

## The relaunch of WPNI's Entertainment Guide

12/12/00

### **Catalysts for Change**

There are three catalysts for a relaunch of the Entertainment Guide:

1. The current product doesn't integrate new ecommerce tools and services as effectively as will be necessary in 2001.
2. The Entertainment Guide staff has evolved the content and tools of the product to a point that can't be reflected or leveraged in the current Entertainment Guide.
3. In the first half of 2001, CitySearch is moving its owned-and-operated sites to a new platform. The new 3.0 platform supposedly is more open and flexible for future development. The 3.0 platform includes expanded and sortable search returns, dynamic delivery of content within parts of pages, and faster searching. The new platform should be available to WPNI in late March. The current platform will no longer be supported by CitySearch.

### **Process**

The User Experience group used both one-on-one and group meetings with the Entertainment Guide staff and Entertainment Guide Relaunch Stakeholders to create a complete content/functionality list of the current product as well as to make additions for the near future. That list and those conversations provided the data for an information architecture for the relaunch product.

Entertainment Guide designers and production staff will take that IA to create design solutions. In early 2001, the assumptions made about the product in those solutions will be tested by users. The designs will then be developed further based on that feedback. Development will occur as stakeholders struggle towards a consensus on the new solution. That gained, the design and production solutions will be further developed as they are merged with the requirements of CitySearch's 3.0 platform. After quality assurance testing, the new product will be launched.

## **THE RELAUNCH PRODUCT**

### **Goals for the Relaunch Product**

1. Maximize the value of the creative and skillful efforts of the Entertainment Guide staff.
2. Provide the most complete, timely and accessible listings and other entertainment information for the Washington Metro area.
3. Provide the most complete, timely and accessible entertainment-related recommendations for the Washington Metro area.
4. Maximize both the value of tools for entertainment-related transactions and the effectiveness of their integration with editorial content.

