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Optimizing Your Web Site for the Search Engines Using CSS and Javascript

By Michael L. White

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Two of the greatest techniques to come along for web site refinement are cascading style sheets (CSS) and javascript navigational menus. In this article, I want to show you how to use both of these to ease the strain of site maintenance while defending against at least two problems with using javascript menus.

CSS can make web site maintenance much easier by consolidating a site's style and appearance attributes into one central file which can be edited alone and yet affect the look of the entire site. Just as wonderful, one javascript file can accomplish a similar effect with your site's navigational menu by making it available to every page on your site through a single line of code per page linking that page to the javascript file. By removing all this CSS style and javascript code into two separate files, you will clean up your web pages' textual content, thus making it easier for search engine spiders to crawl and index your site and more effectively rank it according to your actual textual content. These are definitely two techniques worth implementing.

Here are the examples to show you how this is done. First, here's how your web page incorporating both the CSS and the navigational menu javascript file should look:

Your Page Name

```
href="http://www.yourdomain.com/your_css_file.css">
```

Your Page Name

Your page's textual content goes here....

Your navigational menu is inserted here from your javascript file using the following line of code. See the next example for sample code for the navigational menu javascript file.

```
src="http://www.yourdomain.com/your_nav_menu_file.js">
```

Now, here's how your navigational menu javascript file should look:

```
document.write('href="http://www.yourdomain.com/your_web_file1.html">Page One');
```

```
document.write('href="http://www.yourdomain.com/your_web_file2.html">Page Two');
```

```
-->
```

You can add as many menu items as you need, so you get the picture.

Finally, here's the part of the code in your CSS file which gives your site the table-like look without the high-maintenance, cluttered effect of the HTML TABLE code:

...other CSS code, such as font style, etc., can precede the following segment.

The #left and #center blocks of code below correspond to the left and center columns on your web page. You can also add a #right and #top column and section, respectively, if you so desire.

```
#left
```

```
{ position: absolute;
```

```
top: 0px;
```

```
left: 0px;

width: 220px;

padding: 10px;

margin: 5px;

background-color: #f2f2f2;

}

#center

{ top: 0px;

margin-left: 230px;

padding: 10px;

}
```

Hopefully, those examples give you a fairly good idea of the benefit of using these two powerful practices. For more about using CSS, I can recommend downloading the

Besides these two optimization techniques, however, we're also hearing about all kinds of ways to optimize our web sites for the search engines these days. The competition for those coveted top placements is fierce, for sure. We've heard all about how important it is to have good, pertinent content in the textual portion of our pages, how effective it can be to include our site's keywords within the alternate attributes (i.e., ALT="keyword") of our image tags, and how valuable a link to/from a high traffic, like-minded web site can be. All this is certainly true and well worth the effort to make our web pages rank higher in the search engines, but with all this improvement to web site maintenance, what is the downside? Well, take note, so you can say you saw it here first.

I've detected two pesky problems in this web page wonderland. One is the absence of navigational links for search engine spiders to follow, and the other is the possibility of javascript-disabled web browsers. That's right; as fabulous as it is to store our navigational menu in one javascript file for

easier updating, it removes all the key links from our start page so the search engine spiders have no other pages left to index on our site, and javascript-disabled web browsers can't see a menu at all! What's a webmaster to do? Well, here's how I decided to handle it.

I put my navigational menu with its various links to all my site's other pages on two key pages: the start page and the site map page. This way, when the search engine spiders come calling, they can follow every link from my navigational menu to every other page on my site, and, at least, javascript-disabled web browsers will still have a menu to follow. The same is true of my site map page. For all the rest of my pages, however, I decided to leave intact the line of code calling the javascript file containing my navigational menu in order to take advantage of its centralization benefits. The more pages I add to my site over time, the more beneficial this approach will be, too. I see it as having the best of both worlds: easy site maintenance and search engine optimization.

So, if you want to lighten your web site maintenance load while keeping your site optimized for the search engines, I recommend using CSS to consolidate your site's style attributes, to include a tableless, yet table-like, appearance and the centralization of a single javascript file containing your navigational menu. Just don't remove your navigational links

from your start and site map pages.

You can visit either of my two web sites at

or

to see how I've done this. You're welcome to email me anytime at info@parsonplace.com with any questions or comments.

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Optimizing Pages with JavaScript and Style Sheets for Search Engines

By Dale Goetsch

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Background

Search Engines use a number of criteria to decide what a given web page is all about. These criteria, which can be different from Search Engine to Search Engine, and which may even change over time, all aim at deciding how "relevant" a page is to a given user's search. The Search Engine wants to return the results most relevant to a user's search.

