

CoffeeCup Software

# Sitemap

Handbook



**CoffeeCup**<sup>®</sup>

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# Sitemap Handbook

## INTRODUCTION: WHY YOU SHOULD USE A SITEMAP

We're gonna cut right to the chase: If you have a Website, it needs a sitemap. No exceptions and no excuses. We'll say it again: **If you have a Website, it needs a sitemap.**

And why's that? Because sitemaps form the perfect intersection of usability and SEO; or in layman's terms, they make your site easier for your visitors to find and use. Putting a sitemap on your Website has a positive effect on your search engine rankings, which helps increase your traffic. And when people visit your site, the sitemap gives them an additional navigation option.

Here at CoffeeCup Software, we believe that the best Websites are created when they're backed by a solid understanding of Web design principles. That's why we put together the CoffeeCup Software Sitemap Handbook. This 100% plain English guide holds all the answers to the burning questions you have about sitemaps, such as:

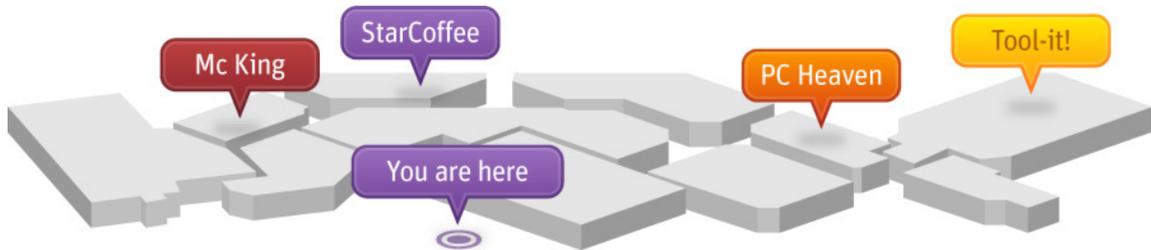
- What is a sitemap?
- How do users benefit from sitemaps?
- How do search engines use sitemaps?
- How can I get the most out of my sitemap?
- How do I create a sitemap by hand?
- How do I submit my sitemap to the major search engines?
- Is there an easier way to create sitemaps?

If your site doesn't have a sitemap yet, don't sweat it! This guide has all the information you need to create one and add it to your Website. If you already have a sitemap, great! You'll learn how to streamline it, transforming it into an intuitive, efficient resource for users and search engines alike.

We're going to start simple and work our way up to more advanced concepts. If you're comfortable with the basics, feel free to jump ahead to whatever section best suits your needs.

## What Is a Sitemap?

Imagine you're in a shopping mall, and you want to find a specific store. Chances are, you'll find your way to the nearest directory. Not only does it give you an idea of where you are and where the store is, but it also shows the structure of the entire mall, as well as a complete list of stores arranged by category.



That's exactly how a sitemap works. A **sitemap** is a Webpage that displays the structure of your Website, complete with links to your most important and useful pages. Here's an example of how a sitemap might look:



Beneath the surface, sitemaps are powered by two files: an **HTML** file, which is the sitemap Webpage itself, and an **XML** file that contains information tailored for search engines. Because of the dual duties they perform, sitemaps are a great tool for Website **usability** and **SEO**. We'll talk about these concepts and how they relate to sitemaps in the next two sections, so read on!

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## Whoa, whoa, hold up. What are HTML and XML?

Glad you asked! **HTML** stands for **HyperText Markup Language**, and it's the code used to write Webpages so that Web browsers (e.g. Firefox and Internet Explorer) know how to display them. **XML** stands for **Extensible Markup Language**. XML documents are similar to HTML documents, except their job is to hold information. If that sounds super-generic, that's because it is. XML is really flexible, and can be used to store any kind of text information you can think of — from scientific data to notes passed back and forth by bored kids in computer science class. In the case of sitemaps, XML documents contain information about all the links that appear in the map. Search engines use this information when they scan the sitemap. We'll get into that a bit later. [\[Jump Ahead\]](#)

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## What Is Usability?

Have you ever been to a Website that you couldn't figure out how to use? Maybe the navigation menu had a weird setup, or the information you needed wasn't in a logical place. Chances are you probably clicked around for a few seconds, got frustrated, and gave up.

That's what happens when a webmaster ignores **usability**, the concept of how easy a Website is to use. The ideal Website makes it easy for users to get where they want to go, and easy to find the information they are looking for. The navigation is an intuitive, fluid process that doesn't require too much thought.

Although they are by no means a replacement for a solid navigation bar, sitemaps are still an important usability tool. They give your users a helpful navigation alternative, one they often turn to as a last-ditch attempt to find what they need. [\[Learn More\]](#)

## What Is SEO?

**SEO** stands for **Search Engine Optimization**, and it's a series of strategies you can use to make your Website easy for search engines to find and index. The ultimate goal of SEO is getting a high ranking in search results.

You're probably aware of how important it is for your Website to be search-engine friendly. After all, the Web is a big place, and search engines are usually the first place people go to find the information they're looking for. One really, really simple SEO strategy is — you guessed it — adding a sitemap to your Website. Having a sitemap is considered a sign of professionalism, and submitting it to the major search engines is an easy way to make sure your site gets scanned. [\[Learn More\]](#)

These factors have a positive effect on your search rankings and increase the findability of your Website. Naturally, a sitemap isn't a magic formula that will instantly get you a top ranking in Google. But it is a sound practice, and it certainly can't hurt.

