

The Future of Information Architecture: Part II

These are the results of a survey conducted by the Asilomar Institute for Information Architecture in January 2003 in preparation for the Leadership Seminar at the ASIS&T IA Summit. Please see the following URL for more information:

<http://aifia.org/calendar/000053.php>

Variations of this survey were run in several communities to solicit diverse perspectives about the future of the field. Communities polled include:

AIFIA > members of the Asilomar Institute for Information Architecture
<http://aifia.org/>

AIGA-ED > participants in the AIGA Experience Design list
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/AIGAExperienceDesign/>

SIGIA > participants in the ASIS&T SIG-IA mailing list
<http://www.asis.org/AboutASIS/SIGEmailLists/ia.html>

SeveralGroups

A number of online groups were surveyed together. They include: Language-Consultants, PAL10n.org, Translation-Technology, Locales, Webstandards, NELOCSIG, Evolt, i18n, Digital Eve Seattle

Results

AIFIA

Please indicate the importance of each factor to the practice of information architecture over the next five years.					
	Very Important	Important	Not Important	Response Average	
(Economy) Size of e-commerce market.	21	34	10	1.83	
(Economy) Overall health of global economy.	34	24	7	1.58	
(Software) Search engine innovations.	14	38	13	1.98	
(Software) Content management systems.	36	26	3	1.49	
(Software) Social software innovations.	18	33	13	1.92	
(Software) Personalization / recommendation systems.	26	33	6	1.69	
(Hardware) Mobile / Wireless	25	27	12	1.8	
(Hardware) Large Flat-Panel Displays	3	16	44	2.65	
(Hardware) Increased Bandwidth	19	25	19	2	
(Business) Executive-level understanding of UX.	39	21	4	1.45	
(Business) Executive-level understanding of IA.	37	21	6	1.52	
(Business) Savvy Users / Customers	9	29	25	2.25	
(Business) Standardized Interfaces / Architectures	14	37	13	1.98	
Total Respondents				65	
(skipped this question)				0	
In the next 5 years...					

	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know	Response Average	
Organizations will increase spending on information technology.	39	11	10	1.52	
Organizations will increase spending on information architecture.	33	11	16	1.72	
The number of practicing "information architects" will grow.	34	12	14	1.67	
The number of people practicing IA will grow.	54	3	3	1.15	
IA processes and methodologies will evolve significantly.	34	19	7	1.55	
More colleges will offer IA courses.	49	6	5	1.27	
More colleges will offer IA degrees.	34	16	10	1.6	
Software developers will have less influence on user experience design.	12	36	10	1.97	
Standards will emerge for measuring IA quality and ROI.	22	24	14	1.87	
The Web will become more important to individuals and businesses.	45	4	11	1.43	
Total Respondents				60	
(skipped this question)				5	
Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.					
	Strongly Agree	Mostly Agree	Mostly Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Response Average
The IA community can affect the future of IA as a practice and profession.	26	30	3	1	1.65
The IA community should embrace a broad definition of IA.	19	28	8	5	1.98
The IA community should embrace a narrow definition of IA.	5	9	25	21	3.03
Total Respondents					60
(skipped this question)					5

AIGA-ED

Please indicate the importance of each factor to the practice of information architecture over the next five years.					
	Very Important	Important	Not Important	Response Average	
(Economy) Size of e-commerce market.	23	22	6	1.67	
(Economy) Overall health of global economy.	20	25	6	1.73	
(Software) Search engine innovations.	12	24	14	2.04	
(Software) Content management systems.	22	25	3	1.62	
(Software) Social software innovations.	16	22	10	1.88	
(Software) Personalization / recommendation systems.	18	24	6	1.75	
(Hardware) Mobile / Wireless	23	19	8	1.7	
(Hardware) Large Flat-Panel Displays	4	14	32	2.56	
(Hardware) Increased Bandwidth	11	21	16	2.1	
(Business) Executive-level understanding of UX.	29	14	5	1.5	

