

Web's **Worst** Practices Find My Content!

Imagine, if you will, that you walk into a retail store wanting to find a specific item (say, garden hoses). Your first assumption is that the store will have signs over the departments saying what the general department is. Well, this store doesn't have signs – any signs at all. Thinking that you'll get lucky, you decide to manually search the store for your garden hose. You make another assumption that this store has employees. Well, there aren't any employees in sight except for one: a cashier, and all the cashier knows how to do is process your money. Being persistent, you keep searching the store for your garden hose. After searching for about ten minutes or so, you come upon the Outdoor department only to find rakes, canoes, hammocks, and grass seed. You would assume that “garden hoses” would be here. Well, guess what: they're not.

Even though this little story is very fictitious in the real world, it's not fictitious at all when browsing most websites. See, most people visit a website assuming that they can find what they need easily. They think that when visiting a site, they can find the section they need (or in this case, the “department”) or some people look for the Search feature (in this case, the “Employee”) to find what they want. The main point is that most websites aren't designed with the visitors in mind. Sure, the Employees of the business know how to navigate the website because they either use it every day or ask someone how to use it. However, when viewing this situation from an outside perspective, most websites are hard and confusing.

This is actually referenced in “Don't Make Me Think” by Steve Krug, who talks more in detail about Site Searching or Site Locating. When browsing a retail store, most people give up after about 10-15 minutes if they don't find their item. When most people are browsing a website for one specific piece of information, they usually give up after **2 minutes**. Think about this for a while: if someone comes to *your* website looking for a specific piece of information and doesn't find it, do you think they will return?

Krug also mentions that by including both general section titles like Home, About, Services, Products, etc (like “departments”) *and* a Search feature (like an “employee”), 99% of people visiting your site will be able to find what they need and find it quickly. I know that most “designers” think that their design is the “best” and it's easy to use. But if **Usability Tests** are performed, how many do you think will actually pass? Not many, I can say that.

Next time you are having a website developed, don't always “assume” that your visitors can find what they want easily. Ask someone (who doesn't know your site very well) to find a specific piece of information and watch where they go and what they do. You may be amazed at where (and how) they go.

To sum up: Design your site with your visitors in mind. Include general Section titles (“Departments”) *and* a Search feature (“Employees”) to satisfy your visitors. They will thank you.