

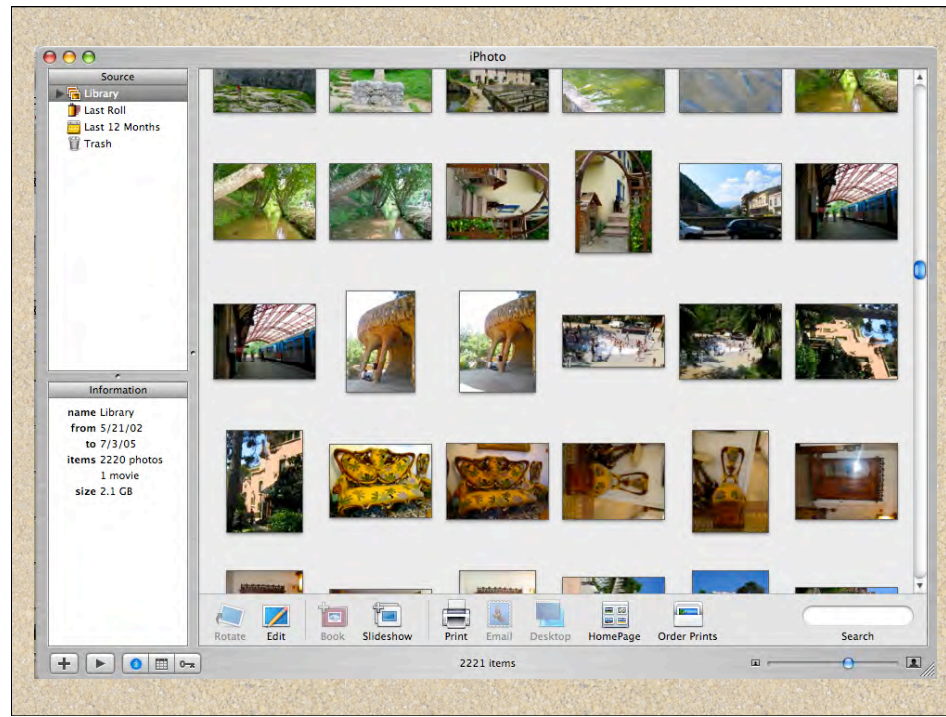
# Designing for the Sandbox

Peter Merholz  
peterme@adaptivepath.com

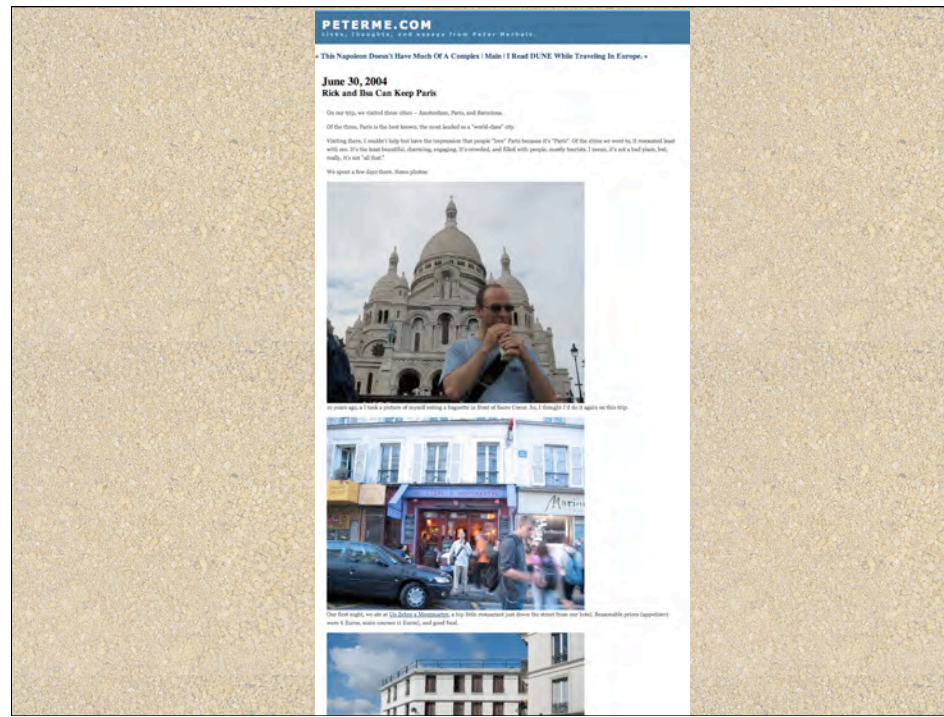
adaptive path The logo graphic for Adaptive Path, consisting of a series of horizontal bars of varying lengths and colors (green and black) that form a stylized path or staircase effect.



This is the Canon PowerShot S60, the camera I own. Like many of you, I take a digital camera with me everywhere, and shoot all manner of things.



And, for the longest time, those things would first make their way to iPhoto...



And then to my blog. It was not the easiest sequence of events, getting my photos out in the world. I had to use either FTP, or kludgy blog software.

A promotional banner for Flickr BETA. The banner features a central headline "EVERY PHOTO TELLS A STORY" in large, bold, black letters. To the left of the headline are several small, overlapping photographs of people. To the right is a larger, prominent photograph of a baby wearing a yellow crown and a red scarf. The Flickr logo, with "BETA" in small letters above it, is in the top right corner. Below the headline, there is a call to action: "Start sharing your stories" followed by a pink button that says "SIGN UP NOW" and the text "...and open a free account." To the right of this, it says "Already a Flickr member?" with a blue link "Log in here." At the bottom of the banner, there is a paragraph of text: "Flickr is a revolution in photo storage, sharing and organization, making photo management an easy, natural and collaborative process. Get comments, notes, and tags on your photos, post to any blog, share and chat live and more!"

**EVERY PHOTO TELLS A STORY**

Start sharing your stories

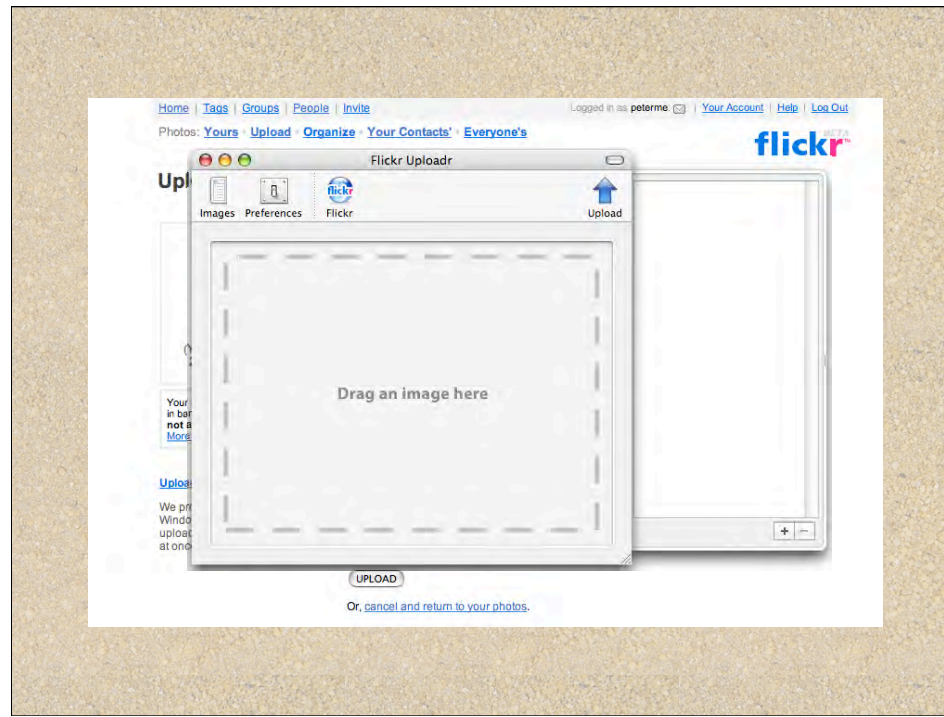
**SIGN UP NOW**

...and open a free account.

