

Name That Content:

Tagging Makes Finding Information Online Easy

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When assessing their association's website, one of the issues that emerges most frequently among members is frustration when they're unable to find the information they're looking for. Members become annoyed, as do association staff, who feel equally frustrated that the content they've worked so hard to create isn't reaching its intended audience. Luckily, there's a remedy: Implement a taxonomy.

Just as categorizing your iTunes library by genre, artist and title makes it easier to find the song you're looking for, creating a logical and strong organization system behind the scenes via taxonomies will improve information sharing across the association and on your website.

Taxonomy and Metadata Defined

The first step is understanding taxonomy and metadata and how they relate to web content. A taxonomy is a system of classifying website content, making data searchable and creating a personalized website experience. Metadata are tags — subjects, descriptions or keywords — that describe content so it's easily found. When you tell iTunes the song or artist you want to hear, the software compares your search terms to the metadata — in this case, the author, genre, year of release, album name, title — that's attached to your songs and displays only the most relevant results. Similarly, for an association to produce relevant results on its website, it must tag its content in words that a site visitor would enter in the site's search function and on major search engines like Google and Yahoo!

Nicki Augustyn, the American College of Chest Physicians' director of publications, oversaw the implementation of a taxonomy for his association's newly launched CHEST Publications platform, comprised of archives dating back to 1935 of its journal, *CHEST*, and a collection of e-books. Soon, this same taxonomy will be used in the association's redesigned website and an online learning platform.

"The taxonomy allows us to marry all the pieces from our different web properties and present them to our users in a seamless, meaningful way across various web platforms," Augustyn says.

Getting Started

Although you may think your association lacks a taxonomy, it most likely categorizes its content or education by discipline or subject. It probably has tags for clinical categories — if it's a medical association — demographic tags in its member database, existing classification schemes and learning categories. The first step, then, is mining these areas and compiling a list of terms common to your organization.

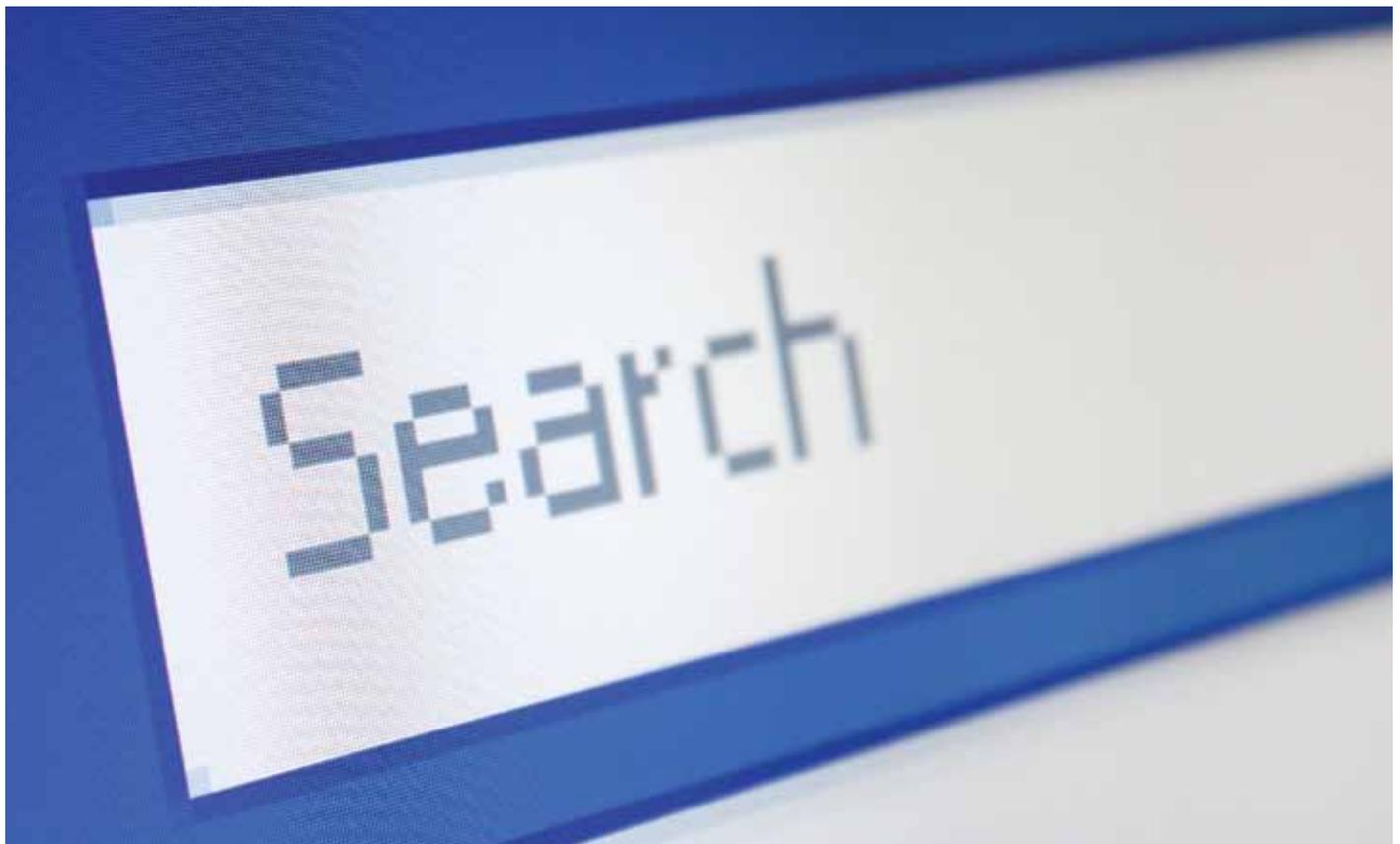
Next, track your site's search logs for queries. It's easier to help visitors find

