An interesting, effective and optimised website[1]

Write interesting, relevant content regularly
- Define your audience[2]
- Plan your content strategy[3]
- What content goes on the site?[4]
- Editorial policy
  - Style guide[5]
  - How to link effectively[6]
- Rich media
  - Video
  - Podcasts
  - Data visualisation[7]
- Copywriting[8]
  - Plain English
- Support contributors[9]
  - How to write for the web
  - Writing tools
- Dynamic content[1]

Linking
- Outgoing links[26]
- Incoming links[27]
- Internal links[28]

Information architecture
- Evaluate current site content[13]
  - Make sitemap of current site[14]
  - Usability interviews
- Metadata
  - Title[16]
  - Description[17]
  - Keywords
- Card sorting exercises[18]
- Define new sitemap
  - List permalinks[19]
  - Define URL permalink structure[20]
  - Make list of old pages to archive[21]
  - Define the key landing pages
- Implement new sitemap[12]
  - Redirect old URLs to new permalinks
  - Your CMS is capable of maintaining new sitemap[23]
  - HTTP server response codes correct[24]
  - Make a helpful 404 error page[25]

Optimise page markup
- Use valid, semantic HTML[48]
- Maximise ratio of content to markup[49]
- Get real content near top of markup[5]
- Meta tags populated accurately

Social media
- Blogging
  - Use an RSS reader[41]
  - Comment on other people's blogs
  - Write your own blog
- Reputation management[42]
  - Google Alerts
  - Twitter Search
  - Addictomatic
- Share presentations[43]
- Twitter[44]
- LinkedIn[45]
- Share bookmarks[46]
- Google Maps[47]

Learn
- Visitors to your website
  - Talk to people who use your site![36]
  - Electronic surveys[37]
  - Usability interviews[38]
- Read blogs[39]
  - Blogs about managing websites
  - Blogs on similar topics to your[40] site content

RSS feeds
- Feed validation
- Google Feedburner
- Yahoo Pipes[51]

Monitor your site
- Traffic stats[29]
  - Google Analytics[30]
  - Google Feedburner
  - Google Webmaster Tools[32]
  - Yahoo Site Explorer
  - Live Search Webmaster Center
- Maintenance
  - Make an XML sitemap[33]
  - Hosting control panel[35]

Notes

1) An interesting, effective andoptimised website

This mindmap was originally created as personal learning tool with a view to improving findability, content and search engine performance of a public sector organisation's website.

Hopefully, this map is general enough for others to make use of when considering how to improve their own website or planning a new site.

There are some overarching ideas behind my approach:

1) You have limited resources so you need to concentrate on areas you can control. The map is broken down so that you can make incremental improvements to specific areas.

2) Your site is content-driven: first and foremost this is about writing interesting content relevant to readers and optimising your site as best you can.

3) Organic SEO: no sneaky tactics, no snake oil, no link exchange programs, no paid-for advertising. The SEO benefits of following a map such as this one will be as a result of writing more interesting content and making your site as easy as possible for search engines to access.

Gavin Wray
11 February 2009
www.gavinwray.com

2) Define your audience

Do you know who your target audience is, what they want and how you will give them what they want through your website? E.g.

1) Formal or informal language?

2) Are you writing for a wide audience or a specific niche?

3) Plan your content strategy

1) E.g. tie in with communication plan, which includes key launch dates for new products / events, etc..

2) When you have an idea for a new post, write it down now. It's easier to come back to a list of stashed ideas than start afresh with a blank page.

3) Save interesting bookmarks you come across and wish to reference later (e.g.with Delicious social bookmarks http://delicious.com). Star interesting items in your RSS feeds (e.g. Google Reader http://reader.google.com) is good for sharing with others.

4) If your site involves a team of contributors, you could try sharing a plan of posts (e.g. with timeline and responsible authors) using collaboration tools such as:

Basecamp
http://www.basecamphq.com

Remember The Milk
http://www.rememberthemilk.com

Google Docs & Spreadsheets
http://docs.google.com

Delicious social bookmarking
http://delicious.com

5) From SEO angle, fresh, accurate and regularly-updated content is the thing.

4) What content goes on the site?

Define what content is appropriate to go on the site and what isn't.

