Information on Websites: Moving Around, Saying a Lot, and Remembering More

Arranging information in a website is hardly different from laying out furniture in a house. As much as you would group different kinds of furniture together in certain rooms, so would you group different kinds of information in certain pages.

If you're just starting out in building your own website, then this is a useful metaphor for you when it comes to positioning information effectively in your website and avoiding a confusing, unorganized mess.

Grouping information together
Beds, dressers and closets belong in a bedroom; kitchen appliances, cupboards and pantry shelves belong in the kitchen – you get the idea, right?

The idea is to categorize information. You don't want to be hopping from one page to another and back again to get a coherent set of information. You'd want them all conveniently contained in one page.

So for example, if you sell items on your website, group these into one page. (Of course if you have a lot of items to sell, categorize them into the different kinds of products as well).

If you maintain a website about your family or an association you're part of, group pertinent information together. It probably won't be helpful if you lump the family tree with the photo albums and the contact information all in one single page. That'd make for one very cluttered site.

Typical websites have major headings or categories, which are:
- Home (also called index) page
- About Me / Us page
- Resources page
- Contact page

A Home page should contain information that answers the question "What is this website about?" It should also display the other categories so a visitor can easily access them.

The About Me / Us page holds information about the person or organization who owns the website. Some websites don't have these, but it adds to reliability and attachment to the site when visitors are allowed information that lets them know more about the site's owner.

The Resources page holds useful and practical information for the visitor. Some

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resource pages also contain trivia and games, which many visitors enjoy. The resources page is usually the page that gets updated the most as resources are added or renewed. Updates on this page is usually the main reason a visitor comes back to surf the site again.

A contact page is usually the last page to be viewed by visitor when accessing a site. It is usually done only when the visitor wishes to directly communicate with the website's administrator and / or owner. While the information for this could have been included in the About Us page, a Contact page makes this getting information easier for the visitor. And ease in accessing information is an important factor in good website design.

Laying Them All Out
Now that you've got your categories and the information ready, now is the time to lay the information out on each page.

First of all, it is highly recommended that you maintain a uniform layout for all your website's major pages. This is to help the visitor orient himself quickly to your site navigate easily.

For example, if you locate the major headings of your website at the top area of your Home page, it is best that you do the same for all the rest of the pages. Getting a different layout for each page tends to confuse the visitor.

Hot Spots, Weak Spots
With a uniform layout, now it's time to begin prioritizing information. As it is with a room, a web page has choice focal points and weak spots. You should identify these areas on your web pages and lay out the information accordingly in degrees of priority.

Even with animation and graphics, the main medium of the Internet is still text. Since this is so, applying the principles of reading when laying out information on your website will make it so that viewing each page is easy and effective.

The English language is written (and therefore, also read) from left to right, top to bottom. The website visitor will skim the pages in this general pattern. So the information you consider the most important should ideally be located at the top left area of your web page.

Of course, the information may not necessarily be text as it could very well be a picture. But rest assured, what will be located in the top left will get the first and therefore, freshest attention from the visitor. It would do well to present your core message in this area.

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Other information follows as the progression from left to right, top to bottom continues. However, despite this pattern, a visitor is capable to digressing from such a pattern. In fact, next to the top left area, a visitor tends to notice the left and right margins of a page. Usually, links to other pages are located in the left side of the page, while pictures or advertisements are located at the right.

The center can either become the weakest or strongest area of a page, depending on how the other elements are laid out.

It becomes weak when the body is uniform all throughout (as one continuous block of text or pictures). However, if the body is strategically broken up, the center of the page becomes a prime focal point and therefore may rank as the most important area next to, if not higher than, the top left area of a web page.

While it is possible to have an endless length for a web page, it is highly discouraged. It is much preferred to have several short pages that are concise with easily seen information, rather than to have a few long ones that are crammed with text and pictures.

As you layout the information you wish to share on your website, keep in mind convenience and practicality as would in laying out tables and chairs in a room. You will soon find that you have come up with a website that is not only informative, but memorable as well, because of how well you laid it out.