

SEO Essentials

The What, Why and How of Search Engine Optimization

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Introduction

In this eBook, we will look at what Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is, why it is good for you and how to take care of the basics. If you understand and implement the basics of SEO, you improve the chances of your customers finding you through search engines. In internet speak, it's called "Traffic". Effective SEO generates Free traffic.

SEO is a long term strategy for generating traffic and it is the best strategy for online marketing. If you need traffic today, then you should go with PPC or PPV but if you can wait a few days, then SEO will out deliver most other methods and at a much lower cost.

Search engines may come and go - yes there were about a dozen a decade ago - but if your site has sound on-page and off page SEO, your pages will keep drawing traffic. It is one of those fields of marketing that all marketers need to understand or at least the basics. It helps you structure your websites from the ground up with search engines and the customer mind. It also helps your copywriters keep both the customers and the search engines in mind.

Whether you have a traditional brick and mortar business or an e-commerce site or a blend of both, you promote your business through different mediums like newspapers, radio, TV and of course the internet. On the internet, you can promote using various methods like Pay Per Click Ads, Pay Per View, sponsorships, mailing lists, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and so on. SEO is just one of them.

Why our fascination with the internet? Because of it's reach, because of it's lower cost and because of it's long term value with certain methods. Why our fascination with SEO? Because of it's long lasting benefits. Pages that were made 10 years ago are still drawing traffic. Where else do you get such value for your dollar?

A banner Ad on the internet is like a TV or radio Ad. You see or hear it and then it's gone. If you want to re-run your campaign, you have to pay again. But if your website ranks well on search engines, it will keep drawing traffic over and over again with minimal effort and no additional cost. The long term benefits of SEO far outweigh it's original costs that aren't much to begin with.

You don't pay search engines to index or catalog your website. They are paid by businesses who advertise on their site. The more people a search engine can draw, the more they charge advertisers. It is in the best interest of search engines to index your website along with million of others so their customers, that is people who are conducting the search, find it useful and don't leave them dissatisfied to conduct their search on a competing search engine. Search engines regularly change the algorithms they use in an effort to improve search results for people using their search engine.

People conduct a search, also called natural or organic search and if they find your website, they come and visit you. Once a prospect reaches your website, the quality of design, content and utility must be appropriate to the market in order to have a chance of doing business. But that is a different subject.

SEO is part of an overall marketing strategy just like Print and Media advertising is, just like Public Relations is, just like Pay Per Click is. It's long term benefits however; keep drawing more and more people towards it and it should.

Chapter 1

Why Use Search Engine Optimization

SEO (Search Engine Optimization), as previously mentioned, is a sub section of internet marketing. With SEO, there are no shortcuts. If you are looking for a way to get quick and easy results, then SEO is not it. You will need patience and sustained effort to get a continuous flow of traffic.

Once you understand it, all your future website developments will keep SEO in mind while developing new categories, pages and content. That is, you will plan and design with SEO in mind.

Here are some of the key points to consider:

Good Content

You want your page to be found by search engines but it should make sense to the people who search, find and visit your page. No point in your site being highly indexed if people immediately leave after they land on your website.

For the content of your site to be good, it should be factually, as well as grammatically correct. However, what is important is that whatever your site is about, the content actually needs to be unique and specific so that it will appeal to people.

By having good content on your site, visitors will refer it to others. They may also return and eventually these visitors who return are quite likely to link to your site from their websites, bookmarks, facebook page etc. Having lots of inbound links is not only great for your site, but for search engine rankings also. It is even better if many of those links are from highly ranked sites.

Not only do you need to have good content on your site, you also need to have fresh content. If you add new content to your site on a regular basis, you are giving your visitors more reasons for returning. Because of your regularly adding fresh content,

search engine robots will also visit your site more often. What this means is that any new content you add will get indexed much quicker in the future.

Check your Spellings

If your site is written in English, then you are probably aware of the differences in spelling between American and British English. Where in the UK they will write “colour”, in the USA it is written as “color”, and the same can be said of “labor” and “labour”. Unfortunately, there are many words between these two languages that are often misspelled, and in fact, the same can be said for many other languages around the world. Write to the language of your audience.

Make sure your Page Titles are Descriptive

Make your page titles simple, descriptive and relevant. It will make it easier for search engines to know what each page is about. This will also allow people to scan through the search results they get, and to quickly determine if your document contains what they are actually looking for. It is tempting to start your Page Title with your company name but think from the searcher's point of view – your company name does not matter to him. What your page is about is what matters.

