2010 Open Source Design Plans

2010 is the year we dive into open source design. We’ve dipped our toes in this pool before (icon contest, graphic design component for Trac tickets, header refresh contest, etc.), but this year we’re going to cannonball and make a big splash. Here’s what you need to know if you want to get involved.

A list for all seasons. Developers have the wp-hackers mailing list to discuss core and plugin code. Sometimes UI/UX stuff comes up and gets discussed there, but there is a whole universe of discussion around navigation labels, gradients, button styling, layouts, alignment, etc. that would be clutter on wp-hackers. Designers need a list to call their own, and now we have one. You can sign up for the wp-ui list to discuss ways to improve the interface or user experience of WordPress, and to discuss progress on design-related projects for the open source project, like the design challenges we’re going to have.

Design Challenges. We learned a lot from the icon design and header refresh contests, and we want to do these kind of open design challenges on a regular basis to give UI/UX designers who want to contribute to the WordPress open source project more opportunities to do so. If we could do one per month, that would be ideal, keeping the challenges relatively bite-sized to allow potential contributors an easy way to get involved at first. As each challenge is posted, people can use the list to bounce ideas off each other and work toward optimal solutions. I’m hoping the design challenges will evolve to be less contest and more collaboration. We’ll announce the first one before the end of January, so if you’re interested, please sign up for the list! (Hint: one will likely be a touch up to the Right Now dashboard module, to improve the information design, and there will be a couple of screen layout challenges coming up as well.)

Distributed Usability Testing. We started to try this out last year, and several dozen usability professionals volunteered to help get the program going, but a combination of scheduling and infrastructure issues combined to stall the progress. Having the “UI/UX contributor team” infrastructure in place, starting with the mailing list, will make it much easier to get this project going again.

Chit-chat. The weekly developer chats in IRC at #wordpress-dev have been very
productive. We’ve created an IRC room at #wordpress-ui on irc.freenode.net so that we can have the same kind of “water cooler” for UI/UX contributors as for core code contributors. In addition to being a place where you can drop in and discuss core UI/UX (note: this room will not be a place to discuss the design of blog themes, it’s to discuss the design of the WordPress application itself), we’ll set up a weekly chat. Choosing a day and time for the chats will probably be the first discussion on the mailing list.

A blog of our own. Once again, taking a page from the code contributor infrastructure, we’ll set up a blog for UI/UX updates, announcements, progress reports, etc. This will be on WordPress.org in the nearish future, and will be announced to the mailing list when it is live.

So, if you want to become a contributor to core WordPress by using your design skills, join the wp-ui mailing list and get ready for a fun year!