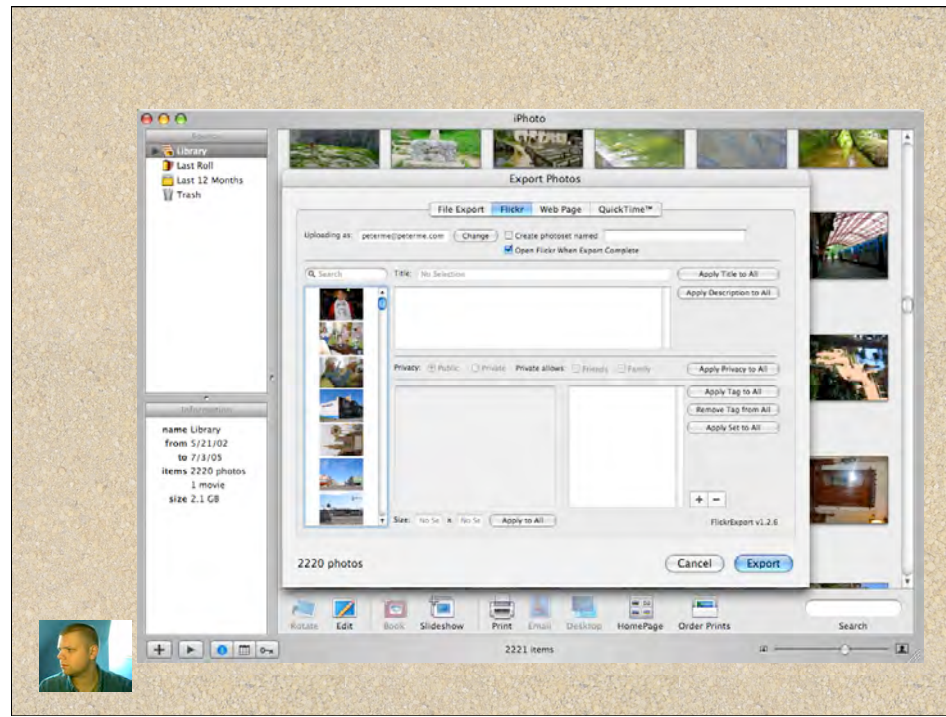
Already a Flickr member?  
[Log in here.](#)

Flickr is a revolution in photo storage, sharing and organization, making photo management an easy, natural and collaborative process. Get comments, notes, and tags on your photos, post to any blog, share and chat live and more!

Then, like many of you, I discovered Flickr. For the three of you who don't know, Flickr is a photo sharing site with Friendster-like connections between people. Unlike Ofoto or Shutterfly, it doesn't assume you want prints. It figures you just want to show people your pictures.



“Out of the box,” there are two ways to get your pictures up on Flickr. The first is the all-too-familiar browse-your-harddrive-and-upload process. The second is the “Flickr Uploader” a rather impoverished little app that makes the process only marginally smoother.



But then there is this man, Fraser Speirs. He clearly loves Flickr and loves the Mac. He's also a programmer. He read the API to upload to Flickr, and wrote a plug-in for iPhoto that makes uploading a breeze. You can tag, and sort, and create photosets, all from this one interface!

32. How many photos can I upload for free? [Top](#)

When you have a free Flickr account, you can upload 20MB worth of photos each calendar month. This is **not** a storage limit, but a bandwidth (or throughput) limit. At the

**20MB worth of photos**

eats into your monthly total. Your upload percentage for the current month can be found on the [upload photos page](#).

You might like to consider either taking photos at a lower resolution to start with, or resizing your photos to a more web-friendly size (like 300KB instead of 5MB), particularly if you know that most of your photos will only be viewed on screen.

## Holy smokes! That's cheap!

Just **\$24.95** for a 1 year pro account.

Here's what you get...

- **2 GB** monthly upload limit
- **Unlimited** storage
- **Unlimited** bandwidth
- **Unlimited** photosets
- **Permanent archiving** of high-resolution original images
- **Ad-free** browsing and sharing \*

