Keeping an eye on the Internet is an enjoyable perk of my job as editor. One of the gurus I watch is Jakob Nielsen, an expert in the usability of user interfaces to software applications and Web sites. The title of one of his recent newsletters, “Evangelizing Usability: Change Your Strategy at the Halfway Point,” grabbed my eye immediately because I misread it as Evangelizing Reliability.

As I read it, I saw that when purposely substituting reliability for usability, it still made a lot of sense. See what you think. Check out the following paragraphs (with appropriate subsitutions made) taken from the article archived on Nielsen’s site .

The evangelism strategies that help a reliability group get established in a company are different from the ones needed to create a full-fledged reliability culture.

The approach that takes your company from miserable reliability to decent performance is not the one you’ll need to get from good to great.

A company progresses through a series of maturity levels as reliability becomes more widely accepted.

In the early maturity stage, few resources are available and the company is not truly committed to reliability. The key word for early evangelism is to be opportunistic in allocating your scarce resources. You can’t follow the recommended reliability process in all its glory because your organization lacks the commitment required. Instead of fighting windmills, go for the easy wins.

Luckily, a company without a systematic reliability history will have much low-hanging fruit for you to pick. Once these easy reliability wins generate substantial business wins for the company, management is usually interested in funding an official reliability group . . . with a manager, a charter, and a budget to perform reliability activities.

As the company matures, more resources become available for reliability, but some

prioritization is still needed. At the previous stage, priorities were opportunistic; they must now be more selective. Rather than chase easy wins, you must build spectacular wins for reliability to convince executives to move the organization to the desired goal state.

At this point, the strategy should be to focus on high-impact projects where the benefits of substantial reliability improvements will have enormous monetary value and high visibility for senior executives.

The way forward is to focus on a few high-impact projects, and make them smash hits.

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