

# Getting Richer

by Stacy Merrill Surla

## Information Architecture

The ASIS&T Information Architecture Summit is a pivotal event in the yearly cycle for many IA-related professionals. Sessions and hallway conversations help the community learn from recent work and also generate points of focus for future exploration. The mixture of case study, research, practical tools and ethical discussion in this issue of the *Bulletin* reflects the range of session and hallway topics at the April Summit.

The success of the research track this year is particularly encouraging. IA practice needs stress-testing and rigor, and these attributes are brought to bear when research is carried out and widely shared. As D. Grant Campbell discusses in “Information Architecture Research: The Future State of the Art,” academics have the job of creating and testing IA tools, teaching a curriculum truly relevant to the next generations and helping define how information architecture relates to and interacts with other areas of expertise. Campbell also encourages academics and practitioners to take advantage of next year’s Summit research track or apply for a grant to support their work through the IA Institute.

In “FaceTag: Integrating Bottom-up and Top-down Classification in a Social Tagging System,” Emanuele Quintarelli, Andrea Resmini and Luca Rosati begin with a succinct overview of semantic structures in tagging systems. This introduction alone is a must-read for anyone interested in collaborative tagging issues and tools. The authors go on to describe FaceTag, a prototype that demonstrates how user-generated tags can be integrated with a faceted classification scheme to deliver an excellent browseable, interactive social bookmarking experience. This work should be of great interest to anyone wrestling with structured and user-generated categorizations.

In “Evolutionary Psychology as a Basis for Ethical Design: Virtual Status and Ubiquitous Altruism,” Olly Wright discusses evolutionary psychology in the realm of social networking. He proposes that IAs apply an understanding of evolutionary psychology to the achievement of more ethical information structures and

user experience. In particular, the author looks at virtual status and enabling and rewarding altruism through online media. I particularly appreciate the closing summation: “[A]s information architects, designers of these new social tools and mediated interactions, we are in a position to influence [design for an ethical and healthy culture], should we choose to.” This work offers particularly useful insights within the context of the developing world, and I hope to see these concepts elaborated further in a future issue of the *Bulletin*.

In “Data Driven Design: Using Web Analytics to Validate Heuristics,” Andrea Wiggins offers practical, research-based, straightforward ways for the information architect to work with web analytics to improve the user experience. Further, this article enriches the practice of IA by describing a teamwork approach for web analytics staff and IAs and by suggesting that measures of user experience be identified as key performance indicators early in the process. The author also discusses heading off the managerial temptation to replace user testing with web analytics alone.

Rich Internet applications (RIA) are what people are talking about when they say “Web 2.0.” User experience professionals naturally want to work on RIA projects, and those who haven’t had the chance yet may feel daunted or concerned about being left behind. Adam Polansky’s lively case study, “IA and RIAs – You Know More Than You Think You Do,” describes his first RIA engagement. He offers practical insights and helpful advice and, in the process, assures us that a well-rounded IA already has the foundations for success on an RIA project team.

Josh Knauer’s “Information Commons: Service to the Community Starts with Solid IA” packs three high value messages into one tight narrative. In this case study Knauer describes the development of a distributed database system that enables social services professionals to access and update information across a decentralized collection of data repositories. The article also showcases how an open system architecture and the use of universally unique identifiers (UUIDs) can help users build new tools in a collaborative manner. Finally, Knauer demonstrates that a solid IA methodology underpins a responsive and innovative solution to a widespread problem.

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