About Information Architecture (IA)

The World Wide Web has an almost infinite amount of information and content. One could virtually swim in it all. This is why navigation and being able to understand concepts are key. The structuring of this is called information architecture (IA). Richard Saul, an American architect and graphic designer and is considered to be the founder. UXplanet.org defines this term as "… a science of organizing and structuring content of the websites, web and mobile applications, and social media software." In a way IA is like a science and without it users would have difficulty taking in the information or might not be able to take it in at all. Ultimately, the goal is to organize content so that it is easily adjustable, clear, and functional.

The content structure for IA is dependent on a variety of factors. This could include customer satisfaction, structure, or focus on a particular target audience. Another factor is the type of product. A retail website in comparison to a blog are structured in two completely different ways because the goals for each are different. For example, a retail website is more visual because the main focus is on making a sale. A blog is more focused on functionality and interaction because it is a social space for people online. One thing that does stay the same when creating information architecture is visual hierarchy and creating a legend. This is because being able to easily navigate around a site is part of the website itself.

Visual hierarchy can consist of features, functions, and behavior. The creation of a legend helps with the displaying of features, interactions, and flows. When building IA one cannot simply do it "from the top down". Each element must be properly researched, designed. and built before all the parts are then put together. Being able to identify the key aspects of the product requires visual hierarchy. The same goes for how pages are organized as you want things to be clear. Again visual hierarchy! An example of this would be going from the home page to the payment screen and then to the screen where you enter in your payment information. Everyone is living life at a fast pace which means people want to be able to accomplish things quickly. If one has a confusing website it will not only cause confusion and possible frustration on the users end but could also result in loss of participation, views, or sales which is someone one never wants.

One important aspect to take note of is that IA is and will always continue to change, evolve, and therefore adapt. New versions will be needed as certain programs are updated and introduced. It is becoming clearer each day that technology is vital in day to day life. Take the pandemic for example as kids and adults have had to attend classes, meetings, and other events remotely. This example shows that IA will not only remain important but become even more popular as our technological abilities continue to grow and develop.