

Jonathan's JA-SIG Weblog

Observations and musings from Jonathan Markow

Fluid Rocks

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I'm not talking molten lava here. I'm referring to the Fluid project, out of the University of Toronto. Fluid is a worldwide collaborative project to help improve the usability and accessibility of community open source projects. The project staff is focusing on a few such projects in its first year, one of which is uPortal.

Colin Clark, Fluid's lead architect, joined the JA-SIG Unconference along with project participants Barbara Glover, Anastasia Cheetham, and Shaw-Han Liem from University of Toronto and Daphne Ogle and Allison Bloodworth from UC-Berkeley. Besides contributing to unconference sessions, the group led a "UCamp" on Tuesday afternoon that tutored JA-SIG developers in the methods of user-centric design and involved them in mini design workshops meant to address some real UI gaps in uPortal. A core of Fluid members and uPortal developers stayed beyond the official close of the unconference to work jointly on the designs that came out of these workshops.

The Fluid project is still in its early stages, but the work holds much promise for improvements in web application usability.

I've been particularly impressed by the way in which Colin and Fluid staffers engage with JA-SIG. They attend our events, contribute to our lists, and otherwise encourage dialog with developers. Rather than trying to impose "the Fluid way" on the uPortal community, they have become active participants, and the value they bring to us is made that much easier to see.