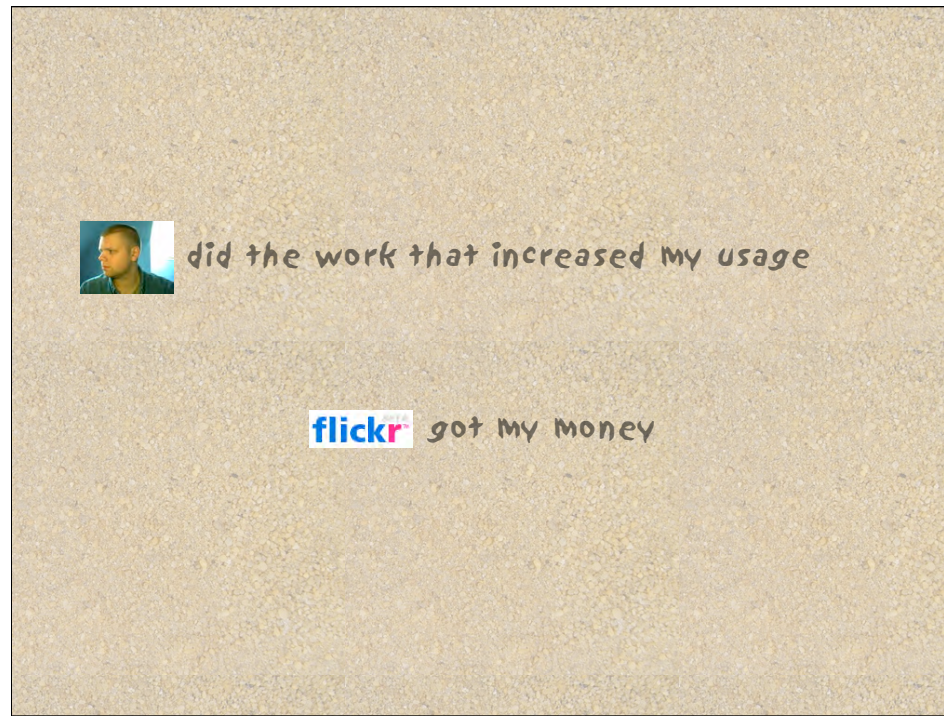
That's about **\$2 a month!**

**Buy Now!**

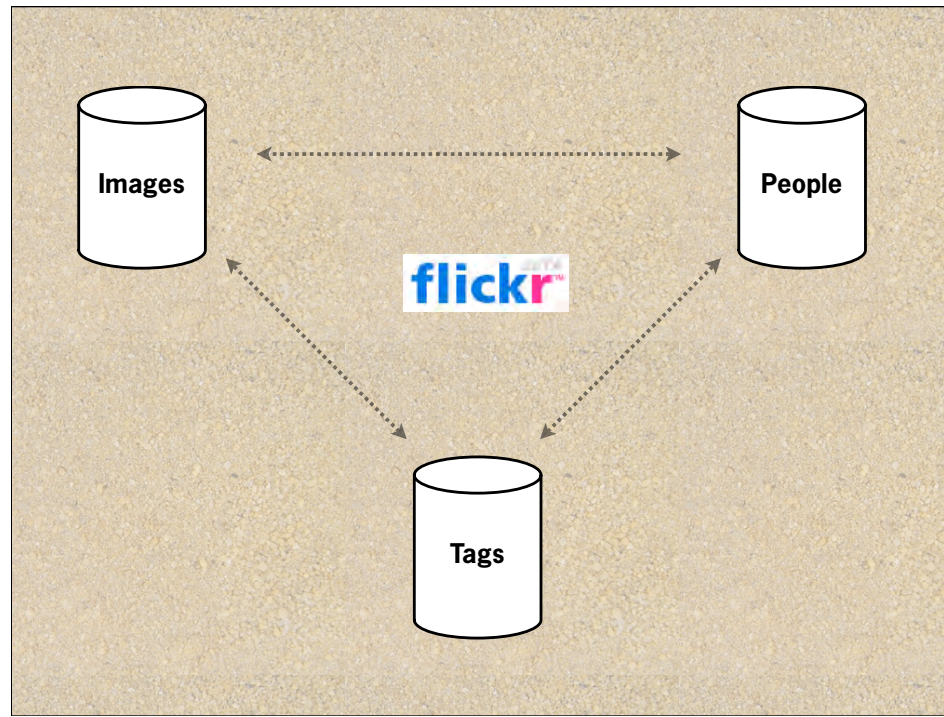
You can get a **2 year** account for just **\$47.99** and that's even less per month!

Well, in pretty short order, I found myself trying to upload more than the 20MB allotted under the free account. Since I clearly was using and committed to the service, I decided to go “pro” and pony up the dough.





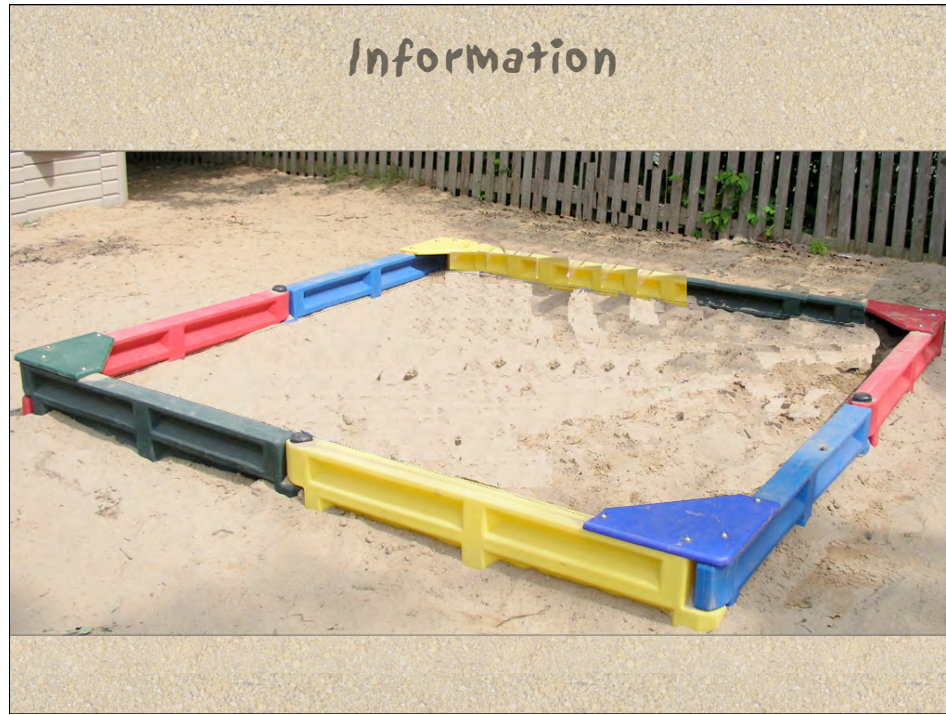
So, Fraser Speirs, out of the goodness of his heart, did the work that increased my usage.  
Flickr got my money.  
And Fraser is probably perfectly happy with that.



Flickr recognized that the value was in exerting as little control as possible over the experience, and to let others make of it what they will. Flickr owns up to what it really is: simply a database of images, people, and tags and the connections in between.

What is the sandbox?





Information is the raw material of digital media. On the Web, it's typically content -- words, images, sounds. But it can also be things -- the products that an online retailer offers. Or it could be data -- clickstreams, behaviors, etc.



People, are, well, people. You and me. The things that actually bring value to the network. It's startling how few sites take advantage of the fact that there are PEOPLE on their sites, doing things that could be leveraged in interesting ways.



Tools allow the people to act on the information. They serve to mediate the experience. Tools on the web are often very simple -- links and forms. But with the development of Ajax and Flash applications and whatnot, the tools we're being given are getting quite interesting.

## Philosophy



These three ingredients aren't particularly interesting. Websites everywhere have information, people using them, and tools that they use. What sets designing for the sandbox apart? It's the philosophy. And it's philosophy is pretty simple, familiar to Jedis everywhere...

## Let go? But I'm a designer!

◇ "As a designer, I would love to be able to control more of the environment and experiences of my customers. Identically, as a business person, I would love to be able to control more of the environment and experiences of my customers. After all, the user experience is influenced by far more than the applications we are creating."

