

The sitemap is simply a hierarchical outline view of your site. Remember doing outline reports back in grade school A report on your state might start with Roman numeral I, Geography, Roman numeral II, Economy, etc. Capital letters were indented, decimal numbers and lower case letters were each further indented. That's the form your sitemap should take.

Your sitemap allows you to show the contents of your entire site, in an outline view, with links to all of the pages on your site. Every item in the sitemap is a text link to the corresponding page of your site. Giving users an immediate overview of the contents of your site means users get an immediate overview of the breadth and depth of the information on your site.

Because your sitemap contains only text links, viewers can get a quick overview of your content without having to figure out your GUI - graphical user interface. Because every item on your sitemap is linked by text, anyone navigating your site via the sitemap will know where he or she has already been because the link will change colors to show pages already visited (do not force link colors to stay the same after visiting a page in the HTML you use for your sitemap, or for any of the rest of your site, for that matter).

### **Sitemaps and Search Engine Registration**

The sitemap makes an excellent page for search engine registration as well. Sitemaps tend to be keyword-rich because they link to all of your content. Further, most search engines go at least one link deep from the page they are indexing. Your sitemap is, by definition, linked to every public page of your site (to every page, that is, that is not password-protected or dynamically-generated). Therefore, registering your sitemap will help you have every page of your site indexed by search engines.

### **Sitemaps and Navigation**

In my opinion, "Sitemap" or "Site Index" (or whatever you choose to call it) must be part of the top level navigation of virtually any web presence.

Your sitemap is a 'must' place to list all of your site content, and navigation to that content, that is not necessarily shown in your top-level navigation. Top-level navigation is the choice of content given on your homepage and, generally, on every page of your site. As discussed earlier, you don't want to inundate viewers with too many choices in your navigation. Naturally, only broad categories and the most important features of the site are listed in top-level navigation. Unfortunately, it is sometimes difficult for viewers to guess which category might contain the information they are looking for. For example, you may have "Map and directions to our offices" shown on your company profile page and on your

contact page, but not shown in top-level navigation. Your Sitemap would be an easy place to find this information.

Sitemaps relieve you of the burden of having to list all navigation on every page of your site, while still making it easy for users to find a comprehensive view of all of the navigation and content on your site in one place.

### **Sitemap Utilities**

We use sitemaps to show how to “Link to Our Site”. The last link on every sitemap of every client is a Link to Our Site text link. See the Other Content chapter for more information.

Other items that might be included in a sitemap - including direct links to everything in the category - without necessarily being shown on top-level navigation include:

**Site Specific Search.** Results belong on the sitemap, allowing viewers to use either the search results or the site hierarchy below it. Consider placing advanced search (search allowing multiple query parameters) at the top of the sitemap for the same reason.

If you have a site-specific search engine (see chapter 8, Other Content) anyone looking for details about content on the sitemap should be able to utilize the search feature without having to leave the sitemap. Indeed, you may want to have your search results show a version of the sitemap after the results are rendered. It is often a good idea, too, for the search feature and sitemap link to show up together on pages throughout your site.

**Pressroom.** Including company news releases, company backgrounders, shareholder information, etc.

**Documentation.** Tutorials, technical specifications, selection charts, drawings, downloadable CAD files and more can easily be shown on a sitemap.

When these items are shown in an outline view on a sitemap, indented under the appropriate product or service heading, it’s easy to discern the extent of the content on the site and to go directly to the level of detailed content desired.

**Site Details.** The sitemap is a good place to give more detail about the site, including details on copyright information, privacy, linking policies, related sites (such as trade associations) and items that are “coming soon” (including a due date).

**Link to Us.** A link to pre-done banners and text links for others to use to link to you belongs somewhere on the sitemap. We customarily make “Link to Us” the last link on every

sitemap.

### **Dynamically-Generated Sitemaps**

Sitemaps can be generated dynamically to match the dynamic content on the site. Our online Wisconsin directory, [www.theBubbler.com](http://www.theBubbler.com), allows users to add links to their own Wisconsin-based sites, including the ability to add new categories. When new categories are added, they are automatically added to the sitemap.

### **“Sitemaps within Sitemaps”**

Because of the breadth of information on large sites, sitemaps for large sites can become quite cumbersome. In the case of very large sites, sitemaps may incorporate drop-down menus to show the information within categories or may be broken down into sections, each of which has its own, smaller sitemap. It is important, however, to offer the viewer as much of an exhaustive overview of content as possible, in case that is what they want to view.

### **Where to Find More Help**

Finally, your sitemap should include invitations to contact you by phone or email if viewers can't find something or just want clarification; or, at least, links to your 'Contact Us' page. It is a given that you include complete contact information on every page of your site, especially so for your sitemap. Be sure that a record is made of calls that come into your company because of questions about site content and navigation, and that this information is passed along to your web presence provider through the top person in your firm with website responsibilities. The “record” that is made doesn't have to be terribly formal; a simple email to the person in charge of the site with the gist of the viewers' difficulties or questions will suffice.