Essential Information
Architecture Resources
for Built Environments
on the Web

Dartmouth College | Hanover, New Hampshire | October 30, 2002
Communities

Typically, the best source of information, especially on a fairly new topic, are people. And the best places to find people who know about a topic are the communities that are organized around that topic.

There are ongoing discussions on whether to form a professional association of information architects or to organize under the auspices of one or more existing associations. In fact, one of the American Society for Information Science and Technology’s largest SIGs (special interest group) is SIG-IA. SIG-IA sponsors the popular Information Architecture Summit series of annual conferences, and has established the SIGIA-L discussion list. But beyond SIG-IA’s admirable contributions, there really is no single association that are dedicated to serving the professional needs of information architects.

Instead, the community “meets” most frequently on discussion lists, specifically SIGIA-L. Established shortly after the first Information Architecture Summit was held in April of 2000, SIGIA-L is absolutely the most important resource for information architects. It will help you learn who your peers are, what they’re working on, and what challenges they face. You’ll find a remarkably friendly and supportive forum for asking questions and occasionally venting frustrations. Below we provide information on SIGIA-L and a few other information architecture-related discussion lists that we’ve found useful. We also list information on some highly relevant professional associations and SIGs that you might consider joining.

During 2001, a spate of local information architecture “cocktail hours” cropped up on at least three continents. Meetings typically involve a guest speaker or discussion facilitator and much alcohol. This exciting grass roots trend is an important first step toward building a “real” community of information architects, and these meetings are just plain fun to boot. Track local meetings from the IAwiki (www.iawiki.net/cgi-bin/wiki.pl?search=CategoryEvent), or consider starting a local group yourself.

Speaking of volunteerism and community building, it’s important to note that no field can transform itself into a community without the “sweat equity” of its practitioners. In other words, if you feel the information architecture community should provide its members with more—whether that means conferences, a job board, a library, or a professional association of its own—then you should make it happen. To coordinate volunteers’ efforts, the Info-Arch.Org site was been established in November of 2001 (www.info-arch.org/infrastructure) and has already spawned a number of important volunteer-driven projects.
Discussion Lists

SIGIA-L
Subscription instructions and archives: www.info-arch.org/lists/sigia-l/
Comment: *The place* for information architects. Roughly 2,000 subscribers with a large international contingent, and approximately 15-20 messages per day. List postings are not moderated, but for the most part SIGIA-L has maintained a surprisingly high level of civility and posters have kept themselves on topic. Additionally, the list isn’t (yet) besieged by a constant barrage of the same “newbie” questions over and over again; in information architecture, apparently we’re all newbies at the same time!

AIGA-Experience Design
Subscription instructions and archives: groups.yahoo.com/group/AIGAExperienceDesign/
Comment: The American Institute of Graphic Arts’ Experience Design community sponsors this lively mailing list of approximately 1,000 members. Traffic ranges widely; a month with 141 postings has been followed by a month with one posting. Established in 1998, the AIGA-ED list is a great place to learn from and mix it up with a highly interdisciplinary crowd interested in the broad area of experience design.

CHI-WEB
Subscription instructions and archives: www.sigchi.org/web/
Comment: If you want to take the pulse of the usability engineering community, sign of for CHI-WEB. Sponsored by the ACM SIG on Computer-Human Interaction, CHI-WEB is a highly moderated (and therefore high quality) list with about 100-200 postings per month.
Professional Associations

While we don’t suggest you go out and join each of these associations, they’re all certainly worth knowing about. Most produce high quality conferences, journals, and other valuable resources. And although these particular associations are not the only ones relevant to the field, each has expressed a desire or taken active steps to provide information architects and other experience designers better and more coordinated professional support.

ACM SIGCHI
www.acm.org/sigchi/
One of the Association for Computing Machinery’s 35 SIGs, the Special Interest Group on Computer-Human Interaction sponsors the CHI-WEB discussion list, bi-monthly Interactions and SIGCHI Bulletin magazines, the SIGCHI annual conferences each spring, and is the force behind many other useful HCI events and resources. SIGCHI has about 5,000 members.

