SEO: Strategies, Factors & Mistakes

SEO doesn't have to be complex and by following these simple on-page optimization techniques you can give your SEO campaign the perfect start.

SEO is often seen as being a difficult and in-depth process, but the reality is that by following some reasonably common sense guidelines it is possible to get good rankings. That's not to say that optimization is a simple or quick process; there are, unfortunately, no short cuts. Your SEO efforts should be a concerted and long term endeavour, in order for you to enjoy the best possible results, and should incorporate both on-page and off-page optimization techniques. By following the on-page SEO strategies below you can set a strong foundation for all your SEO work.

Keyword Research
Before you begin penning content and writing title and meta tags you first need to research the keywords you will use on each of your pages. Using the wrong keywords can negatively impact your entire campaign, causing you to lose untold hours and days of work and eventually forcing you to concede that you made the wrong decision and start all over again.

The most appropriate and most beneficial keywords are popular enough that they will enjoy regular searches but without being prohibitively competitive or overly generic. A number of keyword research tools exist and your competitors' websites are a good place to start your early research. Ensure keywords are targeted specifically to the type of content you will provide as well as the service or product you will be selling. More targeted keywords will result in more targeted visitors and targeted visitors mean greater conversion rates and an improved return on your efforts.

Niche And Semantically Related Keywords
A good strategy is to incorporate a reasonable list of competitive keywords with less competitive ones. The more niche keywords will serve you well during the early days of your website and over time you should be able to start competing for the more challenging of the keywords you use. Also incorporate semantically or topically related keywords into your keyword list because the search engines are placing more and more emphasis on those pages that use related keywords as well as primary keywords.

Accessibility And Standards
Site accessibility is an integral part of good website design, but it should also be considered an important factor in any SEO strategy. Using standards based code for your website will help to ensure that anybody that wishes to access and view your website will be able to do so. It will also mean that the spiders used by search engines will be able to access and index your pages effectively ensuring that you get the full credít for your site.

Navigation And Intra-Linking
Your navigation menu and internal links should be prominently placed, easy to see, and easy to follow for the spiders. It is good practice to include a text link from the home page to a compliant sitemap on your site, alleviating any potential problems that might arise from broken links or the use of graphical or flash based navigation menus. You can also consider adding links into the main body of your content, although too many will make the page difficult to read and therefore diminish the overall effectiveness so don't get too carried away.

Title And Meta Tags
While search engines do not specifically use the meta tags to help assess the value of a page like they once did, meta tags are still critical to good SEO performance. The title and description tags that you add at the top of a page are used in various ways including in the compiling and display of Search Engine Result Pages (SERPs). This is the first thing a potential site visitor will see from your site so this mini listing needs to be as effective as any paid advert or PPC ad. Poorly written titles and descriptions can put many readers off viewing your pages so a little time and effort here can have a very positive effect.

Using your keywords in the title and the description is good practice because these will be highlighted in the search results if they were used in the search query itself. This will make your result more prominent and instantly identify your page as being relevant to the user. Don't needlessly use keywords, however, and don't throw extra keywords into the description at the cost of a well written, short ad.

Other Formatting Tags
On-page content should always be written with the visitor in mind, although obviously it can still be optimized for

search engines. As such, proper page structure is important to your reader as well as to the engines. H1 and H2 tags are an effective way of breaking up page content, and give readers the chance to skim through a page and determine its relevance.

A page should only contain a single H1 tag at the top of the content but can include multiple H2 and H3 tags. Alt tags on images should also be included and these as well as the actual file path to the image itself can include important keywords (but do make sure that they actually make sense and are more than just a keyword thrown in for the sake of SEO).

Page Content Optimization

Finally, we get to the heart of the page - the content itself. Use the keywords you researched for a page, including semantically related keywords. Write as naturally and appealingly as possible while keeping those keywords in mind and don't get carried away stuffing or cramming them into the body of the text. Not only is this unappealing to readers but is seriously frowned upon by the search engines.

The reader really is the most important aspect of your content. If the majority of your visitors are coming from the search engines, remember that they arrived using specific keywords. This means that they are searching for equally specific information relating to those keywords - make sure you deliver on the promise that you made in your title and description tags. - *Matt Jackson*

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Choosing Your Target Keyword Phrase

Many new Internet Marketers make the mistake of choosing the wrong keywords to target. So what makes a keyword inappropriate?

Your ideal keyword phrase should be around three to four keywords. If you are targeting a word like "music", you may find that you may not be able to rank for anything. That is because the keyword itself is too general. Whether you are looking for someone to sign up as a member, download a song, or buy something from you, you want to be sure that you are matching the right offer to the right audience. In other words, you are looking for targeted traffíc. So instead of choosing a keyword like "music", a keyword phrase like "local music bands" would be a much better choice.

