Organising Information

The elements of user experience

Proposition — Value delivered to customer

Concept — Concept for how the value is delivered

Structure — Organisation of product components

Information — What information is used by users

Interaction — How users interact with product components

Appearance — What it looks like and how it is arranged
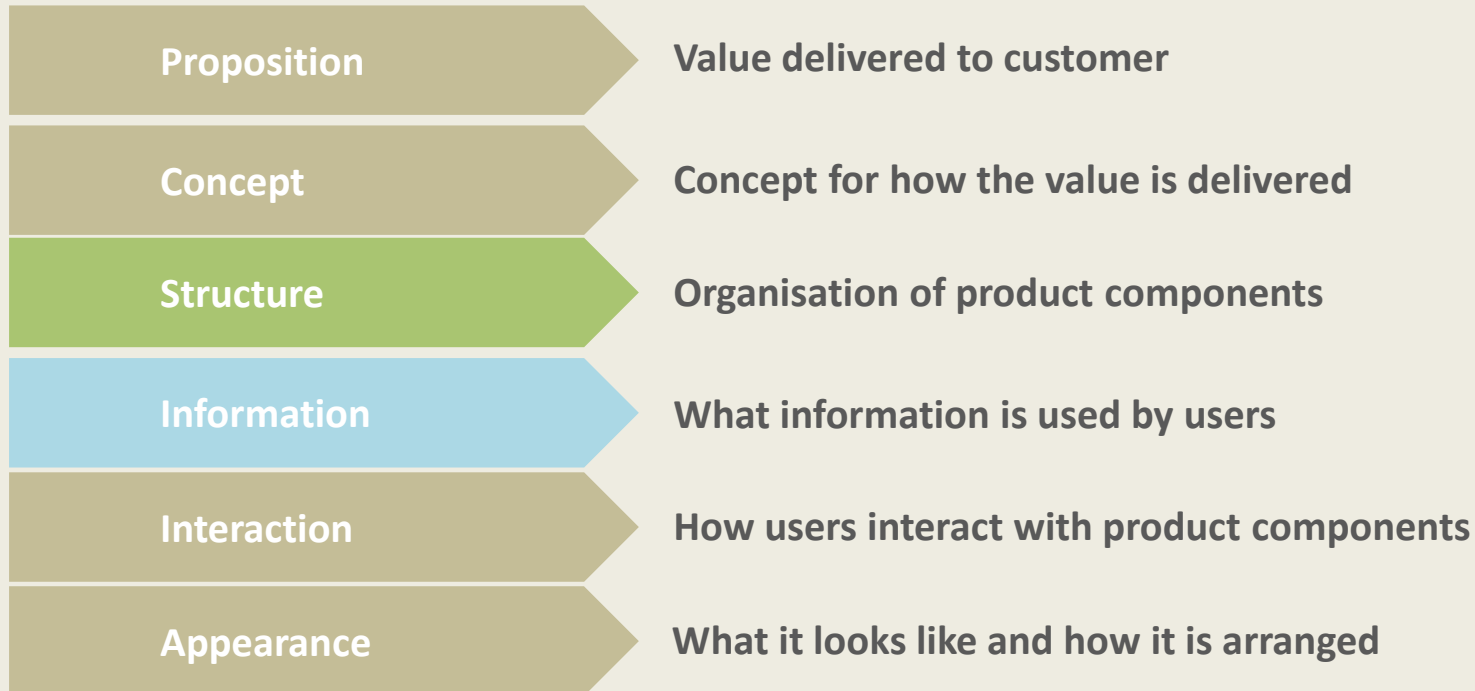
...one view of it. Here's another one

Organising information

Organizing complex information on a web site presents huge challenges:

- **Findability:** Users need to be able to find what they want among a potentially huge numbers of items

- **Ambiguity:** Language is ambiguous, e.g. multiple definitions, cultural differences (the words "pitch", "catch")

- **Heterogeneity**: "Objects composed of unrelated or unlike parts" Most Web sites are very heterogeneous because they have multiple formats, usually all mixed up together

- **Differences in user perspectives**: Ignoring different user perspectives can make parts of your site unusable; make sure that you know your user!

Labelling systems

- **Can't present all information at once,** so need to use informative short cuts, i.e. labels
- These need to **communicate information effectively**

Why labels are important:

- Users have **short attention spans** (avoid high "cognitive load" for your users)
- **Bad labels make bad impressions;** they frustrate users
- **Self-centred labelling makes a bad impression** (avoid business-speak & terminology)
- Labelling systems need serious planning.

