# The Basics of Sitemaps

Google XML Sitemaps have been around for a while now and many webmasters are starting to become familiar with them. They can help you to achieve up to date indexing in Google, and, in a round about way, play a small roll in assisting with rankings. Sitemaps are not needed by everyone, but can be of significant use for many websites. This article will touch on the basics of what they are, who can use them, and how to implement them.

### What is a Google XML Sitemap?
In short a Google XML Sitemap allows webmasters to submit a master list of all their site's pages to Google for indexing. This information is stored in an XML file along with other relevant information where specified by the webmaster. It can be as simple as a list of URL's belonging to the site, or can include, last modified date, update frequency, and priority. The purpose of this Sitemap is to have the most recent version of your URL's indexed in Google at all times.

### Who needs a Google XML Sitemap?
XML sitemaps can generally help any site needing to be indexed by Google; however, small sites may not see the need for this. For example, if you have a small 10 page website that seldom sees any of its pages updated and your entire site is already in Google's index, the XML Sitemap is not necessarily going to help much. It is best used when trying to keep the latest versions of your pages current in Google. Large sites with an extensive list of URL's will also benefit, especially if 100% of their pages are not appearing in the index. So a general rule of thumb, if you have either a dynamic or large site, Google XML Sitemaps just may benefit you.

### Will using XML Sitemaps improve my Google Ranking?
In most cases this will not improve your rankings, however it can help. By having the most current version of your site in Google's index, this can speed up your movement in the results pages. This is because if you make an update to a page for optimization purposes, Google's index will have this page updated more quickly than without the XML sitemap. What this essentially means is that with more frequent spidering you can help influence what version of your site is in the index, and ultimately, help with rankings by decreasing response time.

### How do you create the XML Sitemap?
If you have a very small site, or a lot of time on your hands you can create your XML sitemap manually, but for the vast majority of webmasters, automated tools are an absolute must. There are a number of available solutions for this. One of the simplest methods of creating XML sitemaps is through the use of VIGOS GSitemap. This is a free, easy to use tool that will help you create your XML sitemaps with ease. There are also number of downloadable and online tools listed on Google's site which cater to both beginners and seasoned professionals alike.

Submitting your XML Sitemap to Google is relatively straightforward. After the file has been created the first thing you want to do is upload the file to your server, preferably at the root level. Log into the Sitemap console using your Google account login. From here you can add a site to your account. Simply enter your top level domain where it says "Add Site" (see fig 1.0). This will add the domain to your account and allow you to then submit the XML sitemap.
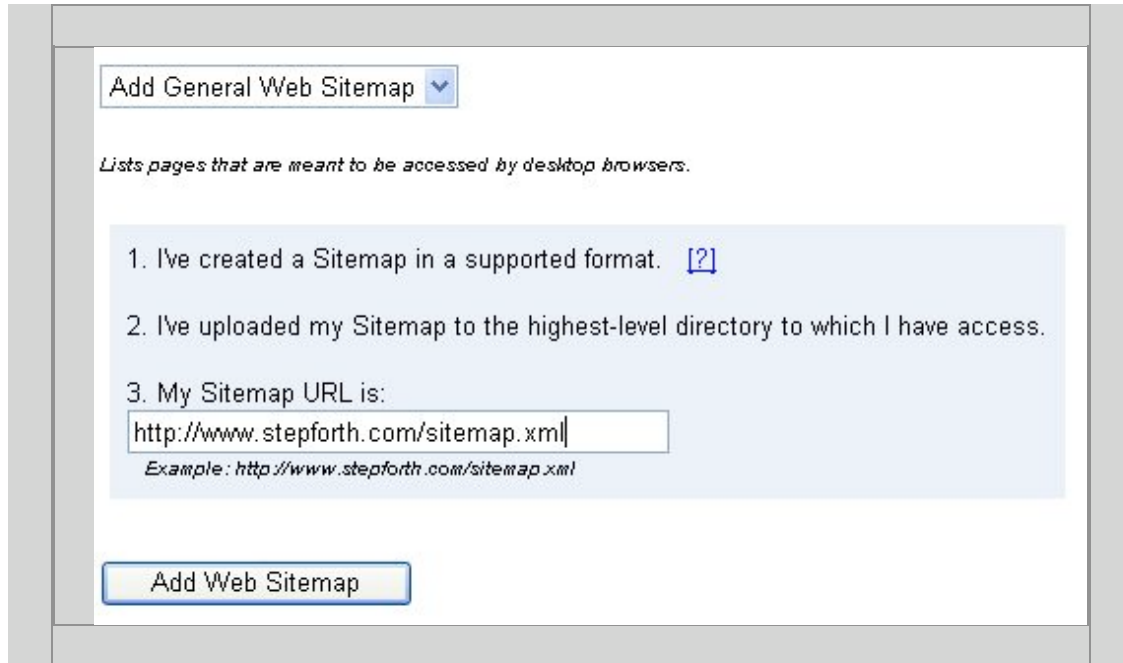
Figure 1.0



After this is done it will take you to a screen with the summary for this site. You will see a text link that

says "Submit a Sitemap". Clicking here will take you to a screen to enter the online location of the XML sitemap. (see fig 1.1 below). Click "Add Web Sitemap" and you are on your way.

Figure 1.1



Once this is complete you have the option of verifying your Sitemap. This can be done by placing a specific meta tag on your home page, or by uploading a blank html file with a file name provided by Google. Verification will allow you to access crawl stats, and other valuable information regarding your Google listing.

Below is a basic example of an XML Sitemap.

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="UTF-8"?>
< urlset xmlns="http://www.google.com/schemas/sitemap/0.84"
xmlns:xsi="http://www.w3.org/2001/XMLSchema-instance"
xsi:schemaLocation="http://www.google.com/schemas/sitemap/0.84
http://www.google.com/schemas/sitemap/0.84/ sitemap.xsd">

<url>
< loc>http://www.stepforth.com/</loc>
< lastmod>2006-08-09T04:46:26+00:00</lastmod>
< changefreq>Weekly</changefreq>
< priority>1.0</priority>
< /url>
...
...
< url>
< loc>http://www.stepforth.com/company/contact.html</loc>
< lastmod>2006-08-08T04:46:26+00:00</lastmod>
< changefreq>Never</changefreq>
< priority>0.5</priority>
```

```
    < /url>

    </urlset>
```

Implementing an XML Sitemap is generally straightforward and worth the effort. Taking the time to implement them is well worth it as there is no negative down side to this tool provided by Google. Every little thing adds up in terms of obtaining site rankings and frequent spidering by Google is certainly one of them.– *Scott Van Achte*

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