FAQ

Questions

How will Sakai track new and emerging UI technologies like AJAX, Web 2.0, Web 3.0, etc?
Does Sakai plan to standardize one or (or a few) presentation technologies?
Will the old Sakai Style Guide be updated for future use?
What are the top five design goals we are trying to accomplish?
What kind of developer support will we be offering going forward (components, widgets, patterns, etc.)?
How can we improve our Information Architecture (IA), User Experience (UX), and Presentation Technology (PT) documentation?
What are the highest priority issues that MUST be addressed?
What are Sakai’s UI strengths?

Answers

Q. How will Sakai track new and emerging UI technologies like AJAX, Web 2.0, Web 3.0, etc?
A. The UX Scorecard will play a limited role in tracking emerging UX technologies. But overall, I believe our users will do a better job of ushering us along in this area. As user’s pick up on new ways of working with better technologies, their expectations will change, forcing us to be held to a higher standard.

That’s not to say we can’t or shouldn’t drive innovation and surprise our users with delightful new ways of doing things – but in the short-run, I think we’re better off addressing several "fundamental" areas of the product before we run toward the bleeding edge.

Q. Does Sakai plan to standardize one or (or a few) presentation technologies?
A. At the present, the UX improvement initiative is mostly concerned with the "what" rather than the "how". That's not to say that "how" we develop (and coordinate the development) of presentation technologies isn't important. In fact, I believe that in the long-run, without a solution in this problem space we’re dead in the water.

But we’re equally in trouble if we concentrate on the solution before first defining the problem. That's why the UX improvement initiative will be centered on envisioning the product from a user and design perspective, leaving the technology question as a natural follow-up.

Q. Will the old Sakai Style Guide be updated for future use?
A. There should be enough documentation to help make an awesome product, but not more. The way I see it, people generally don’t like to read (that’s usability 101) and developers generally want to be developers – not designers.

That’s not to suggest that a style guide isn’t helpful. It certainly can be, but I would want to be sure its format and content is useful to its target audience, otherwise it will likely collect dust.

In any event, it sounds like a good sub-track to carve out for the UX improvement initiative.

Q. What are the top five design goals we are trying to accomplish?
A. There's only one goal really, and that's "To significantly enhance the user's experience resulting in a better overall product."

If that’s too amorphous for you, then I would break it down as follows:

1. Revisiting foundational principles that govern good design (i.e. interaction patterns, user modality, metaphors, conventions, good layout practices, etc.). Some of these things simply got away from us through the course of getting product releases out of the door. It’s time to get back to fundamentals.
2. Making the CLE more intuitive and less cumbersome so that first-time and repeat users can jump-in, do what they need to do, and jump-out without feeling obstructed in anyway.
3. Finding the tools that hold the most promise and re-designing them to be more consistent, easier to use, and better suited for interoperability as a "suite".
4. Getting a more effective community process in place where institutions can work collaboratively with the UX lead to design better solutions.
5. As the cherry on top; thoughtfully introducing rich design trends and interactions that take advantage of emerging web 2.0/3.0 technologies.

Together, these goals will help define a "user aware" direction for the product (which could be a goal of its own).

Q. What kind of developer support will we be offered going forward (components, widgets, patterns, etc.)?
A. Time permitted (and some time will be made) the UX lead will work with the community in a direct way to help with various projects. The help will include: brainstorming, sketching ideas, producing designs, mentoring, and general Q&A. Other design services may include research and usability testing – though that may be better handled within the institution.

Beyond the UX Kit that will prepared at the conclusion of each project, plug-and-play deliverables like components, widgets, pattern libraries, etc... are not currently on the agenda for the UX improvement initiative. However, The Fluid Project is working hard to address those needs and the UX improvement initiative is concerned with cultivating common interests and collaborative goals with the project.
Q. How can we improve our Information Architecture (IA), User Experience (UX), and Presentation Technology (PT) documentation?

A. The best type of documentation is the kind that gets used. From that perspective, as major changes in Sakai’s UX begin to take hold, the users of the system will ask the questions needed to guide the documentation process.

That’s not to say that some documentation of design activity will not already be available. Each project under the UX improvement initiative will have its own special area in confluence and a reasonable amount of knowledge will be available there. But mostly, it will consist of sketches, notes, and other by-products.

Q. What are the highest priority issues that MUST be addressed?

A. Good question – and not one that’s easy to answer. Personally, I think the most important issues relate to our commitments as a community to tackle UX. It shouldn’t be a big annoyance with no end in sight – and it also shouldn’t be an after-thought.

Ideally I’d like to see UX design become a staple of this community’s identity. The more interested we are in holding ourselves to a higher standard – the more delighted our users will be with our product.

The only answer I know to give to make any of that happen is solid design and good old fashion elbow grease!

Q. What are Sakai’s UI strengths?

A. That’s a question for marketing 😊 I’m interested in its weaknesses.