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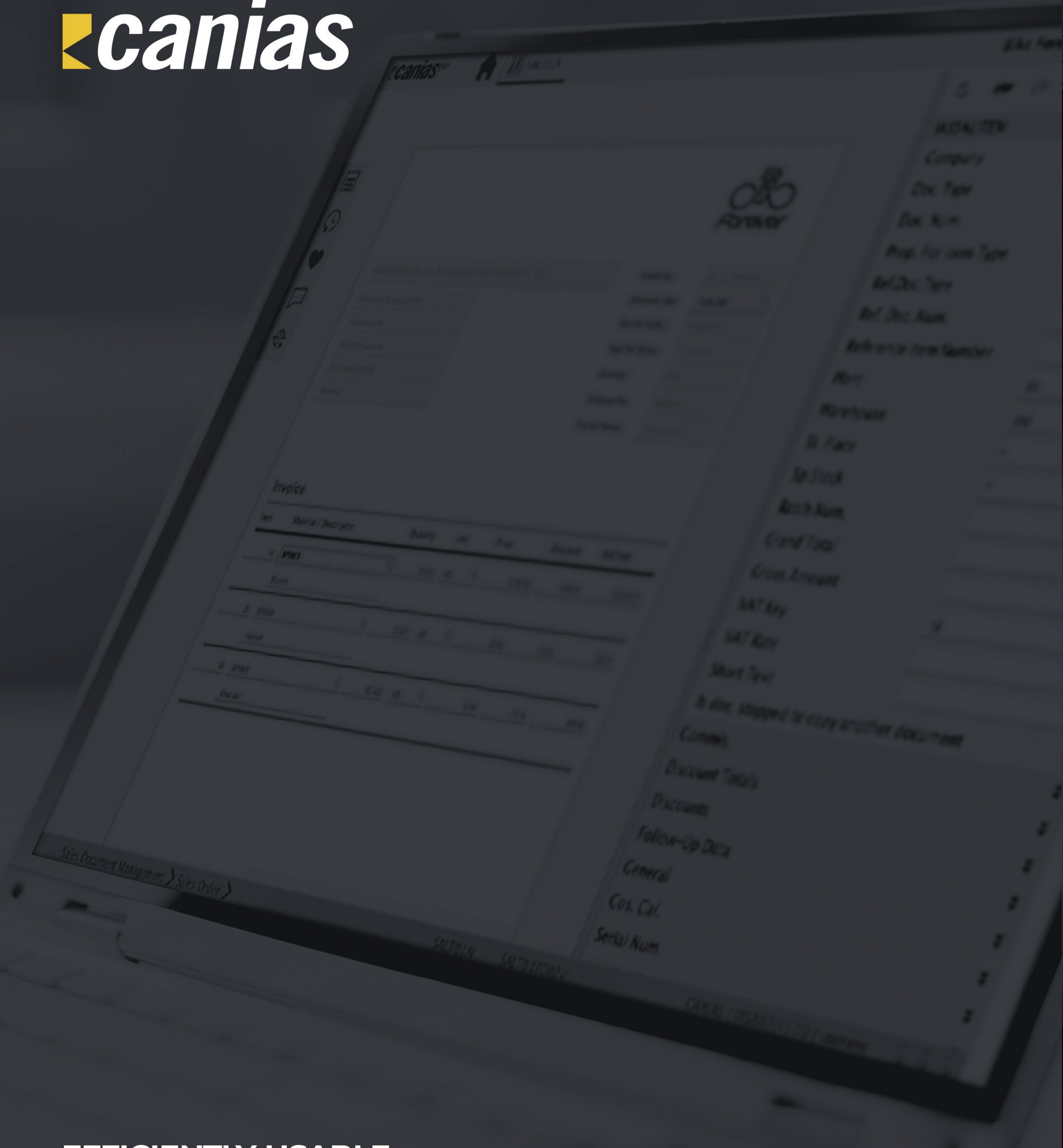

EFFICIENTLY USABLE

USER-FRIENDLY ERP SOLUTIONS

EFFICIENT USE AND DEPLOYMENT OF AN ERP SOLUTION.

What makes an ERP solution user-friendly?

A tent with perfect performance characteristics - cold-resistant to - 90°C, storm-proof and equipped with a lotus effect and then this: You want to set up your new acquisition for the first time and the instructions are written in characters unknown to you, two hours and three helpers later you realize that although the lowest temperatures would not be an issue, but the persistent heat would be and finally still stumble over the much too long - after all, particularly storm-proof - pegs. How much would you now give for a tent that exactly meets your individual needs and not those of the North Pole?

As usability is an important sales argument for products that have to be successful on the market, the corresponding customer benefits are increasingly becoming the focus of product development. This applies also to the software area. Intuitive usability, functionality that meets the requirements, and smooth execution of the program are decisive factors in deciding whether or not to use a software. Who hasn‘t been on the verge of throwing their laptop out of the window because nothing worked as it should? Where is it then, the software with which we can achieve our goal in just a few clicks, work more efficiently and process a wider range of work?

User-friendliness is an essential requirement

Especially for ERP systems, whose goal is to simplify business processes and make them more transparent, usability plays a central role in their acceptance by users in practical use. The systems must be as user-friendly as possible, as studies and surveys of companies have shown: After „flexible and efficient processes“ and a „comprehensive company overview,“ „user-friendliness“ is repeatedly listed as one of the most essential requirements for ERP systems.

