

Interview with Rex Wong (Interaction Designer in Hong Kong)

1. Who are you?

My name is Rex Wong and my academic background is psychology & information technology. I started in usability about 3 years ago as an User Experience Designer. Now I'm working for a Hong Kong portal site as an Interaction Designer. My jobs involves drafting wireframes for different portal site sections.



Rex Wong - Interaction Designer in Hong

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

Have seen a boom in the usability field in Mainland China over the past 3 years. As a committee member of UPA China's - Hong Kong Branch I have been involved in the User Friendly conferences since 2004 and since that time have seen huge increases in participants year on year.

Web designs in Taiwan & Hong Kong have also been influenced by *Korea*. Korea has maintained a leading position among Asian countries for a number of years. With its high broadband penetration rate and increasing gaming industry it allows Korean web designers to experiment with fancier user interfaces and innovative ideas that integrate web into daily life. Examples include the online-presence defining blogging system "Cyworld" (www.cyworld.com) that came a long time before MSNSpace and the knowledge sharing community "Naver" (www.naver.com - like Yahoo! Answers)

3. What opportunities do you see in the region?

The China market and user experience with web multimedia and mobile web.

4. What is the state of the web industry in Hong Kong? What are your primary challenges?

When you visit popular Hong Kong websites listed in Alexa (www.alexa.com), you see there is basically one dominant web portal which is Yahoo! Hong Kong (hk.yahoo.com) plus several discussion forums like "Uwants" (www.uwants.com) & DiscussHK (www.discuss.com.hk). The common elements among these sites is that they have been around for many years and there has not been major changes. The Hong Kong web industry is still advertising-focused and web agencies are more like traditional marketing companies or production houses developing sites that sell off line products.

There have been interesting start-ups like EditGrid (www.editgrid.com, an online spreadsheet application), anobii (www.anobii.com, bookshelf sharing), but these are probably more famous to outsiders than to local Hong Kong people. However, this does not mean that Hong Kong is not interested to web 2.0; for example, blogging has been popular in Hong Kong since 2005. I guess Hong Kong is small and we familiar with using "foreign imports" that we do not feel a strong need to have locally developed web innovations. For example, when we want to upload video, we use www.youtube.com, we don't even bother to search and discover local video sharing sites. This is not very encouraging to the web industry and hope larger companies or startups can come up with new products. This will encourage users (especially the younger generation) to keep an eye on the local web industry again.

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

Hong Kong still needs time to synchronize and catch up with web 2.0. The majority of websites in Hong Kong are either discussion forums or for information display only.

6. Do users in Asia (specifically Hong Kong) work and interact with websites differently than other users around the world? How?

My feeling (not proven and just my observation) is that Asians are less "proactive" - instead of actively searching, Asians actually prefer browsing recommended content by the website. A "tour-like" easy to follow "browsing mode" for a Hong Kong audience to "enjoy the show" is important. Hong Kong people prefer more images and less text compared to Mainland Chinese & Taiwanese. So when I design a page layout, I take this into consideration by checking how much text I've removed compared to similar websites in Taiwan.

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

Asian usability communities are enthusiastic in keeping up with the latest knowledge e.g. mobile web, how usability & design on a web page can affect the social community aspect of the website, etc.

8. If there is ONE Usability tool you could not live without what would it be and why?

I would pick *two* - good observation skills & an analytical mind. Without them you will not be able to understand what your users feel and do.

9. Are there any companies in China that work in product design that are worth watching? Who and Why?

I have been keeping an eye on the start-ups in China yet so far I don't really see any concepts that you can't find in US or Korea....anyway, there are a few worth watching: Baidu (www.baidu.com), douban (www.douban.com - books/movie/music review community) & xunlei (www.xunlei.com, resources download).

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

Thanks!