Findability and Search Optimization

- Chris Pfeiffer / University Webmaster Team
  November 3, 2011

Presentation Overview

- Findability
- Optimizing for search
- The changing Google landscape
- 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
- Search Patterns  
  - Peter Morville & Jeffery Callender
- Designing Interfaces  
  - Jenifer Tidwell
Other Findability Factors

- Information Architecture
- Site Design & Navigation
- User Interface
- Marketing & Public Relations

The Search Experience

- Discovery  <--------|--------> Location

  Discovery search: I want to find everything I can about an issue or topic; every result adds a piece to the puzzle.

  Location search: I want to find a very specific resource or item; anything that isn’t what I’m looking for is a barrier to my search.
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
  - Make changes to site content to optimize for the keywords bringing people to your pages

Basic Information Architectures

- Top-down (narrow-deep, pyramid)
  Entering a site at the home page and navigating “down” or “in” toward specific target content

- Bottom-up (search, database)
  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
Conversion Paths

- The process from start to finish for a specific process or set of actions
  - E-commerce transactions
  - Event registration
  - General access to information

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

Content Management Systems

- Create an HTML-based site map that search engine spiders can easily find and follow

- Link to your site map from your home page

- Link to your site map from your landing pages
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
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

- 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

Meta-tags

- HTML Title
  - Top ranking factor
  - Displayed on most search engine results pages
- Description
  - Less important ranking factor
  - 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 techniques used to deceive or 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

The Changing Google Landscape

Google Caffeine:
- June 2010
- Faster real-time updates of the Google index
- Fresh content ranks higher
- Links from news, blog and social media sites matter more

Google Panda:
- April 2011
- Algorithm that assesses the quality of web content
- Higher “quality” sites rank higher
- News, blog and social media content matters more
Search and Social Media

Social media is an increasingly important factor in optimizing for search. A social media presence can improve your rank in search engine results.

- Facebook
- Google+
- Twitter
- News sites & blogs

The Complexity of SEO

- http://searchengineland.com/seotable/
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
- Engage Social Media

Resources

- University Webmaster
  - http://web.utah.edu/uwebresources
  - webmaster@utah.edu
  - 587-9888
- Marriott Library - Safari Tech Books
- Search Engine Optimization (EDTEC 474)
  - http://www.seomoz.org
  - http://www.searchenginewatch.com
  - http://www.useit.com (Jakob Nielsen)
  - http://findability.org (Peter Morville)