

Observing Everyday Things Report

Analysis of automatic sinks at Starbucks restroom

Description of Item:

At my workplace our public restrooms feature two automatic faucets designed to make things easier and keep things sanitary. In theory they are a great idea because there are no handles to touch and no wasted water. But in reality these sinks are making things more confusing than useful. I have had so many customers waving their hands or moving from sink to sink out of confusion.

Affordance:

The sink's affordance seems really simple, it's clearly for washing hands and the shape of the faucet does not really show where the water comes out. The problem is it does not really tell you how to make the water come out. With a regular handle you can turn it and the water comes right out, with an automatic one there is no clear action to take. After a while people just start guessing.

Signifiers:

The signifiers should help the customer know what to do but they are missing. There is no visible sensor or symbol showing where to put your hands. There are little blue lights but I feel like those do not really help you. Without those little cues customers end up moving their hands all over the place.

Feedback:

The feedback is not very great, when the faucet isn't working you have no idea why. You don't know if the sensor is broken or if your hands are in the wrong spot. The sink doesn't tell you anything, it's just there, maybe a small sound or blinking of the light would make a difference.

Mapping:

The mapping between what people do and what actually happens is weak. With a regular faucet you turn the handle and you get water, it's a direct connection. The automatic sinks don't have the same logic, moving your hands under the faucet should make the water come out but it doesn't. This makes the faucet so unreliable.

Conceptual Model:

Because it's not very reliable people develop a bad conceptual model of the sink. Some people assume it might be broken and others think only one of the sinks work or they give up. The design doesn't really bring confidence to the user.

Suggestions for Improvement:

These sinks need to be redesigned with a human centered design. Two things that would really help would be having the light blink when the water is coming out and a small light place where the hands need to be for the sensor to go off. Having these two features would make the process effortless, instead of having the customer confused they will have a quick and smooth experience that matches the Starbucks experience.

Figure 1. Automatic sink at Starbucks restroom