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## Usability > SEO

We gotta say it: Yes, SEO is important, but your users are much more so. A lot of Web designers fall into the trap of putting so much emphasis on SEO that they create a site that fails to take the user's experience into account. Don't make this mistake! Always remember that you're making a Website for people, not search engines.

If that doesn't convince you, you should also keep in mind that search engines are getting more and more sophisticated all the time. These days, they can see through many of the tricks webmasters use to try to increase their ranking. So don't go trying any of that shady stuff, y'hear?

One of the great things about sitemaps is that they're totally legit from an SEO and a usability perspective. That means using a sitemap is a total win-win.

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## Recap

- No Website is complete without a sitemap.
- A sitemap consists of two files: an **HTML** page for your users, and an **XML** file for search engines. Both files contain links to and information about Webpages in your site.
- **Usability** is the ease of use of a Website. Sitemaps increase usability by providing an additional navigation option.
- **SEO** is a series of strategies that make your site easier for search engines to find. Submitting your sitemap to search engines can help ensure that your site gets scanned.

## HOW SITEMAPS ARE USED

So now you know that sitemaps are an important way to ensure that your users get the most out of your Website and that search engines can find and index your pages. In this section, we'll talk about how exactly sitemaps work from the perspective of the user as well as the search engine. But first, we'll tell you a bit about how sitemaps came about.

### A Brief History of Sitemaps

Sitemaps have been around almost since the beginning of the Web itself. See, back in the early days of Web design, navigation menus were still in their infancy, and search engines didn't work all that well. So webmasters often turned to HTML sitemaps as a reliable way to help users navigate their sites.

Gradually, Web technology evolved, search engines got stronger, developers ironed out navigation menu wrinkles, and sitemaps started to disappear. That is, until June 2, 2005, when Google introduced Google Sitemaps 0.84, with the hopes that this new technology would help keep their index current and give webmasters a chance to let Google know their Websites existed.

"Initially, we plan to use the URL information webmasters supply to further improve the coverage and freshness of our index," wrote Engineering Director Shiva Shivakumar on the official Google blog. "Over time that will lead to our doing an even better job of delivering more search results from more websites."<sup>1</sup>

The premise was simple: Webmasters would include an XML sitemap in their Website that contained links to their Webpages, as well as information about how important the pages were and how often they were updated. They could then send this file to Google, which would scan the file, add the Webpages to its database, and factor the information about importance and update frequency into each page's ranking. The idea caught on, and by November of the next year, MSN (now called Bing) and Yahoo! offered sitemap support. Ask.com and IBM got on board in April of 2007.

These days, sitemaps don't have quite the same weight with search engines as they used to, but they still play an important role in search engine indexing and ranking. You'll learn the specifics of how this works in the next few sections.

## The Anatomy of a Sitemap

As we've explained, a sitemap actually consists of two files: the HTML page that your visitors can use to navigate your site, and an XML file used by search engines to help index your site and assign priority to certain pages. You already saw an example of an HTML sitemap in the introduction, but let's take another look, just to refresh your memory:



This is just one example of how a sitemap might look. There are lots of different ways you can set them up, either by designing the page in a WYSIWYG editor, styling an HTML page with CSS, or customizing a theme in a program like CoffeeCup Sitemapper.

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### What is CSS?

**CSS** stands for **Cascading Style Sheets**, and it's a language used to apply styles to HTML. You'll remember from earlier that HTML is used to designate the structure of a Webpage; with CSS, you can change the appearance of that structure. For more information about CSS and to see how many different looks you can apply to one HTML structure, check out the CSS Zen Garden: <http://www.csszengarden.com/>.

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The XML version of the sitemap is totally different from the HTML version. First off, it isn't displayed anywhere; it's just a text file filled with XML code. Here's the code for a simple sitemap that contains only one link:

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="UTF-8"?>
<urlset xmlns="http://www.sitemaps.org/schemas/sitemap/0.9">
  <url>
    <loc>http://www.yoursite.com/</loc>
    <lastmod>2009-12-14</lastmod>
    <changefreq>weekly</changefreq>
    <priority>0.7</priority>
  </url>
</urlset>
```

Let's take this apart and examine what everything does.

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### A brief overview of XML code.

If you're looking at the sample XML code and going, "Whoa, whoa, what the heck is all that?" don't panic. It's actually really easy, once you have a basic understanding of how **tags** work. (Psst: If you already know HTML, you can skip this part.)

A **tag** is a special keyword enclosed in angle brackets (< and >) that acts as an identifier — kind of like a clothing tag that tells you the size of the garment and how to care for it. Tags usually come in pairs and surround the content they identify. For instance, take a look at this line of code from the XML example:

```
<priority>0.7</priority>
```

See how it starts with **<priority>** and ends with **</priority>**? Those two tags identify the content between them (**0.7**) as the priority. **<priority>** is what's called an **opening tag**, and **</priority>** is a **closing tag**. You can always tell which tag is the closing tag because it starts with **</**.

You'll notice that tags can contain other tags (e.g. **<url>** and **</url>** in the XML code example), and that some tags contain more information than just the keyword, such as this one:

