Thoughts on re-design of IVOA website
Andy Lawrence 2009-11-07

I think our weaknesses are more to do with the structure of the website than the editing of the standards documents. The key is to ask oneself "who reads this stuff" ? Ordinary astronomers don't want to, or need to, read our very technical documents - they are for technically minded data centre staff and so on. But astronomers will nonetheless end up at the IVOA web site, and we need to cater for them; and those technical staff, while positively desiring technical rigour, are likely not to understand everything in advance.

(1) Who are the customers ?

- **ourselves** : IVOA working groups
- **interested visitors** : NSF types, other e-science folk, curious astronomers
- **astronomers** : folks who will *use* VO services and tools
- **deployers** : those will *implement* our standards.

"Deployers" includes data centre staff, third party tools developers, and staff from our own VO projects, when they are in deployment mode as opposed to creation mode. Note that the same physical people can wear different hats at different times, but the above are the correct categories I think.

(2) What do they get now ?

- **ourselves** : not bad but some issues on comprehensibility
- **visitors** : not bad but needs updating and smartening
- **astronomers** : was minimal, getting better with newsletter, but needs more
- **deployers** : almost nothing ; only a laundry list of standards

All the above need improving, but I think the last category needs the most drastic improvement; I also think its the most important category of customer.

(3) Comparison with W3C web site (http://www.w3.org/)

This was interesting. If you find the actual standards documents, eg this for the definition of HTML-4.01 : http://www.w3.org/TR/html401/ they are not so different from ours. (We based our structure on theirs after all, and even borrowed the CSS...) These documents need to be dry and technically rigorous in order to do their intended job. The W3C documents are probably rather better than ours in terms of introductory ma-

terial and consistency of editing, but they are not fundamentally different in approach or style.

However, they are set in a *structured context - see*
http://www.w3.org/standards/webdesign/
and each of those sections has introductory explanatory material which is much easier to understand than the material in the actual standards documents : eg
http://www.w3.org/standards/webdesign/htmlcss

This is what we are really missing - a map of the standards landscape, and a beginners guide. One does not put this in the actual standards documents, but in the surrouding context.This material needs to be aimed at *deployers*, not at *ordinary astronomers* using the VO. But it is crucial if data centres and facilities etc are going to deploy VO standards.

(4) What do the customer types need ?

- **ourselves** : access to Working Group pages; discussions (mailing lists); calendar; access to standards docs and IVOA notes; access to **working drafts** of new standards docs; meetings pages.

- **visitors** : general info; who is involved; why we are doing this; what we do and where we are going; need to leave them with a sense of competence and professionalism, but keep it very slim.

- **astronomers**: explanation of why they should care; what its about at practical level; information on what they need to know, and *not more*; links to projects and portals; links to tools. I think the IVOA website should not develop towards being a user portal itself; but it clearly needs to cater for people who arrive there first.

- **deployers** : explanation of why they should care; technical overview/map of land-scape; structured navigation to the technical docs they need; cookbook - what you need if you are doing X; links to projects; links to related technical software (AstroGrid DSA, AR etc; Aladin plugin developers page; SAADA; DAL toolkit etc); access to **current** standards docs as opposed to old versions and drafts.

(5) Design and Navigation logic

- the four customer types need to be separated right at the top

- minimise navigation and confusion
    - no more than two levels deep; sections and subsections but no sub-sub-sections
    - main choices for each customer type should be clearly available on front page
    - but also always availalable via menu wherever you end up

- people can flip between customer types; this is another reason for having the sections and subsections always available.

- the exception to "everything always available" can be the members wiki. This can be seen as a distinct site, as long as clearly labelled "IVOA members wiki" and with easy link back to home page

- will some sections/pages be the same ? eg both "astronomer" and "visitor" maybe want a page called "idiots guide to the VO". But this doesn't mean you repeat it, because its easy to find anyway. Better to keep sections logically distinct.

 - one might worry that more pages are needed than the subsections we first think of, but this does not mean there should subsubsections; one can just add extra pages that you can get to by clicking links, but which aren't in the menu-tree.

(6) Proposed design.

A sketched design consistent with the above analysis is presented below. The first page shows what the home page could look like, with four sections, and links within each. The boxes on the left are meant to be a drop-down menu, with the same choices, and which is available on every page. In the illustration, the user has clicked on "VO standards landscape" within the "Deployers" section. The second page illustrates what this page could look like, and shows selection of the same page via a drop-down menu. The picture on bottom right of the front page is of course St Laurence being Martyred On The Grid.

(7) Next steps

Reactions of the Exec and TCG would be welcome. Also, before implementation, it needs a step-through of various scenarios, to check that it works. Then we need to identify some effort ...

The International Virtual Observatory Alliance (IVOA)

- Home
- About
- Astronomer
- Deployer
- Member

About IVOA

- What is the Virtual Observatory ?
- What is the IVOA ?
- Roadmap
- Member Organisations
- Contacts

For Astronomers

- Using the VO
- Links to VO portals
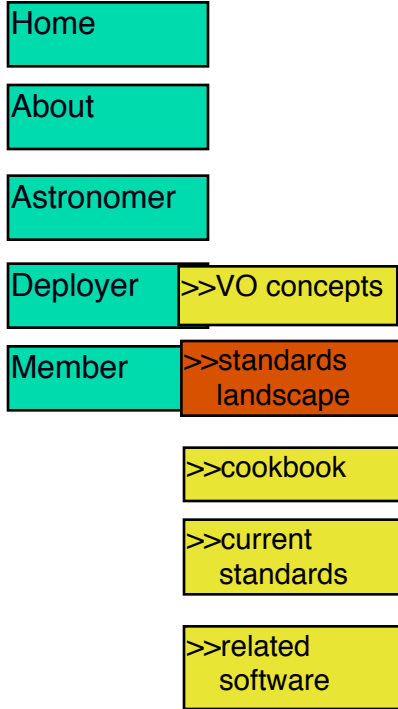- Links to VO tools
- IVOA newsletter

For Deployers

- VO concepts
- The VO standards landscape
- Deployment Cookbook
- Current technical standards
- Links to related software

For Members

- IVOA twiki
- IVOA mailing lists
- Working Groups
- Executive
- Calendar
- Documents in progress

The VO standards landscape

Home

About

Astronomer

Deployer   >>VO concepts

Member   >>standards landscape

>>cookbook

>>current standards

>>related software

Blah Blah overview rhubarb rhubarb etc ipso facto rice pudding. Not only but also and furthermore, with no exceptions. Amazingly, and accordingly, without further ado, it is certainly without a doubt. Izzy whizzy lets get busy. Then again, I have one grunch but the egg plant over there. Dearly beloved, knowing as we do the exceptional qualities of blah blah rhubarb rhubarb and occasionally zuppa inglese with well known consequences. But, I hear you say, it is a truth universally acknowledged that the VO without standards is like a fish without a bicycle. Jesus saves, but Beckham scores on the rebound. So, unaccustomed as I am to the deployment of cliches, we have to acknowledge that time and tide makes dusty fools of us all. Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow creeps in this most excellent adventure, dudes. Now is the winter of our discontent made glorious summer by eating the heads off chocolate bunnies.

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