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Web Reviews: User Experience (UX) in Libraries: Web

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Web Reviews

Lisa R. Johnston



Reviews of web resources of interest to *SciTech News* readers.

User Experience (UX) in Libraries: Web Design

In early 2011 SLA officially launched the User Experience (UX) Caucus¹ with a focus on how users experience their libraries. (Join the SLA discussion list at SLA-KUX@sla.lyris.net). UX Librarian at Rice University, Debra Kolah, will convene the first meeting of the caucus at SLA 2011 in Philadelphia with the goal to “permanently embed the user experience within the culture of librarianship. To accomplish this goal, the caucus will provide structure, advice and support for usability studies. The caucus will ultimately give its members clear strategies to search for, identify, and address areas in their own organizations where usability can be improved.”

In celebration of this exciting movement, this issue will feature tools and resources for UX engagement at the web design level. Rapid prototyping a web experience can be as simple as writing down some labels on a card and interviewing a coworker. But low-tech techniques, such as wireframing with a pen and paper, are just scratching the surface of the UX toolbox. These web sites take your ideas to the next level—without actually writing a line of code!

¹ SLA Blog (10 Jan 2011). UX Caucus Officially Open! Accessed February 1, 2011 at http://slablogger.typepad.com/sla_blog/2011/01/new-ux-caucus-officially-open.html

COMMUNITY

Library Journal Column on User Experience

<http://www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA6713142.html>

This new column of the *Library Journal* launched in early 2010. Columnist Aaron Schmidt is the resident Digital Initiatives Librarian for the District of Columbia Public Library and he writes about the ever changing world of UX for library patrons. One article featured the space-based experience that library users have when they enter a library. The reader photos give a sense that many libraries, public and academic, are embracing the future of user-centered building

design.

Usability Professionals' Association

<http://www.upassoc.org/>

Not specifically library oriented, this professional society brings together the experts of the world to discuss the latest techniques and products for usability and user-centered design. To get a taste of what this society has to offer, check out last year's annual conference report by Liza Zamboglou and Lorraine Paterson at <http://www.ariadne.ac.uk/issue64/upa-2010-rpt/>. The 2011 conference will be held June 21-24, 2011 in Atlanta, GA.

Magazines, Blogs, and Listservs

<http://www.uxbooth.com>

UX Booth is a blog covering topics and resources on usability, user experience, and interaction design.



<http://www.uxmatters.com/index.php>

UXmatters is a Web magazine that posts articles in issue format on topics ranging from Accessibility to Visual Design.

<http://www.uxmag.com>

UX Magazine delivers articles on design and user experience that take on a more (traditional) business focus.

<http://interactions.acm.org>

Web-based *interactions* is a bimonthly publication of the ACM that offers a technology focus on user experience topics.

<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/lita>

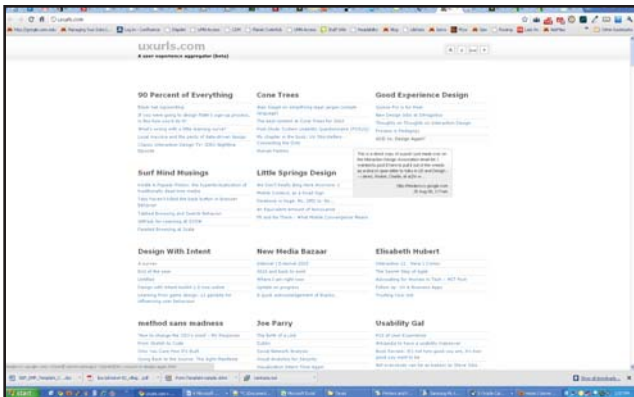
The ALA-based discussion group LITA provides a forum for library professionals to discuss issues of library and information technology.

SLA-KUX@sla.lyris.net

As mentioned in the intro, this new SLA caucus on user experience just kicked off. Their discussion group will shortly be followed by a web presence.

<http://uxurls.com>

What better way to browse the cutting edge knowledge on user experience and usability than a beautifully formatted blog aggregator!



