

January 2008 Myth Buster:

The design of the website is a visual masterpiece, but is it search engine friendly?

The visual aesthetics of a website are equally important to the fundamental code that renders the graphics and content behind it. Websites require Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) documents to display content (i.e. photos, information, movies, etc.) in a web browser. The documents are comprised of a mix of HTML content to be shared and other presentational markup (i.e. code). Search engine “web crawlers” scan these HTML documents for keywords, content, and other information to gather about the website. A web crawler (commonly referred to as “spiders and bots”) is a program or automated script, which browses the Internet in an automated manner. Spiders and bots are mainly used to create a copy of all the visited pages for later processing by a search engine that will index the downloaded pages to provide fast searches. Search engines such as Google, Yahoo, and MSN then use the gathered data to determine the organic placement of the site in their directories.

The goal is to allow search engine spiders and bots to scan the documents as quickly and efficiently as possible in order to find what they want: keywords and information about the site. Large amounts of HTML content can prevent the spiders or bots from finding the information effectively it is searches, hindering the website’s potential for high placement in the search engines’ listings.

There are two popular methods for building a website’s structure. The first method is to use tables. HTML tables were originally created to display tabular data; however, web developers use tables to control the visual layout of a HTML document. Using tables to layout the website structure has been a long-standing practice, and if it weren’t for tables, websites may not have evolved into the graphical works of art we see today. Unfortunately, tables create a lot of HTML code, along with other cumbersome presentational markup. As a result, these websites are bloated, unstable, and possess difficult roadblocks for search engines spiders and bots.

The second method is to use Cascading Style Sheets (CSS). As the Internet evolves and its popularity increases, Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and organic positioning has become a vital component to any successful Internet marketing strategy. Consumers wanting to succeed in their SEO efforts with their website are faced with new challenges and needs continuously. Needs such as lighter HTML documents for increased downloads speeds, greater usability, and a push from the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) to standardize the way websites are created. CSS has fulfilled these requirements and has proven to be the de-facto, more modern method to develop websites.

By separating the HTML and content from the presentational markup with external CSS files, the search engine spiders and bots can quickly and efficiently scan through the now light HTML data, and gather the crucial information about the site needed to gain high search engine placement. Unfortunately, not many developers and web design companies have made the transition to structuring sites with CSS and CSS positioning, thwarting search engine optimization efforts.

RezNEWS Tip: When purchasing a new website, ensure the site is developed with CSS positioning.

Conclusion:

Modern sites should be developed using modern techniques. Using CSS to develop a site will net you better results in terms of search engine optimization, maintainability, and usability. This month's myth, that your website's code isn't important is...**BUSTED!**

About the author

Kevin Guill is the Design and Development Manager for RezStream. He is focused on developing visually appealing, standards-compliant, and high-performing websites for users to enjoy.

[Click here](#) for any comments you might have about this article.