

Nomenclature and recommendations for a website's page of expected entry

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This short article investigates various naming conventions for the page in a website that visitors are typically expected to enter.

This page is searched for automatically when the site's root directory is entered in the browser, and the document is commonly called `index.html`(l), as in the following example:

<http://www.abeleto.com/index.html>. In this article I will refer to such pages by **expected entry page (EEP)**.

It is common to enter a site which prompts the user first for a simple viewing choice (e.g. static or animated). These patchwork solutions are (hopefully) a temporary state of affairs and will improve when bandwidth for home users increases and browsers/platforms are better compatible. These pages are better not treated as an EEP, since they serve none of the functions described below, yet run the risk of scaring away prospective visitors.

I distinguish three main purposes of the EEP, being welcoming, pivotal/navigational and summarizing. Because these are nearly always combined in the EEP as a whole, it is better to speak of different emphases.

Welcoming emphasis

This is strong on visuals while low on content and usability. Users are expected to undergo rather than read or browse, especially when animation is provided. Often the only link present serves to abort viewing (on subsequent visits) and proceed to a page with a more pivotal or summarizing function. Text is typically persuasive or even provocative.

Pivotal/navigation emphasis

This function is commonly provided by a set of links in a button bar, image

map, or drop-down menu. While many sites do not require their users to return to the EEP in order to retrace their bearings, these users often do. Consistent use of navigational elements throughout the site is essential, and the EEP is the best place to introduce them.

Summarizing emphasis

This is distinct from the welcoming functioning. Users get a very brief outline of all the site has to offer, which is informative rather than persuasive or provocative.

Evaluation of commonly used labellings

Home implies a good metaphor for a single site within the large Web, although to apply it to a single page is less fitting. The term is used to refer to personal hobby sites, and using it only for this category would avoid confusion. The term is however very widely used, even when the EEP being referred to is strictly speaking no more than the home's front door.

Welcome stresses unambiguously that this is the place where visitors are expected to enter, but since it implies no more than a welcoming function users are not encouraged to return to this page while they are elsewhere on the site.

Index stresses the pivotal function of the EEP better than anything. It also promises an overview of the site's content, but this choice can be confused with a site map or search engine.

Main stresses the importance of the EEP over the rest of the site, but not every EEP called 'main' is indispensable either as a navigational pivot or summary of what the site has to offer. 'Main' is more suitable to refer to a section with important information in several pages to supplement or facilitate the whole range of user options in the site, such as contact information, site map, and conditions of use.

Finally, **splash page**, is an informal term rarely used as a page title or link label. It typically means a visually exciting, sometimes self-disappearing page which precedes a more informative and useful first encounter. The annoying download speed of many of these pages over a modem connection makes the term an ironic overstatement. Such an EEP has a welcoming emphasis above all.

Conclusion and recommendation

Web designers would do well to consider the implications of referring to the site's EEP by a certain name. Without any compelling reasons to choose otherwise, labelling the EEP by '**home**' or '**main**' appears both intuitive and, more importantly, well established in the user's experience.

Last modified on 22 December 1999.