DESIGN INSPIRATION

Social Bookmarking

Setting up a social bookmark account, such as Diigo (<http://www.diigo.com>) or Delicious (<http://www.delicious.com/>), to engage your staff and/or users to tag web sites and add descriptions of the features that they enjoy (ie. nice white space!), will not only give you some great design ideas but will help your stockholders feel involved in the process.

ARL Libraries

<http://www.arl.org/arl/membership/members.shtml>

Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery... and possibly the cheapest web design tool. Reuse the good ideas collected from the largest research libraries in America collected on this site.

A List Apart

<http://www.alistapart.com/>

This blog has a user focus that has long been a standard for what is new and current in web design.

Code{4}Lib

<http://journal.code4lib.org/>

Sometimes a good web experience is only held back by not knowing what is possible. Keeping up with the latest web programming trends in the library world will help you incorporate some incredible design elements that add function as well as usability to your site.

WIREFRAMES

Drawing a sketch of what your site will look like before you code will save you time and energy. Web mockup tools allow you to quickly lay out a possible version of your site using premade elements such as drop down boxes and tabs. Advanced design tools such as Microsoft Visio (<http://visiotoobox.com/2010/>) and Google Sketchup (<http://sketchup.google.com/>) can get the job done, but there is a steep learning curve. Here are three sites made specifically for wire framing that let you get started quickly.

- Mockflow, <http://www.mockflow.com>
- Balsamiq, <http://balsamiq.com>
- MockingBird, <https://gomockingbird.com>



USER FEEDBACK AND STATISTICS

For libraries, our web site is not just a communications vehicle, it is the backbone of our discovery systems and in many cases the primary tool used to access our information. Therefore, we need to communicate any changes to the web page, both to our staff and our users.

Ethnographic Interviews

<https://confluence.sakaiproject.org/display/UX/Ethnographic+Interviews+-+Interviewing+and+Observing+Users>

The Sakai Project team compiled a wealth of UX and usability information, and this section, Ethnographic interviews, provides valuable techniques and interview skills.

Two Distinguished Journals from AAAS/Science

Indexed in
MEDLINE/PubMed



Science Translational Medicine

Linking basic scientists and clinical researchers to improve patient care worldwide

Launched in 2009, the journal bridges the research-to-application gap by providing a platform for idea exchange in the emerging field of translational research.



ScienceTranslationalMedicine.org



Science Signaling

The leading resource for cell signaling

The journal publishes research that represents a major advance in cell signaling, including systems biology, computation and modeling of regulatory pathways, and drug discovery.



ScienceSignaling.org

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Card Sorting

http://rosenfeldmedia.com/books/cardsorting/blog/card_sorting_software_tools/

http://www.boxesandarrows.com/view/card_sorting_a_definitive_guide

One of the most useful tools in the UX arsenal is also one of the easiest. This first link takes you to some web-based tools and software. But I'd recommend the cheap way (actually cards) and this guide "Card sorting: a definitive guide" by Donna Spencer and Todd Warfel, has some great DIY instructions.

Usability Testing

There are many ways to test how usable your site is: from sitting down a patron with specific tasks and observing their behavior or through high-tech cameras tracking the minute eye movements of your site visitors. Here are a sample of some of these tools:

- Usabilla, <http://usabilla.com/> - Fast, easy way to test your site. The results are collected and analyzed in the tool.



- Navflow, <http://navflow.com> - Going one step further, this tool has the option of opening up your usability tasks to their testing community for feedback.



- GazeHawk, <http://www.gazehawk.com/> - Remote eye tracking tool that collects data using your built-in web camera.
- Protonotes, <http://protonotes.com> - Lets you add sticky notes to a wireframe to collect feedback from your group and co-workers.
- Mocklinkr, <http://www.mocklinkr.com/> - Creates a web version of your wireframe mockup to share as a linked web-demo page.

Use Statistics

Nothing says useful like hard evidence that your site gets used. Web use tracking software has advanced to include not only the number of "hits" to a web page, but also give you usability information about where geographically those hits are coming from, which terms they searched for to arrive on your site, what browser they use, and more.

- Google Analytics, <http://www.google.com/analytics> - Integrates with other Google products such as Urchin software for web use analysis and AdSense.



- StatCounter, <http://statcounter.com/> - A free counter that can be invisibly added to any web page with one line of code. ❖