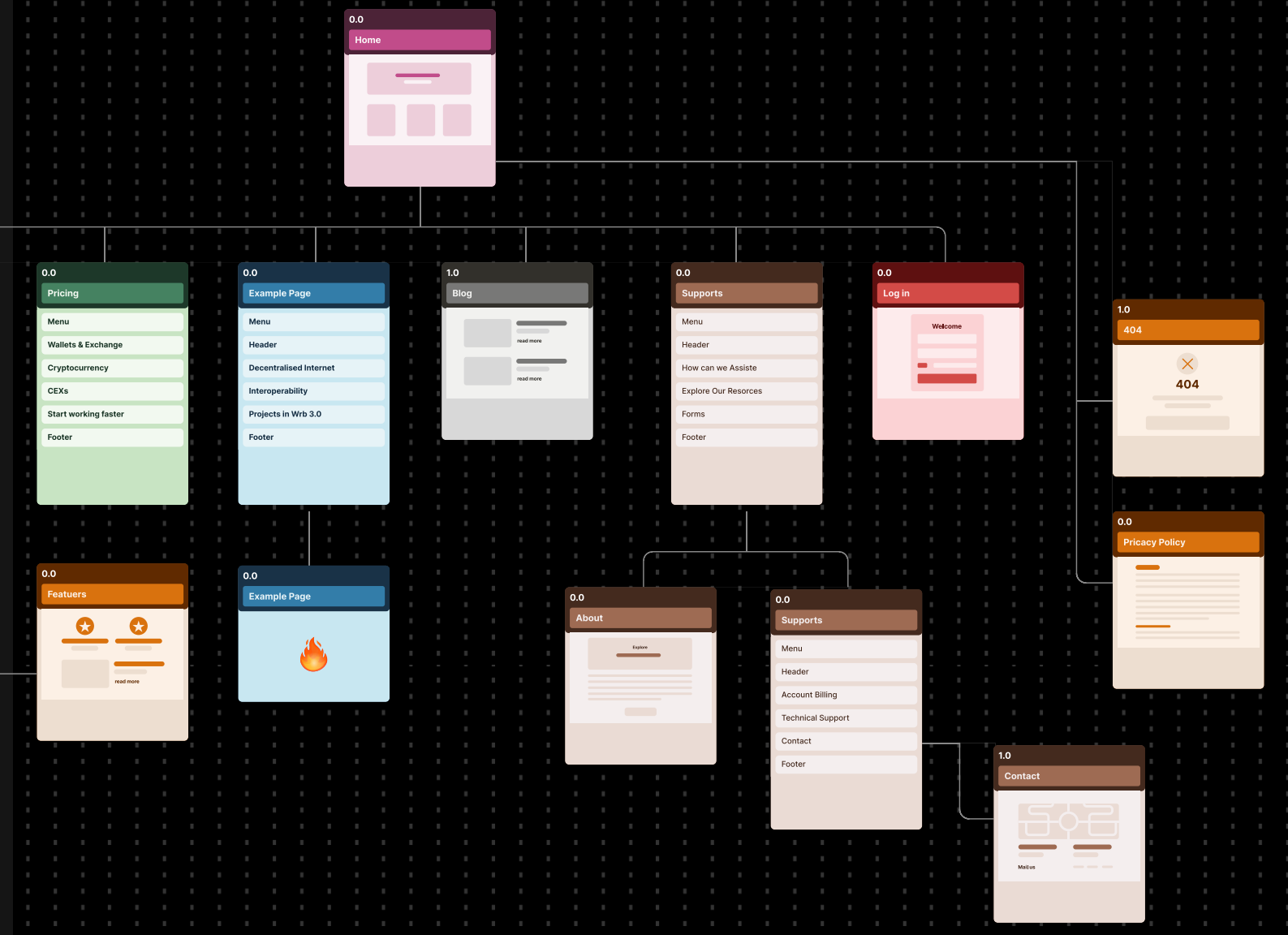
INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE



You will uncover...

1. What is Information Architecture?
2. Why is Information Architecture important in UX design?
3. 8 Principles of Information Architecture
4. Who's responsible for Information Architecture and What does the process look like?
5. How to design the Information Architecture of your app?
6. What is the value of Information Architecture?

What is Information Architecture?

