

APPENDIX E
“WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO DO?” SCREENS

I leave it to the reader to decide how much money he or she believes the following idea — derived from the zero-search-time concept — might be worth to the person or company that implements it. I will introduce the idea with two familiar pieces of technology.

Imagine that, when you rented a car, there was a thin, rectangular, flip-up panel measuring, say, 6 by 9 inches, on top of the dashboard, which, when you flipped it up, had the following on its screen:

What would you like to do?

- Something involving the seats
- Something involving the lights
- Something involving the turn signals
- Something involving the radio
- Something involving the doors
- Something involving the gas tank
- Something involving the windows
- Something involving the windshield wipers
- Something involving the temperature control (heat or air-conditioning)
- Something involving the tires
- Something involving the engine
- Something involving the no. of miles traveled
- Call for help from the rental car company’s service organization

You pressed the bullet corresponding to what you wanted to do and got either a sequence of steps, with appropriate illustrations, for how to do it, or else a further list of tasks that narrowed down your original choice. For example, if you pressed the bullet for “Something involving the radio”, the following might appear on the screen:

What would you like to do?

- Turn the radio on
- Set the band to FM
- Set the band to AM
- Find a station by moving up or down continuously through the frequencies
- Find a station by moving from station to station
- Find a station by call letters

- Raise or lower the volume
- Adjust the bass or treble
- Find out the call letters of the station currently playing
- Turn the radio off

The process would then repeat: you pressed the bullet corresponding to what you wanted to do and got either a sequence of steps, with appropriate illustrations, for how to do it, or else a further list of tasks that narrowed down your current choice.

Given a choice among rental cars that were in other respects equal, which would you choose: the one with the above flip-up panel, or the one that required you to try to ask the garage attendant everything you might need to know on your week-long trip and to memorize what he said?

A similar panel could exist for VCRs and DVD players. In the case of a DVD player, the initial screen might be:

What would you like to do?

- Play a DVD
- Make a selection from the various offerings on a DVD
- Make the DVD stop at the current image
- Start the DVD after it has been stopped at the current image
- Back up or go forward from the image at which the DVD player is stopped
- Stop the DVD player
- Remove a DVD from the player

Again I ask: given a choice between two DVD players equal in all other respects, which would you choose: the one with the flip-up panel, or the one without?

Of course, flip-up panels are not the only way to implement the idea. It can be implemented on paper or plastic-coated sheets bound together in the upper-left corner, or in a manual, although experience strongly suggests that sheets and manuals are soon lost or misplaced.