What are best practices for designing breadcrumbs?

When it comes to web design, there are many types of navigational aids you can use. Examples include top navigation bars, sidebars, and footers. But if your site is on the more complex side with deeper levels of navigation, you might want to consider using breadcrumbs.

Breadcrumbs are a navigation aid that shows the user where they are in the site's hierarchy. Here is an example of what breadcrumbs look like for a mock-up electronics website:

Home / Electronics / Phones / Smartphone XYZ

In most websites, breadcrumbs are displayed at the top of the page, showing the user the path they took to get to the current page. Starting from the Homepage, the user navigated to the Electronics category, then to the Phones category, and finally to the Smartphone XYZ product. You have probably interacted with breadcrumbs on a website as you were searching for a product or specific piece of information.

The use of breadcrumbs is helpful because it can help users understand where they are in the site's hierarchy and how to navigate back to the previous pages. This is especially useful when a user has come from a search result or an external link and needs to understand the context of the page they are on.

When it comes to designing breadcrumbs, there are a few considerations to keep in mind. The first is to decide on what the separator will be. The separator is the character that separates the different levels of the hierarchy. Common separators include the greater than sign (>), right angle quotation marks (») ,and the forward slash (/).

The second consideration is the placement of the breadcrumbs. Breadcrumbs are typically placed at the top of the page, either above or below the main navigation bar. Users shouldn't have to struggle to find the breadcrumbs, so make sure they are visible and easy to locate.

Another consideration is the size of the breadcrumbs. You want to make sure the breadcrumbs are large enough to be easily read, but not so large that they take up too much space on the page. Remember, the breadcrumbs aren't meant to serve as a primary navigation tool, but rather as a secondary navigational aid. In websites where there is a lot of information on a page, users can easily see where they are in the hierarchy and navigate back to previous pages using breadcrumbs.

So when should you use breadcrumbs on your site? If your site is simple and has a shallow hierarchy, breadcrumbs might not be necessary. A shallow hierarchy means that the site has only a few levels of navigation, so breadcrumbs might not add much value. Typically, you will see breadcrumbs on e-commerce sites, news sites, and other sites with a deep hierarchy like technical documentation sites.