2/19/2017

UX Review

Microsoft Tips App

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Introduction

The following is a review of the user experience of the Microsoft Tips App to highlight the relevant pros and cons of the user experience and to introduce new ideas for improvement for the app.

It is important to keep in mind the end goal of the Microsoft Tips team while conducting the UX Review. As stated in the mission of the WDG Design and Content team[1], **the goal is to increase customer's usage and satisfaction** with Microsoft Windows, applications, and devices. It is also important to identify the target users of the app to generate a meaningful and relevant review. Based on the written description of the app on the Microsoft app store[2], target users are both **experienced** and **novice Windows users**.

There are several evaluation methods that can be utilized when conducting a UX review. The Heuristic review focuses on evaluating systems against different guidelines. The scenario based review focuses on evaluating systems against different user scenarios. To paint a complete picture of the Microsoft Tips app, both types of reviews are being used in this document.

Throughout the Microsoft Tips UX review there will be references to two other popular operating systems; macOS and Ubuntu Linux. It is important to research and review competing models to develop a comprehensive picture of the various Tips Apps available to users. This practice enhances the UX Review and identifies areas of achievement and opportunities for improvement. To mimic the macOS and Ubuntu Linux user experience, the reviewer installed the latest version of Ubuntu on a virtual box and used an updated version of macOS on a Mac machine. It was discovered that macOS uses "Help Viewer" and Ubuntu uses "Ubuntu Desktop Guide" to provide tips and guidance to their users.

Note: It can often be challenging to view large diagrams inside text documents. Therefore, a higher resolution version of large diagrams within this document will be shared in the appendix.

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[1] WDG Design and Content Team mission statement: "*to deliver a modern content experiences that engage customers to **increase their usage** and **satisfaction** with Windows, applications (Edge, Paint 3D, Maps, etc.) and devices (Surface, Xbox, HoloLens, etc.)*"
[2] Tips app description:*" …If you're **new to Window**, this app will get you up and running like a pro in no time. And even if you've been **using Windows forever**, the app will guide you to new and updated features."*

Scenario Based Review

The user scenarios utilized in this review are general and relevant to both experienced and novice Windows users. These scenarios are driven by the following user needs:

a. Learn about new features in the latest update to the OS
b. Learn more about a specific new feature that interests the user
c. Learn about a new hardware that is still new to the user
d. Learn how to perform a specific task while using an OS native app

The following section will discuss the user flow within each of these scenarios.

