Structural

Breadcrumbs

(Homeward Path)

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Problem

A user may become disoriented within a large site. This can happen when they are deep within the site - or have landed on a page within the site as the result of an external or internal search engine.

The user needs to be able to navigate up (towards the home, or root page) and have an understanding of where they are in relation to the rest of the site.

Use When

- Sites with a large hierarchical information structure, typically more than 3 levels deep. Such sites are medium to large sized and include E-commerce Site, catalogs, Portal Site, Corporate Site etc.

- Users may be unfamiliar with the hierarchical structure of the information.

- The user cannot easily navigate through the hierarchy via the primary navigation. For example, if the page is deeper than two levels in the hierarchy, the breadcrumb may be the simplest way to provide navigation.

- The page may be arrived at from an external source (e.g., a search results page) and the user will need a sense of context

- Users may want to jump several steps back instead of following the hierarchy step-by-step.

Solution

- Generate an aid for users to show them where they are in the structure of the site.

- Provide a list of side-by-side links that give users a sense of where they are and how it fits in the overall structure of your site or application.

- Generate from the system a set of **Structural Breadcrumbs** – the site's or application's logical structuring of steps (hierarchy). Structural breadcrumbs show you the path from the home page to where the user is currently.

Example:

Home >>   **Level 1**   >>   **Level 2**   >>   **Level 3**   >>   Current Page

How

- Place breadcrumbs at the top-left of the page whenever possible (above page content).

- The list of labels should be horizontally oriented, starting with the site's homepage and continuing down the site's hierarchy to the current page. Labels should be listed from left to right (when using languages that read left to right).

- Visually distinguish each link in the breadcrumb with a separator that suggests the sequential order of the breadcrumb.

Labeling Breadcrumbs:

- Breadcrumb labels should match the title of their corresponding page.

- Use book title capitalization (Upper/lowercase) for breadcrumb labels.

- The current page the user is situated on should be the last label in the breadcrumb, and should be highlighted in some fashion – either with typestyling and/or color.

- There may be instances when a page title may be too lengthy to include the full title in the label. Refer to the business rules of *Contracted Breadcrumbs* should this situation arise.

Hyperlinks:

- Make each Label a hyperlink except the last one (which corresponds to the title of the current page). It should be obvious to the user that it is a hyperlink – either distinguished with color – and/or an underline.

- The hyperlink should be styled the same regardless of whether it has been visited or not.

Don'ts

- Don't include the separators in the breadcrumb hyperlinks.

- Don't try to make breadcrumbs do double-duty: they should not be used as a replacement for a page title.

- Don't use a typeface larger than 12 pts for labels. Breadcrumbs are meant to be an alternative navigation, not the primary form of navigation.

Rationale

- Breadcrumbs are reminiscent of the trail of crumbs that Hansel and Gretel dropped in the woods so they could find their way back home.

- They provide the user context relative to the rest of the site.

- Breadcrumbs also provide a way to navigate up the site hierarchy.

Accessibility

- Each breadcrumb label should match the corresponding page title.

- Allow the breadcrumb link to be navigated to with the right and left arrow keys on the keyboard.

- When an individual breadcrumb label has keyboard focus, the Enter key will navigate to the linked page.

Examples

http://travel.yahoo.com/p-travelguide-191501851-mexico_vacations-i;_ylt=AjNhKYVRLF36cxMIrcovjINDZcIF

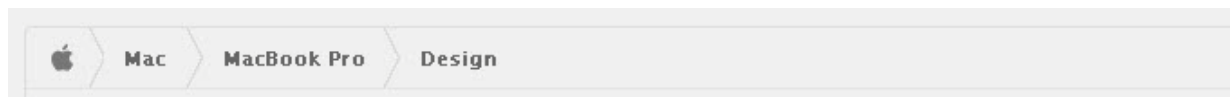http://www.infragistics.com/dotnet/netadvantage.aspx#Overview

In this example, you see that Apple has used the breadcrumbs as a set of buttons, which fits it's visual style. This technique is recommended more for applications than web sites.

http://www.apple.com/macbookpro/design.html

Resources

Jennifer Tidwell, [Designing Interfaces](#)

Yahoo Design Pattern Library, [Breadcrumbs](#)

Patterns in Interaction Design, [Breadcrumbs](#)

Cross-Reference/Links

http://www.visiblearea.com/cgi-bin/twiki/view/Patterns/Homeward_path

http://psychology.wichita.edu/surl/usabilitynews/52/breadcrumb.htm

http://www.otal.umd.edu/SHORE2000/webnav/index.html

http://psychology.wichita.edu/surl/usabilitynews/61/breadcrumb.htm