

Project Brief
for
Upper Sandusky Community Library

IAKM 60112: Information Architecture II

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Introduction

Background

A stakeholder from the Upper Sandusky Community Library contacted the Information Architecture (IA) department at Kent State University for help with the library's website. The stakeholder described the site as needing a redesign "from the ground up." The IA department agreed to help by assigning a team of IA students to work on the redesign. This document was created by the student team for the library stakeholder. It serves as a report of the team's findings, recommendations, and project plan.

Stakeholder Needs

The stakeholder identified the following improvements that need to be made to the site:

- Ease of access to information
- Welcoming thematic elements
- Updated technology
- Better organization of content
- Improved ability for patrons to find the exact information they need

Solving the Site's IA Problems

During the redesign, the student team will use best practices in the IA industry to solve the architectural problems on the website. According to an industry expert, three important points should be understood when designing an IA (Spencer, 2014, p. 21):

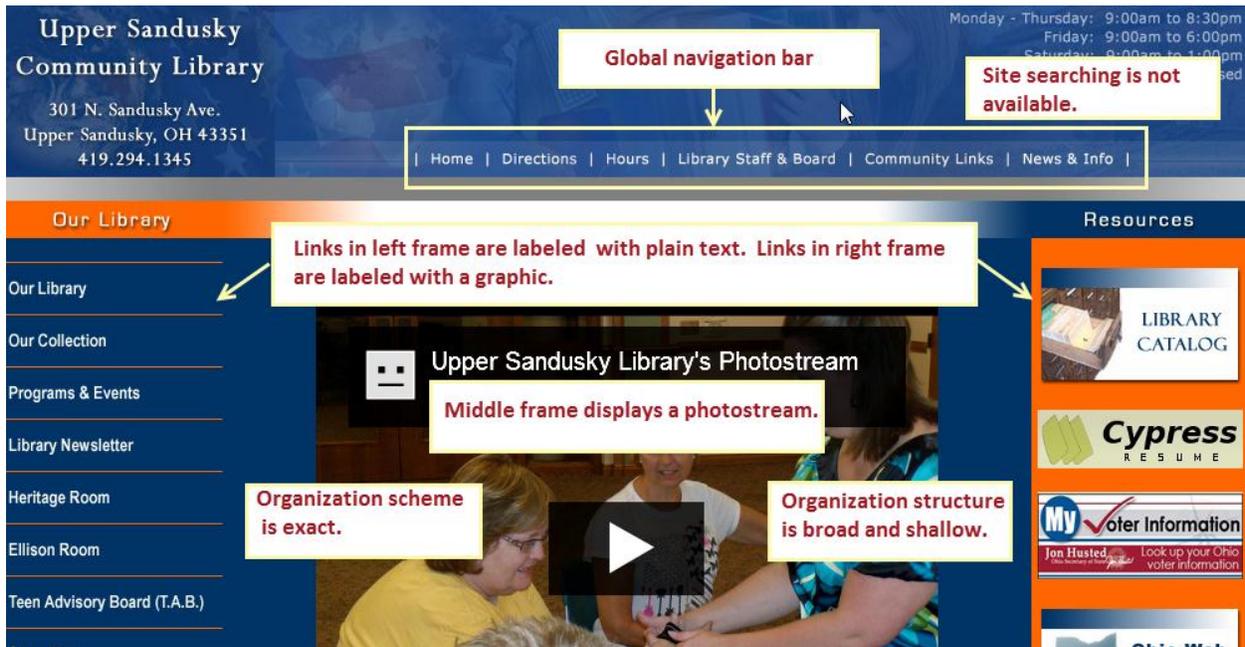
1. People: What they need do to, how they think and what they already know
2. Content: What you have, what you should have and what you need
3. Context: The business or personal goals for the site, who else will be involved and what your constraints are

The IA department agrees that people, content, and context are the three components of an IA (Robins, n.d.). The student team will learn about and understand the intended users of the website, the content that it provides to them, and the context in which they use it. The activities involved are reflected in the Project Plan section of this document.

Current State of the Upper Sandusky Community Library's IA

Before moving forward on a redesign, it is useful to briefly review the current site at <http://www.upper-sandusky.lib.oh.us/>. The high-level review below covers the home page and the site's IA elements (organization, labeling, navigation, and searching.)

The home page appears as shown in the following screen clip:



Overall Appearance of Home Page

- The home page has three frames. The left and right frames provide navigation. The middle frame displays a Flickr slideshow. When a link is clicked, the middle frame displays the linked content.
- Address and hours of operation are on the left and right sides of the masthead.
- The global navigation bar appears below the masthead.
- Links on the left frame have a very plain style. The link labels are plain text. Content linked from the right frame has a graphic as a label.
- There is no footer.

Organization scheme and structure

- IA experts have described information organization schemes as being exact or ambiguous (Morville & Rosenfeld, 2007, p. 59). Exact schemes are objective and have mutually exclusive categories, while ambiguous schemes are subjective and may have overlapping categories. Based on this definition, the organization scheme on the current site is exact. The content is linked to the home page by the specific name of the content. For example, information for the “After School Action Hour” is labeled with that exact name.
- The organization structure of the current site is broad and shallow. Links on the home page lead directly to the content indicated; there is no hierarchy with multiple levels of links.

Labeling systems

- On the home page, links to internal pages are plain text. Links to outside sites are represented by a graphic label. The graphic does not always represent the content being accessed. For example, the graphic labeled “Learning Express Library” leads to a page labeled “Ohio Web Library.”
- Some labeling is clear, but some is not. For example, the label “Library Newsletter” is clear because it links directly to a PDF of the library’s monthly newsletter. Other labels are obscure and internally focused. For example, the links in the left frame have the heading “Our Library.” Those in the right frame have the heading “Resources.” This is an attempt to signify that these are two different groups of links; however, this may not be understood by patrons.