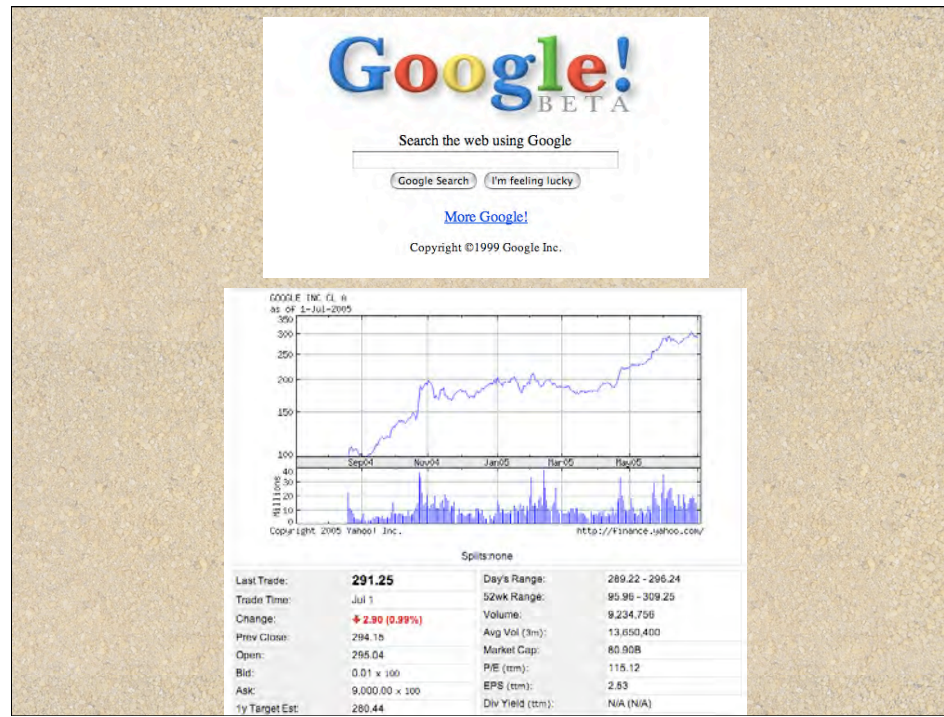
Dirk Knemeyer

<http://www.knemeyer.com/dk.cfm?a=cms,c,292,1>

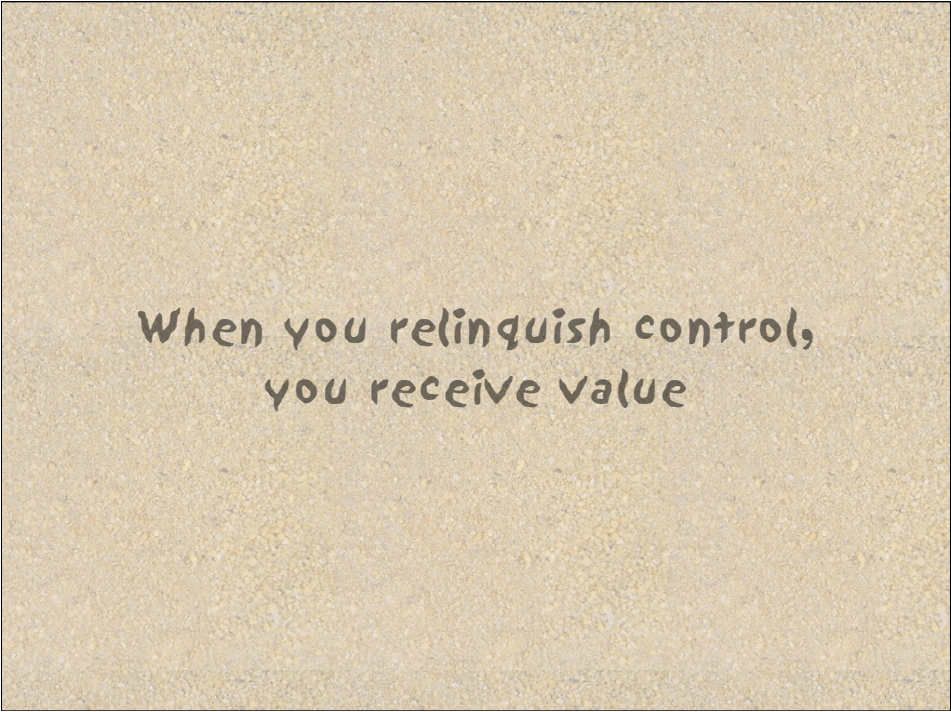




Here are some sites that attempted to exert control. Back when “page views” were considered valuable in and of themselves, sites sought to be “sticky.” So instead of serving a true purpose, they threw all manner of content at you, in desperate hopes that something would be worth clicking and keeping you on the site. They weren’t so concerned with the quality of experience -- just tried to control your behavior to keep you locked in.

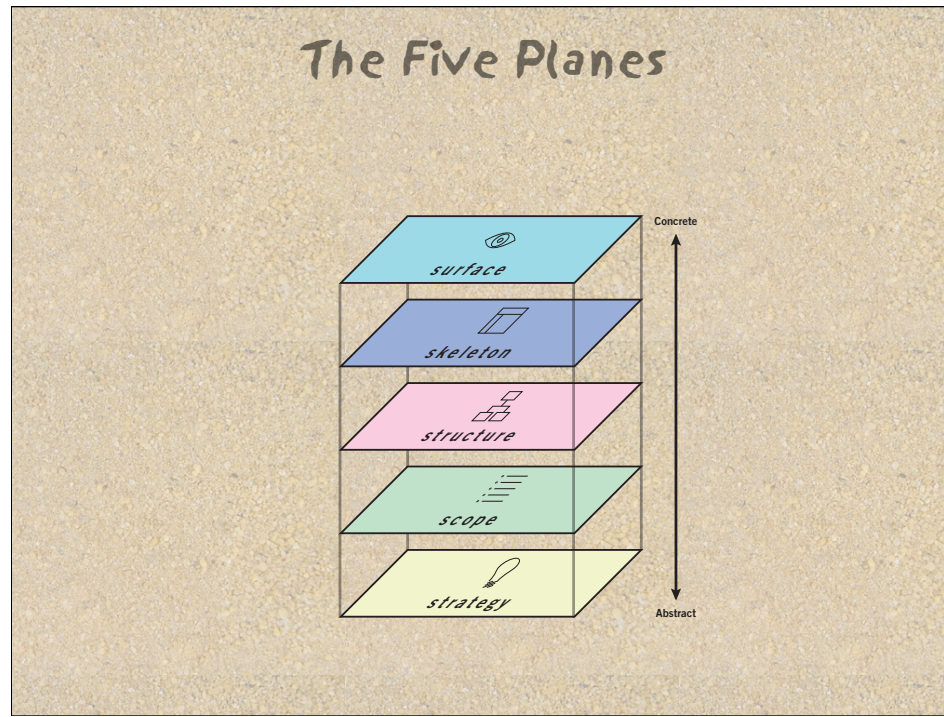


Then Google came along. With “I’m feeling lucky”, you could successfully use the site in one page view. Where’s the value to the business in that? Well, as Google’s valuation suggests, the value wasn’t in page views -- it was in becoming an indispensable tool. Google recognized that it cannot control the experience, because the variety of contexts is nearly infinite. We serve better by providing useful tools that can be integrated into those unforeseen situations.

