college CDI

User interface design (C1U)

Class 2

User interface design

Although part of creating a user interface is an artistic and intuitive task, it cannot be improvised. Designing interfaces requires research and documentation on every aspects of a web site before even starting to work on the interface itself.

Unfortunately, too many designers apply predefined solutions rarely really suiting the company and the users needs.

Designing interfaces is, among others, a communicational task requiring to know about the company you are building a web site for, its different environments, the objectives and, of course, the users.

Three aspects of interface design

Functional design

The interface design has to do with how users interact with the web site. It should be viewed as collections of various tasks with a beginning, a middle and an end.

It is necessary to wonder what users want to do, what tasks they will want to complete upon arrival on the web site.

Example of a task (Facebook):

- I want to tell my friends about the new car I bought (Intention/need)

- I click on «Update status» (Start)

- I write a new status (Middle)

- I click «Publish» (End)

- I see my new status published (Evaluation)

Information design

You cannot just throw 20 pages of content on an home page and think people will read it. That won't happen.

Content has to be segmented, divided into different logical categories in a way that users will easily find what they are looking for.

Users also need to be guided. The interface has to show them where and how they can complete the tasks we anticipated them to looking for.

Aesthetic design

This aspect of the user interface design has to do with the look and feel of the web site, the style.

However, it isn't just aesthetic in this sens that nothing will be created with the only purpose of being nice to see. The artistic work is channelled with various constraints.

First of all, the look and feel will obviously be based on the corporate image or the branding.

Then, the style must take in account the marketing aspects, the objectives, the call to action, etc. It must be designed accordingly with minimal users e expectations in regards of the type of good or service, the competition, etc.

Finally, and certainly not the least, the interface has to be designed with users in mind. Users need to feel they are concerned, that the web site has been made for them. It needs to reflect who they are and provide informations and functionalities they are looking for or that will answer a need.

It probably now becomes obvious to you that prior to any aesthetic work, you will need to know quite a great deal about the company or the brand you are working for, the objectives (the gols of the web site), the environments and the users many specificities.

User interface design process

Before getting into designing a user interface, there are many details you need to investigate regrouped into different steps:

1. Mandate definition
2. Research and documentation
3. Development of a structure
4. Ideation / conceptualization (visual design)
5. Creation and presentation of mock-ups
6. Fine tuning of the final design (and architecture)
7. Alpha version and testing
8. Content integration and layout

Mandate definition

Usually, the mandate definition will be possible to establish based on meeting with the client. You will need to gather as much informations in order to know exactly what is wanted, and what are the objectives.

What does the client want?
Usually, the answer should be a web site. But what kind of web site? Informational? Transactional? Using a database or APIs? Does he need a CMS? Should it be desktop only or Mobile as well?

What is the web site's goals?
Is it to promote a good or a service? Is it for customer to complete tasks that are usually done my employees? Is it to change population's behaviours or opinion regarding a specific topic? Maybe the company needs to wok on its image and reputation? Appear more modern or credible than it is used to be? Goals should be defined for short, medium and long terms.

Who are the targeted users?
It is mandatory to come up with a portrait of the targeted users as precise as possible. Their age, gender, socio-economical and sociocultural profile, their languages and locations, etc. This will help define many aspects of the design.

What are the environments?
It is necessary to know about the field of activity, the domain. Who are the big players? Who's the direct competition? What does their web sites look like? What do they offer? What do they say?

What about the client's corporate image?
What image does the client want to promote? What is the present actual image of the company or the brand? How is it perceived from an external point of view?

What's the deadline?
Client can have many reasons to need a web site at a precise date. For instance, it may need to be coordinate to advertising activities. The deadline is a major factor in the design decisions. A very short production window won't allow to go as far as the client would have wanted. You may need to create a basic web site with different steps of progression. Also, rush production is more expensive than normal paced production.

What's the budget?
Budget is another important factor. Based on hourly rate, it gives you the amount of time you can use for design and production. You won't be able to do the same work whether a 100 or 500 hours are available.

Research and documentation

Having gathered a great volume of information from meeting with the client, you need first to verify some of the information.

You need to get more knowledge of the client's field of activity, of the environments including competition. This will give information on what content should be made available, what functionalities are needed, what style is used, etc.

Structuring the web site project

The ideal way of working a web site structure is to draw a flow chart and, more often, many flow chart. It gives a visual representation of the web site with all possible relations between sections.

The boxes represent different pages or sections of the web site on different vertical levels and on horizontal development.

- 1st level: home page
- 2nd level: section pages
- 3rd level: content pages (details)

Use a pencil and paper so you can erase and modify the structure easily.

