Organising Website Content: A Summary

Jim Byrne: Accessible Website Design For Non-Profits

(http://www.jimbyrne.co.uk)

- **Know your audience** and what they want from you: i.e. aim to make the things they are likely to look for the easiest to find.

- **Create a priority list of your target users**; and a priority lists of what they will be looking for on your site. That way you can address the main needs of the most important groups first.

- It can be helpful to Imagine typical users, how they might navigate through your site and how they might find what they are after.

- **Review your website statistics.** The most popular pages and search terms will be obvious: ensure you make them even easier to find. (Install Google Analytics and you can see the route people take through your site, the page they were viewing when they left - and much more).

- **Create more than one way to find the same thing**: Some users prefer search and some prefer browsing. Just like when a person visits a real store; some people ask staff and some just walk around. Some obvious ways to find things you could offer to visitors would be: search, browse via the main navigation, browse via the site map, ask via email, contact form or telephone.

- **Explore different organisation schemes**, e.g. alphabetic, by subject, by audience, by date. Most websites use a mixture of schemes; e.g. at the top level your scheme could be based on the needs of your audience (e.g for a site about a conference your audience groups could be exhibitors, visitors, press) - down a level the scheme used could be based on subject or alphabetical order. For example on a site selling books, a PHP programmer might click in to the technical books' area; then click Programming books, then PHP books - then browse those PHP books alphabetically. Or more likely - they will just search for PHP books from the home page.

- **Use a site-map tool** to visualise your site such as the free online tool http://writemaps.com

- A content management system can make it easy to offer several different schemes automatically: e.g. it can be easy to organise your content alphabetically, by topic or by date at the click of a link.

- **Group similar things together**. Group navigation visually: e.g. information related links in one place; dynamic things (discussion, social media) on another, play things (weather, games), organisation related things together (about us, press releases, employment opportunities, contact, staff...).

- **Decide whether your navigation will be shallow or deep**. Is everything going to be accessible from the home page, or do you need to burrow down to find things? One approach isn't necessarily better than the other; it's all about how easy and quickly things can be found.

- **Label things clearly and use familiar labels.** Clear and consistent labeling is obviously important. Is it clear what the person will get when they click that link? Does the page they go to have the heading they expect? Use conventions; e.g. Information about your organisation is in the 'About' area, information about your services in the 'Services' area, information about your products in the 'Products' area. 'Information for the press is in the 'Press' area - use 'Contact' for the contact form link.

- **Use search engine friendly urls**, e.g.. websitedomain.com/category/sub-category/pagename.php. Use all lower case, no spaces, don't use any 'funny characters'.

- **Navigation should be based on your content and visitor research**. Your navigation scheme should become clear from the way you have organised your content. I.e. it should be created with your users in mind: it should not reflect your internal organisation chart.

- **Use conventions to place navigation on the page**: horizontal main navigation across the top, left-hand for subsection navigation; right hand for navigation related to page topic. Search - is usually top right, at the very top and bottom is where you usually find contact information and a site-map.