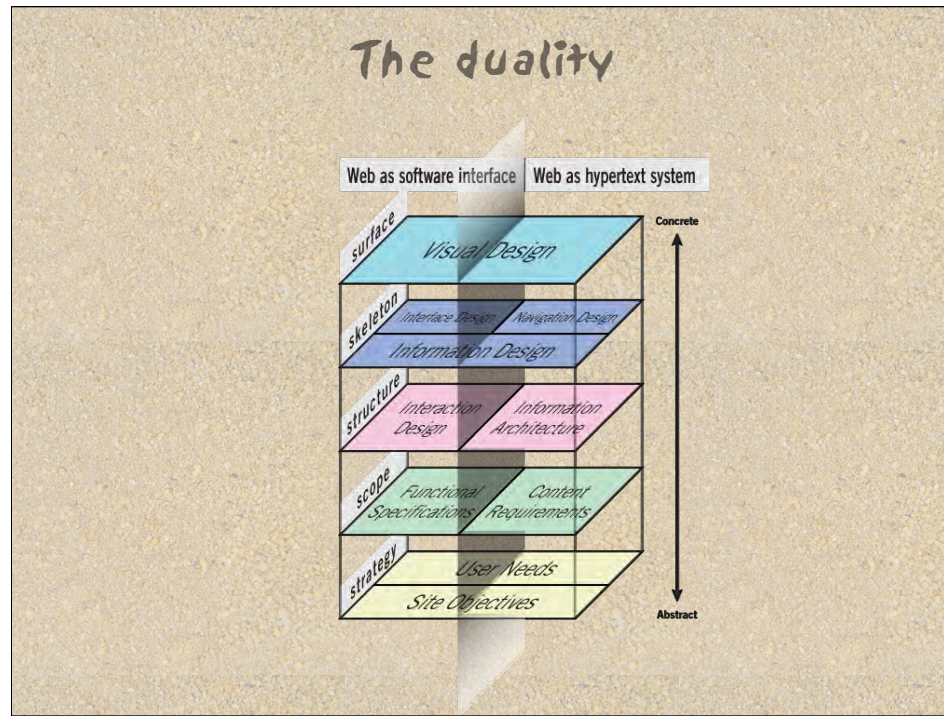


When you relinquish control,  
you receive value

Again and again, the history of the web has taught us that if we relinquish control, we receive value. If we don't try to control the aesthetic with big blocks of GIF text, we're searchable. If we don't try to unnaturally force people to stick to our site, we become an indispensable resource. If we offer people tons of choice, they'll take advantage of it.



So the sandbox is about the appropriate relinquishing of control. But what kinds of control? How can we thinking about it systematically? I think that my colleague Jesse James Garrett's Elements of User Experience provide a potentially helpful framework.



Jesse makes clear to distinguish between the web as software and the web as hypertext system. As we'll see this distinction, and the elements it reveals, can help us think through the notion of control.

# Surface



## Surface

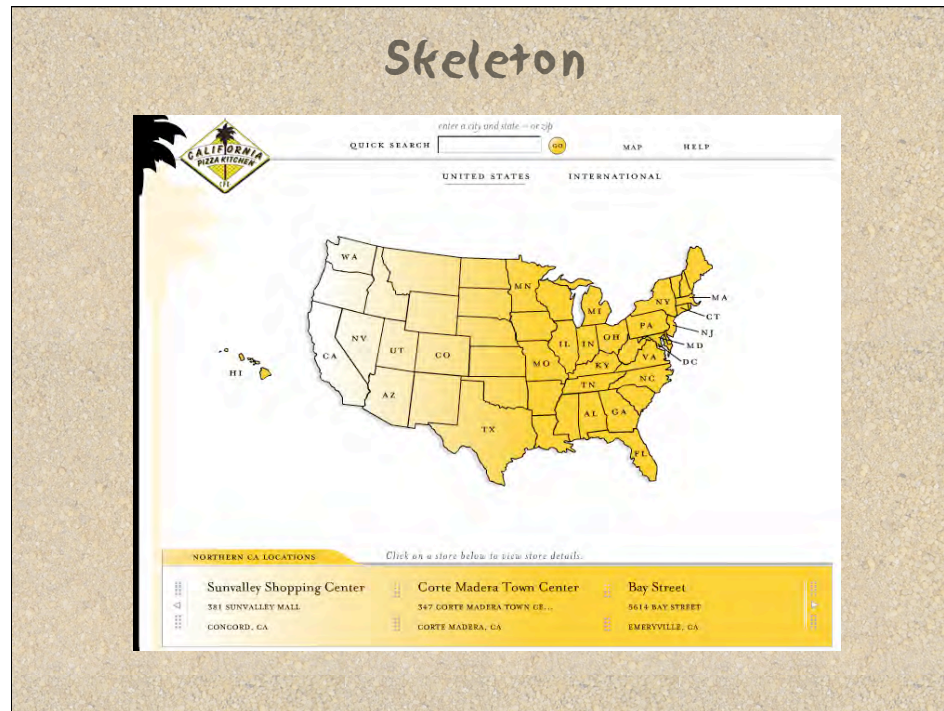
- ◇ Don't take over the screen
- ◇ Don't pop up windows
- ◇ Stop with the graphic text
- ◇ Encourage skinning, if appropriate
- ◇ At best, keep your presentation simple and straightforward

# Skeleton



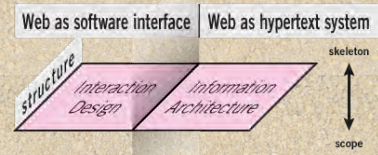


# Skeleton



This is the store locator for California Pizza Kitchen. They were so proud of it that it was submitted to an interactive design award. Yet it's a miserable piece of interaction design, particularly in how they attempt to control the users experience. Instead of making it easy to find a store, they make it remarkably hard, forcing you to jump through their hoops.

# Structure



# Structure

**Allrecipes Recipe Collections**

Recipes of the Day | Top Ten Recipes

- [appetizer](#)
- [asian](#)
- [barbecue](#)
- [beef](#)
- [best brands](#)
- [beverage](#)
- [bread](#)
- [brunch](#)
- [cake](#)
- [chicken](#)
- [christmas](#)
- [cookie](#)
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- [nourmet](#)
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- [holiday](#)
- [italian](#)
- [kids'](#)
- [low-carb](#)
- [main dish](#)
- [mexican](#)
- [pasta](#)
- [pie](#)
- [pork](#)
- [quick & easy](#)
- [salad](#)
- [seafood](#)
- [side dish](#)
- [soup](#)
- [thanksgiving](#)
- [vegetarian](#)

advanced search  
browse all recipes  
search our drinks database

**browse**

Here you may browse more than 17,000 recipes—much as you would leaf through your favorite cookbook for inspiration, only better. As you explore, you may filter and narrow the recipes by category.

