



Website Audit Report for  
**Sample, Inc.**  
[www.SampleInc.com](http://www.SampleInc.com)

Prepared:	July 2, 2004
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Browser: Internet Explorer 5.0  
Resolution: 1024 x 768

**Proprietary and Confidential**  
**TRACKING NUMBER : T89 - 82903 MG - v3**

# Website Audit Report for Sample, Inc. [www.SampleInc.com](http://www.SampleInc.com)

## Introduction

### Purpose of this Report

This document represents the results of a web audit for the company named above. Using our 185-point web content and technical standards as a baseline, an analysis of the site's appearance, organization, navigation, content and compatibility was performed. An in-depth review was also performed to assess the level of search engine optimization and website visibility. A detailed audit of the findings and recommendations has been provided.

### Web Audit Methodology

Your Website was systematically validated through a comprehensive process that checks compatibility, content, broken links and excessive page or graphic sizes. A second stage analysis was then performed in each category to pinpoint key strengths and weaknesses. This data was then used to compile this report, with the results presented as a percentage of compliance to the standards.

**Your Audit includes a comprehensive evaluation of the following areas of your website:**

Categories Assessed	% to Standard
1. Homepage Assessment	75%
2. Framework and Navigation	81%
3. Page Layout & Design	96%
4. Site Content	100%
5. Feedback and Contacts	89%
6. Use of Graphics	71%
7. Search Engine Optimization (SEO)	63%
8. Search Engine Visibility	--
9. Interactive Elements (Forms)	63%
10. Site Search Module	75%
11. Privacy Policy	0%
12. Notices, Alerts and Notifications	33%
13. Multimedia (if applicable)	N/A
14. Applets and Scripts (if applicable)	N/A

### Web Audit Equipment:

Your website audit was performed using equipment with the following technical specifications:

**Web Browser:** Internet Explorer 5.5. IE 5 and above has approximately 80% of market share.

**Video Resolution:** 800 x 600. Approximately 94% of computers use 800x600 or greater.

**Operating System:** Win XP. Win XP currently has approximately 53% of market share.

**Color Depth:** 24 bit. Approximately 96% of computers use 24 bit color or greater.

\*Current statistics from: [http://www.w3schools.com/browsers/browsers\\_stats.asp](http://www.w3schools.com/browsers/browsers_stats.asp)

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## Review and Evaluation

### 1. Homepage Assessment

Your homepage is your site's main navigation page and the first opportunity for you to provide visitors with the key information about your business as well as the products and services your business offers. It is the first opportunity to grab your audience's attention and entice them to explore your site further.

To help ensure that visitors to your site do not simply click the back button and move on, your homepage should be simple, inviting and informative without being overwhelming. It must clearly communicate what the company does, what the site has to offer and should provide a good framework for navigating the site.

[Learn More about Homepage](#)

### Strengths

- The homepage was determined to have a clean layout and design, a clear statement about what the company does, and clear consistent navigation.
- The company's logo is prominently positioned on the upper left side at the top of the page and in close proximity to a list of products offered within the site.
- It is clear to visitors exactly what your company has to offer.

### Findings

- Though the homepage appears simple and uncluttered, the page loads very slowly. A 15-second delay was encountered before each page displayed in the browser. It appears that the HTML for each page is designed to collect the page content, then display it all at once. This is irritating and will cause users to reload or abandon the site.
- The homepage lacks a pointer to the main URL or feedback link.
- The homepage has a checkout link below the navigation. This could be disorienting, as this is the entry point of the site. The user has not yet added to a shopping cart and would have a need for a check out link in this location.
- The homepage contains one "alt" tag and it has been left blank.
- The "sitemap" link appears in the footer of the homepage and is not included in utility navigation bar.

### Recommendations

- The homepage should be retooled to reduce the download/display timeframe to a minimum of five seconds on a dial-up modem or high-speed connection. Site elements should load individually to hold the interest of the visitor while waiting.

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- Include the sites URL (<http://www.SampleInc.com>) in the contact information area along with the street address, phone and fax numbers.
- Include an e-mail link in the footer to provide feedback about your site.
- Remove the "check out" link from the homepage and reposition it in the utility navigation bar on all pages.
- Include "alt" tags in all applicable graphic elements to assist in conveying the content of the page, this is especially important for users with slower connection speed and to enhance search engine visibility.
- Relocate the "sitemap" into the utility navigation bar. Make it available on all pages throughout the Website for easy access.

