

Findability and Search Engine Optimzation

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 WEBMASTER ORIENTATION

Presentation Overview

- Defining Findability
- Understanding Wayfinding
- Optimizing for search engines
- Resources

“Find-a-bil-i-ty”

- The quality of being locatable or navigable
- The degree to which a particular object is easy to discover or locate
- The degree to which a system or environment supports navigation and information retrieval



Findability References

- Ambient Findability
- Peter Morville
- Information Architecture for the World Wide Web
- Peter Morville & Louis Rosenfeld
- Designing Interfaces
- Jenifer Tidwell



Understanding Wayfinding

- The series of things people know and do in order to get from one place to another
- A term originally used by architects to describe behavior within natural and artificial environments
- Now being applied to the study of user behavior within digital information environments



Different modes of wayfinding

- Site Navigation:
 - Using the links and organizational structure of a web site to locate and access desired content
- Search:
 - Using search tools to identify and directly access individual web pages containing desired content



Basic Information Architectures

- Top-down (narrow-deep, pyramid)
 - The most common form of website architecture
 - Entering a site at the home page and navigating “down” or “in” toward specific target content
- Bottom-up (search, database)
 - Increasingly more common form of website navigation
 - Entering a site or locating a page using specific key words in search of specific target content
- Shallow-wide (landing pages)
 - Considering every page within a site to be a potential point of entry into the site



The Importance of Key Words

- Key words:
 - The basic element of findability on the web
 - Not the same as the HTML Keywords Tag
- Key word analysis:
 - Assess what key words should bring visitors to your site or web page
 - Use web analysis tools to discover which key words are actually bringing visitors to your site
 - Compare your key word assessment against frequently searched terms and re-evaluate your information architecture if needed



Other Wayfinding Concepts

- Conversion path - The process from start to finish for a specific process or set of actions
 - E-commerce transactions
 - Event registration
 - General access to information
- Persistent navigation - A set of navigational components which are common and consistent across every page of a site



Wayfinding - Search

- Global search
 - Google, Yahoo!, MSN
 - University of Utah search engine
(global compared to custom U of U search)
- Local search
 - University of Utah search engine
(local compared to Google, Yahoo!, etc.)
 - Site specific or customized search
 - Social search and bookmarking sites



Accessibility

- Search engine accessibility:
The ability for search engine robots and spiders to adequately crawl a site and successfully index content
- ADA Accessibility:
The ability for screen readers and other user-based disability tools to access site content
- Improving one kind of accessibility automatically improves the other



Content Management Systems

- Querystring URLs: can be problematic for search engine robots and spiders
- Friendly URLs
 - Use static rather than dynamic URLs
 - Use shortest URL possible
 - Use relevant and recognizable keywords in URLs
 - Limit the number of querystring elements (?, +, =)
- Databases: many search engine spiders avoid crawling databases to prevent getting trapped
- Site maps: create and link to an HTML based site map or outline of your site that search engine spiders can easily find and follow



Optimizing for search

Accessibility roadblocks

- Flash based pages
- Javascript navigation
- SSL and authentication requirements
- Firewalls & closed ports
- Forms requiring data validation
- Cookies and session IDs



Optimizing for search

Getting crawled & indexed

- Register your site with the University Webmaster
- Register your site with Google using Google Webmaster Tools
- Directory submission - register your site with local or specialty directories
- Social bookmarking - participate with social sites that also serve your target audience (Del.icio.us, Simpy, Furl; Atom/RSS feeds)



Optimizing for search

Getting crawled & indexed

- Canonical URLs - the following URLs are considered completely different sites by search engine spiders:
 - × <http://www.utah.edu>
 - × <http://utah.edu>
- Designate one as the official site-wide URL form, and create a server-redirect to the other
- Redirects
 - Server redirects are crawled by search engine robots and spiders
 - Meta-refresh page redirects are not crawled



Optimizing for search

Getting crawled & indexed

- Robots.txt file - Indicates which robots to allow in and which to exclude
 - Server wide
 - Site wide
 - Directory-by-directory
 - Page-by-page
 - See <http://www.robotstxt.org>



Optimizing for search

Key ranking factors

- HTML Title
 - Number one factor affecting page rank
 - Should be unique for each page of a site
- URL reliability
 - Older, well established sites are more reliable
 - .edu sites are more reliable than other domains
- Popularity
 - The number of other sites that link to a given site is considered an important ranking factor
 - The reliability of other sites is also considered



Optimizing for search

Meta-tags

- HTML Title
 - Top ranking factor
 - Displayed on most search engine results pages
- Description
 - Less important ranking factor
 - Sometimes displayed on results pages
- Keyword tags and Image alt tags
 - Rarely used as a ranking factor
 - May increase page rank slightly if all other factors are equal



Black Hat SEO

Avoid unscrupulous techniques used to deceive or to gain an unfair advantage:

- Invisible text - using the same color text as background to hide content from users
- Keyword stuffing - using the same keyword or phrase over and over in order to increase rank
- Duplicate pages - publishing the same page multiple times in order to increase rank
- Domain cloaking - serving up different content to search engine spiders than to users
- Link farms - publishing pages containing multiple links to other sites in order to increase popularity



Summary

- Design with “findability” in mind
- Know your keywords
- Think landing pages & conversion paths
- Keep content accessible
- Create a site map
- Include a unique HTML title and description for every landing page
- Avoid Black Hat SEO practices



Resources

- University Webmaster
 - ✓ <http://web.utah.edu/uwebresources>
 - ✓ webmaster@utah.edu
 - ✓ 581-6113
- <http://www.seomoz.org>
- <http://www.searchenginewatch.com>
- <http://www.useit.com> (Jakob Nielsen)
- <http://findability.org> (Peter Morville)
- "The ABC of SEO" - David George
- Search Engine Optimization (EDTEC 474)



THANK YOU!

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