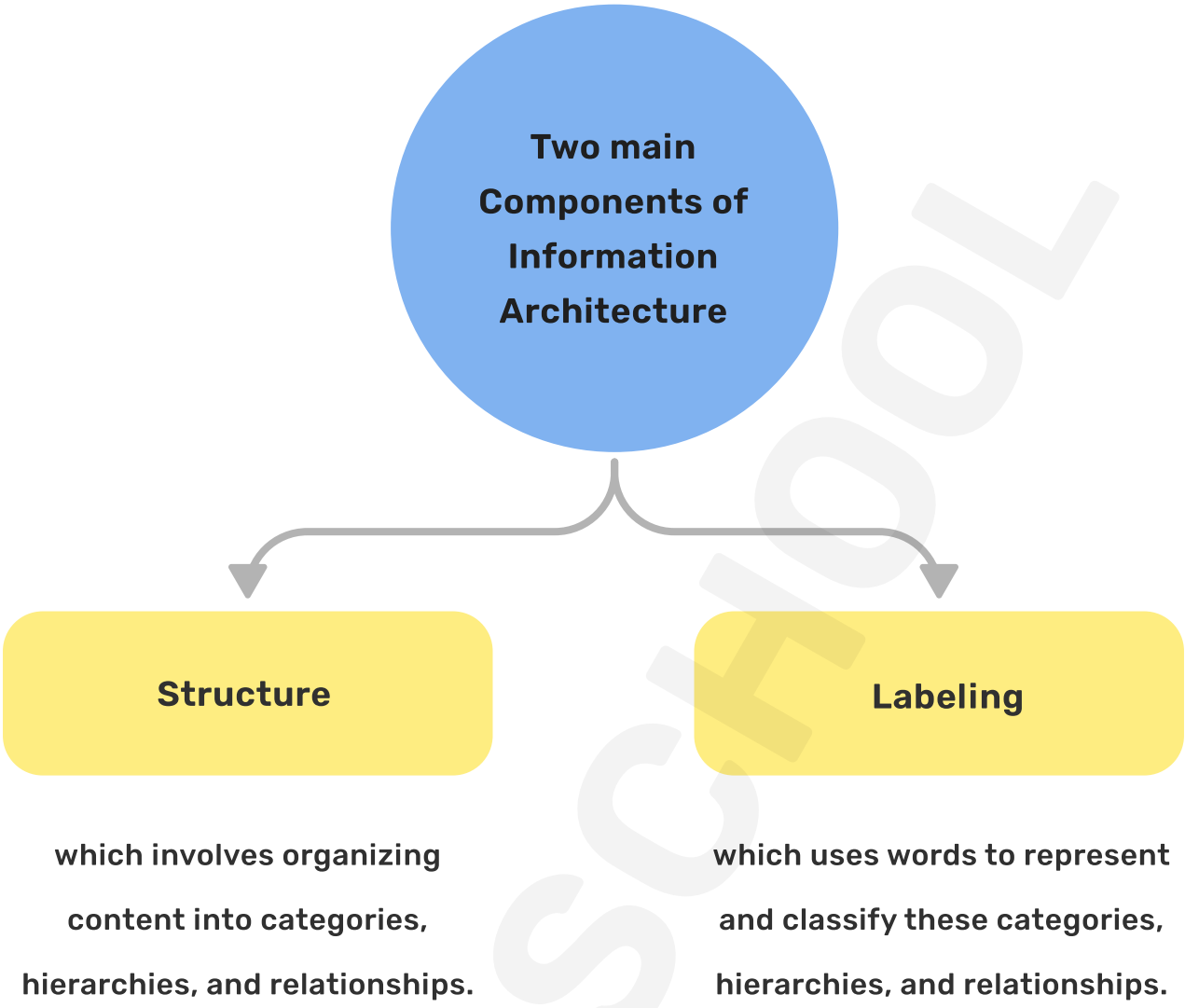
Have you ever been faced with so much information on a page that you didn't know where to look? Well, that's where Information Architecture is used.

Information Architecture is about creating a logical navigation structure that helps users find what they're looking for without getting confused or frustrated.

The famous UX designer, Jared Spool, once said: **"Good design when it's done well, becomes invisible. It's only when it's done poorly that we notice it."** The same applies for information architecture (IA). When all is in order, it becomes invisible.

