

Foreword

In the heart of the Yorkshire Dales in Northern England, a pleasant wander leads through the woods from Bolton Abbey to the Strid, a notorious stretch of water where the River Wharfe is forced into a deep and narrow channel. At its narrowest point, the Strid is about two metres (or a stride) wide, just right to tempt a daring child or a reckless adult. But, jumping the gap is risky, for the rocks are slippery, and nobody survives a fall into the thundering waters and deep, dark caverns of the Strid.

I'm reminded of this chasm not crossed when I ponder the state of search, a vast sociosemantic territory that's riddled with potholes, gaps, and schisms. Many of these fissures are carved by the relentless process of specialization. Designers, developers, information architects, search engine optimization specialists, and web analyticists are valued for their unique strengths, but their singular skills often come with a narrow focus and an idiosyncratic vocabulary that makes teamwork difficult at best.

And, of course, this collaboration chasm creates an experience gap that frustrates users to no end. Our expectations, raised high by Google, are all too often shattered by the sad state of site search. And, as the deep Web grows ever more vast and unruly, even mighty Google cannot keep pace. The gulf between people and the answers they seek threatens to widen, and it's for this reason that this book that you hold in your hands is so vital to the future of findability.

Shari Thurow is among the few specialists brave enough to jump the gap between search engine optimization and web usability. As a result, she has learned how and where to place stepping stones and build bridges. She can speak the language of link analysis and relevance ranking algorithms, while also understanding user psychology and information seeking behavior. In this book, Shari explains how you can design web sites that are friendly to spiders and humans, so that even novice users can find the site and find their way around the site without plunging headfirst into the abyss.

So, if you're crazy enough to leap the Strid alone, it's ready and waiting. But, if you'd prefer a safer path across the chasm, then read this book. See you on the other side!

Peter Morville

When Search Meets Web Usability