

Executive Summary

BDMTW Group for the Idea Index

"We are called to be architects of the future, not its victims." - R. Buckminster Fuller

Introduction

According to the website, the Buckminster Fuller Institute (BFI) is an organization "dedicated to developing and deploying solutions which radically advance human well being and the health of our planet's ecosystems." Each year, BFI holds a design contest, the BFI Challenge, which awards \$100,000 to an idea which supports this mission. The Challenge has its own website, separate from that of the organization, detailing the contest and containing a repository (the Idea Index) of each year's entries, or ideas. Our team was asked to redesign the Challenge site to make information easier to locate, to place a greater emphasis on the Idea Index, and to incorporate social networking features.

Strategy

To begin the redesign process, our team convened with BFI to discuss three concepts that would be key to designing an effective website: audience, mission, and goals.

Who is the site for?

Social innovators, social investors, educators, the media, and informal browsers.

What is the purpose of the site?

Build a collection of innovative ideas, promote discussion about these ideas, and support collaboration on and implementation of these ideas.

What are the goals of the redesign?

Secure BFI's status as the premier organization for the discussion and promotion of design science. Call the site's users to action, enhance searching and browsing capabilities, and facilitate communication between the site's users.

Process

The redesign process was a collaborative effort that can be broken up into a series of five steps. Documentation of these events can be found in the Appendix.

1. *Personas* - Our team first created personas of likely site users, detailing information and features that each user would look for on the website. We made sure to keep these personas in mind throughout the redesign process.
2. *Comparative analysis* - Next, we completed a comparative analysis, where our team compared the Challenge site to the websites of three organizations that have similar missions and goals to BFI. We also examined a social networking site for features that might be of use to BFI.
3. *Content inventory* - Our team cataloged all content on the existing BFI Challenge website; it was necessary to be intimately familiar with the site's content before its reorganization.
4. *Card sorting* - Three participants performed a card sort under our supervision. This helped our team examine main navigation and site structure from the users' perspective.
5. *Paper prototyping* - Using information gathered from the previous four steps, our team then designed a paper prototype of the website. We tested two people with a first draft, and after adjusting our design based on feedback from those first tests, ran a second series of tests with three people, which went much more smoothly.

Redesign Summary

After completing the above five steps, our team was ready to move into the final stages of the design process through the creation of a site map and wire frames. Our design is characterized by the following elements:

- Main navigation that calls the user to action, urges them to "be architects of the future, not its victims."
- Faceted search with a sophisticated range of options.
- Visual representation of concepts presented to entice users into participation.
- The addition of groups allowing users to collaborate with ease and create a sense of community around shared goals and issues.
- Newsfeed creates presence and assures users of the currency of the site.
- High ease of information finding based on actual tests from likely future users.

Site Management after Implementation

Our team recommends the addition of at least one half-time employee to the BFI team to populate the site, add content in discussion areas, facilitate events, coach new entries and monitor comments, developing them into groups as needed. Based on how the community develops, there may be a need for this half-time employee to become full-time. Unpaid interns can be brought on as needed to increase a sense of community through commenting on site content, as well as the creation of and participation in groups.

Future Directions

Our team believes it is important that site structure and enhanced search capabilities are the priority at this stage in the site's development. Once kinks are worked out in those areas, it will be appropriate to add more advanced features, some examples of which follow:

- Private messaging and chat between site members
- Ability to save favorite ideas and frequent contacts into personal folders for easy access
- An area for collaboration between site members