

Information Architecture

ITS290F

Bad Information Architecture

Where are the detergents?



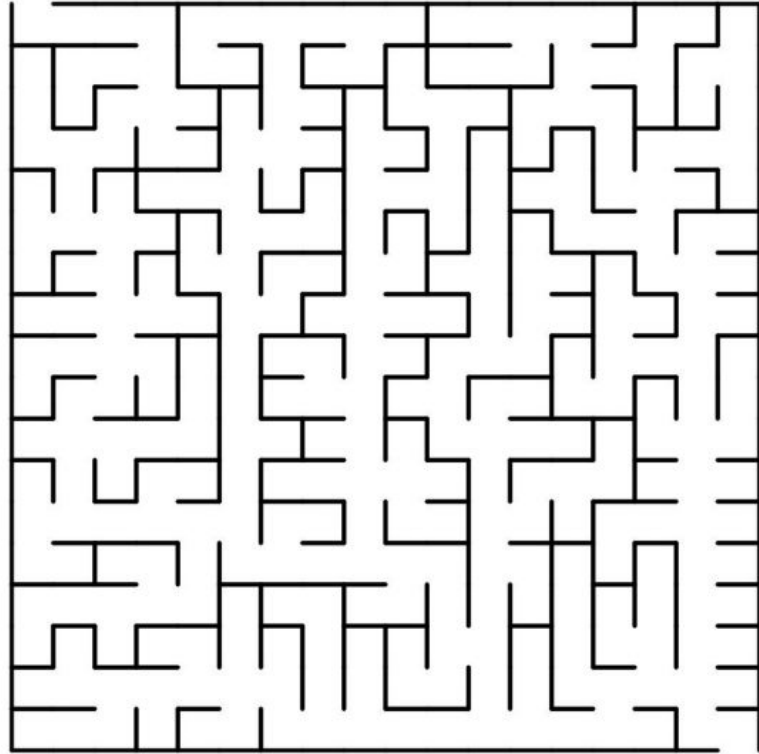
No sign for items...

Information Architecture (IA)

- Information architecture is a science of **organizing and structuring content** of the websites, mobile applications, and social media platforms
- Information architecture is **the practice of deciding how to arrange the parts of something to be understandable.**
- Information architecture is about helping people understand their surroundings and find what they're looking for, in the real world as well as online.

Bad Information Architecture

Bad Information Architecture is like a maze — it forces users to complete a journey to find the required information. When users can't find what they are looking for right from the start **there's a huge possibility that people will abandon a product.**