```
<urlset xmlns="http://www.sitemaps.org/schemas/sitemap/0.9">
```

The **xmlns** bit is called an **attribute**. Attributes identify additional information related to the tag. The equal sign (=) means, well, "equals." Next comes the information the attribute specifies, enclosed in quotation marks (""). In this case, the information is the provided URL.

Don't worry if you're a little fuzzy on this concept. Attributes don't really come into play when you're writing XML sitemaps — in fact, you only have to paste this exact line of code into your sitemap.

One more thing: You may have noticed that we used some indentation in the XML code example, and that each entry is on a separate line. We only did this to make the file easier to read. You can format your XML file with as many indents and hard returns as you like, because search engines ignore these spaces.

We hope this helps! Just remember that tags surround content and tell whoever or whatever is reading the XML document what that information is, and you'll be all set.

---

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="UTF-8"?>
```

This is a standard line of code that goes at the top of all XML sitemaps. It specifies the version of XML the sitemap is written in and the encoding type, which is basically the character set. If you decide to write your own sitemap, just paste this code exactly as it appears here at the top of the XML document. That's it!

```
<urlset xmlns="http://www.sitemaps.org/schemas/sitemap/0.9">
```

This appears just after the **<xml>** tag and specifies the sitemap protocol, which is located at the provided URL (<http://www.sitemaps.org/schemas/sitemap/0.9>). The sitemap protocol is essentially a set of instructions that tell search engine spiders how to read the sitemap. Like the **<xml>** tag, this is standard, so all you have to do is paste this code just beneath the **<xml>** tag in your sitemap.

```
<url>
```

This is the opening URL tag. It tells the search engine spiders that the upcoming content contains information about a given URL for a Webpage in your site.

```
<loc>http://www.yoursite.com/</loc>
```

The **<loc></loc>** tags specify the URL for a page in your site. The URL should start with **http://** and end with a slash (/). The rest of the information that follows is optional, but provides important information about this Webpage.

```
<lastmod>2009-12-14</lastmod>
```

The **<lastmod></lastmod>** tags specify the date when you last changed the Webpage. It should be formatted like so: YYYY-MM-DD. This information is optional, but it lets search engines know whether the content on this page is fresh. Search engines are more likely to scan pages with newer content than with older content.

```
<changefreq>weekly</changefreq>
```

The **<changefreq></changefreq>** tags specify the frequency with which you expect to update the Webpage. This information is optional, but like the **<lastmod>** tags, it lets search engines know about how often your page is going to contain new content. Here are the values you can use:

- always (Use this value if the document changes every time it is accessed)
- hourly
- daily
- weekly
- monthly
- yearly

- never (Use if the URL is archived and will not change)

Don't worry if you don't know exactly when your pages are going to change; it's fine to estimate this value. However, you should try to be accurate. If you lie and say you update all your pages hourly or daily, search engines aren't going to fall for it and scan your pages more often — in fact, they may even penalize you.

```
<priority>0.7</priority>
```

The **<priority></priority>** tags specify the priority of the page, ranging from 0.0 to 1.0, with 0.5 as the default. The higher the priority, the more important the page is. The information about each URL is optional, but it lets search engines know which of your pages are most important. As with the change frequency, you should make sure this number is somewhat accurate. If you give all your pages a priority of 1.0, search engines won't be able to tell which of your pages are most important... and no, they won't assume that all your pages are extremely important and give you a stellar ranking.

```
</url>
```

The closing tag for **<url>**.

```
</urlset>
```

The closing tag for **<urlset>**. This is the last tag to appear in an XML sitemap.

Naturally, most sitemaps contain information about more than one URL. This information goes inside its own set of **<url></url>** tags. You can include up to 50,000 URLs in your sitemap; any more than that, and you'll need to create another sitemap file.

## How People Use Sitemaps

We'll be perfectly honest: People ignore sitemaps most of the time. In fact, one study showed that only 7% of its participants used the provided sitemaps<sup>2</sup>. Navigation menus are a far more popular way to get around a Website. But you shouldn't let this discourage you from adding an HTML sitemap to your Website, and here's why:

**Sitemaps are your Website's last line of navigational defense.** When your users haven't found what they're looking for, when they're about to give up and try to find the information they need somewhere else, when they've lost all hope... that's when they visit your sitemap. It's your last chance to keep your users on your Website, so it's definitely in your best interest to give them an easy-to-understand tool so they can find what they need and stay on your site.

**Sitemaps are evolving.** We're entering an age where sitemaps are becoming more functional, more beautiful, and more useful. The thinking is, if sitemaps improve, people will actually use them more.

**They look professional.** A sitemap is just one of those things people expect, even if they don't use them. If your site doesn't have one, your users might wonder why you omitted it... and they could perceive your site as being amateurish and unprofessional.

**They can't hurt.** Will your Website suffer terribly if you don't have an HTML sitemap? Not too much. But if they don't hurt, and they can help a lot, then why not include one?

## How Search Engines Use Sitemaps

People may not use sitemaps as much as they used to, but search engines still do. To understand how search engines use sitemaps, you'll first have to understand how search engines work.