Use of Real Headings

This is where you need to use H1-H6 (header tags) elements for your headings. If you use graphics for your headings you are able to use any typeface you want but search engines do not pay much attention to that. Even if you use the alt attribute to specify an alternate text for heading images, this is not anywhere near as important as using real text in a heading element.

If for whatever reason you are unable to or do not want to use real text, then look at the various image or flash replacement techniques that are available. However; beware - there may be some risk involved in doing this. As image replacement involves hiding text, it is quite possible that you may be penalized by search engines for doing this. Stick with conventional H1 to H6 headings and you will be fine.

Ensure that your URLs are search engine friendly

It is important to use search engine friendly URLs, as opposed to dynamically generated ones that have a query string (which lets the server know which data to fetch from a database). Unfortunately, there are many search engine robots which have difficulties with this kind of URL and they may well stop at the question mark, and so not actually look at the query string.

By using a search engine friendly URL; you are helping both your ranking and users of your site. Many sites have seen an incredible improvement just because they have changed the URL scheme on it. However, the modification and rewriting of a site's URL can be a little tricky and not always possible with dynamically generated content.

Getting Linked

There is no easy or sustainable way in order to solve this but for one. The really only good way to ensure that your site gets linked is to ensure that it contains good content. For any site on the web, incoming links are very important, especially for Search Engine Optimization. In fact, you may find that this is the hardest part of SEO for you to implement.

If your site has fresh and constantly updated content, then you may keep getting new and repeat visitors. If not, then you may consider various backlinking strategies.

Link Submission

Submitting your site to directories and search engines is useful. This is especially important if the site happens to be new and has not as yet been picked up by Google and many of the other search engines that are around.

But if you do want to look at submitting it to some directories, you may want to consider using Yahoo Directory and Open Directory Project and some directories specific to your topic (for example, if you have a blog, try submitting to <http://www.blog-search.info>). But you will need patience, as it can take several weeks for any submissions to be processed unless you pay for it to be listed.

Do not try to fool the Search Engines

Never use such methods as cloaking, link farms, keyword stuffing, alt text spamming or any other dubious ways. Although they may work for a short time, you not only risk

getting your site penalized, but it could actually be banned from search engines altogether.

As search engines like their results to be accurate, they just do not take kindly to people trying to trick them.

If you can't resist the temptation of trying any and all methods, create a secondary website and turn your creative juices on that.

Avoid the use of Frames

Although it is possible to provide workarounds that will allow a search engine robot to crawl frame based sites, these will still cause problems for any visitors who find that site through a search engine.

What happens is that when someone follows a link from a search result to a frame based site, they will end up on an orphaned document. This will, in most cases, create confusion for the user, as in many cases, vital parts of the site will be lost, such as navigational links.

Browser Detection – Be Careful

If you have to use some kind of browser detection, then make sure that it does not break when a search engine spider or any other unknown agent comes along. Unfortunately, if the spiders can not get in, then your site will not be found.

Meta Tags

You will find that most search engines do not place a great deal of value on content contained within Meta Tags today from the indexing score point of view. That is because they have been abused by spammers. Do put some thought in your Meta Description though as that is quite often what the search engine displays in the search result. It should be addressed to the prospect / customer. Upon reading your description as shown by a search result, your Meta Description may help a person decide whether to visit your site or not.

Meta Keywords do not hurt but they don't really help either as they have been abused by spammers. Use them though as you never know when search engines may decide to use them again.

Chapter 2

Basic Link Structure within a Site

This is probably the most obvious, but certainly one of the most overlooked aspects of search engine optimization. This helps to make sure that search engine spiders can actually find (crawl) all of your site's pages. But if they can not find them, then they won't get spidered, and this means that they won't get indexed. In fact, no amount of search engine optimization you try will help.

Below are some points that should be taken note of in respect to link structure for your site.

Spiders can not see links which are accomplished by JavaScript. This is because, as far as search engines are concerned, they do not exist. So if you want spiders to follow the links on your site, do not use JavaScript. In fact, you will find that Google will not spider any URL if it looks like it has a session ID in it. So any URLs that have a longish number or odd characters (such as a question mark) in them should be avoided (these are often dynamic URLs).