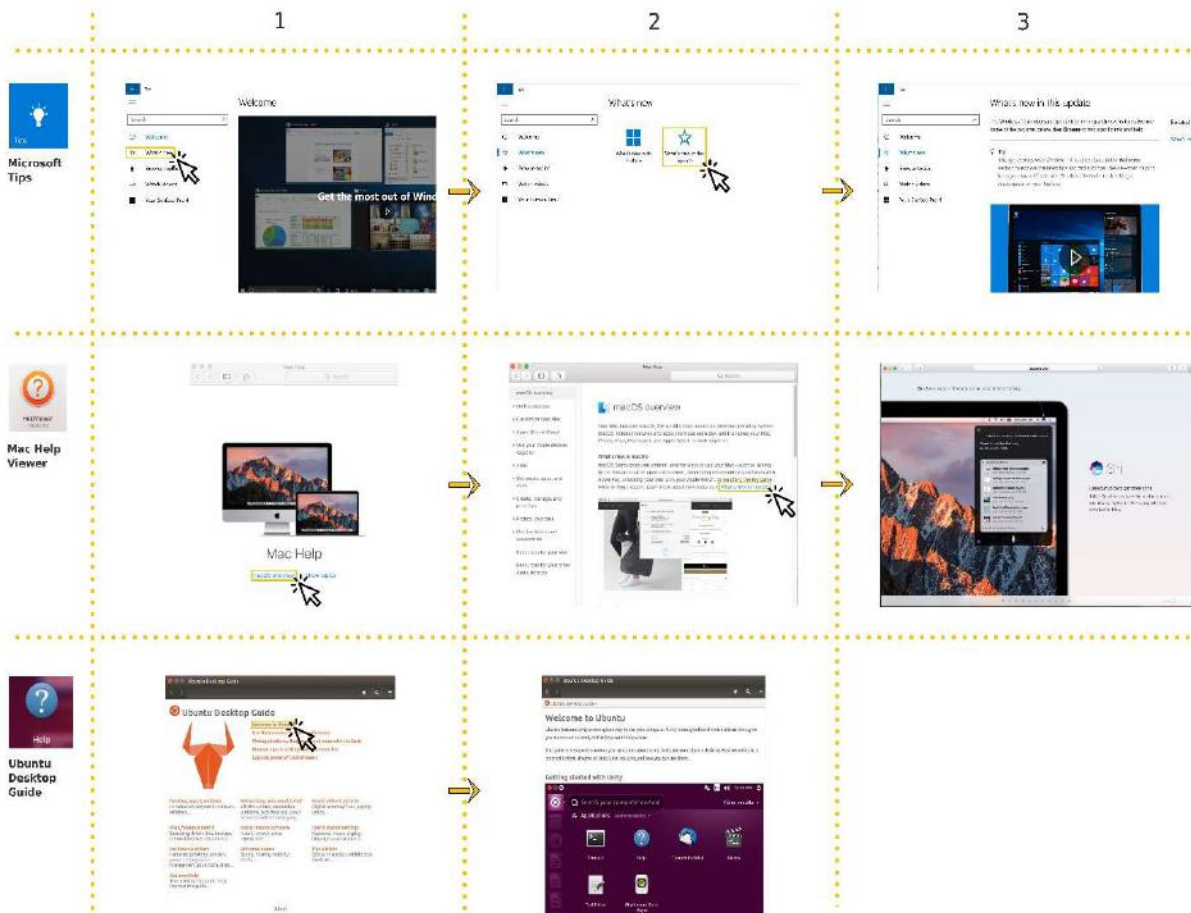## I. Learn about new features in the latest update to the OS

Figure 1: Learn about new features in the latest update to the OS

The following points were discovered by comparing the user flow within the three apps:

- It is relatively easy to find the three apps using the OS search feature. However, users need to know that these apps exist and that they provide a summary about new features. A potential missed opportunity is that some users might not know that these apps exist. For example, even though the reviewer was not new to Windows, Mac OS, or Ubuntu, he was unaware of the native app that provides a summary of new features!

- Once users open the Microsoft Tips app or the Mac Help Viewer it becomes straight forward to navigate to the section that highlights new features. On the Microsoft Tips app, users can get to "what's new in this update" after two steps; users need to first click on "what's new" in the left navigation, then click on "what's new in this update". On the other hand, users can get to "what's new in macOS" in only one step on Mac Help Viewer; the user just needs to click on "macOS overview."

- Ubuntu Desktop Guide does not make it easy for users to view new features. It does not provide a separate section for new features and it groups old and new features together under "Welcome to Ubuntu."

- It is important to note that only the Microsoft Tips app provides interactive content[3] inside the app. The Mac Help Viewer provides links to interactive content on the web. While the Mac Help Viewer app benefits from the freedom that the web provides in terms of user interaction utilizing CSS and JavaScript, the Microsoft Tips app does not require users to leave the app to view this type of content. It is important to keep in mind the edge scenario of when **a user does not have an internet connection**.

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[3] *Interactive Content: Videos and animated images (GIF.)*