<p>main ingredient</p> <p>Beans, Beef, Berrries, Cheese, Chicken, Chocolate, Citrus, Dairy, Duck, Eggs, Fish, Fruits, Game, Garlic, Ginger, Grains, Greens, Herbs, Lamb, Mushrooms, Mustard, Nuts, Olives, Onions, Pasta, Peppers, Pork, Potatoes, Poultry, Rice, Shellfish, Soy, Tomatoes, Turkey, Vegetables, Yogurt</p> <hr/> <p>cuisine</p> <p>African, American, Asian, Cajun/Creole, Caribbean, Central/South American, Chinese, Eastern European, English/Scottish, French, German, Greek, Indian, Irish, Italian, Japanese, Jewish, Mediterranean, Mexican, Middle Eastern, Moroccan, Scandinavian, Southern/Soul Food, Southwestern, Spanish, Thai, Vietnamese</p> <hr/> <p>special considerations</p> <p>Chef Recipes, Epicurious TV, Kid-Friendly, Low Carb, Low Fat, Meatless, One Dish Meal, Part of Menu, Quick, Wine Pairing</p>	<p>preparation method</p> <p>Advance, Bake, Barbecue, Braise, Broil, Freeze/Chill, Fry, Grill, Marinade, Microwave, No Cook, Poach, Quick, Roast, Sauté, Slow Cook, Steam, Stew, Stir Fry</p> <hr/> <p>season / occasion</p> <p>Christmas, Cocktail Party, Easter, Fall, Fourth of July, Hanukkah, New Year's, Passover, Picnics, Spring, Summer, Super Bowl, Thanksgiving, Valentine's Day, Winter</p> <hr/> <p>course / meal</p> <p>Appetizers, Breakfast, Brunch, Desserts, First Course, Hors d'Oeuvres, Main Course, Side, Snacks</p> <hr/> <p>dish</p> <p>Bread, Cake, Candy, Condiments, Cookies, Marinades, Pie/Tart, Salads, Sandwiches, Sauces, Seasonings/Spices, Soup, Vegetables</p>
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Single, hierarchical structures restrict the options people have when trying to find information that is interesting to them. You get one way in, and so you have to figure out what the creator was thinking. For Allrecipes, if you want a beef main dish, do you look in “beef” or “main dishes”? An alternate type of browse, utilizing faceted classification, puts the power in your users hands. You provide them with many entry points, and they build the path that’s relevant to them. Epicurious allows visitors to come with a variety of task approaches. You want to work with a particular ingredient? Maybe you’re interested in exploring a type of cuisine? Or maybe that it is breakfast that is the most important thing?

The image shows a screenshot of a website interface. On the left, there is a sidebar titled 'Community Categories' with a list of categories: Arts & Culture, Camera Zone, Entertainment, Family & Friends, Hobbies & Interests, Nature & Wildlife, Pets, Premier Photography, Schools, Clubs & Organizations, Sony AIBO Entertainment Robots, Sony Digital Days, Sports & Recreation, and Travel & Vacations. On the right, there is a section titled 'All time most popular tags' which lists various tags in blue text, such as 'amsterdam', 'animal', 'animals', 'april', 'architecture', 'art', 'australia', 'baby', 'barcelona', 'beach', 'berlin', 'bird', 'birthday', 'black', 'blackandwhite', 'blue', 'boston', 'bridge', 'building', 'bw', 'california', 'cameraphone', 'camping', 'canada', 'car', 'cat', 'cats', 'chicago', 'china', 'christmas', 'church', 'city', 'clouds', 'color', 'concert', 'day', 'dc', 'dog', 'dogs', 'england', 'europe', 'family', 'festival', 'fireworks', 'florida', 'flower', 'flowers', 'food', 'france', 'friends', 'fun', 'garden', 'geotagged', 'germany', 'girl', 'graduation', 'graffiti', 'green', 'hawaii', 'holiday', 'home', 'honeymoon', 'hongkong', 'house', 'india', 'ireland', 'italy', 'japan', 'july', 'june', 'kids', 'lake', 'landscape', 'light', 'london', 'losangeles', 'macro', 'march', 'may', 'me', 'mexico', 'moblog', 'mountains', 'museum', 'music', 'nature', 'new', 'newyork', 'newyorkcity', 'newzealand', 'night', 'nyc', 'ocean', 'orange', 'oregon', 'paris', 'park', 'party', 'people', 'phone', 'photo', 'pink', 'portrait', 'red', 'reflection', 'river', 'roadtrip', 'rock', 'rome', 'sanfrancisco', 'school', 'scotland', 'sea', 'seattle', 'sign', 'sky', 'snow', 'spain', 'spring', 'street', 'summer', 'sun', 'sunset', 'taiwan', 'texas', 'thailand', 'tokyo', 'toronto', 'travel', 'tree', 'trees', 'trip', 'uk', 'unfound', 'urban', 'usa', 'vacation', 'vancouver', 'washington', 'water', 'wedding', 'white', 'winter', 'yellow', 'zoo'.

Or what about when you're looking for something. Standard methods have you go through site-created categories. But now with tagging, we can build up folksonomies that speak in the language of the users.

open directory project

home | help

Search: **adaptive path**

Open Directory Categories (1-4 of 4)

1. [Computers: Human-Computer Interaction: Companies and Consultants](#) (1 match)
2. [Computers: Internet: Web Design and Development: Web Usability](#) (1)
3. [Science: Math: Applications: Mathematical Economics and Financial Mathematics: Companies](#) (1)
4. [Science: Math: Mathematicians: Personal Pages: I](#) (1)

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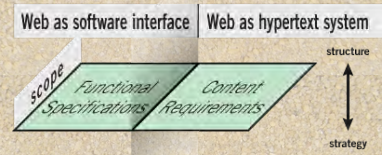
del.icio.us / url

bookmarks | inbox | post | settings | logout | about | popular

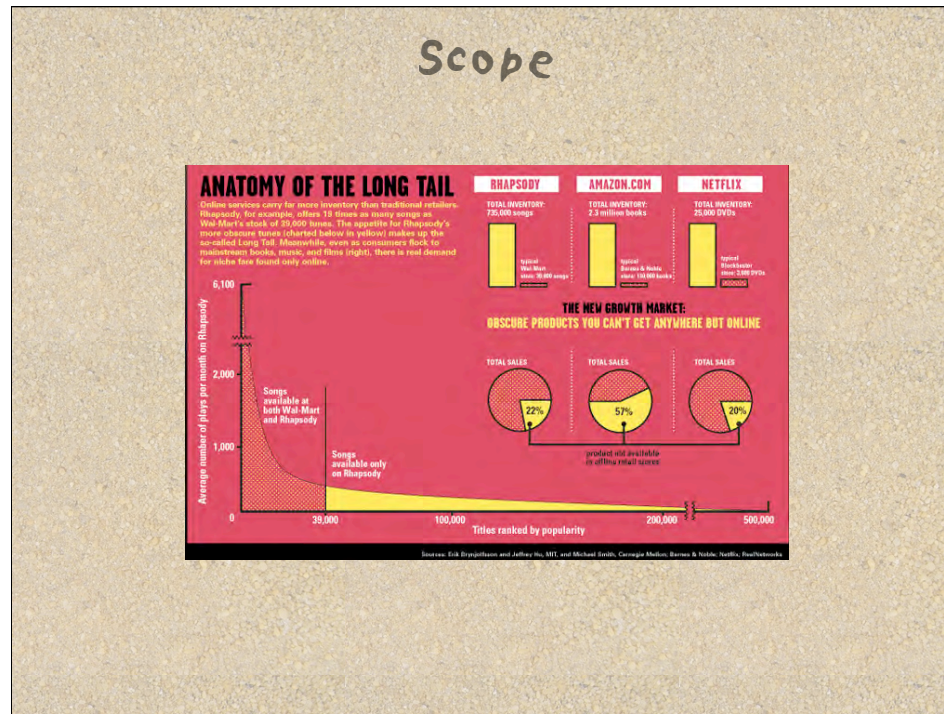
Date	Title	Tags	Common tags
2005-07-12	<b>adaptive path » user experience consulting, events, and reports</b> by peterme ... edit / delete	adaptive path » user experience consulting, events, and reports to design by harjtsingh ... copy this item	<b>common tags</b> 65 design 43 usability 42 web 29 webdesign 24 ajax 24 css 21 ia 19 blog 11 business 9 webdev 9 technology 9 programming 9 cms 8 company 7 development 7 internet 6 accessibility 6 hci 6 architecture 5 blogs 5 ul 5 news 5 xml 5 inspiration 5 software 5 standards
2005-07-07	<b>adaptive path » user experience consulting, events, and reports</b> by weyound ... copy this item	adaptive path » user experience consulting, events, and reports	
2005-07-06	<b>adaptive path » user experience consulting, events, and reports</b> to blog blogs business design programming news research software technology ajax by Drakonian ... copy this item	adaptive path » user experience consulting, events, and reports	
2005-07-04	<b>maximize the value of experience</b> to architecture business design grassroots information internet news process programming research by mguidone ... copy this item	maximize the value of experience	
2005-07-03	<b>Adaptive Path - User Experience</b> by jjesater ... copy this item	Adaptive Path - User Experience	
2005-07-01	<b>adaptive path » user experience consulting, events, and reports</b> to design_business Adaptive_Path by louisev ... copy this item	adaptive path » user experience consulting, events, and reports	
	<b>adaptive path » user experience consulting, events, and reports</b> to blog design webdesign css Technology by thegeekguy ... copy this item	adaptive path » user experience consulting, events, and reports	
2005-06-30	<b>adaptive path » user experience consulting, events, and reports</b> to architecture blog design usability web webdesign ajax css ia blogs by michaelSurtees ... copy this item	adaptive path » user experience consulting, events, and reports	
	<b>adaptive path » user experience consulting, events, and reports</b> to ajax design software web css webdesign ia usability by gniche ... copy this item	adaptive path » user experience consulting, events, and reports	

