Editorial: Welcome to a New Era for TOCHI

Constant change is a given in the world of high technology.

But still it can come as a rude awakening when it arrives in human terms, and we find that it also applies to our friends, our colleagues, and the people we care for.

Not to mention ourselves!

So it was that I found myself, with a tumbler full of fresh coffee steaming between my hands, looking in disbelief at an email nominating me to assume the editorial helm of TOCHI.

Ultimately (through no fault of my own), the ACM Publications Board was apparently seized by an episode of temporary madness and, deeming my formal application to have the necessary qualifications (with a dozen years of TOCHI associate editorship under my belt, a membership in the CHI Academy for recognized leaders in the field, and a Lasting Impact Award for my early work on mobile sensing—not to mention hundreds of paper *rejections* that apparently did no lasting damage to my reputation), they forthwith approved me to take over as Editor-in-Chief from my friend and long-time colleague, Shumin Zhai.

I've known Shumin since 1994, way back when I delivered my very first talk at CHI in the same session as he presented his latest results on "the silk cursor." I took an instant liking to him, but I only came to fully appreciate over the years that followed that Shumin's work ethic is legendary. As my colleague Bill Buxton (who sat on Shumin's thesis committee) once put it, "Shumin works harder than any *two* persons I have ever known."

And of course that applied to Shumin's work ethic with TOCHI as well.

A man who now represents an astoundingly large pair of shoes that I must fill.

To say that I respect Shumin enormously, and the incredible progress he brought to the operation and profile of the journal during his 6-year tenure, would be a vast understatement.

But after I got over the sheer terror of taking on such an important role, I began to get excited.

And then I got ideas.

Lots of ideas.

A few of them might even be good ones:

Ways to advance the journal.

Ways to keep operating at peak efficiency in the face of an ever-expanding stream of submissions.

And most importantly, ways to deliver even more impact to our readers, and on behalf of our authors.

Those same authors whose contributions make it possible for us to proclaim:

TOCHI is the flagship journal of the Computer-Human Interaction community.

So in this, my introductory editorial as the head honcho, new sheriff in town, and supreme benevolent dictator otherwise known as the *Editor-in-Chief,* I would like to talk about how the transition is going, give a few updates on TOCHI's standard operating procedure, and—with an eye towards growing the impact of the journal—announce the first of what I hope will be many exciting new initiatives.

And in case it is not already obvious, I intend to have some fun with this.

All while preserving the absolutely rigorous and top-notch reputation of the journal, and the constant push for excellence in all of the articles that we publish.

FULL STEAM AHEAD

Right from the get-go, let me assure you that the operation of TOCHI has picked up exactly where Shumin, and his eminently capable Information Director, Jeff Nichols, left off.

If anything, I believe we have ratcheted up the pace a notch, if that is even humanly possible given how tight a ship Shumin ran.

I am grateful to Shumin and especially to Jeff for answering my endless questions about all the belts and flywheels of TOCHI's behind-the-scenes machinery during the transition. I hope you can smell the hot grease of a well-oiled engine, because that is precisely what they have assembled here. While Shumin, of course, has now retired from TOCHI's editorial board (as is our long-standing tradition for a departing Editor-in-Chief), Jeff has agreed to continue his service to TOCHI as an Associate Editor, and I am looking forward to working with him a lot more over the coming years.

So what's next?

Well, first off I'm excited to announce that Hrvoje Benko—already a colleague at Microsoft Research who has published many papers with me, and an Associate Editor in good standing on TOCHI's editorial board—has agreed to join me as TOCHI's new Information Director. In essence, this means that he is the "Chief Operating Officer" of TOCHI, a role which certainly puts his well-earned reputation as a brilliant jack-of-all trades to the test. And I'm even happier to report that colloquially he always goes by the nickname of 'Benko,' which means that I don't have to commit an affront to his native tongue by attempting to pronounce 'Hrvoje' with the proper Croatian enunciation. But in all seriousness, there is no one I would rather be joined at the hip with when facing a formidable technical and organizational challenge such as the one represented by the efficient operation of TOCHI.

So that is the new team in place at the journal.

Snapshot. To see how we are doing, Benko and I took a snapshot of the journal's operations over about the first 70 days of our tenure.

A quick aside: one of the minor initiatives we undertook was to start checking *all* submitted manuscripts for plagiarism, that is, the re-use of the text of other authors without proper attribution. With the ever-increasing pressure to publish, and with so much of the scientific literature available online, this struck us as a wise precaution. However, please note that re-use of one's own text is definitely allowed, so long as at least 25% of the article represents new contributions; TOCHI particularly welcomes integrative contributions that build on a series of an author's own prior publications.

Now back to those first 70 days. Because of the continuous nature of a journal's pipeline, "simple" metrics such as acceptance rate are difficult to define unambiguously, so let's look at our inputs and outputs.

In terms of our inputs, the journal received 57 submissions, of which:

—13 were revisions of previously submitted manuscripts that we forwarded directly to the Associate Editor handling each article;
—21 manifested strong potential and were therefore passed up to the Editorial Board; and
—23 were deemed off-topic or unlikely to meet the very high bar of contribution required for TOCHI articles, and were therefore issued *Quick Rejections*.