Example of a web site structure (site map)
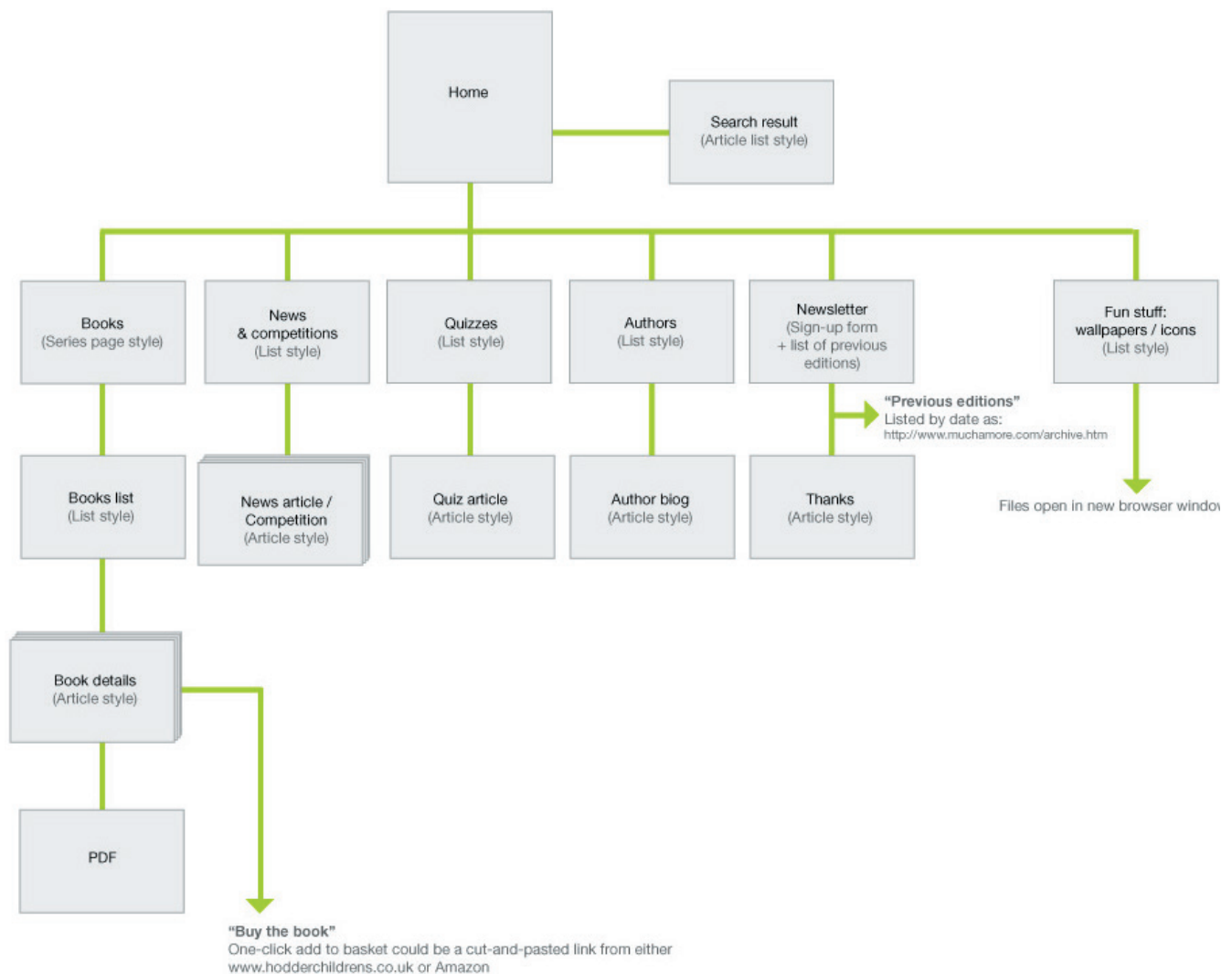
From this structure, we know how many pages the basic web site will have and how the information will be grouped. This also tells us about navigation and sub-navigations as well as where different technologies should be available.

The structure also indicates the contents that are needed and the technology to implement.

With little experience, it will become quite easy to evaluate the time need to design and produce the web site.

The production script

Based on the flow chart (site map), it's a good idea to produce a production script. The document will contain everything there is to know about the web site project. I will be used as a reference guide for production and can be used as a contract with the client.

Each of the web site page is given a row on a page divided in three parts: the first for the page name, the second for the texts and the last one for images, multimedia and technological functionalities.

At first, in the text section, there will only be descriptions of the various content which will be gradually updated with the final content.

The image part will describe the image to be acquired or produced, the same thing for multimedia elements and technology to implement. Descriptions will gradually be replaced with the elements locations.

This document will first be signed by the client as an approval for the project as described. When all the final texts will have replaced the descriptions, the client will have to make a revision and approve again so integration can begin.

Especially useful when many people are working together on a project, a color code can be decided in order to identify what is done, what is in the process of being done and what is left to do.

Page	Texts	Images / multimedia / technologies
index	Slogan **Main navigation:** Home / Products / Services / Contacts Welcome text Sections descriptions (4)	**Header elements:** Logo Main full-screen splash image **Javascript / CSS:** Language redirect (fr / En / Es) Show mobile navigation module Hide desktop navigation on mobile
products/index	Products title Products section's summary text **Contextual navigation:** Commercial products title List of commercial products Domestic products title List of domestic products	**Representative images:** commercial and domestic (2)
products/product_01	Products subtitle Product specs	**Icons:** Add to cart View cart Order now **Online shopping system:** Add to cart View cart Order now