### **Theory**

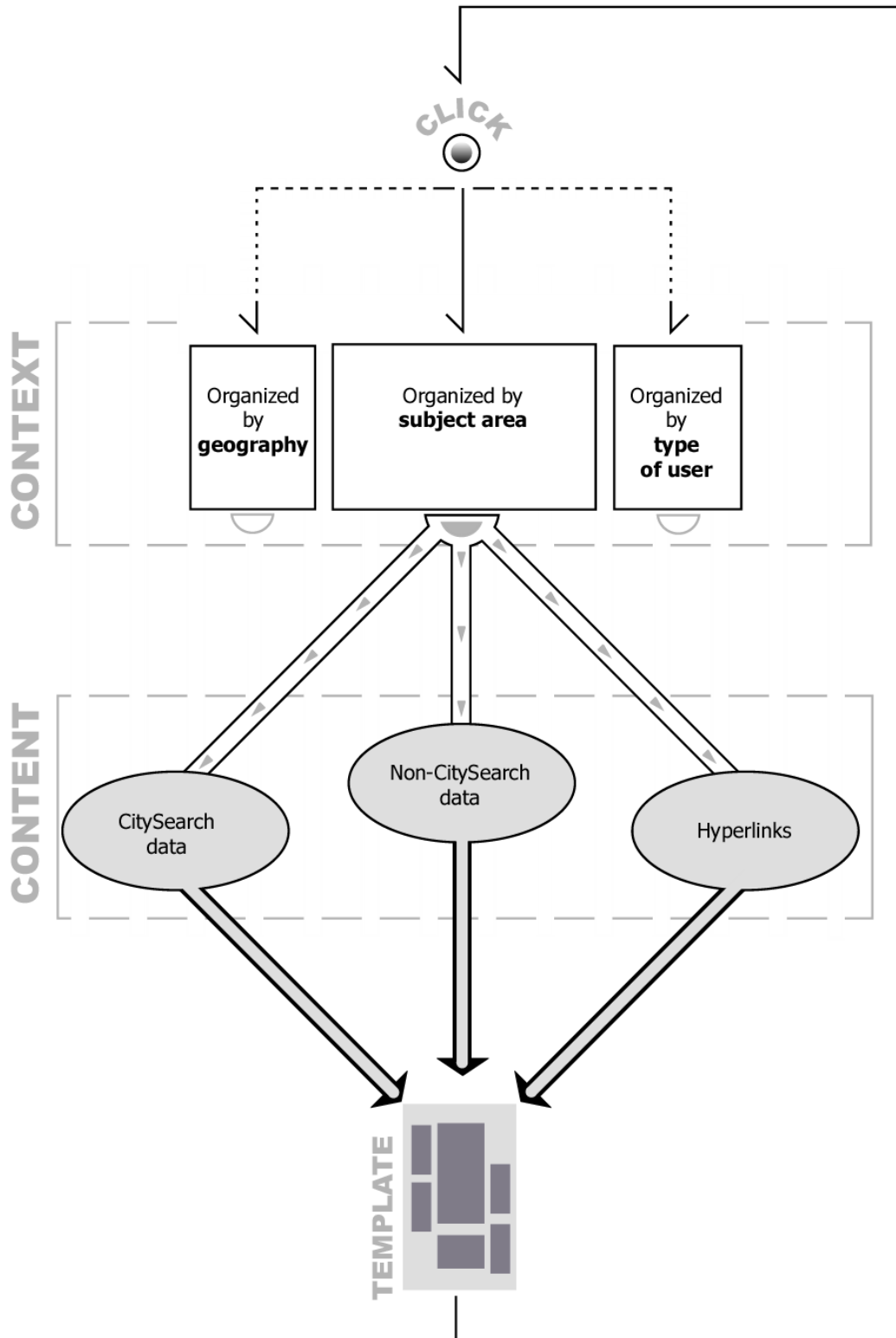
The current Entertainment Guide follows a publication model. The entire world of entertainment is divided into categories based on subject matter, very much like a Sunday newspaper. This approach has merit, especially in content areas where those categories align so well with user expectations (movies, music, restaurants). The model struggles when additional, non-standardized content is introduced. Love Life, which really is a group of content clustered around a type of user (single and looking for a relationship), is treated exactly like a category created for a subject area (again: movies, music, restaurants).

The result is weak integration between the subject-oriented categories and the content forced into pseudo subject-oriented categories. This misalignment also makes the logic describing the relationship between all categories more problematic. This damages product navigation and can limit the expansion of the product (for example, where to add content for 55+ users).

The current model's inflexibility has hindered the integration of ecommerce tools and the effectiveness of more Web-like content. If all of entertainment is sliced up entirely by categories (like movies, music and restaurants) then transaction tools and virtual tours don't have a natural home.

A solution is to stop thinking of the product as a monolithic, statically organized, print-model publication and to build it as a fluid experience. Each click by the user begins a process based on context. Granted, the primary context in a majority of the Entertainment Guide experience will still be based on subject area. But that context can also be based on geography (virtual tours) or on user type (single and dating users; users with kids; users 55 and older). Counter to the cookie cutter categories of the current product, the three types of context can be individually designed to maximize the unique value of each type. The way users experience content based on subject matter is different than the way they experience content based on either user type or geography. (See diagram 1)