(Business) Executive-level understanding of IA.	30	16	4	1.48	
(Business) Savvy Users / Customers	14	23	13	1.98	
(Business) Standardized Interfaces / Architectures	15	27	8	1.86	
Total Respondents				51	
(skipped this question)				0	
In the next 5 years...					
	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know	Response Average	
Organizations will increase spending on information technology.	32	4	12	1.58	
Organizations will increase spending on information architecture.	28	5	14	1.7	
The number of practicing "information architects" will grow.	32	7	8	1.49	
The number of people practicing IA will grow.	40	1	6	1.28	
IA processes and methodologies will evolve significantly.	22	14	11	1.77	
More colleges will offer IA courses.	41	4	2	1.17	
More colleges will offer IA degrees.	27	14	6	1.55	
Software developers will have less influence on user experience design.	24	16	7	1.64	
Standards will emerge for measuring IA quality and ROI.	25	16	6	1.6	
The Web will become more important to individuals and businesses.	40	3	4	1.23	
Total Respondents				48	
(skipped this question)				3	
Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.					
	Strongly Agree	Mostly Agree	Mostly Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Response Average
The IA community can affect the future of IA as a practice and profession.	21	24	3	0	1.63
The IA community should embrace a broad definition of IA.	11	27	8	2	2.02
The IA community should embrace a narrow definition of IA.	4	8	23	13	2.94
Total Respondents					48
(skipped this question)					3

SIGIA

Please indicate the importance of each factor to the practice of information architecture over the next five years.					
	Very Important	Important	Not Important	Response Average	
(Economy) Size of e-commerce market.	21	28	6	1.73	
(Economy) Overall health of global economy.	27	24	3	1.56	
(Software) Search engine innovations.	16	29	8	1.85	

(Software) Content management systems.	30	24	1	1.47	
(Software) Social software innovations.	13	29	11	1.96	
(Software) Personalization / recommendation systems.	18	28	8	1.81	
(Hardware) Mobile / Wireless	16	29	10	1.89	
(Hardware) Large Flat-Panel Displays	5	13	35	2.57	
(Hardware) Increased Bandwidth	18	18	17	1.98	
(Business) Executive-level understanding of UX.	32	18	3	1.45	
(Business) Executive-level understanding of IA.	32	19	3	1.46	
(Business) Savvy Users / Customers	14	24	15	2.02	
(Business) Standardized Interfaces / Architectures	17	27	9	1.85	
Total Respondents				56	
(skipped this question)				0	
In the next 5 years...					
	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know	Response Average	
Organizations will increase spending on information technology.	37	6	11	1.52	
Organizations will increase spending on information architecture.	34	5	15	1.65	
The number of practicing "information architects" will grow.	38	7	9	1.46	
The number of people practicing IA will grow.	46	1	7	1.28	
IA processes and methodologies will evolve significantly.	32	11	11	1.61	
More colleges will offer IA courses.	46	2	6	1.26	
More colleges will offer IA degrees.	28	13	13	1.72	
Software developers will have less influence on user experience design.	13	30	11	1.96	
Standards will emerge for measuring IA quality and ROI.	30	8	16	1.74	
The Web will become more important to individuals and businesses.	45	3	5	1.25	
Total Respondents				54	
(skipped this question)				2	
Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.					
	Strongly Agree	Mostly Agree	Mostly Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Response Average
The IA community can affect the future of IA as a practice and profession.	22	27	4	0	1.66
The IA community should embrace a broad definition of IA.	15	30	4	3	1.9
The IA community should embrace a narrow definition of IA.	2	7	30	13	3.04
Total Respondents					52
(skipped this question)					4

