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I N F O R M A T I O N   A R C H I T E C T U R E: An Information Architect's Persona

I n f o r m a t i o n   A r c h i t e c t   &   D e s i g n   E x p e r i e n c e

An Information Architect's Persona

INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE: An Information Architect's Persona

Information Architect & Design Experience

My motto:

" Information Architecture is the structure of user-centered design and usability—it has to be strong. "

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An Information Architect's Persona

- I am a very busy Information Architect, User Experience Designer, with numerous projects.

- I have got to be fast, efficient, and organized.

- I enjoy and love what I do, in terms of being an Information Architect and User Experience Designer.

- There are always many new things to learn about my profession.

- Learning about new things is always fun!

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Doing Information Architecture

Hello, good morning to all of you! How are you doing?

Fine, I anticipate, because being fine is a state of consciousness and so is expressing joy and happiness, which makes for harmonious professional relationships as well as excellent relationships at home! Well, now it is time for IA work!

Anyway, I am fine and very been busy with all these IA, PM projects. I am pretty excited and jazzed up about it all. Designing gets my juices flowing in my mind pretty fast.

First things first, though, I need a good strong cup of coffee in the morning hours. Let me have my cup of coffee first in peace—some good music to listen to.

In San Francisco, California…

- http://www.boogaloossf.com/menu.html

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If I get really hungry, I might have to go get a cheese, spinach, and bacon omelet—eggs over easy—at <u>Boogaloos</u> on Valencia Street in San Francisco, California (okay, that is another user scenario) before work. One time I ran into Tracy Chapman at Boogaloos and that was very interesting. Drinking my coffee down, I get this IA urge; time to create conceptual designs.

After my cup of **strong coffee** (Trader Joe's Volcano, Super Dark—Darkest Roast, Complex and Strong; and/or Organic Fair Trade Wake Up Blend Coffee, Medium Roast, Smooth and Well Balanced), then I am good to go!

But I also enjoy drinking Twinings of London Classics English Breakfast Tea (in the red box), including All Natural, Tazo Zen (light green box), green tea, a harmonious blend with lemongrass and spearmint.
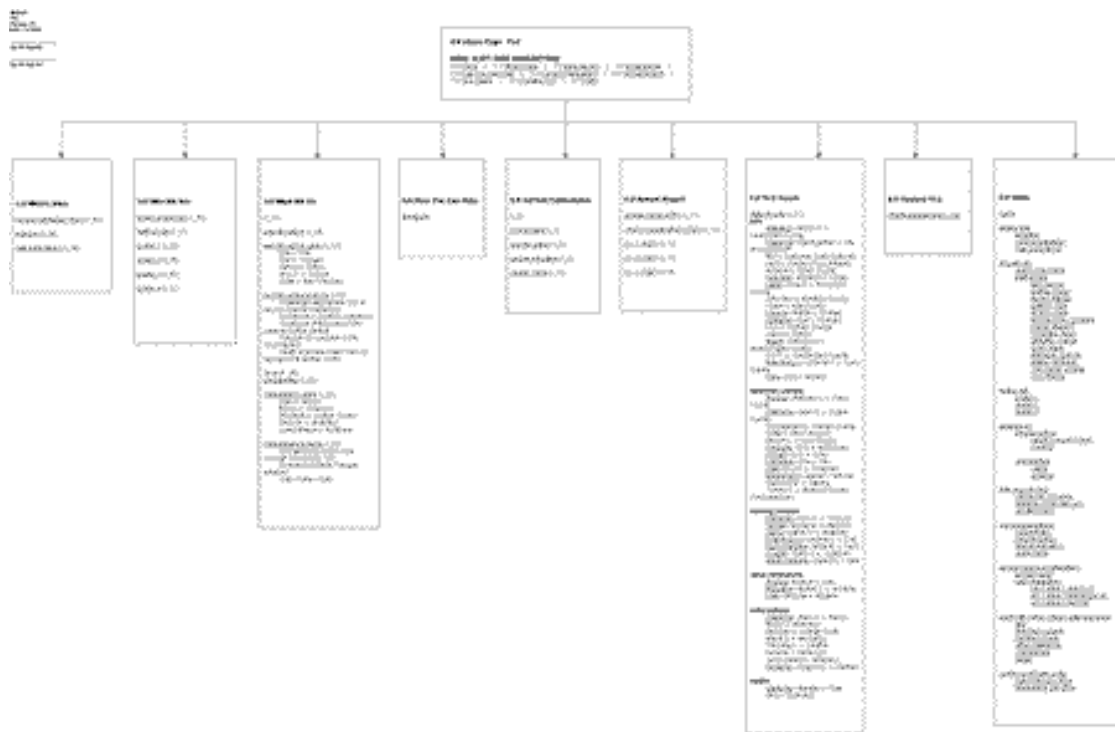
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Getting Started