**Theory** (diagram 1)

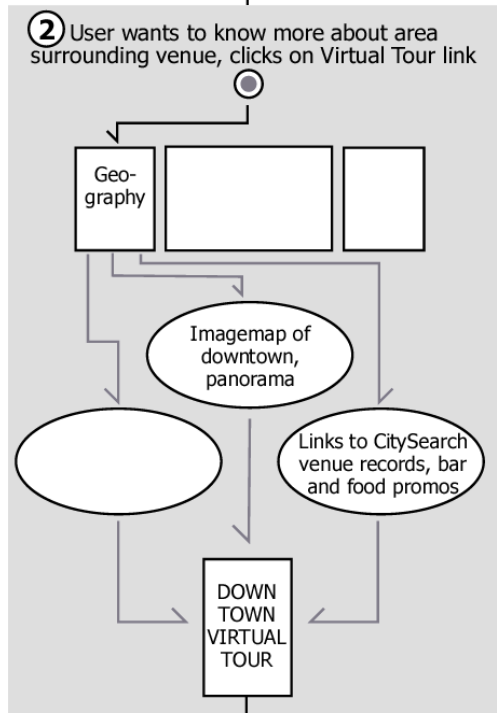
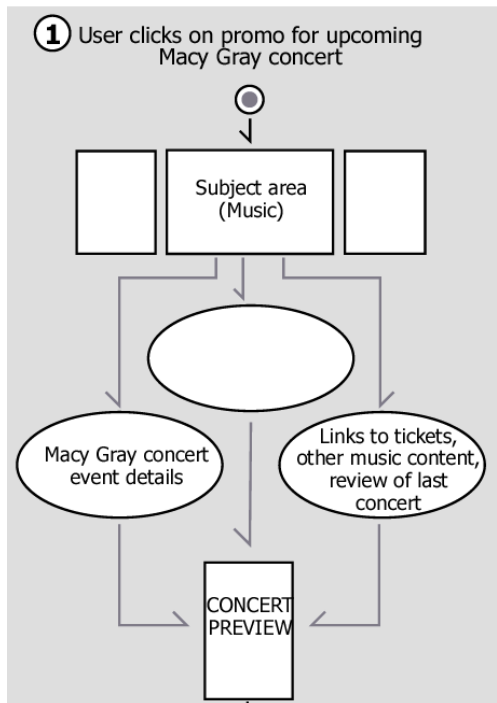


Let's take a look at an example:

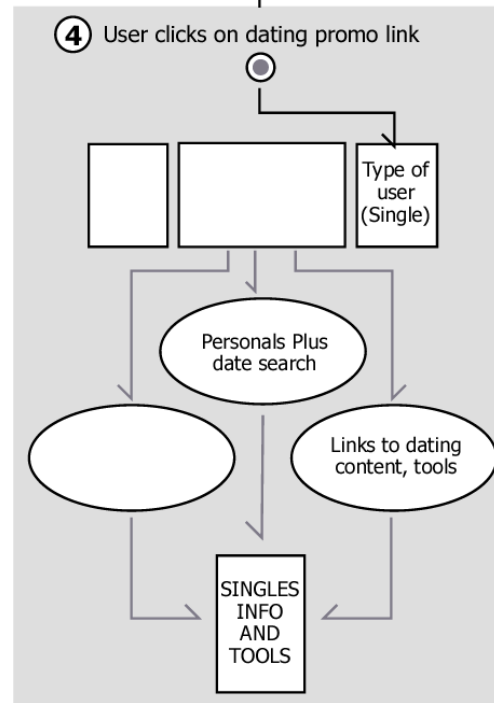
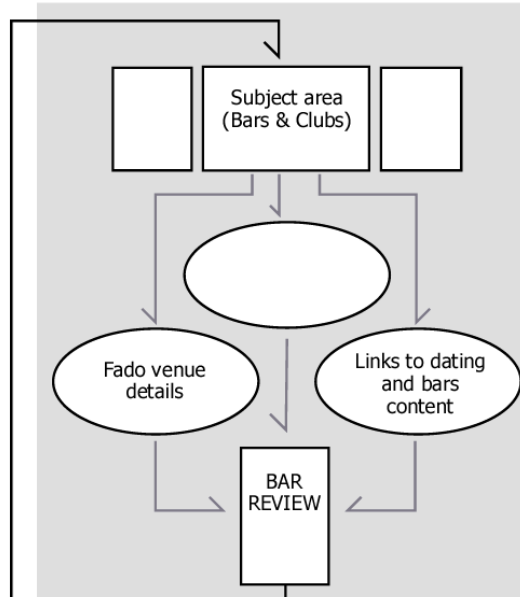
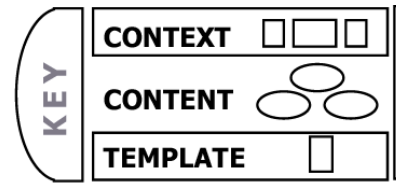
Edwina the User follows a promo to a preview of the Macy Gray concert. Edwina explores the area surrounding DAR Constitution Hall where the concert will take place. She gets information about Fado Bar. Finally, Edwina goes looking for a date to take to the concert.