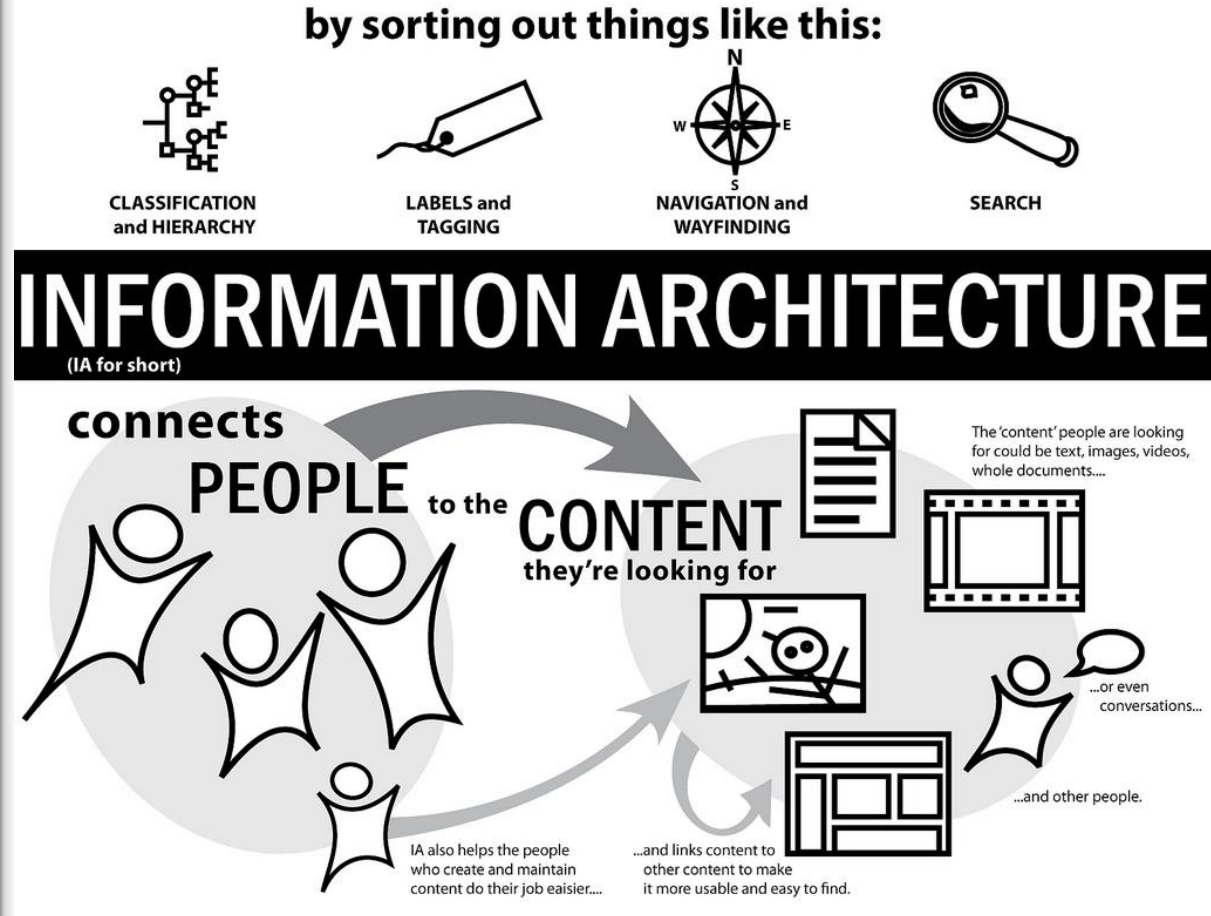
Reference: <https://theblog.adobe.com/a-beginners-guide-to-information-architecture-for-ux-designers/>

Information Architecture (IA) - Definition

1. The **structural design** of shared information environments.
2. The **combination** of organization, labeling, search, and navigation systems within websites and intranets.
3. The art and science of shaping information products and experiences to **support usability and findability**.
4. An emerging discipline and community of practice focused on bringing principles to design and architecture to the **digital landscape**.

A Big Picture of IA

How does IA connects people to content?

