

Flowcharts & Site Structure

The site maps reading from the last tutorial covered site maps that you find on a website (the directory or table of contents of a website). The site map is also the tool used to plan the website before it is built and can also be viewed in a flowchart fashion. Here are steps in developing a flowchart:

Brainstorm a list of all items you'd like to have on your website (this can, of course, be done with a client). This will include both content areas and links to other sites. Keep in mind your audience and the information they're likely looking for. Also think about info that the client already has available that may be useful on their website. Write these out in a rough list.

Group all of your items into logical categories and name the categories appropriately. Again, keep in mind your user and what they would be looking for (and how they would look for it [i.e. in what category]).

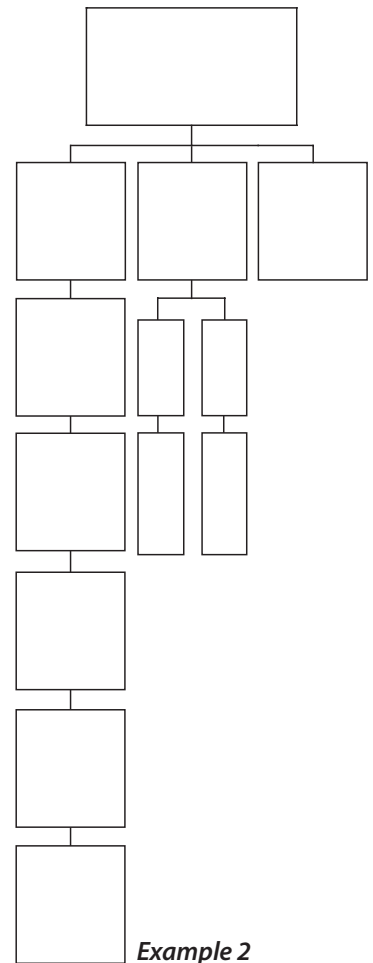
Critique your categories, making sure that they are logical and well organized. Ask:

1. **Who is my audience and what are they looking for?** Think of websites that were well organized, that you could easily find content (within three clicks). Think of others that made you wander through page after page, or even forced you to leave.
2. **What is most important to the user?** The most important items should be within 2 to 3 clicks of your homepage.
3. **Will users have to jump between categories to find what they need?** If so, you may need to rethink your categories, or link from one category to another.
4. **Should some items be in more than one category?** If two products have common specifications, then each product page should link to the common specifications page.
5. **Do the categories make sense?** Make sure that their names accurately describe what is in them and that the underlying pages really do belong in each category.

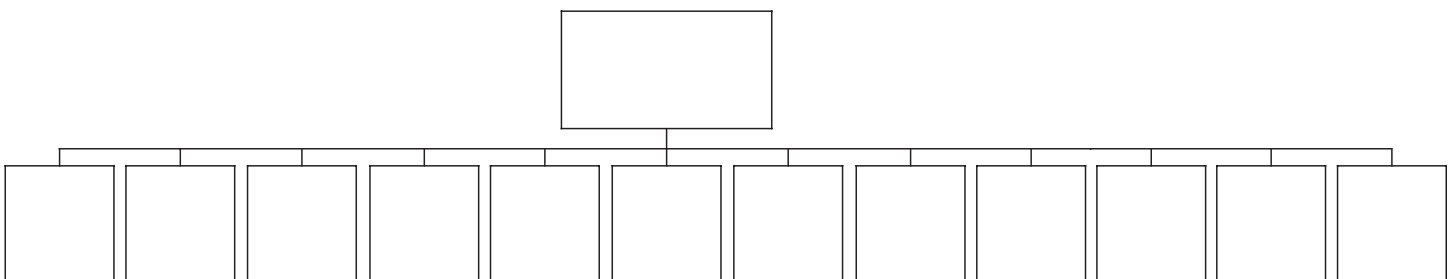
Revise your categories and items as necessary. Any and all cleanup you do at this stage will save you tremendous time and effort later.

Develop a flow chart. Layout your categories and underlying pages in a flow chart to that you can easily see the structure. Make sure that you show any items linked from multiple categories. As you create the flow chart, work to balance the breadth and depth of the site. If you have 12 second level pages, but no third level, you have a very broad, but shallow site (Example 1). Users will have to sort through the long list of second level pages. If you have only 3 second level pages and a depth down to 7 levels, then users may have to click through many pages to get to the info they're looking for (Example 2). Try to find the logical balance between the two.

Very Narrow, but Deep Site



Very Broad, but Shallow Site



Example 1