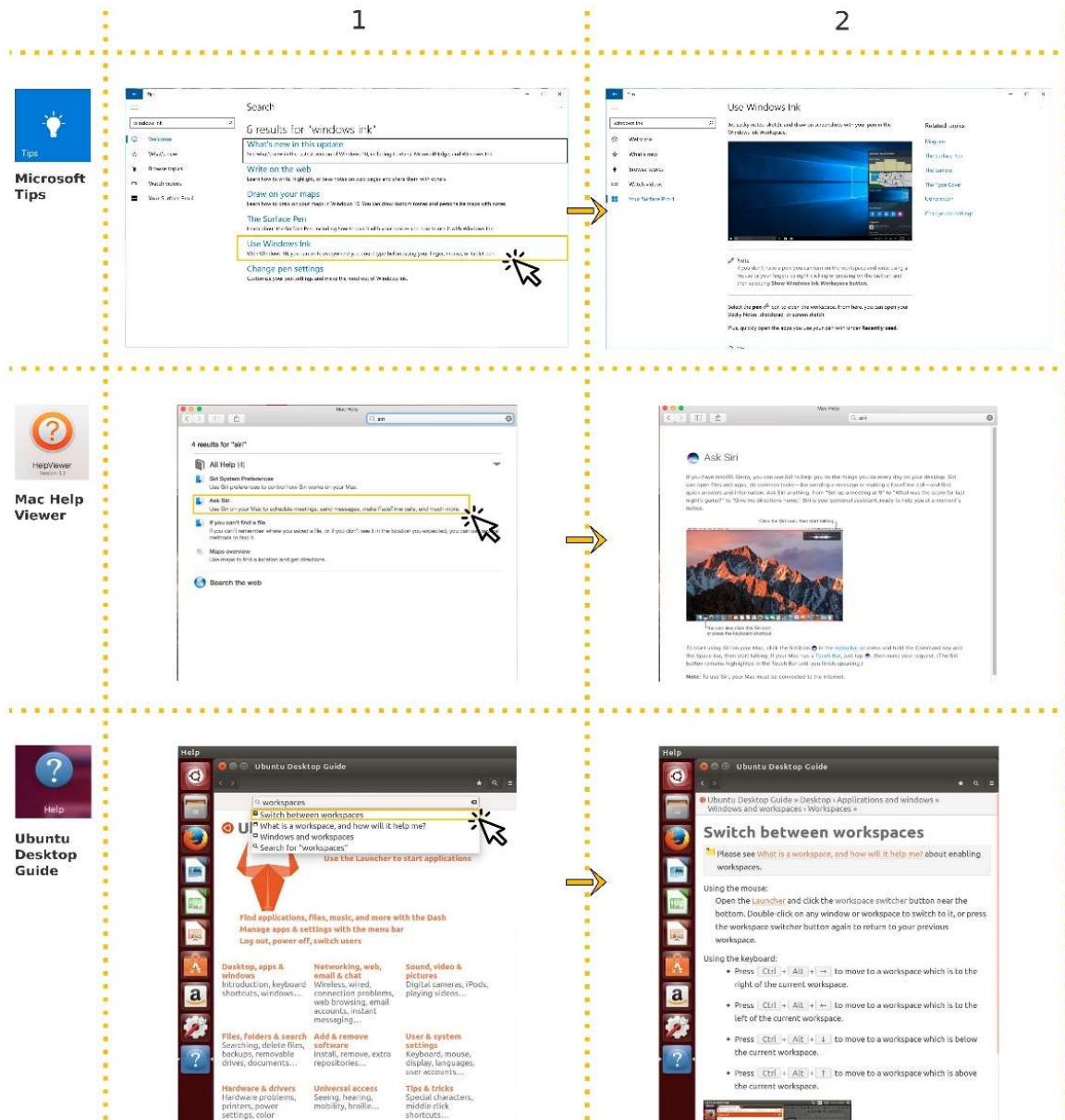II.   Learn more about a specific new feature that interests the user

Figure 2: Learn more about a specific new feature that interests the user

This scenario tests the search functionality on each of the three apps. By searching for several new features on each platform by name and by description I learned the following:

- On the Windows Tips app, when searching for a new feature by name (i.e. Windows Ink), the search results do not get sorted based on relevant topics. In this case, it was reasonable to expect to see the "Use Windows Ink" topic as the first item in the list, but instead it was the fifth

