

# UXnet: Making Connections

**Whitney Quesenbery**

UXnet UPA,

Whitney Interactive Design  
New York City Area, NY, USA  
whitneyq@wqusability.com

**Richard Anderson**

UXnet, SIGCHI, Riander

San Francisco Bay Area, CA, USA  
riander@riander.com

**Beth Mazur**

UXnet, STC

Washington DC Area, USA  
beth@idblog.org

## ABSTRACT

This position paper for the CHI2005 Development Consortium describes the vision that led to the formation of the User Experience Network (UXnet) and cross-disciplinary needs it addresses, for individual practitioners and for the ongoing development of the field as a whole.

**Author Keywords:** UXnet, User Experience Network

## ACM Classification Keywords

K.7.2. The computer profession: organizations

## INTRODUCTION

User Experience (UX) is an emerging field concerned with improving the design of anything people experience: a web site, a toy, or a museum. UX is inherently interdisciplinary, synthesizing methods, techniques, and wisdom from many fields, ranging from brand design to ethnography to library science to architecture and more..

In finding colleagues and organizations, there are many, rich options for UX professionals to choose from. The User Experience Network (UXnet) starts from the principle that facilitating connections is key to increased value: for the profession, for organizations, for businesses and for individuals. We can all benefit from supporting our colleagues from all parts of the user experience world.

One of the goals for UXnet is to provide a “home” for the big picture or strategic discussions that, by their very nature, require cross-disciplinary communications. On virtually every professional e-list, the question of “the big picture” overtook more targeted discussions, as each community struggled to understand both the complete field and the contribution its skills brought to it.

At the same time, there are some practical tools that can provide immediate value to both practitioners and organizations. Two have been defined and launched. Each of these initiatives has intrinsic value, and meets specific needs expressed, sometimes forcefully, by UXnet supporters.

- **Local Ambassadors** –a network of representatives to facilitate collaboration in local areas: coordinate meetings,

encourage joint sponsorship of events, and host First Friday social networking events.

- **Events Calendar and Group Directory** –a searchable listing of UX-related organizations and events. This ambitious technical vision is being implemented in stages, working towards a site that allows visitors to identify locations, organizations and topics of personal interest to them.<sup>1</sup>

A third initiative addresses a structural goal of encouraging cooperation among the organizations

- **Organization Collaboration** – facilitating cooperation among UX-related professional organizations.

Although each society has value in serving a specific discipline or perspective on user experience, we also see the value in making connections between these organizations for joint conferences, shared meetings, advocacy initiatives, cooperative publications...the possibilities are endless. We believe that these connections will only strengthen each organization by providing additional breadth and member benefits. This process already goes on informally. UXnet can become a common ground to facilitate these efforts.

## HISTORY: THE ROAD ALREADY TRAVELLED

In the fall of 2001, Lou Rosenfeld began a discussion of the meaning of user experience among a variety of practices and organizations. This free-ranging discussion covered practical issues, philosophies and tried to understand what shape collaboration or coordination might take. The group considered three metaphors to describe the emerging vision:

- **Linked arms.** The concept that all of the skills represent inter-related aspects of creating a product and the users’ experience of it. (See Figure 1)
- **Super-SIG.** An umbrella organization that would bring together all of the organizations and skills.
- **Interfaith Council**<sup>2</sup>. A forum for the leaders of the “linked” communities.

<sup>1</sup> Keith Instone’s position paper “User Experience: An umbrella topic” covers this initiative.

<sup>2</sup> The name was a word play on the fervently held (even evangelical) views of many of the participants.

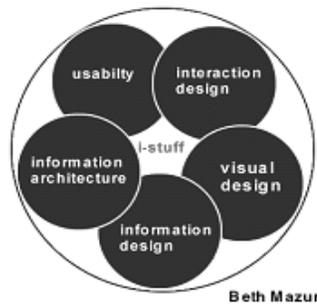


Figure 1. The “linked arms” visualization

In mid-2002, Lou Rosenfeld invited a group of people to join him in creating something new. He wrote, “I’m hoping we can create a small, agile, and strategic team that believes in the value of a truly interdisciplinary approach to user experience design...It’s absolutely not foolish or overly ambitious to believe that we can do things that will make a big impact for thousands of our fellow professionals.”<sup>3</sup>

The results of that work was “soft launched” on June 21, 2004, with a web site ([www.uxnet.org](http://www.uxnet.org)) to communicate the UXnet vision, individual supporters, and several organizations informally supporting the effort.

