

Building Findable Websites

Findability Strategy Checklist

This checklist is intended to serve as a findability best practices quick reference. Use it to make any new project, or modify existing ones to be more findable for your target audience.

The concepts in this checklist briefly summarize those discussed in detail in **Building Findable Websites: Web Standards, SEO, and Beyond** by Aarron Walter, published by New Riders. Each point references the corresponding section of the book where you'll find code examples and thorough explanations of the concept.

You'll find five free bonus chapters at the book's companion website <http://buildingfindablewebsites.com> along with relevant resources and downloadable code examples. The book is available at <http://peachpit.com> or at your local bookstore.

Recommendations for All Projects

Markup

Use valid markup that contains no errors that could make your page difficult for search engines to index. Validate your markup with the W3C's validation tool (<http://validator.w3.org>). See *"A Web Standards Primer"* in Chapter 2.

Write semantically meaningful markup. This means using tags for what they mean and how they relate to your message rather than how they style content by default. Use the W3C's semantics extractor to check your work (<http://www.w3.org/2003/12/semantic-extractor.html>), and view your site without CSS to determine if your information hierarchy appropriately communicates your message. See *"An Issue of Semantics"* in Chapter 2.

Write intelligent title tag text beginning with the page name, then the site name, then a short keyword-rich phrase descriptive of the site. See *"Essential Tags That Promote Findability"* in Chapter 2.

Use heading tags to define the key sections of your pages taking care to include relevant keywords. Place headings tags in the page in order of importance starting with `<h1>` for the site/organization name. See *"How to Use Heading Tags"* in Chapter 2.

Use image replacement techniques such as the Phark method or SIFR to display distinct typefaces and design for headings as needed. See *"Image Replacement: Accessibility, Findability, and Beauty Converge"* in Chapter 2.

Use the meta description tag to provide a description of your site to be displayed on search engine results pages. See *"The Myth of Meta"* in Chapter 2.

Keep presentation (CSS) and behavior (JavaScript) external so search engines aren't required to download them when indexing your pages. See *"Optimizing Performance for Efficient Indexing"* in Chapter 3.

Include `alt` and `title` attributes in image tags. Add `longdesc` and/or D links to detailed text descriptions of images where necessary. See *"More Keyword Opportunities in Accessibility Related Elements"* in Chapter 2.

Use `` and `` to markup keywords in select areas of your page where appropriate in order to emphasize their importance to search engines. See *"Essential Tags That Promote Findability"* in Chapter 2.

Use microformats to markup contact, event, resume, and review content to make it more portable and findable. Tag content with `rel="tag"`. See *"The Findability Benefits of Microformats"* in Chapter 2.

Don't use tables for layout. When using tables as they are intended – for tabular data – include descriptive, keyword-rich text in the `summary` attribute of the `table` tag and `caption` tag. See *"The Right and Wrong Way to Use Tables"* in Chapter 2.

Use CSS sprites to keep HTTP requests to a minimum. See *"Reducing HTTP requests"* in Chapter 3.

Use `abbr` and `acronym` tags with the `title` attribute to provide full text of all abbreviations and acronyms. See *"Reducing HTTP requests"* in Chapter 2.

Use `rel="nofollow"` in anchor tags when linking to sites of questionable or unknown reputation. See *"The Misleading `rel="nofollow"`"* in Chapter 2.

Server

Create search engine friendly URLs that don't require a query string, reflect your navigation structure, and are predictable. See *"Building Search Engine Friendly URLs"* in Chapter 3.

Choose a domain name that contains target keywords. See "Choosing and Managing Domain Names" in Chapter 3.

Take steps to resolve the Google canonical problem. See *"Choosing and Managing Domain Names"* in Chapter 3.

Include keywords in file and folder names throughout your site. See *"Files and Folders: The Power of a Name"* in Chapter 3.

Create custom 404 error pages to reorient lost users. See *"Getting Users Back on Track with Custom 404 Pages"* in Chapter 3.

Gzip files where possible. See *"Optimizing Performance for Efficient Indexing"* in Chapter 3.

Configure your server to cache certain files so search engines can index your site more efficiently. See *"Optimizing Performance for Efficient Indexing"* in Chapter 3.

Prevent indexing of files and folders where necessary using robots.txt. See *"Controlling Search Engine Indexing With robots.txt"* in Chapter 3.