Several Groups

Please indicate the importance of each factor to the practice of information architecture over the next five years.					
	Very Important	Important	Not Important	Response Average	
(Economy) Size of e-commerce market.	21	23	11	1.82	
(Economy) Overall health of global economy.	19	26	8	1.79	
(Software) Search engine innovations.	16	24	13	1.94	
(Software) Content management systems.	24	24	7	1.69	
(Software) Social software innovations.	13	22	17	2.08	
(Hardware) Wireless	23	17	14	1.83	
(Hardware) Bandwidth	20	19	15	1.91	
(Business) Executive-level understanding of UX.	14	27	13	1.98	
(Business) Executive-level understanding of IA.	14	31	8	1.89	
Total Respondents				56	
(skipped this question)				0	
In the next 5 years...					
	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know	Response Average	
Organizations will increase spending on information technology.	41	7	4	1.29	
Organizations will increase spending on information architecture.	38	11	3	1.33	
The number of practicing "information architects" will grow.	32	13	7	1.52	
The number of people practicing IA will grow.	44	4	4	1.23	
IA processes and methodologies will evolve significantly.	36	12	4	1.38	
More colleges will offer IA courses.	39	9	4	1.33	
More colleges will offer IA degrees.	29	12	11	1.65	
Software developers will have less influence on user experience design.	15	27	10	1.9	
Standards will emerge for measuring IA quality and ROI.	32	14	6	1.5	
The Web will become more important to individuals and businesses.	47	5	0	1.1	
Total Respondents				52	
(skipped this question)				4	
Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.					
	Strongly Agree	Mostly Agree	Mostly Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Response Average
The IA community can affect the future of IA as a practice and profession.	20	28	2	2	1.73
The IA community should embrace a broad definition of IA.	18	25	6	3	1.88
The IA community should embrace a narrow definition of IA.	3	10	27	12	2.92

Total Respondents					52
(skipped this question)					4

Combined Future Thoughts

Please share your thoughts about the future of information architecture.

AIGA-ED

Total Respondents	20
(skipped this question)	31

While the number of practising IAs will grow, niches will develop and once again, there will be an identity crisis amongst the community. The most valued (not necessarily well-known or most sought-after) IAs will be those who have a strong business acumen and understanding of how to get a technology-based project done.

The IA community definitely need to stress THE question of knowing who is responsible for what. Especially for topics commonly handle by IA experts, usability experts, user experience experts, interaction designers... We (people of the "information technology buisness") have too long suffer from overspecialization.

I'm concerned, because I sense the value of what a full time IA can bring to a team is being undermined by others that think they can do it.

I see standardized Taxonomies and controlled vocabularies becoming prevelant (and possibly sold!), with the ability to tune the existing vocabularies with culturally specific terms (namely acronyms).

just the general trend that as a field and a practice will continue to grow as our world has an ever expanding amount of information and content, and endless amounts of existing poor examples of AI

The need for information architecture is wider than that required by e-commerce websites. Any company that needs to design a networked system that involves a complex navigation system and a large number of options will require an information architect. As more and more elements in business and daily life become digitized the need will remain. I wonder how standardized designs and systems will affect the growth of this profession.

The potential for growth for this discipline will only break forth when the practitioners look outside the digital box.

I don't believe information architecture will survive as a separate discipline as more people understand that IA is nine parts communication (in its broadest sense) and one part technology. It will become part of the toolkit of any communications professional, and like other skills and talents, some people will be better at it than others.

The luxury of orgnizing content on the web came about because of an era that is now gone. There are plenty of standard ways of organizing now and our responsibilities lie outside our comfort zone now. It is going to be more important that IAs consider taking these skills we have developed back into other arenas: law, medicine, transportation, leisure and entertainment, and more away from a specific technology, ie. the internet. Viva la revolucion!

The field is not growing or evolving. On the positive side, it is also not stagnating. The new crop of literature brings nothing new to the table. It does, hopefully, reach a broader audience. IAs resist new technologies (e.g. CMS) and change. Most IA mailing lists have many people with very little knowledge of the industry. Most new topics are rehashes of old topics. Many IAs do not understand the concept of satisfying business concepts. Also, many times, problems are overengineered, when a simple solution that has been done before will suffice. There are no standards.

