Design thinking for 21st century archives
What does it mean to ‘think digitally’?

- Logic
- Algorithms
- Decomposition
- Identifying patterns
- Abstraction
- Debugging
- Creating, designing and making
What does it mean to ‘think digitally’?

- Logic
- Algorithms (...writing rules)
- Decomposition (...breaking stuff down)
- Identifying patterns
- Abstraction (...simplifying)
- Debugging (...finding and fixing problems)
- Creating, designing and making
What should archivists be?

× Trusted experts
× Able to ‘speak the language’ of digital
× Confident users of digital tools
× Intelligent customers of digital suppliers
× Collaborative
× Embedded in civic digital communities
× Tackling digital exclusion
Digital activities

1. Engagement
   The process by which archives are made interesting and relevant to diverse audiences.

2. Access
   Provision of useful and usable records, metadata, and context to a local and global audience.

3. Preservation
   The active safekeeping of digital content and context to ensure both are usable now and into the future.
Where are we* today?

× Only 1 in 3 UK archivists report that they feel they have the digital skills they need
× 59% say they have no digital strategy (or they haven’t read it)
× Only 18% of managers in archives feel confident judging between suppliers of digital systems

*In the UK (2019 survey, c.300 responses)
What is the effect of this?

- Our systems do a poor job of supporting our users on their research journeys
- Archivists are unable to support emerging digital research
- The sector is relatively weak at digital engagement, online community building and user experience
- The future survival of the record is potentially at risk
“Everyone designs who devises courses of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones.”

Herbert Samuel
Designing for use means thinking about users
Our goals

× Show what we have
Our goals

- Show what we have
- Help users understand our collections and their arrangement
- Teach users to be self-directed researchers
- Users should understand what the system is and isn’t doing
Their goals

- Answer “the question”
- Get “closure”
- Playful exploration
- Publish the paper
- Fill in the form
Design Thinking

1. Empathise
2. Define
3. Ideate
4. Prototype
5. Test
1. Personas

Representing users in the design process
Siobhan is a 21 year old history undergraduate studying at the University of Manchester. She is writing her dissertation on race relations in the British Empire. To do this, she regularly uses her university’s academic resources and subscriptions for her research.

For her area of research, Siobhan has looked at a number of online sources and is beginning to realise that she will need to visit institutions from time to time. She has read two books from her course’s suggested reading list but lacks confidence in using them to find primary sources. These sources are important for her subject and she now has to think about where she needs to go to get the next piece of the puzzle.

She prefers doing her research online and on campus, but she is very happy to travel. Before travelling, she needs to know that she will get something useful from her visit. Her tutor has advised a trip to The National Archives but she is unsure of what it holds and wants to use the website to find this out.

She has had a quick glance at The National Archives’ website and saw that we have some records that could be of interest. She does not have a clear idea what exactly these records are or how she can find out more. She is familiar with libraries but lacks confidence in archives.

During her visit, she expects to speak to a records expert when she arrives to show her all the records she can find on her subject. She has time pressures and deadlines to meet so when she arrives at Kew she wants to hit the ground running.
Why personas?

- User research is turned into a design product
- User goals are captured and shareable
- Help make design choices
- We can reflect existing users and/or we can imagine users we wish to serve
Good personas

× Are specific with enough detail to seem like a real person (but not TOO much!)
× Explore the person’s interactions with and feelings about your services
× Are focused on their goals
× Are based on user research (...but not today!)
Task

Work with a partner to develop two personas.

One should be a user who commonly makes use of your services today. The other should be a type of user who is under-represented in your audience.

- Who are they? (Name, age, background etc.)
- How do they feel about your archive?
- What goals do they have that your service might help them accomplish?
2. Scenario-based design

Imagining the future
Ayesha is visiting the National Archives to examine early 20th century business records for a paper she is planning to write. Her time is limited because her university is a long way from London and she is fitting her visit around a conference.

Ayesha orders a number of Board of Trade files and once they have arrived opens the DigitArk app on her smartphone. Based on phone location data, the app suggests that she is about to photograph records at the National Archives. Ayesha agrees this is correct and then fills in the document reference of the document she is about to photograph and the folio number she is starting from.

She takes the photograph. The app adds some additional metadata to the image from the National Archives catalogue and immediately moves to the next folio number but after taking half a dozen images Ayesha finds a publication she does not wish to copy and edits the folio number manually in order to skip the irrelevant pages.

One of the photos is blurred and presses the down button in the app to reduce the folio number again. She will delete the poor photo later.

When she has all the pages she wishes from the file, she selects the 'copying complete' button and moves on to the next document.

Her photos are in the cloud ready for close study back at her university.
Why scenarios?

- This is the cheapest, fastest way to (re)design a service
- We can produce anything we can imagine
- We can worry about technology later
- We can put our evidence-based personas into realistic settings
- We can question or validate portions of scenarios
Taking it further

- “The National Archives also receives copies of her photos and metadata embargoed for [2 years]”
- How are the researcher’s photos arranged?
- How does this work if there is no or low internet connectivity?
- Whose goals is this meeting?
Good scenarios

- Consider **who, what, where, when, why and how**
- Cover barriers or pain points
- Help think about streamlining
- The environment of the user is particularly important. Where will this interaction be happening? How exactly will it be happening? Through what medium?
Context of use

Task

Again working in pairs, write a scenario involving one of your personas.

In this scenario, the persona will make use of a digital service that your archive could provide in the future. This could be a completely new service or a major enhancement to an existing service.

- How does this new service help the persona accomplish their goals?
- How do they make use of it?
3.

UI Sketching

Building a system - on paper
As easy as one, two, three...
Two useful concepts

Affordance
“The quality or property of an object that defines its possible uses or makes clear how it can or should be used.”

Prospect
“A view of the world where enough information is available for the perceiver to understand the terrain and have a sense of what it affords, without seeing all the details.”
Matrix - The pill

Suggestions

How The Matrix Should Have Ended
by otheruser
4,860,784 views

Neo vs Morpheus
by otheruser
163,624 views

Morpheus shows Neo two pills: a blue and a red one. If Neo chooses the

All Comments (1,838)

Respond to this video...

youtube is the matrix!!! I'm trapped!!! AHHH!!!

matrixuser 7 hours ago
Why sketch?

- Anyone can do it - no special tools or software needed
- Quickly see if an idea doesn’t work
- Start to develop a language for the system
- An intermediate design product which could generate requirements or wireframes
Bad sketches

× Are brilliant
Task

Sketch the outline of your system.

First, consider, what are the key screens in the user’s journey through the system? Write these on post-its.

Now try drawing one or more of these screens.
- What actions can the user take?
- What feedback will they get from the system?
- How will they ‘see what they can do’?
Conclusions

- Digital skills are far wider than programming
- We can do digital work on paper
- User centred research and design thinking can help us better fulfil our missions
- Serious engagement with (digital) design is an archival skill
Thanks!

Any questions?

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