



Top ten things to do to help improve your Website's position in the search engines

Contents

1. Choose the right keyphrases.....	2
2. Optimise every page on your Web site.....	2
3. Optimise your Page Title and other Meta Tags	3
4. Optimise your page content	3
5. Undertake a reciprocal links campaign.....	4
6. Use keywords in hyperlinks, filenames and image text	5
7. Make sure your site is search engine friendly	5
8. Do not spam the search engines.....	6
9. Update your site regularly	7
10. Buy the right domain names and use them to your advantage	8

1. Choose the right keyphrases

Choosing the keyphrases to work with on your Web site is a vital first step before optimising your site for the search engines. If you optimise for the wrong keyphrases (ones that people don't often search for), then even if you succeed in getting to the top of the search engines, this will be in vain as not many people will be searching for these keyphrases, resulting in very little new traffic. For example, your Web site may rank in the top position in Google for 'your business name'. However, this is unlikely to gain you any new customers, as they will probably not know you exist in the first place.

There are various ways to discover what people are searching, but two of the best online services are provided free of charge. Services offered at www.wordtracker.com (American based searches) or Google Keyword tool (<https://adwords.google.co.uk/select/KeywordToolExternal>) can help you discover which keyphrases people are searching for the most. By using these two sites you can identify what people are searching for on the Internet. You should choose 2-3 keyphrases for each page on your Web site and 10-15 other words that often appear in similar search phrases. Then you need to start to weave these keyphrases into your Web site so when someone searches for a certain keyphrase in a search engine, your site is more likely to rank higher in the results.

2. Optimise every page on your Web site

Very often, people optimize their Web site's home page for the search engines and then either don't bother optimizing the rest of the Web site. Every page on your Web site has the potential to come up in the search engine results and can be optimized for different keyphrases.

It is impossible to optimize a page for dozens of keyphrases as in order to rank highly in the search engines for a particular keyphrase you need to make the page 'focus' on that keyphrase by including it in strategic and prominent places throughout your Web site. You can use the other pages on your Web site to target different areas of your business or different keyphrases that people are searching for.

For example, if you have a bed and breakfast business, you may focus on optimising for the keyphrase "bed and breakfast [your location]". Other pages on your Web site may focus on the activities that can be undertaken whilst staying with you such as walking holidays or cycling. You can optimize each of these pages for different keyphrases.

To use a fishing analogy, think of your Web pages as different types of hooks and baits that are suited to different fish. By optimising your pages in this way you create more chances to attract visitors to your Web site.

3. Optimise your Page Title and other Meta Tags

Meta Tags are hidden sections of Web site code within your Web site. There are many different Meta Tags but the main ones you should be concerned with are the Title, Keyword and Description Tags. In the early days of search engines, these tags were the main sections that search engines used to decide where to rank you in their results pages. Some Web developers still see Meta Tags as the only requirement for optimising a Web page for the search engines. These days, the keyword and description tags are largely ignored by most search engines and there are many other factors to take into consideration that we will cover in this and future newsletters. However, Title tags are still widely used by search engines and are the most important tag.

All of the major search engines have 100's of different algorithms that compute where your Web page should be listed for different keyword searches. Putting your keywords within the Title description (the blue bar you will see at the top of your screen) of your pages is one of the most important search engine optimisation techniques and will help your Web site climb through the rankings and allow your visitors to remember exactly what your page is all about when they save it to their "favourites". In addition, the Title tag is nearly always used in the search engine result listings, and a good Title tag that sets out clearly what your Web site offers will help encourage the right kind of visitor. You should aim to put your most important keyword/keyphrase in once, at the front of the Title tag, and it should contain no more than eight words. You should of course tailor your Title tag on each individual page within your site to reflect the focus of that page.

The other two tags, keyword and description, are far less important, with the keyword tag all but redundant but they should still be included on every page.

The Keyword tag can be used to give the search engine or directory an indication of the site's content. It should include your chosen keyphrases, separated by commas, in order of importance, and should be no longer than 20 words.

The Description tag is often used in the search engine results as a description of your Web site. It is therefore your chance to sell your Web site to potential visitors. Your Meta Description tag should contain around 25 words/200 characters and include your most important keyphrases, at the beginning of the tag.

4. Optimise your page content

It is sometimes very difficult to write content for your Web site. Not only do you need put the information that you want the visitor to see in front of them in an easy-to-read style, you also have to keep in mind the keywords or keyphrases that your page is targeting so that you can rank better within search engines.

You should aim to repeat your important keyphrases 3 to 10 times with the body text of your Web site, ideally at the beginning of the first sentence of the page and then repeated towards the top of the text. This is because search engines use

'prominence' as a factor when deciding where Web pages rank in their results for a particular keyphrase. In logical terms, a search engine will see Web pages that have the keyphrase towards the top of the page as more relevant than those that include them towards the bottom.

