

Eleven Guidelines to Successful URLs

<http://www.seomoz.org/blog/11-best-practices-for-urls>

1. Describe Your Content

An obvious URL is a great URL. If a user can look at the Address bar (or a pasted link) and make an accurate guess about the content of the page before ever reaching it, you've done your job. These URLs get pasted, shared, emailed, written down, and yes, even recognized by the engines.

2. Keep it Short

~~Remember always~~; brevity is a virtue. The shorter the URL, the easier to copy & paste, read over the phone, write on a business card, or use in a hundred other unorthodox fashions, all of which spell better usability & increased branding.

3. Static is the Way & the Light

Not to bring religion into this, but I can tell you with certainty that some of the engines absolutely DO treat static URLs differently than dynamic ones. And no human likes a URL where the big players are "?," "&," and "=".

4. Descriptives are Better than Numbers

If you're thinking of using `114/cat223/`, go with `/brand/adidas/` instead. Even if the descriptive isn't a keyword or particularly informative to an uninitiated user, it's far better to use words when possible. If nothing else, your team members will thank you for making it that much easier to ID problems in development and testing.

5. Keywords Never Hurt

If you know that you're going to be targeting a lot of competitive keyword phrases on your website for search traffic, you'll want every advantage you can get. Keywords are certainly one element of that strategy, so take the list from marketing, map it to the proper pages, and get to work. For dynamically created pages through a CMS, create the option of including keywords in the URL.

6. Subdomains Aren't the Answer

First off, never use multiple subdomains (e.g. `siteexplorer.search.yahoo.com`) - it's unnecessarily complex and lengthy. Secondly, consider that subdomains have the potential to be treated separately from the primary domain when it comes to passing link and trust value. In most cases where just a few subdomains are used and there's good interlinking, it won't hurt, but I wouldn't take the chance. To me, the benefits derived from reputation management (by flooding the SERPs with your subdomains) are minimal compared to the potential loss of link/trust juice. I also think that subdomain takeovers of SERPs is not something the search engines see as beneficial to their users and may shut down at any point. Luckily, if you're doing it now, you can always 301 to the main domain.

7. Fewer Folders

A URL should contain no unnecessary folders (or words or characters for that matter), for the same reason

that a man's pants should contain no unnecessary pleats. The extra fabric is useless and will reduce his likelihood of impressing potential mates.

8. **Hyphens Separate Best**

When creating URLs with multiple words in the format of a phrase, hyphens are best to separate the terms (e.g. /brands/dolce-and-gabbana/), followed (in order) by, underscores (_), pluses (+) and nothing.

9. **Stick with Conventions**

If your site uses a single format throughout, don't consider making one section unique. Stick to your URL guidelines once established, so users (and future developers) will have a clear idea of how content is organized into folders and pages. This can apply globally as well for sites that share platforms, brands, etc. Re-inventing the wheel in situations where reliance on convention makes everyone's tasks easier is folly.

10. **Don't be Case Sensitive**

Since URLs can accept both uppercase and lowercase characters, don't ever, ever allow any uppercase letters in your structure. If you have them now, 301 them to all-lowercase versions to help avoid confusion. If you have a lot of type-in traffic, you might even consider a 301 rule that sends any incorrect capitalization permutation to its rightful home.

11. **Don't Append Extraneous Data**

There is no point to having a URL exist in which removing characters generates the same content. You can be virtually assured that people on the web will figure it out, link to you in different fashions, confuse themselves, their readers and the search engines (with duplicate content issues), and then complain about it.