

# A Quick Guide To SSI

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Up-to-date information on Affiliate Marketing  
and Search Engine Optimization

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# Overview

## SSI - the secret weapon of the professionals

In this Report you will:

- ✦ Learn what server side includes (SSI) are
- ✦ See why they can be a huge asset to your site
- ✦ Learn how to convert a non-SSI site into one using SSI without affecting your search engine rankings
- ✦ Learn how to use SSI for yourself
- ✦ Be given simple template files to play with

## Why is SSI useful?

Server Side Includes (SSI) is a tool that every Webmaster should have in their toolbox. This technique can:

1. Get your pages indexed quicker
2. Help them rank higher, and
3. Let you make changes to hundreds of pages at a time.

Have a look at my website at <http://ezseonews.com>

Notice on every page of that site there is a left and right menu. This menu is identical on every page of the site. If I want to review a new product, I simply link to the new review from the left menu by editing one file (my left-menu file). I upload the file and immediately have over 300+ links pointing to the new review page with my chosen link text.

The outcome?

1. Google finds the page quicker
2. Google assigns a high link reputation to the review page because of all the incoming link text (over 300 pages are pointing to that page with the same link text – the primary keyword phrase for the review page)
3. Google ranks the review page highly
4. Traffic within a week, and sales of the product I have reviewed.

The best part of all this is that it only take 1 minute to add a link to the left hand menu of every page of my site.

These menus were done with SSI. I am sure you can think of lots more uses and immediately see the benefits of learning SSI for yourself.

## SSI - Planning ahead

SSI is basically a way of inserting a file inside an HTML document(s). In my example above, the file I want to insert is the left menu and the place I want to insert it is into every page of my site.

NOTE: You can convert an existing non-SSI site into one using SSI, but it will take you time. You would need to go in and manually edit every web page on your site to specify where you want the file(s) inserted. What I always do when starting a new site is to create a template for that site. That template has four areas designated as SSI regions (i.e. places I might want to insert a file). These four regions are:

1. Header (to hold the logo and any important stuff I might want right at the top of the page). This way I can put important announcements or change the logo easily throughout the site by editing the header file.

2. Footer (To hold a navigation system, or special offers, or lists of recommended merchants). This allows me to rapidly change merchants on every page of my site (e.g. should one become de-activated in CJ).

3. Left Menu (To hold a menu or Google AdSense). Great for linking to new pages on your site for the benefits listed above.

4. Right Menu (To hold a menu, Google AdSense, or a tower style banner if there are any good relevant ones).

Now it may be that I won't use all four regions, but having them defined won't hurt in the slightest and gives me more long-term flexibility and ease of updating. If I don't want to insert any information into one of those regions, I simply leave that particular file to be included blank (i.e. an empty text file so nothing gets inserted).

## OK, so how does SSI Work?

SSI is something that is invisible to the visitors to your website. Go ahead and look at the HTML code behind the pages on my site. You won't find anything unusual there.

Lets take a hypothetical site:

I have a main Index Page, and I want to insert a left menu using SSI so that I can easily keep the menu updated on all pages as I develop the site and add new pages.

When I add a new page to my site, I simply add a link to it in the menu file and upload it. Every page in your site that inserts that menu will be updated instantly because the new file is always inserted at the time a visitor comes to view your page.

These are my two documents:

1. index.shtml - we will look at the .shtml ending later and what to do if you are updating a site that uses .html extensions.
2. menu.html - the menu we want inserted.

All I need to do is place an instruction in the index page to tell my server where to insert the menu.html file when someone requests that page.

Then when someone visits my index page and their browser goes to my server to pick it up, the server looks at my index page, substitutes the menu in the appropriate place and sends the resulting "complete" index page back as one file. All the visitor sees is my menu on the left of my web page.

When designing your menu page, you need to remember that the entire menu document will be inserted into a web page. Therefore the menu must not have title tags, or Meta tags or a header or body tag. The only thing that the menu file should have is the code to show the menu itself i.e. this is not a complete web page.

For example, here is a fairly simple menu that could be filled with your own title and links and used as the menu.html in the example above:

```
<table width="200" border="1" cellpadding="5" bordercolor="#FFFFFF">
  <tr>
    <td valign="top" bordercolor="#000099" bgcolor="#000099">
      <div align="center"><font color="#FFFFFF" size="2"><b>
        INSERT MENU TITLE HERE
      </b></font></div></td>
    </tr>
    <tr>
      <td valign="top" bordercolor="#000099">
        <div align="center">
          <p><br>
            YOUR WEB PAGE LINKS HERE
          <br></p></div></td>
    </tr>
</table>
```

If you copy and paste that code into your html editor, you can see what it looks like.

The above code would then be exactly what my server would insert on every page of my site that has an SSI command to insert the menu.

# How to insert one file into another

## Virtual & File Includes

To insert one file into another is fairly easy to do, but it does depend on the type of server you host your sites on.

