

***Site-it!*: An Information Architecture Prototyping Tool**

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Abstract. *Site-it!* is a simple, powerful and cheap prototyping tool for site structure and user experience flow. This tool is a set of sticky notes printed abstract appearance of web pages. It contains 7 types of templates that express most of web pages. IAs can use it for brainstorming and discussion with clients. By using this tool, you can focus on IA discussion and cultivate understandings of user experience in the sites with team members and clients.

Keywords: Information Architecture, Workshop, Prototyping, User Experience.

1 Introduction

The web design in business is becoming increasingly important with the spread of the Internet. Along with the rise of its importance, the designing of web sites is now required to provide a solution to business needs and to assure the superiority over competition. In order to provide the solution to business need, especially to improve user satisfaction or to solve problems, human-centred design processes are utilized.

It is clearly specified that in the human-centred design processes, user needs define the requirements, and the designing is done based on those requirements. In this designing phase, preparing and comparing different several prototypes is considered to be effective for problem solution.

In the web designing and user interface designing industry, the prototyping evaluation called “paper prototyping,” which uses paper-made screen images, is actively conducted in screen designing.

However, as for the design of more abstract information architecture, it is difficult to make comparison and share the process of the design. Therefore, currently such abstract information architecture is not examined very effectively.

This paper will introduce a prototyping tool that is effective in evaluating information architecture to solve the problems.

2 Web Design Process and Information Architecture Designing

2.1 Web Design Process

The general web design processes such as those for companies or services can be divided into the research phase, designing phase, and development phase, as shown in

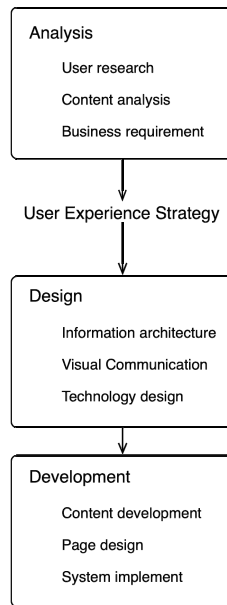


Fig. 1. One example of web design process

Fig. 1. In the designing phase, the information architecture designing occupies an important position.

The information architecture designing is essential for web sites where various users visit and that handle a large volume of information. With appropriate information architecture designing, the following solutions may be expected [1].

1. Users can find information that they want.
2. Providers can appeal information that they want to provide.
3. Manage the increase of change of the volume of information.

In general, information architecture designing consists of:

- site structure;
- inter-page navigation system;
- labeling system;
- page design.

Among them the page design is examined with methods such as paper prototyping or wireframe.

2.2 Problems in Information Architecture Designing

Meanwhile, as for the site structure designing that has an important role in the website designing and information architecture designing, there is no means for sharing the stages in the process of design, so the designing can be judged only by viewing the finished site structure documents.

The site structure is designed based on several requirements such as user experience strategy, contents classification, navigation mechanism, or page design, so the background of the site structure cannot be understood just by seeing the final map. Moreover, since the site structure document is an abstract conceptual diagram, it is difficult to imagine how the elements expressed in the structure will specifically look like.

For those reasons, problems are likely to be overlooked in the phase of the site structure designing, which may lead to a situation that a crucial requirement is found in the implementation phase and the site structure then needs to be adjusted.

In addition, at the initial stage of site structure designing, sticky notes like Post-it® is often used: those sticky notes are regarded as web pages and put on a white board to conduct the designing. This method does not cost much and allows flexible evaluation, so it is widely used. In this method, however, the roles of each sheet of sticky notes are not clarified. Therefore, participants in a workshop incorrectly recognize the role of each page, or they tend to discuss the detail of pages even though the entire picture should be the subject of discussion.

3 Development of *Site-it!*

3.1 Extraction of Page Templates

In light of the foregoing current situation, we considered that producing sticky notes on which page templates are printed in advance and using those sticky notes for designing might solve the problem.