An unplanned labelling system…

- **Technology Interface Unit**

- **Project QA**

- **Business & Media Interaction**

- **Internal Services Office**

- **New Media Center**

These assume that the user knows what you are talking about!

A planned labelling system...

- **Arts & Humanities**
- **Business & Economy**
- **Computers & Internet**
- **Education**
- **Entertainment**
- **Health**

These might also make us wonder... e.g. what resources are contained within these categories? We do know what subject areas are covered, though. It's also a common system. Users have seen it before so they only need to learn the system, not individual labels (familiarity breeds contentment!)

Organising information

Information can be organized in the following ways:

- **Alphabetical,** e.g. Cambridge Uni
- **Chronological,** e.g. Facebook
- **Geographical,** e.g. Hotels.com
- **Topical,** e.g. Birkbeck
- **Task-oriented,** e.g. Three mobile
- **Audience-specific,** e.g Birkbeck
- **Metaphor-driven**

Organising information: Classification and hierarchies

- **Taxonomy is the classification of things.** e.g. Dewey Decimal System, Linnaean classification

- **Not all taxonomies are hierarchical** e.g. days of week

- Classification schemes provide important metadata for a Web site. They provide the basis for efficient search and information retrieval and sharing of data between Web sites.

The hierarchy: a top-down approach

- A more rigid approach with usually **mutually exclusive categories**

- You can choose a **narrow and deep approach;** fewer sections, more levels of sub pages beneath

- Or a **broad and shallow approach:** lots of section with fewer sub pages.

- If you expect your site to grow, **it's easier to incorporate change into a broad and shallow design**

- **Don't feel trapped by hierarchies,** and don't force topics in a hierarchy, hyperlinked or database driven approaches are useful too

Relational databases: a bottom-up approach

- Better where users want to retrieve information in different ways, having different starting knowledge.

- Content created "on-the-fly" depending on requirements

- Examples of a bottom-up approach are **search based** sites, or **faceted navigation** e.g. Amazon or Ebay

Folksonomies

- Informal structures are common and and in many websites users are tagging their own content e.g. Twitter , Flickr, Pinterest

- See also: the Wikipedia entry for Folksonomy

Folksonomies

Suggested by 11 customers
★★★★☆ (259)
Suggested by 11 customers
★★★★★ (24)
Suggested by 8 cu

› **Explore 118 other items related to "paris hilton"**

Tags Customers Associate with This Product (What's this?)
Click on a tag to find related items, discussions, and people.

overrated (41)   makes me wanna smash the radio (22)   rubbish (12)

trash (33)   disgusting (18)   talentless (12)

horrible (25)   useless (14)   paris hilton (11)

pathetic (25)   fun (13)   › **See all 211 tags...**

Your tags: Add your first tag

Help others find this product - tag it for Amazon search
 No one has tagged this product for Amazon search yet. Why not be the first to suggest a search for which it should appear?

Rate This Item to Improve Your Recommendations

Sign in to rate this item
☆☆☆☆☆ ☐ I own it

Sometimes the results of allowing users to tag content can be interesting...

Common labels within navigation systems

- Home / home page / main / main page /
- Search / find / browse / sitemap / index / table of contents
- Contact / feedback
- Help / FAQ / frequently asked questions
- News / what's new

Some of these have clear user expectations attached to them; use these in your favour!

Using metaphors

- Sometimes the use of metaphors helps users understand things

- Use them wisely to support your navigation

- **Steer away from metaphors that are obscure or ambiguous,** or have different meanings in different cultures

- Common metaphors include: Checkout, Shopping basket, Home

Card sorting

- Card sorting is a simple, quick method for **understanding how site users classify content** (by shuffling cards around, hence the name).

- The method is used to generate an **overall structure for your information,** as well as **suggestions for navigation, menus,** and **possible taxonomies.**

- **See also: Card sorting: a definitive guide** on Boxes & Arrows and **Information design using card sorting**

Steps in a card sort

- **Select the content to be tested** (pages of existing site? new content?)

- **Find the participants** (should be representative of site users)

- **Prepare the cards** (write names of pages on cards)

- **Conduct the tests**
  - **Open sort** - participants create and label groups for the cards as they see fit
  - **Closed sort** - how do the cards fit into an existing classification? (validation of an existing classification)

- **Analyse the results** (common groupings? cluster analysis?)

Task: *Conduct a card sort*

Go to optimalsort.com

Working in groups of 3, conduct the open card sort on the site. Try to group the cards in a meaningful way (what is 'meaningful'?) and try to produce appropriate labels for the groups.