How Edwina does the above in the theoretical Entertainment Guide:

1. She clicks on a promo of the concert that takes her to a page based on subject area context (Music).
2. She follows a link from the vehicle on the page designed for geographical context (the same vehicle that appears on every page on the site where geographical context is both available and relevant).
3. From this geographically-oriented page, she follows a link to a particular bar. The bar link brings her to a page with subject area context (Bars & Clubs).
4. Finally, Edwina follows a link from the vehicle on the page designed for user-type context (the same vehicle that appears on every page on the site where user-type context is both available and relevant) to a page organized for single users looking for a relationship. (See diagram 2)



③ User clicks on link to Fado Bar



Now the same experience on the current Entertainment Guide product:

1. Edwina follows a link to the concert preview.
2. She wants to find out about the area around the concert so she clicks on the hyperlinked venue. This takes her to the venue page which gives quite a few details about the venue, but only a "maps and directions" tool to help her find out about the area.
3. Following the link, she gets a map and driving directions but no idea of what else is in downtown D.C. As she leaves that last page, she thinks she sees some sort of search in the right rail. She clicks her "Back" button.
4. Back on the venue page, she pulls down the menu of the "What Else is Nearby?" form to "Nightlife." She's not sure what kind of entertainment she wants, but Nightlife sounds like it would have some variety.
5. She gets quite a bit of information from the resulting map page, but isn't really sure what some of the hyperlinks on the left refer to and she's not wild about clicking through each one to find out. Edwina then remembers a small graphic that she saw on the Entertainment Guide's main page.
6. After briefly considering clicking on the "Home" link at the top of the map and driving directions page, she uses the left rail "Main Page" link to go to the site's main page.
7. Edwina scrolls two screens down on the main page and clicks the inch-and-a-half wide graphic that says "Virtual Tour" guessing that that may offer her some help.
8. She suspects that the map she had seen a few pages ago was downtown D.C., so she clicks on a "Downtown" link.
9. She looks at a really cool looking panorama but still isn't sure she's in the right place. Showing the kind of tenacity we can only dream about our users having, she continues her quest by clicking on the "high-bandwidth" link.
10. A pop-up window with a map completely unlike the earlier one lists a number of entertainment venues. She clicks on a red square which she knows from the rollover is something called Fado.
11. After reading the Fado page, Edwina decides it's the perfect place to grab a beer after the show. She decides that the show and the beer would make a great date. So she goes looking for one. She makes an educated guess and clicks on the "Love Life" link in left rail.
12. On the Love Life page, she gets advice from Carolyn Hax, reads the first paragraph of the "Ladies Man Guide to Washington," reads two messages about interracial dating on a page from something called "Live Online," and finally makes her way to a link at the bottom of the Love Life page that says "Personals: Place an ad, read an ad."

As soon as Edwina's interests brought her out of alignment with the rigid, subject-area mandated Entertainment Guide, her life got more difficult. She had to learn how the Entertainment Guide organizes the world and then adjust her actions to fit our model.

In the model described by the relaunch product information architecture, the experience (data, context and navigation) wrapped around Edwina as she followed her desire. She followed links that were relevant to her and her experience rather than being forced to learn and utilize the logic of the site.

