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I N F O R M A T I O N   A R C H I T E C T U R E: User/Design Research Project

I n f o r m a t i o n   A r c h i t e c t   &   D e s i g n   E x p e r i e n c e

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Sr. User/Design Researcher / Information Architect Specialist
User Experience Designer

User/Design Research Project

How did you get started—working in this industry and doing serious vocational training—
as a user/design researcher, information architect, user experience designer, project/product
manager?

I get asked that question a lot by clients and all my friends. The curriculum provided a
broad-based liberal arts design program that included: user research, information architecture,
management, other design courses, and usability testing. I was doing information architect/user
experience design internships—in my junior/senior years—as part of my courses at the university.

The Professor asked the group—who wanted to be the information architect/user
experience designer for the Youth Law project? She told us that this also included being the project
manager and coordinating events between the client and our group. I was the first person to stand
up and say, yes. I agreed on the spot to be the information architect. In that moment of time, I felt
very empowered. At the same time, I knew right away it was what I wanted to do all the time. That
was back in 1998-1999, even though I was just learning about information architecture and design.
All the courses at the university provided me with a well-rounded design and information
architecture education.

I realized I could major in it, since the School of Design Graduate Program at SFSU is flexible.
I could actually major in IA, user-centered design, including user experience design, and usability
testing. I enjoy improving digital design products for end users. I think the many testimonials speak
clearly about expertise and the value I offer to clients.

I completed the MAIA program with an informative dissertation on navigation systems
design and information architecture. In my research, I also focused on interface design and
reviewing (doing heuristic evaluations) different Websites. Thinking about how the collected data
could be used to improve products. It is difficult in this day and age to think about not doing
usability testing, coupled with information architecture and user-centered design. That is why I do
it and what interested me in doing it.

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In conjunction with finishing the MAIA program, I continued on with the ID&T Cert. program in Internet design and technology. My focus during that vocational training program was largely on information architecture and experience design—as it relates to user-experience design and the Web—building Web pages and Websites. The program stressed the value of doing user research and information architecture and user experience design. Also, I concentrated on how to do user research and usability testing, related to user-centered design. I studied with many excellent Professors that all worked in the Internet industry for notable companies.

I did an additional MAEd graduate-level degree. Information architecture is cited as being part of the curriculum, including usability testing. We study the ADDIE model, and we abide in strict accordance with the ADDIE model (analysis, design, development, implementation, evaluation). The dissertation report is written in accordance with the ADDIE model in mind. Other issues include Web standards and accessibility, like Section 508 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act. How universal design is really about user experience design and user-centered design for everyone, including accessibility.

My Professor, Dr. Beatty (he was my main Professor for about 4 years), presented his article to our group of learners. It was about how, not doing information architecture and user experience design first, this problem created the dilemma of having to go back to do the information architecture and user-centered design, even instructional designers/corporate trainers have to design with these things in mind for end users. The article further explained how this added additional scope creep to the project. In the long run, it cost more money to successfully complete the project, after doing additional research and putting information architecture standards into place.

That is how I got started on being an information architect; then doing additional successful projects. I also do project/product management and enjoy working with a wide variety of stakeholders and clients. Additionally, I spend a lot of time doing high-tech updates and learning more about computer/Web programming skills.

I get asked a lot by people that want to become information architects—how do you do it? My answer is that you study relevant subjects and think clearly about how this applies to human-computer interaction and human factors. The application of information architecture to digital design products creates a higher level of user-centered design. Because humans have to use computers, it better enables humans to use products more easily. This increased productivity results in higher profit margins. Who does not want to earn more money?

As I need to learn more about different components related to user-centered design, I read more books. Taking additional courses is normal and continues to enhance all my skills. As an information architect, I find all the updates extremely useful, including BayCHI meetings at PARC near Stanford University in Palo Alto. My parents and grandparents told me that one learns by doing. I believe you always learn by doing, and I continue to learn by doing.