<b>75%</b>	<b>Homepage Compliant to Web Standards</b>
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## 2. Framework and Navigation

Framework refers to features in the Website such as the navigation, header and footer. These elements should be a fixture on every single page of the Website. Standardize placement of these features helps orient the user at all times.

Navigation refers to the orientation system that helps users understand where they are on the site and what they can do there, namely where they can find what they want and what else they can explore. There are four types of navigation: main, local, utility and contextual.

[Learn More about Framework and Navigation](#)

### Strengths

- Overall, the framework and navigation of the site is intuitive and easy to navigate. The navigation placed on the left side of the page is consistent. Navigation links for each are positioned prominently and are easily located.
- The header and footer are consistent throughout the site.
- The contact information and link to the homepage are consistent throughout.

### Findings

- Navigation links do not have expanded information to further describe the content of the destination.
- Long pages do not contain anchor links to help facilitate fast browsing.
- "Jump to top" links have been excluded from long pages.
- There is no privacy policy, customer service or return policy information available in the Website.

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## Recommendations

- It is recommended that navigation links be denoted with 7 to 12 words of copy to further describe the content of the destination page.
- Long pages should include anchor links to help facilitate fast browsing.
- On long pages, we recommend including a "jump to top" link at the bottom of the page, to guide the user back to the top of the page.
- An appropriate privacy policy, customer service, and return policy information links should be available throughout the Website.

<b>81%</b>	<b>Framework and Navigation Compliant to Web Standards</b>
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## 3. Layout & Design

Page layout and design refers to the placement of images, recurring text, and company specific branding graphics in a consistent and organized position on all pages. The consistency of elements on a page is essential to maintaining a familiar and organized environment where the user can go about his/her quest for information without becoming disoriented. A consistent look and feel to the graphics contributes to the ease of content navigation within the Web pages. This helps avoid noise distractions as the user browses through the Website.

[Learn More about Layout & Design](#)

## Strengths

- The Website has an intuitive overall layout and design.
- Recurring text, modules and graphics are consistent throughout the pages on the site.
- The site has a consistent design and style that is appropriate for this type of business.
- The site's overall appearance is distinguishable and conveys a good sense of branding for the company's image.
- Link labels are consistent.
- Each link uniquely indicates its target destination.
- The fonts used throughout the site are of good size making the content easy to read.

## Findings

- The navigation label and body copy (text) of each page is of similar font, sizes, and weight, causing the two to appear as though they converge.

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- The typeface, size and style of the navigation labels are too similar to the page content.
- There are no local navigation links at the end of the page layout, therefore requiring unnecessary scrolling.

## Recommendations

- Increase the white space between the navigation area and the page content area.
- A bolder or different font type should be used for the navigation link labels to further distinguish them from the page content.
- Local navigation should be placed at both the beginning and the end of each page layout to assist in reducing unnecessary scrolling. This will also increase the quality of the navigation and make for easier browsing throughout the website.

<b>96%</b>	<b>Page Layout &amp; Design Compliant to Web Standards</b>
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## 4. Site Content

The content of a website refers to what it communicates to the user through natural language, images, sound, movies and animation. The content, the clarity of that content, and its organization is of major importance to keep and convert visitors into customers.

[Learn More about Site Content](#)

## Strengths

- The sites content is clear and concise enough regardless of the user's field of expertise.
- The site uses straightforward vocabulary and word usage.
- Web pages were independent without making assumptions about what pages the user has visited on the site.
- The sites content is succinct, containing simple sentence structure with 20 or fewer words.
- The site uses bulleted and numbered lists to break up long sentences and draw attention to important points.
- Content displayed correctly in each Web Browser where it was tested (IE 6.0 PC, 5.0 Mac).
- Each page has query terms that can be used to search for the topic of the page.
- Headings clearly communicate the content of the sections.
- Headings are followed with reinforcing short summary.

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## Findings

- The site's contains a good assortment of specifics pertaining to the product appearing throughout each section. There are no other items to report on at this time.

## Recommendations

- No further action needed.

<b>100%</b>	<b>Site Content: Compliant to Web Standards</b>
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## 5. Feedback and Contacts

The goal of the feedback form is to learn about the users' experience on the site. Obtaining the name of a contact provides a means of contacting individuals at the company. The Contact information and the Feedback form can share the same page or appear separately.

