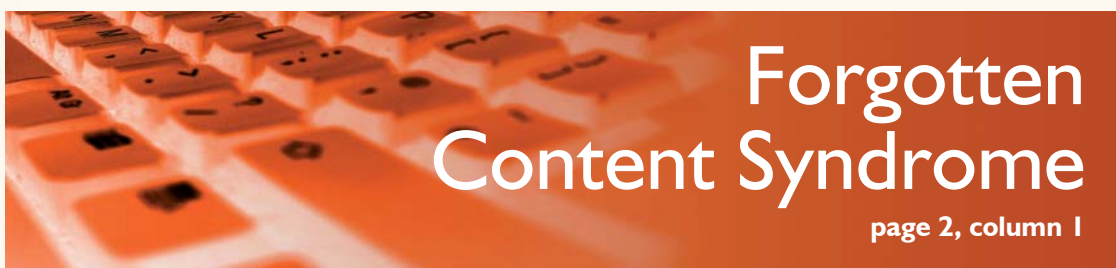


THE EXPERIENCE HERALD

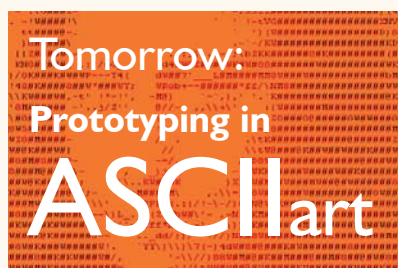


webtorqe.org.uk/herald



Forgotten Content Syndrome

page 2, column 1



Tomorrow: Prototyping in ASCII art

Content Is Everything

Gordon Bennet London

Words, pictures, sounds, smells - a website is simply a container for content. All the design and build work makes that content accessible via the web.

And yet, when it comes to the design process itself, content is left out in the cold. Jonathan Baker-Bates, junior experience architect at global digital agency network LBi Ltd, has been looking at the problem for a while. He talked to us about the issues.



Jonathan with some content, yesterday.

just don't have the tools to do this. They need to though."

But what about the CMS? Don't they separate content from presentation to allow its manipulation? "At best, a CMS is irrelevant during the design process itself. At worst it serves as a wall between those that think it's "managing" content and those that know it's doing quite the opposite."

"We need to bring content into a position in the design process where it can influence the quality of the design."

"It's not that it's a bad process, but without an extremely detailed knowledge of the content, it's very hard for the designer to do that content justice. While web developers evolve new processes, and graphic designers have literally a century of tradition to look to, the best the content providers can usually manage is a stack of Word files and the hope that it will all fit nicely.

Firstly, we need to bring content into a position in the design process where it can influence the quality of the design. Once that happens, we need a way of keeping it close to the design process itself. But most most designers

Did you know?

The Clipboard

The clipboard is the single most important piece of software for our information age. At some point in most web projects, a team of people will sit down with content in one format and copy/paste all or part of it into the new architecture.

The CMS

If you re-design an existing site into a radically new information architecture, chances are you won't have any way of communicating how the content in the old architecture maps to your new one. The project plan has to have a black hole in it marked "content migration" - during which everyone crosses their fingers

Axure

Axure (www.axure.com) is a tool that can create simple content inventories to save a lot of time and error. It's not perfect by any means, but it can be a good way of capturing all the "functional" text so as to enable it all to be written and translated.

Towards A Content Habitat: Incorporating Content Into the Design Process - Poster for Euro IA, Barcelona 2007

Jonathan Baker-Bates, LBi London
Layout and design by Austin Sutter
Photo (c) Shayan (USA) @ Flickr

Jonathan is available to expand on this and other ideas at children's parties, bar mitzvahs and weddings. Contact him at LBi London for more details. Oh, and if you feel the need to mention that the typesetting for this poster is bad - you've missed the point.



Forgotten Content Syndrome

Jack Flak London

Marcus Alexander is a senior developer at LBi London. "Sometimes you need to listen to the people who have to manage the content in your content management system."