A quick word about these "Quick Rejections."

They are TOCHI's way of *efficiently* declining articles that are unlikely to meet the very high bar of contribution required for acceptance. Typically these are papers that are off-topic for our audience, or which offer a potential contribution that does not have enough scope to carry an article at a flagship journal.

Our primary motivation for issuing these Quick Rejections is to return control of the manuscript to the author as quickly as possible. They also keep our operations streamlined and preserve the limited resources of our editorial board for the articles that show the most potential.

And while issued rapidly, Quick Rejections still always take the form of a thoughtful personal letter, often from the Editor-in-Chief, which explains our decision in some detail and provides helpful suggestions for other publication venues to try. And if we see something that shows particular promise in a manuscript, the letters also provide detailed suggestions on how the scope of the contribution might be expanded (or better framed for the TOCHI audience), along with an invitation to consider resubmitting a new and substantially extended article in the future if that corresponds with the author's research goals.

In recognition of the opportunity cost of the author's time when submitting work for publication, TOCHI issues Quick Rejections as soon as we can carefully read the manuscript, often within 3 days of submission. So there is no harm (and certainly no dishonor!) in trying us with an article, even it ends up not being a fit. We are always happy to assess new work by any author.

In terms of our outputs, the journal issued 60 decisions during this same inaugural period of our tenure, of which:

—26 were either Quick Rejections or Withdrawals by the authors, and
—34 were detailed decision letters from the Editorial Board, of which:
  —19 were rejections;
  —10 were asked to submit a major or minor revision; and
  —4 were accepted research contributions (we also accepted Shumin's farewell editorial, of course).

This 70-day period is too short to compute meaningful statistics on our efficiency, but prior to Shumin's departure, the journal's average response time had dropped to about 50 days. So we have maintained, and perhaps even advanced, TOCHI's strong commitment to the efficient operation of the journal through a continuous effort to push our response times down even further.

And we continue to tow the line with our Editorial Board, making all possible efforts to issue decisions within 90 days for all manuscripts. However, we will be the first to admit that this is not always possible: reviews come in late; editors get swamped or experience life issues that prevent timely response; things happen. But we will continue to do our best to ensure that such long-tail response times are rare exceptions.

And if you find that your own submitted manuscript has been with TOCHI for longer than 90 days, feel free to query me directly at tochi@acm.org for an update on its status; such author inquiries are often a helpful inducement for editors and reviewers to complete their work on an overdue manuscript.

A CALL TO ACTION

One of the most common questions that I now get asked—since I so foolishly agreed to assume this heavy yoke of responsibility known as editor-in-chiefdom—is whether a submission (or a potential submission) fits what TOCHI is looking for.

This question has an easy answer and a hard answer.

The easy answer? "Send it the heck in!"

TOCHI will gladly consider any manuscript relevant to human-computer interaction. It's straightforward for us to decline if it isn't a good fit for the journal, and as noted above, we always strive to do so quickly if that proves to be the case.

The hard answer goes much deeper.

And it's one that I usually don't have the time to dutifully type out in response.

But since one of the very first tasks that confronted me was to update our call for papers, in the following I will try to briefly convey an idea of what gets us excited.

And why you should send us the best work that you have to offer.

Or to take a step back and reflect on the arc of your research agenda, and send us a great write up of your perspectives in the form of a summative contribution. The field sorely lacks the wisdom of such reflections, because the rat-race of the conference review cycle offers few rewards to those who would pause to look back on what they have done, and why, and how their view of their contributions (and the implications of their results) might have changed over time.

And given that you, dutiful reader of this TOCHI editorial, are by definition a likely contributor to the journal, I wanted to echo the resulting call to action here so that you would be herewith inspired to set pen to paper—or fingers to keyboard, as the case may be—and submit your most impactful contributions for the due consideration of our amazing editorial board.

As you will see, there are also a couple more hints of those exciting things-to-come that I promised up front.

CALL FOR PAPERS:
ACM Transactions on Computer-Human Interaction (TOCHI)

TOCHI is the premier archival journal for contributions from the frontiers of human-computer interaction.

CHI is an exciting field, often with profound implications. What are the human consequences of the technologies we create? What are the impacts of user interfaces—and of the design choices we make—on people's everyday lives? How are technologies changing our society, and how can we use them to shape the many possible futures that are emerging as a result?

These questions, and many more, drive the vibrancy of the journal—and our field.

No Artificial Bounds. TOCHI embraces the full breadth of the diverse CHI community. We publish articles on any topic relevant to human-computer interaction, so long as the results offer significant new insights for the community. TOCHI particularly encourages integrative contributions that span multiple studies, multiple systems, or multiple explorations of a theme so as to contribute a new perspective to the field—the type of contribution that is nigh-impossible to convey in a typical conference paper.

Wisdom of the Elite. Papers go through rigorous peer review, led by a world-class editorial board stacked with leading experts. As one of our authors, you will benefit from their advice and deep insights to hone your research. Getting published in TOCHI represents a prestigious recognition of excellence.