[Learn More about Feedback & Contacts](#)

## Strengths

- The "Feedback and Contacts" links are available consistently throughout the site.
- A form is available for getting "Feedback and Contacts" from users.
- A "Thank You" page is provided upon submitting the feedback form.
- All contact information is present on the "Feedback and Contacts" form.
- Users are able to express feedback in their own words by utilizing the available text box in the form.
- An e-mail link is provided to allow users to click on the address and have their e-mail program automatically launch.
- An acknowledgement (auto-responder) is provided to notify the user of successful receipt of their correspondence.

## Findings

- The "Feedback and Contacts" lacks the appropriate fields for the user to indicate how he/she would prefer to be contacted (e.g. phone, fax, e-mail).
- "Feedback and Contacts" is not available within the Order Online form.

## Recommendations

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- The appropriate fields should be added to the “Feedback and Contacts” form, this to enable the user to note the preferred method and time they want to be contacted.
- A “Feedback and Contacts” link should be made available in the Order Online interface to facilitate feedback and inquiries.

<b>89%</b>	<b>Feedback &amp; Contacts Compliant to Web Standards</b>
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## 6. Use of Graphics

While it is true that a picture paints a thousand words, a poorly chosen picture or one that adds no value to the information or wastes users’ time by downloading slowly can actually detract from the quality of your Website.

**Static Graphics** – Graphics that do not move.

**Inline Graphics** – Typically small images or icons embedded within the display of the HTML page

**Icons** – Symbolic representation in graphic form

**Image Maps** – Two-dimensional images that can help users understand the organization of information on your website and to navigate to parts of the document that interest them by clicking on an active region of the imagemap.

### Strengths

- The site uses graphics that complement – not distract from the pages content.
- Graphics are of appropriate file sizes and dimension to help facilitate faster downloading.
- Overall, the page sizes are within the 150K file size recommendation.
- The site utilizes graphics sparingly, keeping overall page size to a minimum.

### Findings

- Most graphics present on the pages do not utilize the “alt” tag attributes which provides a textual equivalent for images
- The inline graphics are not coded with the appropriate equivalent alternative text.
- There are no links provided to download the appropriate Acrobat Reader software (required to read the PDF spec sheet).

### Recommendations

- Add “alt” tags and their appropriate “alt” tag labels for each and every graphic.
- On each page that contains a PDF file, provide a link to download Acrobat Reader software (required to read the PDF files).

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<b>71%</b>	<b>Use of Graphics Compliant to Web Standards</b>
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## **7. Search Engine Optimization (SEO)**

To aid in gaining better placement within a natural search engine listing as a result of a search engine query, it is important that your Website contain the elements that attract search engines. SEO, refers to key components programmed into a web page which search engines will index, store and reference when queries come up on those topics. It is also the use of descriptive tags (called meta tags), and content added within the framework of each page that will help to facilitate indexing by the search engines. Such tags are invisible to the user and are only read in the background by the Web Browser and search engines. Title tags and description tags, when indexed by a search engine, will appear in search engine results for that query. Meta data is information created to describe a web document. Meta data is extracted from the Website by the search engine in order to make the web resources more searchable.

[Learn More about Search Engine Optimization](#)

### **Strengths**

- Each page contains the appropriate title tags incorporating the company name.
- Each page contains title tags that summarize the contents of the page.
- Each page contains the appropriate keyword meta tag coded within the page (HTML). This will assist in the delivery a concise summary of the page when indexed by the search engines.
- Each page avoids the use of generic terms and instead uses words and references specific to the content of the page.
- Each page includes query terms that can be used to search for the topic of the page. This helps search engines deliver content specific to the search criteria. A better search result is attained as more prevalent content is delivered back to the user.

### **Findings**

- Though each page contains many key words within the meta tag, many of these words are not specific to the page, but instead are specific to the Website as a whole. The effect of this approach is that users will be taken to pages that do not contain the products or information they are searching for.

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- Description tags are not utilized within each page of the Website. The omission of descriptive tags will prevent the appropriate information from being displayed in a search engine listing. It also reduces the search engine visibility of the page.
- “Alt” tags and “alt” tags in anchor links are not utilized in this website.

## Recommendations

- Utilize keywords that are specific solely to the content of that page. This will ensure that the users' query is directed to the correct page.
- Utilize “alt” tags on each and every page and on each and every graphic throughout the site. This will better enable the search engines to properly index and list the appropriate information in describing each page and graphics.
- It is recommended that long pages utilize anchor links that are encoded with the appropriate descriptive “alt” tag in anchor links. This practice further ensures that anchor links are indexed appropriately by the search engines to provide more opportunity for users to find applicable items being searched.