I'm still seeing IA as more of a skill than a profession.

Information architecture is a discipline born at a curious juncture - the intersection of the mass adoption of a new technology and an economic boom. This afforded the development and differentiation of this profession vs. other similar professions (retail design, graphic design, traditional interface design, software design). I think the future of information design lies in embracing those disparate professions and spreading the wisdom of the IA profession, rather than codifying it into what an IA is versus everyone else.

IA may not evolve to be one field, but rather an expanded role or aspect of existing professions (i.e. an editor, graphic designer or programmer). It will also introduce several new roles, like folks who will just specialize in coming up with naming conventions or people who just focus on search engine design.

As an IA in business for myself, I'm trying to develop specific strategies for working with graphic designers, small web design shops, independent developers, developer shops, internal ecommerce groups, internal IT groups, internal marketing or publications office groups, etc. My biggest challenge is the perception that even if the client "gets" IA, it is something that a project can "do without" as long as there is someone to create images and someone to code HTML. Another challenge is typical of any consultant: to resist competing on price. Personally I want to find more examples of publicly available good/bad IA and usability, in order to *show* clients what I mean. I would find a "hall of fame/shame" site with these types of examples useful. It may be harder to sell IA while the availability of the low-cost instant website (pick a color/layout scheme, enter your info, and go) increases. In any case, we'll need to make specific "why should I" cases in the face of more templates and prefab sites.

Lots of room to grow, but IA's need to start thinking about more than the Web, and put more emphasis on aligning IA so that it's relevant to the world at large. If folks keep concentrating their attention on things like "using personas" or "faceted metadata" or "proving ROI", IA will quickly become irrelevant as the scope of problems outgrows the relatively immature methods and techniques that exist today.

Information architecture is just one piece of the user experience. There needs to be both a top-down Information Architecture community which is what we so often talk about as IA. The IAs that start with users and goals as a means of classification, but we need to embrace the computer/information scientists that are studying ways to extract meaningful data from large complex data sources, i.e., knowledge management, data mining/visualization. The IA community is growing, as there is more information people will need better ways to access, store and relate it. We should embrace all of the professions that touch information systems.

Most positive thing the IA community can do other than beat Derek Rogerson with a stick is to establish a core set of standards of excellence and metrics of success. I don't care what the definition of IA is if I can demonstrate what excellence in the field is and measure my work against it.* While I feel I can do that to some extent on my own, I think the community needs to be able to do it writ large. *Yeah, yeah one depends on the other. So how about a medium definition, erring on the side of narrow.

Information architecture will always be part of the larger discipline of (visual) communication design. Well-trained designers are excellent "information architects." It will continue to be difficult to separate "information architecture" as a profession for this reason.

The need to "sell" IA won't go away any time soon, so we need to support each other in doing this. Key to that is identifying markets where we are able to pitch IA as a critical component (most significant potential I see now is "marketing"). We have to become salesmen for ourselves... no way around that. We have to sell our skills to different audiences, which we should be good at as we tend to pride ourselves in being empathetic to audience needs. Whether "IA" is the right title or not is irrelevant; but rallying around one title, one point of reference, is key to getting other people to build a personal understanding of 'what we do.' IA is as good a title as any other... we need to just accept it and use it (and stop arguing about it) and give it power by all contributing to a universal understanding of what it means. Everyone will benefit from that.

I think it's rather ridiculous that so many of us feel compelled to assert our definitions of "IA" onto the rest of the community. I certainly hope that we can learn to embrace different approaches - and backgrounds - and that we can comfortably embrace a BROAD common definition. I also hope that we move away from the trend towards certification, as this is highly misleading of our many talents. Thanks!

