

Jesse James Garrett

The elements of user experience – User-centered design for the Web –

There are lots of books about *Web design*. Amazon.de lists about 790 books in German and about 1050 books in English, (I haven't checked it) including books of such famous authors as Ben Shneiderman, Jacob Nielsen, Jenniver Fleming, Jenny Preece, Jared M. Spool, Patrick J. Lynch to mention some. Jesse James Garrett's book seems not to be included, I regret it.

Most of the citations which I found (the books by the famous authors excepted) consider very narrow topics, most of them with a limited actuality, say, up to two years, product-oriented. If I had been asked for a recommendation of a good text book I would have problems.

With Garrett's book I hadn't the problem. It is a well-written, well-illustrated essay, just 190 pages. The argument is based on a rather simple, convincing, *layered model*. The Web is considered as a *software interface* and, in duality, as a *hypertext system* for information search and information representation, resp.; the Web applications the design of which is considered are recommended to follow instantiations of this model. The model puts user experience how to interact with the Web as the guiding approach, not the information engineering approach, not the (transient) product aspect, not a specific application aspect.

Layers – what Garrett calls planes of user experience – are

- the *surface*, the medium of interaction,
- the *skeleton*, i.e., the arrangement of interaction elements, e.g., how and where to locate navigation support,
- the *structure*, more abstract than the skeleton, considering, e.g., division of items across pages of a Web site,
- the *scope*, derived from requirement investigation, and
- the *strategy*, relating what the organization spending the considered Web site wants to accomplish and what the expected user will really achieve in visiting it.

From a constructive point of view (which Garrett, of course, also keeps in mind) design, *user-centred design*, starts from the last mentioned layer upwards, providing a clear and profound *design methodology*. The duality of task interaction as provided by the Web considered a software interface *and* information technology orientation as supported by the Web considered a hypertext system is combined in all layers; (imaginating a specific design activity) it may be supposed resulting in an appropriate, balanced, user-centred surface design in the end.

Reading the book sometimes you think of commonplaces what we continually forget, as many observations demonstrate. Yes, important commonplaces which we designers have suppressed for a long time struggling only and prominently with product complexities and the like; there is no high-level, formalized theory behind the advices the book gives us; there is no disturbing *Tech-speak*; there is no human-factors know-how disseminated above well-known everyday experience for a designer trying to centre the design upon users' needs (there are, however, good literature references given!).

The author puts his work in the context of *information architecture*. There may be some (minor) objections to introduce/to strengthen this clouded term and persons identifying their personality as *information architects*. Web design should be (must be) a *science* with a methodologically based and teachable foundation – here the book occupies a respected place –, not an *art* – where architects (in contrast to civil engineers, to remain in this field) are too much involved –.

As a reviewer one should also give hints to an author for future corrections: Page 98, a *hierarchical structure* is more than only a *tree structure*, these terms are not synonym.

A final remark, the illustrations in the book, in their simplicity but power of evidence and expressiveness, prove the slogan of *A picture is worth more than a thousand words*. The methodological model introduced in the book gets a remarkable impression to be well remembered by the Web design community.

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