63%	<b>Search Engine Optimization (SEO) Compliant to Web Standards</b>
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## 8. Search Engine Visibility

Many web users start their search for product and company information through the use of a general search engine or directories. To determine how easy it is to find your site from the most frequently used search engines and directories we completed searches for your company name and the keyword/keyword phases submitted with your Web Audit order. The results of our searches are summarized below.

[Learn More about Ranking High on Search Engines](#)

**Keyword Position for Sample, Inc.  
on Search Engines and Directories as of June 24, 2004**

Keywords	ThomasNet	Google	Yahoo	MSN	AltaVista
Sample, Inc.	1	1	1	1	1
Keyword #1	6	40	12	7	1
Keyword #2	6	1	12	16	11
Keyword #3	6	25	36	70	36
Keyword #4	14	34	50	69	36
Keyword #5	1	5	14	13	13

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## Findings

- Sample, Inc. can be found across the web by its company name.
- Sample, Inc. is positioned well for 3 of 5 important keyword phrases. Being listed in the first 3 pages of search engine results is because current research indicate that approximately 83% of search engine users click on a result in the first three pages.
- Sample, Inc. is ranked well for its key products within ThomasNet, the industrial search directory powered by Thomas Register & Thomas Regional.

## Recommendations

- Sample, Inc. overall has good visibility via the most frequently used search engines and directories. Consideration should be give to increasing rank within ThomasNet's industry specific directory for the keyword phrase **Industrial Enclosures** Buy updating content regularly within the site and following recommendations made in section 7 Search Engine Optimization of this report, Sample, Inc. can potentially improve its search engine visibility.

## 9. Interactive Elements (Forms)

A form is a section of a Website containing applicable content, markup, special elements called controls (checkboxes, radio buttons, menus, etc.), and labels on those controls. Users generally "complete" a form by modifying its controls (entering text, selecting menu items, etc.), before submitting the form for processing. An example of a popular form in a Website is the contact and feedback form which allows the user to input specific information such as his/her name, address, phone, fax, credit card number and more, and then submit that information to the appropriate party. In order for the required information to be submitted from a form, many checks and balances, combined with intuitive error messages need to be a standard element of the form.

[Learn More about Interactive Elements](#)

## Strengths

- All form labels are aligned with their controls and properly positioned intuitively for the user.
- The appropriate browser-generated elements such as buttons and checkboxes are correctly positioned in close proximity to their labels.
- All buttons and checkboxes stand out from the rest of the page and are immediately identifiable.
- Each field is appropriately labeled
- All input action buttons are browser-generated, not graphics or text links.
- All checkboxes are appropriately placed within a 10-pixel distance from its corresponding label.
- All fields within the form abide by the same form marking policy

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## Findings

- Fields in the form are not labeled as “required” or “optional,” though all fields are NOT required.
- The "submit" button is labeled "Send" instead of the accepted “Submit” label.
- Error messages are displayed on a subsequent page.
- Error messages are displayed in black, not RED.
- The “reset” button is located far away from the “send” button. Though this button should not be immediately next to the “submit” button, it is standard practice to keep the “reset” button within 50 pixels of the “submit” button. This, to maintain a direct relationship and association of the functionality of the two choices.
- There is no indication if an error has occurred upon submission of the form.

## Recommendations

- To avoid confusing the user, the form or form fields should be labeled “required” or “optional” accordingly. If all fields are required, then a “required” label should be positioned at the top just before the first form field.
- The current “Send” button should be relabeled to read “Submit.”
- Reposition the current “Reset” button to within 50 pixels of the “Submit” button.
- Error messages should appear on the same page, in RED and be above the form.
- A client-side error message should be displayed immediately upon submitting an incomplete form, notifying the user that the form has not been submitted and what steps they should take.

<b>63%</b>	<b>Interactive Elements (Forms) Compliant to Web Standards</b>
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## 10. Site Search Module

Search is the ability to use specified words to define or instruct a search engine what to retrieve within that Website. The Websites that can benefit most from search functionality are those that are large and complex with more than 100 pages and smaller sites that update information frequently.

[Learn More about Site Search Module](#)

## Strengths

- The search feature is accessible from all pages throughout the Website. This will ensure that users can perform a search from any location.