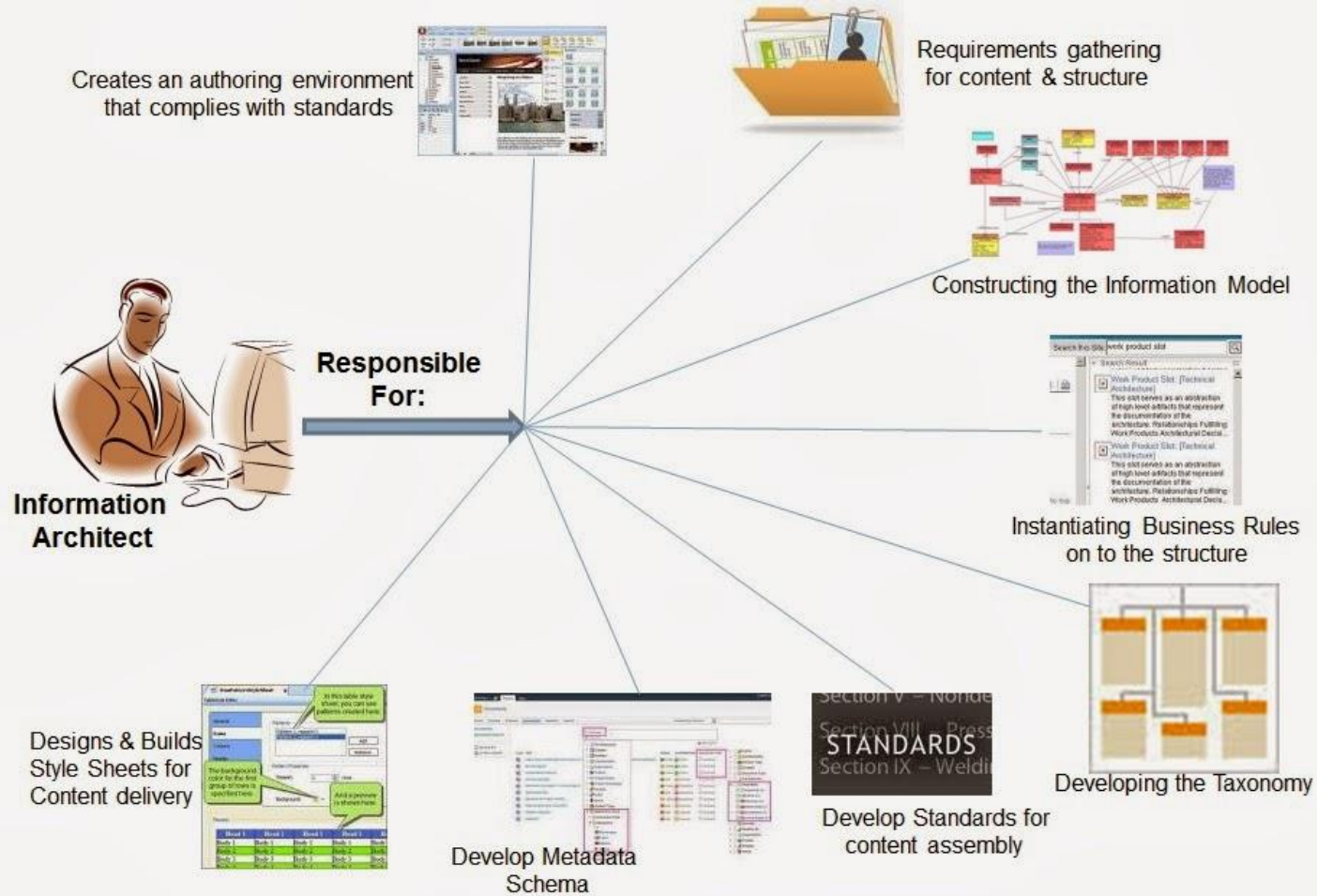


Information Architect

Information Architects are generally the “**master planner**” of websites. They define what the site will actually be and how they will work.

- Clarifies the **mission and vision** for the site, **balancing the needs** of its sponsoring organization and the needs of its audiences.
- Determines **what content and functionality** the site will contain.
- Specifies **how users will find information** in the site by defining its organization, navigation, labeling, and searching systems.
- Maps out how the site will **accommodate change and growth** over time.

IA is also relevant to digital devices that connect people to content



Principles of Information Architecture

1. Principles of objects
2. Principles of choices
3. Principles of disclosure
4. Principles of exemplars
5. Principles of front doors
6. Principles of multiple classification
7. Principles of focused navigation
8. Principles of growth

1. Principles of objects

- The principle of objects says that **content** should be treated as **an evolving thing** that has its **own lifecycle**. Different content has **different attributes and behaviors**, and this has to be recognized in order to best utilize that content.
- You should start every project by **identifying the kinds of content** that will be present. That means **both on a broad scale and a more granular one**.
- For example, an ecommerce site might have content that includes **products in various categories** (broad), but also has **different kinds of content within each of those products**: title, description, specifications, prices, and related items. This type of site might also have additional pages, like an about page, an FAQ, a customer service page, etc. Listing out all of these content types and how they relate to one another is the first step in devising a plan to best deliver the information on a site.

2. Principles of choices

- The principle of choices means that you should offer your users **meaningful choices**. However, you need to make sure that those choices are **focused on something specific**. Too many choices can overwhelm a user and negatively affect their experience using your site.
- Information should be **arranged in hierarchies**, avoiding long lists of options, which can become cumbersome to sort through. **Categorizing and sub-categorizing content is much more effective if you have more than a handful of options to begin with.**

3. Principles of disclosure

- It's important to **give your users the information they need**. But be sure you **identify what the necessary information** actually is, and don't just give them information because you feel like it. Give them the information they need to **have an idea of what they can expect to find** as they delve deeper into your site, **no more, no less** (this is called progressive disclosure).
- By **limiting the information** they see at any one time, you **allow your user to better absorb what they're seeing**. A paragraph on each page for ten pages is much easier to digest than a single page with ten paragraphs of text. Use tools at your disposal to guide your users through your content in a way that makes it feel accessible and easy to use.
- The main concept here is to **not overload your user** by trying to cram every bit of information on a single page. Steer them through the information in a way that **makes it easy to digest and remember**.

