

Rocketface® Workshop How to Design a Website

welcome
to the
web

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Website Structure

Building the framework of your website

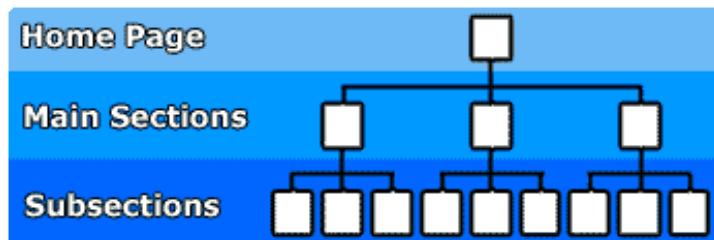
Website structure a framework for your site

Now we're going to look at the overall structure of a website. This is different from the individual pages within the site (i.e. content). The structure of your site is composed of the different sections of your website and navigation within those sections. It is the framework that shapes your site and defines your navigation scheme.

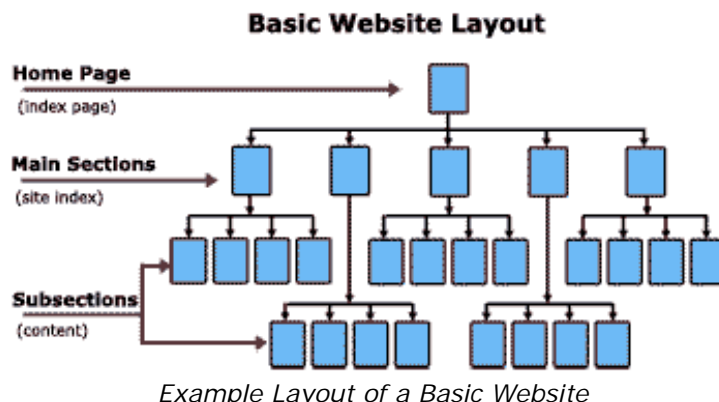
Website Structure

As the diagram shows a website is composed of three main areas:

- **The Home Page**
The portal to your website. This is your sites front door.
- **The Main Sections**
The backbone network of your website and navigation.
- **The Subsections**
The body content of your website. These pages are the soul of your site.



The structure of a website is like the skeleton or nervous system in the human body. Every joint or synapse is connected together into a network of mechanical or electrical links, which in turn makes us who and what we are. So should a website be connected through a network of links into something with form and function. The website basic layout shown below is a simplified example of such a network.

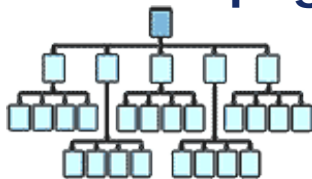


Website Navigation

The key to the success of your website's structure is the ease with which your visitors can navigate the site. A general rule of thumb is that it should take no more than *three* clicks for a visitor to find what they are looking for.

In the example above there are three tiers of content which can be accessed in two clicks. From the homepage to the main sections (click 1) and then to the subsections (click 2) is a simple and intuitive path. If necessary you can add a third tier of data but more than that will not only begin to confuse your visitors but also impedes the deep access of search engine spiders.

The Homepage



Designing your Homepage

This is a visitor's first impression of your site. It should tell visitors what your site is about. The homepage should answer the questions *Who*, *What*, and *Why* about the site's purpose.

A home page should also provide an *sitemap* or *table of contents* and guide visitors to the information they need. If they can find the information they want quickly and easily, they will enjoy their visit. And if they enjoy their visit and find that the time spent there was worthwhile, they'll come back.

A home page should not contain a lot of text. 400 words should be about the limit you should shoot for. It should provide an overview of your site giving the visitor a clear idea of what is available and how to get there and also provides the search engines with something to go by when they index your site.

