

Bend in the River

an SEO project

Goals

Primary

- ▣ Move existing site from one hosting company to another
- ▣ Swap out primary domain name with domain alias
- ▣ Maximize SEO

Secondary

- ▣ Convert site from HTML to PHP
- ▣ Clean up code; convert from table format to XHTML/CSS

Tasks

- ▣ Move existing site from one hosting company to another
- ▣ Swap out primary domain name with domain alias

The original site was under the domain name bend-in-the-river.com, with susanlitton.com listed as an alias. The desire was to move both domain names to a new hosting company and make susanlitton.com the primary domain name and bend-in-the-river.com the alias.

The steps to accomplish this were:

- Create the new site
- Delete the alias from the old hosting company and transfer the alias' DNS to the new company
- Upload the new site to the new domain name on the new server
- Redirect the old site to the new

■ Maximize SEO

An additional goal during the move was to make changes to the site that would maximize the SEO (Search Engine Optimization). Steps chosen to accomplish this were:

- **Choose effective keywords based on a keyword analysis**
- **Change folder structure, URLs and page titles to target chosen keywords**
- **Use keywords in anchor tag text as well as in alt and title attributes**
- **Rename images to include keywords**
- **Find additional ways to maximize those pages on the site that have the richest content**
- **Create a non-Flash home page**
- **Create a sitemap for the new site and submit to Google**

■ Convert site from HTML to PHP

■ Clean up code; convert from table format to XHTML/CSS

- **Pay attention to structure, e.g., heading tags**
- **Validate the new site as XHTML transitional**

Implementation

■ Move existing site from one hosting company to another

■ Swap out primary domain name with domain alias

- **Create the new site**
- **Delete the alias from the old hosting company and transfer the alias' DNS to the new company**
- **Upload the new site to the new domain name on the new server**
- **Redirect the old site to the new**

The first three of these tasks are straightforward and don't require explanation. The fourth task was accomplished by 301 redirects with an .htaccess file.

■ Maximize SEO

- **Choose effective keywords based on a keyword analysis**

When I built my original site many years ago, I just guessed at what good keywords might be. The audience I hoped to target consisted of people living in or near Atlanta, GA, who were looking for a psychotherapist. I decided that good keywords might be "Psychotherapy in Atlanta, GA" so I incorporated that into the title of each of my pages. However, since it is now possible to research keywords, I decided to incorporate a keyword analysis into the redesign.

The first tool I tried was Yahoo's "Keyword Selector Tool" (<http://searchmarketing.yahoo.com/rc/srch/>). I entered "psychotherapy" in the Keyword Selector Tool. There had been 34053 searches for "psychotherapy" in January, 2007. The related terms were interesting. Many of them were things like "theory and practice of . . ." which probably represented students and/or researchers looking for resources for papers. Others were things like "the complete

adult treatment planner” which probably represented other clinicians looking for resources for their practices. Neither of those groups were ones I wanted to target.

Next I entered “psychotherapy Atlanta” and “psychotherapy in Atlanta, GA” and was surprised to find that NO one had searched for either of those terms in January, 2007. This was an important piece of information. The keywords I have been trying to target in my site weren’t ones that people were searching for.

Then I tried “psychologist”. 102454 searches in January. Now we’re getting somewhere. Evidently people search for the word “psychologist” almost 3 times more than they search for psychotherapy. And also, many of the people who do search for the term psychotherapy are students or other professionals, which aren’t audiences I wanted to target. Also, 586 people searched for “psychologist Atlanta”! Just this amount of research showed me that making a simple change from “psychotherapy Atlanta” to “psychology Atlanta” or “psychologist Atlanta” could possibly increase the number of hits my site received significantly.

I also used “WordTracker” (<http://www.wordtracker.com>) for some additional keyword research. WordTracker was especially helpful in finding words that are related to keywords I had chosen. I entered “psychotherapy” and got this list of related keywords:

- psychotherapy
- therapy
- psychology
- Psychotherapy
- mental health
- therapist
- psychiatry
- counseling
- psychologist
- depression
- psychotherapist
- anxiety
- family therapy
- trauma
- Depression