5) Style guide

A List Apart have a good style guide for contributors at:

http://www.alistapart.com/contribute/styleguide/

If you're writing a style guide for contributors working in the same organisation as yourself I would also include information on:

1) Political independence - state how contributors treat this. Can they have opinions or should they simply 'present the facts'?

2) Commercial products - can contributors express an opinion (positive or negative) about a product or company?

3) Terminology on disablity

4) Cultural sensitivity - especially if contributors are writing for an international audience

6) How to link effectively

Add links to text words and phrases that describe what the link is.

Use a link's title attribute to provide extra information within a link on what the reader can expect by clicking the link. The title may display as a tooltip and be spoken by a screenreader.

http://www.w3.org/TR/REC-html40/struct/links.html#h-12.1.4

7) Data visualisation

How to present tabular data in more interesting and accessible ways e.g. animated charts, maps.

Google Chart API
http://code.google.com/apis/chart/

Google Motion Chart
http://www.google.com/ig/directory?url=www.google.com/ig/modules/motionchart.xml

Gapminder
http://www.gapminder.org/

8) Copywriting

Write interesting content that is well-structured and informative.

Writing for SEO is a divisive issue. Personally, I don't advocate SEO-optimised copy as a genuine human reader can spot it a mile off as marketing fluff.

However, there are some tactics you can use in writing good copy for a reader that also benefit search engines crawling your site:

One principal topic per page

Link to other relevant pages on within your own website

Succinct, page and paragraph headings that are also rich in keywords

Summary bullet points

Hat tip @webcredible
http://www.webcredible.co.uk/user-friendly-resources/content/seo-writing.shtml

9) Support contributors

For example:

1) How to write for the web; pyramid structure.

2) How to find and add appropriate images.

3) How to link to files so readers can download the files.

4) Give feedback on contributions.

10) Writing tools

For example, Windows Live Writer.

Get away from the 'write in Word > paste in CMS > tidy up HTML' problems

11) Dynamic content

For example, content pulled in from other sites using RSS, such as delicious bookmarks or anything on Twitter tagged with a meme e.g. #brumtwestival

12) Implement new sitemap

1) Move your pages into the new sitemap structure.

2) Ensure all old URLs are redirecting correctly to new canonical URL / permalink.

13) Evaluate current site content

What's essential? What are the most popular pages?

14) Make sitemap of current site

Make a list in Excel of all the pages in your site. Boring but necessary job.

Keep a note of URL for each page (especially if there is more than one URL for the same page). Search engines don't like duplicate URLs. Later you'll 'canonise' (also known as 'normalise') the URLs and redirect all old versions to the single canonical URL.

15) Usability interviews

Find out what visitors really think of your site by asking them to perform routine tasks on the site while you watch.

You don't need an expensive testing lab or recording facilities to make this work. 1-to-1 face-to-face conversations can be highly valuable.

16) Title

1) Titles play a large role in seo.

2) Titles should be unique within your site. Use Google Webmaster Tools to flag up pages with duplicate title tags.

3) Generally limit to 10 words.

4) Don't repeat keywords within titles.

17) Description

1) Maximum of 160 characters.

18) Card sorting exercises

Useful to help learn how to organise content in a topic-based scheme.

1) No budget card sorting:

a) Create cards with one topic or title per card

b) Shuffle cards and spread around a table

c) Ask a group of people to sort cards into the groups they think are appropriate.

d) Analyse results to find agreements (hard on no budget)

2) With some budget you can use card sorting software:

a) Participants arrange topics in software

b) Software generates visualisation of relationships between items so you can see a picture of topic 'groups' emerging.

19) List permalinks

Note to self: check your terminology.

Record the desired permalink in your sitemap spreadsheet.

20) Define URL permalink structure

Decide on a structure for a page's permanent URL e.g.:

http://www.yourdomain.com/topic/the-title-of-your-page

... or:

http://www.yourdomain.com/year/month/daythe-title-of-your-page

1) Search engines like 1 URL for 1 page.

2) This is a long-term decision. You don't want to lose links from other sites if you reorganise your sitemap 12 months in the future.

21) Make list of old pages to archive

This isn't necessarily applicable to all sites.

1) Are there old pages that still serve a purpose but clutter up the site navigation and search results?

Consider creating an 'archive' template for these pages to catch visitors arriving from old bookmarks or cached search results.

Maintain these pages with links to the most up-to-date content.