4. Principle of exemplars (范例)

- Describing the content within a category of information via **example** makes it easier for your users to understand what they're getting. It **greatly improves user experience**.
- For example, when browsing categories on Amazon, they often show products that fall within that category. This makes it easy to immediately **identify the correct category**, especially **if you're not exactly sure what the category** in question might be called.
- This principle is a bit harder to use in some scenarios, depending on the type of content you're providing. But think about how you can incorporate it into your category labels and menus, as it does provide a big boost in user satisfaction when done well.

5. Principles of front doors

Half of your visitors are likely going to arrive on your site via a page other than your home page. That means that every page they land on should **include some basic information so that they know what kind of site they're on**. It also means every page should **include at least top-level navigation**, as well as navigation to related pages.

There are **two major avenues** that visitors will access interior pages of your site from: **search engine results** and **social media links**. In either case, the **user may have very little information about your site or organization**, other than that the information they're looking for is somewhere on the page they've arrived on.

If they can't find it quickly, then they're unlikely to stick around for long.

One takeaway from this is that you don't need to cram all of your information onto your home page, since half of your visitors, give or take, aren't landing there and may never even see it at all.

6. Principles of multiple classification

Multiple classification means that there should be **different ways for your users to browse the content on your site**. Different people are likely to use different methods for finding the information on your site.

For example, some users may **go straight to your search function** while others may want to **browse**. But beyond that, even, some users may want to browse by one specification, while others might want to browse by another.

For example, on an ecommerce site selling clothing one user might want to look at all of the dresses on the site, while another user might want to look at everything that comes in a large size, and yet another user might want to browse by price range.

Giving users multiple options results in more satisfied users.

7. Principle of focused navigation

Navigational menus should not be defined by where they appear, but rather by **what they contain**. Your **menus form the primary method** for most users to find content on your site. In many cases, there may be more than one navigational menu on the site, to provide different ways to access the content.

You might have **topic-based navigation** (often the main navigation for a site); **menus on interior pages** that show how the current page is classified, as well as related pages; a **menu offering sales or marketing links**; and even **seasonal or topical menus** that provide content that might be pertinent at a given time.

In any case, **keep each navigational menu focused to make them easier to use**.

8. Principle of growth

On the vast majority of sites, content is a fluid, changing thing. The amount of content you have on a site today may be only a small fraction of what you'll have tomorrow, next week, or next year.

Organize your content in a way that **allows it to grow over time**. Your navigational menus and general information architecture should be **able to scale** to accommodate a lot of content without becoming cumbersome or unwieldy.

Sit down and **consider what content may be added in the future**, including entirely different types of content rather than just extensions of what will be on the site now. Think of how this additional content will interact with the current content, how they're related, and how they can be **integrated successfully without the need to redesign** the site's entire content structure.

Understanding users: How users find content?

There are four main ways that users seek information on a website. There may be some overlap between these different types of content seeking, but classifying them in this way gives you a good starting point for catering to their different needs.

1. Known-item
2. Exploratory
3. Unknown
4. Re-finding

How users find content?

1. Known-item



- In this seeking pattern, the **user knows exactly what they're looking for**, they know how to describe it, and they might even know where to start looking. These are an IA professional's dream.
- These users don't really need any hand-holding. They're likely to **look for your site's search function**, or to **dive right into menus**. As long as your information is well-organized and logical, and/or your search function returns all relevant results, then these users are **likely to have few problems** finding what they need on your site.

How users find content?

2. Exploratory



- The exploratory visitor has an idea of what they might need to know, but they might not have much idea of how to actually find it or where to start. They may dive into your site's menus to **see if anything looks like it might be relevant** (this is where well-thought-out labels are key), or **they might attempt a search**.
- Search that **auto-suggests terms is a huge advantage** for these visitors. They may know a keyword or two, and a search that will suggest related terms to **help narrow their results** is likely to be a huge help to them and give them a better user experience.

How users find content?

3. Unknown



- The unknown user doesn't really know what they need. They might **have a vague idea**, or they might **think they know, but they don't know enough** to effectively find it without some assistance. This is common in more complex industries like legal or financial.
- It can also be present in many educational settings, where users might be looking for a solution without really understanding their problem.
- In any case, you need to find a way to **guide your visitors through your content**, to help them figure out both **what they need** and **how to find it**. How you do that can vary depending on the specific likelihood of each scenario.
- For example, how you guide a visitor through *a news site* is entirely different than how you would guide them through content on a *site offering financial advice*. The main similarity, though, is that the **user needs more guidance**.