Information Architecture is the practice of **organizing content** in an effective way.

Information architecture (IA) is the process of guiding users through the site by **organizing and arranging all the relevant content in a clear, intuitive way**. It also ensures consistency throughout a product's design by standardizing labeling conventions such as menu names, link titles, and button labels across all pages.

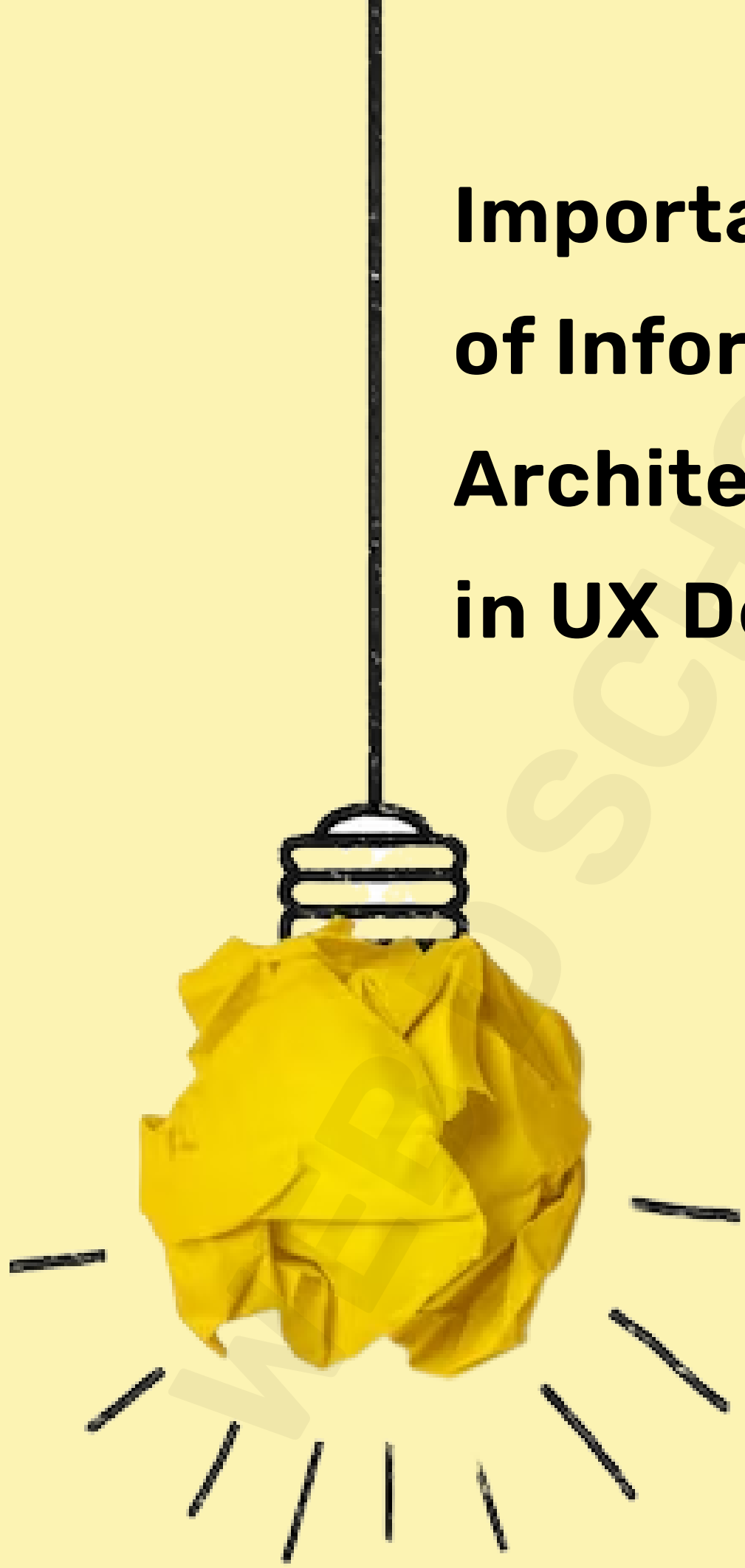


Together, these components create an efficient navigation system so users can easily find what they need without getting lost or overwhelmed by too much information.