I really desire to get down to IA business and fast. Good to start out by defining your Website's goals. Excellent design research begins by asking good questions:

- What is the mission, goal, or purpose of your organization?
- What are the short-term goals for your Website?
- What are the long-term goals for your Website?
- Do you know who the intended audiences will be?
- Why will end users use your Website?

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Doing Interviews

Now I can put a list of questions together and interview people at your organization on a one-to-one basis or at a company meeting. After I have received feedback from subject matter experts, I will document details (mapping and diagramming) and write an IA design plan report.

Defining User Experiences

Let us define the user experience. Now it is time to interview people in the marketing department or other departments. Writing user scenarios that tell specific stories about an end user, and what they do when they use the Website.

An Information Architect creates 8 to 20-plus user scenarios with photos, depending on the complexity of the Website. Other projects may require additional user scenarios and personas. User scenarios are really an excellent way to help define user experiences for a Website or other design products.

Writing IA Design Plan Report

The next step might be to do a competitive analysis or a case study (part of the IA design plan) about the competitor's Website or Websites, including documentation about functionality, style, design, color, and navigational systems.

This information will be included in the IA design plan. At this point in the process, it is important to think about the content and structure of the Website. Then I can create a list of content requirements and functional requirements.

From my design plan, I can then identify the content and functional requirements necessary for the Website. Now I can start to organize content and define the Website's architecture. This is the basis for defining major sections of the Website as well as the headers for each section. Technical writing also adds structure and integrity on a Website.

Let us think about exploring the use of metaphors as a way of organizing information and navigational systems in terms of using icons.

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Can an end user understand what the icons mean?

The truth is that all icons used in any fully integrated navigational systems must be labeled.

At this point in the process, time to create a site map, blueprint, and/or flow chart (Visio, OmniGraffle, Inspiration) to document the Website's structure. I prefer using Axure.

Navigational systems are designed and developed exclusively for each Website. They are incorporated into the overall structure of the Website, adding value to end users. Navigational systems should also be fully integrated together to provide clear navigation to end users on any Website.

Why you may ask are navigational systems so important?

If an end user can navigate successfully on a Website or through an exhibition, then an end user can easily access the information! Being able to wayfind on a Website, it is like being able to get from point A to point B.

Defining Navigational Systems
In my IA design plan, I provide detailed specifications for the Website's structure and global and local navigational systems. If necessary or required good to have graphic designers, art directors, as well as creative directors involved in the design process.

Wire frame mockups are developed and show structure for a Web page as well as fully annotated wire frame mockups because then any person can read them easily (Adobe Creative Suite). Wire frame mockups visually represent structure of a Web page.

These items sketched out by the Information Architect and help graphic designers to create a graphically designed Web page. Wire frame mockups can be sketched out informally and then drawn up using Adobe Creative Suite or other software programs (Axure), and I might develop working prototypes, if necessary (rapid prototyping).

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Being Ready
Now the team is ready to build a Website. Let us not forget to do usability testing to make sure our design product works for end users. No one wants to spend a lot of time and money building a design product that does not work for end users.

Doing User-Centered Design
Always include end users at the beginning of any project to incorporate usability design into a design product that is user-centered design! Good to develop a formative usability testing plan document.

Every Website is quite different. I develop usability testing plans relevant and specific for each project. I think it is very important to incorporate user-centered design at the onset of any project.

Steven Heitman
IA Design & Usability
Information Architect
User Experience Designer
Project Manager