dmoz, the open directory project, has only two categories for Adaptive Path. Del.icio.us, the social bookmark engine, offers a list of 20 or so tags that have been applied. From a browse perspective, which is more likely to find us?

# Scope



## Scope



One of the more obvious shifts of control that has happened on the Web is the move toward offering people a lot more choice when they're shopping. Physical stores are constrained by shelf space, and so necessarily limit what they sell. On the Web, shelf space is infinite, and some smart companies have taken advantage of that. The Long Tail depicts just how much opportunity there is in the things that stores don't carry. Over half of Amazon's total sales occurs in products not available in offline retail stores.

For Rent For Sale Rooms<sup>New</sup> Sublets<sup>New</sup> Powered by [craigslist](#) and [Google Maps](#)

City: SF - East Bay Price Range: \$1500 - \$2000

[Refresh](#) [Satellite](#) [About / Feedback](#) [Tell a friend!](#)

Price	Bed	Description	Neighborhood	Date
\$1795	3bd	Spacious House - 3bed/bath w/ big living room/garage - off Soane Ave	Albany	7/10
\$1700	3bd	3bd/2 ba at 555 Pierce. Recently Renovated!	Albany	7/10
\$1500		Duplex in Albany	Albany	7/10
\$1500	3bd	Prewett Ranch - Beautiful Home across from park in area!	Antioch	7/11
\$1500	3bd	Prewett Ranch - Beautiful Home across from park in area!	Antioch	7/10
\$1800		Large Three Room Flat across from north campus Gate	Berkeley	7/11
\$1400	1bd	Beautiful Apt, suitable for 2-3 people- Four blocks to UC Berkeley	Berkeley	7/11
\$1800	2bd	Great apartment building in a safe and charming neighborhood	Berkeley	7/11
\$1550	2bd	Very Nice 2 BR Apt, 3 Blocks To UCB, Available Now	Berkeley	7/10
\$1800	2bd	Open today 2-3/42 Hardwood floors, Gorgeous Apartment	Berkeley	7/10
\$1800	2bd	Hardwood Yard, Ashby/BART 2Blocks, Avail Sept 1 - See OPEN HOUSE Dates	Berkeley	7/10
\$1800	2bd	Hardwood Yard, Ashby/BART 2Blocks, Avail Sept 1 - See OPEN HOUSE Dates	Berkeley	7/10
\$1795	2bd	2 full baths*Walk to UCB/Across Clark Kerr Campus*Elmwood District	Berkeley	7/10
\$1695	2bd	Showing Sun - Amazing 2 Story Loft	Berkeley	7/10
\$1650	2bd	Showing Sun - Large 2Story Loft in Great Building	Berkeley	7/10
\$1950		Nice 3 Bedrooms House in A Great Berkeley Area	Berkeley	7/10
\$2000		Great Home in Discovery Bay!	Byron	7/10

On the functional side of things, opening up APIs allows folks to alter a company's functional requirements. Google and Craigslist are two archetypal sandbox companies, and look at what happens when you mash those two together. Gold!



# Strategy





Netflix made a core strategic decision to relax control on the one thing that drives significant revenue in the video rental business -- late fees. No more late fees. They opted out of that potential font of revenue in favor of attracting more people who wanted control over their viewing schedule.

DIGITAL DOMAIN

## What 10 million unique visitors each month

By RANDALL LUKUSS  
Published: June 5, 2005


[E-Mail This](#)  
[Printer-Friendly](#)  
[Single Page](#)

**Correction Appended**

120 cities in 25 countries and serves up 2.4 billion pages a month. sites. Meet that rarty: Craigslist.

Exceptional, too, is the ability to draw 10 million unique visitors each month without ever relying on venture capital and equity markets. Or the ability to attain fourth place

According to the company's data, its traffic is now about a fifth of eBay's. And the operational efficiencies are astounding: Craigslist has 18 employees; eBay has 8,800.



"Folks, we're considering charging apartment brokers for apartment listings in N.Y.C.," Mr. Newmark told the community earlier this year, explaining in great detail the pros and cons. He added that he would "need your help figuring out what I've missed."

tree community service that year, a little experiment in applying

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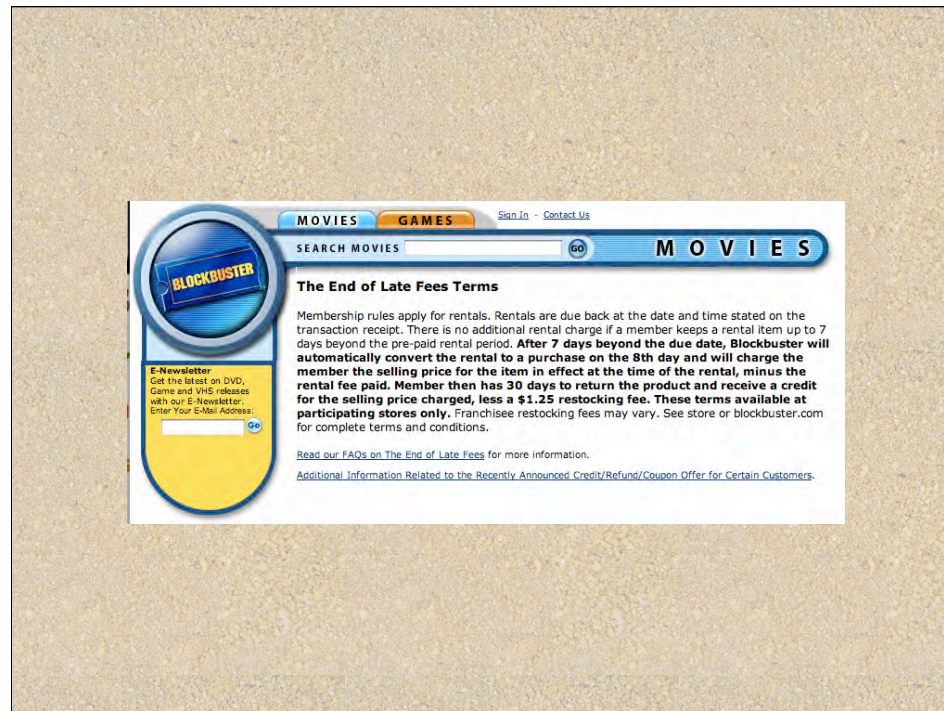
Craigslist is probably the company that has given the most strategic control to its users. Craigslist is phenomenally successful -- 10 million unique visitor, 120 cities in 25 countries. It's traffic is one-fifth of eBay's, while having .2% the number of employees. And why is he so successful? In part because Craig asks his users for their input.