Use a keyword research tool to make sure that the keyword will bring you traffic. If you are targeting an obscure keyword that nobody ever uses, you may just be wasting your time and resources. Google offers a free keyword tool that will give you a good idea on which keyword phrase to choose. The tool reveals estimated search traffic, as well as the level of competition.

But don't be over-reliant on keyword tools to help you find keywords. As a business owner, you should be very familiar with the market. Know who your target customers are. That will help you find and locate valuable keywords that no one else would've thought of.

Choose keywords with a fair amount of competition. Some marketers believe strongly that keywords with little competition are easier to rank. Therefore, it makes sense to target those keywords. But if you are setting up an online business, you want to be in an active market. In other words, the best keywords are those with a fair amount of competition, but are not overly saturated. A fair amount of competition is a good indicator of the value of a keyword phrase. You stand a much greater chance of success if you target those keywords.

Setting Up a Search Engine Friendly Website

Fortunately, you don't have to be a geek to learn how to tweak your sites. Most content management systems are SEO friendly, and the best part is, most of them are free. The popular ones include Wordpress, Joomla, Drupal, and DotNetNuke. Your web pages will be search friendly when they are hosted on these systems. But if you really want to learn the basics, make sure that you implement the following.

If you are tweaking your site manually, there are two important things that you must implement. First, always make sure that your target keyword phrases are included in the title tags. Use them in your META keyword and description tags as well. Next, use a search engine friendly file name such as "your-keyword-phrase.html". You can easily rename your html files using any text editor.

Manual tweaks can be implemented easily if you have a small site. But if you are thinking of growing the website into a huge site, you should consider using a content management system (CMS). If you are using a CMS, be careful not to overload the site by installing too many unnecessary plug-ins. Remember that your primary goal is to make it easy for the search bots to find your web pages, and to determine the overall theme of the content. By installing too many unnecessary bells and whistles, you are making it more difficult for the search bots to do their job. For that reason, you will often find that simple templates tend to work better than fancy ones. Don't overcomplicate things. The golden principle here is to keep things simple.

When you are satisfied with the design and content, it's time to let the world know about your site.

Link Building with Articles

There are many ways you can build back links to your site. You can post entries on blogs, submit links to Web 2.0 properties, submit URLs to a bunch of web directories, or write and distribute press releases and/or articles. You can use a combination of these methods if you have the time and resources, or you can keep your focus on just one - such as article marketing.

Article marketing is one of the easiest methods to get well established websites to link to you. These are authority sites that have been around for years, and you can get hundreds (maybe even thousands) of one way back links from these sites. One way back links means links that point to your sites, but that don't require a reciprocal link back.

Every article you write allows you to include two to three simple text links at the bottom of the article. This is when things get interesting.

In the "eyes" of the search engines, every link from an external site to your website is counted as a vote. In other words, the more back links you have pointing to your site, the better your site will rank. Of course, these can't be any back links. They have to be links from authority sites and relevant web pages.

Now you already know that there are literally hundreds of article directories on the Internet that are recognized as authority sites by the search engines. All you have to do is to create relevant content, put your links at the end of the articles, and submit them to the article directories. When they are approved, your articles get published online, and you get a bunch of high quality links pointing to your site.

What you really need to know here is that you must be careful about what you include as the anchor text for your links. Anchor text are words that you place within the HTML link tags. For instance, instead of having your links as "Click here", make sure that you create links that say, "Your Keyword Phrase".

This is how the search engines determine the theme and relevancy of the content on your website. The assumption here is that if there are a thousand links from external sites "saying" that your site is about "green aliens", then perhaps your site is really about "green aliens".

Write on topic, and include your target keywords as anchor text. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise.

What to Expect After Your Articles Have Been Published

If your website is brand new, don't expect to see miracles overnight. It can take anywhere from four to six weeks for a new website to pick up speed. If you have done everything right (choosen the right keywords, optimized your site, and picked the right anchor text), your site will appear in the search index in about three weeks. Initially, it will appear on page 5 or 6 of the search results, but that is a very good sign.

Two weeks later, your website should move up to page 3 or 4. Don't rest on your laurels and stop writing and distributing articles. Keep up with your link building campaigns. If you have chosen the right keywords, you should be able to rank in about 6 weeks. For highly competitive keywords, it may take longer.

