on technology, the topic User Experience (UX) is highly important for Bosch.

BISE: User Experience is not an entirely new topic. I assume that in various business divisions of Bosch topics such as human factors, ergonomics, and usability are well established since many years.

So, what is new and different with User Experience?

Schnaebele: Yes, you’re right; in general this is not a new insight. However, UX can only be the key success factor we intend it to be by applying the approach systematically, throughout the user journey. If you solely take human factors, ergonomics, and usability into consideration, one important already mentioned part is missing: emotional connection. Good usability and ergonomics usually lead to customer satisfaction. However the aim is to create enthusiasm for the product. For this you also need, for example, a beautiful design, or a “fun factor” for the user during use. So far, user-oriented approaches mainly focus on the rational factors of UX. With the new approach, we want to create a holistic user experience. This is much more than a primarily technologically-based, well-developed product usually offers.

BISE: Your background is business administration with a PhD in Marketing. What kind of people are working in your User Experience department at Bosch? What are their educational and professional backgrounds?

Schnaebele: On the surface, marketing and UX are the same. This thought is underlined by a quote from a recognized expert, Philip Kotler, who defines Marketing as orientation to user needs. If you take a closer look however, the implementation of professional UX methods makes much more possible than traditional marketing instruments. This is especially visible in our UX team composition. Working in multidisciplinary teams is key: Human factors specialists (e.g., psychologists), designers (e.g., industrial, GUI designer),

rapid prototyping specialists (e.g., media and computer scientists), engineers, and, last but not least, business model development specialists work tightly together. They all hold at least one university degree and have gained working experience in well-known design agencies, or other industrial companies before joining Bosch. What they all have in common, and what I consider to be most important, is a capability to work together with other competencies and stay open-minded.

BISE: What are the key areas at Bosch where you specifically look at the User Experience? Can you give some concrete examples?

Schnaebeler: The Bosch UX department collaborates worldwide with all divisions. Considering the very heterogeneous businesses of Bosch – from automotive, to industrial machines, to power tools, to household appliances – UX is applicable in all areas and plays an important role all over Bosch. In addition, there is high variety in relevant application areas within the divisions: hardware, software and services. Our goal is to always create a holistic user-centric solution. Let me give you some examples: Inspiring new HMI and connectivity solutions for eBikes, B2B Conference Systems, voice-driven in-car infotainment systems, easy-to-use applications for complex industrial machine interfaces, or software tools to support unskilled workers during the repair process of complex diesel injection systems especially in emerging markets.

BISE: Software solutions seem to play an increasingly growing role in the future business of Bosch. Is this also an area where you engage with regards to User Experience? What are the differences to projects focusing on engineering hardware?

Schnaebeler: No doubt, in all applications in daily life software plays an increasingly important role. The User Experience approach has its origin in the software and CE industry. So the general methods and basics are applicable the same way in both areas – software

and hardware. But some differences can be found. In general, software is designed to be adapted more easily, even if you are not developing it from scratch. This supports rapid iteration during the development phase, a major aspect in implementing the UX approach.

BISE: Bosch is an engineering-minded company and it is well-known for its technological innovations. How do you bring in User Experience into this culture? What are critical success factors from an organizational- and a project/team-level viewpoint?

Schnaebeler: That's right; technology is one of Bosch's core competencies. This isn't necessarily contradictory to the implementation of the UX approach. UX demands a balanced interaction of feasible technologies, viable business models and fulfillment of user needs. With this understanding, the value of technology actually increases and leads to even more successful solutions. This is exactly what we successfully communicated to the engineering community. Showing the potential and approach with concrete light-house projects as well as communicating methods, tools and principles according to the needs of different target groups became critical success factors. In other words, to implement UX, we used the UX method.

BISE: User Experience does not come for free, it requires a dedicated budget within development projects. How do you justify these additional costs?

Schnaebeler: That UX is expensive is a common, but incorrect myth we frequently have to fight against. The realization of UX always requires initial investment. It is also true that if an organization hasn't been working with appropriate methods before, additional investments will be required. Taking a closer look at the entire product development process, the highest costs by far are incurred through so called change requests during the manufacturing process optimization stage. Even worse, if a product is not successful on the market, the so-called "flop-costs" can be huge. If we by

consequently applying the UX approach (a clear specification of the development request based on user needs) manage to significantly reduce change requests, this automatically leads to much lower total costs of development. In other words: from a total cost of development perspective, the UX approach actually helps to reduce costs. The earlier you fail, the more money you save.

BISE: Large enterprises in Germany such as SAP AG and Deutsche Bank AG put a specific emphasis on Design Thinking. How do you see the relationship between Design Thinking and User Experience? What's your take on that?

Schnaebeler: I understand design thinking as a multi-faceted, user-centric method, which offers the highest potential in an early innovation phase. From a company's perspective, huge challenges also manifest themselves during series development. Here, user-oriented concepts for products or services must be optimized and solidified. This means of course we need a selection of additional methods, tools and approaches such as usability, agile development or lean startup. In the end, the overriding goal is not to focus on a single method or approach, it is to focus on the result; fascinating products and solutions... in other words, a great User Experience.

BISE: Looking at the future, how do you see the User Experience topic evolving at Bosch? What are the key challenges for the future?

Schnaebeler: We have to continuously invest in this highly important topic. The key challenge to provide a fascinating UX is to maintain the ability to change perspective. We have to see our offerings as they are perceived by our users, not from our own internal perspective. Users always have an experience with Bosch. We understand it as not only our responsibility, but also as an opportunity to make their experience positive!

BISE: Dr. Schnaebeler, thank you very much for your time and for this interview.