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User Experience Design

June 21, 2004

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I've been practicing information architecture since 1994, and from [Gopher](#) to [Google](#) have seen dramatic changes in the landscape of organization, search and retrieval.

Through these ten tempestuous years, I've found the infamous three circle diagram to be a great tool for explaining how and why we must strike a unique balance on each project between business goals and context, user needs and behavior, and the available mix of content.

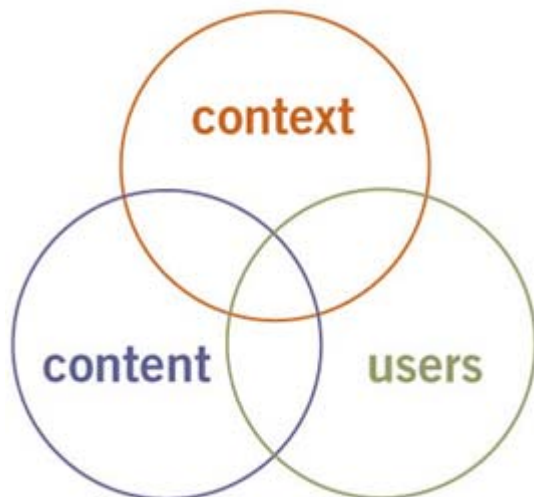


Figure 1. The Three Circles of Information Architecture

While this diagram was conceived with IA in mind, it's equally useful for explaining UX. In conjunction with Jesse's [masterpiece](#), I use the three circles to illustrate the distinction between user experience and user-centered design. I'm still not convinced UCD exists outside the realm of theory, but I practice user experience design every day.

Facets of the User Experience

When I broadened my interest from IA to UX, I found the need for a new diagram to illustrate the facets of user experience - especially to help clients understand why they must move beyond usability - and so with a little help from my [friends](#) developed the user experience honeycomb.



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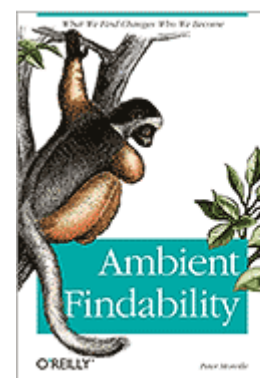
Peter Morville said:
"Thanks Challis. I've heard that "a subset" argument before. You to read Ambient Findability [1]..."
November 11, 2005

Mohammed S. El Nasr said:
"I'd like to thank you for this demonstration, it is really simple focused, and comprehensive. As Arab..."
December 28, 2005

Digital District said:
"I like the honeycomb very much Digital District we developed with UX-Team and some scientists a. January 21, 2006

Ambient Findability

Peter Morville's new book about business and life at the crossroad ubiquitous computing and the Inte



"I envy the young sc who find: inventive The futur just unw it's unsea
Bruce Ster

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Figure 2. The User Experience Honeycomb

Naturally, the jump from three circles to seven hexagons gave me an instant buzz, but after several months of road testing, I can safely say this diagram has survived the honeymoon.

Here's how I explain each facet or quality of the user experience:

- **Useful.** As practitioners, we can't be content to paint within the lines drawn by managers. We must have the courage and creativity to ask whether our products and systems are useful, and to apply our deep knowledge of craft and medium to define innovative solutions that are more useful.
- **Usable.** Ease of use remains vital, and yet the interface-centered methods and perspectives of human-computer interaction do not address all dimensions of web design. In short, usability is necessary but not sufficient.
- **Desirable.** Our quest for efficiency must be tempered by an appreciation for the power and value of image, identity, brand, and other elements of emotional design.
- **Findable.** We must strive to design navigable web sites and locatable objects, so users can find what they need.
- **Accessible.** Just as our buildings have elevators and ramps, our web sites should be accessible to people with disabilities (more than 10% of the population). Today, it's good business and the ethical thing to do. Eventually, it will become the law.
- **Credible.** Thanks to the Web Credibility Project, we're beginning to understand the design elements that influence whether users trust and believe what we tell them.
- **Valuable.** Our sites must deliver value to our sponsors. For non-profits, the user experience must advance the mission. With for-profits, it must contribute to the bottom line and improve customer satisfaction.

The honeycomb hits the sweet spot by serving several purposes at once.

See Also

User Experience Refined
Article by James Melzer

UXnet
User Experience Network

The Elements of User Experience
Book by Jesse James Garrett

AIGA Experience Design
A Community of Practice

Emotional Design
Book by Don Norman

Don't Make Me Think
Book by Steve Krug

Search Engine Visibility
Book by Shari Thurow

Web Credibility Project
Stanford University

Web Accessibility Initiative
World Wide Web Consortium

Web Standards Project (WASP)
Access to Web Technologies for /

En Français
Translation by Michael Carpentier

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First, it's a great tool for advancing the conversation beyond usability and for helping people understand the need to define priorities. Is it more important for your web site to be desirable or accessible? How about usable or credible? The truth is, it depends on your unique balance of context, content and users, and the required tradeoffs are better made explicitly than unconsciously.

Second, this model supports a modular approach to web design. Let's say you want to improve your site but lack the budget, time, or stomach for a complete overhaul. Why not try a targeted redesign, perhaps starting with Stanford's [ten guidelines](#) as a resource for evaluating and enhancing the credibility of your web site?

Third, each facet of the user experience honeycomb can serve as a singular looking glass, transforming how we see what we do, and enabling us to explore beyond conventional boundaries.

A Different Way of Seeing

For example, I realized some time ago that while "information architect" describes my profession, [findability](#) defines my passion.

Since then, I've found my focus on findability has [opened my eyes](#), leading me beyond IA while simultaneously making me a better information architect.

Last Summer, while redesigning the [Q](#) web site, we identified findability as a top priority. Our quest to make this small site more findable took me beyond the discipline of information architecture and deep into the realm of search engine optimization.

That experience proved useful last Fall, during a redesign project for the [National Cancer Institute](#), in which we used findability concepts and SEO statistics to alleviate an unhealthy fixation on the home page, raising awareness of the need to design findable documents for direct access via the Google, MSN, and Yahoo! search engines.

And this Spring, I was hired to perform my first [findability audit](#) for a major international nonprofit. Feeling a bit concerned about dedicating four weeks exclusively to findability, I asked whether I should also consider usability factors. "No thanks," my client replied. "We already had [Jakob](#) in last year to focus on usability."

A Big Hive

Though the findability audit was a success, it did feel ironic to once again be ensnared inside a box (or hexagon) of my own making.

But I'm sticking with findability for now. Between my [new seminar](#), my new book, and [findability.org](#), I'm busy as a bee.

And anytime I feel trapped, I can explore other facets of the user experience honeycomb, or perhaps even create a new diagram.

For me, user experience design is a [big hive](#): a dynamic, multi-dimensional space where there's still plenty of room to build new boxes and draw new arrows, at least for the next ten years.

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