

# The Challenges of Expressing Parerga—Part 2

July 20, 2009 | [Progress on the website](#)

CDRS is lucky enough to have Fordham University Press as a partner. Even before our proposal with Neni and the Press was signed, we received tons of content to review, both text and images, so we were able to make assessments quickly and have real content examples of what Neni was thinking. Therefore, with the [challenges](#) (and potential successes!) of this project ahead of us and the content at hand, we were able to start comprehensive planning early. This allowed us to address and brainstorm all of the known challenges at once.

**Challenge #1: How could we develop a method that would allow users the comfort of expected narrative reading and still provide them with the opportunity to experience the “voices” in *Dangerous Citizens* within an appropriate context?**

Solution: While we could have made an effort to create a brand-new user experience, the expectations associated with books and articles (particularly in academia) prevented us from going too far in that direction. Creating a new style of experience works for web images or navigation, but not for reading. Therefore, we decided to take the print style and expand it. The model of associated sidebar reading is known and expected in print and on the web, so we felt we had a good foundation and plenty of models on the web with which we could compare and contrast our work.

**Challenge #2: How would we include *all* parerga and still adhere to good user interface (UI) principles?**

Solution: The inset model of the parerga in the print book’s design requires short content; the associated sidebar on the web is a bit more flexible but still assumes only a few paragraphs or links, or a single small multimedia thumbnail. Considering the product we had in front of us, this wouldn’t do. However, there were plenty of examples of expandable sidebars on the web, and so we created an experience that would allow users to see and read only those parerga in which they had an interest, and would allow for the formatting to be diverse and suited to the length and type of content. I could be more descriptive, but we’re all really thrilled about how it has ended up and want it to be a surprise, so stay tuned for future blog posts!

**Challenge #3: How would we create an experience that suited both text and media?**

Solution: The ability to let the user choose how and what to navigate provided us with a great mechanism to address all sorts of content types. Video, audio, photo, text, and other formats became easy to customize, since we didn’t have to worry as much about how everything would fit into the narrative layout. Because we could control formatting of the sidebars, as well as inform users as to what kind of content was available, we suddenly had a freedom of layout we hadn’t originally anticipated. We still have a few elements to address, notably some potential multimedia playback concerns, but otherwise we’re happy with the method we’re pursuing, and believe our users will be too.

#### **Challenge #4: How could we be fluid and creative in our parerga information architecture and UI planning, yet not inadvertently extend the build time?**

Solution: Paradoxically, this challenge had the easiest potential solution and the most complex implementation. We'd long discussed using an [Agile](#) methodology for our application builds in order to speed delivery, but we hadn't considered it in development of UI. We didn't have the ability to acquire professional Agile training for the entire group, so we had to devise a bit of an ad hoc, train-as-you-go method. Eva, our project manager, found a [UI-specific Agile presentation](#), and from there we went into our brainstorming sessions where I explained how Agile could and would apply to each conversation.

The first brainstorming sessions were, understandably, mostly silent and fumbling, since the people designated as the product group weren't used to thinking about individual "[sprint](#)-worthy" requirements. The initial sprints were also overwhelming to the development crew, as they started off with a high-level requirement on a story card, which they intrinsically felt had to be addressed in full. Eva and I had regular conversations about her sprint coaching, discussing where she and I could better convey Agile methods to the team.

It took us over a month to get our bearings as a group, but the experiential learning has actually proved invaluable. As multiple brainstormings and sprints passed and started showing significant successes, our entire group grew accustomed to the model. We now have a very engaged and innovative Agile team—and, I believe, a very happy one. We're using the Agile method to develop the site, the UI, and the design—a truly holistic implementation!

We know there are still project challenges ahead; we started addressing the challenges of the most significant and complex part of the project before nearly anything else. However, since the area that held the most unknowns is mostly solved, the rest of the project seems to be falling into place.

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