Now, let's take a look at some of the key elements of the relaunch product's information architecture:

### **The Core**

The core of the relaunch product will be a comprehensive yet simplistic tool that is consistently used on every page of the Entertainment Guide. The success or failure of the new Entertainment Guide rests primarily on the effectiveness of this tool. The tool's purpose is to provide users easy access to local event and venue information. It should also be an efficient driver of traffic to ecommerce tools and most of the other content available on the site.

### **Ecommerce Toolbox**

This mechanism serves two purposes. Users will be able to access links to all ecommerce tools at all times so the toolbox needs to be on every Entertainment Guide page. However, the toolbox won't be uniform on all of those pages. When a particular tool in the toolbox is relevant to the contents of a particular page, the toolbox should be flexible enough to highlight and personalize that tool. For example, a page containing a review of a Macy Gray CD would highlight the ability to buy that specific CD.

### **Entertaining Neighborhoods Tool**

This mechanism will appear on all relevant pages within Entertainment Guide. The tool would ideally be specific to its particular page. For example, the Entertaining Neighborhoods Tool on the Buffalo Billiards review page would access all virtual tours, but highlight Dupont Circle. This level of relevance may not be realistic for 2001.

### **Promos**

Promos are present on all index pages in the Entertainment Guide. In the data collection stage of this project, several EG staffers complained about the inflexibility of the current product's promos. Ideally, the promos on the relaunch product will walk the thin line between standardization and flexibility. There will be three levels of promotion: promos with a sentence, a label, a link and an image; promos with a sentence, a label and a label; promos with a phrase or label hyperlink.

The initial requirements listed above for promos can be adjusted for the product designer if it will make a more successful product.

### **Secondary Promos**

This is the key feature to the "fluid online experience" theory. Editors need to be able to set up two kinds of promos. Index page promos (movies, for example) are described in the "Promos" section earlier in this document. Editors also need to be able to create timely promos that will appear on related pages both inside and outside their subject areas. For example, the same secondary Bars & Clubs promos will appear on the Music search result/profile pages, the Restaurants search result/profile pages, and the Singles index page.

### **Calendar of Events**

This is a chance to clean up a bit of unfortunate usability from the current site. The calendar interface on all current section fronts will be redesigned to allow users to click on a day to get just events within the particular subject area instead of always returning all events. Users should also have the ability to get all events if they so desire. Look and feel can also change from the current solution as needed.

### **Live Online Schedules and Links**

Links to Live Online should help users understand that following the links will take them to another site in the WPNI network. Ideally, they would also have a basic understanding of what Live Online is.

### **Personality Cults**

The Entertainment Guide has already made great strides in elevating Post personalities like Eric Brace. The relaunch is an opportunity to push even further. The design will need to help users feel connected to the personalities as people. When users participate, they need to interact with the personalities as if they were good friends or trusted family.

### **High-End Photo Experiences**

This will be a joint venture with the staff of CameraWorks. Museums or local parks provide a great opportunity for WPNI to explore using a photo experience to access deep venue and event data. Once one of these experiences is created, the relevant subject area index will need to be flexible enough to drive traffic to the new feature.

**Links to The Washington Post Online (TWPO)**

The challenge here is not unlike the challenge of Live Online links. There will be value in clustering the links to TWPO. The design should help users understand that following the links will take them to another site in the WPNI network.

