People, Persuasion, Politics and IT

By: John Canny
June 22, 2010

Abstract:
Computing has come a long way from its beginnings as a tool for engineering and science. Now it’s recognized as part of the solution to major social problems like health care, education, energy and environmental conservation. With that shift has come an outward focus, especially in the Human-Computer Interaction community, to social sciences and even humanities. In our work on education (MILLEE) we draw heavily on learning science and on ethnographic studies of village life in India. In health care we use theories of motivation and persuasion in a project on maternal health called "First Days". Similarly for energy conservation (mPOwer), we use persuasive interfaces to help users follow through on their commitments to use less energy. I will describe these projects and then discuss a new behavioral framework we are using to guide our design work. This framework emphasizes the role of dialog, narrative and social context in human behavior. Two particular explorations under way are the use of dialogic (conversation-like) interfaces for persuasion, and the design of systems to exploit local power structures (politics) rather than fighting them, which often happens when new technologies are introduced in a community.

About the Speaker:
John Canny is the Paul and Stacy Jacobs Distinguished Professor of Engineering in the Computer Science Division at UC Berkeley. His early research was in computer vision and robotics - on the interaction between computers and the physical world. Since the 1990's he has focused on the democratization of computing, and what it means to design systems for everyday life. In 2002, he founded the Berkeley Institute of Design, an interdisciplinary, human-centered design research lab. BID now houses 30 researchers from 8 departments. His research priorities are IT for health care and education, ICT 4 development, models of human behavior and ubiquitous computing. His Ph.D. thesis won the ACM doctoral dissertation award, and a paper based on his M.S. thesis received the AAAI test of time award a decade later. He has recent best paper prizes at CHI 2007, Persuasive Technology 2008 ACM KDD 2009, and CHI 2010.