Think of it like an architect building a house. Before the house gets built, they'll map exactly what goes where—considering what the tenant will expect at every turn and carefully placing elements in a way that helps them navigate the space with ease. In the end, they'll have created an inviting and efficient setup that makes the most of the space available.

That's what information architecture does for websites and apps. From what appears on each page, to how users move between pages, everything must align with one purpose: to help the user quickly and easily find what they need.

Importance of Information Architecture in UX Design

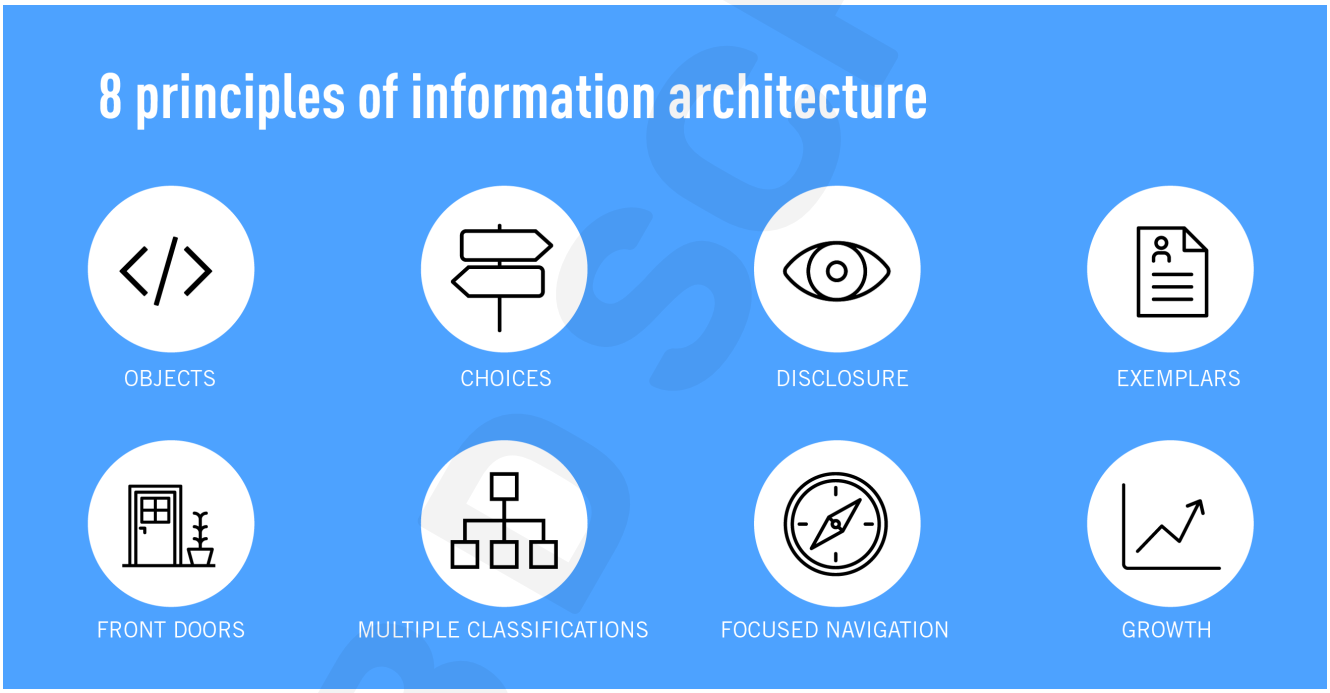


At its core, **UX aims to create a digital product or service that makes user's life easier.** Information Architecture is vital in helping companies achieve this goal by providing structure, consistency, and an easy-to-navigate interface. Put simply, Information Architecture makes **Good UX** possible. In an increasingly digital world, where many users suffer from 'information overload' and dwindling attention spans, helping users find what they need quickly is a guaranteed UX win.

Principles of Information Architecture

Building the information architecture for a website should not be done in a vacuum. From user behavior, to future-proofing, there are lots of things to take into account, beyond organizing the information in a logical way.

In the quest to design a good site structure, **information architect Dan Brown** laid out **8 principles** that he keeps coming back to.



1. **The principle of objects**: Content should be treated as a living, breathing thing. It has lifecycles, behaviors, and attributes.

2. **The principle of choices**: Less is more. Keep the number of choices to a minimum.

