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Search Engine Optimization Guidelines

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is the process of structuring your web site for the best possible positioning in search results for the major search engines. These guidelines will introduce you to the basics of SEO.

Choose your Keywords

The first step in optimizing your web site for search engines is to think of the main phrases that best reflect your business, and then compose the text of your pages around them. These words or phrases are known as keywords.

1. Your first keyword is the name of your business.

2. Your second set of keywords consists of your name and the names of your sales staff, or anyone in your organization who meets prospective clients.

3. Create as many additional keywords as you can think of that reflect your business. Brainstorming sessions are a great way to generate keyword ideas. Get your staff together at the local pizza pub. Meet with business associates or people in your Leads group.

Qualifying your Keywords

Not all keywords are created equal. If your business is unusual, or if you don't have a lot of competition, the most obvious keywords will get good positioning in search results. Even if you are in a crowded field, target your relevant keywords. You may want to explore additional strategies such as directory listings or pay-per-click to get your business seen on the web.

One strategy for identifying the best keywords from your brainstorming sessions is to use Wordtracker (www.wordtracker.com). Wordtracker gives you lists of keywords that are related to the ones you enter, and shows you which of your keywords are popular and how well your page would rank relative to other sites that are currently using the keyword.

Structuring page content around your Keywords

Once you have identified your keywords, put them to use, **one keyword per page**. Include keywords wherever possible in the visible page text. Start with page Titles and Page Content, as search engines give the heaviest weight to keyword usage in these areas.

1. **Page titles (title tag).** Put your keyword in the page title, preferable at the start of the title. (The title is shown at the top of the browser page). Although different search engines like to see different word counts – for example Google likes 5-8 words in the title, MSN likes 3-5 words – don't get too obsessive about it. Write something that makes sense to your visitor and describes what is on the page.

2. **Page content.** Structure your page content to feature your keyword. Google and Yahoo like to see the keyword appear 5-38 times in your page text, whereas MSN likes 1-2. Use your judgment on this. Remember, your content has to make sense to your audience first.

Fine Tuning

Search engines also use other visible content in determining keyword relevance. Text within links, file names, and alt tags may influence page ranking.

1. **Text within links.** This text, usually underlined, links to another page or another section within the same page.

2. **File names.** If you can include the keyword in the name of the .html file that targets the keyword, this helps with some search engines.

3. **Alt tags.** This text that appears in a little white box when you roll the mouse over a photo or image.

Non-visible Content

Meta Keywords and Meta Descriptions are non-visible content that influence some search engines. The Meta Keyword tag contains the keywords appearing in the page. The Meta Description contains a short description of what the page is about, and is shown in the search results.

Because of over-use and abuse, most search engines do not rely solely of these elements, and some ignore them entirely. However, a good Meta Description that states the page content in a nutshell can be valuable. Use this tag for marketing purposes, to attract people to click on **your** link rather than the other 10 in the search results.

Link Popularity

In theory, the search engines assume that if other sites are linking to your site, it deserves a better ranking (when all else is equal). Two main types of links work best to increase your link popularity: links from other sites that focus on the same keyword phrases your site focuses on, and links from relevant categories in major directories and industry-specific portals.

Very often these links from relevant sites will bring more traffic to your site than a high search engine ranking, so it is useful to put some effort into obtaining such links.