Search engines are powered by programs called **spiders** or **crawlers** that scan (or “crawl”) Websites by following links. For the sake of clarity, we'll anthropomorphize them, so go ahead and imagine a brave little adventurer spider. She sets off on her journey by following a link. When she gets to the page, she crawls through it, looking for keywords that appear frequently. She keeps track of these keywords — where they appear, how often they appear, etc. — and uses them to figure out what the Web-page is all about. She then reports back to the search engine, telling them about what she found and where she found it. The search engine stores this information and eventually shares it with the people who search for the keywords the spider found. (Of course, the process is a bit more complicated than that, and the exact algorithms search engines use are kept a closely guarded secret.)

So, where do sitemaps figure into all this? Well, it's like putting a map of your Website into the hands of the brave little adventurer spider, making it easy for her to find and explore your Website. This doesn't guarantee you a good ranking, but at least it makes your site noticed.

After all, the Web is a big place, and if you don't make yourself known, you run a good chance of getting overlooked. As of 1999, search engines could only really scan about 16% of the Web<sup>3</sup>. That 16% is known as the **surface Web**. Everything else, all the sites that haven't been discovered, is called the **deep Web**. As of 2000, it was estimated that the surface Web had 19 terabytes of information, whereas the deep Web had almost 400 times as much information: 7,500 terabytes! Most of these sites are relevant, and much of it (around 95%) is publicly accessible — that is, not password protected<sup>4</sup>.

Sitemaps help keep your site from getting lost in the deep Web. They also give search engines information about which pages in your site are most important. Remember in the last section, how we talked about the anatomy of an XML sitemap? The last time the page was updated, the priority, and the change frequency give the search engine an idea of how relevant each page is.

- The last time the page was updated gives search engines an idea of how fresh the page content is. Remember, new content gets scanned more often.
- The priority lets search engines know which pages are more important in comparison to other pages on your Website. More important pages may get a higher priority than your other pages in search engine results.
- The change frequency lets search engines know which pages need to be crawled more often than others.

The end result of submitting your sitemap is that it can help get you listed in search engines, thereby increasing traffic to your Website. And by having an HTML sitemap, you can make better use of that traffic. The more users who come to your site and have a better navigational experience, the more likely it is that they'll link to your site, thereby helping it rise in the search engine ranks.

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3 <http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v400/n6740/full/400107a0.html>

4 <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=jep;view=text;rgn=main;idno=3336451.0007.104>

## Recap

- XML files tell search engines the location of your pages, the last time they were updated, their priority relative to the other pages in your site, and the frequency with which you change them.
- Sitemaps aren't the most popular way for people to navigate your Website, but they do make it look more professional and give users an additional navigation option.
- Submitting your sitemap to search engines is a good way to ensure your site doesn't get overlooked.

## SITEMAP DO'S AND DON'TS

There are a few things you should keep in mind when you're thinking about creating or redesigning your sitemap. After all, a resource this important should be well designed.

### HTML Sitemaps

-  **Do include relevant links.** Think about which links will be most helpful for your users, and make sure they're easy to find in your sitemap.
-  **Don't feel obligated to include every single link in your site.** Too much information can bog down your users and keep them from finding what they're looking for.
-  **Do display a clear visual hierarchy.** Remember, sitemaps not only give users access to the most important parts of your site, they also gives users an idea of the structure of your site.
-  **Don't make an ugly sitemap.** Make your sitemap visually pleasing, and people are more likely to stick around and actually use it.
-  **Do arrange links into relevant categories.** Giving these categories clear headings helps users locate the information they need.
-  **Don't forget to include information about your Website.** You never know where your users might be coming from, so you should include a link to your homepage somewhere on your sitemap page. If you have a navigation menu, include it at the top of the sitemap page just as you would on any other page in your site.
-  **Do use descriptive text... but don't overdo it.** Descriptive link text gives your users an idea of what they can expect from the Webpage, but no one wants to read a book.
-  **Do put your sitemap in the right place.** You should store your sitemap in your root folder and name it **sitemap.html**. If people can't find a link to your sitemap, **<http://www.yoursite.com/sitemap/>** is the first place they're going to look.
-  **Don't forget to link to your sitemap!** Include a link to your sitemap on every page of your site. The footer is a great place for this. Additionally, when you link to your sitemap, use "Sitemap" as the link text. After all, people turn to your sitemap when they're confused — you don't want to confuse them further with vague or unclear link text.

### XML Sitemaps

-  **Do include lots of information about your links.** Sure, `<changefreq>`, `<lastmod>`, and `<priority>` are optional, but you really shouldn't omit them. After all, they provide important information about your pages that search engine spiders use. So always include this information, and remember to keep it as accurate as possible!
-  **Don't list every single page on your site.** Unless your site is really small, there's no need to include links to all the pages in your site.
-  **Do put your .xml file in the right place.** You should name your XML sitemap **sitemap.xml** and store it in the root folder of your Website.



**Do make sure your XML code is valid.** This is a big one. You have to make sure all your XML code is error-free, otherwise your sitemap won't work correctly. You can check whether your sitemap is valid here: <http://www.xml-sitemaps.com/validate-xml-sitemap.html>. (Oh, FYI, CoffeeCup Sitemapper always produces 100% valid XML. [\[Learn More\]](#))

## HOW TO CREATE A SITEMAP

You know why you should use a sitemap, you know how they're used, and you have a general idea of what to do and what to avoid. Now it's time to learn how to actually put one of these bad boys together. Get ready to get your hands dirty with some HTML, CSS, and XML!

