Cabrillo College — Information Architecture — Guest Lecture Notes
Michael Barnes & Scott Robinson November 2, 21 & 22, 2000

Introductions

Interaction Exercise (Mike):

Class defines IA, we document terms, then group them – an IA exercise. Then we share our definition:

- **Architect** defined – the art and science of building (Merriam Webster's online)

- **Information** defined - Peter Drucker defines information as "data endowed with relevance and purpose."

- = **The art and science of building data endowed with relevance and purpose.**

- organization vs. grouping vs. hierarchy (relationship)

- **The house building analogy (Mike)**

Where do IAs work? How?

Definitions of Roles (Scott)
- **Information architect** – pure version is very relational and organizational focused on things such as *controlled vocabularies, indexing/searching strategies and structuring*, and taxonomy development. More of the information and library science approach.
- **Information designer/interaction designer**
- **Customer experience design** -
- **(Mike) Information Ecologists** – employs elements of multiple IA roles, skills, and; reference book.

Basic Skills (Mike):
- Ability to articulate and compromise; mediate.
- Understand **visual design** and **technical** tools, terminology, appropriateness of use, and liabilities.
- Marketing and Business Knowledge
- Consultative Skills, Presentation skills
- Conflict resolution skills
- Like long walks on the beach
- **Subjective** nature of discipline – hence the need for user testing **(Scott)**

The IA Process
Coffee – procrastination + fear = energy!

1. **Usability Audit**
   - **Business Rules/Heuristics** defined via interviews with customers, marketing/sales, other existing documentation, log analysis, all to define the business and customer-centric goals.

   - These are added to the "Jakobian Commandments" or **ten standard usability design heuristics** or rules of thumb. Give and take of these heuristics, sometimes dueling heuristics, i.e. there's always compromise. – **reconciliation** of both sets of rules.

   - Look for basic usability violations

   - Reconcile **perceived goals vs. intended goals** – when a client has a business goal vs. customers perceived goal of interaction choices and opportunities available. *Customers will be viewing the site from a different perspective than the business is aware of* - cryptic error messages, prompting for unwanted/solicited informational exchanges/interactions, product comparisons or sales interaction where internal business rules conflict (such as where/how products are shipped, global/language/culture considerations).

   - Audit and User testing are usually surprising to client. Help improve business goals, show perceived improvement (change/new is better)

   - **Audit can yield** – deliverable doc with major usability violations identified, ranking of severity, recommendations for improvements which may reference a site map we produce for visual effect (quiver.com sample site map).

1. **Customer Flow Diagrams**
   - Recommended Improved Customer Experience Flow Diagrams – Existing site map/customer experience flow compared to new flow (sample from insurance site)

1. **Content Map**
   - Or Ingredients list or content model – documentation of all page elements, their importance/hierarchy, and purpose. For designer, client, etc.

1. **Site Map**
   - Build out of high-level elements in to a large, typically tree, structure (sample from Imagesmith marketing material - Mike's project).

1. **Focus Group**
   - Not necessarily here in the process, mind you.
   - Proof of concept (about what people *say* they want, not what they *do*).
   - Prototype testing of popular concepts.

1. **Prototype**
   - A visual representation of **functionality, layout, flow, and navigation, content placement** - minimal design until it becomes a design comp.

- Wireframe, paper, faux functional (no design) HTML, experiential (with design incorporated) HTML prototypes.

1. **User Testing**
   - Analyst, administrator to coordinate test of an integrated concept and the User comprise one user test. We typically try and do five individuals per round of user testing, fix the problems which are identified (not all the details, but the major ones found consistently throughout most of the users), then do another round. See Jakob Nielsen's 5x5x5 iterative user testing article on useit.com. Film it for reporting.

1. **Implementation**
   - Merge with design then build/produce
   - Consultative and troubleshooting with team.

Other Elements & Issues

- Navigation Naming and **Labeling** models/conventions – Sinage!

- Page, File Naming, **meta data** and search related content/structure development
  - Indexing – i.e search optimization .

- Tech coordination and consultation.

Future outlook for IA as a profession/academic discipline:

- Wireless, PDA, various new and developing information devices, languages/OS, culture/demographics of users.

Books & Web Sites referenced in our lecture:

Designing Web Usability: The Practice of Simplicity **Jakob Nielsen**
http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/156205810X/qid=975291350/sr=1-1/107-8080711-0147757

Information Architecture **Lou Rosenfeld and Peter Morville, O'Reilly & Associates**
http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1565922824/o/qid=975291218/sr=2-1/107-8080711-0147757

Secrets of Successful Web Site: Project Management on the World Wide Web **David Siegel,**
http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1568303823/qid=975290639/sr=1-1/107-8080711-0147757

Web Navigation: Designing the User Experience **Jennifer Fleming, O'Reilly & Associates**
http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1565923510/qid=975291283/sr=1-1/107-8080711-0147757

Webworks: Navigation **Rockport Press**

http://www.useit.com — Jakob Nielsen's Web site, with lots of articles, comments and opinions

http://www.egroups.com/links/sc-ia — A continually growing list of links from a local IA group.