Dos and Don’ts of Designing in Drupal

George DeMet
Drupalcon Szeged 2008
What I’m going to cover today:
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• How to work with both in-house and external design partners to create Drupal sites that are not only highly functional, but beautiful as well
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• A best practices-driven workflow for designing and building Drupal themes
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• A best practices-driven workflow for designing and building Drupal themes

• Tips n’ tricks for working with designers
What I’m not going to cover today:
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- How to write HTML or CSS
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• The nuts and bolts of building a theme or subtheme from scratch
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- How to create cool layouts using fancy tools like Panels
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- How to write HTML or CSS
- The nuts and bolts of building a theme or subtheme from scratch
- How to create cool layouts using fancy tools like Panels
- Fundamentals of design
Who is George DeMet?
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- Founder and co-owner of Palantir.net
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- Developing Web sites since 1994
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- Founder and co-owner of Palantir.net
- Developing Web sites since 1994
- Created the Internet’s first 2001: A Space Odyssey fan site (not updated since 2001)
Chicago, Illinois, home of the Bat-Man
George DeMet, Tiffany Farriss, and some guy
What we do
What we do

• Collaborations with design firms
What we do

• Collaborations with design firms
• End-to-end design and development projects
What we do

• Collaborations with design firms
• End-to-end design and development projects
• Web applications using custom and out-of-the box themes
Indianapolis Museum of Art
Arts & Sciences at Washington University in St. Louis
Herron School of Art and Design
Community. Creativity. Home.

Ragdale is an artists’ retreat located on the grounds of Arts and Crafts architect Howard Van Doren Shaw’s 1897 summer home in Lake Forest, IL.

The artists’ community, which is situated just 30 miles north of Chicago and overlooks 50 acres of prairie, now hosts over 200 emerging and established artists of all disciplines each year.

These writers, artists, and composers come from around the country and the world to work and experience Ragdale’s remarkable gifts of community, tranquility, and creativity.
Kohl Children’s Museum of Greater Chicagoland
First Bank & Trust
So, how do you do it?
First: nail down the functionality
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- Listen to the client
First: nail down the functionality

- Listen to the client
- Think about the users
First: nail down the functionality

- Listen to the client
- Think about the users
- Talk to your creative partners and/or team
First: nail down the functionality

• Listen to the client
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• Develop a data model
First: nail down the functionality

- Listen to the client
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- Develop a data model
- Wireframe
Data model
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- Narrative document that outlines site functionality and the technical approach to implementing it in Drupal
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- List of modules, block regions, content types, views, panels, taxonomy
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- List of modules, block regions, content types, views, panels, taxonomy
- Using this, a developer should be able to begin building the site without any idea what it will look like
Wireframes
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• Helps the designer understand what functionality will be on the site and how it will work
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- Helps the developer understand the context for the site’s functionality
Wireframes

• Helps the designer understand what functionality will be on the site and how it will work
• Helps the developer understand the context for the site’s functionality
• Helps the themer understand what block regions will be used on the site before they start building
AIC Collections: before Drupal
AIC Collections: After Drupal
Design deliverables
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• Layered Photoshop or Illustrator design files
Design deliverables

- Layered Photoshop or Illustrator design files
- Content
Design deliverables

- Layered Photoshop or Illustrator design files
- Content
- Style guide
BBC style guide
BBC style guide

- http://www.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/newmedia/desed/visual_language.shtml
How do you bring together design and functionality?
Design implementation document
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- A marked-up PDF of the design templates that has comments targeted at both the client and the internal development team
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• A mash-up of the design concept and the data model
Graycor final site
So now we can start theming, right?
Wrong!
Be Zen
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- Zen is more than just a “starter” theme, it’s a theme development framework
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• Zen has great subtheme support built-in
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- Zen is more than just a “starter” theme, it’s a theme development framework
- Zen has great subtheme support built-in
- Hacking Zen is like hacking core, don’t do it!
Every time you hack core
God kills a kitten
Please, think of the kittens!

Public Service Announcement
courtesy of Greg Dunlap (heyrocker)
Interactive prototype
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• Build out site in Drupal with no theme first
Interactive prototype

- Build out site in Drupal with no theme first
- Account for all use cases, show semantic markup, layout
Interactive prototype

- Build out site in Drupal with no theme first
- Account for all use cases, show semantic markup, layout
- Use greeked text, FPO images
Interactive prototype

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- Account for all use cases, show semantic markup, layout
- Use greeked text, FPO images
- Real sitemap, real page titles, some real content
Okay, now it’s safe to start theming
Building a theme, not a skin
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• What do you think this is, WordPress?
Building a theme, not a skin

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- Always build for the future, even if you aren’t there today
Building a theme, not a skin

• What do you think this is, WordPress?
• Always build for the future, even if you aren’t there today
• Even if elements aren’t being used on the site at launch, make sure that they get styled so that they won’t look ugly when turned on
Sit back, relax, and let Drupal run the show for a while
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- Don’t write your HTML/CSS first, then try to shoehorn it into your theme
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• Touch template.php and the tpl files as little as possible
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- Never, ever hardcode content into your templates!
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• Never, ever hardcode content into your templates!

• Drupal is supposed to make your life easier; don’t fight with it!
Theme prototype
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- Themed version of the functional prototype
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- Still uses greeked copy, FPO images
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- Client should be reacting to the design, not distracted by the content
Theme prototype

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- Client should be reacting to the design, not distracted by the content
- Use Google Docs for feedback
Beta (and launch!)
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- Populate content, continue to refine front and back-end, based on feedback from theme prototype
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• Move the authoritative copy of the site to the staging environment
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- Make the admin area “client-friendly”
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• Provide client with orientation, training and documentation
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• When everyone has signed off, push it live!
Tips n’ tricks for working with designers
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- Insist on consistency
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- Watch your profiles
Tips n’ tricks for working with designers

• Insist on consistency
• Watch your profiles
• Progressive enhancement is your best exit strategy
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• DO: Let Drupal (and Zen) do the heavy lifting for you
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- **DO:** Build on your previous steps
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- On using sustainable theming techniques for Graycor: http://www.palantir.net/blog/graycor-drupal-