AIGA-ED
www.aiga.org/content.cfm?Alias=fourthadvancefordesignsummit
AIGA-ED (Experience Design) was established in 2001 as a highly interdisciplinary community of interest within the American Institute of Graphic Arts. The AIGA-ED discussion list, as mentioned above, is quite active; the group is working to develop many other services and content for the broad experience design community.

ASIS&T
www.asis.org
Formerly the American Society for Information Science (the “and Technology” is a very recent change), ASIS&T sponsors SIG-IA for information architects, as well as its corresponding discussion list and the Information Architecture Summits. ASIS&T has approximately 3,000 members, many information scientists from academia and business. ASIS&T publishes its journal (JASIS&T) 14 times per year, as well as a bi-monthly bulletin called, as you might guess, BASIS&T. ASIS&T’s annual conference is held in the fall.

STC
www.stc.org
The Society for Technical Communication has about 25,000 members worldwide. Two of its most popular SIGs—Information Design with 3,200 members, and Usability with 2,500 members—are most relevant to information architects. STC publishes Intercom ten times annually. The spring annual event draws a large audience, and STC’s 150 local chapters are also quite active.

UPA
www.upassoc.org/
Established in 1991, the Usability Professionals’ Association focuses on the needs of usability practitioners; UPA now has approximately 2,500 members. Its annual conference takes place in the summer. In 2002 UPA is launching a new magazine, User Experience, to be published three times per year.
Directories

When something is “comprehensive,” that typically means it covers everything on a particular domain. However, in the case of comprehensive directories on the Web, comprehensive is a relative term; there are no absolutes. There are no obvious models that support the creation and continued maintenance of anything coming close to comprehensive coverage of a specific topic. So, while there are a few directories of information architecture resources, none will provide you with everything. We’d love to point you to the one and only comprehensive IA directory, but instead recommend that regularly visit multiple directories to find information about the field.

Argus Center for Information Architecture IA Guide
argus-acia.com/ia_guide/
Organized by author, title, and subject, the guide contains over 200 annotated resources. Unfortunately, with the demise of Argus, the guide is no longer being updated. So you’ll find it highly useful for resources created before the spring of 2001.

The IAwiki
www.iawiki.net/IAwiki
In the fall of 2001, Eric Scheid and Victor Lombardi established the IAwiki as a “collaborative discussion space for the topic of Information Architecture”. Think of the IAwiki as a wonderful shared collection of annotated bookmarks that anyone can add to, modify, or delete, regardless of who they are. (You can learn more about wikis from the original wiki —c2.com/cgi/wiki?FrontPage.) Of course, this is good and bad: the IAwiki is self-propagating, packed with useful resources, and is updated daily. But it’s difficult to design and maintain a shared information architecture, meaning that it’s not always a snap to find what you’re looking for in the IAwiki.

Usable Web
www.usableweb.com/
Keith Instone’s directory is primarily focused on usability engineering resources; however, there is rich coverage of information architecture and other related area as well. Usable Web’s 1400+ resources are organized by topic, author, source, and date of entry.

There is one other resource the bears mention, even though it doesn’t exist (yet): the IA Library, one of the offshoots of the Info-Arch.Org project. At the time of this writing, a dedicated volunteer team has assembled an extremely impressive plan that, among other things, banks on collaborative filtering approaches to address the scaling challenges faced by most directories. If they pull it off, the IA Library will supersede most other efforts to collect information architecture resources. Stay tuned.
Books

We’d like to have titled this category “Books and Magazines,” but information architecture is a new field and currently sports a single, brand new (and quite wonderful) journal, *Boxes and Arrows* (www.boxesandarrows.com/). *B&A* promises to be the field’s “peer-written journal dedicated to discussing, improving and promoting the work of this community, through the sharing of exemplary technique, innovation and informed opinion”. With a star-studded editorial team and an excellent initial few issues, they seem a good bet make good on this promise.

