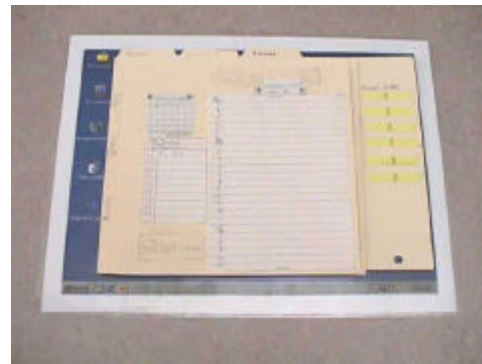# Paper Prototyping

Paper prototyping involves the use of a paper simulation of an interface or system. A paper prototype contains interface elements such as menus, windows, dialogue boxes and icons which have been sketched on paper or created in advance with materials such as stickies, index cards, and acetate sheets. One member of the design team presents a user with an initial interface design and tasks to perform using the interface. The user is instructed to use their finger as a mouse to make selections and activate interface elements, and to talk out loud expressing thoughts and impressions. Another member of the design team "plays the computer" and manipulates interface elements around in response to the user's actions. The session may be recorded or other members of the team may serve as observers and record user comments and impressions. This type of testing is termed "lo-fidelity" as opposed to using some type of rapid prototyping tool like Visual Basic or Powerbuilder to build a prototype in software, which would be termed "hi-fidelity".

Benefits of paper prototyping include the following:

- Promotes detection of problems at an early stage in design process and before extensive coding has been done.

- Quick and easy to build and to refine. "Maximal feedback for minimal effort". Hi-fidelity prototypes can take days or weeks to build, a paper prototype can be done in a few hours.

- Incorporates feedback from real user into design at stage when changes can easily be made.

- Increases likelihood of user suggesting changes or challenging design than if presented with a product that looks closer to being finished. This invites the user in the process as a co-designer.

- Users will focus on the overall organization and feel of the application rather than on "fit and finish" details such as the font type being used.

- Increases wiliness of design team to make changes because they haven't invested extensive time into design and coding of a prototype.

- A bug in a hi-fidelity prototype will quickly end a testing session.

- Uses simple, inexpensive tools such as paper, scissors and stickies to convey feel of product.

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Photos of paper prototypes made out of manila folders, paper & yellow stick notes