AIFIA - Members of the Asilomar Institute for Information Architecture

Total Respondents

22

(skipped this question)

43

Unless the economy improves significantly, we will continue to have software development-oriented projects: "It's more important that it works, rather than that it works well." Technical ability is still and will be the cock of the walk. Also, IA as a separate discipline is quite endangered: rather, its focus should be on a combination of interaction design, user research, and IA. Rather than specializing, we need to broaden our abilities. CEOs won't pay for specialized boxes-and-arrows people. Value-add needs to come from bundled skills, along with empirical, measurable ROI.

I believe everyone is trying to do the same thing -- give data context so it is information. Right now, everyone has their personal bias defining what it is and isn't. Developers, designers, librarians, etc. It will work its way out. I do believe that products and services which have solid IA exercises applied to it will become dominant and industry leaders. People will gravitate to applications that let them work, rather than requiring them to learn a new paradigm.

To be perfectly honest, I think your organization is one of the sadder recent trends. It seems that some important voices have self-over-estimated their importance by forming a new organization based on a very narrow, clique-ish section of the IA community. Not involving others in trying to form "the" IA organization was a large miscalculation. It reinforces the unfortunate tendency for the IA community to rally around cults of personality, where it could have helped break new ground. I'm sure you meant well, but you should have started soliciting involvement long before there were boards, initiatives, and fees. At the very least, you should have made the community aware of the effort and the progress. The future of IA is now less open and more firmly entwined with a narrow group of voices.

I personally would look forward to a far greater understanding of the value of User Experience within the companies we work for but I'm not convinced... The economy is terrible and may not recover for years, companies are shrinking and consolidating and this would not necessarily indicate likely progression toward a utopia of good customer/user experience.

I think the words, the copy, will become more and more important in the field. We have to organize information but the first thing is to make the interface tell something. Words have a great role in that... That's something a lot of IAs forget...

Please stop defining the word and embrace the practice by evangelizing the benefits it provides to the end product, its owners, and its users. It is perfectly alright and normal to have 3000 IAs practicing at least 500 different combinations of subsets of architecture & design skills from within the "broader" (but hopefully not the broadest) definition of IA...we have to support each other by telling the world what good comes of our work. Doctors help heal people...they don't have to bicker about what variety of healing is going on...to score with their public they just have to share an image of friendly, helping healers...we too have to build an image of being website, software, ui, and workflow healers (and believe me there are plenty of sick interfaces and information structures out there to work on). IA is more than (the narrow definition) of cyberarian filing, structuring and retrieving skills; and perhaps less than the broad "it's a happening" definition whereby UX tries to stake claim to a chemical & and emotional reaction that happens in the User's brain after (or best while) they ingest our work. It's not as tangible as putting a book in its proper place, but it's not as psycho-reactive as a tab of acid (or even a chocolate bar, for that matter). Besides, I'm a hair dresser, and somebody always needs a haircut...so who has time to worry?

IA will start to break down the current barriers between "design," marketing, software development and library sciences. We are hundreds of thousands of practitioners, all from different backgrounds. We are already beginning to fully appreciate what each body of knowledge brings to the discipline.

I believe that as the importance of the Internet increases in our lives, we will need more usable interfaces. I have seen business slowly but surely begin to understand this. If business uses the web to increase efficiency, information architecture is key in that equation. There will be opportunities. The definition needs to remain broad because there is work in this field on many levels and the information architects that will succeed will be the ones who are willing to adapt to this.

IA will be defined by its practitioners. IA mailing lists continue to feature powerfully articulate posts pondering the definitions of basic terms. Daily. Standard, conventional architectures will evolve and become recognized as such.

So much is up in the air re: IA in the "future." I do think the Web is where IA will be prominently recognized, and as markets waver, UX design has become important for companies that recognize its ROI.

