Confirmation Dialogs | Studio Task #3 (Individual)

Due: Thursday, April 19, 2012

Goals

To reflect on the essential role that the user interface plays in protecting our computers from harm; to design alternatives/extensions to confirmation dialogs.

Assignment

"Confirmation: A technique for preventing unintended actions by requiring verification of the actions before they are performed." *The Universal Principles of Design* (p. 44)

Microsoft Vista and the follow-on Windows 7 was touted by Bill Gates as the most secure operating system ever. One reason for this is not simply the built-in security software (e.g., spyware sniffer and Windows firewall), but also these systems' reliance on confirmation dialogs to inform the user of potential hazardous operations. Certainly there is value in prompting the user when a computer detects a problem; however, the cost of user involvement could lead to usability issues such as desensitization, user annoyance, and false confidence. Moreover, many times the language used within confirmation dialogs is incomprehensible to an average user— how are users to make an educated choice about the proper action when they don't understand the problem?

This is a really challenging problem that involves many different aspects of computer science from operating systems to networks to user interfaces and interaction design.
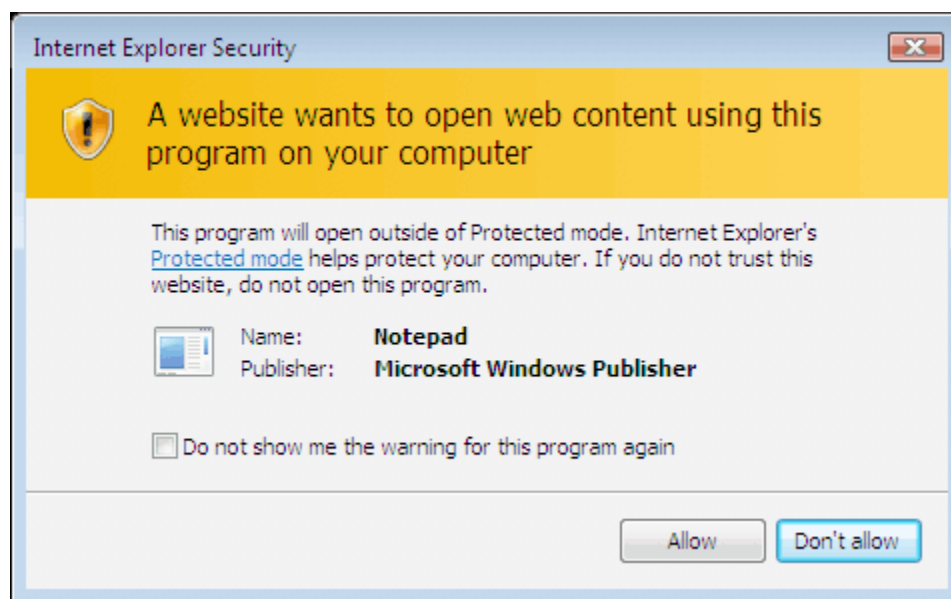

Figure 1 : An example Windows confirmation dialog

Your assignment is to redesign the "confirmation" aspect of Microsoft Windows security system. Some questions to aid you in your design: Would a more peripheral/implicit display be useful? What are the tradeoffs? How do we provide an interface that protects novices but does not annoy power users? Is this simply a problem of transparency? It's often hard for users to know what's going on in their computer (e.g., the process list in Windows Task Manager is rather opaque; without proper background or context it is nearly impossible to differentiate a bad process from a good one), could one potential solution involve educating the user such that they are better informed for the next security prompt?

A few related links

Some of these links refer to Windows Vista Beta; however, I think they are still relevant to the assignment at hand because this was, at the very least, a design that Microsoft was seriously considering releasing to the public. Microsoft since tweaked the number of confirmation dialogs and in fact redesigned this again in Windows 7 to reduce the number even further.

Microsoft Vista's Endless Security Warnings
The problem with lots of warning dialog boxes is that they don't provide security. Users stop reading them. They think of them as annoyances, as an extra click required to get a feature to work. Clicking through gets embedded into muscle memory, and when it actually matters the user won't even realize it.
http://www.schneier.com/blog/archives/2006/04/microsoft_vista.html

Seven Steps to Delete a Shortcut
http://www.flickr.com/photo_zoom.gne?id=151250154&size=o

Deliverables

1. **Update studio design website**
   Update your top level html page (index.html) in your personal studio directory and include a link to this week's studio design html document.

2. **Your Design**
   Your design should be accessible online in your individual studio directory as an html (or, if you prefer, pdf) page. This page should be linked off your index.html defined above. Please include screenshots of your sketches and a description of the interface and proposed interaction.

3. **Presentation**
   You must be prepared to present your work in class and lead a small discussion about your design.

Grading (100 Points)

You should not spend enormous amounts of time on this assignment. As usual, you are welcome to sketch up your design and scan it in (rather than mocking it up digitally).

For this assignment, you will be graded on:

- [10] Updating your studio design website
- [80] Your design and thoughts about current "confirmation dialog" practices
- [10] Your presentation