It is important that you make sure that all pages link to at least one other page. Pages which do not link out are known as "dangling links". It is important that you structure the internal links so that targeted search terms are reinforced. Make sure that you organize your links such that your topic's sub topic pages are linked to it (ensuring that you use the right link text that is specific to the page being linked to) and vice versa. See below for the different types of methods we mean.

Link Text (some link text

Example:

My favorite site about

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<a href="http://interlopergolf.com/category/golf-reviews-comparisons">Golf reviews and comparisons</a>
```

This is one of the 2 most important elements to ensure good rankings for a site. It can either be on pages within the site, or on other sites' pages. But which ever way you do it, it is important that it is included. It is vital that you include the target page's main search term in the link text. Also, whenever possible, do not use identical text for every link that links to a page. But if you can include the target page's main search term in the link text instead.

In fact, links will carry more weight with search engines if the text around them is about the target page's topic and search term(s).

Title Tag <title>some title words</title>

This is probably the second most important element in order to get good rankings for a site. It is important that you make sure the page's primary search term is contained within this tag. So place it as near to the front as possible while ensuring that the title reads well. In fact, there is nothing wrong with your placing the search term up front on its own and then follow it with a period or hyphen such as "Review of Golf Wedges – InterloperGolf.com ?" As you can see, the target search term here is "Review of Golf Wedges". Make sure that each page's title tag is different from the title tags on your site's other pages.

Some people insert their company name in front but you put yourself at a disadvantage when you do that. In the above example, we could have used 'InterloperGolf.com' as the leading term but most people won't search on that. Most people would search for 'Review of Golf Wedges' and that's why we put that phrase ahead of the company name / site name.

Description Tag <meta name="description" content="a nice description">

Google no longer indexes the description tag. But you should include this on each page for search engines that do. Even if search engines don't index the description tag, they quite often will display that as the summary / brief under your link. It is important that you write a description that is appealing and meaningful to the reader and incorporates the page's search term into it at least once. If you can, place one at the start or as near to the start of the description as possible.

Keywords Tag <meta="keywords" content="some keywords">

It is important to remember that the keywords tag is never actually treated by search

engines as keywords. They will be treated as text on a page. Although this tag is not effective as it used to be, there is no reason to leave it out. Instead, make sure that you put in plenty of relevant keywords and include the search term once at the front of the tag. Also, you do not need to separate keywords or key phrases with commas (as is often done) as search engines ignore these.

H Tag <Hn>some heading words</Hn>

The “n” in this tag represents a number from 1 to 6. The biggest heading is represented by 1. You will find that H tags are given more weight than ordinary text in a page, and so the bigger the H size, the more weight it will have. It is important that you include your target search term in the H tags at least once on the page, but if possible two or three times is even better. Also place your first H Tag as near to the top of the site page as possible.

Bold Text

This gives more weight to a phrase than ordinary text, but not as much as an H Tag. Wherever possible, enclose the search term in bold tags occasionally where it appears on the page.

Normal Text

Whenever possible, use the search term as often as you can on the pages of your site. But ensure that they do not detract from how the page actually reads. Ensure that you use the term once or twice in the very early parts of the body text, and then as often as possible throughout. If you need to, reword small parts and add sentences to ensure that the search term is well represented in the text for good search engine optimization. Don't overdo this though as your readers won't like it. Besides, if you overdo it, search engines will penalize you for keyword stuffing.

Alternate Text

**Alt Text **

Include your search term in the alt text of all images on your pages. It is important to

remember that some systems, such as those used by Braille readers and speech synthesizers, use the alt text. So it may be advisable to make them usable while including the search term.

Summary:

1. Carefully select the main search terms you want to use.
2. Allocate these search terms to a suitable page, and if you need to, split pages, that is, create multiple pages.
3. Organize your internal links, and then link text, to suit the target search terms and their pages.
4. If you can, organize links from other pages to suit the target search terms and their pages also.
5. Organize on page elements in order to suit each page's target search term.
6. Sit back and watch your rankings improve.

Chapter 3

Keywords Optimized for SEO

Search Engine Optimization does not need to be complicated. Each and every page of your site is a unique entity, and needs to be treated in the appropriate manner where SEO is concerned. Below we provide you with some guidelines which should help you achieve your desired SEO results.

Get the Keywords Right

It is important that you pick the right keywords (words used to describe your product or service). Do not pick words which are too general. Using words that are more specific will result in a higher ranking for your site. Also, it is important that you choose words which are suitable to your site. For example, you will find that “optimizing search engines” and “search engine optimization” have completely different rankings.