### Step 1: Choose which Webpages you want to include in your sitemap.

Remember, you should include only the most important pages in your site so users and search engine spiders don't get bogged down with superfluous information. Take a few minutes and click through your site, pretend you're totally unfamiliar with it, and figure out which pages are the most helpful and important.

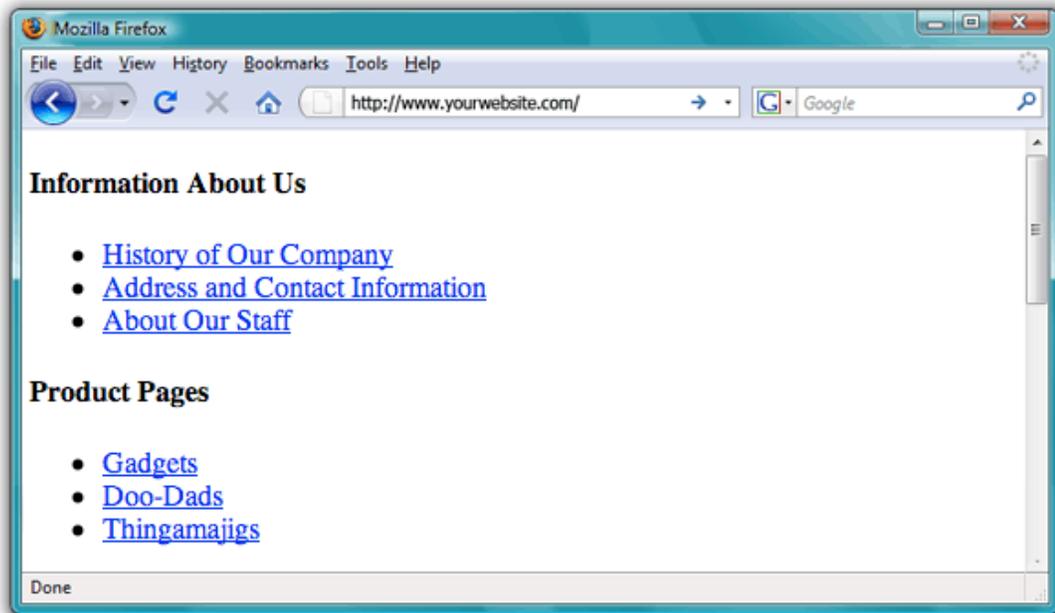
### Step 2: Create your HTML sitemap.

Creating an HTML sitemap is the same as creating any other Webpage. If you're using a WYSIWYG editor like Visual Site Designer, use the text, link, and image tools to create the design of your choice. The process varies so much from program to program that we really can't go into much more detail here, but we trust you and your imagination to make something really spectacular!

If you're using an HTML editor like CoffeeCup HTML Editor, your sitemap code might look something like this (for the sake of space, we're going to omit the <head> and <body> tags):

```
<h4>Information About Us</h4>
  <ul>
    <li><a href="http://www.website.com/history/">History of Our Company</a></li>
    <li><a href="http://www.website.com/contact/">Address and Contact Information</a></li>
    <li><a href="http://www.website.com/about">About Our Staff</a></li>
  </ul>
<h4>Product Pages</h4>
  <ul>
    <li><a href="http://www.website.com/gadgets/">Gadgets</a></li>
    <li><a href="http://www.website.com/doo-dads">Doo-Dads</a></li>
    <li><a href="http://www.website.com">Thingamajigs</a></li>
  </ul>
```

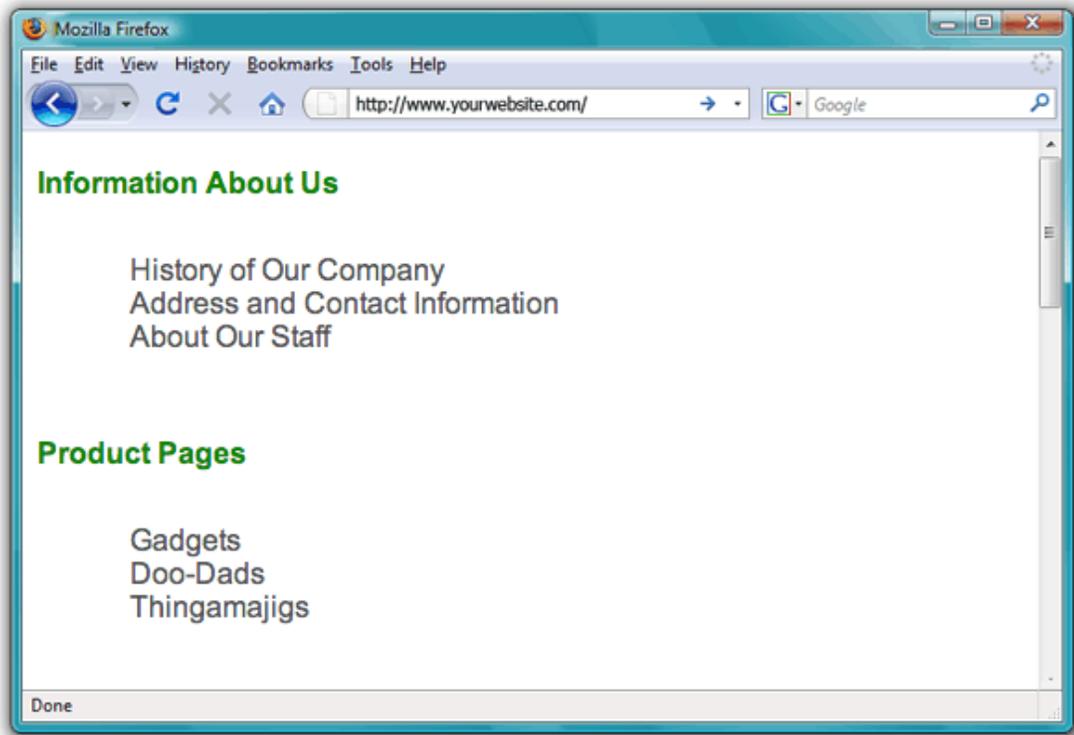
Here's how all this would look in a browser:



As you can see, it's not particularly visually impressive. However, if you're familiar with CSS, you can whip up a nice style sheet to make this sitemap sparkle. So, let's say you used this style sheet:

```
body {
    font-family: arial;
}
h4 {
    font-family: arial;
    color: #007700
}
a {
    text-decoration: none;
    color: #444;
}
ul {
    margin-left: 0px;
    padding: .5em 0 1.5em 20px;
}
li {
    margin-left: 10px;
    list-style: none;
    padding-left: 20px;
    background: transparent;
}
```

The sitemap would then look like this:



It's a subtle change, but it already looks a lot better.

### Step 3: Create your XML sitemap.

First, use a text editor like TextEdit or Notepad to create a new text file. Save it as **sitemap** with the **.xml** file extension. Next, add the following code to the top of the file:

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="UTF-8"?>  
<urlset xmlns="http://www.sitemaps.org/schemas/sitemap/0.9">
```

Then create an entry for each URL you want to include in the map, following this format:

```
<url>  
  <loc>http://www.example.com/</loc>  
  <lastmod>2010-01-01</lastmod>  
  <changefreq>monthly</changefreq>  
  <priority>0.5</priority>  
</url>
```

Just so you don't have to flip back to the **Anatomy of a Sitemap** section, here's a brief reminder of what goes on each line:

Tag	Required	Information
<code>&lt;url&gt;</code>	Yes	Goes around each URL entry.
<code>&lt;loc&gt;</code>	Yes	The URL of the Webpage.
<code>&lt;lastmod&gt;</code>	No	The last time the Webpage was modified, formatted like this: YYYY-MM-DD
<code>&lt;changefreq&gt;</code>	No	The frequency with which you expect to change the page. Your options are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• always (Use this value if the document changes every time it is accessed)</li> <li>• hourly</li> <li>• daily</li> <li>• weekly</li> <li>• monthly</li> <li>• yearly</li> <li>• never (Use if the URL is archived and will not change)</li> </ul>
<code>&lt;priority&gt;</code>	No	The importance of the page as compared to the other pages in your Website. The value ranges from 0.0 (lowest priority) to 1.0 (highest priority), with 0.5 as the default.

If any of your URLs contain certain special characters, you'll need to replace them with special escape codes. This is important, because these characters might be interpreted as part of the XML code, which could confuse the search engines. Here's a table of the characters you need to replace, along with the code you have to replace them with:

Character	Symbol	Escape Code
Ampersand	&	<code>&amp;amp;</code>
Single Quote	'	<code>&amp;apos;</code>
Double Quote	"	<code>&amp;quot;</code>
Greater Than	>	<code>&amp;gt;</code>
Less Than	<	<code>&amp;lt;</code>

**Remember, you only have to use these codes in your URLs.** Don't try to replace any of the XML code with these codes, or it won't work!

One last reminder: Your sitemap can contain up to 50,000 URLs. Any more than that, and you'll have to create another sitemap file. Of course, you probably have better things to do with your time than

compile 50,000 of these entries. Besides, you already know that your sitemap should only contain the important pages in your site. Still, we had to let you know.

When you're all done entering your URLs, put the closing **urlset** tag at the bottom of the file:

