# Usability is "Mission Critical" for Syncrude Canada Ltd.

Syncrude Canada Ltd. is the world's largest producer of crude oil from oil sands and the largest single-source producer in Canada. Syncrude currently produces about a quarter of a million barrels a day of Syncrude Sweet Blend.

Syncrude's Goal Syncrude developed *mySyncrude.com* as an Intranet platform for managing Syncrude's information assets. It was to be a primary entry point and interface with all applications and information that users needed to perform their day-to-day work. Because most would be "casual users" such as field technicians, it had to be easy to learn, and information had to be easy to access. Syncrude contracted Human Factors International (HFI) to help out.

HFI's Process HFI and Syncrude took a two-prong approach: 1) user-centered design and testing, and 2) standards for future development. The design and testing phase pointed out navigation and usage issues, which were addressed before roll-out. Then, as part of the process of adding content to the Intranet, Syncrude developers had to incorporate usability principles and standards. Usability was "institutionalized" into the design process. This was achieved with a combination of usability training, consulting, and HFI's Usability Central (UC) Gold product.
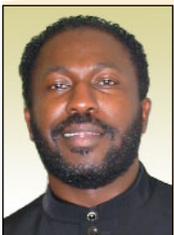
"In terms of system projects, this has probably been one of the more successful projects in our organization. And it has been well received.

Now we have the president of our company using this tool, right down to the individuals on the shop floor and in the field. It's very gratifying for us to know that we have a tool that is actually being used—from the casual user to the expert user."

—Jeff Thompson
Corporate Presentation Layer
Business Lead
Syncrude Canada Ltd.

Benefits and measures of success:

User acceptance One of the most telling measures of success was the immediate acceptance of *mySyncrude.com*.

Less time spent in training It used to take up to a day to train people on similar software tools. Now most users are up and running within 10 to 15 minutes. Even inexperienced users take less than an hour to get oriented.

Dramatic improvement in productivity Syncrude found that team leaders are now able to put together their monthly reports in less than 15 minutes, compared with the one to two hours it used to take. Field workers are able to find information they need in minutes and get back to work without wasting time looking for crucial data.

More time to focus on content and user needs Because usability issues were addressed before roll-out of the Intranet, energy can now be spent on providing richer, more useful content rather than on user support.

Widespread use of software tools A pleasant surprise for project leaders was that the tools available on *mySyncrude.com* were used throughout the company, from the president to the technicians in the field, from casual to expert users.

Developers thinking more like users Syncrude developers and designers are now armed with clear usability principles and standards, making it easier to incorporate user-centered design principles into their projects. Usability is becoming part of the corporate culture and provides an added competitive advantage.

For more information and free guidelines on measuring the ROI of usability, call HFI at 1–800–242–4480, or visit our Web site at www.humanfactors.com