Overview: Information Architecture

by Thom Haller, associate editor for information architecture and guest editor

EDITOR’S SUMMARY
This issue’s special section delves into issues in information architecture and usability (IA/UX), ranging from the theoretical and conceptual to the practical. Authors explore the fundamental nature of information and evolving designs to support its complexity and translating patterns in semantic space to the screen and interface. The value of metaphors is shown for demonstrating information architecture to clients, while visual images can help illustrate the process. Last, an interview with Eric Reiss reveals the noted IA practitioner’s thoughts on explaining usability to clients and his new publication.

KEYWORDS
information architecture
usability
user experience
interfaces
human computer interaction
metaphors
interviews

As the IA editor for the ASIST Bulletin, I have the task of sorting through possible content to support our audiences of students, educators and practitioners. To meet your needs in this year’s special section, I’ve selected content that reflects academic thought and IA/UX practice.

Andrea Resmini in “IA in the Age of Complexity” takes us beyond the traditional web space as “single artifact” and directs our attention to the nature of information – mobile, bleeding into physical space. He reminds us that our job now is handling complexity and our call is to answer this need.

Similarly, Martyn Dade-Robertson, in “The Architecture of Information,” encourages us to look at the work we do identifying patterns in semantic space, thinking coherently about the differences in screen space and attending to the movement within interaction space.

These well-researched observations underlie some of the nuts-and-bolts provided by Marianne Sweeny, who gives us direction in thinking through semantic space in her helpful article “Optimizing Websites in the Post Panda World.”

Carrie Hane Dennison provides us with “A Metaphor for Content Strategy” – a strategy for explaining to clients and others how we need to attend to both building and furnishing a house.

Metaphors can support learning; so can visuals. If you are visually inclined (or perhaps want to become more so), you can view the “sketchnotes” developed by Veronica Erb and provided in her visual article “How to Start Sketchnoting.”

Finally, and for fun, I’ve included a jolly interview with long-time IA author and practitioner Eric Reiss. In “A Conversation with Eric Reiss, Author of Usable Usability: Simple Steps for Making Stuff Better,” Eric talks about a new publication and gives us structure for making usable choices and explaining usability to our colleagues and clients.

Enjoy the issue and feel free to send me your comments. You can reach me at thom<at>thomhaller.com.

Thom Haller – teacher, speaker, writer and user advocate – teaches principles of performance-based information architecture and usability. Since 1998, Thom has taught classes on architecting usable web/Intranet sites. As a teacher, Thom enables students to structure information so people can find it, use it and appreciate the experience. He can be reached at thom<at>thomhaller.com.