How users find content?

4. Re-finding

- These people are **looking for things they've already seen**, and they may or may not know exactly how to find those things again. There are two different ways you can deal with this type of visitor.
- The first way is to **passively save content for users** (such as a “**recently viewed**” section on an ecommerce site). This type of system requires no action on the part of the user, but can also be limited in how effective it is. For example, you might opt to save the last five pages a user visits, but what if the thing they want to get back to was ten pages ago? Or fifty? They'll have to re-find it on their own.
- The other is to provide active tools for visitors to **use to save content** so they can easily re-find it later. This could be things like a “**save for later**” function, a wishlist, a favorites, or something similar. These active solutions can make it easier to for users to re-find content that's important to them much better than an automated, passive solution can.
- Of course, it's also **possible to combine the two methods**, both passively saving recent content and giving users an easy way to save content that they deem important for later reference.

Models for content organization

1. Single page
2. Flat
3. Index
4. Daisy
5. Strict hierarchy
6. Multidimensional hierarchy

Models for content org.

1. Single page

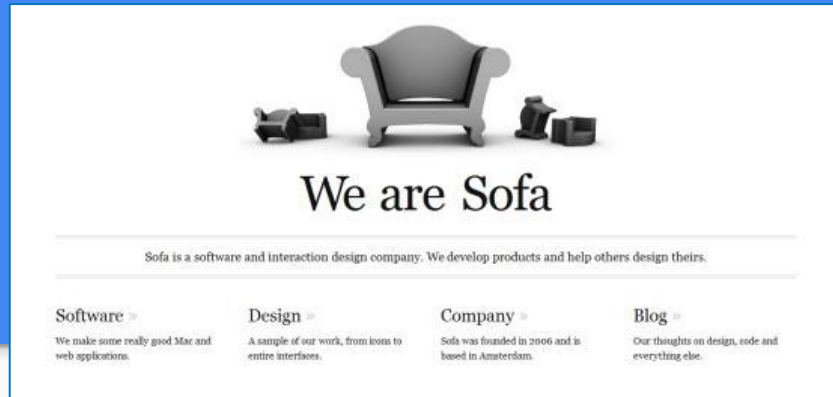
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- A single page site **puts all of the content and information on just one page**. This works best on a site with **limited content and a very focused purpose**. Single page sites are generally broken down into different sections, often with **navigation to permalinks** for each topic.
- Single pages are common for things like personal websites, sites for individual products (either digital or physical), and similar sites. You may also see them as standalone sub-sites on a larger site.

Models for content org.

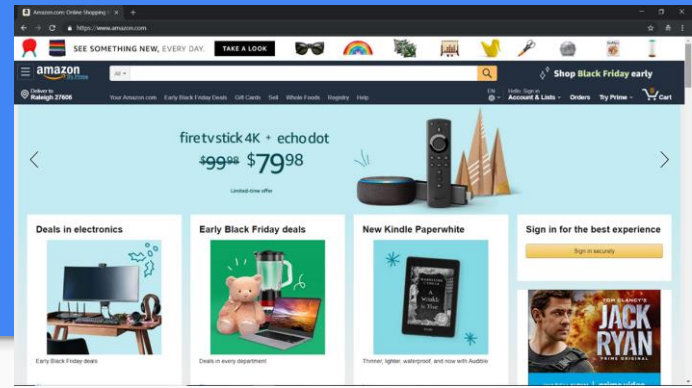
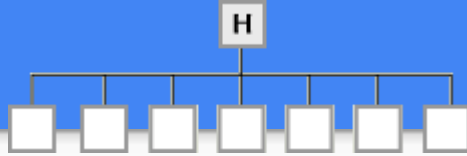
2. Flat



- Flat structures are most often seen on small sites with **less than a dozen pages**. On a flat site, all of the pages are interchangeably accessible, ie, there's only **one level of navigation**. This kind of site is most common on things like portfolios and agency sites, simple business sites, and e-commerce sites with only a handful of products.
- Flat sites become significantly less usable as they grow in size. If you're considering using a flat site, be sure that the content will not eventually grow to the point that this kind of structure would become unwieldy.

Models for content org.

