

## Embracing Tedium

A couple years ago, there was a commercial for a consulting company showing how *not* to deliver valuable services. An employee was showing a manager the new corporate website and the manager asked about each of the missing features. The employee's response was an incredulous "But it has a spinning logo!"

Sometimes we get caught up in using the latest and greatest technologies. Don't get me wrong, I am considered an 'early adopter' by most people who know me. I'm always on the lookout for new gadgets and software to see how I can use them. Too often, our excitement of using the latest high-tech tools gets in the way of delivering dependable and useful products.

One example of a misuse of a new technology at Flagstar happened about three years ago. We at Flagstar had contracted a company to 'give the homepage to the corporate website some movement and a sense of action.' The end result was a beautiful design that made an extremely unusable interface. There were two versions of the enhancement, one HTML and one Flash.

The HTML version was a series of approximately 30 images that filled the screen and only looked right if you had your browser set at 800x600 resolution. Also, it took nearly 60 seconds to download over a dialup modem. Think about having to count to 60 each time you wanted to open the main page of a website... yikes! The Flash version wasn't any better; you couldn't see the items in the sub-menu unless you put your mouse over each main menu option. Worse yet, depending on which main option you chose, the sub-menu opened either above, below or on the opposite end of the screen so that it would all fit. The list of problems doesn't end there. Each time your mouse moved over a hotspot, a different sound would play (Whoosh, beep, boink, etc.). Using sound isn't the problem, but it didn't provide any value beyond just being 'cool.' To top it all off, it would have taken over 90 seconds for this to completely load over a dialup connection. As a point of reference, most websites are designed to load in 5-15 seconds.

The most unappealing aspect (a.k.a. tedium) of development is making sure the system works as intended. This includes doing code reviews, requirements reviews, production acceptance approvals, unit testing, functional testing, usability testing, load testing, etc. Very few developers look forward to these parts of the process and generally do only what is necessary. However, a wise man once said, "Good is the enemy of great."

So what's the point? We need to stay competitive and show that we're technologically savvy and at the same time we need to build dependable and useful systems, i.e. 'Embrace Tedium'. But how is this done? Embrace the activities that result in dependable and useful systems (reviews and testing). Allow ourselves to use new technologies without forgetting the lessons we learned (reviews and testing) when we were using the old technologies. Realize that we can always do better and strive to close the gap between good and best.