This is better than arriving on a 'page not found'.

2) Add 'nofollow, noindex' to metadata to drop the page from a search engine index.

22) Redirect old URLsto newpermalinks

Technical: for large sites with lots of pages you'll need a programmer.

23) Your CMS is capable ofmaintaining new sitemap

Essential for those using a Content Management System to maintain the site going forward:

1) Can you specify the permalink individually per page?

2) If you move a page, does the permalink stay intact?

3) Does the metadata you add in CMS populate the correct meta tags in the generated HTML?

Nice-to-have:

1) Can the CMS automatically generate a new sitemap.xml file following edits in the CMS?

For example: Google (XML) Sitemap Generator plugin for WordPress

http://www.arnebrachhold.de/projects/wordpress-plugins/google-xml-sitemaps-generator/

24) HTTP server response codes correct

1) If you delete a page via your CMS, is the correct HTTP server response returned? (404 File Not Found)

2) Can you redirect a page within the CMS? If so, is the correct HTTP server response returned from the old page? (301 Page Redirect)

25) Make a helpful 404 error page

Isn't it annoying when you click on a link and your browser displays the default "Page could not be found" message.

Instead, show a customised error page that looks just like a standard page on your site.

Include helpful text for visitor to continue browsing the site.

26) Outgoing links

Linking is the foundation of the web. Having an open attitude to sharing information by linking out to other websites demonstrates that:

1) You are familiar with your field, associated topics, key figures.

2) You want to provide your reader with further information on the topic you are writing about.

If you link to other websites (this is particularly relevant to blogs), the person responsible for monitoring that site may notice that you have linked to them. This increases the likelihood that they will link back to you in the future (good for your SERPs).

3) Use meaningful link text e.g. placing the link on key words or phrases, not just names.

27) Incoming links

Incoming links to your site are core in terms of SEO.

If you have got a permalink structure in place, rest easy that external links will not break when you update your site structure.

Note: There's an entire industry dedicated to building up the number of incoming links (i.e. link from an external site to your site), some ethical, some less so.

In this project, I'm going to leave this section out. My attitude (probably terribly naive) is: if you 1) write interesting stuff and 2) people know that it exists they will link to you and share this information with their own networks.

Plus I have no experience in link-building strategies.

For a formal, commercial approach to link-building strategies, see Nick Garner's SEO roadmap:
http://www.sepguy.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/07/seomap.gif

28) Internal links

Link to related pages within your own site.

29) Traffic stats

How many people visit your site, what pages are being read the most, what keywords are people searching on that result in a visit?

30) Google Analytics

Fully-featured and easy to use website analytics tool. It's free too. I can't over-exaggerate just how valuable the information provided by Google Analytics has proved to be.

31) Google Feedburner

Set up your RSS feeds to pass through Google's Feedburner service:

1) Get stats on usage

2) Takes basic feed from your site and optimises to give it the best chance of displaying accurately across RSS reader software.

32) Google Webmaster Tools

Learn how Google is indexing your site and any problems encountered by the Google spider when crawling yor site.

This tool is helpful for fixing broken links, discovering problems with duplicate page titles plus lots of other useful tidbits e.g.

To target users specifically searching Google within UK, go to Google Webmaster Tools > Settings > Geographic target

33) Make an XML sitemap

A sitemap is a list of all page URLs on your site. Placing an XML sitemap file (typically on the root of your site e.g. http://www.yourdomain. com/sitemap.xml), enables search engine crawlers (e.g. Google) to find out what pages are present and which have recently changed, and to crawl your site accordingly.

Tools:

1) If your site has less than 500 pages, use http://www.xml-sitemaps.com to generate a compliant sitemap file for you to download - all you need to do is submit your homepage URL and it'll do the rest for you:

2) For sites with more than 500 pages, you may have to pay to generate a sitemap XML file using a web-based service.

3) Applications to make your own sitemap: I've tried GSiteCrawler (freeware, Windows-only) but did find it a bit tricky to use. Probably more suited to developers.

4) For WordPress sites, Arne Brachhold made the Google XML Sitemaps Generator plugin which does all the work for you. The plugin updates your sitemap file automatically when you update your site:

http://www.arnebrachhold.de/projects/wordpress-plugins/google-xml-sitemaps-generator/

34) Live Search Webmaster Center

Nowhere near as fully-featured as Google Webmaster Tools but worth having a look at anyway from time to time.