### THE JOURNEY AHEAD

One thing became obvious the early discussions: this could not be a small vision. UXnet can only succeed if it adds to what current organizations already offer, and creates something greater than the sum of the parts. The UXnet Roadmap (see supplemental material) maps out a three year strategic plan and long-term vision. In addition to organizational development activities, it identifies three main areas of focus:

- **Building the network:** networking the idea in the community and facilitating the discussion of shared professional interests. Long term ideas include symposia or “UX retreats” to continue to develop UX concepts.
- **Reaching out:** sharing best practices, communicating UX principles both within the community and to a broadening base. Long term ideas include educational programs for practitioners and business colleagues.
- **Influencing others:** influencing public policy, advocacy, fostering UX research and development, promoting the best work in the field through recognition programs.

### LONG TERM VISION: THE INSTITUTE

One of the challenges in developing user experience as a field is that this work is inherently multi-disciplinary,. It cannot be effectively led by any of the current organizations, as each is centered on one aspect of the field. However, without an umbrella under which this work can be done, the field will never gain the maturity and public stature it deserves. Other fields have their thought leaders, for example

the Software Engineering Institute (SEI) in Pittsburgh or the Design Council in the UK which serve to both shape and communicate critical issues in their fields.

One long-term vision to meet this challenge is a “UX Institute.” Such an organization could not only bring together the UX disciplines, but also work other fields (such as software and product development, marketing and others) to create a better understanding of how they contribute to great (not just good) products.

Where the current organizations are focused on a single aspect of UX, and on the critical goal of serving their members, UXnet is focused on the overview and the relationships between the disciplines.

### CONCLUSION

The general idea of a UXnet as a way to connect individuals and organizations from many different disciplines under the user experience umbrella has always been a compelling one. However, despite enthusiasm for the idea, it has been hard to move from discussion to action, and harder to define concrete goals. The UXnet Executive Council concluded that only big goals, a mission that would make a substantial difference, were worth the effort that bringing together so many (sometimes competing) interests. Along with a large group of volunteers, we have begun the work of networking in the community and building collaborative tools to support that cooperation. The next steps will require commitments from the organizations, and a plan to achieve the potential of the UXnet vision.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This paper is based on a discussion lasting several years among many people. First among them is Lou Rosenfeld, who first brought the group together. The Executive Council of UXnet is Richard Anderson, Keith Instone, Dirk Knemeyer, Beth Mazur and Whitney Quesenbery.

### SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

The following supplemental information will be made available to Development Consortium participants.

- **Organizational Models** – A summary of different approaches to creating an organization.
- **UXnet Roadmap** – A three year strategic plan and long term goals, released January 2005.
- **UXnet Governance** – A preliminary diagram of the structure and leadership of UXnet, released January 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Private communications, dated June 8, 2002

# UXnet: Making connections

## Supplemental Information

**Whitney Quesenbery**  
Usability Professionals' Association, UXnet,  
Whitney Interactive Design  
78 Washington Ave, High Bridge, NJ 08829  
whitneyq@wqusability.com

Beth Mazur  
Society for Technical Communication, UXnet  
AARP  
Arlington, VA  
bowseat@bethmazur.com

## Organizational Models

As the User Experience Network (UXnet) was in formation, the executive council<sup>1</sup> considered several different organizational models for the new organization.

Most of the organizations where we had substantive experience were based on an individual membership model. For all of them, serving these individual members with binding member benefits (including professional development, education and outreach) is the core mission.

UXnet would be a different kind of organization, one more focused on the development of the field and in collaboration among individuals and associations. As we considered how to meet the needs of both the bottom up (individual) and top down (organizations) constituents, the executive council looked in depth at five organizations with similar missions, but very different organizational approaches.

Group	Purpose	How	Customers
ICOGRADA	awareness (bring associations together)	umbrella group	professional societies
Design Management Institute	make money, publish, educate	(corporate) memberships, tightly held assets (pay to read)	managers
Corporate Design Foundation	education	publishing and good works	sponsors (public)
Software Engineering Institute	change the world (software industry)	government funding, academic linkage	software industry
Move On	change the world	donations	activists (politicians)

---

<sup>1</sup> The Executive Council of UXnet includes (as of January 2005) Richard Anderson, Keith Instone, Dirk Knemeyer, Beth Mazur and Whitney Quesenbery. Other participants in the discussions included Lou Rosenfeld, Challis Hodge, Nigel Bevan and George Olsen. Beth Mazur led the project to gather organizational models.