```
</urlset>
```

You're almost done! The last step is to make sure your XML is formatted correctly. To do this, visit an XML validator, such as the one at <http://www.xml-sitemaps.com/validate-xml-sitemap.html>. If you don't validate your code and your sitemap contains errors, it may not work correctly, so this step is really important!

As you can probably tell, this is kind of a time-consuming process. If you're looking for an easier and quicker way to put an XML sitemap together, you should check out CoffeeCup Sitemapper. Not only does it take care of all this stuff for you, it also produces perfectly valid code, so there's no chance of pesky human error. [\[Jump Ahead\]](#)

## Recap

- Include the most important pages in your Website in your sitemap.
- Even though they're optional, always use the <lastmod>, <changefreq>, and <priority> tags in your XML sitemap. This information is important to search engine spiders.
- Special characters in the URLs in your XML sitemap must be replaced by the corresponding escape codes, listed in the table above.
- Always validate your XML sitemap using a validator like the one at <http://www.xml-sitemaps.com/validate-xml-sitemap.html>.

## HOW TO SUBMIT YOUR SITEMAP TO SEARCH ENGINES

Without a doubt, the four most popular search engines on the Web are Google (<http://www.google.com>), Yahoo! (<http://www.yahoo.com>), Bing (<http://www.bing.com>), and Ask (<http://www.ask.com>). If you want people to find your Website, these search engines are your best bet. In this section, we'll give you instructions for submitting your sitemap to these giants of the Web.

### Google

In order to submit a sitemap to Google, you'll need to set up a free Webmaster Tools account. (For more information about how to do this, visit <http://www.google.com/webmasters/>.) Once you're all done, here's how you submit your sitemap:

1. Go to <http://www.google.com/webmasters/tools/home>. You'll see a list of your Websites in the main workspace. (Note: You'll specify your Websites when you sign up for your Webmaster Tools account.)
2. Select the Website you would like to add a sitemap for.
3. Expand the **Site configuration** link on the left-hand side and select **Sitemaps**.
4. Click **Submit a Sitemap**.
5. In the field that appears, complete the path to your sitemap. For example, if the URL of your sitemap is <http://www.yoursite.com/sitemap.xml>, you would enter **sitemap.xml**.
6. Click **Submit Sitemap**.

### Yahoo!

To submit a sitemap to Yahoo!, you'll first need to sign in to your Yahoo! account.

1. Go to <http://siteexplorer.search.yahoo.com/submit>.
2. Click **Submit a Website or Webpage**.
3. In the field that appears, enter the path to your sitemap.
4. Click **Submit URL**.

### Bing

Bing is the newest iteration of Microsoft's search engine, which has formerly been known as Live Search, Windows Live Search, and MSN Search. Here's how you submit your sitemap:

1. Go to <http://www.bing.com/docs/submit.aspx>.
2. Enter the URL of your homepage in the provided field.

### Ask

The infamous Jeeves may have retired, but Ask lives on. The sitemap submission process for this search engine is fairly simple.

1. Paste the following URL into your browser's address bar: <http://submissions.ask.com/ping?sitemap=http%3A//>

2. Paste the URL of your sitemap, starting with **www**, directly after the **//**, like so: **http://submissions.ask.com/ping?sitemap=http%3A//www.yoursite.com/sitemap.xml**
3. Press **Enter**.

## SIMPLER SITEMAPS WITH COFFEECUP SITEMAPPER (IT'S SHAMELESS PLUG TIME)

By now, you've probably noticed that creating sitemaps from scratch is a bit labor-intensive and time-consuming — not to mention it comes with the risk of human error. If you aren't proficient in HTML and CSS, you might not be able to create a sitemap that looks just the way you want it, and if you're using a WYSIWYG editor, your code won't be as clean as it could be.

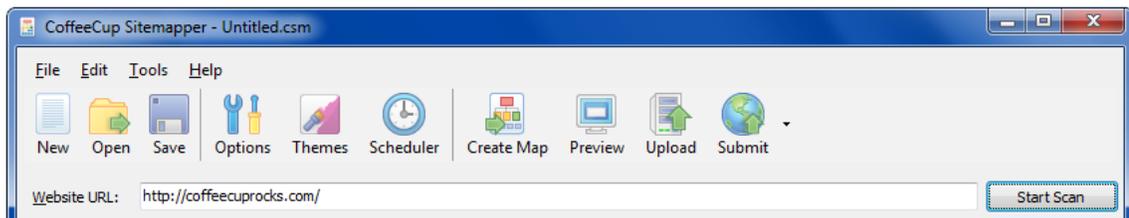
But don't panic, 'cause we've gotcha covered. CoffeeCup Sitemapper is the ideal solution for creating the full-featured, kick-awesome sitemap of your dreams — oh, and it's ridiculously easy to use.

Yeah, yeah, it's a bit of blatant self-promotion. But here's the thing: We don't put the CoffeeCup name on just anything, and Sitemapper had to meet our stringent standards of excellence before we'd even think of telling you about it. It's tremendously helpful, intuitive and easy to learn, and it creates amazing results. Plus, as with all our software, you can try it out for free, just to make sure it's what you're looking for. You can grab your free trial at <http://www.coffeecup.com/sitemapper/>, or you can read on to learn about some of the features that make Sitemapper a cut above the rest:

### No Coding.

We know you're going to be completely crushed when you read this: With Sitemapper, you don't have to work with code. You don't even have to **look** at the stuff. No XML knowledge, no HTML experience, no problem. It's positively **tragic!** After all, what could be more fun than wrestling with HTML and XML for hours and hours on end?

