

How To Organize Your Content

Organized Content Equals Navigational Utopia for Your Website



How Do People Find Information On Your Website?

In a perfect world, users would be able to find content on your site without resorting to Google or some other search engine. In that perfect world scenario, your content would be well organized and your navigation would be flawless. This would enable users to find information with ease, and your Website structure would make perfect sense. However, we don't live in a perfect world, and in many cases, Website content is so disorganized that good navigation is next to impossible. Of course, in some cases, disorganization isn't the only issue. Within some sites, org charts or internal terminology dictates how the navigation flows.

If your site suffers from any of these maladies, it's time to fix them. In this article, we'll focus on fixing these issues and provide insight on how to organize your site for maximum navigational perfection.

What Are Your Users Looking For?

You could have the most amazingly informative Website on the Internet, however, if your site doesn't have information categorized in a way that your users understand, they won't find it. In order to help your users, you'll not only need to know what your users are looking for, but how they try to find it. In many cases, your users will be willing to drill down to find things, but you don't want to make them dig too deep. In order to avoid this, keep the top-layer choices simple. Make sure that the information is easy for your users to understand. In most cases, it's safe to begin with a general overview of many similar products at the top-layer, and become more specific the deeper a customer goes.

Another solution for helping guide your customers through your site is to use a guided search system. Doing this allows you to provide an additional layer to the local search algorithm on your site so that customers can refine their searches based on where they are within your site.

Industry Terminology May Be Fun For You, But Not For Your Customers

Industry buzzwords, and technological sounding terms may be the norm within your organization, but in most cases your customers won't be using them. Keep in mind that your "common" pages are important, too. Customers like to know "About Us" and how to "Contact Us."

These pages make great points of contact for your customers. Use them wisely. It's also still a great idea to use a footer with these types of links, as well.

Let's get back to buzzwords, though. While it may seem cool or cutting-edge to use words that are commonly known within your industry, it's the customers outside of your industry that you're most likely trying to reach. This is why it's important to use words that are instantly recognizable. Customers love words they're familiar with. The following terms are "must haves" for your site:

But Our Industry is Full of Cool Jargon!

And that's just it. Jargon is jargon, and you and your employees are probably the only ones who understand those words. If you're interested in understanding what your customers are looking for, you can look at your Web traffic analytics and click-through ad accounts to see which keywords are pulling your customers into your site. It's also important to record internal searches on your site, as well. Compare the terms your customers are using within your site and use that information within product descriptions, Meta tags, for SEO, and product names.



Another easy and inexpensive way to build a customer-friendly site is to imagine the organizational flow of the site. Use index cards to create the steps a customer takes to get to the result you want.

Generally, the result will be a purchase. One way to do this is to start from the end and work backward. For example, you begin with “Buy Product.” The step prior to that would be “Add to Cart.” Before that, the user would select a product to view from among similar products, and before that, the user would choose the type of product they’re looking for. At this point, you’re probably at the second-layer of user interaction. The very first layer would be your top level of navigation, which would probably be something like “Products.” The end term is broad, simple, and the drill-down makes sense to the customer. By doing this exercise, you’re taking a different look at the way customers interact with your site. Use different sets of terms and repeat this exercise several times. Once you have several sets of index cards, gather a test group of people together who do not have a deep understanding of your products or services. Give each person a set of cards and time how quickly they’re able to get through the “navigation” from beginning to end. By doing this, you’ll be able to find the best navigation system for your site.

After you’ve reorganized your site, you’ll need to keep a close eye on the site analytics. If you compare these percentages with the same percentages from your previous site design, you’ll be able to see how much of an effect the improvements are having on your site. In most cases, you’ll want to keep your eyes on two pieces of information:

First, how many users ended up on a buying decision page, and second, how many clicks did it take for them to reach that page.

Keep in mind that the larger your samples are, the more accurate your information will be.

Whenever you begin a site design or re-design with your users in mind, you’ll be giving them the best opportunity to end up exactly where you want them to be and where they want to be.