

What Business & Technical Professionals Need to Know About Information Architecture

Information architecture is the art and science of organizing and labeling Web sites, software, intranets, and online communities to support usability and findability.

Creating solid information architecture requires researching user needs and testing solutions with users. This puts the user at the core of development and leads to products that delight customers. Most teams already have members who focus on business and technology; information architects focus on the user.

Good information architecture results in:

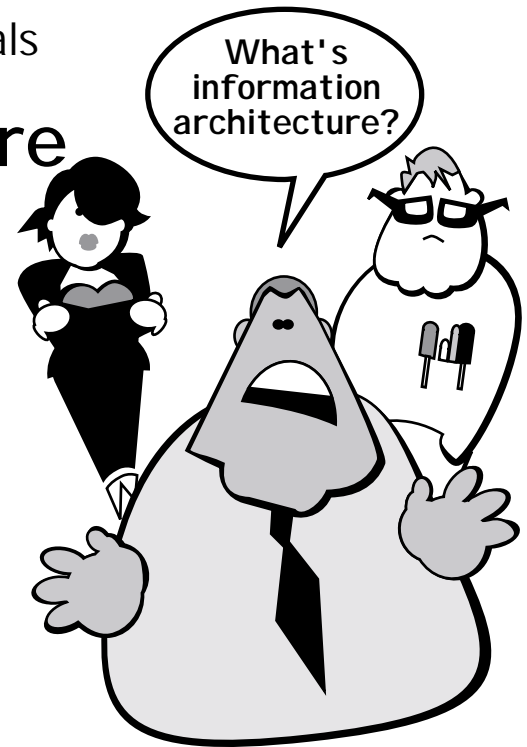
- Products that are easier to use.
- Information that's easier to find and understand.
- Higher customer satisfaction (which can lead to higher sales).

Usability Guru Jakob Nielsen advises:

"If users can't find what they are looking for, they will leave; if employees can't find what they need, productivity goes down the drain. Avoid lost sales, lost users, and unproductive employees: get an information architecture that makes sense to other people - not just to you."

Information architecture grew from the need to organize the massive amounts of information

found in computer software, CD-ROMs, and the Internet. Information architecture uses concepts from established disciplines such as library science, user-centered design, and human-computer interface design, combining them in new ways to solve new problems.



When do I need information architecture?

How does information architecture fit in with what I'm doing now?

Where can I learn more about information architecture?

- Whenever you're designing or significantly redesigning a user interface or Web site.
- When customers have trouble using your software or finding information on your Web site.
- Information architects assist business analysts to identify user-based requirements.
- IAs are responsible for how users interpret and interact with information, freeing up visual designers to concentrate on visual design elements and programmers to concentrate on code.
- Long before programming begins, IAs investigate customers and their needs and they factor business strategy and technology resources into solutions. This reduces the need later in the project to throw away code that doesn't work for customers.

The Asilomar Institute for Information Architecture is a non-profit volunteer organization dedicated to advancing and promoting information architecture. Please visit <http://www.aifia.org>.