There are also precious few books dedicated to information architecture. But there are thousands of titles that are relevant to the field, and perhaps hundreds that merit reading. We can’t hope to narrow that list down to four or five, so we’ll instead rely upon an ACIA survey (argus-acia.com/iask/survey071801/071801index.html) we conducted in June of 2001.

This survey tried to determine which sources of information the community used to learn about and keep up with the field. Among other questions, we asked what books information architects had already read, and which they planned to read in the near future. We present the top answers to each question below; these lists are useful as they provide a sense of what 107 of your peers are actually reading, if not what we would suggest they read.

### Books Information Architects Had Already Read

June 2001 responses to the question “Which books have you read during the last year that are relevant to Information Architecture?”

Books Information Architects *Planned* to Read

June 2001 responses to the question “Which books will you read during the next year that are relevant to Information Architecture?”

Formal Education (Graduate Level)

Kent State University (Bowling Green, Ohio, USA)
ian.kent.edu/
Masters in Information Architecture and Knowledge Management.

University of Baltimore (Baltimore, Maryland, USA)
iat.ubalt.edu/odia/
Masters in Interaction Design and Information Architecture.

U.S. News and World Report
www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/beyond/gradrank/gbinfos.htm
Ranked list of US graduate schools in library science from 1999.

ACM SIGCHI
www.acm.org/sigchi/educhi/program.html
Published in 1998, this HCI Education Survey Report lists 76 HCI programs.

HCI Bibliography
www.hcibib.org/education/
“The HCI Education page is a collection of resources for students and educators interested in Human-Computer Interaction.”
Education Articles, Surveys and Other Resources

IAwiki Degree in IA Page
www.iawiki.net/DegreeInIA
The most up-to-date collection of resources on the topic; includes listings of programs and discussion of syllabi.

Information Architecture Resources
https://www.quickbase.com/db/7ca4anz3?a=q&qid=6
Compiled by SIGIA-L community; useful but does not seem be currently maintained.

University of Texas on Information Architecture
www.gslis.utexas.edu/~l38613dw/readings.InfoArchitecture.html
R.E. Wyllis’ excellent article on IA education; “discusses ideas associated with the phrase ‘information architecture’ and relates them to aspects of the library- and information-science (LIS) professions”. Published in 2000.

Syracuse University on Information Architects
istweb.syr.edu/21stcenlib/who/architect.html
Another academic take on information architecture and its relationship to LIS.
Conferences

Currently, just one conference is dedicated to information architecture — the ASIS&T-sponsored Information Architecture Summit, held each spring starting in 2000 (and, we hope, continuing indefinitely). Held in the US, the Summit is organized by volunteers and has attracted 300-400 attendees. Visit the ASIS&T web site for information on the next Summit: www.asis.org/

Information architecture continues to crop up on the programs of more and more established conferences, such as the ASIS&T, SIGCHI, and STC annual meetings, and KM (knowledge management) World. At this writing, there is no single ideal calendar of conferences relevant to information architects, although the community-maintained calendar in the IAwiki is your best bet. All the calendars listed below are all worth checking from time to time. Also subscribe to the SIGIA-L discussion list to monitor announcements of upcoming events.

Brint (knowledge management)
www.brint.com/calendar/cal/calendar.cgi

IAwiki Conferences page (information architecture)
www.iawiki.net/IAconferences

InfoDesign (information design and many related areas)
www.bogieland.com/infodesign/

SearchTools (information retrieval)
www.searchtools.com/info/conferences.html

Usable Web (usability engineering)
usableweb.com/topics/000856-0-0.html
News

iaslash
www.iaslash.org/ia/
Only a year old, Michael Angeles’ news service has emerged as one of the two or three most essential information architecture resources. Absolutely indispensable for keeping up on the field, iaslash provides daily updates on new articles, books, sites, tools, and other fresh information architecture news. It’s remarkable that one person can cover so much on a daily basis, and we hope that Michael can maintain his pace. Also available via email.