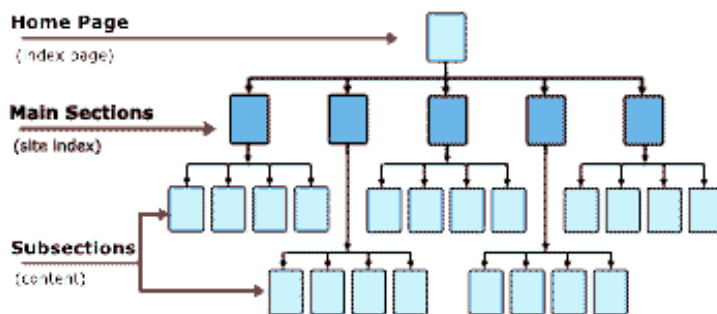
Also, don't present your visitors with a huge list of links to every single page on your site - that's why you have *main* and *sub sections*. (see diagram above)

It has been determined that most web users browse a website's homepage quickly. They look to see if there is any reason for them to go deeper into the site. They want to find this information quick without being confused by irrelevant distractions.

A large percentage of those using the web never scroll down past the first screen full of information. So, keep that homepage short and to the point. Have your links prominently displayed and make sure a visitor knows what your site is about on the first screen they see.

The Main Sections

Basic Website Layout



Organizing your Data and Navigation

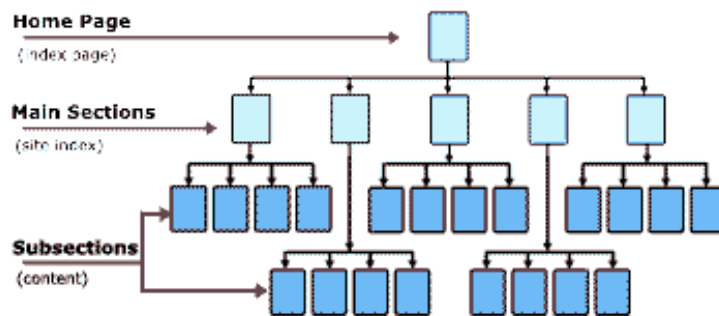
The main sections of a website form the headings of specific bodies of data. In other words the main sections of a website form the gateway or entry point into particular areas of your site (i.e. site index). For example if you are selling shoes your main sections might be mens shoes, ladies shoes and childrens shoes. The subsections would break down each category of shoes into color, size and style.

Your main sections will form the backbone of your navigation system. These will be the links that take your visitors deeper into your website. Select them with care, keeping in mind that your website structure will be shaped by them. These pages should provide one click access to the subsections.

This tier of your website structure is primarily a collection of links that provide access to the main content (i.e. subsections) of the site. Each main section should cover a specific subject or data base which is focused on a single topic. Theme each main section to correspond to its subsection content.

The Subsections

Basic Website Layout



The Body and Message of your Website

Once you have developed the main sections of your website and decided upon your navigation scheme group your data into subsections.

Each subsection should contain all of the important data relating to a particular main section. Keep the topical information organized into its specific category for easy retrieval.

The subsections of a website form the body and central message of the site. This is where most of your content will reside.

When a visitor decides to look further into your site it is into the subsections that they should be directed. Provide a navigation scheme that allows one click access to your subsections.

Subsections are the Money Pages

This level of a website is often referred to as the money pages. Here is where sales occur and the place that your primary message is presented. If a website had a soul the subsections would fill the bill.

If your visitors have drilled down this deeply into your website they are very interested in what you are presenting. It is likely that they are ready to purchase a product or click on ads. The heart and soul of any website is in the subsections so spend a lot of time and effort here.

Webpage Construction

To create the individual pages of a website you are going to need a web authoring program, or be knowledgeable in HTML coding. If you are going to create a large site, have several web sites online, or do design work for other people, it is strongly recommended that you learn HTML.

There will be times when you don't like how a web authoring program has coded a page. With HTML knowledge, you can correct it. And with the quickly changing nature of the Internet, it would be difficult for any program to stay current with the newest tag rules and coding possibilities. The place that I learned HTML, is [Joe Barta's PageTutor](#). I think it is the best HTML tutorial on the web and I think you will too.