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- The Website offers one type of search that helps to maintain a consistent experience throughout.
- The “search” feature is prominently positioned in a consistent location in the header. This ensures that users need only look in one location to perform a search.

## Findings

- The search feature does not stand out from the rest of the page or navigation.
- The search feature is integrated as a part of the utility navigation in the form of a link.

## Recommendations

- Fifty percent of users use search when visiting a Website. The search feature should be made more prominent on the site by placing the actual search fields above the navigation area but directly below the company logo. This will provide a more inviting search mechanism and will also be less troublesome to access as it will always be visible to the user.

<b>75%</b>	<b>Site Search Module Compliant to Web Standards</b>
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## 11. Privacy Policy

Customers are increasingly concerned about their privacy online. For this reason, Websites must find a way to tell their customers about the kind of information they are collecting, how that information provides value as well as the conditions under which such information is disclosed to third parties.

[Learn More about Privacy Policy](#)

## Strengths

- Not Applicable

## Findings

- There is no Privacy Policy available at the Website.

## Recommendations

- A Privacy Policy is highly recommended for this website. The purpose of a Privacy Policy is to inform users on how their personal information will be used. In many cases, users will not utilize the “Contact and Feedback” form unless a Privacy Policy is available at the Website. The Privacy Policy must clearly state how their information will be used and whether it will be shared with third

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parties. The Privacy Policy should mention or include the following:

- A. The word "Privacy Policy" must be used in the name of the link.
- B. The link to the Privacy Policy should be available on all pages of the Website.
- C. Ensure that the Privacy Policy identifies what data is collected
- D. Ensure the Privacy Policy addresses whether personal identifiable information is disclosed to third parties.
- E. Ensure the Privacy Policy is not used for unauthorized purposes.
- D. Ensure the Privacy Policy addresses the use of encryption in the transmission of data.
- F. Ensure that the Privacy Policy addresses the use of cookies
- G. Provide a specific e-mail address or Web response form for inquiries regarding the Privacy Policy.

<b>0%</b>	<b>Privacy Policy Compliant to Web Standards</b>
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## 12. Notices, Alerts and Notification

Warnings and alerts are scripts used to notify users about timed response or to communicate errors. A scripted alert or message box is one of the ways to implement support. Without warnings, alerts or notifications, users will not receive information describing the problem and specific information about what has occurred.

[Learn More about Notices, Alerts and Notification](#)

### Strengths

- Error messages are intuitive and do not assign blame to the user. This serves to better point to the problem without any implication that the user did something wrong.
- Errors are presented with the appropriate error message statement and not simply by turning the item RED.

### Findings

- Error messages are displayed on a subsequent page and away from where the error occurred.
- There is no explanation or link to information on how to recover from an error.
- Error messages do not display in a prominently apparent location on the page.

