

Paul Kahn

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Paul Kahn is managing director of Kahn+Associates, an information architecture consulting group based in Paris. Kahn began working with text processing systems as a production editor and analyst at Harvard University in 1977, and served as an application specialist for Atex, Inc. From 1985-1994 he was a member of the hypertext research staff at Brown University's Institute for Research in Information and Scholarship (IRIS). He co-founded Dynamic Diagrams with Krzysztof Lenk in 1991. When d/D was acquired by Ingenta, he served as Chief Technology Officer. He taught interactive design at Rhode Island School of Design from 1994-2001, and since moving to France teaches at Ecole nationale supérieure des beaux-arts; École nationale supérieure des Télécommunications; Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne; and at Media Lab, University of Art and Design, Helsinki (Finland). He is the co-author of Mapping Web Sites (with Krzysztof Lenk), which since its appearance in 2001 has been translated into French, German, Korean, and Spanish. He is the editor/publisher of NEW Magazine, international visual & verbal communications.

Creating Patterns that Connect – drawing overview maps of complex data networks / mapping networks, data visualization, information architecture

Abstract:

Websites are often a complex agglomeration of many sub-structures: static and dynamic pages, document databases, and web-based applications. In our information architecture practice, we are often engaged by clients to analyze, evaluate and restructure complex websites. The purpose of this activity may be to add new features, to improve the quality or efficiency of existing features, or completely rethink the relationship between the information collection and the intended audience.

Communicating the analysis of complex data networks requires the capture of both quantitative and qualitative information. The structure of the information is a subtle relationship between the classification hierarchies used by the client, often thought of as tree structures, and navigational options presented by the website. Analysis often reveals other important layer: the impact of the client's organization structure on the data.

The overview diagram must communicate to the entire team a visual synthesis, a pattern that connects in the mind of the observer what they know about their own information, often circumscribed by their task, with the larger view of the entire network. To produce overview diagrams, K+A uses a variety of visual techniques: arrangement of elements on an isometric grids that support three axis of information, and a range of color and symbols systems. Information is often presented in a series of layers positioned over a repeated structure. By combining high-level patterns and layers containing details, we are able to combine large amounts of analysis though a visual language that communicates to both a technical and non-technical audience.

Our talk will illustrate this method by describing our current work for Institut national de recherche et de sécurité (INRS), the French agency responsible for worker safety.

By separating information into layers, this overview shows the relationship between the content of the website and contributing departments, technical solutions, and search indexes.