Yahoo! Mail

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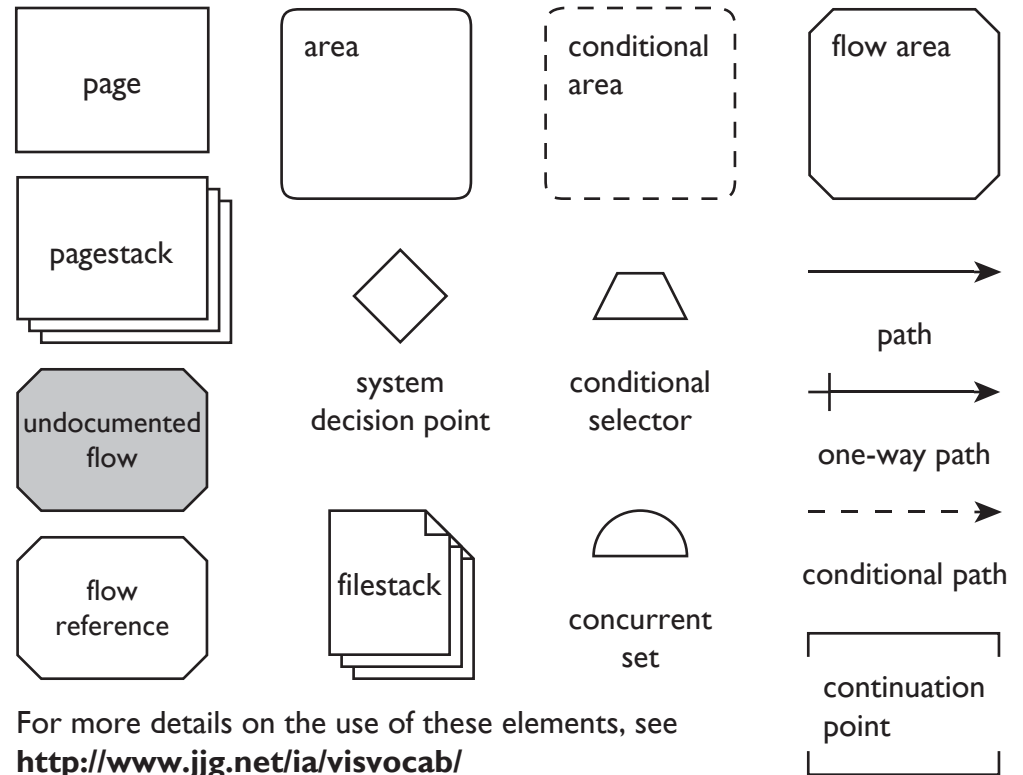**diagram by Jesse James Garrett**
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E-mail was one of the first applications to move to the Web, and the first to find widespread popularity among users. In many respects, e-mail is the ideal Web application: it's an application that people often need access to when they're away from their "home" environment, and the core user tasks (reading and writing) are easily accommodated with standard HTML interface elements.

As a result, it should come as little surprise that the basic flow of Yahoo! Mail has hardly changed at all since the portal first acquired the RocketMail service in 1997. But rather than offering an outdated solution to the Web-based e-mail problem, Yahoo! Mail demonstrates the lasting effectiveness of a simple approach.

The application is extremely conservative with page designs. Almost all user interaction takes place across only three pages: the 'message list' folder view, the 'message display' page, and the 'compose' page. Another demonstration of this conservative approach is in the site's error handling. The entire application contains only one standalone error page (the 'no acct found' page in the login flow), and this seems more likely to be the result of a backend limitation than a deliberate design choice.

A few awkward spots do appear in the flow. An empty search result set returns a search result page with a "no messages found" message, rather than bringing the user directly back to the query interface to retry the search. Downloading attachments is a two-step process, which seems like one step too many. The dichotomy between viewing and editing contact information in the address book seems like an artificial distinction whose purpose is unclear. But these are really minor quibbles; overall, Yahoo! Mail is a model of streamlined interaction design.

LEGEND

- page
- pagestack
- undocumented flow
- flow reference
- area
- conditional area
- flow area
- system decision point
- filestack
- conditional selector
- concurrent set
- path
- one-way path
- conditional path
- continuation point

For more details on the use of these elements, see
http://www.jjg.net/ia/visvocab/

NOTES

(1a) If login info is valid, proceed to (2b); otherwise, go to 'hints' page.
(1b) If password lookup authentication info is valid, proceed to 'password sent confirmation'; if username is invalid, proceed to 'no acct found'; otherwise, return to 'password lookup' with error message.
(1c) If sign-up info is valid, proceed to 'sign-up confirmation'; otherwise, go to 'data correction' page.

(2a) If user attempts access to any page within the authenticated area without a valid session cookie, go to 'login' page.
(2b) 'Persistent nav pane' appears as a frame concurrent with all pages throughout the authenticated area of the site.
(2c) If the user has chosen to display the list of folders in the nav pane, navigation directly to the 'message list' for each folder is permitted.
(2d) The 'message list' page only allows navigation to 'message display' pages for those messages contained in the current folder (or messages meeting the search criteria, in the case of search results).

continue from:
• Yahoo! home
• sign-out confirmation
• authenticated area (2a)

login

choose package

retry

password lookup

hints

(1a)

learn more (free)

learn more (custom)

learn more (business)

input error

(1b)

no acct found

sign up (free)

sign up (custom)

sign up (business)

password sent confirmation

retry

data correction

(1c)

sign up confirmation

continue to:
concurrent set (2b)

authenticated area (2a)

(2b)

continue from:
message
display

persistent
nav pane

mail home

spellcheck

done

compose

continue from:
• decision point (1a)
• sign-up confirmation

search

advanced
search

submit

pop-up windows

add/delete
attachments

address book

folder list

view folder

add from
address book

• to:
• cc:
• bcc:

help

• add folder
• rename folder
• delete folder

continue to:
login

view folder (2c)

message list

save draft

options

continue to:
check other
mail

• re-sort
• move message
• delete message
• empty trash

return to
folder

send

(2d)

sign-out
confirmation

sign out

continue to:
message
display

next message

message sent
confirmation

continue from:
persistent nav pane

continue to:
compose

address book

send e-mail

view contact
detail

edit contact
detail

save changes

send e-mail

addresses

delete contact

confirm
delete

view list

edit list

• add contact
• remove contact

save

continue from:
message list

check other
mail

• check mail
• delete acct

configure
POP acct

save
changes

continue from:
selector (2d)

add to
address book

message
display

• reply
• reply all
• forward

continue to:
compose

attachments
list

download

files