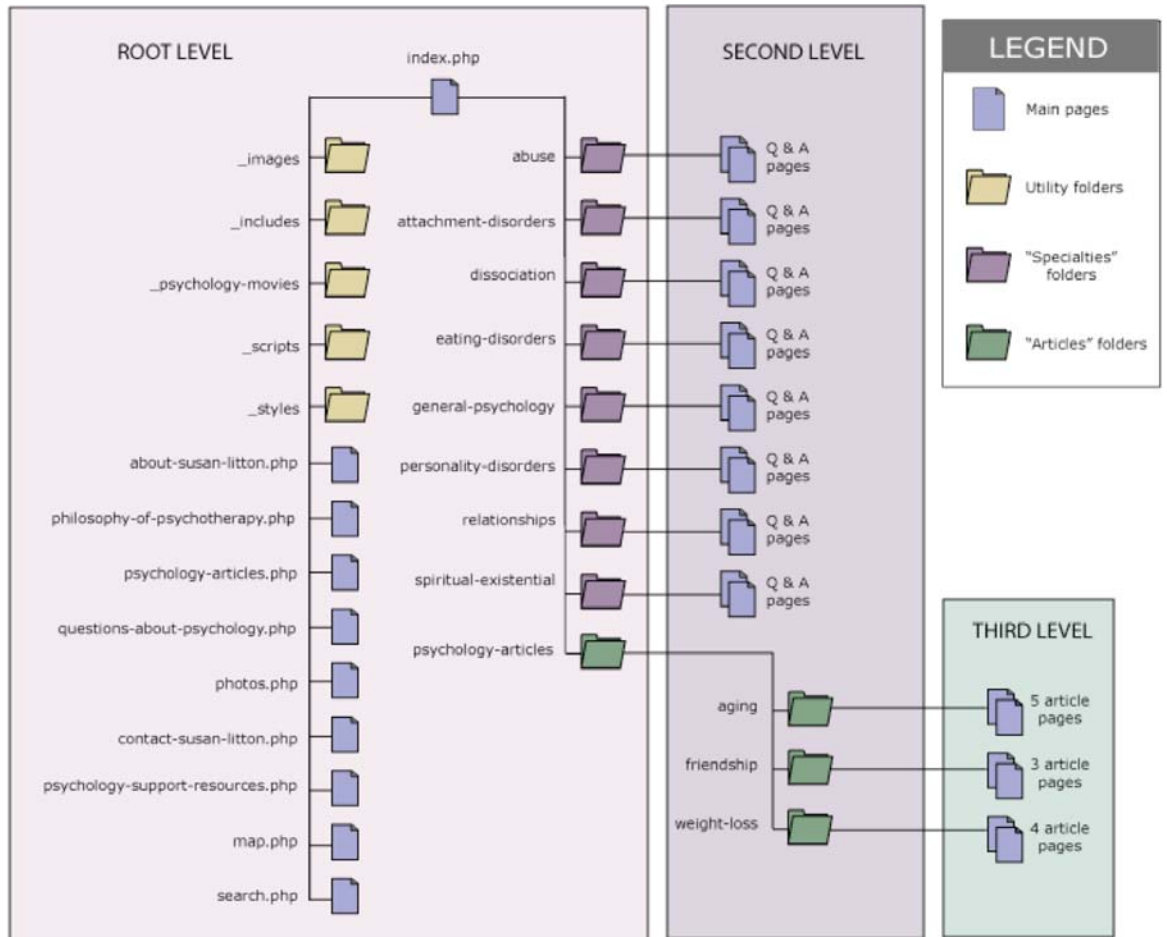
Clicking on the various terms on the list confirmed that more people search for “psychology” (1811 Dogpile & Metacrawler searches in the last 90 days) than “psychotherapy” (222 similar searches). Also, “psychologist” got 540 hits.

- **Change folder structure, URLs and titles to target chosen keywords**

Folder Structure. The original site is all on one level. Even properties such as style sheets, swf files and Java applets all exist on the root level of the site. As part of the redesign, it was decided to create a folder structure that would achieve the multiples goals of less clutter, better organization and better SEO. Folder names were chosen that make sense content-wise, and that will hopefully also be good keywords for search engines.

The folder structure for the new site is:

SITEMAP



URLs. The old site had attempted to create file names that made some logical sense. However, names were abbreviated in such a way that would render them meaningless as potential keywords.

For example, in the Questions & Answers area, although the main keyword for the page does appear in the URL, the keyword for each question page is prefaced with "qa" and the keyword for each answer page is prefaced with "ans". For example, the URL for the page of questions pertaining to abuse is:

<http://www.susanlitton.com/qaabuse.html>

and the URL for the corresponding answer page is:

<http://www.susanlitton.com/ansabuse1.html>.

The word "abuse" could be a meaningful keyword for the site, but it's totally lost in the way the files were named.