Influence and Laurels. Acceptance at TOCHI garners an invitation to present your work at leading SIGCHI conferences. Combine the continuity of journal review—judicious and fair-minded, with an opportunity to redress critiques—with the lively

discussion and influence that speaking at a top-notch conference brings. And starting in 2016, TOCHI will recognize our very best work with Best Paper Awards.

Rigorous and Fast. Although rigorous, TOCHI maintains a fast pace: decision time averages about 50 days. We publish accepted works quickly, online-first in the ACM Digital Library, and the pipeline from submission to publication can be shorter than the overwrought processes that tend to burden conference publication these days.

High Exposure. TOCHI heightens exposure for your research and enshrines the premier work in our field. And starting with Volume 23, the Editor-in-Chief will spotlight select articles, offering perspectives and reflections on some of the most intriguing contributions to grace our pages.

Submit your work today, and help advance the frontiers of technology—and the human experience.

Visit tochi.acm.org/authors to entrust us with your manuscript.

So, now that I've hopefully whet your appetite a bit for submitting your best work to TOCHI, let's cover a few more details of these initiatives—and see what else I might have up my sleeve. . .

A NEW SPECIAL ISSUE SEEKS SUBMISSIONS

Before I say a little more about the TOCHI Best Paper Award, I must pause here briefly and (at the risk of sounding like a late night infomercial) dutifully say:

"But wait! There's more!"

And that's because we've *also* just opened the first Special Issue of my tenure, which is now soliciting contributions on *End-User Development for the Internet of Things*.

This special issue will bring together developments in two exciting areas, through a sharply focused lens of human-computer interaction, and should therefore spark considerable interest and discussion.

To discuss a possible contribution, please contact the special issue editors at

eud-for-iot@tochi.acm.org

And the call for papers is now live on TOCHI's web site at

http://tochi.acm.org/end-user-development-for-the-internet-of-things

Be sure to check out the call for papers.

And keep in mind that submissions are due March 22, 2016.

TOCHI BEST PAPER AWARD

I've contributed to TOCHI—as a reviewer, author, Associate Editor, and now Editor-in-Chief—for almost *20 years*.

And although I recognize that not everyone is totally comfortable with the idea of best paper awards for journals, I think it's high time that we also acknowledge that TOCHI publishes a lot of truly excellent work.

When I assumed the helm of TOCHI, I embarked on a quick survey of the other *Transactions*-level journals. I also studied a number of status reports authored by their various Editors-in-Chief.

Several *Transactions* already have established "best paper" (and other) awards.

Most of our leading SIGCHI conferences have had best paper awards for many years now.

And the ACM Publications Board already has a well-documented process in place for establishing Best Paper Awards for its journals.

I therefore decided that it was time and submitted a formal proposal, which has now been approved.

As a mark of distinction at an already highly selective journal, the annual ACM Transactions on Computer-Human Interaction Best Paper Award will bring considerable prestige to the authors thus distinguished.

The purpose of the award is to recognize and bring greater attention to the excellence of top articles published in TOCHI. This helps build the careers of our authors as well as the stature and desirability of publication in the TOCHI journal itself.

In addition to giving authors further incentive to submit their best work, this affords carry-over benefits to publicity, downloads, and citations to the journal, thereby enhancing the influence of the award winners as well as the impact factor all of the excellent articles that we publish.

We will play no favorites here, and in fact the formal proposal (which publically documents the rules governing the selection committee at http://tochi.acm.org/awards) bars the Editor-in-Chief from consideration. The sole criteria shall be the overall merit of the work, in terms of technical excellence, significance to the research community, impact, clarity of presentation, and scope of the contribution—among many other criteria of outstanding research.

Okay.

There you have it.

We are thrilled to start recognizing our very best.

I really hope that you will submit us your best work, to keep our pipeline bubbling with great contributions from our vibrant community.

And that you will also take a moment to nominate impactful TOCHI articles as they come to your attention over the course of the year; we accept nominations from anyone in the community. A brief statement of why you think the article should be considered for an award is appreciated but not required.

With the New Year upon us, I am really looking forward to 2016.

And I hope that you are too.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Hopefully by now I have whet your appetite for all of these exciting new developments at TOCHI.

And the main course will follow shortly:

The very first TOCHI Editor's Spotlight, not to mention all the great articles in Issue 23:1, will pick up as soon as I leave off.

So, like a lecturer in the unenviable position of standing between his audience and a big juicy hamburger for lunch (or perhaps a delicious black bean burger if you lean towards the vegan predilection), let me wrap this up as quickly possible.

My hope and expectation is that these, and other initiatives that are in the works, will extend TOCHI's reach as a vibrant and exciting forum.

A place that always showcases the latest and most rigorously vetted developments in the field.

And whose impact persists far into the future.

To keep up with the latest, follow @acmtochi on Twitter.
And be sure to check out our News page (http://tochi.acm.org/news) where you can be the first to hear about our Editor's Spotlight articles, calls for special issues, and all the latest developments at the journal.

Ken Hinckley

Editor-in-Chief