3. **The principle of disclosure**: Show a preview of information that will help users understand what kind of information is hidden if they dig deeper.

4. **The principle of exemplars**: Show examples of content when describing the content of the categories.

5. **The principle of front doors**: Assume that at least 50% of users will use a different entry point than the home page.

6. **The principle of multiple classifications**: Offer users several different classification schemes to browse the site's content.

7. **The principle of focused navigation**: Keep navigation simple and never mix different things.

8. **The principle of growth**: Assume that the content on the website will grow. Make sure the website is scalable.

As you can see, there are many things to take into consideration. Depending on the size of a website, Information Architecture can be a complex task requiring ongoing maintenance.

Who’s responsible for Information Architecture and what does the process look like?

Now we've got a handle on what information architecture is and its guiding principles, let's move on to the age-old question: **Who actually does Information Architecture? And when does it happen?**

Larger companies with a high UX maturity level will usually have a dedicated information architect in-house, who's primarily responsible for creating the structure of digital products.

However, not all teams have an information architect. In smaller companies, the responsibility of Information Architecture will fall to UX designers, who'll work collaboratively with UI designers and product managers to create an Information Architecture strategy that meets user needs and hits business goals.

Information architecture usually takes place in the early stages of a product design process, once the overall UX strategy is set and the user researchers have lots of juicy data to share.

Design the Information Architecture of your app

Step 1 : Group and label the content

Once you have a list of all content, prioritize it and group. Use card-sorting techniques to help you group the content.

Card sorting is a participatory design technique, which we use to determine how users group different items into different categories. They are given cards with printed terms, features, or concepts and are asked to sort them into groups. In the end group names can be refined into a menu and sitemap.

Step 2 : Define Navigation and Create site map

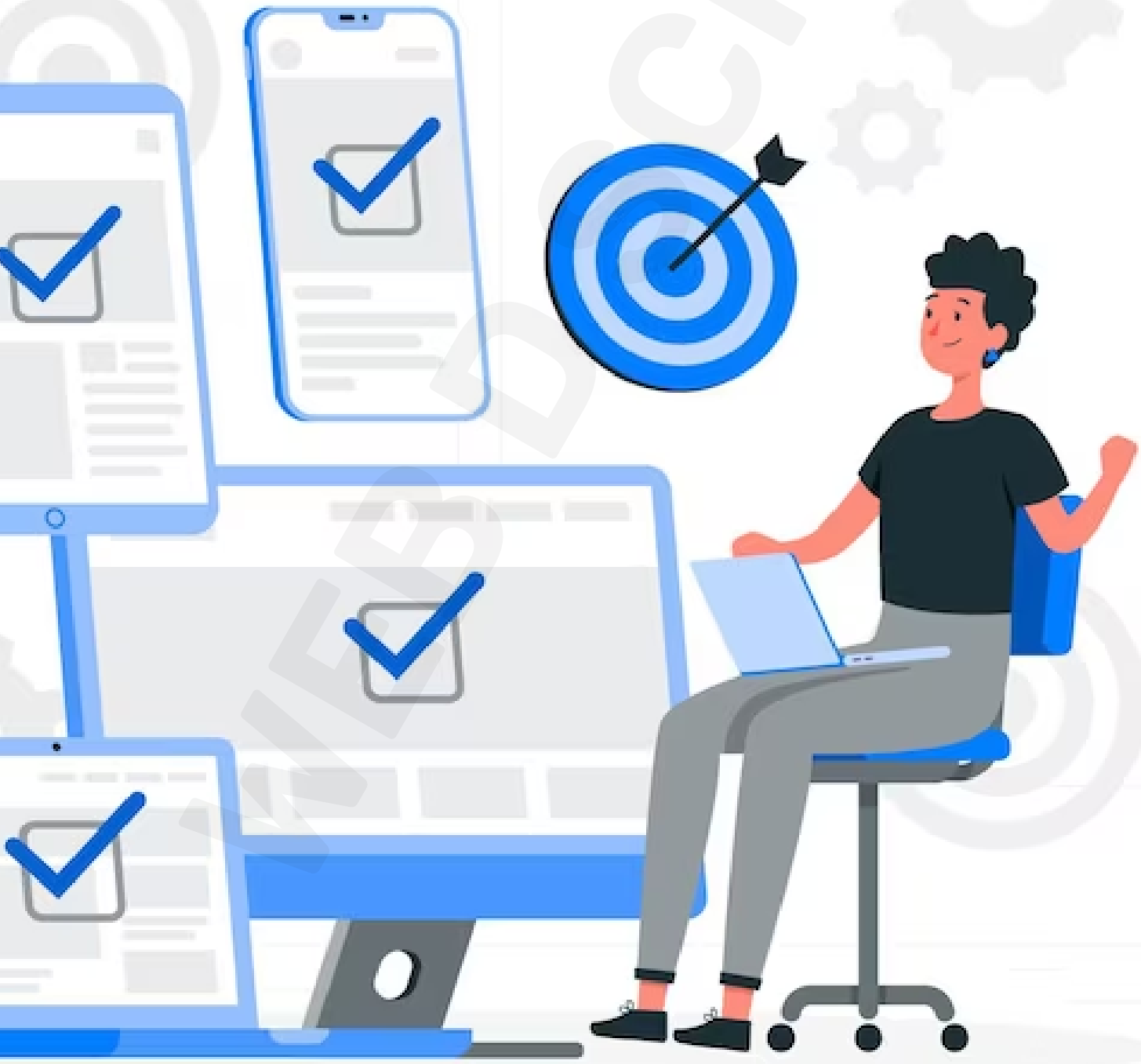
You have content, and you have groups that make sense. Now the big question is – how will users get to this content? Before you can create a sitemap and navigation, your IA needs to be defined. The navigation is most of the time just the tip of the iceberg. Information architecture isn't really visible to the visitors, but it presents a backbone of the website.