While the particulars may change over time, there are some criteria which remain constant. One of these is where the keywords are located on the page. Typically words that are located closer to the beginning of a page are considered more important than words that occur further down the page. This stands to reason: think of a newspaper article, where the headline and the first paragraph usually have more "meat" than the rest of the story.

Another measure of relevance is "keyword density". This is roughly the ratio of keywords on a page to the total number of words on a page. Having a higher ratio of keywords to total words will make a page more relevant for a search on those keywords.

When a Search Engine sends its robot out to look at your page, you want to make sure that it finds important information near the top of the web page, and that the page has a high keyword density. Sometimes there are complications, even when you have a lot of keyword-rich text early in the visible portion of your page. Two of these complications, extensive JavaScript code and extensive Cascading Style Sheet code, can be easily remedied.

JavaScript problem

Large amounts of JavaScript code can get in the way. Typically the largest amount of JavaScript code in a web page is found in the HEAD section. This is usually where variables and functions are defined, and so forth.

Unfortunately, having a large amount of JavaScript code in a page can be detrimental to a page's ranking in the Search Engines.

Since Search Engines tend to pay more attention to text at the beginning of a web page than they do to text further from the beginning, it stands to reason that if you have several dozen lines of JavaScript code at the top of the page, your real content is going to be further from the beginning of the page. Further down the page means less important to the Search Engine.

Keyword density is also important. Here again, if you have several hundred words of JavaScript code in a page, the keyword density—the ratio of your keywords to all the words in the whole page, both text and code—is going to be much lower. That means that some Search Engines will decide that your page is less relevant.

JavaScript solution

So how do you maintain JavaScript functionality, but make your page as Search Engine–friendly as possible? You put the JavaScript code into a separate file, and link it back to the web page.

The original page, "mypage.html", may look something like this.

My Title

```
function helloWorld(){  
alert("Hello, World!");  
return;  
}
```

...body of page...

Example 1—mypage.html with JavaScript code

We replace the JavaScript code with an instruction for the browser to go and grab the code from a separate file. The new page will look like this.

My Title

...body of page...

Example 2—mypage.html with JavaScript code offloaded

Note the addition of the "src" attribute to the SCRIPT tag. The value assigned to that attribute is the name of the external file that contains the JavaScript code. Typically, these external files will be given the filename extension ".js" to indicate that they contain JavaScript code. Note also that there are both and tags here, even though there is nothing between those tags.

A new page is then created that holds the code that was formerly held in the SCRIPT tags. We will call

it "codepage.js", and it looks like this.

```
function helloWorld(){  
alert("Hello, World!");  
return;  
}
```

Example 3—codepage.js includes only JavaScript code

This new file doesn't need any kind of HTML markup. It contains only the code that was originally held between the SCRIPT tags.

Style Sheet problem

In addition to JavaScript code, Style Sheet code can cause complications for Search Engines when it is put into a web page. For the same reasons as JavaScript—moving the important content further down the page, and diluting the keyword density—it is important to move Style Sheet code off of the page as well.

Style Sheet solution

The thought behind removing Style Sheet information from a page is very similar to that of offloading JavaScript; the syntax to do so is different.

The original page, "mypage.html", may look something like this.

My Title

```
body{
background:white;
color:red;
}
```

...body of page...

Example 4—mypage.html with style sheet code

We want to move this code into a separate file, so we remove it from the original page, and add a link to point to the separate file that now holds the Style Sheet code.

My Title

...body of page...

Example 5—mypage.html with Style Sheet code offloaded

Note the addition of the LINK tag. This contains three types of information that the browser will need to reconstruct the page when a visitor looks at it. The "rel='stylesheet'" attribute/value pair indicates that we are looking at a Style Sheet file here. The "href='style.css'" attribute/value pair points to the external file that contains the Style Sheet information. Typically these external files will be given the filename extension ".css" to indicate that they contain Cascading Style Sheet code. You will replace the filename "style.css" with the name of the actual file into which you place your stylesheet code. Finally, we have to specify the MIME type of the file, in the "type='text/css'" attribute/value pair.

A new page is then created that holds the code that was formerly held in the STYLE tags. We will call it "style.css", and it looks like this.

```
body{  
background:white;  
color:red;  
}
```

Example 6—style.css includes only Style Sheet code

This new file doesn't need any kind of HTML markup. It contains only the code that was originally held between the STYLE tags.

Conclusion

By following these two procedures, you have now made your web page more friendly to the Search Engines. This means that the next time your page is spidered by the Search Engine robots, the important content on your page will be closer to the top of the page, and you will have a better keyword density. This will result in your page appearing higher in the Search Engine listings, and will probably bring more traffic to your website.

When you are ready to put your website to work for you, it's time to contact us.

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