A challenge for companies is to figure out what their appropriate sandbox is. This seems to be easier for web-only companies, perhaps because sandbox ideals are more obvious online. But their offline counterparts shouldn't just be copying what the web-only companies do... For example, you have Amazon. It's only 10 years old, and only on-line. Their sandbox has things like customer comments, people who bought this also bought... and sales rank. Barnes and Noble, which began in 1917, and is best known for their superstores, has a sandbox with things like.... customer comments, people who bought this also bought... and sales rank. Why?



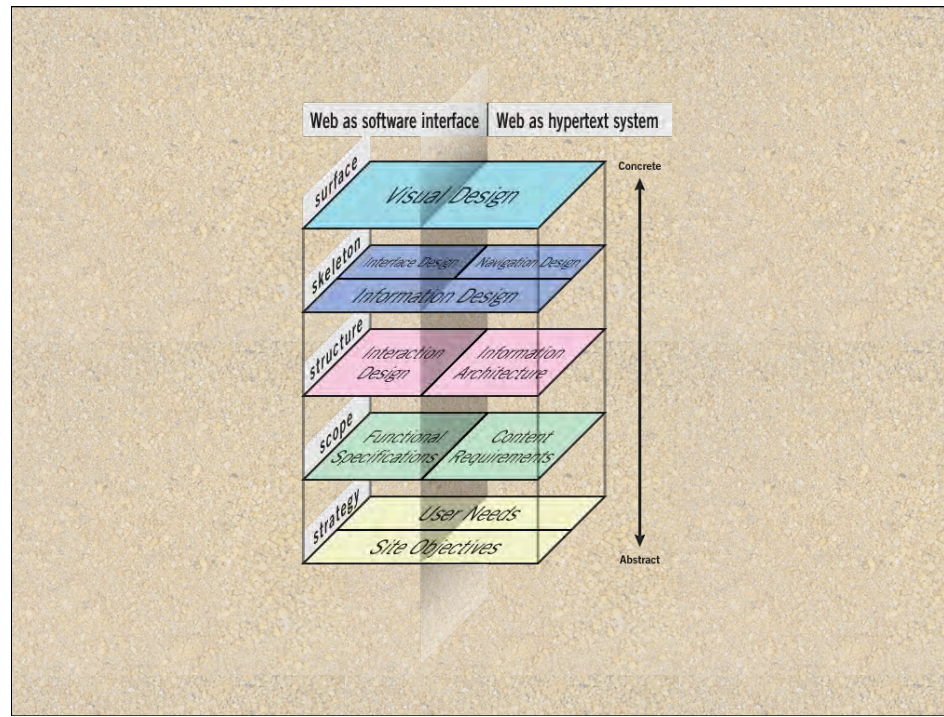
I mean, Barnes and Noble is known for their presence in the real world. How could they sandbox-ify that? Well, let's think -- information, people, tools. An obvious example -- have some type of social networking like service, but that's rooted in stores. Find out who else shops where you do! Offer a Meetup like service around these stores -- get people coming in once a week! Hell, as the folks who prowl the aisles at Powell's here now, this is ripe for a dating service!



Blockbuster, similarly, was foolish. They're the classic example of a company trying to play in the sandbox, but where it's just clearly not true to their nature. Their stores touted "The End of Late Fees," which made it sound just like Netflix. One problem, as the terms shown here suggest... If you're TOO late with your DVD, well, you've just bought it! Isn't that nice?

The image shows a screenshot of the Walmart website's homepage. At the top left is the Walmart logo with the tagline "ALWAYS LOW PRICES" and "Always" in red script. To the right are links for "Home Page", "Your Account", "Cart & Checkout", "Track Your Order", "Help", and "International". Below this is a navigation bar with categories: Electronics, Movies, Music, Books, Toys, Baby, Jewelry, Sports, and "See All Departments". A secondary navigation bar lists: For the Home, Garden & Patio, Photo Center, Video Games, Apparel, Gifts & Flowers, Pharmacy, and In Stores Now. A search bar is located below the navigation, with "Search" and "Find!" buttons. The main promotional banner has a red header that says "Wal-Mart is proud to present ..." followed by "Lights, Camera, Netflix!" in large white text. Below this, it says "Starting at \$9.99/month". A list of bullet points describes the service: "Most popular DVD rentals service", "More than 40,000 titles", "Fast, free shipping. Nearly 90% of members live within a one-day postal zone.", "Movie recommendations", "Unlimited monthly rentals", "No late fees", "Prepaid return envelopes", and "Cancel anytime, online, 24/7. No cancellation fee." To the right of the text is a photograph of a man and a woman sitting on a couch watching a movie. At the bottom of the banner is a red button that says "Join Netflix Now! It's Fast & Easy" with a "Join Netflix" button next to it. Below the button is a small disclaimer: "By clicking the button you will leave Walmart.com and go to Netflix.com." The Netflix logo is visible in the bottom right corner of the banner.

Walmart, on the other hand, wasn't so foolish. They tried the DVD rental game, and realized that they couldn't compete. It wasn't in their DNA. So, when you can't beat 'em, join 'em. They've now got an agreement with Netflix.



So think about how deeply you can relinquish control, to what ends, and how it remains germane to your business.



So what about convergence?



Well, we have to think about all the things that people are doing. Our designs have to fit into the context of our users lives. How does convergence square with that?

## The sandbox means letting people make it their own

- ◇ Convergence is not about greater control for the business
- ◇ It's about greater choice for the user
- ◇ Get out of their way
- ◇ Keep it simple!
- ◇ "Design" as little as possible
- ◇ People will derive their own meaning and value from the experience - you don't have to give it to them
- ◇ Make information, people, and tools "small pieces loosely joined"
- ◇ Meaningful convergence will then just happen

# Thank You

User Experience Week 2005

Washington, D.C.

August 22-25

Including our just announced  
**Flickr** Case Study, with Eric Costello

<http://www.adaptivepath.com/events/2005/august/>

adaptive path The logo for adaptive path features the word "adaptive" in a light green font and "path" in a darker green font. To the right of the text is a graphic consisting of several horizontal bars of varying lengths and heights, arranged in a stepped, staircase-like pattern, also in shades of green.