item listed. In contrast, neither Mac Help Viewer nor Ubuntu Desktop Guide demonstrated this issue when using the search function.
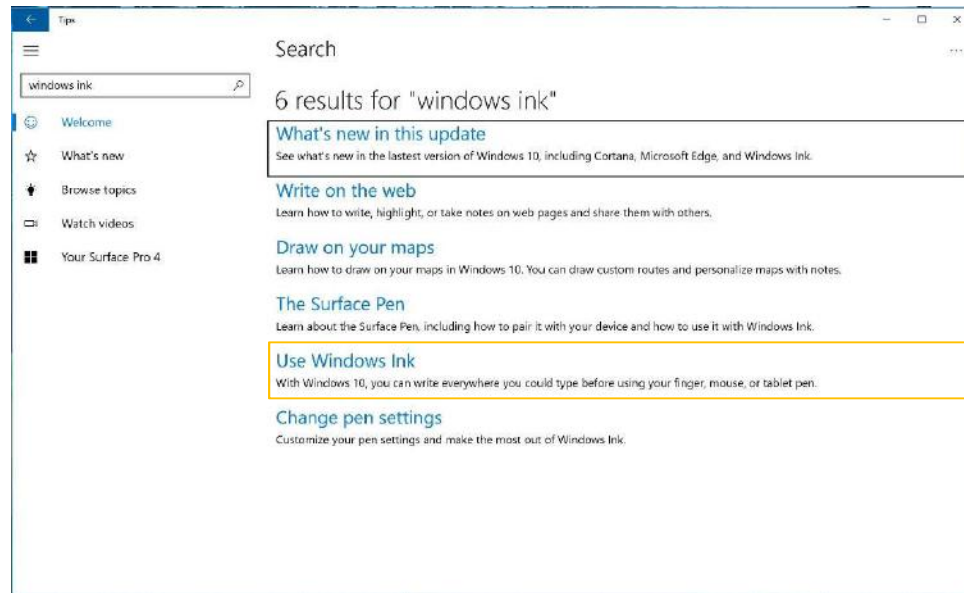

Figure 3: Searching for "Windows Ink" on the Windows Tips app

- The Windows Tips app has better functionality when searching for new features by description. As seen in Figure 4, searching for "assistant" returns results that contain "Cortana".
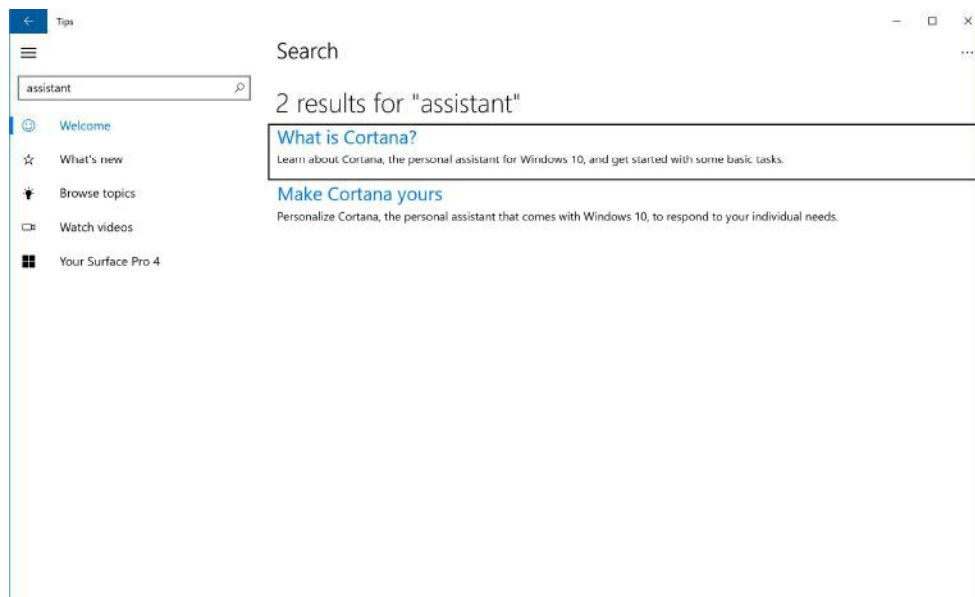

