

Site Maps

Many web designers will add a site map to a website to assist users in finding content that is not obvious to them. This begs the question, if you do your job correctly and have the entire site well organized and your navigation is direct and easy to access, are site maps necessary? While it may be a slight duplication in effort (not really, site maps come together quickly), I find that it is good for the user if you supply them with a site map. I know that some people just respond better to that kind of information organization, so why not give it to them?

Five Common Styles of Site Maps:

Categorical	http://www.saccourt.com/sitemap/categmap.asp
Extended Categorical	https://www.key.com/html/sitemap.html
Hierarchical	http://tinyurl.com/hierarchicalsitemap
Graphical	http://www.4dcompanion.com/sitemap.html
Alphabetical Index	http://www.fema.gov/help/site.shtm

Sample Site Maps:

In a purely unscientific method, I googled “site map” and these were the top 10:

Apple	http://www.apple.com/sitemap/
Google	http://www.google.com/sitemap.html
Microsoft	http://www.microsoft.com/library/toolbar/3.0/sitemap/en-us.mspcx
eBay	http://pages.ebay.com/SITEMAP.HTML
IRS	http://www.irs.gov/sitemap/index.html
NCBI (National Center for Biotechnology Information)	http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/Sitemap/index.html
FCC	http://www.fcc.gov/fccsitemap.html
RefDesk	http://www.refdesk.com/toc.html
The Wall Street Journal	http://online.wsj.com/public/page/sitemap.html
Federal Reserve	http://www.federalreserve.gov/sitemap.htm

Most of these use an Extended Categorical form of the site map.

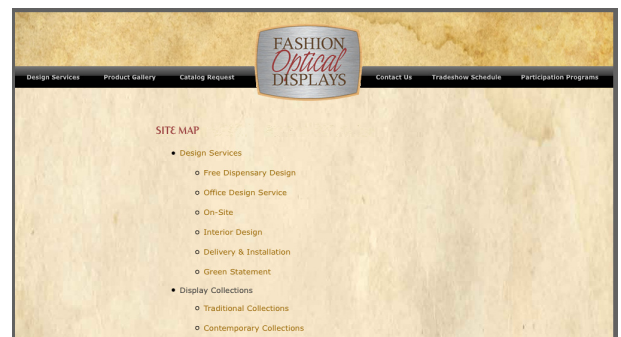
One variation that I don't see often, but I've preferred for smaller sites is a simple outline form; a variation on Hierarchical. *FashionOptical* —>

XML SiteMaps

A common file-format supported by Google, Microsoft & Yahoo! which contains links and priority of those links for a website. It is created and uploaded to a website host for search engine spiders. Users cannot see this file. More info:

<http://www.sitemaps.org/>

<https://www.google.com/webmasters/tools/docs/en/protocol.html>



<http://fashionoptical.com/site-map.htm>

Reading Assignment: Following are a number of links on the subject of site maps for you to read.

Give Visitors A Map: http://www.netmechanic.com/news/vol5/usability_no20.htm

An introduction to site maps.

Fortune 500 Revisited: Current Trends in Sitemap Design:

<http://web.archive.org/web/20080117004932/http://psychology.wichita.edu/surl/usabilitynews/42/sitemaps.htm>

While this is a few years old, it does have very interesting information on the styles of site maps and what is in use.

Site Map Usability: <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/20020106.html>

Additional study on the use of site maps.

Flowcharts & Site Structure

The previous page 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.

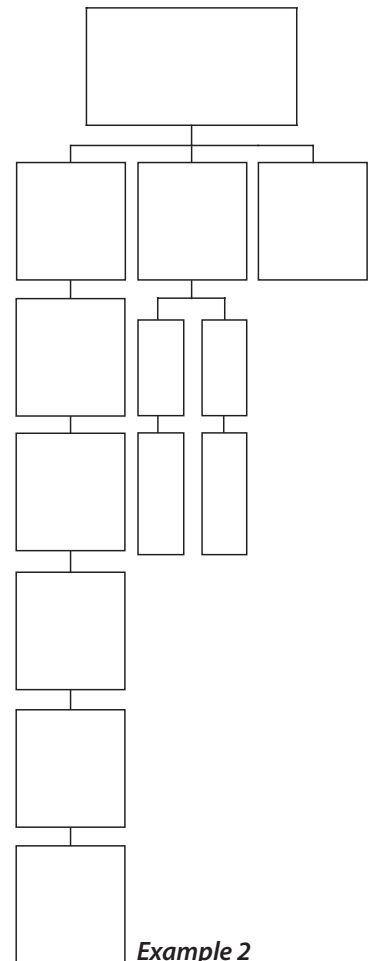
Revise your categories and items as necessary. Any and all cleanup you do at this stage will save you tremendous time and effort later.

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.

Lab/Homework:

Create a planning site map (can be hand-drawn) for this site:
<http://thecakewalkcary.com/>

Very Narrow, but Deep Site



Very Broad, but Shallow Site

