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On alternatives to 'users' and 'the business'

In response to Naked Leader David Taylor's first monthly column (Computer Weekly 22 February)

I would like to ask about the following statements in David Taylor's column:

- "Never ever call me a user."
- "Stop using the term 'the business' to mean ever 'one else in your organisation."
- "Please do not call internal colleagues customers."

Although I realise that the damage done by using the terms above is mitigated by all the actions David Taylor identified in his column, it would be better not to use them at all. The only problem is that I have not yet come up with concise, acceptable substitutes - do you have any suggestions, please?

Sarah Jane Thornley
Head of strategy and planning
Metronet IT Services

David Taylor replies:

Choose one and ensure that everyone adopts the same words. "User" is a superfluous word - banish it completely and we get, for example, a "guide for marketing" rather than a "user guide". For individuals we can use people's names or at worst, "someone in marketing is..."

"The business" means everyone in the organisation including IT, and instead of "customers" use "colleagues" or "partners".

On the challenge of legacy upgrading

In response to advice given to CIOs on legacy modernisation (Computer Weekly, 1 March)

Despite the challenges, legacy modernisation is crucial for organisations that spend too much maintaining the business value of their outdated information systems.

Asking the IT department to rewrite a legacy system from scratch comes with a high risk of failure. Also, the move from client/server to internet applications and XML-based web services using

technology such as Microsoft .net involves a complete change in the programming environment and is very complex. This generally ends up costing a fortune in development, deployment and associated labour costs.

In many cases the business process in the legacy system is perfectly adequate and the main driving force for modernisation is the need to deploy via web browsers and to update the user interface to meet the expectations of today's users. Some XML-based rapid application development tools are available that web-enable existing business logic from legacy applications without the need for expensive rewrites. This can substantially reduce development time and costs.

That said, one of the main reasons migration can be so cost-intensive is that IT departments spend most of their time configuring the look and feel of an application. What is needed is a way to shorten development time by putting the power into users' hands.

By getting users to develop the interface to their own requirements, IT departments can focus on the nuts and bolts of an application, meaning that migration projects can be delivered quicker.

David Hipkin
Managing director, FastNET ASP

On making websites accessible to all

In response to Mick Hegarty's opinion piece (Computer Weekly 8 March), which outlined simple rules to improve business websites

What a pity Hegarty overlooked the issue of accessibility.

Last year the Disability Rights Commission published a report which said that hundreds of businesses may face legal action because their websites are not accessible to disabled customers.

Web accessibility is about making your website accessible to all internet users (both disabled and non-disabled) regardless of what browsing technology they are using.

With 9.8 million disabled people in the UK, with a spending power of some £50bn, what greater incentive do small businesses need? Making your website accessible to all is good for business.

David Sparrow
Disability Rights Commission