

1. Who are you? What is your background?

My name is Douglas Wang and I am the Product Design Manager at Autodesk Shanghai, China. I have been involved in different areas of design for about 9 years, including graphic design, multimedia, branding, UI and user experience. My focus is primarily on interface design and user experience for desktop, mobile and browser-based applications. I have a strong interest in information visualization, experience design and branding strategy and an awareness of specific concerns in consumer and enterprise segments. I am also experienced in managing multicultural design/dev teams cross time zones.

I hold a Master of Architecture, Design and Technology from Carleton University (Ottawa, Canada), a Bachelor of Science in Industrial Design from Beijing Institute of Technology (Beijing, China). I am a registered Graphic Designer in Ontario, Canada and also a member of the Usability Professionals Association (UPA).



Douglas Wang - Product Design Manager at Autodesk Shanghai, China

2. Where do you work? What is your role?

I am working for Autodesk at the Shanghai branch. My primary role is to manage a local team of product interface designers across Autodesk products. I am also responsible of educating local developers about UCD process and usability awareness.

3. What changes have you seen in Usability in Asia since starting in the Design/Usability field?

There was a much stronger voice in North America and Europe when I started my career in usability. Along with the popularity of outsourcing to Asia and local Asian IT growth around 2003, especially in web technologies, the awareness of usability has been increasing. The Asian voice of usability is starting to be widely heard. I think Chinese business find more and more value in usability, instead of "pure" technology advances.

4. What opportunities do you see in the region?

One, lots of opportunities resides in collaborating with global companies' local operations. There are more and more foreign development centers in China and India where usability professionals could contribute great value.

Two, I see great demand of usability related training in the Chinese and Indian market, for business decision makers, usability practitioners, as well as students.

Three, large amounts of user research activities need to be organized to study the regional users and cultural changes. In China and India, due to the technology development, the life of the average person has been impacted greatly. For example, in early 2006, the "Institute for the Future" at Stanford University, studied the cross-impacts of Mobility, Pervasive Information (real-time aware environments), and Abundant Computing (super-computing for personal use) on changing conditions of family employment, infrastructure, and Environment in China, Russia and India. The study is only the start of massive user/culture research in Asia. For people who have experience in other countries, this is a golden time to merge technologies with their local cultures to create a more friendly future.

5. What is the state of the web industry in China (or more specifically your region)? What are your primary challenges?

I think the web industry is going to the right direction. These days, more and more web companies are concerned about how to serve the people with their products, such as baidu.com and alibaba.com. To serve this purpose, usability is sometimes well considered and promoted. However, this only prevails in the big cities with large number of online users and technology incubators.

6. What trends are you seeing at the moment in design?

Well, this is a big topic and there are many perspectives to look at. From a business point of view, design starts to hold more practical value as an integrated solution of different fields, so as to require more cross-disciplinary collaboration. As designers, we have more opportunities to work with people from different business, culture and regions; therefore, designers need to get ready for all these challenges.

As for design effectiveness, modern designer tends to deliver a much clearer, friendly, and cultural feel via various interfaces. No matter what you are designing, say, TV commercials, product manual, or software UI, the message needs to be consistent and simple, not to confuse anyone.

7. Do users in Asia (specifically China) work and interact with web sites differently than other users around the world? How?

I have been involved in user research conducted in Europe, North America and Asia. The ethnographies are really different and so as their online behaviors. Compared to other regions, a large portion of Chinese web surfers tend to spend more time on entertainment, rather than assisting their work. However, most users in North America are more goal-oriented.

8. What are some hot topics currently that Asian audiences would like to hear more about?

As for usability related topics, I believe Asian audiences are willing to learn about what their peers in other countries are doing in the same field and the tools they are using. Most people know about the UCD process but have little clue of its real value and how to conduct it in depth. More, design awareness in comprehensive contexts seems to be critical for new practitioners in Asia. For example, how to factor in users' cultural or religious background will definitely impact the way of doing research.

9. If there is one Usability tool you could not live without what would it be? Why?

I would say that, field observation is the last thing I would give up for usability studies. Observing users in their native environment is often the best way to determine their usability requirements. This tool is extremely helpful when I deal with enterprise customers. Most enterprise IT administrators are always too busy to answer my team's questions when we are present. Some users are not good at expressing their true feelings, so their answers may mislead the research. Traditional usability testing requires a laboratory environment that makes data collection and recording easy, however, it removes the user and the product from the context. I believe that, a research team with psychology, ethnography, and usability knowledge, could efficiently identify the usability issues, through the users' ways of doing things (their mental model), even objects they interact with.

10. Are there any companies in China that work in product design that is worth watching? Who? Why?

There are quite a few teams in China that are specialized in product usability, such as Microsoft, Baidu.com, Motorola CXD, and Autodesk Product Design. These teams either work very closely with other global peers, or talented local hires. For now, they represent the professional front in China.

11. Do you have any final comments? Did I leave anything out? What should every person remember about this interview?

I grow up in China but set up my design career mostly in North America. Now I get the chance to work with my native culture. As I always believed, design should be rooted in culture and it is the right time to do design in this unique culture. I hope more and more foreign designers and oversea Chinese see this trend and move to China to experience this historical moment.