

# Practicing Information Architecture

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## OVERVIEW

We propose a CHI 2001 Special Interest Group that is a “round table” discussion about how information architecture (IA) is being practiced by SIG attendees. The organizers will do some pre-meeting preparation to help seed the discussion. We will make short presentations to kick-off the SIG and will then moderate and document the discussion. After the SIG, we will report on what happened and we will attempt to create further activities for the members of the HCI community who are doing information architecture work.

## SIG CONTENT

The content of the SIG will center on information architecture, a term that has gained prominence as the way information is organized has become crucial to the success of web sites, intranets and other information systems.

We will focus not on defining the term, but on letting people share their stories of how they “do” information architecture in a wide variety of contexts, backgrounds, and corporate structures.

Some of the specific topics that are likely to be discussed include:

- How IA fits in with business strategy, user research, product development, content management, visual design, project management, interaction design, and usability engineering.
- What methods, tools, techniques and tricks people are using for their IA work.
- What “flavors” of information architects are there: specialists vs. generalists who practice IA as part of their larger responsibilities; in-house IAs vs. consultants; interaction designers vs. library scientists.
- Advice and “therapy” on how to create effective IA within an “Internet time” culture that may not see the value in information architecture.
- Resources (web sites, books, mailing lists, conference, etc.) that help attendees deal with the problems they face practicing information architecture, and what resources they need that are not available.

This topic is related to a panel that has been accepted on “Measuring Information Architecture” (by Keith Instone and Lou Rosenfeld) that will cover the qualitative and quantitative aspects of IA work.

## BEFORE THE SIG

In preparation for the SIG, each organizer will present a *short* presentation and handouts about how they practice information architecture in their jobs. We will create a short paper survey about practicing IA for attendees to fill out.

We will also solicit comments from existing IA discussion forums (the CHI-WEB and SIGIA-L mailing lists) to help us structure the discussion of the SIG, generate interest in the SIG, recruit a note-taker, and possibly even to select some “preferred attendees” that would prepare their own short presentations ahead of time.

## DURING THE SIG

At CHI 2001 session, we will hand out forms for attendees to fill out, introduce ourselves and make our presentations, and then open the floor up for audience questions and story-telling. Each organizer presentation will be limited to 5 minutes, one sheet of paper as a handout (to be given to each attendee) and a few overhead slides in order to leave most of the time for audience participation.

One of the organizers will be the moderator to keep the discussion on track. One organizer will take notes on the overhead projector while a volunteer will be in charge of more formal documentation of the proceedings. If we decide to have some attendees prepare short talks ahead of time, each will be given a chance to speak.

Some time at the end of the session will be reserved for talking about what “next steps” attendees would like to have happen as a result of the SIG. The organizers will make their best effort to see those goals through. The attendee forms will be collected.

## AFTER THE SIG

What happens after the SIG will be just as important as what happens during. We plan on doing the following work in order to capitalize on any momentum built up by the SIG:

- Compile a list of attendees to distribute follow-up information to, such as notes and reports.
- Write up notes from the SIG and distribute to attendees.
- Publish more formal reports from the SIG, in places such as the SIGCHI Bulletin, ACIA and/or Internetworking.
- Consider more formal activities at future CHI conferences (or other venues), such as a workshop, panel, or coordinated short paper submission.

## ABOUT THE ORGANIZERS

**Keith Instone** is an Information Architect and Usability Specialist at Argus Associates, a consulting firm that specializes in information architecture. Keith is managing organizer of the SIG. During the SIG, Keith will discuss how information architecture is practiced at a consulting firm that concentrates on IA.

**Lisa Chan** is an Information Architect at AltaVista Company, where she does research and development of user interactions for new search products. She will serve as moderator and will present the information architecture challenges of working in-house at AltaVista with the redirection of the company’s focus from a portal architecture to a search-centric architecture.

**Arnie Lund** is the Director of Information Architecture at Sapient. He will discuss the HCI space at the “border” between IA and user research.

**Fran Arble** is a User Experience Architect with Capital One, a financial services company that is one of the largest providers of credit cards. Fran will discuss how IA is integrated into the creative development process of a brand marketing organization that produces banners, solicitations, and web interfaces for credit card E-commerce initiatives.