Having spent way too many hours of my life trying to fit content into pages which simply aren't designed to accommodate it (or vice-versa) I am only too aware of the problems caused by "forgotten content" syndrome. I am always amazed that it still exists. IAs spend bloody ages in theoretical discussions about content in the abstract, but don't seem to be interested in content for real.

The "clipboard monkeys" (people tasked with entering the content into the CMS) are too often thought of as cheap drones. But in fact they have to put in a lot of thought to work out how the content they have can actually fit into the site. "Where does this heading go?" "This layout doesn't allow for a second image." There may need to be a vast amount

of decisions made by people who are not designers, because the designers themselves didn't know about the actual content. It would be sensible also to create a content structure while designing a site: for example, stating that an "article page" will include a heading of less than 200 characters, a summary of no more than 5 sentences, an optional strap line and no more than 200 words in the article body. From this it is not only possible for content

"IAs spend bloody ages in theoretical discussions about content in the abstract."

producers to prepare stuff which actually works within the context of the website, but structured processes (and indeed technologies) can be introduced to put the actual content into the pages - with or without a CMS.

As a bit of an aside, it's worth noting that content for the web should be written by people who understand

"Where does this heading go?" "This layout doesn't allow for a second image."

writing for the web, which is very different from writing for paper. The most basic observation I have is that you can comfortably fit no more than a third of the content on a web page that you would think you can fit.

Marcus said lots more about this that we'd like to put here, but there's not enough space so we've had to cut it short. This is a pity really. Had we known that his views on the subject were more interesting than Jonathan's, we might have put him on the front page instead.

Towards a Content Habitat

As part of a project completed by LBi for a leading UK a street bank, it became clear that the organisation had become separated from their web content, and they needed reconciliation.

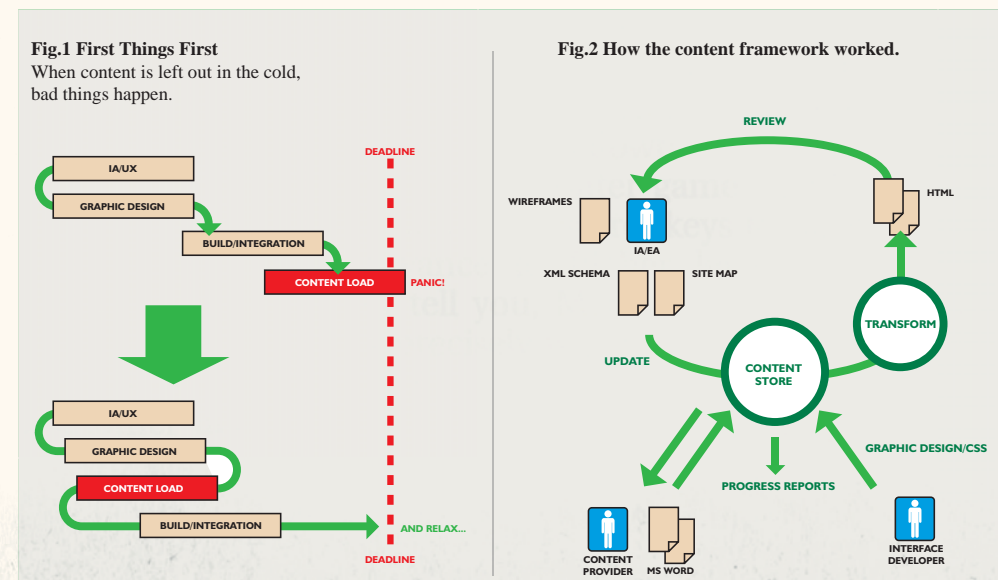
The team created a "content framework" (see fig 2 below) as a light-weight method of aligning the content to the design and experience strategy. The experience architect (EA) could then see content working with his designs almost from the start, and change his designs accordingly - in this case using an XML schema and an Excel site map.

MS Word

One unexpectedly positive feature of the approach was its use of MS Word. Everyone was familiar with Word: they could email the files around, they could print them out; they could spell check and word count. Above all, they needed no training to do so.

This alone made the solution worthwhile - more people in the organisation were engaged with the content.

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