Even the number of words on a page is important. In theory, a page with several words on it is more useful to someone than a page with 100 words on it. All search engines work slightly differently, but a good target to aim for is 500-600 words on a page.

The home page of a Web site is always the most important when it comes to search engine optimisation. This is for two reasons. Firstly, because search engines always see home pages (i.e. index.htm) as more important. Secondly, for a page to rank well in the search engines, it needs to be optimised well for a particular keyphrase and also have many other quality Web sites linking to it. Other Web sites will nearly always link to your home page and therefore it is important that this page is also well optimised in order to gain the best results.

5. Undertake a reciprocal links campaign

As more and more Web sites become optimised for search engines, other ways of assessing the relevance of a Web site to a search phrase are being adopted by search engines, including Google. As well as being the second main way to drive new visitors to your Web site, the number of linking sites is an increasingly important factor used by search engines in order to determine your position in the search engine listings. In order to boost your rankings, you should conduct a reciprocal links campaign by contacting related but not competing businesses, portals, directories and local town Web sites and arranging to include reciprocal links on each other's Web sites.

Top Tip

If you are unsure as to which types of Web site would link to you, a good tool to use can be found at www.linkpopularity.com. As well as giving you an indication of the number of links to your Web site that exist on the Internet, it will enable you to see which Web sites link to your competitors. This may well provide you with some ideas of the types of Web sites that will be prepared to link to you. It's not just the volume of links coming to your site that matters, it is the quality of the links. Quality links are those that come from sites that are also popular in terms of links, sites that are relevant to your Web site, links from pages without lots of other links to other sites and links that use your chosen keyphrases to link to your Web site.

A good way to assess the link score of your own site, competitors and potential link partners, is to use a function that comes with Google Toolbar (free – <http://toolbar.google.com>). A page rank appears on the Google Toolbar on your Internet browser software and gives a graphical link rating of 0-10.

One final point. Search engines always place more importance on the home page of a Web site and this is also the page that most links on other sites will go to.

Therefore, if you want your Web site rank well in the search engines, it is important that your home page is optimised well for the search engines with lots of keyword rich text. If you have a simple entry page to your site with an animation or, 'click here to enter' with a logo or picture, remove it!

Getting more links to your Web site can be very effective in improving your position in the search engines.

6. Use keywords in hyperlinks, filenames and image text

This section covers three other places where you should include your keywords/keyphrases in order to make your site be seen more favourably in the search engines.

Hyperlinks – When linking to other pages on your site or indeed to other Web sites, try to include your keywords and keyphrases in the link text. These can be your main navigational links, text within the body of the page or a separate set of links at the bottom of the page. If your main navigational links are graphic buttons with text in them, search engines will not be able to read them. You should either replace these buttons with text or text on top of a plain graphic, or alternatively include a list of hyperlinks at the bottom of the page.

Filenames – Keywords within filenames can also be used to help with your rankings in some search engines. You can't rename your home page, but things like changing a page about bed and breakfast tariffs from tariffs.htm to bedandbreakfasttariffs.htm is easy to do. A word of caution. Be sure to change the links on other pages that link to the page that you have changed the link for or these links will cease to work. Most Web design software will make the changes automatically for you.

Image text - Alt Tags (the text description that appears when a mouse hovers over an image) can contribute to search engine optimisation and also serve to aid accessibility. You should include your keywords and keyphrases in these rather than merely describing the image or indeed having no Alt Tag at all. This will also help your Web site to be more accessible to the disabled community as the text can be read by screen readers that are used by people with impaired vision.

7. Make sure your site is search engine friendly

You may be very proud of your Web site and indeed you may have every right to be. More and more Web sites are using Flash and Javascript to make Web pages more visually attractive. However, if your Web site contains Flash and Javascript it's important to know that search engine spiders can't read this code and they certainly can't see or appreciate your impressive design efforts. You can check what the search engines actually see by going to www.webconfs.com and using the search engine spider simulator. This will reveal what text and links the search engines are visible to search engines.

We have, on many occasions, come across Web sites where the method of providing interactive navigation menus has rendered the search engines unable to crawl through the site and index the other pages. The way around this is to provide navigation alternatives that allow the spiders crawl deep within your Web site and index the Web pages within their results.

Framed Web sites can also cause problems with search engines. A framed Web site is essentially a way of constructing a page by actually merging two or more pages together to display in a browser. For example, a page may be displayed down the left hand side with links, a page across the top which contains a logo and some pictures, with a main page that contains the main content for the page. When a user clicks on a navigational link, the main page changes and the other pages stay the same. A framed site can also be identified by scroll bars within the page itself. Search engines have problems navigating framed Web sites and even if they can, the home page (which is the most important page as we discussed in the last issue) will contain little or no text altogether for the search engines to index, as it just contains code telling the browser where to display the pages in the frameset. A quick check of your site on the search engine spider simulator mentioned above will reveal any problems with search engines seeing your site.