Figure 4: Figure 5: Searching for the word "assistant" on the Windows Tips app

III.   Learn about a new hardware that is still new to the user

Both the Mac Help Viewer and the Microsoft Tips have a section that is focused on hardware. While this section is general on the Mac Help Viewer, it is device specific on the Microsoft Tips app. The Microsoft Tips app was able to recognize the device type that was being used, a Surface Pro 4. It is unclear if the Microsoft Tips app can recognize all different types of devices in the market or not, but it was a nice feature when using the Surface Pro 4. Giving device specific tips is important for Windows users where devices may have many differentiating factors.
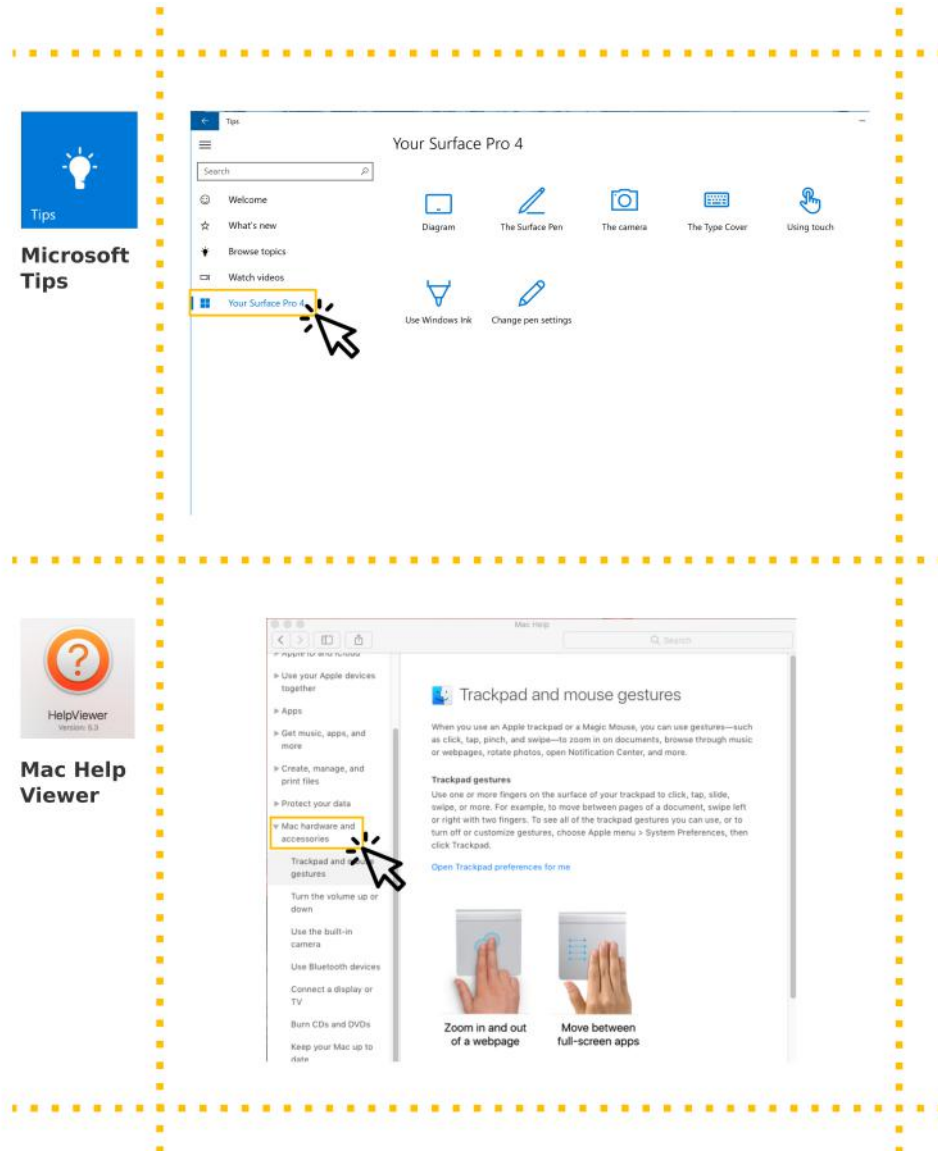

