

Rocketface® Workshop How to Design a Website

welcome
to the
web

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Website Navigation

Creating a path through your website

Target Audience

The first thing you have to decide upon is who your target audience will be. What type of person will your website appeal to and will they be satisfied with what they find on your site. Ask yourself, what kind of information will they will be looking for and what questions will they will be asking?

Once you can answer these questions you will need to help your visitors find the information and the answers, that they are seeking, by the shortest route possible. This means that you will need to provide a clear, user friendly and efficient navigation system. Make no mistake a poor navigation scheme will hamper your website's ability to capture and retain visitors.

Too Many Links?

Have you ever visited a website where you keep clicking on links, hoping you are going to find that information you're looking for, only to be led to more pages of links? It gets frustrating and visitors often leave without finding what they were looking for. That is not good for you or your visitor.

Website Navigation and Structure

The answer is to have a clean, simple website structure and navigation scheme that is as clear and obvious as possible. You should always make it clear for your visitors how they can get between topics easily and always provide a means for them to go back from where they started. Make an outline of your website and go from there.

Website Navigation Methods

There are many schools of thought on the best website navigational design. I don't believe there is any one "best" design; Your navigation model depends on your website and its content and is often a combination of two or more designs.

We will examine the three primary website navigation methods in use on the Web today and see how they work. You can then create the type of navigation scheme that best suits your site by modifying or combining them to produce the optimum configuration. They are; linear navigation, database navigation and hierarchical navigation.

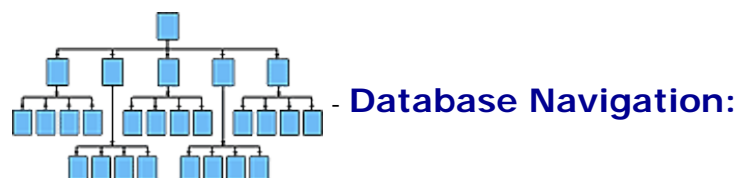
Linear Navigation



Moving in a straight line through a website

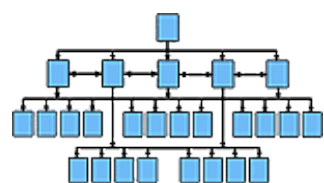
Linear navigation is used for a website when you want the visitor to go from one step to another in a particular order.

Database Navigation



The *database* or grid design of website navigation is made up of multiple main divisions and each division is linked to its own database.

Hierarchical Navigation



- **Hierarchical Navigation:**

Often referred to as Web navigation the *Hierarchical* navigation model goes from the general to the specific; from a homepage to main sections to subsections and databases.

Moving up, down and around a website

Website Structure

As I said earlier, many websites are a combination of navigational models and you will have to determine which method works best for your webpages. It is important to have a clear idea of your navigational system before you organize your website. Help your visitors find the information they need with the least number of clicks. This will also serve you in creating an easy to maintain website structure.

Note: you don't want to put a direct link to everything on your website on any single page. Your website links should progress through several levels branching out as they go. Too many links to choose from and your visitors often won't know what to click on.

Using Sitemaps for Navigation

Your sitemap is an excellent navigation tool. The good thing about a sitemap is that it provides your visitor with direct access to anything on the website. But, in order for your sitemap to function as a navigational tool it is necessary for your visitors to be able to access it easily. Provide a link to your sitemap on every page on your website. The sitemap should be your secondary means of navigation, not the primary one.

Navigation Bar (nav bar)

There are no certain rules about how and where to put your navigation bar. Many webmasters put it along the left side of their webpages. Some put it on the top. Occasionally a website will put it on the right side, forcing the visitor to look in that direction. Whatever works best for your website and its contents should be your approach to placing your navigation bar.

When deciding on the placement of your nav bar you should consider the effect it will have on the space you will have available for your content. Navigation bars can take up a lot of space that could otherwise be used for content. This is why it is advisable to use links only to your main topics and branch out from them on following pages.

Theme and Navigation Links

Every website should have some type of theme - a way of giving your site an identifying look. This can be through the use of a unique logo, a particular color combination or a recognizable idea such as gardening or pets.

Your theme should be considered when designing your navigation scheme. Work it into the way that you display your navigation links. (i.e. icons, bullets, colors, etc.)

It's also important to note that you should always include a text-only copy of your navigation links, as some people surf with images turned off or even with text-only browsers. Page headers and footers are a logical place to include your text-only links.