The Basics of SEO

SEO Basics 1

SEO stands for "Search Engine Optimization" and is the process by which you Optimize your web site so that it is positioned well in the search engines. This is not the same thing as designing a site so that it attracts customers and entices them to buy.

SEO is what you do specifically on your site to improve your Search Engine Position. If you do a search on Google for any search term you will be presented with a list of links. At the top of the page and along the right side will be PPC (Pay Per Click) links where someone pays an amount per click to get positioned. With PPC the more you pay the better your position. Most people only glance at these listings. You don't need SEO to get one of these positions, just lots of money.

The body of the page contains "organic" listings. These links are listed in the order that Google determined best fit your search, with the best match first. There are only 10 listings per page, most people will only look at the 1st page, maybe the 2nd. So your site needs to be listed within the top 10 and at the worst within the top 20 for any useful exposure. With SEO you will be adjusting your site code so that your site will rank highly. This can be a daunting process as there may be thousands of sites competing for the same top listing. A trick is to aim your pages at less popular search terms to get higher placement. It is better to be on page one for a term that gets 1,000 searches per month than to be on page three for a search term that gets millions of visits.

SEO Basics 2

Your web site must be search engine friendly. The search engines send out "spiders" or "bots" cataloging web pages they come across. If the search engine has trouble getting through to your pages it will either rank your page poorly, or skip your site all together. Making your site Search Engine Friendly means having the code easily accessible, no errors in the code, and guiding the search engine through your site.

Try to steer away from complicated coding when possible. Check your site for coding errors. This is fairly easy to do with web programs like Dreamweaver which do this for you automatically. Plan on having text based navigation on every page. This is usually placed at the bottom of the pages. You may also want to have a "Site Map" page with easy to follow text based links to all of your important pages. Search Engines will look for a Site Map and will use that to navigate a site if available.

SEO Basics 3

The Most Important SEO Aspect is Keywords. Keywords are the terms you type into a search engine to find interesting web sites. You need to know what search terms people are likely to use to find your site, then use those terms as your Keywords. Make a list of the keyword combinations you can think of that you would use to find your site. Try them all on a search engine and see the results.

You need to see how these search terms perform on the web and what other search terms could be used. A great free tool to help with this research is available at Google:

https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal

You type in a search term, then you are given a list of similar search terms, how often they were searched and some advertiser comparison figures. You can quickly find additional keywords and to see how well they perform. A good idea is to optimize your site for a less frequently used keyword combinations so that you can achieve a higher placement. The Google Keyword Tool will help you figure this out.

Focus on keyword groups with 3 or 4 keywords. Many times keywords will overlap, so you can focus on a longer keyword combination and cover many other combinations at the same time. For instance, if you are designing a page to sell Photoshop Training, you can optimize for this keyword phrase "Adobe Photoshop Training Video". This will not only give you optimized performance for this keyword combination but also for these other keywords and combinations as well:

Adobe
Photoshop
Training
Adobe Photoshop
Photoshop Training

Adobe Photoshop Training
Photoshop Training Video

So try to come up with a multiple keyword combination that will contain several other keyword combinations as well.

Once you know what keywords you want to use you are ready to place those keywords on your page. The main places you want to use the keywords are:

In the meta title of the page
In the meta description of the page
In the first sentence on the page
In all of the image alt tags
In links to and from the page
Well represented in the body text of the page

Make sure you Pick the right keywords, and make sure they cover more than 5% of the word usage on the page. An easy way to get more keywords onto a page is by using lists such as:

We carry:
Adobe Photoshop Training Video Sets for Educators
Adobe Photoshop Training Video Sets for Students
Adobe Photoshop Training Video Sets for Business

Keep in mind that your page text should still be user friendly. If you use your keywords too frequently or in strange ways on your page, it may rank better in the search engines, but it will drive away visitors. Who wants to read a poorly written page?

SEO Basics 4
Don't try anything funny. There are lots of "tricky" things you can do to cram more keywords into a page without annoying your visitors. The problem is that the search engines know about these tricks and will penalize your site if you use them. So don't do any of the following or you may find your web site disappear completely from the search engine listings.

White letters on white background, or any other similar text coloring trick. Even using a very light gray text on a white background, or very dark gray text on a black background can get you bumped from the search engines.

Don't repeat your keyword over and over again. People used to do things like this at the top or bottom of their pages: Photoshop Photoshop Photoshop. This worked in the early days of search engine optimization, but no longer. You should also not try this trick in alt tags, image names, links or other places in your code. The search engines will spot this and you will be penalized.

Don't put keywords into comment tags. Also don't put keywords in hidden form fields. The search engines will spot these and mark you down accordingly.

Even though putting keywords into image names and alt tags is a great idea, don't think that you can just create a bunch of clear gif images sized at 1x1 and fill those with keywords. The search engines are very good at spotting tricks like this as well.

So use your keywords appropriately, don't try to sneak one past the search engines and you should do just fine. Just keep in mind, if you think that you need to hide the keywords to trick the search engine you can rest assured that they have already thought of that and will do their best to devalue your site accordingly if you use these "black hat" tricks.

SEO Basics 5
All pages should have links to other pages. The main search engines like links. They like outside sites linking into yours, but they also like links within your site going to other pages. So in this case having more pages can be useful. Also since you now have all these pages that you are linking to it gives you a great place to use some more keywords. Make sure that your links include your keywords.

But, and this could have been in section 4 above, don't create "doorway pages" that redirect you to another

page. It used to be common SEO practice to create lots of doorway pages, each one stuffed with specific keywords, all of which would redirect the visitor to the actual page they were looking for. This would give your site lots of pages, with lots of internal links and would allow you to tightly optimize these doorway pages for specific keywords, but the search engines have gotten wise to this trick and now penalize the use of redirect pages. So don't use redirects unless you absolutely need to and never use doorway pages.

SEO Basics 6
Only optimize a page for one or two keyword groups. More than that just dilutes your keyword ratio. The search engines will analyze your web page to determine which words are used as keywords. They do this by looking at the title, the description, the page heading and the words used on the page. They then determine how relevant your keywords are to your page. So, if you try to use too many different keywords on a page, it will only bring down the percentage of any individual keyword or group for that page. It is better to optimize for a larger keyword group as discussed above than to try to optimize a page for a lot of individual keywords that can't be easily used in one sentence. If you need to have a page optimized for several different, unrelated keywords you are better off creating several different pages and re-writing the body text on each page to match the keywords you are optimizing for. This will make each page relevant for the specific keyword and will get a better placement in the search engines.

SEO Basics 7
Be patient. Even with a perfectly optimized web site it can take several months for it to rise in the search engine standings. I usually recommend waiting at least 90 days and up to 6 months to see how well a web page is doing in the search engines. Also, even though you have gone to great lengths to target a specific keyword or keyword combination keep in mind that the search engines aren't required to agree with you. So when checking your standings look at several different search terms that you discovered in your research and see how well your page is placing. Hopefully you will find that your chosen keywords are getting your page listed the way you want, showing that your SEO has worked properly.

If you find that your page is ranking better for a different keyword, you should examine your page code to see why and make adjustments as needed. Maybe your page is placing higher for a keyword combination you weren't focusing on, but it is still a good combination for your goals. This gives you an ideal opportunity to go with that new combination to achieve even higher placing.

There is a lot more to SEO than just these 7 quick points, but this will get you started on the right path. Go through these steps and your web pages will be well positioned for any other SEO you may want to perform on your site in the future. – *George Peirson*