2.2.3 Designing navigation systems

Four modes of information search

See: Four Modes of Seeking Information

- **Known-item searching.** You know what you're looking for.
- **Exploration.** Seeing what's around.
- **Don't know what you need to know.** Know general area, but looking for guidance.
- **Re-finding.** Finding something that you've found before.

If we understand which of these modes our primary users are most likely to use, we can design our interface to support them (e.g. via search, navigation, contextual links, site indexes, bookmarks, wish lists etc.)

The scent of information

- This is an extremely important concept in designing navigation. It's "the magical force that pulls users to their content".

- **"Trigger" words and phrases** that users recognize give them confidence that their information quest is on the right track.

- Specific phrases that have direct meaning to the user (e.g. *Second Hand Audi, Arctic Monkeys CD*) produce a stronger scent than very general phrases (e.g. *Products, Solutions*).

- Use of the back button is usually associated with a lost scent of information.

- See: Getting Confidence From Lincoln

Hierarchical navigation

- Information hierarchy as primary navigation system
- Main options at each level taken are directly from hierarchy

For example, [dmoz](#).

Global (primary) navigation systems

- **What's on the whole site?**
- Allows greater vertical & lateral navigational movement
- Simple navigation bar
- Usually have some indicator to show where you are (e.g. tabs change colour on Amazon)

Local navigation systems

- **What's nearby?**

- **Complement global navigation**

- Navigational options refer to **information in a specific category**

- Get list of **options for entire level** for example, [Biz/ed](Biz/ed)

- Can get secondary, tertiary navigation, etc…

- Such navigation systems **can be challenging to design,** particularly when there are many options/levels

- How does the [BBC](BBC) site deal with multiple levels?

Ad hoc navigation

Embedded links

- Links within the page (hypertext)
- Must be informative (avoid "click here" and "more..."!)

Structural links

- Point to other levels of site structure
- e.g. "up to services and products"

Associative links

- "See also..."

Most easily implemented in database-driven sites where information has to be classified in detail e.g. BBC News

Browser navigation features

- **Open URL**
- **Back & Forward buttons**
- **Bookmark**
- **History**
- **Visited links**
- **URL display in status bar for links**

Don't override these features - support them! For example, the back button doesn't work on many Flash sites, or if new windows are spawned, and frames don't allow pages to be bookmarked.

Breadcrumbs paths

Breadcrumbs are a secondary navigation aid

Why are they useful:

- They tell users **where they are** and/or **where they have come from**

- They provide a **mechanism for back-tracking** (in addition to the back button)

- They are small: **low real-estate "cost"**

See: Guardian.co.uk or Tiso.co.uk

Navigation to avoid: mine-sweeping

Also known as Mystery Meat navigation

- Options are not clearly presented

- User has to roll-over every option to see what it is

- Can only really be justified if it's for entertainment, to get a sense of exploration (it can be useful for kids sites - kids love to explore!)

- Example: 10 Worst Web Site Uses of Navigation for 2008, The Matrix, The CSI Companies

Task: *Navigation stress test*

Have a look at Keith Instone's navigation stress test