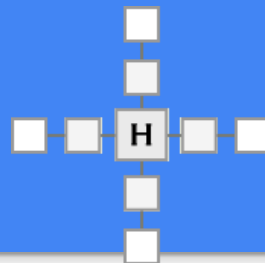
3. Index



- Index sites are similar to flat sites, though they often have **a list of all of the pages on the site in a central location**. This makes sites with larger numbers of pages still usable with a close-to-flat content structure, which keeps them simple.
- Again, these kinds of structures are **best for sites with a specific purpose**, like an ecommerce site, a business site, a portfolio, or a site educating on a very specific topic.

Models for content organization

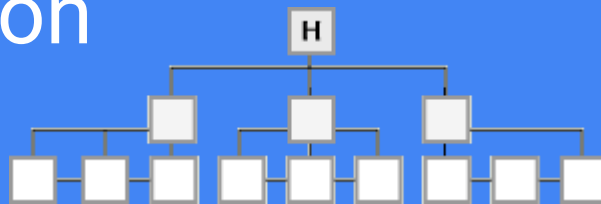
4. Daisy



- A daisy structure is most commonly seen in things like web apps, though it is also seen on educational sites sometimes. The daisy structure means that **users return to a central point** (like a home page or landing page) after completing specific tasks on a site.
- For example, in something like a to-do list app, users might be returned to the to-do list after completing a task, editing a task, or adding a new task. Similarly, on an educational site, users might be returned to a central hub after completing a lesson.

Models for content organization

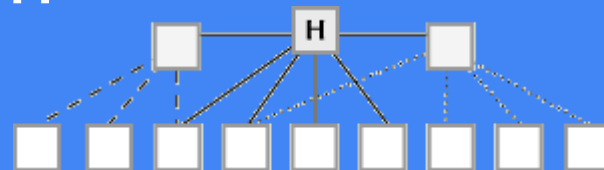
5. Strict Hierarchy



- With a strict hierarchy, **pages are only accessible from their parent page**. This can be a great structure for sites that wish to guide users through information in a very specific manner, **without allowing them to skip ahead**.
- Because of this, these kinds of structures work well on educational sites, where one lesson builds upon the last. By only allowing users to access a new page from its parent page, you prevent users from skipping ahead to information they might not understand.

Models for content organization

6. Multidimensional hierarchy



- Closely related to the strict hierarchy is the multidimensional hierarchy, which **provides users with more than one way to access particular content**. This is one of the most common organizational patterns, partly because of its ease of implementation.
- Multidimensional hierarchies can also be the **trickiest to pull off**. Because while you want to allow users multiple ways to access content, **you still want to guide them along logical paths** whenever it makes sense to do so.
- At its most complex, you have sites like Wikipedia, where pages are linked to one another in contextual ways, as one page is mentioned on another. This weaves an intricate web of interrelated content that seemingly goes on forever.

Remarks about content organization

- These varying methods for organizing content can be adapted and hybridized to meet the needs of a particular project, or for particular aspects of a project.
- For example, if you had an ecommerce website, the majority of your website might use an index hierarchy, but then individual sections might use a strict hierarchy pattern for specific purpose, such as checkout and payment.

Organizational and labelling conventions

- There's nothing out there that says specific pages on your site have to be named certain things. But at the same time, **following certain conventions can make a site easier to navigate** and guide the way content is organized.
- For example, when a user is looking for *contact information*, the first thing they're going to look for is a page or link that says "contact us", "contact", or something similar. But calling it something like "reach out", "feedback", or another less-used term is going to make the user have to expend extra effort to find what they're looking for. And that may result in them just navigating elsewhere (to a competitor, perhaps) out of frustration.

Organizational and labelling conventions

- If you do decide to **stray from standard labelling conventions**, be sure that **you have a very good reason** for doing so, and that your labels still make sense within the context of the site and its content.
- The same should be said for **organizing certain content**. For example, a “help” section might include a knowledge base, a contact form, a forum, and/or a user guide. If your user guide is located in an entirely different section (even its own section), you may confuse your user.
- Look at how other sites are arranging their sites, and follow similar patterns unless you have a reason to do things differently.

Summary

- Information architecture is a vital part of creating a good user experience. Well-organized, well-structured content makes your site easier to use and more useful to your visitors.
- Without a grasp of IA principles, tools, and what they can do for you, you're taking a stab in the dark at how your content is arranged. A good grasp of IA will make you a more effective designer, even if you end up working with a dedicated information architect on some projects.

References

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