Chapter 4: Anatomy of an Information Architecture

James Vorbach, Ph.D.

Component Systems
- Organization System
  - categories group pages and application
- Labeling system
  - Labels represent site content; what is displayed to represent a category
- Navigation systems
  - Global, local, and contextual systems are integrated within web pages to support browsing
  - Search systems execute user queries against indices and metadata

Resources
- Controlled Vocabularies
  - Lists of terms describing a particular domain
  - Synonym ring of equivalent terms
- Thesauri
  - controlled vocabularies which include synonyms, antonym, related terms, and parent-child relationships
- Metadata
  - Descriptive information about the data
  - Special tags used to describe content objects
    <meta name="keywords" content="information architecture, content management system">

Visualizing Information Architecture
- Top-down
  - User questions anticipated and designed into the structure of the web page
- Bottom-up
  - Architecture is embedded in content
- Invisible
  - Search engine; systems to support browsing

Top-down Information Architecture
- User questions anticipated and designed into the structure of the web page
- Architecture provides a framework for content via hierarchical organization
- Consistent global and local navigation
- Search available from the home page

User Questions
1. Where am I?
2. How do I find out about something? What's available on this site?
3. How do I search for what I want?
4. How can I communicate with XYZ?
5. What's happening at XYZ?
6. What's happening at XYZ right now?
7. Does XYZ do any cool stuff?
8. How do I get back to the main page or start over?
9. I know what I want, but how do I browse for it?
10. Where can I get help?
Bottom-up Information Architecture

- Architecture is embedded in content
- Information is ‘chunked’ so its semantics is clear without explicit subtitles
- Less reliance on explicit navigation
- Example: www.dictionary.com – architecture is embedded within the structure of the stored terms and the indexing methods

Invisible Information Architecture

- Structure behind the scenes
- Search systems
  - Controlled vocabulary substitutions
  - Results categorized
  - Browsing results for more information
  - Browse result categorizes
- Example: www.amazon.com