Figure 6: Learn about a new hardware that is still new to the user

IV. Learn how to perform a specific task while using an OS native app

This scenario is important because it is how users want to use a tips app most of the time. A user is using an app and suddenly they need help! This scenario will test the integration level between the three Tips apps and other apps in their corresponding operating systems.
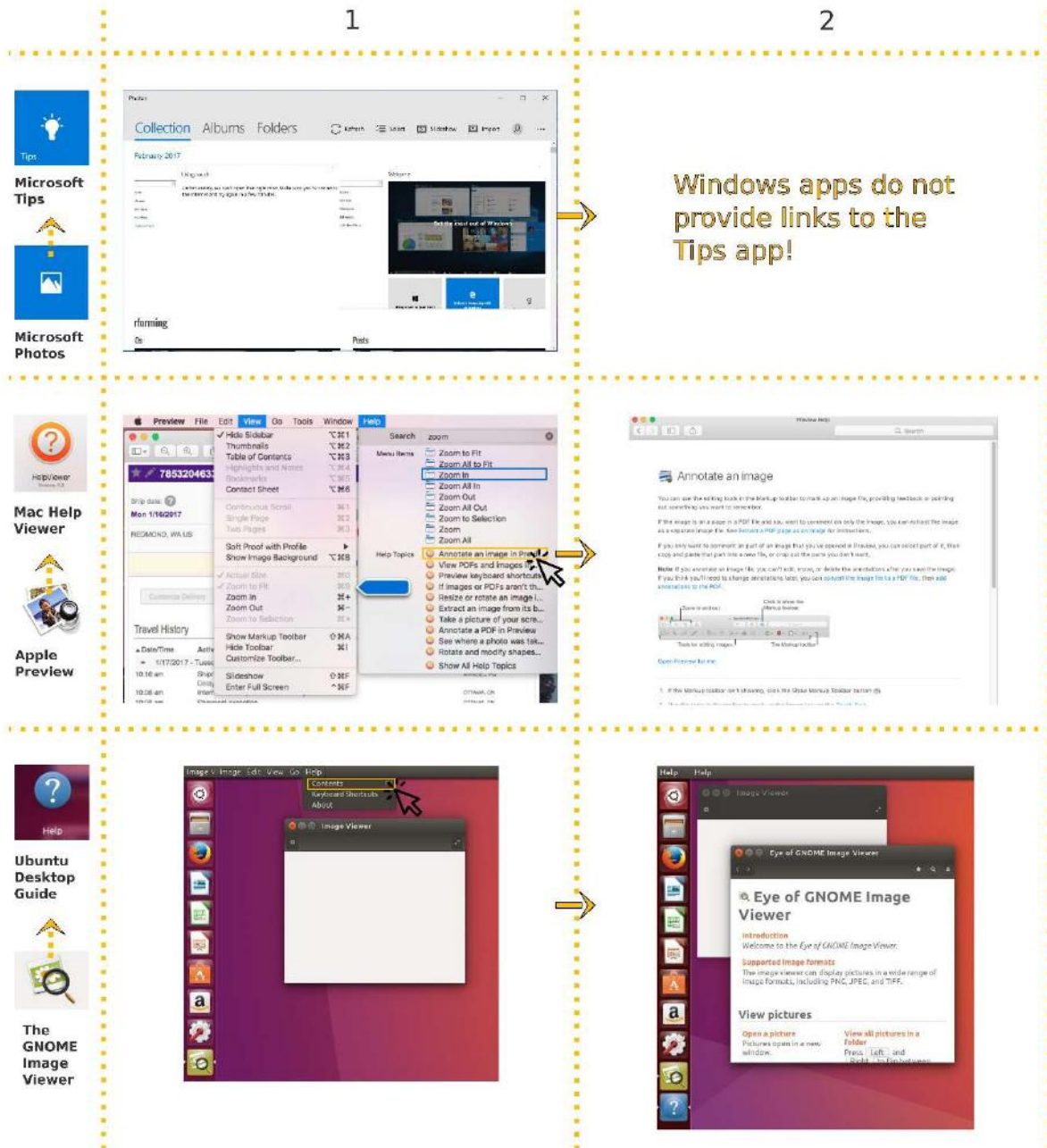

