

WHAT IS A SITEMAP?

A sitemap is a list of pages that are contained in a website that is accessible to website crawlers or users. It can vary in type—sometimes it may be a simple document used as a planning tool for designing the website, or it may be a web page that contains a list of all pages within a website, which is generally organized in a hierarchical way. Sitemaps display the relationship between various pages and content of a website, demonstrating the way that the website is organized, how it can be navigated, and how it is labeled. There are a few different types of sitemaps, and a few different styles of sitemaps. Both of these factors will vary simply based on who or what the sitemap is intended for.

TYPES OF SITEMAPS

Visual sitemaps, XML sitemaps, and HTML sitemaps all provide different benefits and make a website great when they are all used together and cohesively. While the 3 types of sitemaps are used for distinctly different purposes, the best outcome will be had when all 3 are employed and are created with full effort. Using all 3 kinds of sitemaps will help to ensure that the website contains all of the basic information and content that is intended, but that it also functions successfully to provide a great user experience as they are browsing the website and looking for the information that is provided. Sitemaps also act as comparison points for various checkpoints in the life-cycle of a website.

1. Visual sitemaps

Visual sitemaps are used mostly as a planning tool that will help webmasters to organize and sort the content that will be included on the website, and helps to eliminate any pages that may be unnecessary. When doing this, a visual sitemap allows the webmaster to outline the purpose and goal of the website to be focused and easy to navigate, which will provide a great user experience to the website visitors. Visual sitemaps are ideal for when the webmaster is planning the project, managing it through the process, and maintaining it after it has been completed. Is it absolutely vital to have a visual sitemap in order to have a successful website? It is difficult to say, but having a visual sitemap is just one factor in the length of time that it takes to see success for a website. It is a great planning tool that comes in hand for every step of the way in building a website.

2. XML sitemap

XML sitemaps are structured in a way that the user does not need to see, but its purpose is to inform the search engines about the pages that are on the website, relates their importance to each other, as well as how often they are updated. The thought behind XML sitemaps is that some websites are made up of a large amount of pages that are only accessible through user entries and forms (think Amazon). This sitemap will contain URLs to all of the individual pages so that they can be found by web crawlers. This type of sitemap is much more precise than others—syntax must be exact because errors are absolutely not tolerated. An XML sitemap ensures that all nooks and crannies of a website are available to be crawled and indexed, so that

they can be found by search engines when relevant search queries are performed. This expands the chance that a website will show up in a search engine results page (SERP), reaching more users than without showing up on the SERP.

3. HTML sitemap

HTML sitemaps are designed with the user in mind, to help them find content on the web page. Because of this, the HTML sitemaps do not need to include every single subpage on the website. An HTML sitemap helps both website visitors and search engine bots to find web pages within a website. It should be noted that this format is not supported by Google's Webmaster Tools, thus it cannot be submitted. This is purely for the user experience, front end portion, and website search. Sometimes it is a component of the CMS.

Sitemap Generator Tools

1. DYNOMAPPER.COM

DYNO Mapper is a visual sitemap generator that makes planning your website's information architecture easy. Sort pages visually using Google Analytics metrics for discovery. Our premium features include Content Audit, Content Inventory, Keyword Tracking, and Website Accessibility testing. DYNO Mapper will export sitemaps in PDF. Using a visual sitemap generator will help you and your team keep on track, allowing you to create, edit, customize and share interactive visual sitemaps from scratch.

2. MINDMUP.COM

Mindmup is a free open source mind mapping tool that is available free and in the cloud. Mindmup allows users to create mind maps quickly that can be shared and bookmarked for friends and colleagues. The sitemap software launched in early 2013 with its first public beta version and since then the project has transitioned to open source with accessible repositories in GitHub. If you are just looking to storyboard a project, then Mindmup would be a perfect choice to achieve your goals.

3. SLICKPLAN.COM

Slickplan launched in 2009 and filled a void that had been present for creating visual sitemaps. The project started to fulfil an internal need to communicate design and architecture planning of web development clients of Awmous Agency. They made significant improvements from version 1.0 and the software now includes a diagram maker and the ability to display design mockups. Slickplan comes with a 30-day free trial.

4. WRITEMAPS.COM

You can create sitemaps using Writemaps' sitemap builder. Unlike most sitemap generators that include a website crawler, Writemaps provides a sitemap builder that lets you create sitemaps manually which is perfect for small projects. It also comes with features that aid in planning your content at the same time while displaying this content within shared their sitemaps. You can

share, export to pdf, and XML. The software has a free version available with plans starting at 14.99 per month.

5. MINDNODE.COM

If you would like to outline a project visually, mind mapping is a great place to start. This tool is perfect for brainstorming about a new project and gives you another option for writing and to-do lists. Mindnode shows an iOS preference with versions available for iPhone, iPad, and Mac. The software is available for a free trial on Mac and their mobile version costs \$9.99 in the Apple App Store.