To create a sitemap, you need to have content, which is grouped and labeled, and then presented in a diagram. Once that is done, you can create navigation – collections of UI elements that are connected in a meaningful way. Those can be anything from global navigation – menu, to local navigation, breadcrumbs, filters, footer…

Step 3 : User Testing

Test early and test often.

There are a couple of ways how to test to see if the information architecture works. The Nielsen Norman Group suggest four different types of testing, depending on the design phase and goals:



Test 1: Tree testing

This test is used to determine if the key information can be found in the Information Architecture of the website. Participants navigate through the website only by using link names. Tree testing is a **Quantitative testing method.**

Tree testing shows us if the names of the categories are understandable, if they convey the content correctly, if the content is categorized in a user-centered manner, if the titles are distinguishable from one another, and if the information is easy to find.

Test 2: Closed card sorting

The test is used to determine the strength of category names. It is both a **Quantitative and Qualitative testing method.**

It shows if the names of categories are accurately conveyed and if they accurately convey the content. It also shows us if the categorization is done in a user-centered manner, and if the titles are distinguishable from one another.

Test 3: Click testing

The test shows us how users use the available UI components. It is a **Quantitative testing method**.

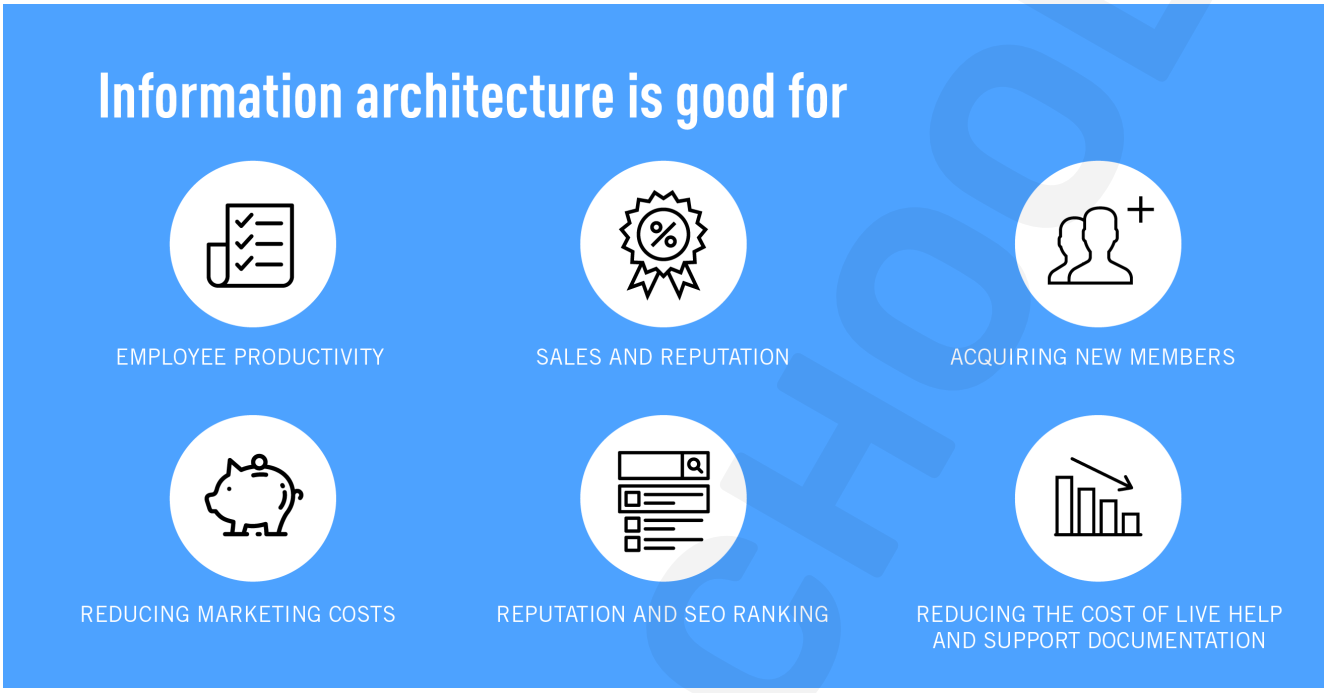
It shows us which navigation elements are used and which are overlooked or avoided.

Test 4: Usability testing

The test is used to determine how and why users use a website (or a product). It is one of the **Qualitative testing techniques**. It reveals how users find information, which ways do they use and which do they ignore or just plainly refuse to use and why.

If you cannot do all 4, make sure you at least do the usability testing in combination with an interview at the end. That will give you valuable insight into what features people are using and what they do on your website and why. The answer to the question ‘why?’ is such valuable information that can help you design and get better results.

Values of Information Architecture



1. EMPLOYEE PRODUCTIVITY