I like the display of total URLs indexed on the Summary page.

35) Hosting control panel

Most web hosting companies provide a control panel where you can view activity on your site - such as bandwidth usage, logs - and make changes to other server settings.

Depending on the type of host, quality of control panels can vary. This is worth considering if, like me, you are not comfortable working on your server directly and prefer a clear interface to make changes.

36) Talk to people who use your site!

Like, erm... face to face, over email, by telephone, on Twitter. Ask them what they think and what you can do better. Talk to people!

37) Electronic surveys

Ask the people who use your site what they think and how you can do things better.

38) Usability interviews

Of all the tools and techniques I've tried, basic usability interviews have proved the most useful. Watching how a person looks for information on your website, talking out loud as they do so, is really enlightening.

You can do this without a budget tool.

39) Read blogs

Subscribe to blogs in an RSS reader.

40) Blogs on similar topics to yoursite content

This might seem a bit obvious... as well as the actual content, it's useful to see how other organisations in your sector present themselves online.

Are other organisations doing something well that you can learn from and implement in your own site?

41) Use an RSS reader

An RSS reader is essential to keep track of your own sites, other people's websites, social media activities and news. Without it, you're driving blind. For example:

Web-based:

Google Reader
http://www.google.com/reader

Yahoo Bloglines
http://www.bloglines.com/

Windows:
http://www.feedreader.com

Mac:
Newsfire
http://www.newsfirerss.com

42) Reputation management

Listen to what other people are saying about you and learn how and when to engage.

43) Share presentations

You can use services such as SlideShare:

1) To share your PowerPoint presentations with others

2) As a tool to embed presentation slides within the body of your website pages. This is a nice alternative to providing links to 'download my presentation slides', where the user has to downlod and open a PowerPoint presentation or PDF, for example.

3) To create groups around common themes: for example, you can create a group on Slideshare on a specific theme to which members can post their presentations. Useful for gathering people around an event or in teaching situations.

44) Twitter

Use Twitter to have 2-way conversations. Engage with other people, follow other people on Twitter working in your sphere, share links, answer questions and others will engage with you.

Dos:

1) Add a link to your website from your Twitter profile.

2) Add a descriptive description about yourself in your Twitter profile.

3) Use a real portrait photo in your Twitter profile.

4) Be yourself.

5) Answer others' questions.

6) Share links.

Don'ts

1) Don't tweet anything that you wouldn't be happy for your partner/mum/boss/prime minister to read. It's a public conversation!

2) Use Twitter for marketing and PR:
http://www.howtousetwitterformarketingandpr.com

3) Just use Twitter to push out links solely to your own website / projects.

45) LinkedIn

This social networking isn't applicable to everyone but can be useful.

Of all the social networking sites, this is aimed firmly at professionals. It's business-like.

Ideas for website publishers:

1) Add a link to your website from your public profile

2) There are widgets within LinkedIn that can be used to display your blog posts on your LinkedIn profile.

46) Share bookmarks

Why use a social bookmarking site in terms of improving your website?

1) Personal productivity: Social bookmarking sites offer far better tools to organise your bookmarks than those available in your web browser. Access your bookmarks from anywhere.

2) Share: your bookmarks with colleagues and friends quickly. This is particularly useful if you are collaborating with others when writing content. You can quickly share and receive bookmarks to interesting content.

3) RSS feeds: You can pull in an RSS feed from sites such as delicious and display the contents within your own site.

47) Google Maps

Submit your office location to Google Maps Local Business Center. You can link to your office location.

You can also embed a Google Map within a page on your own website.

48) Use valid, semantic HTML

Follow the W3C's web standards.

49) Maximise ratio of content to markup

1) Maximise the ratio of 'real' content that the visitor reads over the HTML markup to display the page.

2) Strip out heavy use of JavaScript from within the markup and link to external files.

50) Get real content near top of markup

Remove as much markup as you can from the top of the page e.g. strip out Javascript into separate files and link to them.

If you need to include JavaScript, place it just before the closing tag. If there are problems with an external site or running the script, it won't prevent the rest of the page from loading (or slow it down).

51) Yahoo Pipes

Pipes can be used to "aggregate, manipulate, and mashup content from around the web".