

How to Create an Effective Navigation Structure for Your Site

By Herman Drost

How to Create an Effective Navigation Structure for Your Site

Herman Drost
ffwpmd@aol.com

iSiteBuild.com <http://www.isitebuild.com>

How to Create an Effective Navigation Structure for Your Site
(Part 2)

By Herman Drost

Searching for information on the Web has recently become like a mine field. You find the site you want, only to be greeted by pop-ups when you enter, pop-ups when you are on the site and pop-ups when you leave. Other sites use a flash introduction, make you wait several minutes (which feels like hours), until the page finishes loading. Heck, you just want to find the information as swiftly as possible without having to watch out for these mine fields.

A fast and simple navigation structure is essential for a successful web site. Visitors must have a good experience at your site, if you want them to return.

How to design your navigation structure

1. Sketching it out.

Part 1 of this article (www.isitebuild.com/navigation), discussed the different navigation styles and a navigation action plan. Now let's begin sketching out your site.

Take one sheet of paper, draw a circle in the middle - this is the subject of your homepage. From there, draw branches, which have more ideas about your topic. If any topics are related in a more definitive way, create another branch off the current idea branch. Within minutes, you will see your web site develop into a dynamic sketch. You might find that a standard sheet of paper is not enough to contain all your thoughts. Use more paper, create more branches, and keep the ideas flowing.

Once you have sketched out your site, use separate sheets of paper for each web page. Make sure you define a heading for each page and decide how it links to the other pages. This exercise will help you to decide how you want visitors to navigate

through your web site.

2. Which navigation style?

This could be a navigation bar across the top, a navigation bar on the left (the two most common styles), or an image map (an image divided into separate links to other pages).

If you use graphical icons or other graphics instead of text, then include the text links elsewhere on your site. This is because some people browse with their graphics turned off and this technique allows them to still see and use the links.

3. What colors should you use?

If you have a dark background, with dark graphical icons or text, your links will be invisible. When using rollovers (links that change color when you move the mouse over them), be careful that the color of the changed link will not disappear, in case your visitor wishes to return to that link.

4. Navigation alignment

Some sites have the navigation icons or text links lined up against the side or top of the page. Leave an equal amount of space on either side of your navigational links and make sure they are aligned with each other.

5. Repetition and consistency

If the visitor has to search for the buttons on every page, or if the links have different words, techniques or icons, they get annoyed. Don't you? Navigation elements from page to page should be repeated and consistent throughout your site. If a visitor sees a navigation system on every page, it will add to familiarity and orientation.

6. Check your links

Have you ever followed a navigation link, only to find you can't get back to the home page? You may have clicked on a link, only to get a page error - the page does not exist! Particularly if you have linked to a web site outside of your own. With time that site may have disappeared or changed its address.

Make it easy for your visitor to find their way around your site, by testing out where your links go and that each of them work. You should do this periodically to avoid the problem of dead or broken links.

7. Testing your navigation structure

You're overjoyed that your site is finally finished, so you tell all your friends and family about it. They politely say it is great, but ask you what it is about and how can they find their way around.

Once completed, you need to step back (go outside of the box you have been in) and get others to navigate your site - preferably your Grandmother or someone that has never been on the Net. This is called a usability test. If they have no problem to

discern the purpose of your site and can navigate it with ease, you are ready to publish it for all the world to see.

Design your navigation structure with the visitor in mind. Eliminate any obstacles (minefields) that will annoy and frustrate them, causing them to leave and never wish to return. If you make it easy for them to find the information they seek, you will gain many happy customers.

=====
Herman Drost is a Certified Internet Webmaster (CIW) owner and author of iSiteBuild.com.

FREE Web Site Designed, when combined with our Low Cost Hosting Plan(www.isitebuild.com/freedesign).

Subscribe to the "Marketing Tips" newsletter for more original articles. [mailto: subscribe@isitebuild.com](mailto:subscribe@isitebuild.com)

=====
Get-Articles.com : 1000's of reprintable business and internet marketing-related articles.

[Submit your article for reprint.](#)