If there is a bad Information Architecture for internal content, it can result in wasted time and reduced productivity. In **1999, the International Data Corporation (IDC)** conducted research into knowledge workers to find out the financial cost of this. They considered things like how long workers spend searching for information each week and how much time they spend creating content that already exists because they couldn't find it. They estimated the cost of this "knowledge work deficit" at $5000 per employer every year.

2. SALES AND REPUTATION

Lost business is one of the most obvious consequences of poor customer-facing Information Architecture. If users cannot find desired products, sales will go down, and the effects can be long-lasting. When people abandon a website it is more difficult to bring them back.

They'll usually find a competitor who'll solve their problem (e.g. offer a desired product) without the hassle. And, because so many sales still rely on word of mouth, especially in the service sector, this can have a knock-on effect and impact their whole network of potential customers.

3. ACQUIRING NEW NUMBERS

Depending on your business model, getting new members could be one of your key targets. If so, your sign-up pages – and how to get there – should be carefully crafted with UX research. If it's too complicated, no one will register or give their personal data, which means you'll struggle to make profits or demonstrate traction.

4. REDUCING MARKETING COSTS

If users cannot find desirable information, product or services, marketing costs will skyrocket to achieve the same results. If you're sending paid traffic to a page, it should be easy for people to navigate from that page to where they want to go. If people regularly leave the site before completing the desired action, you may even end up spending lots on remarketing – i.e. trying to win them back! Also, poor website structure can result in less organic traffic, due to a lower page rank in search results – see next!

5. REPUTATION AND SEO RANKING

Information Architecture has a big impact on the SEO. Organizing website's data and content affects usability, conversions, and ranking. Ranking places the website higher in the search results, usability makes the website easy to use, and a seamless flow leads to a higher conversion rate. If you have repetitive content, or index huge amounts of poorly defined content, it could adversely affect your SEO.

6. REDUCING THE COST OF LIVE HELP AND SUPPORT DOCUMENTATION

When the information architecture makes it easy for users to find what they are searching for, the cost of live help will decrease significantly and so will the need of the written documentation.

So as you can see, the costs of poor IA can quickly add up.

“From Pixels to Perfection transform your digital creations with Information Architecture “