Best Practice Site Structures for the Site Manager CMS

Key Principle

Organizational hierarchy is a key differentiating principle that Site Manager uses when compared to a traditional file system approach to content management. While Site Manager does support files and folders, the hierarchical definition of content allows for a few benefits:

- Automated navigation
- Visual linkage to information architecture
- Encapsulation and reusability

Automated navigation

The ability to create navigation on the fly is a time-saving feature built in to Site Manager. By using automated navigation, “dead” links are minimized, and new content can be immediately integrated into a site without manipulating the other pages.

Visual linkage to information architecture

By expanding the nodes, a person unfamiliar with a site can quickly understand the informational architecture of the website.

Encapsulation and reusability

By adhering to best practices, site owners can readily reuse content and navigation structures within their site. These objects can be contained within folders so that they do not interfere with the main flow of information in the website.

Background: Traditional File Based Structure

In a traditional file system approach, html files are stored within folders and sub folders on the server. The presentational relationship amongst these disparate pages is defined at the code level. So although a page might be nested several folders down, it might be presented as relevant to the content on the home page. There is not any inherent automated system for defining relationships amongst the pages; rather, all the informational relationships and links are created explicitly through code or scripting programs.

Best Practice Site Structures

Although Site Manager will not explicitly prevent you from following best practices there certainly may be an extenuating circumstance or reason to deviate from best practices. After having created, assisted, and managed hundreds of sites, we have found that these structures to be robust in practice and simple in management. These structures facilitate reliability and ease of use in automated navigation, sharing, and other features of Site Manager.

Single Root

The single root site structure can serve everything from a simple site that only has a few pages, to a site that has a deeply nested informational structure. The basic format is a default or "home" page that is the principle entry point to the site. From there relevant ideas in the form of content pages are delivered as "child pages" to the home page. This process can repeat down any number generations.

Multiple Root

Some sites that serve multiple audiences but rely on reusable content have multiple roots. Each root contains a recursive single root structure.

Secondary Clusters

Secondary clusters of pages and external links might represent a special case of navigation, a group pages that are not typically pulled in to any formal navigation structure, or are grouped together for organizational purposes. These secondary clusters are typically housed in a folder. Examples might be newsletters, spotlights, or pages related to a special event.

Excluded Clusters

Excluded clusters of pages are pages that are explicitly excluded from any navigation structures. These pages might represent special marketing campaigns, or information that is targeted to a small, a-typical audience for the website. These pages are marked "Do not display in navigation" and should be housed in a folder. Examples of these types of clusters might be announcements that are linked from brochures, single page advertisements, or registration pages for special events.

Experimental Clusters

Often times during the course of ownership of a website, there is a need to share a design or work in process with a limited audience. Typically during a radical redesign of presentation or content, the developer will create a secondary structure to use, but might not want the pages publically available. The best practice is to use the above structures, but house them in a folder that is in the root.

Archival Structures

Occasionally after a significant redesign, the old content of a site may be kept locally for quick retrieval or recovery of information that was not included in the new site. These pages are typically just moved to a folder that resides in the root. The pages in an archival structure, if not intended for public consumption, should be marked as "unpublished".

Structures to Avoid

Flat System

All content is stored in the root of the site. There is no hierarchical structure to the site.

Imitated File Systems

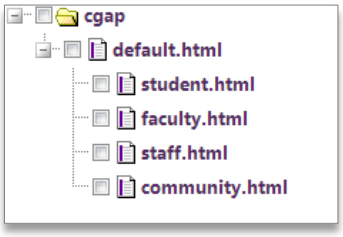
Trying to recreate what you see in DreamWeaver or the file system.

Outlier Structures

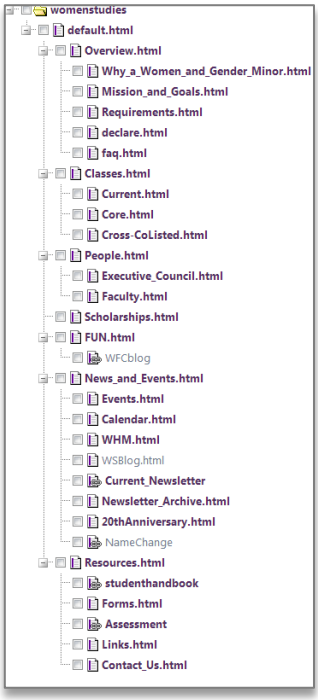
Anything structure that contradicts your information design would be considered an outlier structure. For example, placing content that is expected to be in automated navigation under a “Do not display in navigation” node or under an “unpublished” node would be a contradictory practice. Similarly, using folders instead of recursive page nodes would be considered an outlier. Folders should house secondary and excluded clusters rather than content that is intended to participate in the general flow of the website. Additionally, a structure that implements an unexpected behavior, such as creating external links to pages that are in existence elsewhere in the site would prove unexpected. Typically these structures arise because best practices have not been followed regarding secondary and excluded content.