Figure 7: Learn how to perform a specific task while using an OS native app

As seen in the diagrams native apps on both Ubuntu and macOS allow users to utilize the Ubuntu Desktop Guide and the Mac Help Viewer by providing links in their help menus. On the other hand, native apps on Windows do not provide links to the Tips app. This means that every time users need to learn something about the app that they are using they have to manually open the Tips app, assuming first that they know the Tips app exists.

macOS provides the best user experience in this scenario by allowing users to search for content right from native apps on the OS. For example; by typing in the phrase "zoom," users get a comprehensive search results categorized in menu items and help topics items. While hovering over an item in the menu items section points the user to the place of the item in the app's menu, clicking on an item in the help topics section navigates the user to the right page on the Mac Help Viewer.

Heuristic Based Review:

The 45 best practice usability principles, recommended in the guide to carrying out usability reviews[4], was implemented in providing the following heuristic review of the Microsoft Tips app. These best practices were preferred when reviewing this app to the more general Nielsen's 10 usability heuristics. As seen in the following chart developed specifically for this UX review, only items that are applicable to the Microsoft Tips App are being utilized in the review; 33 principles sub-categorized under eight heuristic review criteria.
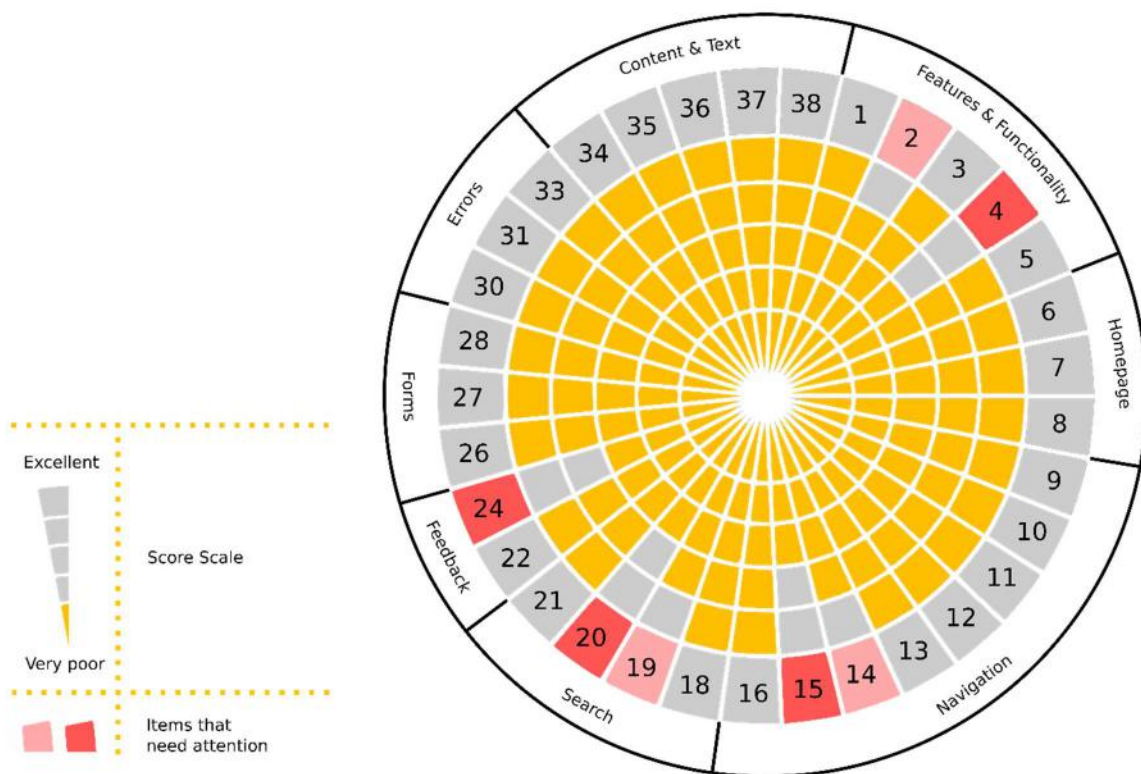

Figure 8: Heuristic review on the Microsoft Tips App

In this exercise, the Microsoft Tips App scored excellent (5 out of 5) on 26 items in total. The app got full marks on all items under the following categories:

- Homepage
- Forms
- Errors
- Content & Text

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[4] http://www.uxforthemasses.com/usability-reviews/

Microsoft Tips UX Review

The following section will focus on the seven items that did not achieve an excellent score. For more information on all the heuristic principles used in the review, please refer to the included usability-review-template document.