**Links to Weekend**

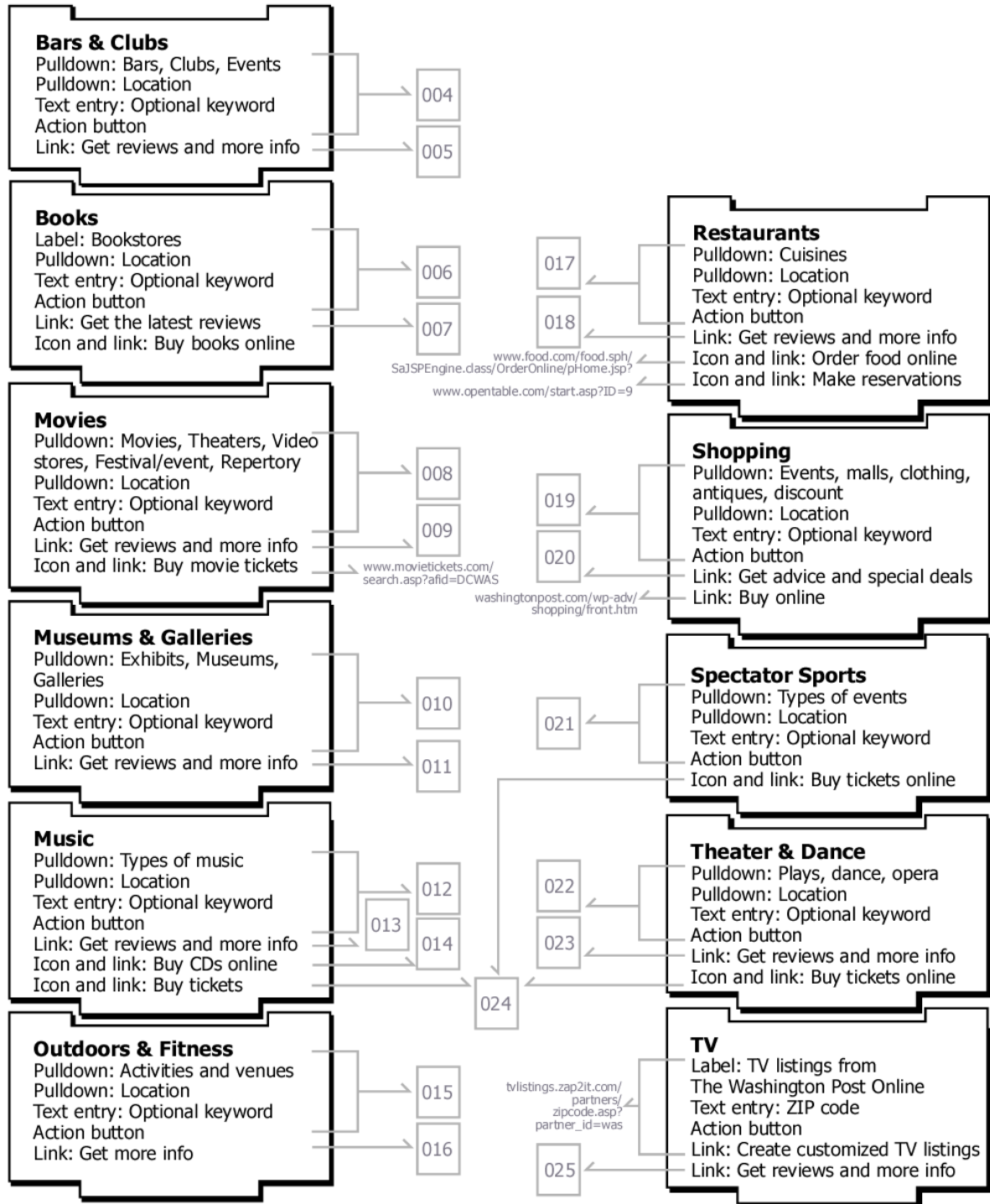
Links and branding for TWP's Weekend content will be dealt with in a fashion similar to TWPO and Live Online.

**User-Typing Elements**

Some linkage/promotion elements within subject area index and search result pages will need to be tailored to show value to specific types of users (single users looking for relationships, users with kids, users over 55). The new design will help users understand this clustering of information consistently throughout the site.

**The Core**

The core of the relaunch product will be a simple but powerful tool that allows users easy access to local event and venue information. The tool described below will need to be on every page of the new Entertainment Guide.



### eCommerce toolbox

The content of the eCommerce toolbox is the same on all pages, but the emphasis of the elements changes depending on the subject area.

When a particular element is primary to a subject area, it should include an icon and either a sentence of explanation or the beginning of the purchase process. When the element is secondary, it should just be an icon and a simple link.

