

Designing the User Experience

Deborah A. Levinson
Design Lead, ATG

Discovery process

This is a process of definition:

- Why are you doing this?
- Who are you working for?
- Who will benefit from this?
- What is it going to do?

Why are you doing this?

- Sell products
- Corporate/educational information
- Aggregate information from different sources (e.g., search engine, portal, calendar)
- Build community through shared interests (e.g., class web site)

Goals for web.mit.edu:

- Promote the MIT identity
- Provide users with a greater ability to find MIT information
- Facilitate work processes at MIT with web-based applications
- Make better use of content to showcase MIT's strengths
- Define strategies to further integrate components of the site

Goals for [My ATG](#):

- Marketing goals: Showcase latest ATG products; get sales and promotional material to users

- Support the developer community (build grassroots)
- Meet user demand: customization/personalization; targeted information; online technical support

Who are you working for?

May have one or more clients, some with competing needs

Don't confuse client with audience (person paying for site is not necessarily audience)

Who will benefit from this?

Defining an audience:

- Adults
- Children
- Teenagers
- Students
- Faculty
- Employees
- Customers
- Investors
- All of the above?

Other demographics:

- Gender
- Education level
- Profession
- Computer/web literacy
- Locale

Primary vs. secondary audiences

Primary audience needs to visit site, will gain direct benefit

Secondary audience is more casual

If you've defined need clearly, audience may be apparent:

Need: [admissions guidelines](#) for a school

Audience: prospective undergraduates

Need: people with little knowledge of the area want to [find out about local restaurants, entertainment](#), etc.

Audience: "lazy college students"

Need: [in-depth technical product information](#)

Audience: engineers and system administrators

Needs of the primary audience helps define content and functions. Always try to look at it from visitor's point of view - how do they solve problems?

Identifying audience needs sometimes leads to other features ...

For example, an online registration site must have

- course catalogue, and also ...
- private/secure transactions

Think about what users want now versus what they want later

- visual design for ATG Developer Network
- strong information architecture

Focus groups can narrow down audience and site needs.

What is it going to do?

Easy to get caught up in whiz-bang technology without thinking about why the site is there in the first place (example: [MOMA Workspheres](#))

What questions would users bring to the site, in the hope of finding an

answer?

Make a list of questions: How do I ... Where would I ... Who's in charge of ...

Use active verbs: For example, "the student will find the hours the pool is open," or "the user will purchase and download" an article.

Later, use these questions to test the navigation and functions.

Site development and tools

If you and your client don't know what users want ... find out!

- surveys
- focus groups
- competitive analysis (careful!)
- observation
- anecdotal data

How should you communicate with your users?

Key messages: "Elevator speech"

What is the metaphor for the site?

- Define the feeling of your site using abstract language, to define qualities as opposed to features.
- List some adjectives describing the design.
- How do you want the audience/users to feel?

Good content and solid information architecture are key

What makes up info architecture?

- Identifying content (existing and to be written)

- Identifying categories of information
- Mapping content/categories into physical site structure
 - <http://www.foo.com/career/salary/>
 - <http://www.foo.com/career/salary/computer-programming/>
 - <http://www.foo.com/career/salary/engineering/>

Without info architecture, users won't be able to navigate efficiently, or may never find what they're looking for

Examples:

- [Smithsonian Institution](#)
- [Department of Defense](#)
- [ESD](#)
- [Apple Computer](#)

What tools should you use for design?

- site maps
- flowcharts
- scenarios
- use cases
- prototypes
- most important - feature spec

Site maps and charting user experience (literally): many ways to develop them - sticky notes, doodling on paper, white board

Flowchart is good way of showing levels of site

- MLK web site
- Office of Sponsored Programs
- Boston Modern Orchestra Project

Represent basic assumptions with bullet points (pages or concepts)

Can map specific paths in more detail if you need to later:

- old ATG software download process
- current ATG software download process

Keep parts of planning process in mind while working on map:

- Audience
- Different paths for different viewers?
- Too many or too few categories of information?
- Hierarchy?
- Flow natural, from general to specific?

You do NOT have to get it right the first time. Strong information architecture + flexible UI/visual design= site design built for growth!

Scenarios tell your users' stories

- See *The Inmates are Running the Asylum* (Alan Cooper) for examples

Use cases describe system interactions

- Good for complex, branched user-system transactions, e.g., ATM
- Poor for understanding how users think - scenarios better

Prototypes give you flexibility

- Paper sketches
- Lightweight HTML

Bring it all together with a **feature spec**

- ATG Knowledge Base feature spec (long)
- Event materials distribution feature spec (short)