CONTENT FIRST DESIGN

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"Design in the absence of content is just decoration" - Jeffrey Zeldman

In the world of interactive technologies, which includes apps, videogames, smart TVs, websites with dynamic content, among others, there is a tendency to forget that the reason we visit a site, or play a videogame or watch a video online is because of its content. Human beings learn, since primordial times, through conversations with their peers. The process of a conversation its a constant feedback from both parties involved in the process.

Nowadays more and more people are learning about the world through their electronic devices. And the way in which they can process the information they are looking at its in the hands of designers. Designers now have the responsibility to make a digital product visually attractive.

The goal of this work is to analyze advantages and disadvantages of content first viewpoint on the web design process and determine how to create successful web site.

Lets explore the features that make a website successful based on reliability, navigability, responsiveness, efficiency, functionality, usefulness, ease of use, accuracy, web appearance. The information about website success and web activity in general is mainly anecdotal and explanatory in nature, in other words, there is not an investigation, at this point in time, that could include all aspects and all the possibilities and forms websites can take.

Once we understand that we need to put restrictions in our understanding of websites we can focus on business sites. The majority of serious investigations and papers have to do with security on the web and although security is an important aspect of a site success it is not the only or the most important either to achieve that goal. We cannot talk about the success of a website if we do not know what is the intention of its creator to begin with. In this case we are talking about business sites that deal with electronic commerce.

Now before getting into the workflow of using content to create design let's review the traditional design process. First there is the *Brief*, where the client of a designer outlines the needs and expectations about the site. After this comes the *Research* where the designer informs himself about the kind of public the site it's for. In fourth place comes the *Design* process, with its many iterations and amends that arise from working with the client. And last the site its ready for *Production*.

The traditional design workflow doesn't take into account the content itself for the site. It takes the info from the interested client and the viewers to be attracted in

the future. The content just fill the empty space of a design already prepared and finished. All of this advice have to be taken into account to create a winning website, however now we must establish the process by which the Content First Design can complete all of this requirements.

Think about content to create design. Content First Design turns the design process upside down, since the homepage can be the very last element of the site to be design. Starting with content means to be a copywriter or having a copywriters as part of the designing team. In fact design have always been about an harmonious union of parts, never leaving the text aside but using it as part of the visual product. The problem with using Lorem Ipsum as a tool for design is that as it help us to fill empty space it is also completely inert and meaningless, lacks context and deceive us into believing that we are designing with content as a guide. The dummy text does not give any reference to what the user will be reading while watching the overall page, we are designing for font style and size but this is all just decoration not design.

Another reason to start with content before design it's that having the content will give us constraints in our work. Constraints have always been a part of design, it breeds opportunity and creativity. This restrictions help the designer to focus on the essential experience that needs to be supplied. It is absolutely necessary for the designer to know the function of the site he is building. In the case of websites the majority of time the purpose it's the content itself. That's why to know the content its to know the purpose, with this knowledge in hand the designer can begin to create the visual design to present the data in the most convenient way.

Now, how do we use our content to create design? To use the data in our possession in a suitable manner we need to organize, structure and label all of it. All of our content needs to be separated and then reorganized in a way that is effective and helpful to us. In this case we are talking about Information Architecture.

Information architecture (IA) is defined, by author Peter Morville, *as the structural design of information systems, interactive services and user experiences*. It is also *the organization, search, and navigation systems that help people to complete tasks, find what they need, and understand what they've found*. So if we act as information architects from the beginning our content will become a source of understanding and a guide to every decision we need to make about our design.

Applying information architecture to a web site information is the foundation of a content-first well build and designed site. Having the information well organized and labeled will save plenty of time in the later process. The workflow to follow in a content first design comes from anecdotal experiences shared by web designers all around the globe.

Workflow. Although that are the basics of Information Architecture, in reality there is not a complete body of theory or knowledge that defines exactly the steps we need to take to apply it to a web design work. The activity on the web itself has a minor number of investigations, and the majority are about security online, and IA is a relatively new tool oriented towards site's building.

In general terms what we need to do is: first, create **Content Inventory**.

Analyze goals, target audience and success criteria. And finally start producing and make early drafts as soon as possible, since we invest a lot of time on content already so we can speed this part of the process.

The comparison between the traditional design workflow and a Content-First its primarily the inclusion of content strategy and early content drafts before even begin with visual styles or prototypes. In the traditional design this part of the process involves using Lorem Ipsum dummy text to make a final design. In the Content-First strategy the dummy text it's never used.

Once the principles of Information Architecture are applied, and the content is well structured, the **Content Strategy** involves how to present the information to the viewer so the message get across the screen and the goals of the site are met. For this purpose the first **Content Drafts** are essential. In this case there is no dummy text filling up the empty design. This early drafts already contain paragraphs and titles that will be used in the final product. Once the information is presented in a way that will secure the fulfillment of the goals of the site, the next phase it's to design a **Visual Style Guide** which includes all the tools a designer has at his disposal to create a visually attractive and interesting page design. The **Final Design** already has content and its ready to develop as soon as finished. The content its already there, there will be no problems with titles number of words, or paragraphs. All the content now forms the guide by which everything else aligns, not only text but media of all type it's in the correct place and presented in a way that makes the content more relevant for the viewer. **Developing** its now a matter of transporting the design to web terms.

Conclusions. In very general terms the Content-First Design is basically a change in perspective and a comeback to the essence of design. When the content is not the fundamental guide for the design work, there always exist problems and repeated iterations that can be solved initially with this manner of work. Investing time, from the very beginning of the job, into familiarization and organization of all the information of the site can make the work more fluent and easiest to create a perfect design. A design is created from the content and for the content.

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