Create a sitemap.xml file and notify all major search engines that support the format of its location. Include a directive to your sitemap.xml file in robots.txt. See *"Building and Submitting sitemap.xml"* in Chapter 8.

Content

Include content on your site that serves your audience's needs and interests. See *"The Mark of Quality Content"* in Chapter 4.

Include variety of content types on your web site. See *"Content of Many Flavors"* in Chapter 4.

Create a home page that effectively funnels your traffic into the content-rich areas of your site. See *"All Roads Lead to Content"* in Chapter 4.

Research keywords that will be most advantageous to target. See *"Targeting Keywords in Your Content"* in Chapter 4.

Place keywords in strategic locations throughout your pages. See *"Placing Keywords in Your Content"* in Chapter 4.

Evaluate your keyword density to ensure it is below seven percent. See *"Evaluating Keyword Density"* in Chapter 4.

Include RSS content from other sources relevant to your audience on your site. See *"Displaying RSS Content on Your Site"* in Chapter 4.

Keep your content open where appropriate using a Creative Commons (<http://creativecommons.org>) license that requires attribution in order to build awareness of your site and encourage open license searches. See *"Open Content Generates Attribution"* in Chapter 4.

Create link libraries or other useful repositories of information on a particular subject. See *"Using the RSS Parsing System to Create a Link Library"* in Chapter 4.

JavaScript, Ajax, Flash, Video, Audio and Other Potential Roadblocks

Build applications to work without JavaScript and Ajax before adding a behavior layer on top to ensure it gracefully degrades for search engine indexing. See *"Progressive Enhancement"* in Chapter 7.

Minify JavaScript where possible using Dean Edwards' Packer (<http://dean.edwards.name/packer/>). Be aware that some libraries like Prototype and Scriptaculous might break when minified. See *"Managing File Size" in Chapter 3*.

Use JavaScript to apply the `display:none` property so search engines don't mistakenly suspect your site is using black hat techniques. Use JavaScript to collapse and/or hide elements not default CSS. See *"Solving Scripted Style Problems" in Chapter 7*.

Make sure JavaScript is not required to navigate any area of your site. See *"Solving JavaScript Navigation Problems" in Chapter 7*.

Use SWFObject to embed Flash files into an HTML page that contains semantically marked up content. See *"Findable Flash" in Chapter 7*.

Create text transcripts of audio and video content. See *"Findable Audio and Video" in Chapter 7*.

Build image maps so the content they link to is accessible to search engines. See *"clearing Roadblocks Caused by Image Maps" in Chapter 2*.

Avoid frames at all costs. See *"Let Go of the Past to Embrace the Findable Future" in Chapter 2*.

Other

Use a link validator to locate broken links that need to be fixed (<http://validator.w3.org/checklink>). See *"Hunting Down Broken Links" in Chapter 3*.

Make sure your blog is set up to notify all major ping services when new content is published. See *"Defining Update Services" in Chapter 5*.

Create a site-wide search system that will help your audience find the content they seek. See *Chapter 6*.

Add social networking links under blog posts and other areas where appropriate to foster a viral exchange of your content. See *"Building Social Network Submission Links" in Chapter 9*.

Create inbound links to your site from directories, affiliates, friends, social network profile pages, blog posts, discussion boards, design galleries, and any other appropriate location. See *Chapter 10*.

Build an opt in mailing list and send periodic emails to subscribers with updates, news, discounts, or other valuable information. See *Chapter 11*.

Avoid using any black hat technique. See *Chapter 13*.

Observe traffic statistics in order to discover findability shortcomings, and discern which content you should develop further. See *Chapter 12*.

Redesigning or Moving a Site

Create 301 redirects to point all old URLs to new pages. See *"Moving Pages and Domains With 301 Redirects" in Chapter 3*.

Rebuild your `sitemap.xml` file, and ping all search engines to notify them of the revised site structure. See *"Building and Submitting `sitemap.xml`" in Chapter 8*.

When redesigning submit your new design to gallery sites to generate new traffic. See *"Building Inbound Links" in Chapter 10*.

When redesigning projects for clients, be sure to include a link in the footer back to your site. See *"Building Inbound Links" in Chapter 10*.

When redesigning update your custom 404 error page to let lost users know the new location of certain files. See *"Getting Users Back on Track with Custom 404 Pages"* in Chapter 3.

When redesigning watch your traffic stats closely to find the new site's findability shortcomings. See *Chapter 12*.