In my experience it is crucial to be able to argue the value of IA within the project. IA has no future, if we are not able to do that. It is difficult to prove the value of IA if the (web-)project isn't well planned - if you have a 'shoot first, ask later'-project. Often it is the IA who has the skills to identify the importance of asking questions before shooting. The craft should work with this opportunity for two reasons: 1) I see IA more and more interconnected with (some parts of) project management. Not the management of hours and money, but planning of process and tasks, and setting project scope. It would be good to acknowledge this and include it in our "skill database" as I see it as stuff we do anyway. (Take J.J. Garrett's book e.g.). 2) If we (IAs) take it on us to argue the importance of 'asking before shooting', we will - naturally, as IA is logical, proven and an economical sensible thing to include in the dev. process - at the same time sell IA in. Argue the benefits to clients, stakeholders and gatekeepers. Project managers have failed, key account managers have failed, sales people and strategists have failed, and within organisations, middle leaders who are gatekeepers to the actual decision makers have failed. Probably because they don't see the full picture. The future for IA? It's in the hands of the information architects. Will we pick up the glove and fight our own battle? I think so and AIFIA could become a key forum. Stig Andersen Denmark stig.andersen@it.dk

I think IA is very important to the future of information technology and the Web. I think that it'll be hard to push it as a profession for a bit, until the economy picks up and there is money to be spent solely on IA. Right now I see being able to push IA as a discipline and a practice that is a very important piece to Software and Web design.

Define the damn thing. Be specific. Don't generalize. Generalization will only put other practices on the defence. Also know what the real goal is here. Preach in terms of what the goal is, not what the process is. We are not trying to explain how a gas engine works to someone who doesn't know what a motorized vehicle is, we are just trying to explain that the vehicle can move on it's own and eases the passenger by providing them with transportation beyond using their feet.

I think we will see the same steady but slow progression over the coming 5 years as we've seen in the last 2-3. There is development taking place in the field of IA...our skills are growing, executives will learn the importance of what we do and so will the rest of our co-workers. For those companies in which the website is their main communication/information vehicle with customers or employees, the development of IA will continue. Three or 4 years ago, Jakob Nielsen said that the Web had only evolved to 5% of its potential. Maybe we're at 10 or 15% now, but we still have a long ways to go. As the potential of the Web evolves, so will our ability to build sites right and maintain them.

sorry, i'm blank right now

I'd like to believe that: 1) defining the role and influence of IA as a discipline popularizes the fact that IA already has a significant presence across a broad spectrum of media, and 2) developing tools to measure and qualify various implementations of IA will help us evolve current standards.

We need to focus. A narrow definition of IA will help people understand it better. The more we broaden it to mean UX and Usability the more we loose respect within business in understanding what IA really offers business, users and such. To this regard I also think "findability" as a term is a waste of time other than a piece of criteria used to determine usability. It should be treated like effectiveness, learnability, etc. It is not on the same level as Usability in our taxonomy.

while IA will become more recognised & accepted in the future, i think it'll become so under the greater umbrella of user experience. therefore, you'll have more UX professionals practising IA, and fewer folks strictly specialising in IA.

I appreciate the survey. But saying it's "3 questions" is a bit misleading :o)

Currently technology is underutilized. Boundless amounts of information exists. Humankind can do amazing things with existing technology and information. IAs hold the key to the future of everything from usable wireless devices to artificial intelligence. Not as interface designers or usability experts or strategists, but as professionals whose narrow focus is the organization, categorization and labeling of information.

1. Don't underestimate the importance that the IA of Intranets will play as broadening the experience of the practice - the creation of intranets touches 10 times the people inside an organisation than the internet site of most organisations which is the domain of the marketeers. 2. Large companies will adopt Enterprise Information Architectures on a large scale. By definition intranets don't have anything to sell - they (should) provide democratic access to information for people within organisations. I think the practice and techniques of IA within organisations will alter to the those in the external world and IA will be seen as a unifying and clarifying force that will allow businesses to perform better with very little investment. 3. De-americanise! In europe people hardly ever go and get a qualification, hardly ever post their CV on their own website and go off and publish books. We come in in the morning and get on with it heads down. Try and understand what is happening outside of Palo Alto where we don't have to be heroes just happy cogs. Just my 1.21549 Pence.

AIFIA can play a significant role in shaping the profession.