There are two types of include commands used for inserting one file into another. These are called **Virtual Includes** and **File includes**. You will need to use one or the other, not both. The type you will need to use depends on the type of server you use.

## The format of the include statement

If your server is an **Apache Server** you will use **Virtual includes**.

```
<!--#include virtual="FILE-TO-INCLUDE" -->
```

e.g.

```
<!--#include virtual=" menu.html " -->
```

If your server is a **Microsoft IIS server**, virtual includes may work, but you probably need to use a **File Include**.

```
<!--#include file="FILE-TO-INCLUDE" -->
```

e.g.

```
<!--#include file=" menu.html " -->
```

**(If you are unsure which server type your site is hosted on, contact customer support and ask about the format of SSI commands).**

You will notice that the two commands are identical except for the word virtual or file.

You just insert the appropriate command into the position that you want the menu to be inserted on the page. Depending on your HTML editor, you may not be able to preview this insertion on your machine. I suggest that you upload your files to the server to check everything works. Just check the actual format you need to use with your hosting provider.

## File Extensions of pages containing SSI commands

You will notice at the beginning of this chapter that I mentioned a file extension of `.shtml`. You may not be familiar with this extension as most people use `.html` or `.htm`.

What the `.shtml` extension does is alert your server to the fact that this page has an SSI statement in it and therefore requires pre-processing (replacing SSI commands with files). Most servers will not pre-process `.html` files because it would slow down the server and make your pages load slower.

With this in mind, you should always use the extension of `.shtml` whenever you have an SSI in the page. Therefore my main page in the hypothetical example we were looking at would be called “`index.shtml`”. The menu to be included does not require the `.shtml` ending, so I would call it `menu.html`.

## Updating a site to SSI if extensions used are `.html`

One of the biggest problems a Webmaster faces when learning & incorporating SSI into existing sites is that your sites tend to have `.html` extensions instead of the required `.shtml`. This means that they don't get pre-processed by the server and your menu won't get inserted. Don't worry. There is a way around this. There is a file you can use in the root directory of your web site called the `.htaccess` file. You may or may not have one - check with your customer support.

Note: that this filename begins with a period (full-stop). This is not a spelling mistake on my behalf. That is what it is called:

### **`.htaccess`**

If you do not have one, you can just create a text file in any text editor and call it `.htaccess` (though check with your customer support to make sure this file is not just hidden from view).

This file has many uses, so if you have one already, do not delete anything in it. Instead, just add the following line to the end of the file and upload it:

**AddHandler server-parsed `.html`**

If you use .htm instead of .html in your site, add:

### **AddHandler server-parsed .htm**

If you have a mixture of .htm and .html, include both lines.

What this line will do is to alert your server to the fact it needs to pre-process all files with the extension .html and/or .htm as well as just plain .shtml files. This will slow down your web page loading by a small amount, but not generally anything to worry about.

This technique of forcing .html pages to be pre-processed has one great advantage. Search engines would normally treat index.html and index.shtml as separate pages. If you have good rankings for your index.html page and just change the extension to index.shtml, you will lose your rankings. You may get them back eventually, but it will take time. By forcing your server to pre-process the index.html file, you save your rankings while allowing you to use SSI in standard .html files.

## **Example showing SSI in action**

OK, back to our hypothetical example. I want to show you some code in its simplest form - an index page with a menu inserted using SSI. I have used a table in the index page, so please load these files into your default HTML editor and explore the possibilities. When you are happy how they work, upload them to your server and see if the menu is inserted OK. I have used a File Include, so remember, you may need to change it to a Virtual include.

Just save the two files with the names I have suggested, into a temporary folder on your hard drive, and then fire-up your editor. Have fun.

## Index.shtml

```
<html>
<head>
<title>Index file containing a menu via SSI</title>
<meta http-equiv="Content-Type" content="text/html; charset=iso-8859-
1">
</head>

<body>




<table width="100%" border="0" cellpadding="10">
<tr>
<td>
<!--#include file="menu.html" -->
</td>
<td>&nbsp;</td>
<td>&nbsp;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&nbsp;</td>
<td>&nbsp;</td>
<td>&nbsp;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&nbsp;</td>
<td>&nbsp;</td>
<td>&nbsp;</td>
</tr>
</table>

</body>
</html>
```

## menu.html

```
<table width="100%" border="0" cellpadding="5">
  <tr>
    <td bgcolor="#000099">
      <div align="center"><font face="Verdana, Arial, Helvetica, sans-serif"
color="#FFFFFF"><b>Test Menu</b></font></div>
    </td>
  </tr>
  <tr>
    <td height="1">
      <div align="center"><font size="2" face="Verdana, Arial, Helvetica, sans-
serif"><a href="http://ezseonews.com">ez Search Engine Optimization</a>
      </font></div>
    </td>
  </tr>
</table>
```

This example is a very simple one. Your pages can have multiple files included in various positions. Used wisely, SSI will be a great tool that will:

-  Get your pages indexed quicker
-  Help them rank higher, and
-  Let you make changes to hundreds of pages at a time.