InfoDesign News Flashes
www.bogieland.com/infodesign/
Like Michael Angeles, Peter Bogaards also deserves recognition for his regular, consistent, and expert filtering of an incredibly huge amount of material. His service covers a broader scope than iaslash, including information design, usability, visual design, and information visualization as well as information architecture. Also available via email.

Tomalak’s Realm
www.tomalak.org/
Established in 1998, Lawrence Lee’s news service is “a daily source of links to strategic Web design stories”. Tomalak’s Realm focuses on happenings in the broader web design “industry,” and tends toward filtering more traditional news sources such as the New York Times, Business Week and Wired magazine. Also available via email.

WebWord
www.webword.com/
John Rhodes’ excellent site claims to focus on “industrial strength usability” but has increasingly forayed into information architecture. WebWord filters a broad set of usability-related sources, but also includes substantial original content in the form of columns and interviews. Also available via email.

XBlog
www.xplane.com/xblog
Xplane is the name of both the blog and its sponsor, the “visual thinking company”. Of all the services we’ve listed, Xplane takes perhaps the most wide-ranging approach to filtering news, covering diverse topics from advertising and graphic design to mapping and linguistics. As information architecture becomes increasingly interdisciplinary, Xplane will become only more valuable to practitioners.
Opinion

Alertbox
www.useit.com/
Jakob Nielsen’s bi-weekly column on Web usability. Short, to-the-point, and easily digested. Nielsen is probably the best-known commentator on topics of usability engineering and, more broadly, experience design.

Andrew Dillon on Information Architecture
www.asis.org/Bulletin/
Andrew Dillon is the Dean of the University of Texas’ Graduate School of Library and Information Science, and active in organizing programs for the ASIS&T Information Architecture Summits. His regular column is published bi-monthly in the Bulletin of the American Society for Information Science and Technology.

Bloug
www.louisrosenfeld.com
Lou Rosenfeld’s blog focuses solely on information architecture, at least for now. Some of the ideas for this book’s second edition were initially floated on Bloug.

Elegant Hack
www.eleganthack.com
Christina Wodtke is a voracious reader and writer. So it’s not surprising that her blog is perhaps the most wide-ranging and active source of opinions on information architecture and interaction design.

PeterMe
www.peterme.com/
Peter Merholz’s blog is one of the most influential within both the information architecture community and the broader field of experience design. And it’s not surprising: PeterMe not only spots trends but often initiates them by bringing up interesting memes like faceted classification. And Peter doesn’t shirk from airing his intense takes on everything from complexity theory to Krispy Kreme donuts.

Semantics
www.semanticstudios.com/publications/semantics/
Peter Morville’s “irregularly irreverent column” comes out about once per month. In Semantics Peter emphasizes the business strategy aspects of information architecture, but is not above looking into some quirkier topics, such as social networks and citation analysis.
Examples, Deliverables and Tools

There are no definitive ways to create architectural deliverables, no standards for diagrams, no consensus tools to help you do your work as an information architect (and it’s not clear if there ever will be). Thankfully there are more and more useful resources to provide you with options and ideas, primarily from the IAwiki.

IAwiki Deliverables and Artifacts
www.iawiki.net/DeliverablesAndArtifacts
From site maps and wire frames to examples and advice, this page provides an extremely impressive collection of links on the products of information architecture design.

IAwiki Diagramming Tools
www.iawiki.net/DiagrammingTools
The IAwiki doesn’t have quite as much information on actual tools, but this page is a good start and is the best source on the topic so far.

jjg.net’s Visual Vocabulary
www.jjg.net/ia/visvocab/
Originally released in October of 2000, Jesse James Garrett has regularly updated this collection of tools, templates and thoughts. His goal is “to describe, at a high level, the structure and/or flow of the user experience of a Web site.” He’s done so in a highly systematic way, and both information architects and interaction designers will find it quite useful.