

Designing Information Structure for Users: Presentation Notes

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1. Project overview [**Browser view: Old site at <http://web.archive.org/web/20070404011519/http://www.fmr.org/>**]
 - Comprehensive redesign process began in 2005 - New graphics, content, features, and information architecture.
 - CMS decision to use Drupal came later, in 2006.
 - Had done a lot of reading on design and usability since developing the previous design in 2000
2. Problems with old site
 - Hand-coded HTML - maintenance mess
 - Table-based layout - wanted to make presentation all CSS
 - Poor use of screen space
 - "Org chart" structure for information, which is my focus today
3. Information selection and design choices
 - Process began with identifying audiences
 - Volunteers (actual and potential)
 - Members (financial supporters - actual and potential)
 - Institutional funders
 - People concerned about the health of the Mississippi River
 - We had a good idea about this at the start, but capturing the info on paper helped keep us on track
 - Selecting which information to include
 - Staff driven: Program and organizational development staff were responsible for selecting content, focus, and priorities
 - Based on our identified audiences
 - Organizing information structure for benefit of site visitors
 - Opted for traditional hierarchical structure: Sections & subsections, url paths
 - Design followed similar trusted approaches - Left sidebar menu, "breadcrumbs"
4. Information hierarchy [**Handout - Card Sorting/Gaffney**]
 - Card creation
 - Created set of cards to represent the breadth and depth of site information
 - Not comprehensive, but representative [**Handout - sample card set**]
 - Participant selection
 - 5 participants total: 1 member/non-volunteer, 2 frequent volunteers/non-members, 2 occasional volunteers/members
 - Sorting process
 - Each volunteer was given instructions [**Handout - Directions**] and sorted cards independently
 - When completed, I wrote down resulting organization
 - Interpretation [**Handout - Results Report**]
 - Goals:
 - Identify the clear convergences - what do all sorters agree on?
 - Identify the troublesome areas - where is there little agreement?

- Keep the menus as short as possible while maintaining meaningful distinctions
 - Approaches
 - Find exact top level convergences (what categories matched at the top level)
 - Find approximate top level matches (where similar categories emerged at the top level)
 - This has some room for interpretation, and thus potential error
 - Find exact second level convergences (where second level categories matched)
 - This can identify groupings that were shared at a lower level, but not a higher level (for example, person A might have created "birds" and "mammals" at the top level, with "penguins" and "big cats" on the second level. Person B might have created "Animals" at the top level, containing both "penguins" and "big cats" on the second level. Second level convergences shows that they shared "penguins" and "big cats" even though they differed in their top level categories.
 - Find approximate second level convergences
 - This has some wide room for interpretation, because there are a lot of possible combinations at that level with nearly 30 unique groups.
 - Convergences can be dramatic
 - Resolving problem areas
 - Find creative solutions, or steal them.
 - My problem areas were: FMR appearances in the press, FMR press releases, print newsletters, and e-mail newsletter archives. Stole the answer - "News and Views"
 - Naming is the last step **[Handout - Full page and hierarchy list]**
 - Keep it clear and obvious, relatively short (you'll appreciate that when you're tweaking the sidebar width)
 - Avoid getting too clever ("Mighty Mississippi" might be pushing it)
 - Ideally, this would be followed with another round of testing where new volunteers are asked to navigate to particular content
 - Can check your interpretation of the results
 - Can check wording of menu items
5. **[Browser view: New site at <http://www.fmr.org>]**
 6. Let me know if you want copies of any of these materials or further direction
 7. Questions?