



A-Z Site Indexes for usable, accessible information findability

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What is an index

- “A systematic arrangement of entries designed to enable users to locate information in a document.”--British indexing standard (BS3700:1988)
- Alphabetical (A-Z)
- Second-level terms (subentries)
- Variant, equivalent terms (multiple entry points)
- Cross-references (See, See also)

Structure of HTML A-Z Indexes

Back-of-the-book style index with:

- Hyperlinked main entries and subentries
- Hyperlinked cross-references (*See, See also*)
- Hyperlinked navigational letters
- Single page, or a page per letter
- Icons or notes for non-HTML or restricted documents

Advantages of A-Z Indexes

■ Over Search Engines:

- Indexed to substantive information
- Browsible pick-list precludes typos, singular/plural, variant term issues
- Points to specific information at anchors within pages

■ Over Hierarchical Site Maps, or Taxonomies:

- Index has multiple variant entries for different perspectives.
- Site maps/taxonomies can be structured in only one way, which may not be logical to all users. A-Z is logical to all.
- Back-of-the-book format familiar to users.
- Index can be any length; scrolling is not a problem.

Ideally have all three: search engine, site map, site A-Z index

Sites Best Suited for Indexes

- Not a high level of change
- Repeat users
- Small-medium number of pages, documents (10s – 100s)
- Specifically: institutions, membership organizations, intranets, information-oriented sites or sub-sites

Content Best Suited for Indexes

- Content not easily categorized into a taxonomy (e.g. policies, instructions)
- Content that is varied or broad (e.g. a general site or intranet)
- A combination of topics and names
- Content for varied users

Accessibility issues

- Don't use small font
- Clearly distinguish by color/underline hyperlinked vs. non-hyperlinked entries.
- For screen readers:
 - Wording of subentries should stand on their own, not only within the context of a main entry
 - Bulleted list may work better
- Place link to index on top (upper right?) of all pages of a site, not at the bottom.

Additional Resources

- Web Indexing SIG of the American Society for Indexing
<http://www.web-indexing.org>
- Web Indexing Discussion group
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/web-indexing>
- Creating Website Indexes” online workshop
Simmons Graduate School of Library and Information Science
<http://www.simmons.edu/gslis/continuinged>
- Books:
 - Hedden, Heather. *Indexing Specialties: Web Sites*. Medford, New Jersey: Information Today, Inc., 2007. ISBN: 978-1-57387-302-4.
 - Lamb, James A. *Website Indexes: Visitors to Content in Two Clicks*. Ardleigh, Essex, England: Jalamb.com Ltd., 2006. ISBN: 978-1-4116-7937-5.
 - Browne, Glenda and Jonathan Jermey. *Website Indexing: Enhancing Access to Information within Websites*, 2nd edition. Adelaide, South Australia: Auslib Press, 2004.