As the template patterns to be printed, among from several types of page design pattern that have conventionally been used for designing at Concent, Inc., the most typical ones were extracted. For this extraction information architects conducted card sorting.

The thus extracted typical page patterns are shown in Fig. 2.

The page patterns are roughly classified into the “portal type” for representing a top page or category top pages; the “list type” for representing a page which contains a list of items; the “detail type” for representing the detailed information pages; and the “interactive type” for representing the dynamic pages such as a form page and a search page. We prepared variation for the list type and the detail type: users may choose to include the text only or also contain graphics. We also provided each template with space where a page title can be written down.

3.2 Workshop Using *Site-it!*

Site-it! is used in a workshop for site structure. As shown in Fig. 3, *Site-it!*s for major pages are attached on a wall or a white board. The participants can see the entire configuration of the site and compare various patterns.

Also, since *Site-it!* pieces are attached on a white board, the relationship between pages can be drawn down.

Site-it! is particularly suitable for:

- High-level site structure.
- Inter-site configuration for several websites of a single enterprise (EIA: enterprise information architecture).

Portal type:
Homepage, Category top



List type:
Text index, List with picture



Detail type:
Text, Text with picture



Interactive type:
Form, Search



Fig. 2. *Site-it!* page templates

For a more detailed site structure, you may need applications such as Microsoft Excel or OmniGraffle.

3.3 Features of *Site-it!*

By using *Site-it!* for designing and evaluation, the process of the site structure that has seemed to be an individual task can be shared.

Moreover, the page types can be visually checked, thereby allow those who do not have much technical knowledge to catch a detailed image. At the same time, during the site structure evaluation unnecessary discussion about the detail of each page can be avoided.

In addition to those advantages, *Site-it!* uses paper pieces, on which notes can be made, and the pieces can be freely attached. Thus the site structure can be discussed anywhere at any time.

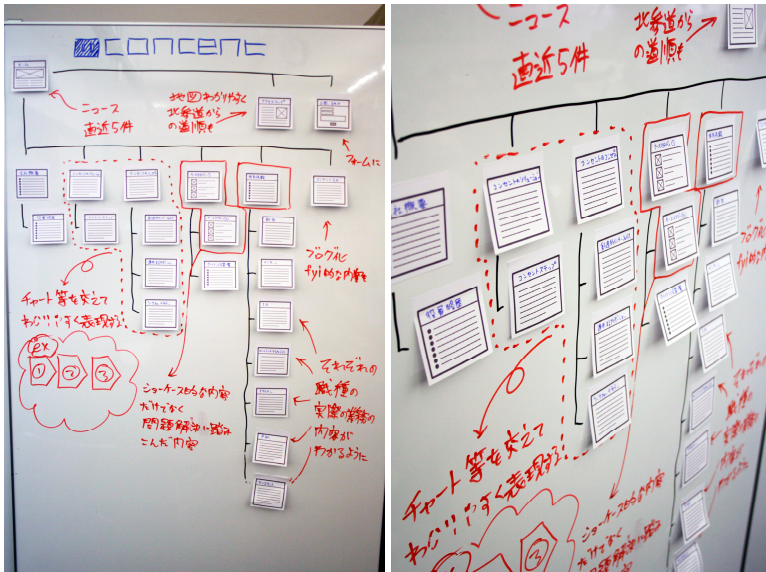


Fig. 3. View of designing workshop using Site-it!

Accordingly, discussion using *Site-it!* is effective at the initial stage of the site structure designing.

4 Summary

A tool using sticky notes on which typical page patterns are printed was created for the site structure phase in website designing. In order to create this tool, the templates were extracted from typical page patterns. This inexpensive, convenient tool has made it easy to hold a workshop, and to improve understanding among team member on site structure.

Reference

1. Morville, P., Rosenfeld, L.: Information Architecture for the World Wide Web. O'reilly Media, San Francisco (2006)