### Recommendations

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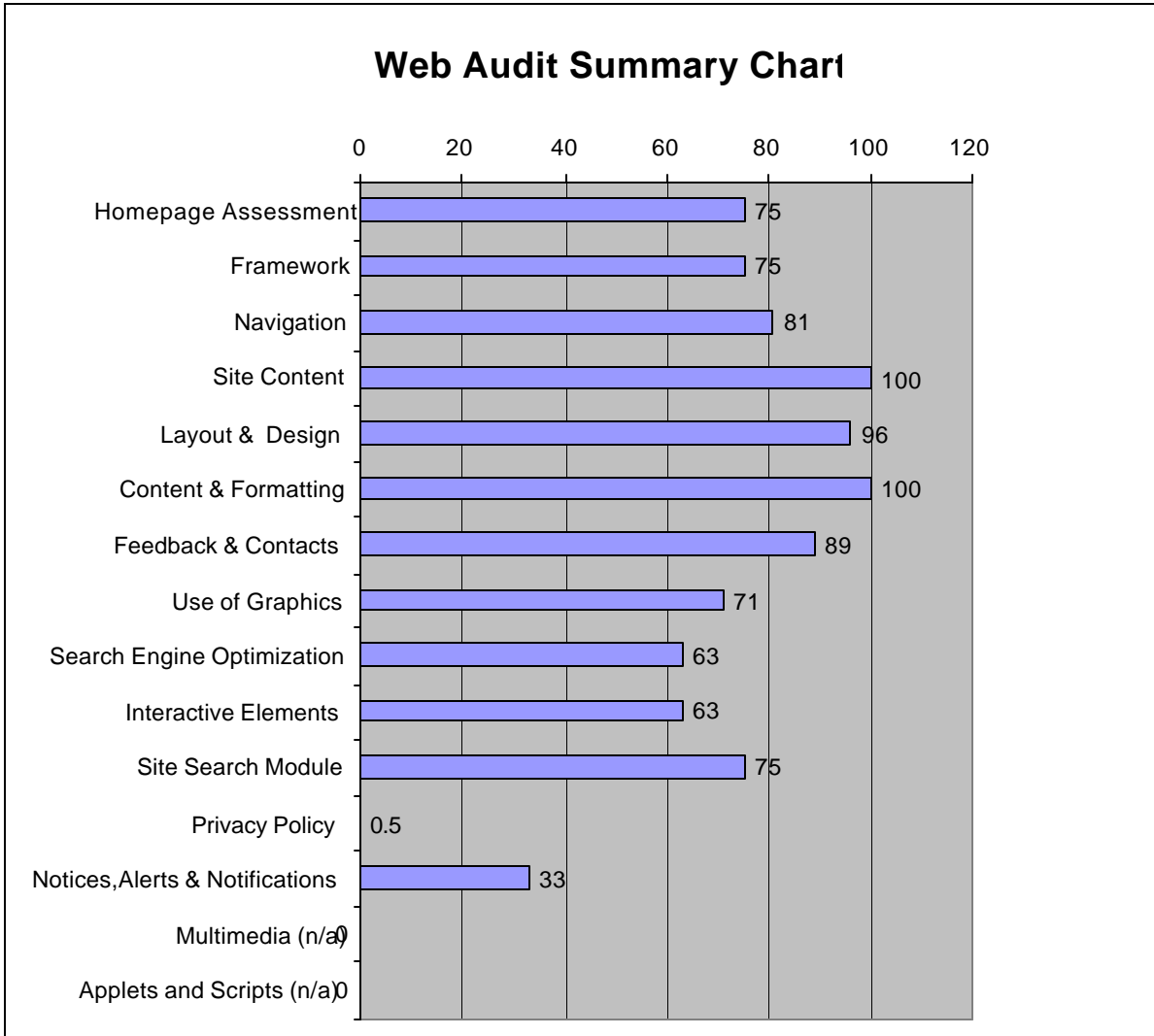
- Display error messages below the header on the same page where the error has occurred.
- Distinguish error messages from other content on the page by highlighting the error message in RED, and within a box with a RED border.
- An explanation or link to a pop up window containing an explanation on how to recover from the error should be included.
- ALL error messages should appear in a prominent location on the page (i.e. at top of the page or in close proximity to where the error occurred).

<b>33%</b>	<b>Notices, Alerts and Notifications Compliant to Web Standards</b>
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**13. Multimedia - Not Applicable**

**14. Applets and Scripts - Not Applicable**

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## Conclusion

The Sample, Inc., website has a reasonably good, clean and simple design that will not intimidate or confuse visitors to the site. Navigation menus are well positioned and are consistent throughout the entire site. Good navigation is important for a site that contains so many products and pages. It is unquestionable however, that the response time for each page to load is EXTREMELY SLOW – 15 seconds per page on a high-speed (Cable or DSL) connection. A user on a dial-up connection would simply not wait for the site to load and will leave. Slow loading pages is the most problematic aspect of the Sample, Inc. website. We suspect that this problem is due in part to a combination of slow server response time, coupled with heavy front-loading HTML content and codes that need to be processed by the browser, before the content can be displayed. Further evaluation will be necessary in order to determine the precise cause of the problem. In order for this site to function properly, the load time problem MUST be resolved.

**Sample, Inc. receives an overall compliance score of 68% to our web standards.** It is our professional judgement that 95 -100% compliance can be achieved if the recommendations within this audit are acted upon.

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## Contact Information

### Thomas Industrial Network

Web Audit Group  
Five Penn Plaza, 9<sup>th</sup> floor  
New York, NY 10001

### Business Hours:

Monday - Friday 9 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. EST.

### Customer Service and General Inquiries

212-290-XXXX  
212-290-XXXX

### Technical Assistance

212-290-XXXX  
212-290-XXXX

### Department E-Mail:

[WebAudit@ThomasNet.com](mailto:WebAudit@ThomasNet.com)

### Department Fax:

212-290-XXXX

### URL:

<http://www.ThomasNet.com>