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ICT 320

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Final Prototype:

Home: <https://weatherproto.wordpress.com>

Main Page: <https://weatherproto.wordpress.com/weather-safety/>

Specific Page: <https://weatherproto.wordpress.com/space-weather-2/>

There are many aspects to consider when redesigning and analyzing the Information Architecture of a website. Upon looking at the National Weather Service (NWS) website (<https://www.weather.gov>) , I noticed that there were many aspects that could be improved. Some of these include the navigation system, labeling system, and the organization system. Regarding that, I updated those aspects accordingly in my prototype so that information would be easier to find for any user. Upon improving these aspects, it is also important to discuss IA administration, the technology integration, document type identification, organization and labeling systems, and metadata fields.

The first aspect that I considered was the navigation system of the website. I noticed that there was much overlap of information and risk of information overload. Also, within the navigation system, I realized that certain content was not relevant within some categories. Therefore, I moved some of the content within the categories around. To address the overlap of information, I removed the navigation system that was shown at the bottom of the original NWS website. Next, to address the risk of information overload, I categorized some of the content within the categories. For instance, in the “Safety” category (which was changed in the prototype to “Weather Safety” for a labeling concern), I split it into four sections. The sections included “Water,” “Temperature,” “Other Weather,” “More Information.” I believe that this will aid in users finding information easier because they can look for more broad categories, rather than sorting through much detailed information. Another way that I addressed the overlap of information was removing one of the ways to search for local forecast on the homepage. On the original website, there was two ways to find this, and they were right next to each other. This could get confusing for users, so I removed one of them for the prototype. Also, I moved around some of the content. Within instance, in the “Information” tab on the original NWS site, I did not think that the “Owlie’s Kids Page” fit very well within it. Since this was more education related, I added it into the “Education” tab instead.

Another issue that I noticed throughout the website was the labeling system. Within the navigation system, I altered the “Safety” tab to “Weather Safety.” It is important that the labeling is clear and concise. Also, a user should have an idea of what they will see below upon looking at a label. Therefore, I thought this would help in the search of information. Next, throughout the homepage, I noticed that there was hardly any labeling. Therefore, within the prototype, I added a label for “Updates,” “Other Maps,” and “Weather News.” I thought this would aid in the finding of information because user will, now, be able to follow the labels throughout the home page to find the information that they need. On the Weather Safety page, I added more labeling to aid in the search of information. On the original Safety page (https://www.weather.gov/safety/) , the information was not labeled into categories at all. In response to that, I categorized all the information, as I did in the navigation system.

The next aspect that I addressed was the organization system. This was mainly altered on the specific page (Space Weather: https://www.weather.gov/safety/space). I thought that the organization of information on this page was a bit confusing and scattered. Therefore, I tried to follow a more top-down approach to show this information. In the prototype, I separated the content into the same categories but listed it from the top of the page to the bottom of the page. This will aid in users finding information because it provides a more systematic way of searching, rather than looking at randomly dispersed information on the screen.

Next, the way in which the website will be maintained must be addressed. Being a weather website, I feel that it is simple and systematic to maintain. A lot of the information relating to safety, education, and about the organization, does not typically need to be altered. A weather website is one that needs to be updated every day. This relates to the maintenance because it is important that the forecast is updated, current weather conditions, alerts, and many other aspects is updated daily so that users can find the most recent information.

Another aspect that should be considered is the technology integration. There are many tools that are available, although there are still some that could be used to further improve this website. For instance, it was helpful that I was able to alter the navigation system and change the organization scheme of certain parts. Also, it was super convenient to be able to add labels where they were needed. Some things that I wish I was able to incorporate was an advanced and updated search system. There were basic things that could have been put in place, but I did not have the capabilities to fully advance it. For instance, I would have liked to add a drop-down menu within the search system for different dates to sort through. Also, I wish I was able to have more flexibility within the navigation system. I was able to create categories to the best of my ability. Though, I wish I was able to design the navigation system a little more so that the separation of different categories within each tab was more prominent.

Next is important to address the document type identification. The content will be authored and managed, somewhat, automatically. Since the information within this website must be updated day to day, it would be more convenient for automatic management to be put in place. Therefore, the National Weather Service will have to assure that this can be put in place so that the most up to date information is shown for users. Also, a lot of the alerts/updates/news that are presented on this website are implemented by NWS itself with their own information that is needed to be relayed to people in the United States. A big part in the document type identification of this said information is the labeling system. I updated this accordingly, so that it is understandable as to what documents will be presented to users. For instance, on the home page of the prototype, there is a label to the different maps that can be found.

Next, it is important to address the organization and labeling system. Throughout the prototypes, I aimed for a top-down hierarchy. I used this hierarchy because it is very systematic and holds all the information that a user needs on one page. For instance, in the original “Space Weather” page of the NWS website, there were many links that needed to be clicked to see any information. In response to this, I laid the information out vertically so that the user would be able to see all the information that is present on the page. This will allow for a faster and more efficient search for the user since that is one of the main goals of Information Architects. Also, I assured that the navigation system was at the top of each screen and showed the main categories of information within the website. This will be the most predominant way users will find information within the website. In respect to the labeling system, I assured that it was as detailed as possible. For instance, within the navigation system, it followed a noun-based labeling system. This assures that it is consistent throughout, aiding in the users’ findability

As mentioned before, the navigation system was altered so that the information is more categorized, eliminating the risk of an information overload. The navigation system is presented at the top of the screen on each page (global navigation system). This will be the main way that users can access information, since it presents all the main broad categories, as well as the detailed categories that users might need. In relation to the search system, instead of only allowing two filters for searching the whole NWS website, I added some more. I think the separate categories in which users can search within, will allowed for more detailed and relevant results, with more relevant results, the users will be able to find information quicker and more efficient. The categories that I added in the prototype are “Documents,” “Weather Safety,” “Current/Past Weather Information,” “Include NOAA,” “News,” “About NWS,” and “Education Resources.”

Next, the metadata field must be addressed. I think that the metadata field was quite evident in the search system. I aimed to use a classification scheme within my search system. I think that the information within the NWS website can be classified into the categories that I provided as part of the updated search system. They are defined by the categories that I listed above within my prototype. It will help for all the information within the website to be classified within certain topics so that users can find information quicker. In respect to this, it would be a global metadata field since the classification is incorporated into all the information on the website.

In conclusion, I have learned a lot throughout the process of completing this project. I feel that I have a basic understanding of what information architects really do. It is one thing to read through a textbook and learn about what they do. But, on the other hand, it is way more helpful and enjoyable to do hands on work and get a feel of what information architects do every day. I learned how to apply the IA strategies, and think about what will aid in the users’ experience of finding information within an information environment. By learning everything about information architecture (organization, labeling, navigation, etc.), I was able to apply it and understand why each aspect important. I thought it was interesting to work on the design aspects, specifically, as well. I enjoyed creating the wireframes and blueprints, and then integrating those to an actual prototype. At first, I understood the reasoning behind wireframes and blueprints, but now I understand the importance of them. Throughout working on this project, they were very my guidelines to completing my prototype. Also, I can fully understand the reasoning to why the whole process worked and was created in such a way. It was essential for us to, first, identify what issues the website had and how they could be altered. Then we came up with an “outline” (wireframes and blueprints) as to how we could fix these issues. Next, it was important to put out ideas into action by creating a prototype of what an improved information environment should look like. From this project, I have a great basic understanding of information architecture and all the important steps and aspects that need to be considered for completion of an information environment. In all, I think that this project – and class in general – has sparked my interest in possibly being an information architect in the future. Through hands on activity, I found that I really enjoy working through this process and seeing the final product come together.