# **ICOGRADA**

## **(International Council of Graphic Design Associations)**

### **Governance: Board of Directors**

ICOGRADA's Executive Board consists of individuals who are duly nominated and elected by ICOGRADA member associations at the biennial ICOGRADA General Assembly. Members of the Executive Board serve in a volunteer position and donate their time and expertise to further ICOGRADA 's mandate. Board meetings are typically held four times a year in different locations around the world, usually in conjunction with regional meetings, seminars, or other scheduled design events.

### **Funding: Membership, sponsorship, and donation\**

Membership: ICOGRADA is an association of independent Member associations, forming a global network. More than 70 Member associations in over 45 countries share common concerns, commitments, and standards. Professional design organizations join ICOGRADA as Full Members with voting rights. Promotional or technical organizations join as Associate Members with voting rights. Non-voting Members include: Patron Members, who contribute financially; Subscriber and Education Members, engaged in education, the raising of standards, or design research and practice; Corresponding Members, residing in a country not represented by a Member organization; and Affiliate Members, international organizations concerned with professional practice in fields related to graphic design.

The ICOGRADA Foundation was established in 1991 for the advancement of worldwide understanding and education through the effective use of graphic design. The Icograda Foundation charity registered with the Charity Commission for England and Wales. It obtains funds from corporate sponsorships, individual donations, legacies, and various fundraising activities.

Friends of ICOGRADA is a worldwide network of individuals and corporations who share a common interest in graphic design and visual communication. Friends support ICOGRADA and desire to contribute to ICOGRADA and its worldwide aims. Anyone who wishes to support ICOGRADA and who agrees with ICOGRADA 's aims and values can become a Friend of Icograda on a contribution basis.

### **ICOGRADA 's Purpose**

Icograda is the world's non-governmental and non-political representative and advisory body for graphic design and visual communication. It serves the worldwide community of graphic designers. In doing so, ICOGRADA aims to:

- raise the standards of design, professional practice, and ethics
- raise the professional status of the graphic designer
- further the appreciation of designers' professional achievements
- extend design's contribution to understanding among people
- promote the exchange of information, views, and research
- contribute to design education - theory, practice and research
- coordinate matters of professional practice and conduct
- establish international standards and procedures
- hold congresses, conferences, seminars, and symposia
- publish and distribute information concerned with graphic design.

**URL:** <http://www.icograda.org/web/> and <http://www.friends.icograda.net/web/home.shtml>

# DMI (Design Management Institute)

## **Governance: Staff plus advisory council**

DMI has a 6-person staff, including president, a board of directors and an advisory council

## **Funding: Membership and educational revenue**

There are several membership types:

- Professional Individual
- Professional Group
- Professional Organization
- Forum
- Student
- Academic Individual
- Academic Group

## **DMI's Purpose**

Founded in 1975, the Design Management Institute (DMI) has become the leading resource and international authority on design management. DMI has earned a reputation worldwide as a multifaceted resource, providing invaluable know-how, tools and training through its conferences, seminars, membership program, and publications. DMI is a nonprofit organization that seeks to heighten awareness of design as an essential part of business strategy.

The DMI strategy is at once practical and dynamic – in touch with technological and business realities, and driven by a deep commitment to managing for design excellence. DMI brings together design and business professionals from corporations, consultancies, the public sector, and universities – across all categories of design – who are interested in advancing their understanding and providing greater value to their organizations, and participating in a community of professionals sharing their knowledge.

The DMI mission statement is:

### Vision

Improve organizations worldwide through effective management of design for economic growth.

### Mission

Be the international authority, resource and advocate on design management.

## Objectives

- Assist design managers to become leaders in their profession.
- Sponsor, conduct and promote research.
- Collect, organize and make accessible a body of knowledge.
- Educate and foster interaction among design managers, organizational managers, public policy makers and academics.
- Be a public advocate for the economic and cultural importance of design.

**URL:** <http://www.dmi.org/dmi/html/index.htm>

# Corporate Design Foundation

**Governance: Board of directors.**

No mention of staff on website.

**Funding: Sponsorship/donation.**

Support for Corporate Design Foundation takes the form of both charitable contributions and participation in the development of programs.

**Corporate Design Foundation's Purpose** "It is the mission of the Foundation to improve the quality of life and effectiveness of organizations through design. At the heart of this mission is a desire to expand the awareness of design through the education of corporate leaders, managers and public sector executives. Through its programs, the Foundation promotes the research and documentation of the impact of design in business, and the development of new teaching curricula and materials for use in business education."