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what they're looking for when you know how they are searching for it. Look at the individual terms and search strings they consistently use. For example, are individuals searching for just "membership," or are they searching for something more specific, like "membership renewal" or "membership benefits"? If you are categorizing a document, would you search for just the main point, or is there a secondary point to consider?

Be sure to engage all your subject matter experts, including your volunteers. Ask them what themes they think will be most important to members and the public, then use these themes when constructing your taxonomy. Don't overlook your own internal experts — particularly IT leadership, who can verify whether your content management sys-



tem supports tagging of content.

“If someone forgets to include a director or other project stakeholder, an important set of terms can be missed or overlooked,” Augustyn says.

While an organization might have several websites, the taxonomy should be consistent for each one. For example, ACCP has separate sites for its *CHEST* journal and annual meeting, but has a uniform taxonomy.

“The taxonomy came out of the education committee, which developed a detailed curriculum to guide program development,” Augustyn says. “The subject matter covered in our educational sessions extends to the topics published in the journal and throughout our other offerings, so the content we had been historically creating helped guide our taxonomy.”

Keep the Taxonomy Moving

At the end of its initial phase, your association will have a categorization system that can be communicated to all staff who work with web content. The tags will be broad enough to describe current and future content without being so numerous that they overlap or become unwieldy.

Next, it's time to make sure future content is tagged appropriately. Here are a few steps to ensure it is:

- **Re-train your brain.** Tagging content should become part of the content creation process, just like developing a title or figuring out which words to put on the page.

“You just change your mindset so it becomes part of the content-generation process,” Augustyn says. “The more ingrained the process is, the less onerous it is to develop and

maintain robust taxonomies. When talking about written content, you're always concerned about the story or voice. You have to have another side of your brain concerned about the theme and putting the content in boxes that your organization has predefined.”

Of course, it's one thing to create a robust system of categorization. It's another to maintain it and freshen it with themes and terms that users care about. So, be sure to revisit the terms at least once a year and make sure they are still relevant.

- **Create a clear set of standards.** This removes the ambiguity for staff who are adding metadata to the content, especially when that staff is composed of volunteers who may not fully grasp the organization's lingo.

“It's an investment in time to develop the right taxonomy for your organization,” Augustyn says. “You need to be able to apply the taxonomy in a uniform way.”

Clear, concise training can help staff determine which tags are relevant to the type of content you produce.

- **Don't go it alone.** With a taxonomy in hand, associations can partner with digital media companies to develop platforms that add semantic search engines to their websites in order to help users find and retrieve the information they are looking for. Semantic search takes into account not just search terms, but the context of the search terms to present the information the user has queried for, rather than a list of the most highly cited results.

Good indexing means good retrieval, and that makes for an engaging and productive user experience while ensuring knowledge sharing throughout an organization. If you don't properly index your web content against a strong, standards-based taxonomy, a good amount of your content will never find its way to the intended audience. If you want to inform, therefore, index! 📌



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