The Value of Improving Taxonomy

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Improving taxonomy helps companies **find**, **manage**, and **scale** content more easily.

Organizations improve their taxonomies because it is a fundamental building block to improving other areas of any digital properties, analytics, and reporting.

Reasons for improvement include:

- Improving search results.

- Incorporating SEO needs.

- Ensuring terms are relevant, necessary, and accurate.

- Improving findability of content for both users and authors.

- Ensuring integration with the UI.

- Scaling and leveraging existing content in new ways.

- Revising governance processes to be more effective.

Contents

Find Content

Improving taxonomy makes it easier to reuse content, support users through better design, and provide better search results.

The right granularity of tags is a fine art. Too much content associated with a tag and users authors feel overwhelmed. The tag may be too generic, leading authors to use it too frequently.

Too little content associated with a tag and users feel like they're missing out on relevant content. The tag may be too granular for authors to feel that it's a relevant term to use.

Tag Usage

Reviewing the frequency with which a tag is used can illustrate where the taxonomy needs to be revised to improve or reduce granularity. Spot checking the content for applied tags can ensure tagging quality.

Content Reuse

On our taxonomy projects, we've seen large organizations create the same content two, three, four, or five times for several reasons:

- Their content set is too large for someone to be intimately familiar with all of it.

- The content is not structured or tagged properly, making it difficult to browse or search.

- In a distributed authoring environment, different writers don't know about all the content being created.

Improving the taxonomy helps content authors find and reuse content.

Integration with the UI

One way to improve taxonomy is by ensuring the user interface properly integrates taxonomy.[1] On one project, we saw the taxonomy integrated into the CMS, but because of a bug, content authors were unable to use type-ahead to select a tag. They were able to select the tag, but the CMS did not save the tags.

Testing the taxonomy in the UI, either with authors or users, is a straightforward way to get feedback on the structure and use of the taxonomy.

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[1] Hert, Carlson & Wessel
http://tinyurl.com/yxg9zucs

Support Users

Once content is tagged properly, it also allows designing access to the content in different ways.

- We can effectively support faceted browse using the taxonomy.

- The navigation can better incorporate tags.

- Search can incorporate facets as search refiners.[2]

Improve Search Results

Improving taxonomy also improves search. If the taxonomy management tool is able to incorporate synonyms, long tail keywords and phrases, SEO keywords, the search can reference this information to provide more accurate search results.

While search was seen as an inexpensive alternative to building a taxonomy, but results weren't as accurate as desired. Now taxonomy can support search through faceted search or browse and filtering on search results.[3]

Manage Content

Organizations have many reasons to improve the management and measurement of taxonomy efforts.

Taxonomy Adoption

While a taxonomy can be designed and implemented, it may not necessarily be adopted and used by content authors. It may not be well integrated into all touchpoints (as discussed above). Ensuring taxonomy is well integrated will increase use and adoption.[4]

Organizations can also review their taxonomy for several qualities: accuracy, completeness, workflow, and governance.[5] If there are certain aspects of the taxonomy that are not being managed to a high standard, workflow and governance can be improved.

Content Review Process

Taxonomy can be used to support the content review and archival process. As writers, editors, and content owners review content in the content management process, taxonomy helps review content based on various facets.

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[2] Earley http://tinyurl.com/y54fkz5e
[3] Hedden http://tinyurl.com/yyzqd3tn

[4] Earley http://tinyurl.com/y4r29owf
[5] EK http://tinyurl.com/y6n8la94

For example,

- If the taxonomy tracks departments, content workflow can be kicked off and tracked by department.

- If the taxonomy tracks products, workflows can be kicked off when a product is newly released, updated, or sunset.

We uncover these business needs through discovery, such as stakeholder interviews.

Report on Content

Content needs to be tracked by various attributes, such as product, program, department, topic, or content type.

"Enterprises collect enormous quantities of information that can significantly improve all aspects of a business, from forecasting and decision making to sales and customer service."[6]

Applying relevant facets to content and assets allows organizations to more accurately report on the effort and value of specific types of content.

A relevant and accurate taxonomy ensures organizational goals are supported.

As organizational goals are changed or updated, the taxonomy needs to be updated or improved to support these goals.

Scale Content

At Key Pointe, we've heard these issues from clients:

- We want to target content at certain users, but we don't have the structure to do this.

- We spend a lot of time building links, but it takes too long and isn't scalable.

- We need teams to reuse content, but they can't find content that other teams have created.

- We need to tag content, but we have so much content that we can't do it manually.

Digging into these comments shows strategic goals that are not being supported. This can point to the need for the taxonomy framework to be updated to meet new business needs.

According to Factor Firm, scaling taxonomy can include looking at size, function, and usage.[7] Particularly looking at usage, the

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[6] KM World http://tinyurl.com/pul723p

[7] Carlson http://tinyurl.com/y4h79vgt

ways an organization wants to use taxonomy changes over time.

Re-examining business needs provides insight into ways the taxonomy can support a digital property or the enterprise.

When thinking about structural content strategy, taxonomy can specifically support:

- Targeting content at certain audiences, or personalization, by ensuring the audience attribute is available and content is tagged with these audiences.

- Building related content or suggested content using taxonomy instead of hand building links. (Note that related content can be dynamically created and personalized.)

- Ensuring authors can find and reference existing content by providing an alterative way to browse and search content. They don't need to know where the content is stored; they can find it via taxonomy.

- Improving auto-tagging with the identification and iteration of

synonyms, keywords, and key phrases.

- Enabling better reporting and analytics through standardized terminology throughout the organization.

Additionally, taxonomy governance ensures that different organizational needs are articulated and supported. Taxonomy moves from simply supporting web content to supporting the organization.

Looking Forward

Looking forward, improving taxonomy will support voice search, natural language processing (NLP), and different AI. Voice search terms can be integrated into the taxonomy to support on-site search result optimization. It can also support chatbot design and responses.[8]

The Impact of Doing Nothing

Taxonomy work isn't "once and done." It's a living, breathing entity that acts as the "silent superhero" to support organizational goals.

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[8] Carlson http://tinyurl.com/yyys7t96

What's the business impact of not improving taxonomy? You'll continue to experience issues such as:

- Users continue to complain that they can't find information, pushing them to other venues for support, such as the call center.

- Complaints like "our search sucks" will continue, decreasing confidence in search results and in the website or product itself.

- The organization will continue to throw money out the window as it creates, re-creates, and re-creates the same content.

- Stale, out of date, or inaccurate will continue to bog down digital properties, decreasing the effectiveness of search and possibly leading to users accessing inappropriate information.

- Reporting will still be difficult within departments or across the organization.

Conclusion

Neglect your taxonomy and it simply can not continue to meet strategic goals, support search, improve the user experience, and enable content reuse.

When you put in no effort, your taxonomy becomes a relic, a snapshot in time that supports the needs of a bygone era.

An accurate and up-to-date taxonomy helps find content so it can be reused and discovered within digital properties. An accurate and relevant taxonomy supports content management workflows, reviews, and reporting. A strategically designed taxonomy supports scaling content beyond the basic uses on digital properties.

Next Steps

Key Pointe provides content strategy consulting services to enable medium and large organizations to find, manage, and scale content more easily. We're known for working on large, disorganized websites, especially intranets and extranets, and for training internal teams. We use proven methodologies to create evidence-based solutions grounded in business goals and user needs.

We offer structural content strategy, information architecture, and taxonomy consulting and training.

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