Information Architecture:
Making Sense of Unstructured Content

Good interfaces are nice, good data is crucial
Is/Will IA be the most important part of your job?

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Information Architecture: Everyone Has One

1. Do you know what yours is?
2. How good is it?
3. How do you use it?
Interfaces Naturally Flow from a Well Structured Data Set

1. Know your content.
2. Know your users.
3. Metadata is king.
4. Test regularly.
5. Google may be your most important user.
Case Studies

‣ Content Management Systems
  ‣ What you, as an IA, need to ask of your CMS

‣ Recipes
  ‣ Starting with the content, building the structure

‣ Animals
  ‣ Building the structure, finding some content
Information Architecture
as Expressed in
Content Management Systems
IA and CMS

- Don’t just think tactically
  - Create
  - Manage
  - Deploy
- Think strategically
  - Develop
  - Exploit
- What do you need from your CMS?
The Content Management Context

- Author
- Editor
- Publisher

Develop Content → The Content → Exploit Content

Describe the Content → Target the Delivery

Taxonomies, Controlled Vocabularies and other Attributes

Success criteria
How Do You Package Your Content?

‣ What is the story?
  ‣ The article itself; or,
  ‣ A series of articles on a subject?
‣ How about the photos?
‣ How many/what fields?
‣ What about widgets?
‣ Re-Use?
How Is Your Content Made?

- What are the roles?
  - Author / Editor / Publisher
- Segregated work flows?
  - By content type:
    - Articles / Blogs
  - By subject:
    - News / Sports
- How granular do you need to be?
  - Now / Future
How Do You Describe the Content?

- What can be inferred?
  - Author, data published
  - Can you extract meaning?
    - Entities / Topic
- Filling in the holes
  - How do authors tag content?
    - Free-form or controlled vocabularies?
  - What are you tagging?
    - Topic / Geography / Sentiment
- Ownership
How Do You Exploit Your Content?

- One size fits all display
- Infer what the user wants
- Have the user tell you
- Repackage / Re-use / Syndicate
Are You Doing It Right?

- What are your success criteria?
- What analytics are you collecting?
- What how are things trending?
  - Seasonality?
- Serendipity
The Information Architecture of Eating:

*What is a Recipe?*
Meal Taxonomy: Where Does the Recipe Fit?

Meal
- Breakfast
- Lunch
- Dinner
- Other

Meal Part
- Starter
- Main Course
- Side Dish
- Dessert
- Other

Dish
- Brownies
- Beef Stew
- Pupusas
- Etc., etc., etc.

Recipe
- Brownie Heaven
- Fudge Landslide
- Chocolate Brownies
- Etc., ad infinitum...
The Lady's Cheesy Mac:

- 4 cups cooked elbow macaroni, drained
- 2 cups grated Cheddar
- 3 eggs, beaten
- 1/2 cup sour cream
- 4 tablespoons butter, cut into pieces
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup milk

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F.
2. Once you have the macaroni cooked and drained, place in a large bowl and while still hot and add the cheddar. In a separate bowl, combine the remaining ingredients and add to the macaroni mixture. Pour macaroni mixture into a casserole dish and bake for 30 to 45 minutes. Top with additional cheese if desired.
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Recipe Metadata: Source

▶ Who created this recipe?
▶ Where was it published?
▶ Have I seen this before?
Recipe Metadata: Cuisine

- For every taxonomy or controlled vocabulary you intend to user, consider:
  - Do you need it?
  - Do your users understand it?
  - Build a bridge between it and your users’ language.

**Mexican cuisine** is a style of food that originated in **Mexico**.

-- Mexican cuisine - Wikipedia
Metadata vs. Data: Ingredient or Dish?
When There Are Hundreds of Hits,
What Do You Display First?
Who Is Searching?

The Viewer
- Someone who saw a recipe on a show.
- Will search once and then filter.
- Needs cues.

The Cook
- Has or will soon purchase one or more ingredients with which they hope to cook a meal.
- May conduct multiple searches that may also include filtering.
- Needs guidance.

The Chef
- Has a menu in mind and wants to find recipes for one or more dishes.
- Will conduct multiple searches looking for multiple recipes.
- Needs suggestions.

The Foodie
- Wants to prove her skill and taste.
- Will conduct multiple searches until she homes in on an idea.
- Wants inspiration.
What Is Right? -- Look at the Recipe

- Who is the source?
- How recent is the recipe?
- How similar is it to other recipes?
What Is Right? -- Look at the Current User

- What are the search terms?
- What path did he follow?
- What do you think he liked in the past?
What Is Right? -- Look at All Users
Rule #1: Know Your Content

Layered Mac 'n Cheese With Ground Beef

You can use penne or rotini pasta in place of the elbow macaroni if you would like. Also, use Swiss cheese and a dash of ground mustard in place of the cheddar cheese to bring a whole new flavor to this dish. This recipe is from Hildabury. MORE>

Outback Steakhouse Macaroni and Cheese (Mac-A-Roo & Cheese)

Posted in response to a recipe request. MORE>

Italian-Style Mac 'n Cheese

From Rachel Ray's Get Together cookbook. Very hearty and a wonderful taste. MORE>
Rule #2: Test Your Searches

▪ What are your most popular searches?
  ▪ Over all
  ▪ Without hits
    ▪ Should there have been hits?
    ▪ There isn’t content for this, but perhaps there should be?
    ▪ No, we’ll never have a recipe for Penguin Soufflé.
  ▪ With re-search
  ▪ Without clicks

▪ For each of the top 10 searches, evaluate the top 10 hits:
  ▪ Does it belong here?
  ▪ Is it a good result?
  ▪ What’s missing?
Rule #3: Show Only What the User Wants to See

Supporting content is key!
Photos
Video
Comments
Don’t do something unless there’s a need for it.
When is enough, enough?
Can you count discrete objects?
Where are these lessons applicable?
Music
Books
The
Information Architecture of
Animals
Animals vs. Content about Animals
What do users want to see?

User Wants

Tiger
• Related

Tiger Photos
• Related

Photos

User Searches with Either

Tiger Pictures
Tiger Picts
Tiger Shots

Content is Tagged
Animals Taxonomy: Sorry Mr. Linnaeus

Wild Animals

Big Cats

Tiger
Animals Taxonomy: Attributes

- Wild Animals
  - Big Cats
    - Endangered
  - Tiger
Animals Taxonomy: Relationships

- Land
- Wild Animals
- South Asia
- Big Cats
- India
- Preys on
- Tiger
- Preys on
- Swamp Deer
- Deer
- Endangered
- Is Prey of
- South Asia
- India
- Land
- Wild Animals
Um, wait!

We don’t have any content!
Step 1: What Do Users Want?
Step 2: Generate the Content
Step 3: Evaluate the Content

- Do we even display the content?
  - Accepted
  - Rejected
  - Queued

- Generate and maintain a Black and White list.

- Same process as with recipes: Look at the content, the current user and all users.

- No decision should ever be final.
Rule #3: Give the people what they want

- Everyone loves photos.
- Provide interactions
  - Video
  - Games
  - Messages Boards
- Avoid displaying large quantities of text until the user wants to see it.
Rule #4: Put Some Thought into Your Search Results Page

- It doesn’t have to be a simple list of hits.
- Think specialized home pages.
- Think search engine landing pages.
Rule #5: Employ Your Users

- People want to belong and feel valued.
- People will work for free.
- Quantity has a quality all its own.
Interfaces Naturally Flow
from a Well Structured Data Set

1. Know your content.
2. Know your users.
3. Metadata is king.
4. Test regularly.
5. Google may be your most important user.
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