Also, potentially important URL keywords have often been abbreviated. For example, the questions page for dissociative disorders uses "did" (the abbreviation for Dissociative Identity Disorder) in the URL instead of spelling out "dissociative-identity-disorder". By the time you add the "qa" or "ans" prefix, the reference to the potential keyword is basically non-existent:

<http://www.susanlitton.com/qadid.html>

<http://www.susanlitton.com/ansdid1.html>

The following table shows the original file name and the corresponding name for the same page in the new site:

Original Site	New Site		
	Top Level	Second Level	Third Level
about.html	about-susan-litton.php		
philosophy.html	philosophy-of-psychotherapy.php		
articles.html	psychology-articles.php		
puppy.html	psychology-articles/	friendship/	friendship-lessons.php
puppy2.html	psychology-articles/	friendship/	friendship-lessons-2.php
puppy3.html	psychology-articles/	friendship/	friendship-lessons-3.php
49.html	psychology-articles/	aging/	age-49.php
492.html	psychology-articles/	aging/	age-49-2.php
bendintheriver.html	psychology-articles/	aging/	bend-in-the-river.php
bendintheriver2.html	psychology-articles/	aging/	bend-in-the-river-2.php
bendintheriver3.html	psychology-articles/	aging/	bend-in-the-river-3.php
weight.html	psychology-articles/	weight-loss/	losing-weight.php
weight2.html	psychology-articles/	weight-loss/	losing-weight-2.php
weight3.html	psychology-articles/	weight-loss/	losing-weight-3.php
weight4.html	psychology-articles/	weight-loss/	losing-weight-4.php
questions.html	questions-about-psychology.php		
qaabuse.html	abuse/	abuse-questions.php	
ansabuse1.html	abuse/	abuse-answers.php	
qaattach.html	attachment-disorders/	attachment-disorders-questions.php	
ansattach1.html	attachment-disorders/	attachment-disorders-answers.php	
qadid.html	dissociation/	dissociation-questions.php	
ansdid1.html	dissociation/	dissociation-answers.php	
qaeat.html	eating-disorders/	eating-disorders-questions.php	
anseat1.htm	eating-disorders/	eating-disorders-answers.php	
qageneral.html	general-psychology/	general-psychology-questions.php	
ansgeneral1.html	general-psychology/	general-psychology-answers.php	
qapersonality.html	personality-disorders/	personality-disorders-questions.php	
anspersonality1.html	personality-disorders/	personality-disorders-answers.php	
qarelationship.html	relationships/	relationship-questions.php	
ansrelationship1.html	relationships/	relationship-answers.php	
qaspirit.html	spiritual-existential/	spiritual-existential-questions.php	
ansspirit1.html	spiritual-existential/	spiritual-existential-answers.php	
photos.html	photos.php		
contact.html	contact-susan-litton.php		
map.html	map.php		
support.html	psychology-support-resources.php		
search.html	search.php		
	sitemap_google.xml		

Titles. Each title in the old site begins with "Psychotherapy in Atlanta, GA: Susan C. Litton, Ph.D." and is then followed by a dash and a description of the page (e.g., Psychotherapy in Atlanta, GA: Susan C. Litton, Ph.D. – Questions & Answers: Eating Disorders). Not only have I now discovered that "Psychotherapy in Atlanta, GA" is pretty useless in terms of how people search for therapists, using the exact same title over and over might have run the risk of getting me banned from Google. Also, having my name in the title isn't a horrible idea, but on the other hand, most of the target audience I'm hoping to attract won't know me by name. They're looking for a therapist, not necessarily for Susan Litton. The next part of the title "Questions & Answers" is also meaningless. Not likely to help at all. This leaves the part of the URL that MIGHT be helpful, "Eating Disorders", at the very end of the title, which makes it unlikely to be found.

Titles for the new site were created with keywords in mind. Each was unique and each tried to capture the main communication objective of the page. Some examples of titles for the new site are:

Specialties: Eating Disorders & Food Addictions | Compulsive Overeating | Bulimia | Anorexia

Specialties: Relationships | Couple's Therapy | Marriage Counseling

- **Use keywords in anchor tag text as well as in alt and title attributes**

Anchor Tag Text. The original site made no attempt to use keywords in anchor tag text so this issue was revisited for the redesign. Copy was not changed – all that changed was the choice of words to include in an anchor. For example, in the text below, the hyperlink in the original site was on the words, "seeing nothing but fat". In the new site, the hyperlink was changed to the words, "anorexic/bulimic":

I'm a recovering anorexic/bulimic. How do you get over looking in the mirror and seeing nothing but fat?

