Metaphors

Metaphor n. the application of a word or phrase to an object or concept which it does not literally denote, in order to suggest comparison with another object or concept, as in "A mighty fortress is our God."

(Weber's Dictionary)

No one likes reading manuals

It is efficient to employ an appropriate metaphor in which an aspect of the real world is used to symbolize and simplify an aspect of the application.
Map

physical or mental, is a very familiar metaphor.

Map

The Lincoln-Douglas Debates
Example of a map used in lieu of menus or buttons

Historylines

very useful but tricky to compress tons of data in a small screen

A good example of increasing information density

Beware!

Form beats function

Screen real estate sold cheap