

■ **Information Architecture Is a Distinct Service**

Information Architecture (IA) is the practice of designing the user experience for an interactive application. Information Architects work with the project team from the earliest stage of client engagement to identify the UI requirements and translate these requirements into functional definitions and design solutions. The deliverables of Information Architecture include conceptual diagramming, such as user experience maps, workflow/dataflow diagrams and schematic page layouts. These deliverables provide the team with a vision for the application's UI and provide a tool for early lifecycle client review and validation. Later in the project, they are a guide for the design and production of HTML screens. Information Architecture is driven by Business and User Requirements and its deliverables constitute a set of Design Requirements. Graphic Designers develop a look and feel based upon the IA deliverables, as well as other graphic requirements such as branding, client marketing strategy, etc.

Information Architecture should not be confused with Technical Architecture or Graphic Design. IA is a creative practice but unlike Graphic Design, as it does not concern itself with colors, logos, and other visual elements except for their influence on function, usability and navigation.

■ **Information Architecture Deliverables**

- + Site Maps and Conceptual Diagrams that indicate how the various parts of an application will be categorized and arranged and diagrams that indicate dynamic behavior such as personalization, etc.
- + Workflow diagrams describe the interactive path users will take to perform tasks such as shop, trade, edit or publish documents, update web page content, etc.
- + Schematic web page layouts provide a rough layout plan for individual pages and indicate content components and navigational requirements throughout the application.

■ **Sales Strategy**

No matter how technically robust an application is, it is a failure if people can't or won't use it.

Information Architecture creates applications that are easy-to-use and encourage user adoption while minimizing the need for training or support. It accomplishes this by through user-centered design methods. User-centered methods translate business and user requirements into easy-to-use interface solutions.

■ **Use Information Architects for:**

- + Business to business applications and sites
- + Corporate web presences
- + Web trading hubs
- + Intranets
- + E-commerce sites
- + Industry Portals

■ **Selling Points**

- + Promotes user adoption by making application easy-to-use.
- + Provides early life-cycle validation tool.
- + Provides client with an early, low-cost presentation to lock-in sponsor support.
- + Makes future application enhancements easier to integrate.
- + Provides tool for directing UI development, managing overall design costs, including effective management of third-party design vendors.
- + Can reduce overall application development time (by splitting Information Architecture apart from Development and Graphic Design).
- + Reduces application support costs associated with training and user support.

IA deliverables are themselves excellent sales tools. They illustrate the maturity of our methods and provide a window to the application development process that is too often missing.

■ **Information Architecture Helps Achieve Client Strategic Goals**

Information Architecture enhances usability, so any system that will be used by human beings will benefit from it. The greater the quantity of users, or the greater the business value associated with user adoption, the greater the value of including an Information Architect. Information Architecture has a much higher value for a public E-commerce site used by many than for an infrastructure system that will be used by a handful of technicians.

■ **When to Use An Information Architect**

The rule of thumb is that when you are designing a system that people will need to use, put an IA on the team. Information Architecture will have added value in the following circumstances:

- + When user adoption is a critical success factor
- + When it is desirable to reduce training costs.
- + When system has a large page count, dynamic content or will require a complex navigational structure.
- + When system will support tasks or workflow.
- + When content is culled from various sources, is poorly organized, or needs to be categorized.

Information Architecture builds a tighter development team because it links together Business Requirements, Engineering, and Design and allows each group to focus on their area of expertise.

■ **Benefit to the Project Team**

- + Reduced development time.
- + Provides early lifecycle internal validation tools for UI and functionality.
- + Helps to Integrate and manage creative resources
- + "Missing link" between Business Analysts, Designers and Engineers.

■ **Information Architects Work with Standard Project Documentation**

Information Architects use the following documentation:

- + User Profiles
- + Use Cases
- + Site Inventory (Content and other content objects such as tools, forms, reports, etc.)
- + User access requirements

■ **Information Architecture and Graphic Design**

Information Architecture should not inhibit or creative freedom of the graphic design team. Graphic designers need to consider requirements outside the scope of Information Architecture such as branding, marketing strategy, and visual elements including illustration and photography, and others.

■ **Information Architecture Process Overview**

- + Goals Understand project business strategy, schedule and critical success factors.
- + Decompose the system into manageable, user-centered components.
- + Design the user experience.
- + Ensure effective implementation of design requirements.
- + Ensure that enhancements and fixes are consistent with IA design

■ **Activities**

- + Participate in JAD (*Joint Application Development*) or other high-level discussions, as required.
- + Contribute to strategy discussion.
- + Review use cases and site inventory.
- + Create high-level site maps.
- + Create workflow diagrams.
- + Validate internally and with client.
- + Create wire frame outlines of all significant screens types.
- + Specify all navigational elements and their functional requirements.
- + Specify the interactive components for all pages, including forms and event triggers.
- + Validate internally and with client.
- + Ensure graphic solution supports wire frame and interactive requirements.
- + Create new or revised screen, navigational or other designs, as required.
- + Validate internally and with client.

■ **Deliverables**

- + Review and validate budget and schedule for IA activities.
- + Proposed site map.
- + Workflow/dataflow diagram.
- + Navigation plan Schematic web page layouts.
- + Detailed site map.
- + Detailed workflow map.
- + Specifications for interactive components (pull-down menus, radio buttons, et cetera).
- + Revised design documentation.

■ **Integrating Information Architecture in the Project Team**

- + IA active in the first half of the project lifecycle.
- + IA must have intimate knowledge of project strategy and business requirements.
- + IA must work closely with the graphic design team.
- + If design or branding services are provided by a third-party, the IA should be in direct contact with them.
- + AE or PL must validate budget and schedule with IA at the proposal stage.

■ **Information Architecture Project Budgeting Guidelines**

- + Overall creative participation should be viewed as a parallel and equal track to application development.
- + Budget creative services at approximately 30%-50% of the overall engagement budget.

Exact costs associated with providing Information Architecture will vary based upon the complexity of the project, the maturity of the client's vision for the application, and their understanding of their users.

■ **Information Architecture Infrastructure Requirements**

Information architects have infrastructure requirements similar to Creative Services. They must be provided with Mac and PC systems, large monitors and IA design software. In addition, and of utmost importance, Information Architects require access to a large-format color printer for presentation deliverables.

■ **Overview of Typical Tasks and Infrastructure requirements**

Hardware: Networked PC and MAC for reviewing design prototypes, large monitor, access to large-format color printer (max print area: US E/International A0 size (34" x 44")).

- **Software:** Standard business software suite, Diagramming software such as Actrix, Visio Professional, or Adobe Illustrator, Adobe PressReady, Browsers, PostScript option installed.