Include keywords in your Page Titles

Unfortunately, a lot of people will use either inappropriate names or their company name in the page’s titles. It is important that you include the appropriate keywords in your title, as that is the way people carry out searches on the internet.

Inclusion of keywords in your Title Tags and Meta Tags

It is vital that for each page of your site, you include the appropriate keywords within all the page’s tags. Also, take time to go over the Meta description that you use. You should make sure that any description you use is catchy and of interest to potential visitors to your site, and include keywords within it wherever possible. Search engines may use the description as a summary under the Title and link.

Keywords in Content

It is important that you include keywords in the content of your site. But do not over do this, as too many will result in your page being discounted by the search engines.

Using these basic guidelines for keywords in relation to search engine optimization will help you rank your site higher in search engines. Translation – increased traffic.

Chapter 4

How to pick the right keywords

Making a website attractive to search engines is a key factor for its success. One way to rank well with search engines is by optimizing the visible keywords on pages. But in order to be successful in your keyword strategy campaign, you should use the following two steps.

Keyword Selection

You will need to determine what your pages are offering and also determine which words your potential visitors might use in order to search for the pages of your site. You then need to create keywords which are based on those words.

For the full optimization of keywords on your site you should use between 3 to 5 keywords on the appropriate pages. It is vital that you start using them from the top left and then down. Many times you will find that this will be the first 200 words on each page of your site which will include the title tag, headings, abstract etc.

So the closer to the top left of your page the keywords are placed then the more weight they will be given by search engines. Often, visitors will view your site in the same way that the search engine spider's do, so emphasizing your keywords from the top left and down is a good way to design a site.

However, if your pages are already built, you may be thinking it is too late to select your keywords. But it's not. It does not matter if you choose your keywords before or after the site has gone live (although it is better to do it before, as then you will not need to rewrite the text on the pages). Re-writing some paragraphs may be all you need to optimize a page.

Also, another issue where keyword selection is concerned is you need to determine whether the keyword is too popular or competitive. So if you find sites that are already competing for high rankings using particular keywords, then you may need to

select more specific keywords instead. This can also be said for keywords which have several different meanings as well. Therefore it is important that you look how users will search for your pages, and which specific questions the content of your pages actually answers. So whenever possible, refine the keywords that you use in order to answer these questions.

But whenever you are refining your keywords, it is important that you keep in mind that a large portion of searches carried out on the net contain three words or more. So when people are searching for answers on the internet, they will often phrase their search term as a question. Therefore many people will not use search words that describe the solution to a question. In order to optimize your pages to their full extent, it is best if you think like the person who is searching.

Check out the Competition

This is a great way of getting ideas, and you do this by carrying out a search using keywords that you already know, and that you would like to target. Then click through the top sites that come up as a result of this search. Once on the site, view their source HTML code and view the keywords that they have in their Meta tags. But it is important that you remember to use those keywords which relate to your site or page. It is easy to view a sites HTML code, all you do is click on the "View" button at the top of your web browser page and then select "Source" or "Page Source".

By developing a list of keyword phrases, you should be able to optimize each page of your site for the search engines. Don't be afraid of making multiple pages for the same product with different keywords.

Chapter 5

Search Engine Friendly Content

Although you may think it is about stuffing your website with target keywords, it isn't. In fact, you may find that you could fall afoul of search engines if you do this. What you need to remember is that you need to write copy that not only spiders will look at, but also human beings. What is the point of having a site that is highly ranked, yet none of your visitors can understand? So it is vital that your site is user friendly to both your visitors, as well as search engine spiders.

First of all you need to answer the following questions:-

1. What is your site for?
2. What does it do?
3. What do you want your visitors to do when they reach it?
4. Would you like them to spend money when they get to it?
5. Or are you just providing them with information?

Answering these questions will have an impact on the copy that you write.

Whenever possible, use short paragraphs or bullet points, as these are more likely to attract visitors, while more lengthy essays will only drive them away.

But if you are selling a service or product then you need to make your site look interesting. Provide as many calls to action as you can, and not just provide them with an online price list.

Remember that even though you are trying to rank higher in search engines, your site should be designed first and foremost for human readers. As long as a site has been designed well with people in mind, then 9 times out of 10 you will find that it is search engine friendly also.