Involving users in the decision-making process not only creates acceptance it also helps to improve usability.

The focus is on the user

To check an ERP system for its user-friendliness and develop it accordingly, one can particularly benefit from the knowledge of the employees, because they know best what is required at their workplace and what is dispensable. An ERP solution is perceived as user-friendly if topics such as effectiveness, efficiency, controllability, and customizability are considered.

Users of an ERP system want an individual and easy-to-understand user interface as well as intuitive manageability of the system. Day-to-day business should be able to be carried out efficiently and easily, and the system should be a help to the user in doing so. This is also important for companies when implementing a new ERP software: Employees should be able to work quickly with the new system, thus creating acceptance for the system. Consequently, the topic of usability is a relevant point when purchasing a new ERP system. A user-friendly interface and manageability are fundamental advantages that can save time and costs.

Criteria for a user-friendly ERP solution

But which criteria specifically leads to higher perceived usability of ERP systems? With the evaluation of customer surveys, 12 main starting points can be derived that increase the perceived usability:

1. Simple structure of the software

This primarily refers to test tables and the interrelationships of the modules. The more transparent and thus comprehensible the structure of the software appears, the easier it is for the user to learn and understand the processes in the software.

2. Easy learnability of the software

As mentioned in the first point, a user-friendly interface and handling makes it possible to learn the software more quickly. This is important so that the user feels secure and is encouraged to try it out. Descriptive texts for certain functions, for example, can also support this. If the user feels well trained, he can better integrate his wishes and habits into the system.

3. Surface can be customized individually

Due to the individual adaptability of masks or the user interface, each user can independently compile the data that is relevant for him. For example, the business unit or department can predefine a mask and the user can still customize it in terms of functionality that is suitable for the completion of the respective tasks. This will improve the effectiveness of work.

4. Individual menu

It is also considered positive if the user can individually adapt the menu to the areas of responsibility. By using a self-defined menu, each user can regulate the control of his ERP system and control the daily business in the most useful way. This supports employees in performing the respective tasks efficiently - i.e. with the best possible use of time.

5. User-specific configuration

User-specific configuration options help control an ERP system efficiently. This can include, for example, the possibility of assigning individual shortcuts. This means that every user can access the desired area with shortcuts or key combinations.

6. Workstation-independent personalization

With workstation-independent personalization, users of the ERP system can work with their personal settings at any workstation. This enables flexible and location-independent work.

7. Self-explanatory system

The ERP system should be structured in such a way that it can be operated without much training - at best intuitively. It is perceived positively, for example, if the operation follows a uniform principle and, in the best case, also complies with general conventions, so that a previously learned behavior pattern can be reused. Also, the masks should not be filled with too much information. The visual design of an application, such as the grouping of elements or the deliberate use of colors to make connections recognizable, helps to ensure that information and components are easy to perceive and read.

8.

Direct buttons and cross jumps between individual sub-areas

Especially to design entire processes efficiently, it is important to enable cross jumps between modules and to be able to jump to the relevant area via direct buttons. Jumping between business areas is made possible by integrating all modules. In this way, a continuous process can be mapped.

9.

Search functions

A good search function can make work much easier, especially when there is a high density of information within the system. The search function is perceived as particularly positive if it can be used throughout the entire system (i.e. across all modules) and if the search results are highly accurate.

10.

Copy functions (copy/paste)

As already mentioned in point 7, the usability of common methods increases work efficiency and enhances usability. A concrete example here is the copy/paste function. With the common copy function, data can be duplicated easily and quickly - for example, with ctrl+c and ctrl+v - and data does not have to be transferred manually.

11.

Short click paths

In the optimal case, the necessary work steps can be carried out with as few clicks as possible, to perform especially recurring tasks of daily business as quickly and easily as possible. It is therefore advantageous if the objects, functions, and options relevant to the user are clearly visible in the interface so that the target can be reached quickly.

12.

Opening different input screens at the same time.

It is often necessary to work in different input screens. This should be possible in a clear and structu-red interface. It should also be possible to open a input screens several times so that data can be compared or copied, for example.

How can the perceived usability be maintained in long term?

If the ERP system conveys security and reliability, people like to use it and find it useful. A positive user experience results from a good emotional experience during use. The above points can be understood as a kind of checklist, but they are not exhaustive. This is because perceived usability is also subject to constant change and must be regularly compared with current user needs. This can be done, for example, by user testing. Topics that should be given special con-sideration can be derived from typical usability problems in ERP systems that are known from surveys. These include the following points:

complexity, without possibilities for simplification or individualization

lack of transparency in the presentation of data and (interim) results

lack of availability of relevant data

routine actions are not mapped as such

low adaptability and little flexible assistance

missing or not recognizable routines and non-transparent workflows

missing assistance

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Usability and a look into the future

One trend that will increasingly come into focus in the area of usability in the future is the topic of cloud ERP. This is very much in line with the desire for mobility and networking. Tablets and smartphones will then be increasingly used to enable the desired flexibility. If data can be entered effortlessly on devices with comparatively small displays, adjustments to the interface will be necessary. Solution approaches can already be seen, when websites have equally good usability on desktop and smartphone. With an ERP provider at your side who is sensitive to the issue of usability and a system that allows dynamic adaptation of the requirements, you have the best prerequisites for achieving a high level of acceptance for the software used among your employees and consequently the desired improvement of efficiency.

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