Seminar Objectives

- To develop an understanding of the relevance of information architecture for website design
- To explore some key concerns addressed in information architecture:
  - Site organisation
  - Navigation
  - User needs
- To look at some examples

Seminar Objectives

Some issues involved in website design

A host of questions need to be addressed when constructing websites, including:

- IT architecture
- HCI
- Information architecture

Defining information architecture

‘the design of organization, indexing, labelling and navigation systems to support browsing and searching throughout the web site’
(Rosenfeld & Morville 1998: 20)

‘the art and science of structuring and organizing information environments to help people effectively fulfil their information needs’
(Toub 2000: 2)

Information architecture — purpose

To address the organisation of information within a website:

- What individual pages contain (content)
- How information is sorted (classification)
- How pages are connected (structure)
- How users move around the site (navigation)

Information architecture — emergence

- A new profession that soared in the late nineties, and may not yet have recovered from the dot com crash
- Has come into its own with the growing complexity of website
- But the issues it addresses are longstanding
Comparing websites and books — components

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Books</th>
<th>Websites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Cover</td>
<td>• Main page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Title</td>
<td>• Navigation bar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Author</td>
<td>• Links</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Chapters</td>
<td>• Content pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sections</td>
<td>• Sitemap</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Pages</td>
<td>• Site index</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Page numbers</td>
<td>• Search</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Table of contents</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Index</td>
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</table>

Comparing websites and books — dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Books</th>
<th>Websites</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• ‘Two-dimensional pages presented in a linear, sequential order’</td>
<td>• ‘Multidimensional information space with hypertextual navigation’</td>
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<td>(Rosenfeld &amp; Morville 2000: 6)</td>
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</table>

Comparing websites and books — boundaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Books</th>
<th>Websites</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• ‘Tangible and finite with a clear beginning and ending’</td>
<td>• ‘Fairly intangible with fuzzy borders that ‘bleed’ into other sites’</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Rosenfeld &amp; Morville 2000: 6)</td>
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Evolution in website size and complexity

- Finding information was relatively simple when websites themselves were small
- Pages were typically static, and made of little beyond HTML code and image files
- By the late nineties, however, this had begun to change

Searching for information online

Rosenfeld & Morville (2002: 29) characterise the “‘too-simple’ model of information needs” as follows:
1. ‘User asks a question.’
2. ‘Something happens (i.e., searching or browsing).’
3. ‘User receives the answer.’
4. ‘Fin.’

Reality is more complex. Marcia Bates (1989) has likened it to ‘berry-picking’. Others talk of ‘pearl-growing’.

Chewing gum and walking at the same time

- Users may be seeking new information
- They may be seeking known information
- They may be exploring
- Websites need to support all these possibilities
How will you organise your content?

- Think about how you need to classify (sort/group/separate) the information you want to convey
- What sort of pathways do you need to put in place between webpages?

Only one pathway?

- Multiple pathways are possible in an electronic environment, even though traditional hierarchical classification systems find this distressful
- For example, what are some different ways of classifying recipes online (and so providing multiple pathways for users)?

Navigation

Website design needs to take user information seeking practices into account when constructing a site.

How will you ensure that users:
- Can find what they need to find?
- Can find what you want them to find?
- Retain their bearings within the site?

Appropriate use of navigation devices

- ‘provide sitewide context at all times’
- ‘provide descriptive text every place it may be needed’
- ‘judiciously employ navigation aids’ (links, buttons, navigation bars etc)
- ‘consistency, consistency, consistency’
  (Holmes 2002: 267, 278, 289)

IA design process

- Data gathering
- Modeling site
- Constructing site
  - Understanding users
  - Getting user feedback

Data gathering

- Let’s imagine we’ve been asked to construct a website for a university sports club
- We need to find out what activities the club undertakes, and which of these need to be publicised online
- We also need to find out what potential users want to learn from a club website
Understanding users

- Who are the users?
- Are their information needs and priorities identical to those of the website owners?
- How can we design websites so that users will use them?
- In our hypothetical case, is the site directed primarily at existing members, or potential new members?

Getting user feedback

- Test your site with ‘real users’
  - Observation
  - Card sorting
- Incorporate feedback into the design process
- Remember that one size does not fit all
  - Alternative pathways?

Modeling the site

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What information does the club want to convey?</th>
<th>What information are users seeking?</th>
</tr>
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One technique: user task analysis

- Model the steps that users must take in order to acquire information from the website
- Map ‘each step to a definable chunk of the content that you have decided needs to be on the Web site’

( Holmes 2002: 237)

Constructing the site

- Examine the relationships between the various ‘chunks’ of content that you have identified
- What kind of structure will you put in place?
- What system of classification will you adopt to integrate this content into a whole?

Next week

IT architecture

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References


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