

# Ramblings from Chris Pacione's Seminar

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I don't have as much to say about last week's seminar. While our discussion with Jodi inspired a lot of questions as to the nature, science, and even etymology of interaction design, Chris Pacione's talk was of a far more practical nature, all the more interesting for that, but not as evocative in inspiring this week's essay.

As a 'slice of life' into the realities of starting a new technology-driven business, Pacione's talk was fascinating. The exercise at the beginning of the class was particularly interesting. One of the frustrations I have in the HCII is that the golden nugget of wisdom, creating usable innovations, seems to be a forest being explored from both ends, but never quite reached.

On one path, contextual inquiry, competitive analysis and other needs assessment techniques teach us how to understand the space we're designing for. We learn how to analyze the social, physical, and informational environments of the user, to better create a solution to the problem. On the opposite path, we learn about quantitative assessment, usability testing, and iterative design so that we can improve our creations.

It seems that somewhere in the middle there is a cloud that says 'and here a miracle occurs,' with needs flowing in to one side, and designs drifting out the other. This is the center of the path which I'm constantly looking for a way to better understand.

Chris's exercise with the vase design was a great boon to this task. As needs-driven design seems to be a hill-climbing task, where the result you get doesn't fall too far from what one would expect given the inputs, the exercise to 'create a way to display flowers' was extremely useful as a reminder that when we know what we're looking for, we tend to find it, and that real innovation doesn't come through evolution.

Okay, and again, I'm waxing rhapsodic.

Retrospectively, I think I like last week's talk *because* the question 'what is an interaction designer' was dodged. We got to see, in great detail, what Chris's role was at BodyMedia. Though he wears many hats, they're not heterogeneous roles. They all branch out from a center that can be called interaction design, and maybe this is evidence that the moniker 'interaction designer' isn't so important as an understanding of 'interaction design'.