

SITE MAPS AND SEARCH FACILITIES FOR LARGER SITES

Usability is all about making your website useful to your users. In big sites the very best way to get your bearings is through a site map. Strangely, site maps are not as common as they once were; maybe web developers don't see the need for them. Users still do.

SITE MAPS

Perhaps the simplest site map you will see is at Google. The Google site map is a series of hypertext links listed under headings across four columns in a table. This map, like everything else on Google loads very quickly – speed is their principle design criteria. You can see the Google site map at <http://www.google.com/sitemap.html>

If you feel that you would like a site map that looks a little bit more upmarket, speak to your web developer (who has probably got a preferred tool). Or you could suggest they look at Mindman or Linkno's allweb menus, they are both highly configurable and are not too expensive.

SEARCH FACILITIES

MS – INDEX SERVER

This is the search facility included with MS IIS (Microsoft Internet Information Server). If your web host runs a Windows hosting platform you may have access to this feature. But it is unlikely if you are running your website on a server that hosts lots of web sites. Microsoft lists the benefits of Index Server as follows:

- The system respects all security restrictions and will not list a result if it is not within the users access rights.
- Support for seven languages.
- Uses linguistic stemming - it matches the various tenses of query words. So the word "swim" will expand to include "swimming," "swam," "swum," and other related words.
- No installation is required if you are already hosting on MS IIS; your web host may be able to configure this for you at little or no cost.

GOOGLE

Google offers a site search facility, but only if you offer the Google WebSearch facility along with it. There is no doubt that the search functionality is of a very high standard but we are not keen to recommend a feature that has the potential to take the user away from your website. You should also note that Google reserves the right to sell ads on all Google Free search results pages. This also has the potential to divert users from your website.

SUMMARY

You will note that the heading of this resource includes the words 'for larger sites'. Most small business websites are not large enough to use a search facility to any significant benefit to the user. Some obvious exceptions are sites that host lots of product specification sheets and those that keep archives of their newsletters.

Site Maps become more useful as your navigation gets more complicated; if you want to put off adding a site map to your site ensure that you keep your navigation very simple and consistent.