

## **Search Engine Optimization Strategies**

There are millions of web sites available on the internet, so how do you ensure prospective clients find you before they find your competition? There are only two surefire ways and they both cost money - pay for an ad that appears on the results page or advertise your website and direct clients to your actual URL. But if you don't want to spend any money, this article contains a few tips that will help move you up on the search engine results - for free!

### **Web Search Engines**

Before we get into the search tips, let's review what a web search engine is. Every web search engine does 3 things:

1. Searches the web (web crawling),
2. Creates an index database,
3. Retrieves web pages based on user key words and presents them on a Results Page.

In the beginning, engines looked at information that was entirely within a web developer's control. For example, they searched the "meta-tags" which provide a guide to a page's content. But some shady developers began putting misinformation in the meta-tags to cause their pages to be displayed in results, even though they had no relation to the key words.

Next, the search engines searched for key words in titles, domain names, headings, and inside HTML <EM> and <STRONG> tags. However the developers could still manipulate their page results. Some developers put invisible text (same colour as the background) containing popular search words on a page to improve the page rankings.

PageRank (Google) was the first criteria that considered an "off-site" factor for search results, making it more difficult, but not impossible, for web developers to manipulate. It uses the logic that each link to a page is a vote for that page. The more incoming links a page had the more "worthy" it was and therefore, the higher it ranked. As a result a new kind of business sprang up on the web that facilitated exchanging, buying, and selling links on a massive scale, again creating "false" results.

Now, most search engines (including Google, Yahoo and Microsoft) use more than 100 criteria in their ranking algorithm and do not disclose exactly what their methods are.

### **Now What?**

Don't despair! Although the search engine companies no longer publish how they organize their search results there are things you can do to move on up on the results page. Remember the 3 things that all search engines do? First they send out "spiders" that follow every link they find and retrieve page information. Secondly, they create an index database storing the content and key words found. Thirdly, when someone enters search words into the search engine page, the search engine

uses the key words entered to look in the index database and present a results page of ranked web pages. The results page includes three types of results:

1. pay per click advertisements,
2. paid inclusion listings, and
3. organic (free!) search results.

Every challenge breeds a new opportunity. Search Engine Optimizers (SEOs) are a new type of consultant who attempt to figure out what the search criteria for each search engine are by running experiments. They tweak web pages and see what effect that has on the search engines results. Luckily these SEOs are willing to share their findings in forums and blogs on the web, and you can use this knowledge to improve your own website.

First, put yourself in your ideal visitor's head. What are the key words they are most likely to search on? Use a tool like Yahoo! Search Keyword Selector Tool <http://searchmarketing.yahoo.com/rc/srch/> to see the most common search words and phrases related to both your business and those of your key competitors. And then optimize your web site by:

- Using key words in the title tag and domain name. Be specific and unique.
- Using a unique and relevant title for each page.
- Ensuring keywords are used in links pointing to the page.
- Ensuring keywords appear in visible text.
- Putting keywords inside <EM> and <STRONG> HTML tags.
- Putting key words in the proper order and in close proximity.
- Ensuring the page contains terminology that specifies your products and services as uniquely as possible.
- Improving the accessibility of your site. For example, use ALT attribute for images and alternate text for Flash movies.
- Increasing the popularity of your page by having other websites link to yours.
- Using the HTML meta-tags but be very accurate and informative.
- Allowing search engines to examine your website pages without requiring any logging in or session cookies.

For more tips, look at the main search engines web sites. All of them provide tips on how to optimize your web site and improve your search results. Once you have made your changes you have to be patient! It can take weeks before the spiders crawl your site again, and your hard work starts paying off. Making some changes will help your search engine results, but remember the best way to have prospective clients find you is by advertising your website on all of your marketing material.

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