


## Plain Language: What's Next?

Panel for User Focus 2010  
October 15, 2010



## Evidence of Traction for Plain Language

- Plain Writing Act – passed by Congress!!  
Signed into law by President Obama this week!
- Examples from federal and state government  
and from business
- Occasional requirements for plain language  
in RFPs and contracts

## Supporting Organizations

- Plain Language Action and Information Network (PLAIN)  
[www.plainlanguage.gov](http://www.plainlanguage.gov)
- Center for Plain Language  
[www.centerforplainlanguage.org](http://www.centerforplainlanguage.org)
- Plain Language Association InterNational  
[www.plainlanguagenetwork.org](http://www.plainlanguagenetwork.org)
- Clarity (promoting plain legal language)  
[www.clarity.org](http://www.clarity.org)

## Local Government Resources

- NIH's plain language program  
(training and awards)  
<http://www.nih.gov/clearcommunication/plainlanguage.htm>
- Guidance on plain language in health communication  
<http://www.health.gov/healthliteracyonline/>
- Guidance on usability  
[www.usability.gov](http://www.usability.gov)

## Objectives for this Panel

- Describe some success stories
- Provide perspective on the implications of recent signs of traction
- Offer opinions on “what’s next”
- Tell us what usability practitioners should be doing to further the cause

## The Panel

**Dick Horst, UserWorks, Inc.** (moderator)

- **Charlene Haykel**
  - The Haykel Group, NYC  
Specializing in effectively communicating complex information to lay audiences; focus on financial communications
- **Ginny Redish**
  - Redish & Associates, Inc  
Active in plain language for more than 30 years  
*Letting Go of the Words: Writing Web Content that Works*
- **Kathryn Summers**
  - Summers Consulting and University of Baltimore’s program in Interaction Design and Information Architecture  
Co-author of *Creating Websites That Work*

## Questions and Discussion Points

- Is "plain language" mostly about language? Is it about document design? Is it about understanding your audience? Is it about other factors?
- Cost: What evidence is there that plain language saves money or increases revenue or has other benefits that justify costs?
- Does writing in plain language help low-literacy readers? Does it harm or bother high-literacy readers?
- What's next in plain language and what should we be doing to further the cause?

## • **SUPPORTING INFORMATION AND EXAMPLES**

### Results Can Be Dramatic: Example 1 (2003)

	Site 1	Site 2	Improvement
High-lit users ToT	14:19	5:05	+182%
Low-lit users ToT	22:16	9:30	+134%
Time-on-Task (ToT)	17:50	6:45	+164%
High-lit users SR	68%	93%	+37%
Low-lit users SR	46%	82%	+77%
Success Rate (SR)	59%	89%	+52%
High-lit users SS	3.73	4.58	+23%
Low-lit users SS	3.54	4.38	+24%
Subjective Satisfaction (SS)	3.67	4.51	+23%

\*Summers, and Summers (2003), Usability Professional's Association, Montreal, Clear-Health Communication on the Web: Making Medical Content Accessible to Users

### Example 2 – Performance Comparison (2007):

	Old	New	% Change
Errors	6.6	3.4	48%
Skipped Fields	7.7	3.5	54%
Time-on-Task (TOT)	0:10:45	0:12:24	-15%
Satisfaction (SUS)	75.1	80.6	7%

Values stated are averages over all participants

Acceptable apps are those eligible for a "first fill" without additional follow-up:

Acceptable Apps	3	22	633%
Acceptable Apps without proof of income	6	35	483%

Values stated are total counts of acceptable forms



# Content Disposition

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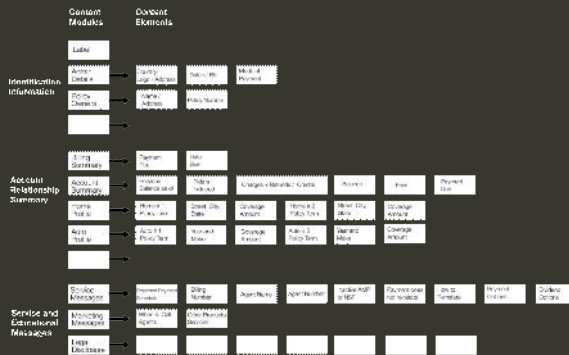
Reason

Health Premium	"Message regarding your health insurance" It is a "bill."	Unclear
	Coverage Description: 25	Unclear to customer
	Check No/Amount/Date Paid Fields Customer has check/money order as receipt	Unhelpful
	"Keep top portion for your records."	Unhelpful/obvious
	HEALTH label	Unhelpful to customer
P/C Premium Bill	Account Number – last 8 digits	Number inoperative
	Six-digit Auto ID #	Unhelpful
	Policy Effective Date	Redundant
	Activity Summary Bar	Redundant
	Premium Charges and Credits Column	
	Amount Due Column	
	Retain: <i>Policy/Term &amp; Description</i>	
	EFF Date	Redundant
	"We appreciate your business"	Unhelpful
	"Please contact your agent..."	Unhelpful
P/C Premium Stub	"Thank you for payment."	Unhelpful
	"Please mail early..."	Unhelpful
	Account Payoff	Redundant
	Account Number – last 8 digits	Number inoperative
P/C Premium Back	"Remember to allow ample mailing time..."	Unhelpful
	Retain: "Payment made in your agent's office..."	
	Important terms for you to know	
	Reworked in updated language and design	Unhelpful
P/C Commercial Farm	Account Number – last 8 digits	Number inoperative
	Payment Summary	Redundant
	Remaining Installments in Term	Unhelpful
	Auto ID #s	Unhelpful
	Stub: Account Payoff	Redundant

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## Premium Notice: Property Casualty



## Premium Notice: Property Casualty (STUB)



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