

Hoschka

## Computers As Assistants

A New Generation of Support Systems

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Computer systems based on the notion of the computer as assistant have recently become the focus of intense interest. The expanding role of the computer in everyday life and the growing number of untrained users make it necessary to think about new ways of dividing labor between humans and machines. Future systems must take on more tasks and perform them more competently and autonomously than existing systems. If they are to be adequately flexible and responsive to complexity, they cannot automate their performance completely. The aim of designers should be to create computer systems with capabilities similar to those of good assistants in the real world. Effective assistance has many characteristics. An assistant is expected to be competent in some domains of expertise, to know the limits of his/her knowledge, to be able to process inexact instructions from clients, to adjust to and learn from them, to explain his/her behavior and suggestions, and to support clients in communication and cooperation with other people. This book believes that such capabilities can be built into computer systems. To that end, the chapter contributors discuss the concepts and methods--particularly from the fields of artificial intelligence and computer-supported cooperative work (CSCW)--that they have drawn from to develop successful system prototypes. They present several of these prototypes including assistants for graphics design, knowledge discovery in data bases, coordination support, organizational memory, user interface design, and knowledge base construction. As such, this volume helps map out the future for all those involved in computer systems design.



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