Neon Carrot Prototype I Evaluation

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Preamble

Overall, we were impressed with the prototype's visual style, although some interface elements confused us. The visual representation of system history, encapsulated as discrete items within the Actions pane, provided a new way to diagnose actions and see history visually. However, the abilities within the system - viewing past document state, easy undo, etc - are not fully explored in the prototype. While the prototype avoided use of jargon in most areas, some icons and tutorial names were confusing to the target non-advanced user of the system ("101" is jargon specific to college, and may not be familiar to all users). The task scenarios involved diagnostic aid with the intervention of a more advanced user; this was clearly more necessary for an advanced evaluator, but excluded the appealing self-help potential of the system. Making help available directly to the users not only gives them a sense of confidence, but it also aids them in learning and thus reducing their need for help in the future.

HCI Violations

0. [H1 Visibility of System Status] (Severity 2) (Noted by 2 Reviewers)
Inserting the letter 'a' at the beginning of the document causes a large mash of struck-out, lowercase, and tiny-font (mixed of all three types) to appear in the green item for the Actions panel. This makes distinguishing *which* past action to correct a difficult one.

1. [H1 Visibility of System Status] (Severity 2) (Noticed by 2 reviewers)
Actions which have suggestions associated with them are colored yellow, but actions without such suggestions are colored green. The green and yellow colors have little contrast on a grayscale. This association is inferred; the system does not indicate this, although it could.

2. [H2 Match Between System and the Real World] (Severity 3) (Noticed by 3 reviewers)
All states recorded within the "Actions" panel are associated with a frowny-face icon at the right margin. Clicking the frowny-face icon next to items with no associated suggestions causes the system to sit there and do nothing, failing to acknowledge the click.

3. [H2 Match Between System and the Real World] (Severity 3)
Recent actions are available in the Actions panel, yet cannot be used to revert the document to that state. This would aid the user in verifying which state is the correct one, especially in a long document-editing session with many states. Include save events in the Actions panel.
4. [H8 Aesthetic and Minimalist Design] (Severity 1) (Noticed by 2 reviewers)
Walkthroughs/Suggest dialog tabs are visible even when content is empty. Their presence suggests that they might contain content, which gives the user a hint about how they might interact with this sidebar. There is good and bad here.

5. [H1 Visibility of System Status] (Severity 2)
   After selecting an action with suggestions, the suggest dialogue pops up. However, in the case of multiple actions that each have associated suggestions, the suggestions box does not indicate which action in the list of actions its suggestions correspond to; the user must search through the list manually and pair the description "You seem to have typed a number of tabs" with the action box containing "-> -> -> -> ->".

6. [H3 User Control and Freedom] (Severity 4) (Noticed by 3 reviewers)
   After dismissing the actions panel, it cannot be recalled.

7. [H6 Recognition Rather Than Recall] (Severity 2)
   Once selecting one of the options in the "Suggest!" panel, the walkthroughs box pops up. However, the title of the activity the user is performing ("Creating Headings 101") is not displayed.

8. [H8 Aesthetic and minimalist design] (Severity 1)
   What does the frowny face next to "Today" do (PPT prototype only)? What is the purpose of the date labels? Is it important information?

9. [H11 Weird transitions] (Severity 1)
   Switching from "Walk through" to "Suggest!" changes the height of the pop up and is mildly surprising. This is especially true if you haven't selected a walk through yet; in that case, the box goes away almost entirely.

10. [H4 Consistency and standards] (Severity 3)
    The usage of tabs for the "Walkthrough" and "Suggest" panels does not seem correct. First of all, the Suggest panel is always seen first, which then links to the Walkthrough panel. A left-to-right flow might be more expected than right-to-left. Overall, though, we don't feel that tabs are the best way to display this information, since there seems to be one order in which things happen: frowning face to Suggest to Walkthrough.

11. [Match between system and the real world] (Severity 0)
    The actions stack goes from top to bottom. In Photoshop, and some other programs, the stack is ordered a different way, with recent actions on the top. Not necessarily a problem, but this might be intuitive to some people. Something to think about.

12. [Aesthetic and minimalist design] (Severity 2)
    We would reconsider the "frowning face" icon. The user might misinterpret this as the computer disapproving with everything the user has done. If the frowning face is really the icon you want (I'd consider alternatives) maybe it could be shown later, or be less prominent.
13. [Consistency and standards] (Severity 3)
When making a formatting change, the icon in the actions panel is the font style icon. There is a little black downwards triangle, which usually means a drop-down menu, but none appears. Also, the items in the actions panel appear clickable (the underline text contributes), but aren't.

14. [Consistency and standards] (Severity 1)
In the heading hate scenario, each action has what is clearly a text resize icon next to it. This icon has a down triangle, which usually implies a dropdown menu. Changing or modifying the icon might avoid confusion.

**Recommendations**

Ensure that your interface employs a consistent model for indicating that help is available, and what specific help is there. Differentiation by color can confuse rather than enlighten, and is a major issue for colorblind users. The frowny-face icon can indicate disapproval of an action - "what you did is incorrect", although you may have meant it to indicate "I [the user] am unhappy with this action" or "suggestions are available". Make sure that your interface communicates the relevant information to the user upon first glance - after all, what good is a help system that needs its own help system to explain it?
Heuristic Analysis on Prototype Design for Neon Carrot

1. [H3 User control and freedom] (Severity 4)

Once the user closes the sidebar, there is no obvious way to reopen it. (I suspect this is a feature that was consciously left unimplemented.)

2. [H8 Aesthetic and minimalist design] (Severity 1)

What does the frowny face next to "Today" do (PPT prototype only)? What is the purpose of the date labels? Is it important information? It might be... I'd be interested to hear your justification.

3. [H8 Aesthetic and minimalist design] (Severity 2)

Are yellow-highlighted action entries the only ones that yield help? They all have smiley faces (and all of them turn red on mouse over) even though most don't produce any action. This might be confusing/frustrating.

4. [H? Weird transitions] (Severity 1)

Switching from "Walk through" to "Suggest!" changes the height of the pop up and is mildly surprising. This is especially true if you haven't selected a walk through yet; in that case, the box goes away almost entirely.
Heuristic Evaluation

Team Neon Carrot

Reviewer: Logan Dethrow

1. Inability to restore actions sidebar—Error Prevention—Severity 4

   After closing the actions toolbar with the close “X” in the corner, there is no apparent way to restore the toolbar.

2. Walkthrough tab blank until task selected—Visibility of system status—Severity 2

   The walkthrough tab is first from left to right, but the tab to the right of it must be interacted with first before the walkthrough tab displays any information. The expectation is that right to left convention would be followed.

3. Frowning Faces on each action—Consistency and standards—Severity 2

   All actions taken by the user receive a “frowning face” icon next to them that appears the same as actions that can be improved by following instructions from the team design. This could be seen as telling the user they are constantly making mistakes.

4. Crushed text is displayed in web prototype—Aesthetic and minimalist design—Severity 3

   If a user types in the text box in the column scenario, the displayed information in the actions toolbar becomes crushed and garbled. This is really bad in Firefox 3, and not good in IE 7.

5. Confusing icon for text in web prototype—Consistency and Standards—Severity 1

   In the heading hate scenario, each action has a text resize icon next to it, and the icon has a down arrow in it, which usually implies a dropdown menu, which is not present.
Ben Fisher
Individual Document

1. [Aesthetic and minimalist design] (Severity 2)
   It seems aesthetically unpleasing to have a prominent column of frowning faces. The user might misinterpret this as the computer disapproving with what the user has done. If the frowning face is really the icon you want (I'd consider alternatives) maybe it could be shown later, or be less prominent.

2. [Consistency and standards] (Severity 2)
   Upon first glance, one might misread the actions panel as a list of items where one at a time is selected. If there are many green actions and one yellow action, it looks like the yellow action is a selected item.

3. [Aesthetic and minimalist design] (Severity 1)
   I do not see the logic behind the color scheme in the actions bar, especially in the ppt prototype. In the ppt version the box sizes are different. Also, the color changes are pretty large, maybe different shades of one color would be less attention-grabbing.

4. [User control and freedom] (Severity 4)
   Once the actions panel is closed, it doesn't seem like it can be reopened.

5. [Consistency and standards] (Severity 3)
   The items in the actions panel look clickable, but nothing happens when you click on one. The text is underlined which sometimes indicates a link, but it is not a link.

6. [Recognition rather than recall] (Severity 2)
   When you click on one of the frowning faces, you see suggestions for that item. Later, though, there isn't an indication of which of the items was clicked.

7. [User control and freedom] (Severity 1)
   When you click on one of the frowning faces, you see suggestions for that item. There isn't, though, a button to close or ignore those suggestions and to go back. Functionally there isn't anything missing but it was just something I expected to see.

8. [Consistency and standards] (Severity 3)
   The "suggest" and "walkthrough" pages should be redesigned. I don't think tabs are the best way to display this. You probably mean "Suggestions!" rather than "Suggest!".

More comments:

Just prototype, not a design issue: The text in the Heading 1 button can be accidently selected.

Regarding the headings part 2 scenario, I'm not sure your target user would understand the benefits of using headings. Do they care about changing the formatting of all of the headings at once? How does this help them accomplish a task?
In your usage scenarios, how do the characters line up with your personas? I note that all of the scenarios involve the help of the "young hip engineering student". What if that person isn't around? Which one of your personas is the mother?
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