



## Roadmap Series

Issue 12

# HTML and XML Sitemaps for SEO

Prepared by Neil Beadle

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Recommended Experience Level

1

Beginner

2

Intermediate

3

Advanced

# HTML and XML Sitemaps for SEO

Produced by Neil Beadle

Creating an HTML sitemap and a XML sitemap for your website could be the easiest thing you do to improve your exposure on the web. For those of you who pay close attention to the search engine optimization (SEO) of your site, this could be the one thing that gets you onto the first page of Google's results. For those who don't devote too much time on the SEO of their site – this is a good place to start. By submitting a sitemap to various search engines, you are telling them that you exist and what pages your site has to offer the World Wide Web.

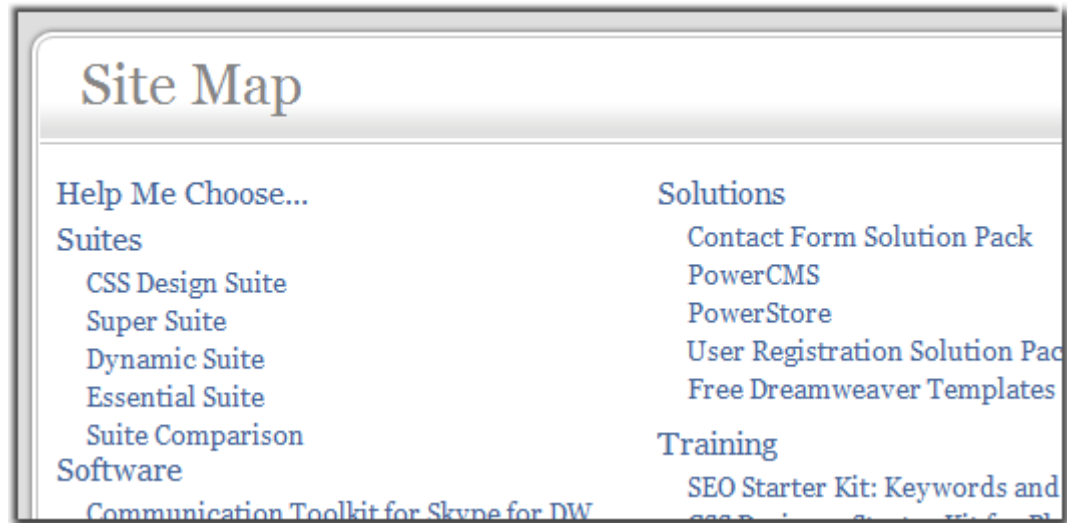
There are two types of sitemaps, HTML and XML. An HTML sitemap provides a useful directory of all the pages that are in your site. While XML sitemaps play an important role in helping the search engine "crawl" the various pages of your site. This Roadmap discusses the benefit of creating both an HTML sitemap and XML sitemap, and how you can go about creating them using a [sitemap generator](#).

## HTML sitemaps

An HTML sitemap is a single HTML page that contains links to all the pages of your website. Normally, this is accessible via a link in your site footer, where it will be displayed on every page. With large sites, it is easy to get lost and struggle to find the page you are looking for. With a well organized HTML sitemap, your site visitors will be able to use this to easily find the page they are looking for.

From an SEO perspective, as the search engine's robot (or spider) crawls your site indexing pages, it may find some pages on your site easier using this sitemap, rather than through the general navigation. Therefore, sitemaps can benefit your site visitor's and even play a role in enhancing your exposure on the web.

Take a look at [WebAssist's sitemap](#) to get an idea of what an HTML sitemap looks like. Notice that each page on the WebAssist website contains a link to this page in the footer.



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## XML sitemaps

HTML sitemaps are designed to benefit your human site visitors, however XML sitemaps are created specifically for the search engines. All of the most popular search engines including Google, Yahoo and Ask.com utilize XML sitemaps as part of their process for indexing the pages of a website. A good XML sitemap will tell the search engine what pages are in your site, how often those pages are updated, and when they were last modified. This way, the search engines know which pages to revisit more regularly, and are likely to do a better job of indexing them.

Here's an example of the XML you might include in your XML sitemap:

```
<url>
  <loc>http://mysite.com/index.htm</loc>
  <lastmod>2009-03-05</lastmod>
  <changefreq>weekly</changefreq>
  <priority>1.0</priority>
</url>
```

Notice that for the index.htm page of this website, we have provided details regarding the last modified date (<lastmod>), the frequency that this page is updated (<changefreq>), and the priority of this page in relation to the other pages of our site (<priority>). By providing this information as accurately as possible to the search engine, they will be better equipped to index your site, and give the correct pages the appropriate attention.



Be honest about the information you provide in your sitemaps. If a search engine finds that you are not updating your site as often as your sitemap suggests, they may come back less often.

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## Creating both HTML sitemaps and XML sitemaps

Creating HTML sitemaps is as easy as creating a basic HTML page that contains links to all the pages in your site. However, you need to keep in mind that whenever you create new pages in your site, you will want to add those links on the sitemap as well.

Creating XML sitemaps manually can be quite a time consuming process. However, there are many great [sitemap generators](#) out there to help you automate this. If you Google "sitemap generator" you will find that there are a number of free and paid sitemap tools that you can use.

Here at WebAssist, we have developed [Surveyor](#) to help you create both HTML sitemaps and XML sitemaps. Surveyor is a [Dreamweaver extension](#) that you can use as part of your website development. For Dreamweaver users, this is the easiest and most efficient way to create sitemaps. Surveyor includes multiple step-by-step interfaces that guide you through creating your sitemap with all the necessary details, and then submits your sitemap to the five most popular search engines on the web (as shown in figure below). Surveyor even includes a reminder tool that you can schedule to alert you when it is time to submit an updated sitemap.



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## How often should I submit my XML sitemap?

You should be in the habit of submitting a sitemap to search engines a number of times a year. This allows you to update the search engine on any new pages in your site. If you create new pages on a regular basis, you may want to submit your sitemap more frequently.

## Conclusion

Both HTML sitemaps and XML sitemaps are a good step in the right direction to improve your website's exposure. You will most likely find your search engine rankings climb after submitting a sitemap for the first time. However, keep in mind that this is only one part of search engine optimization, and there is a lot more you can do to improve how search engines rank the pages in your site, and your website's discoverability.

To gain a greater understanding of what more you can do to improve your website's SEO, take a look at the [SEO Starter Kit from WebAssist](#). This interactive training will guide you through understanding how a search engine works, and how you can create keyword-rich content for your website.

## About WebAssist

WebAssist helps you build better websites faster by offering software, solutions, and training needed to succeed on the web. WebAssist.com hosts a thriving community of over 300,000 designers, developers, and business owners. WebAssist's partners include Adobe, Microsoft, and PayPal.

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