Just like a visitor to your site reads the copy on your page in order to figure out what

you have to offer, so does a search engine. So when a search engine is looking at your page, they are looking for keyword phrases in your copy (Content).

Here are some tips on writing SEO friendly content for your website:

1. You should have at least 200 words of copy on each page of your site. Although this may be difficult at times, search engines really like it, so it is important that you increase the amount of copy where you can. Generally speaking, once you surpass 1,000 words, the search engines will pretty much stop looking...so no need to get too long, unless the desired action you want from the visitor requires it.

This text, wherever possible, should include your most important keyword phrases, but should still remain logical and easy to read by visitors to the site.

2. Make sure that you use phrases that you have used in your tags / keywords.
3. Add additional copy filled pages to the site, such as how to articles, tips or tutorials. Not only do these types of pages help with SEO, but you may find that other sites will link to yours.

Optimizing your page copy (content) is one of the most important things you could possibly do in order to improve your rankings in Search Engines.

Chapter 6

Do Backlinks matter

A backlink is a link which directs others towards your site; they are also often referred to as inbound links (IBL's). So, the number of backlinks that your site has is an indication of how popular or important it is according to your peers (other site owners). These are especially important for SEO, as search engines such as Google will give more credit to those sites with a good number of quality backlinks. They consider these sites more relevant than others in the results pages of a search query.

Most search engines want websites to have a level playing field, and will more often than not look for natural links that have been built slowly over time. Although it can be fairly easy to manipulate the links on a web page in order to achieve a higher ranking, it is a lot harder to influence a search engine with external backlinks from another site. This is why these feature so highly in a search engine's algorithm. Today it has gotten even harder to achieve these inbound links because of unscrupulous webmasters. Such people try to achieve these links by deceptive or sneaky techniques (through either hidden links or through automatically generated pages). Such pages are known as link farms and they are generally disregarded by search engines. Such techniques though enticing are risky and can get your site banned entirely from search engines.

There are a number of ways in which back linking can be achieved.

1. Reciprocal Linking - this is where you link to another site that provides similar service or product as you and they in turn have a link to your site on theirs. Don't overdo this as search engines don't like too much of reciprocal linking.
2. Site Submissions. Submit links for your site to directories which allow free submissions, or if you can afford it, some paid directories. There are many sites around which offer a service where you can submit your site details to numerous sites. Plus, if you want, you can always create your own directory of similar websites.

3. Articles. This is another way of getting great backlinks. So if you have a reputable looking site that contains informative, well written reviews, then there is a good chance that your articles will receive high search engine rankings also. But it is vital that any articles you write are on the subject, informative and thorough in relation to your site. Also you could always write a few articles for submission to article sites such as EzineArticles.com or SearchWarp.com. This is another great way of getting even more backlinks to your site.

Below are a few tips you will need to consider in order to write good articles for your site.

- a. Write in a way that your intended target audience will understand what you are trying to say. In other words, don't write it like you were a teacher talking to a class of 10 year olds, but don't be overly complicated.
 - b. Watch your spelling, grammar and punctuation. If in doubt, then use your spell checker.
 - c. Do not make your article too long. Usually a good article will consist of between 350 to 500 words.
 - d. Always include a resource box at the end, as this will include that all important backlink to your site. This resource box should also include a short biography regarding you and your site.
4. Blogging. This has now become an integral part of the internet, and is one of the most effective ways of linking. You either have the choice of placing a few words of comments on to someone else's blog, or you may want to link to them from your own blog. In fact, you will find that most blogs will be happy to link back to you. However, it is important that you try to update your blog regularly and post interesting content to ensure that people will want to link back to you.

Conclusion

People find you through search engines. If your site shows up higher in searches, you will get more traffic. More traffic translates to greater sales.

Although everybody wants to rank high, most sites don't. That is because people fail to understand just exactly how search engines work and how to optimize their site for search engines. But you have by reading this eBook and now you have an advantage over your competition.

This eBook is just the starting point. Search Engine Optimization is a vast subject but this is a good starting point. Start making pages that are optimized and re-write your pages where necessary. Measure your current traffic and keep measuring every month. That will give you feedback as to the effectiveness of your SEO efforts.

Every site and every product is different. Keep experimenting. When you figure out what works well for you, rinse and repeat.

Good Luck!

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