Navigation systems

- The site currently has a standard global navigation bar and local navigation links. Patrons viewing content under “Our Library” do not really navigate away from the home page because the content displays in the middle frame.
- The site has some contextual linking in the content (see, for example, the jump links on the “Our Library” sub-page.) It does not, however, have true hypertext navigation (Morville & Rosenfeld, 2007, p. 121). See comments under “Other Issues Found by the IA Student Team” below.

Searching systems

- Other than catalog search, the current site has no search feature. See comments under “Other Issues Found by the IA Student Team” below.

Other Issues Found by the IA Student Team

The team found the following issues that should be addressed during the redesign:

- There is no site search function available on the current site. Since searching is necessary for users to find content, it needs to be part of the redesign. The content may need enhancement with metadata and topic tagging to create an effective search feature. Enhancing the content with metadata would also facilitate the creation of faceted browse.
- Development of contextual linking is another way that content can be found and navigated. The existing content may require a significant amount of enhancement to increase the number of hypertext links.
- The current site has no footer or social media navigation. These features are standard on contemporary websites. They should be included in the redesign.
- Links do not have tool tips that provide users with additional information. This is a standard feature that should be part of the redesign.

Project Plan

The project will take place over a seven-week period. The project tasks are listed below, along with the value of each activity, the approach taken, and the timeframe involved. Following the list of tasks is a Gantt chart showing the timeframe for task completion.

User Research

- **Interview two people who have knowledge of online patrons of municipal libraries.**
 - **Value:** The interviews will provide information about users in the context of what they want from an online municipal library site.
 - **Approach:** Due to time constraints, actual users will not be interviewed. Instead, knowledgeable stakeholders from the library community will be interviewed.
 - **Timeframe:** Week 2

- **Use interview results to create distinct user profiles with different sets of needs. These profiles are known in user research as “personas.”**
 - **Value:** Personas facilitate online web site development by serving as user models.
 - **Approach:** Specific goals and tasks with respect to the library’s website will be identified and prioritized as high, medium and low. This information will be used to determine the type and number of personas needed.
 - **Timeframe:** Week 2

- **Conduct a literature search to learn more about the users of municipal library websites.**
 - **Value:** Provides a deeper level of knowledge in the project.
 - **Approach:** Perform online searches in professional Information Architecture journals and studies.
 - **Timeframe:** Week 2

- **Create a draft user research document**
 - **Value:** Gather information obtained into one document.
 - **Approach:** Describe a) how the team conducted user research, b) what we learned about the typical users (i.e., their goals, tasks, and information they seek), c) persona(s) derived from the research and d) a list of the tasks the site should support, organized by priority and persona.
 - **Timeframe:** Week 2

Content Inventory, Classification Scheme Selection, and Site Map

- **Perform a content analysis based on the personas’ needs and key tasks.**
 - **Value:** Determine the content that is best suited for library patrons.
 - **Approach:** Determine what content is already present on the current site and what content is missing. Current content can be repurposed or reworked; missing content must be created or acquired.
 - **Timeframe:** Week 4

- **Choose a primary classification scheme for the content.**
 - **Value:** A classification scheme is a way of organizing and categorizing content for a given purpose. Every website needs a classification scheme that works well for its users.
 - **Approach:** For this project, the user research noted above will guide the selection of a primary classification scheme.
 - **Timeframe:** Week 4

- **Create a site map of the web site.**
 - **Value:** A site map is a chart or diagram created by information architects to indicate where the key components on a site are located relative to each other. A site map helps the user navigate around the site (Spencer, 2014, p. 29).
 - **Approach:** For this project, key tasks performed by municipal library patrons will be indicated on the site map. The labels associated with the classification scheme will also be shown.
 - **Timeframe:** Week 4

- **Test the site structure.**
 - **Value:** Use a technique known as “tree testing” to validate the usability of the site’s structure.
 - **Approach:** Treejack is an online tool used by professional Information Architects to evaluate the findability of topics in a website. It will be used for the test.
 - **Timeframe:** Week 5

Navigation, Workflows and Final Recommendations

- **Create a paper sketch of the home page and several workflows on the website.**
 - **Value:** This type of sketch is called a “wireframe.” It is a type of drawing that information architects use to show the framework of a website page
 - **Approach:** Sketching wireframes on paper is quick and economical. This approach is often used to expedite website development (Morville & Rosenfeld, 2007, p. 310).
 - **Timeframe:** Week 6
- **Test site navigation.**
 - **Value:** This technique is known as “first impression testing.” It assesses a user’s ability to correctly navigate through a task when the user first sees the site.
 - **Approach:** Use wireframes and the online tool Chalkmark to test navigation. Chalkmark is used by professional information architects to evaluate the findability of topics in a website.
 - **Timeframe:** Week 6
- **Deliver final recommendations.**
 - **Value:** Gather information and recommendations into a final document
 - **Approach:** Provide a final recommendations document that provides information from the entire project.
 - **Timeframe:** Week 7

Gantt Chart for the Upper Sandusky Community Library Project

Activity	Week	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Write draft project brief		X						
Recruit and conduct interviews with two people who have knowledge of municipal library users, create personas			X					
Conduct literature search for archival information on municipal library users			X					
Create draft user research document, including personas			X					
Review team feedback on user research document, submit revised document				X				
Recruit participants for Treejack study					X			
Create draft content analysis, classification scheme, and site map; review team feedback; submit final version					X			
Perform Treejack test, submit results, review team feedback, submit report						X		
Recruit participants for Chalkmark study						X		
Create wireframes, review team feedback, perform Chalkmark test, submit results							X	
Write final research document deliverable								X

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