Solutions

The first option is to redesign or restructure the site. You can actually achieve the same look on your site by using a simple table design.

The second option is to utilise the no frames section your pages. This section of code on a framed site was originally intended for people with old Web browsers that can't display framed sites. However, you can use this section to help the search engines get around your site. At the very least you should provide links to the other pages on your site for the search engines to follow. However, for search engine optimisation purposes you can actually create a full Web page that is well optimised for the search engines and then copy the HTML code into the no frames section.

Doing either of the above will boost your visibility in the search engines but a side effect is that people may find some of your main pages without the surrounding frames. This is overcome by including prominent links to your home page on every page and/or including a small piece of readily available javascript code on each page that recognises when people come to a page without the benefit of other frames and redirects them to the home page. This script is readily available on the Internet.

If you do have a framed site then the good news is that by overcoming the barriers it presents to search engines, you can have a large impact on your position in the search engines and therefore see increased Web site traffic.

8. Do not spam the search engines

In the early days of the Internet and search engines, Web masters tried lots of tricks to mislead the search engines into ranking their sites higher in the listings. Search

engines are aware of these old, crude tricks and will drop your site down their listings or even remove it altogether if they detect them. Here are a few Don'ts for the search engines:

Meta refresh tags (redirects user to new page) – You may use these to innocently move people from the entry page of your Web site to the main section of your site. However, unscrupulous Web masters make pages that are optimised for the search engines for particular topics and then redirect people to sites of a different nature altogether. Entry pages are not good for search engines anyway as they contain very little text. If you must have an entry page, then use a prominent hyperling rather than an automatic refresh/forwarding.

Invisible text / tiny text – Don't try and cram lots of keywords on your page by having white text on a white background or very small text. The search engines are watching! Instead go for lots of keyphrase rich text throughout your site. Excessive repetition/off-topic keywords

Don't be tempted to repeat your keywords over and over again on your site in order to trick the search engines. It won't work. Also don't think that by including off topic popular search phrases on your site you will get more traffic. These popular search phrases will be very competitive with other Web sites and even if you do get near the top, the traffic you attract won't be very targeted.

Overuse of mirror sites (replicas of existing site) – Having exact copies of your Web site on other domain names, in an attempt to get more visitors, will be picked up by search engines. More on making the most of domain names in the next issue.

9. Update your site regularly

Any business with a Web site will tell you that they often get eMails and phone calls offering various search engine optimization services that claim to get you to the top of the search engines for a monthly fee. These claims are often misleading as they only guarantee to get you to the top of the search engines for keyword phrases that they select! Usually ones that hardly anyone is searching with which obviously isn't great for bringing visitors to your Web site.

Once common service that is offered by these search engine promotion businesses is submission to the search engines on a monthly basis in order to make search engines visit your site more often. This is a waste of money! In fact, submitting your Web site too many times may result in it dropping down the listings.

Search engines won't revisit your site often just because you tell them to. They will revisit sites that change often in order to keep their database of Web site content up to date. The more often your site changes, the more often the search engines will visit and the more likely they are to see your site as a living, changing and useful site to present to searchers. The only time you should submit your site to the search engines is if it is a new Web site or it has been changed after remaining static for a long time.

In summary, don't resubmit to the search engines and don't waste money paying a company to do it for you, update your Web site on a regular basis with useful and relevant content.

10. Buy the right domain names and use them to your advantage

Choosing the right domain name (Web address) can make a difference to how well your Web site ranks in the search engines. When you undertake a search on a search engine such as Google, invariably you will see that some of the top results have some of the keywords you searched with in the domain name. Another benefit to this is that people are more able to identify the likely nature of your Web site by virtue of your domain name, making you more likely to be picked by the user in a search results page or on a directory listing.

Some businesses have understood that domain names can make a difference and so proceed to purchase countless domain names containing relevant keywords. Unfortunately, these domain names will not bring any traffic a Web site unless they are typed in by people on the Internet (which is unlikely). As there is no content at any of these domain names the search engines are unable to index them and include them in their listings. They are therefore of very little benefit.

Having additional domain names can work for your business if you purchase a cheap hosting package with them and include some content in the form of a Web page or pages, with a prominent link to your main Web site. These are called doorway sites and can act as keyword focused pages that may attract search traffic. In addition, they can be counted as a separate Web site that links to your main Web site, thus increasing its page rank (link score), which can have a positive effect on search engine rankings.

Two words of warning. If you do decide to create 'doorway' sites, make sure you don't just copy and paste pages from your main Web site. This will be penalised by search engines. You should also buy the domain names for doorway sites from a different hosting company to your main site. This is because multiple domain names are hosted against an IP address with a hosting company and search engines are known to ignore links that come from the same IP address.