SIGIA - SIGIA mailing list plus IASlash

Total Respondents

20

(skipped this question)

36

I have big hopes for the field of IA. Its premise and practice make such sense to me, and I find comfort in the fact that it is represented by a growing, committed and analytical community. I see its main challenges in the next number of years being its ability to measure its impact on a project (ROI), standardizing its vocabulary and methodology, and educating as many people as possible of its worth. I look forward to engaging in this process.

Though more standardized educational programs should help normalize communication difficulties within the community, we should not devalue the skills of those who have not participated in non-standardized training. Many practicing IAs have educational backgrounds in varied fields (e.g., philosophy). The trick is to identify those who have used their backgrounds effectively in the field from those who "go through the motions" of practicing IA.

Although I've been pondering this topic, I wonder how helpful a survey is for collecting this kind of information. Speaking only for myself, I think my future as an information architect lies in designing internal systems and processes that allow my co-workers and collaborators (content creators, editors, web producers, designers and programmers) the ability to create useful, usable, well-designed, sustainable and replicable systems. By this I mean, creating and sharing the requisite tools (web style guides, design component libraries, controlled vocabs etc) and strategies (user experience methodologies and visions) to develop good systems (web or otherwise). Convincing an enterprise not to use the org chart as primary nav requires putting into place something that is as familiar and easy to understand. Developing that something is where I think the future of ia lies.

like i said b4 it aint rocket science it seems to be going towards the marketing crowd are bored marketing people developing an interest in IA as opposed to bored techies?

1) I think the future of IA most will depend on the perception of its strategic value by the companies decision makers. For me, that's the conditio sine qua non. 2) Then, I see the other driving factors in: the consolidation of IA community; the sharing of methods and practices; the growing of standards.

We should (and I suppose will) work towards more standardized models, that determine information structures up to a fairly high degree. For example, we could design (and build) content management systems that offer predefined structures for recurring topics (topic types), which can be altered to the user's need. Like semi-standard CMS for legal procedures, or insurance products, etc.

1. The title is a bit absurd because it's metaphoric and euphemistic (kind of like calling a garbage man a "waste engineer"). 2. "Software Architect" is a better title. We should be aligned with traditional "Architecture" by qualifying our title with the product/space that we architect (software, residential) - not the materials we use (information, wood). All Architects work with information. 3. The key to having companies employ IAs is in the value of our deliverables (flow, wireframes, etc.). ie: as a proven way to cut development costs.

I am still wondering what the difference between IA and traditional librarian functions are. There is perhaps a chance that IA is better differentiated as Information Landscaping but I not convinced. Maybe we are just reinventing the wheel cos we know how to write code.

IMHO: It's useful to have "information architects," but it's just as useful, and in some ways more useful to have a broad range of people, in a range of disciplines, understand what IA is, and how to address IA issues in their work. There are so many overlaps between fields - it's important to foster collaboration between them (the fields and the people in them), and share knowledge, techniques, and resources. I don't think the wish by some to have "IA" become the heading underwhich everything else falls will come to pass, and I think that if the IA community attempts to push that, other groups will view the community as "the snobs over there."

The time is now for Information Architects to make their mark. For many established businesses, the next differentiating factor is a usable website that was built with user-centered design processes. Developing in this manner will save development costs and increase customer/user satisfaction.

Unfortunately, I.A. is being heavily influenced by the library science, card sorting mentality. These folks should be working with Information Design and the categorization of info buckets. The I.A. should be bringing on these folks to "assist" in a web design, re-design, etc. We're now working with huge enterprise applications for which the "library science" trained groups would be a sub-set of practitioners.

Everyone will need to know something about the subject. There's IA in everything. But only a relatively (proportionately) few large sites will need specialist help. Big IA will be swallowed up by the business consultants and content providers. Little IA will remain the domain of specialists.

