



## Effective Information Architecture for Search Engine Visibility

Keyword focus and link development should be at the center of an effective optimization campaign. However, they're useless if not used appropriately. Information architecture is essential to an effective SEO campaign. Are you getting bad information architecture advice from unqualified SEOs?

### Information Architecture Is Important

A site's information architecture communicates important information to search engines and end users. A page's focus should be obvious through specific content and keyword phrases. Visitors shouldn't need to scroll or read the full text to find it. The main call to action should be above the fold. If a visitor isn't prepared to take that action, what alternatives are presented?

A page should have visual and textual cues that clearly communicate the site area the user is viewing. Are HTML title tags and page headings concise and descriptive? Does the site use breadcrumb links? Is there a difference between visited and unvisited links, and is that difference clear to the user? If the site utilizes graphical navigation buttons, are on/off visual cues legible and unmistakable?

Site and page architecture can communicate keyword focus to end users and search engines. But if information architecture is so important to search engine visibility, why do SEO firms continually give bad advice about it?

Below are some examples of bad SEO advice.

### Blanket Statements About CSS-Formatted Text

Many SEO firm staffers have little or no expertise in user-centered design. Yes, search queries are text-based. And yes, Web pages should contain keyword-rich text to appear focused to search engines and end users. However, Web sites don't exist in a vacuum.

People won't link to or purchase from a site that isn't user friendly, even if it has a number one Google or Yahoo! position. Knowing how and when to use CSS-formatted text and graphic images is an important skill SEO professionals should have. I know few search professionals who truly comprehend visual affordance.

### Usability Has Nothing to Do With Sales

Effective site usability strikes a balance between user and business goals. If a site only satisfies user needs, it can't sustain itself (i.e., make money). If it only satisfies business goals, users won't likely purchase from it and won't link to it if it's difficult to use and navigate. Creating and maintaining a search-friendly site is an important part of meeting both user and business goals.

**HTB's hotel e-Marketing success formula: TRACK. ANALYZE. OPTIMIZE.**



## **Split Up Content on Subdirectories, Subdomains, and Microsites**

If a professional information architect dispensed this advice, I might be OK with it. An information architect would create a site that consistently uses and places site navigation and relevant cross links. The URL structure would also support a page's desired message whenever possible. However, too many search engine optimizers produce a divide-and-conquer strategy without truly comprehending its long-term consequences.

For example, many SEO firms used to recommend sites build subdomains (e.g., <http://subdomain.domain.com>) instead of subdirectories (e.g., <http://domain.com/subdirectory>) because a subdomain's home page acted as an additional home page. Search engines supposedly weigh a home page more than other site pages, so a site with multiple home pages should rank higher in search engines, right?

As long as pages are cross-linked well, URLs with subdirectories can rank just as well as URLs with subdomains. The depth of subdirectories doesn't matter either, as long as related pages are cross-linked well. An information architect can clearly define different types of cross linking and knows how and when to apply these cross links to various Web pages.

## **Cleaning the Mess**

I often shudder when I read RFPs with advice from other SEO firms. One company received SEO and information architecture advice from a rather large SEO firm that specializes in Web copywriting. Granted, copywriting is a key component of a successful SEO campaign. However, as no one at this firm has any background in site architecture, the current site is a huge mess.

It has subdomains, subdirectories, and microsites in addition to the main site. Even if visitors can find the page with the desired information, the navigation and URL structure is utterly confusing. Users might think, "Do I purchase this product on one site and get the accessory from another? How come the global navigation scheme changes when I click on this link? Maybe the site isn't trustworthy."

Bingo! Will people purchase from a site that appears untrustworthy? No. Will they link to a site that appears untrustworthy? No.

I've seen other RFPs with advice from self-proclaimed advanced SEO firms, whose staff consists primarily of programmers with little or no design, copywriting, and information architecture skills. Quite often, these messes are harder to clean up than others. I have to deal with multiple link farms, multiple sites with duplicate (or near-duplicate) content, and horrendous site architecture.

## **Conclusion**

I feel bad for prospects who received poor information architecture advice from SEO firms. If these firms give such great advice, why are the RFPs on my desk? Be

**HTB's hotel e-Marketing success formula: TRACK. ANALYZE. OPTIMIZE.**



realistic. If the problem is poor information architecture, fix the problem. Work with an SEO firm that understands effective information architecture.

###

**About Hotel Traffic Builders (HTB):**

We are a full-service digital marketing agency dedicated to the boutique hotel & residential resort industry.

Our mission is very simple: ***"To maximize sales success by providing our clients with exceptional internet marketing results"***.

Our clients consistently enjoy industry leading success because of our dedicated focus and experience. Our use of state-of-the art tools, best in class technology and wealth of industry experience enable us to provide full solution applications. We recognize that our clients are experts at running their hotels, and our role is to develop and maintain online marketing leadership for our client hotels.

We differentiate ourselves through:

**Industry Expertise**

We have a singular specialized focus on boutique hotel, resort and vacation home e-Marketing. Our sole goal is to be the best at what we do by ensuring maximum success for all of your e-marketing activities. Our 52 person design and development technology team delivers unparalleled quality and results. Our sole focus is resort marketing.

**Individual Customized Creative Approach & Solutions**

Every client has unique needs, opportunities and priorities, our e-Marketing plans are always custom built and based on in-depth research of your specific hotel.

**Cutting Edge Technology**

We use proprietary state of the art tools and applications that enable project efficiency, measurability and success of your e-marketing. We not only promise success, we document it in a 24/7 real-time secured private reporting platform that we create for every hotel client. Our clients never wonder about how hard their marketing dollars are working because they always know!

**Return On Investment**

The true measurement of our success is our proven ability to deliver reservation bookings. We grow booking results year over year, and we grow advance bookings, which result in higher occupancy levels and ADRs.

**Contact us at: [www.HotelTrafficBuilders.com](http://www.HotelTrafficBuilders.com) or call us 954- 421-6399**

**HTB's hotel e-Marketing success formula: TRACK. ANALYZE. OPTIMIZE.**