

Interview: Chris Anderton, CDRS Web Developer

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The web designer/application developer speaks to CDRS about the [Agile](#)-style design process and his source of inspiration for work on the *Dangerous Citizens* project.

Chris, you've never experienced an Agile-style design project before. How did you work out transforming a set of short-sentence index cards into a visual experience?

It was somewhat of a learning curve at first to know exactly where the boundaries were of the index card. There was a lot of potential to get carried away because of the non-detailed nature of it. What I ended up doing was taking what was on the card, creating the barebones [requirement](#), then doing my own brainstorming on different features which would be widely applicable to the project so that the piece I was working on could be used in a variety of places on the site.

How did you include some of the usability requirements that came up as we went along?

That was a big part of trying to make it as useful as possible. Most of the accessibility and usability requirements were in line with creating useful and flexible designs. The elements needed to work not only with specific colors, but also allow a variety of yet undetermined colors, fonts, etc. A lot of ideas were pulled from codices and papyrus texts, as they have a lot of great colors and texture, but can be easy to read (provided that you know the language they're written in). Those texts were a surprisingly good source for design ideas, the exception being line spacing. Older texts tend to really pack the lines against each other.

There needed to be a good amount of margin space around the web page elements, since the amount and type of content will vary quite a bit, while staying visually interesting enough to keep your attention. On the same note, it couldn't be too vibrant or bold, or else elements would fight for the viewer's attention and it would quickly become unreadable. As such, it required a subtlety to the overall appearance.

Is that how you came up with the idea for the timeline application design?

N.B. In order for CDRS to create a rich, interactive experience of the Dangerous Citizens book, it was necessary to transform the various types of content into discrete applications, one of which is transforming Neni's chronology back matter into a timeline that users can self-adjust to display information associated with certain periods.

Very much so, yes. I also went with the appearance of the timeline because Greece has such a rich heritage of texts. As the material deals with very sober happenings, as well, I wanted to make sure that the timeline showed that in addition to reflecting the culture it takes place in.

In which ways did the subject matter help to inform the design?

The subject isn't very cheerful. It's not any sort of happily-ever-after, and so the design needed a certain propriety and respectful handling. Neni provided us with a rich trove of images about the happenings in Greece, and I tried to incorporate many of them into the designs we had, from photographs of prisoners, to drawings about the people involved.

What has your favorite part of the design work been so far?

I've really enjoyed the opportunity to design a wide variety of tools geared towards immersing people in the subject. Most projects only have one or two ways of getting at the information, but this project presents the content in a meaningful way and allows numerous entry points into it. An opportunity to provide so many tools doesn't come by often, and it's been very enjoyable to design such a variety of elements with a common theme.

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