Alt and title attributes. The original site did not use any title attributes, so they were added to appropriate tags, using targeted keywords. Although the original site did have alt attributes on images, an effort was made to include more keywords in the new site.

- **Rename images to include keywords**

No thought about SEO was given to naming images in the original site. The site is very image-rich, containing about 130 images so it was felt that renaming the images to include keywords would be a worthwhile endeavor. As an example of the new image names, the images on the two pages on the site pertaining to abuse are:

- abuse-arrow.gif
- abuse-block-back.gif
- abuse-block-title.gif
- abuse-block-top.gif
- abuse-icon.gif
- abuse-issues-menu.jpg
- abuse-questions.gif

- **Find additional ways to maximize the pages with the richest content**

An analysis of the statistics on the original site revealed that many of the hits were from searches that landed on pages in the section called "Questions & Answers". It was decided that those pages actually represent specialty areas and that presenting them that way might help with SEO.

As such, it was decided to create a left nav called "Specialties" that would appear on most pages on the site that would contain links to each of the pages in the original "Questions & Answers" section. Just having links to each of these pages with text that contains rich keywords should be beneficial. The titles chosen for the links in the left nav Specialties area are:

- Abuse Issues
- Attachment Disorders
- Dissociative Disorders
- Eating Disorders
- General Issues
- Personality Disorders
- Relationship Issues
- Spiritual & Existential Issues

Similarly, the pages from the "Articles" section contain themes that have good keywords (e.g., weight loss, losing weight, aging, friendship). To help boost the impact of these pages, a right nav was created that links to the articles. It doesn't appear on as many pages as the "Specialties" left nav for design reasons and because the articles aren't as likely to specifically appeal to potential new clients.

- **Create a non-Flash home page**

The home page for the original site was all in Flash, including the navigation. It is likely that many search engines never got beyond the home page. A new home page was created with no Flash and with the navigation in XHTML (no JavaScript or images in the navigation).

- **Add a sitemap to the new site and submit to Google**

The sitemap was created in XML from the sitemap generator found at this site:
<http://www.auditmypc.com/free-sitemap-generator.asp>

It was uploaded to the site and submitted to Google. The sitemap can be found at:
http://susanlitton.com/sitemap_google.xml

- **Convert site from HTML to PHP**

This was done. Include files were made for header, footer, left nav ("Specialties") and right nav ("Articles") for ease in making changes later on.

- **Clean up code; convert from table format to XHTML/CSS**

Code was cleaned up and simplified, removing all design elements to various stylesheets and behaviors to either PHP or external JavaScript files.

Layout was accomplished with CSS instead of tables on all pages except one:

<http://susanlitton.com/questions-about-psychology.php>

Although I'm sure it would be possible to convert this page to a CSS layout, it was felt that it would be too time-consuming an endeavor for the current project where the primary goals were about moving the site and increasing SEO. Despite the fact that the page is not the best example of coding since it uses a table for non-tabular data, the page does validate and its structure should not hinder SEO.

- **Pay attention to structure, e.g., heading tags**

The original site was not structured well. Attention was paid to achieving a certain look and feel but not to creating a meaningful structure. For example, instead of using heading tags (h1, h2, etc.) and then styling them as desired, elements were styled haphazardly, e.g., using the b or strong tag on a paragraph to achieve the effect of an h1 tag.

The new site has a clean and fairly lean structure with clear heading delineations that make use of keywords.

- **Validate the new site as XHTML transitional**

XHTML does not allow for embed or applet tags, which effected pages on the site that contained Flash movies or Java applets. After some research about the various fixes and thinking regarding this issue, a decision was made to just leave the tags as is which means that pages with those elements do not validate. However, all other pages on the site do.

Results

Success of the SEO goals of this endeavor will be measured by watching the site's statistics. Mint (www.haveamint.com/) and also Google Analytics (<http://www.google.com/analytics/>) will be used to measure the number of hits the site gets, which keywords are being used to find the site and what the relevant pages are. Mint was installed on the original site about a month prior to the redirect to give some baseline statistics on the old site for comparison.

Results of the move and redesign were tested by viewing the site on both Mac and PC with the following browsers:

PC: IE6, Firefox 2.0.0.3

Mac: Safari 2.0.4, Opera 8.54, Firefox 1.5.0.7