Design Critique Paper

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Introduction

As with any homepage, the homepage of The Information Architecture Institute (IAI) displays its organization’s name prominently at the top of the page, followed by a horizontal listing of global navigation buttons. At the bottom of the page is another horizontal list of global navigation buttons, as well as the copyright year of the homepage. The page is organized into three distinct columns. Beginning from the left-most column, the list of resources caters to both members as well as the general public who is interested in the field of information architecture. The middle column features a brief introduction to the Institute, followed by a list of links of resources for the information architecture community, list of resources for members, then an “Institute Member Snapshot” that features a different member daily. The right-most column contains a search box at the very top of the page, lists news, mainly the most recent past issues of the Institute’s newsletter, and features an event partner with an upcoming conference. The Institute has also taken the effort to translate the content of its homepage into several languages besides English, and the list of languages is listed in this column.

Removal and Consolidation of Links

Whether it is tools for designing a website, where the next information architecture job beckons, or if there is an information architecture conference, workshop or meeting conveniently located no matter where in the world one is, the IAI website seems to be able to provide a link to such information, and more. Indeed, the IAI website is a rich resource for people who are interested in the field of information architecture. But, at first look, the number of links of resources found on the IAI homepage seems overwhelming because nearly every line on the page is a link!
My first task hence was to identify unique links, and removed repeated ones. For example, the link “Contact Us” appears on both the top and bottom horizontal global navigation bars. I hence removed the one on the bottom navigation bar leaving it only in the top navigation bar as the top navigation bar is more likely to catch users’ attention. Regional links such as “IA Library” and the “Information Architecture Library” lead to the same page but are entitled differently, and placed under different headings. Another link, the “Job Board” is again placed under two different headings, one being under “Resources for Institute Members” although it is a link accessible to non-members. As a result of the process of removal and consolidation of links, I reorganized the remaining links and placed them under two headings – “Resources for the IA Community”, and “Member Center”. “Resources for the IA Community” then refers to those links that the general public can gain access to, and those links under the “Member Center” heading then refers to those pertaining to membership issues such as member profile update, access to the member directory and so on. In addition, the links under both headings are reorganized and listed alphabetically to aid more systematic browsing.

Colors for Navigation

On the original IAI homepage, the differentiation between a link and text with no link is not obvious. For example, links embedded in a paragraph of text will be underlined, but the color differentiation is not obvious. Other links, such as those in the left-most column are not underlined, and again, there is no obvious color differentiation. In redesigning the homepage, I have changed the color for regional links into blue, and had those all underlined. In addition, the color of global links has been changed into an obvious green to differentiate them from the regional links.

Section Rearrangement
Bearing in mind that wide screen computer monitors are becoming more and more common, I have rearranged the various sections of the IAI homepage to reflect such a change (Nielsen 2006). Since most users usually read from left to right, I have placed the “Resources for the IA community” as the first section of links that users will encounter when they come to this homepage. This is also done since the resources under this heading are available to all users whether they are members or otherwise. The space that is currently empty to the right of the links under this heading is to accommodate the addition of more resources and hence more links to be included under this section in the near future.

The “Member Center” resources are the next section on the page as these links are applicable to a more specific population of users. I have intentionally made the heading of this section prominent to bring to the attention of general users the benefits members enjoy. On the current homepage, the “Member Center” heading is not at all conspicuous, and seems embedded in the list of links for general users in the left-most column of the page. In fact, this list is separated into resources for non-members (upper portion of list), and members (lower portion of list), but the distinction is not obvious. By making the “Member Center” heading obvious, the interest of general users may be piqued and perhaps more users will sign up to become members.

The option of reading the homepage in a language other than English has been moved to the upper right-hand corner of the page. This is to make it evident to users who want to or need to view the homepage in another available language to know that there is an option for them to do so. Especially for users who need to be able to read in another language that is available, knowing so early in their encounter of the page will greatly facilitate their understanding of the material available to them. Such a facility will enable this site to reach a greater audience and potentially attract more members for the organization.
Conclusion

As Rosenfeld and Morville (2002) mentioned in their book, the content of a site reveals the character of an organization (p. 40). The architecture of the site especially that of the homepage should reflect this character in its layout since this is the gateway to the rest of the site. IAI states that it is “dedicated to advancing and promoting information architecture”, and the lists of rich resources the homepage has links to seem to echo that. Users who come to this site are probably serious information architecture enthusiasts who want to find specific information to help them with their tasks at hand or to learn more about the field, and its recent developments. The current homepage has kept graphics to a minimum if at all, and I have also chosen to limit that aspect of information architecture in my redesign. Instead, my objective for the reorganization and rearrangement of the homepage is to enable users to get to what they want more effectively and efficiently. So said, a site’s homepage should not remain static, and its changes should anticipate users’ expectations and more importantly, their needs.

References


The redesigned website:

Resources for the IA community
- Calendar of Events
- Design tools
- Education resources
- Event calendar
- Event resurrected
- Free IAI Newsletter sign-up
- Freedom of the Library
- IA journal for information architects
- IA Progress Grants
- Job Board
- join (membership)
- Local IA groups - Resources
- Skill
- Translations

Member Center
- Discounts on conferences held around the world
- Forgot your password?
- Information to support members’ Big Ideas (propose a new initiative)
- Member directory
- Monitoring Program
- Moderator-IA discussion list
- Renew your membership
- Update your profile

Institute Member Snapshot
Who: Bryce Johnson, Manager, Interface Development, Navigant Inc., Toronto, Ontario
Most recent IA project: I worked with city staff, community groups and citizens to define user, develop scenarios and evaluate prototypes for the upcoming City of Hamilton Community Portal.
Why belong to the IA Institute: I wanted to belong to an association in a field that I am actually interested in.

Event Partners
idea2006
October 23-24, 2006
A conference on designing complex information spaces of all kinds.
Seattle Public Library
Seattle, WA, USA
www.ideaconference.org
The Information Architecture Institute

The Information Architecture Institute is a non-profit, volunteer organization dedicated to advancing and promoting information architecture. Founded in 2002, the Institute has over 1000 members in 60 countries. Learn more about IA, review Member Benefits, or Join Now. If you're looking for a way to make an impact in the IA Community, consider Volunteering at IA.

Resources for the IA Community

- Information Architecture Library
- Local IA groups - Resources
- IA news for information architects
- Newsletter (sign up)
- Events calendar
- Design tools
- Education resources
- Event sponsorship program
- IA Progress Grants
- Translations of IA articles

Resources for Institute Members

- Member directory
- Job board
- Mentoring Program
- Moderated IA discussion lists
- Infrastructure to support members' Big Ideas (propose a new initiative)
- Discounts on conferences held around the world

Institute Member Snapshot

Who: Regnard Keeler C. Raqueden, Web Designer, East West Banking Corporation, Makati City, Philippines

Most recent IA project: Led redesign of East West Bank's internet portal, resulting in improved the portal's usability and adherence to web standards.

Why belong to the IA Institute? Connecting to an organization that has diversity in information architecture on IA, broadens one's knowledge and sense of community.

Learn more about me at: http://regnard.raqueden.com

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