## Accomplishments

- In 2002, launched Natural Design Consortium, to establish multidisciplinary courses on sustainable product development and sustainable architecture
- In 2002, collaborated with Carnegie Mellon University and Rochester Institute of Technology, to produce The Business Edge, a nationally broadcast teleconference to 43 locations illustrating the impact of design on business. Sponsored by NEA.
- Since 1995, publish @issue: The Journal of Business & Design, the first publication written for corporate executives about design, sponsored by Sappi. Current circulation 60,000 with an additional 40,000 distributed at business schools and conferences.
- Collaborated with Rochester Institute of Technology to produce the teleconference Business, Design and Communication, a program dedicated to educating executives and students about the effect of design on successful business.
- Organized the National Forum on Design (1995-1997) with the National Endowment for the Arts and General Services Administration aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of government through workplace design.
- Organized the first conference for university faculty about teaching interdisciplinary courses, including design and business, and published the results of this conference and research as Teaching Collaborative Product Development (1994).
- 1991-1998, offered the annual Design Leadership Symposium, to bring business school faculty together with designers and business executives to discuss design practice and business school teaching about design, sponsored by IBM.
- Since 1990, distributed over 500 design related books to 50 business school and public libraries as part of the Library Initiative.
- Developed a library of business school case studies and videos that examine the impact of effective design on successful business.
- Produced Winning through Innovation, a program for corporate executives develop a framework for thinking strategically about design and innovation.
- Facilitated development of the first interdisciplinary courses bringing together students and faculty in design, business, and engineering.
- Collaborated with business school faculty to establish the first full-length courses at business schools about design and business. The Foundation continues to collaborate with over 250 faculty at 70 business schools.

**URL:** <http://www.cdf.org/>

# Software Engineering Institute

## **Governance: Staff, funders.**

SEI now has four offices in US and Europe

Organizations that sponsor and otherwise oversee SEI operations, include the following:

- Office of the Secretary of Defense/Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics (OSD/AT&L)
- Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA)
- Joint Program Office (JPO)
- Carnegie Mellon University
- Board of Visitors

## **Funding: Grant-funded.**

The Software Engineering Institute (SEI) is a federally funded research and development center sponsored by the U.S. Department of Defense through the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics [OUSD (AT&L)].

## **SEI's Purpose**

The SEI's core purpose is to help others make measured improvements in their software engineering capabilities.

**Vision** The right software, delivered defect free, on time and on cost, every time. To be successful, integrated teams of developers, acquirers, and software users must have the necessary software engineering skills and knowledge to ensure that the right software is delivered to end users.

**Mission** The SEI is a preeminent software engineering R&D technology center.

The SEI provides the technical leadership to advance the practice of software engineering so the DoD can acquire and sustain its software-intensive systems with predictable and improved cost, schedule, and quality. The SEI mission includes four objectives:

1. accelerate the introduction and widespread use of high-payoff software engineering practices and technology by identifying, evaluating, and maturing promising or underused technology and practices
2. maintain a long-term competency in software engineering and technology transition
3. enable industry and government organizations to make measured improvements in their software engineering practices by working with them directly
4. foster the adoption and sustained use of standards of excellence for software engineering practice

The SEI works closely with DoD engineering organizations. In addition, the SEI offers continuing education courses based on matured, validated, and documented solutions. The SEI also licenses the packaging and delivery of new and improved technologies, working with developers and acquirers as well as with transition partners -- DoD and industry organizations that help others adopt new technology.

**URL:** <http://www.sei.cmu.edu/sei-home.html>

# Move On

## **Governance: Staff**

Small staff (four at MoveOn.org, plus others at MoveOnPac)

## **Funding: Donations.**

Because MoveOn.org has only a tiny staff, our basic operating costs are very low. You can support our work with a secure online contribution. Almost all of our funding comes through these donations from people like you.

## **MoveOn's Purpose**

MoveOn is working to bring ordinary people back into politics. With a system that today revolves around big money and big media, most citizens are left out. When it becomes clear that our "representatives" don't represent the public, the foundations of democracy are in peril. MoveOn is a catalyst for a new kind of grassroots involvement, supporting busy but concerned citizens in finding their political voice. Our nationwide network of more than 2,000,000 online activists is one of the most effective and responsive outlets for democratic participation available today.

**URL:** <http://www.MoveOn.org>