Um... just about anything. That's why we gave Sitemapper an intuitive workspace that lets you create a sitemap with a few keystrokes and a click of your mouse. Literally. All you have to do is enter your Website URL and click the **Start Scan** button.



When you click that button, Sitemapper gets to work. It crawls your entire Website, follows links, and adds URLs to the workspace. It organizes your pages in a logical hierarchy, so you get a complete visual representation of your Website. It also automatically detects the last time your pages were updated, so you don't have to rack your brain and remember the last time you changed each individual page.

When the scan is finished, you can sift through the results and customize them to your heart's content. Adjust priority and change frequency, remove any unnecessary pages, and change the link text — do whatcha gotta do to make a sitemap that fits your needs perfectly.

Oh, and dig this: If you know there are certain files and folders you want Sitemapper to ignore when it scans your site, you can tell it so ahead of time. You can also set the default priority and change frequency for all the pages it finds, so you don't have to make the same changes to all your pages.

So in case you haven't gathered, everything is easily customizable — all without having to grapple with code.

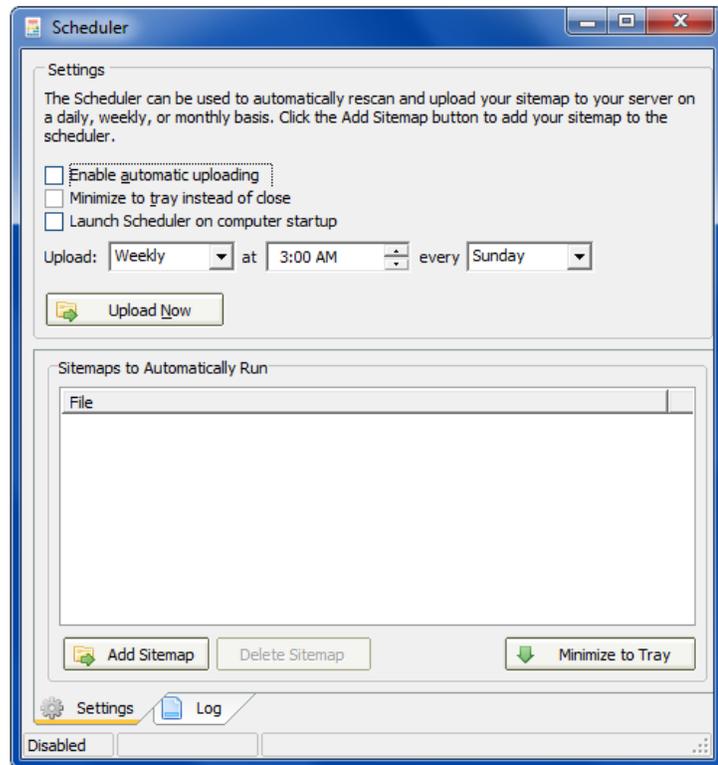
## Not Just a Sitemap Generator.

Don't let the name fool you: Sitemapper does far more than just create sitemaps. It's also an invaluable tool for estimating your Website's "crawlability." What makes our program unique is that it scans your Website using a spider similar to the ones used by the major search engines. That means the search results it spits out are the same ones the major search engines are going to find. If any of your pages don't show up, that's a good indicator that you should do a better job of linking to them — otherwise the search engines will miss them, too.

## Automatic Updating.

We probably don't need to tell you that it's essential that your sitemap is up-to-date. After all, you don't want to give your users or the search engines any outdated information. We probably also don't need to tell you that updating your sitemap by hand every time you change a page is a pain in the neck.

Fortunately, Sitemapper's built-in **Scheduler** tool makes this process a piece of cake. Just tell the program how often you want to update your sitemap, and it'll automatically scan your Website and upload the changes to your server. You don't have to lift a finger.



## Built-in Uploading.

When you're done customizing your sitemap, the next step is uploading it to your server. You could fire up an external FTP client, sign into your server, and deal with all that rigmarole... or you could use Sitemapper's **Upload** tool. Just click a button in the toolbar, and the built-in, lightning-fast FTP client uploads all your sitemap files. The whole process takes just a few moments, and then your sitemap is up and running!

## Built-in Submission to Google, Yahoo!, and Bing.

Your sitemap looks amazing. It's online and ready for your visitors to use. Life is good! Now all you have to do is get the search engines' attention. Don't worry about remembering the links we talked about earlier — all you have to do is click Sitemapper's **Submit** button. This opens a drop-down list that lets you select which search engine you'd like to: Google, Yahoo!, or Bing. (Remember, Ask's submission process is just a matter of pasting a URL into your browser's address bar.) When you select a search engine, your default Web browser will open the Webpage where you should submit your site. It's like a direct line to our brave little adventurer spider pal!

## With All Those Great Features, How Can You Go Wrong?

Yep, it's crystal-clear: Sitemapper makes it easy to create stellar sitemaps. But don't take our word for it: Take the free trial for a spin! You'll get a chance to see the program in action and decide if it lives up to all the hype. (We don't want to spoil the surprise, but it totally does.) So what are you waiting for? Go ahead and download it here: <http://www.coffeecup.com/sitemapper/>.

## Recap

- CoffeeCup Sitemapper makes it easy to create great sitemaps.
- You don't need to write code — or even know it at all — to use the program.
- Sitemapper uses a similar spider to the ones used by the major search engines, which gives you an idea of how “crawlable” your Website is.
- The Scheduler tool automatically updates your sitemap for you.
- Sitemapper comes with eight gorgeous, professionally designed sitemap themes, plus two themes you can customize yourself.
- Built-in uploading means you don't have to open a separate program to put your sitemap online.
- You can easily access the submission pages for the major search engines right from inside the program.

## **THANK YOU!**

Thanks for reading! We hope we've clarified the process of creating a sitemap, either by hand or by using our great software. Just remember, when you use a sitemap, you're doing a great service to your Website, your users, to search engines, and to the whole wide Web.

**Happy Website building!**