Features & Functionality

1. Item #2 - Features and functionality support users desired workflows[5]

   The app does not have the level of operating system integration required to provide users the help they need when and where they need it. Users must manually launch the app every time they want to learn about a feature or access a tip. As outlined in the scenario review, both Ubuntu and MacOS demonstrate a better user experience for this functionality.

2. Item #4 - Users are adequately supported according to their level of expertise (i.e. short cuts for expert users, help and instructions for novice users).

   The current version of the app focuses more on novice users and provides less value and/or useful information to more advanced users. For example, the app does not have any information about how users can hibernate[6] their Windows 10.

Navigation

3. Item #14 - Browser standard functions (i.e. 'back', 'forward', 'bookmark') are supported.

   The Microsoft Tips App has a 'back' button but not a 'forward' button, which is not important to the user in this case. However, a 'bookmark' feature would be very useful to users and is currently not available.

4. Item #15 - The current location is clearly indicated (i.e. breadcrumb, highlighted menu item).

   Current users can lose their location in the "Browse topics" section. When browsing to "Add features with extensions" the app does not show this section as located under "Microsoft Edge".

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[5] *The site or application should support or at least be compatible with the way that users wish to work. For example, users might want to be able to carry out bulk transactions or be able to save and return to their work.*
[6] http://www.pcworld.com/article/3078533/windows/how-to-add-a-hibernate-option-to-the-windows-10-start-menu.html

Search

5. Item #19 - The search interface is appropriate to meet user goals (i.e. multi-parameter, prioritized results, filtering search results).

   As explained in the second scenario of the scenario review (Item II), the Microsoft Tips app search results do not get sorted based on relevant topics when searching for features by name.

6. Item #20 - The search facility deals well with common searches (i.e. showing most popular results), misspellings and abbreviations.

   The Microsoft Tips app is very sensitive to misspellings and it does not allow users to search for features that are named differently on other platforms. (i.e. searching for "Siri" should bring up search results that contain "Cortana"). This will not only help users who are switching from macOS, but also users who have other Apple devices such as iPhones, iPads, etc.

Feedback

7. Item #24 - Users can easily give feedback (e.g. via email or an online feedback/Contact Us form).

   It is easy to give feedback on content by answering "Was this helpful?" at the end of each topic. However, it is not possible to give general feedback about the app due to the following two points:

   - The Microsoft Tips app does not provide a form to capture general feedback
   - The Microsoft Tips app is not included in the list of apps for which users can give feedback on at the Windows Feedback Hub

Recommendations

Recommendations for the Microsoft Tips App team are listed under the following categories:

Better integration with Windows

1. The first-time users login to Windows after a feature update the Microsoft Tips app start automatically and loads the "what's new in this update" page. Doing this will not only make it convenient for users to learn about the update that they have just installed, but will also improve the visibility of the app and introduce the Tips app to users that were unaware of it before.

2. Allow users to utilize the Tips app from within native Windows apps. This should dramatically improve the user experience and provide access to the Tips app right when users need it most. The macOS demonstrates an excellent method that can be observed to gain insight and identify opportunities for improvement.

Improve the search feature

3. Search results should get sorted based on relevant topics when searching for new features by name.

4. When searching for functionalities named differently on other platforms, the search results should generate cross-platform results relevant to the initial search (i.e. "Siri → Cortana")

Content Strategy

5. Provide more content in general and include more useful information to advanced users.

Navigation

6. Improve how the users' location is indicated within the app

7. Consider adding a bookmark feature once more content has been added to the app. This will make it easier for users to quickly navigate to sections they use frequently.

Edge Cases

8. Consider making some of the main interactive items available to users offline for times when there is no internet available.

Feedback

9. Make it easy for users to give general feedback about the app.