The future of Information Architecture is assured - how else can we hope to escape the unhealthy consequences of the veritable avalanche of 'information pollution' threatening to overwhelm us - but the future of information architects is very much in doubt. Anyone who creates a blog uses the skills of UI design, content definition, and HTML coding - yet they do not necessarily utilize the services of a designer, IA, or developer; the skills that at the moment cohere in the title of Information Architect may become the purview of well-rounded members of other professional roles.

However you define it, it's a good thing.

Owning a camera doesn't make one a photographer, nor does owning a guitar make one a musician. But one can still shoot photos or learn how to play a tune. Out of sheer necessity, more and more people are going to have to know how to use a little IA. A little or a lot, the standards still apply.

You must have faith things will unfold in the way they should.

The future's so bright, I have to wear shades.

united we stand, divided we fall we need less squabbling about definitions of IA and more support for those who practice IA and all the related fields. more willingness to share details and examples of best practices.

I believe that information architecture will be something that various roles - software developers, project managers, interface designers - will practice. There will be fewer dedicated IAs. I also believe that the question of a broad or narrow definition of IA is largely moot. It's broad. That's how it's being practiced, and therefore that's how it is. The genie is out of the bottle. The people who preach a narrow definition tend to be people with a book out, and/or people who are trying to align "what IA is" with their peculiar skillset.

Need formalisms. :)

Several Groups - Several Online Communities

Total Respondents

(skipped this question)

17

39

Things may change so much that most of this doesn't matter, really.

nothing

Access to information will be what it all comes down to. Right now, we're in the "information overload" (i.e., party, party, party) mode. But people are burning out. The importance of structuring sites to provide meaningful information in a quick, concise and comprehensive fashion will only grow in importance as people tire of sifting through the crud and poor usability designs.

The goal of IA should be communication of information and a decrease in the digital divide (vs an academic pursuit)

vitaly important as finding and discerning the relevance of information becomes more and more the responsibility of individuals, rather than content experts or trained information specialists (i.e. librarians). careful attention to IA will help data/information owners more efficiently target markets, while concurrently guiding the user experience.

Information architecture will become more integrated as part of other professions--programmers, designers, etc. Only the largest companies can afford pure IA services. This could change if the economy suddenly rebounds, but that's unlikely. Cash will be too tight for the next few years. Companies will make do with IA training instead of new IA staff.

The IA community is a whiny group of faux-intellectual, exclusionary elitists; they are too busy sniping at each other over minutiae and definitions of IA to be effective in the real world. Having employed a member of this "community" in the past, I will not make the same mistake again.

IA will branch out of just "the Web" realm and into practical use in other areas, such as software development, company libraries/filing systems, and documentation. As broadband and wireless technologies become more popular within the United States, there will be a need for more IA specialists to create efficient "small screen" solutions to allow users to effectively navigate large amounts of data.

The need for IA will continue to grow as information and our need to access information grows. Like web development, many people who really know very little about IA will claim to be IA experts because it sounds good and brings in business. To maintain credibility in the field, some sort of certification process should be put in place that is NOT expensive. Certification programs that are money based, not purely knowledge based may lose a certain amount of credibility in public opinion, which negates the whole concept of certification.

Information architecture is driven by users, not information architects.

With the amount of information being made available on the web, and even more waiting in the wings, if we do not spend time and energy on IA matters now, it will take longer and cost more to do it once it becomes obvious to all that more architecture is needed.

There are many "designers" who practice IA, and that will continue. While the number of specialists IAs will grow, the discipline does not always require a specialist. But all online designers need to become more versed in IA.

I believe IA will dissolve into other disciplines so there will be few "Information Architects" but more Designers and Project Managers (for instance) practising the skills.

Should include the issues of globalization, internationalization, and localization. IA should NEVER be seen as a national island - this should be considered as worst practice. An architect with no g11n/i18n/l10n knowledge should not be called an architect.

good design was practiced long before it was called information architecture, and will continue to be practiced long after the buzzword morphs into something else

Thank you for your time

five years is a very long time