

IxDG: Finding a Home in the UX Community -- Build it and they will come; And they did!

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ABSTRACT

For close to 2 years now I have been part of an exciting project—to create a new community and organization dedicated to the advancement of Interaction Design (IxD). It has been both a fun and frustrating road. We have had mostly successes, but there is an environment out there today in the UX community that makes it difficult for this community to grow freely.

I'd like to take the opportunity of the consortium to discuss what it has been like to take on this initiative and how we have been thinking about how to make this project more successfully. Finally, how can a more organized UX community can help facilitate this, instead of fighting what is probably the inevitable.

BACKGROUND

In 2003 a “call to arms” was made by two people over the Internet—Bruce “Tog” Tognazzini¹ and Challis Hodge²—to form an organization dedicated to the promotion, and advancement of Interaction Design (IxD) and to benefit the careers of those who practice it. That call led to an e-mail list hosted by Challis where some 200-300 design practitioners, researchers, students and teachers came together in short of a month.

After further time it was clear that this list needed more of an organizing body and Challis invited people to join a steering committee and 3 people heeded that call—including myself. This steering committee took it upon itself to represent this community, and asked for volunteers to help create some initiatives. The very first initiative was defining the discipline and creating a mission statement. Both are available on <http://ixdg.org/>³.

When we first started to organize, there were many organizational reactions from abject horror to full embracing, but none that really wanted to consider the need for a new home for the interaction design practitioner as something separate from what already existed. Most embracing was in the offer for us as IxDG to join the existing entity.

For most of the last 2 years, IxDG has basically existed at two levels: First, as an online community, where a similar, yet slightly different conversation was going on; second, a series of face-to-face gatherings around the world: London, New York, Pune (India), San Francisco Bay Area and Los Angeles. Other communities have said that they would like to plan an event: Boston, Vienna, Bangalore, Mumbai, St. Louis, Seattle, and Washington, D.C.

The first project of the new steering committee and workgroup was to create a definition of what is IxD. The key part of this conversation was that the steering committee at that time and many of the people who were working on this first initiative were and are committed to talking about the discipline of interaction design and not people who hold the title of interaction design (or any other title for that matter.) This focus is at the core of our strategy and a strict guideline to reflect off of as we moved forward with other initiatives and strategy.

A next core part of the creation of the group was the steering committee focused on creating value for its constituency. We were in no position to charge for membership and create services that would make a US\$50 expense worthwhile, but we knew we had to do something. We created 3 initiatives and a few taskforces that would help support those initiatives. The initiatives are Career Development, Education, and Tools & Resources. Because we are a purely volunteer based organization these have not come to fruition (hopefully by the end of this month the Resource Library, a main effort of the Tools & Resources Initiative will go live.)

Another defining element of IxDG's community is that we have a very active international “membership”. This might be coincidental, but the steering committee from the first day set out to create a home that worked against its US-centric realities. We recently produced our first translated version of our website: German.

This spring the IxDG is going to be having a small retreat to determine its final strategy and tactics for achieving that strategy. The goal of this meeting is to make some final decisions towards formalizing the IxDG community into a

functioning organization. The form of that organization is not finalized and will be in large effort the point of the retreat to determine:

- Are we an independent organization?
- Do we take up the offer of 1 or 2 existing organizations to find/make a home within their organizational structure.
- What type of membership will we have?
- What are our immediate offerings for that membership? For the IxD community?

We have a tough road ahead of us. We have attempted to interview people who have been a part of doing this work in the past and who are doing the work currently to find out what challenges and what opportunities they were able to overcome or take advantage of. We have learned a lot.

THE PRESENTATION

To this particular audience, I would like to offer this story, and address some of the experiences we have faced in the last 2 years.

- Creating another group in the UX community? Are we yet another faction? Is there anything wrong with factions?
- What is it about existing organizations that even necessitate this?
- Can/will a single practioners/human find a home in just one organization?
- What is a home for a practitioner?

- What does it mean to not only create an organization, but create a community where there wasn't one already naturally?
- Why UXnet's success is important to the success of IxDG, and why IxDG's formation during the same period of UXnet is not a coincidence?

My goal here is not to present final answers, but rather reflect the history of IxDG into the workshop as a dialog for thinking about the future of User Experience Design.

I'm sure there are more questions, and in fact I'm looking forward to an opportunity to collaborating with peers so that as I go into the retreat for IxDG I can reap the experiences and knowledge of the attendees to the consortium.

Final reference to title:

Yes, "If you build it they will come, but it helps A LOT when the person getting the word out is famous in the field and puts out an amazing call to action, not just once, but now twice. (See the May/June issue of *Interactions*.)

REFERENCES

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<http://ixdg.org> - core web site
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