Appendix A – Examples

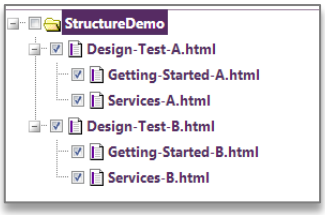
Single Root – Shallow:



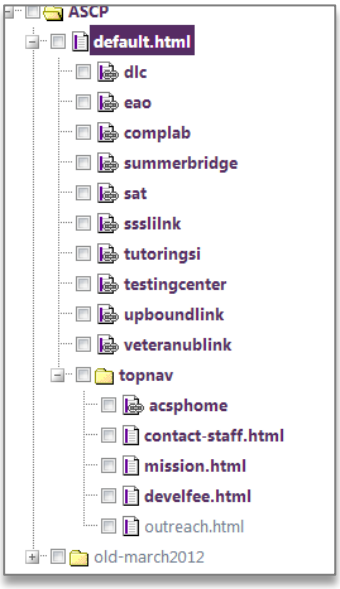
Single Root – Deep:



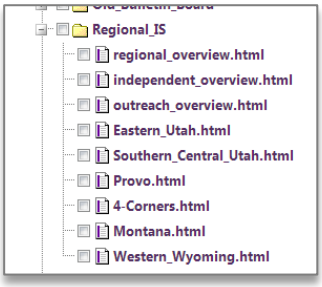
Multiple Root:



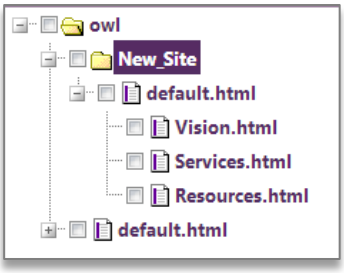
Secondary Cluster:



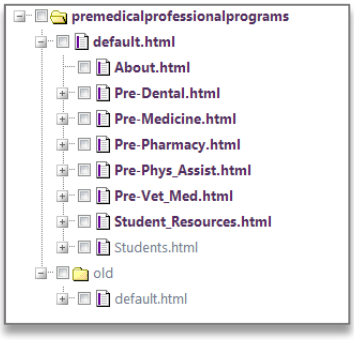
Excluded Cluster:



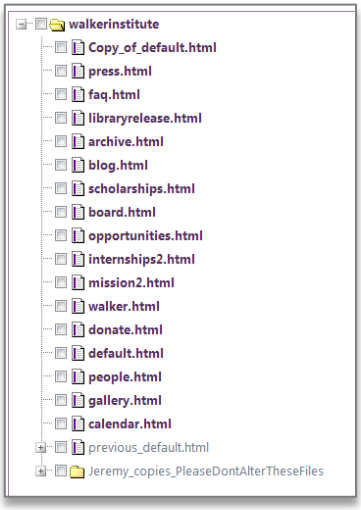
Experimental:



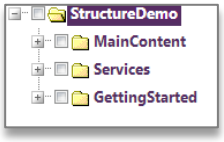
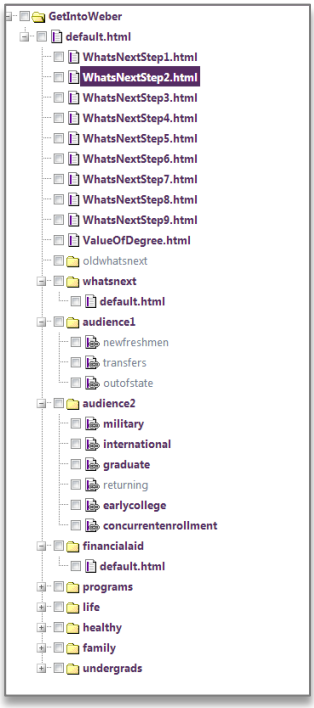
Archival:



Flat:



Imitated File System:



Outlier: