



Leonardo's Laptop: Human Needs and the New Computing Technologies (MIT Press)

Ben Shneiderman

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Ben Shneiderman's book dramatically raises computer users' expectations of what they should get from technology. He opens their eyes to new possibilities and invites them to think freshly about future technology. He challenges developers to build products that better support human needs and that are usable at any bandwidth. Shneiderman proposes Leonardo da Vinci as an inspirational muse for the "new computing." He wonders how Leonardo would use a laptop and what applications he would create. Shneiderman shifts the focus from what computers can do to what users can do. A key transformation is to what he calls "universal usability," enabling participation by young and old, novice and expert, able and disabled. This transformation would empower those yearning for literacy or coping with their limitations. Shneiderman proposes new computing applications in education, medicine, business, and government. He envisions a World Wide Med that delivers secure patient histories in local languages at any emergency room and thriving million-person communities for e-commerce and e-government. Raising larger questions about human relationships and society, he explores the computer's potential to support creativity, consensus-seeking, and conflict resolution. Each chapter ends with a Skeptic's Corner that challenges assumptions about trust, privacy, and digital divides.

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