

Assignment 6: Critical Reflection

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People-Content-Context Framework

The user-content-context framework refers to the triad of topics that need to be focused on in information architecture design. Usability.gov states that “In order to create these systems of information, you need to understand the interdependent nature of users, content, and context (US General Services Administration).” The user-content-context framework is key to completing proper information architecture design as is it necessary to properly create or modify the systems of information (Organization, Labeling, Navigation, and Search systems). In this framework users refers to the audience and their needs, content refers to subject matter of the information, and context refers to the business goals and resources. I used this framework throughout the entirety of this project and thus it was a necessary part in making decisions on our final redesign. For example, to understand the common user groups of the website and the tasks that they need to complete, we did some observational studies to see how someone in that said user group would interact with the site. Essentially one of our group members watched as users navigated throughout the site to complete their tasks, notating anything hiccups that they have. We used the information that we gathered from these observations to make decisions for our final redesign of the website. One thing that I could have focused on a little bit more would be the context portion of this framework. This was the section of the framework that my group, and I, paid the least amount of attention to. We focused our time on the users and the content of the website. However, if this framework is followed correctly then all three categories would get equal attention because of their equal importance. This is confirmed by Rosenfeld and Morville who referred to this framework as the “information ecology” and visualized it as a Venn diagram which signifies each categories equal importance.

Information Architecture Concepts

Ideal Design Procedure

I think the ideal design procedure starts with a website that has bad design implementations, which would be identifying a client and their current problem. Once that information is defined, we can then begin the research phase, which includes gathering information about the website and its users. One thing to note is that there will be a significant focus on three things, the users of the website, the content that the users need to access, and the context of the information. In fact, the users should somewhat be involved in the design process. From there, we can use strategies we learned in class, like observational studies and card sorting, to make the necessary decisions to have a good information architecture.

What is information scent?

Information scent is essentially how users elect which links that they want to click on. The things that make up information scent are “What the user sees (which is given by the representation of the information source on other pages) and what the user already knows about the source (Budi, 2020).” Knowing this, along with some of the other information we gathered, we made the tasks on our site with a higher scent easier for the user to access.

Strategies Used

Some of the strategies that we used to improve the organizational structure of the website included General Research, Interviews & Observational Studies, Content Inventory, Card Sorting, and Wireframing. Content inventory is a way for us to understand the existing content of the website. This can be done by starting at the homepage and making your way through the site,

collecting basic metadata on the pages that you visit. Card sorting is a way for us to “Learn how people think about content, how they organize it into categories that make sense to them, and what labels they use for those categories (Kanke, 2021).” For our project, we created a card sort online using OptimalSort and distributed amongst our classmates. We used the results to come up with a plan to modify the organization of the site. Finally, we ended with our wireframe, or paper prototype, of our recommended changes. We took all the information that we gathered from completing the other strategies to create a final prototype of the site, annotated with our recommended changes that will improve the usability of the website.

Top Skills Learned

Throughout this semester, I was able to learn new strategies that I believe could be beneficial to my future career path. One of the new strategies that I learned was the card sort. Card sorting is a way for us to “Learn how people think about content, how they organize it into categories that make sense to them, and what labels they use for those categories (Kanke, 2021).” This skill could be useful for me to get insight on how to organize information in my future endeavors.

Another skill that I got to develop throughout this process would have to be wireframing. I have had previous experience wireframing, but I got to enhance my previously learned knowledge with some newer learned knowledge of wireframing. In fact, this is the first time that I have done a wireframe that is not just basic lines and text. This skill will be useful in my future career because it allows for a rudimentary way for others to see the vision.

The last skill that I got to improve upon throughout this semester was working in a group. The biggest key to this was communicating amongst my team members to make sure that the work is split up evenly and is completed by the deadline. This skill will be useful in my future ventures because there is a high chance that I will be working as part of a team.

References

Budiu, R. (2020, February 2). Information Scent: How Users Decide Where to Go Next. *The Nielsen Norman Group*. <https://www.nngroup.com/articles/information-scent/>

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US General Services Administration. *Information Architecture Basics*. Usability.gov. <https://www.usability.gov/what-and-why/information-architecture.html>.