Your goal is to at least get your site to rank on page 1 on the major search engines. Once it emerges on page 1 of the search results, you will be receiving a steady stream of highly targeted traffíc from the search engines. Do your part by serving your visitors well by publishing valuable content or offering killer products. You will soon be enjoying handsome rewards. - *Darren Chow*

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Search for a list of SEO factors and you'll find that most feature at least 50. There are actually more like 200+ signals that search engines use when ranking websites.

The truth is that everything boils down to three factors:
1. Search-Friendly Pages
2. Relevant Content
3. A Trusted Website

All of those other factors and elements of SEO? They all fit into one of these three basic categories.

You don't need to be a search scientist to understand the basics of what's going on with these three factors and improve them for your website.

1) Search-Friendly Pages
Essentially, this first factor has to do with the technical aspects of how your website and pages work.

Search engines use crawlers (or "bots") to browse the web by following links. As they browse, these crawlers scan the content they see and store it in databases. These databases form the search engine's web index - and when a user comes along and enters a search phrase the index is scanned for pages that match.

The basic idea: you want to make sure your pages, and the content that fills them, are visible to search engine crawlers.

There are a few things you should know about crawlers:

• **They don't support JavaScript** - so that rollover menu, those drop-down links, etc, might not be visible to search engine crawlers.

• **They don't support Flash** (mostly) - while there have been a few developments in this regard recently, Flash websites still aren't too search engine friendly.

• **They can't "see"** - sometimes designers use images instead of HTML text (usually because they want to use a certain font that isn't web-safe), and search engine crawlers can't read or index this text. Crawlers can only read code - and if your content isn't found there it's essentially invisible to search engines.

• **They skimp on resources** - it takes a lot of energy and time (and money) to crawl the web (there are a lot of pages out there) so crawlers are usually programmed to be conservative with how far they'll dive into a page. If your web pages take a long time to load or feature a tremendous amount of content crawlers might leave without scanning/indexing everything.

There are some other things crawlers can't/won't do. To get a sense of what they can see on your website try SEO-Browser.com. This tool allows you to enter the address of a web page and see it as search crawlers see it.

The bottom line: you might have the best content in the world, but if crawlers can't see it you won't rank for relevant keywords.

2) Relevant Content
This factor is all about the words on your pages.

As we discussed above, the visible content on your pages is stored and searched every time someone uses a search engine. If the keyword or phrase entered doesn't occur on your page you probably won't show up.

There are a few key places where you'll want to use the right language on your pages:

• Title tags
• Headlines
• Body copy
• Anchor text (links pointing to internal pages)

As you browse the web you'll probably notice that lots of webmasters have gotten a bit, shall we say, "overzealous" with optimizing their content. Title tags stuffed to the brim with dozens of keyword variations is common. Sometimes even the body copy itself is stuffed with keywords in an attempt to boost rankings.

You might be tempted to do this yourself to try and enhance your chances of ranking for a given keyword.

Don't do it. Please.

Why not? Try reading a page that's been stuffed with keywords this way. It's an awful experience, right? Certainly enough to stop your reading flow and send you to another website, isn't it?

Don't sacrifice your user's reading experience in the aim of ranking for a given keyword. It's not worth it. All of the traffic in the world won't mean a thing if the users who land at your pages are turned off and leave. Your competitors are just a few painless clicks away.

To learn about what keywords people use when they search for your products/services/info try Google's AdWords Keyword Tool - enter either your website address or a keyword and this tool will return a list of related keywords including numbers on how many people search for them.

The bottom line: it's rare to rank for a keyword that doesn't occur on your pages so use the language your users do when they search. Don't overdo it and stuff keywords, though, because you'll annoy your visitors (and search engines don't like it either - they might flag you as SPAM).

3) A Trusted Website

When you've got **1)** search-friendly pages and **2)** relevant content it's still not time to sit back and let the search traffic pour in.

The truth is that most of your competitors will have looked into these factors already - they're kind of the "low hanging fruit" of SEO, because they're not usually terribly difficult to work out.

Trust is what sets you apart. It is by far the most important of the three factors.

Before Google came onto the scene using PageRank (a measurement of link popularity) to rank websites, search engines generally based their rankings on the first two factors we've discussed.

What was the problem with that approach?

Webmasters are greedy. We can't help ourselves. We love traffic.

Keyword stuffing was rampant, and rarely did webmasters stick to the honest truth about what their website was relevant to. The result: search results littered with SPAM and just about anything with very little relevance.

The reason links were a better signal to Google was simple - it's harder to game. While you can control the content/ keywords on your website, it's a lot harder to control it on someone else's. It's pretty tough to get someone to link to you against their will.

The model simply worked - Google's results were better. The other search engines quickly caught on and looked to signals of trust for sorting through the SPAM.

Some signals that search engines use to determine whether they can trust your website:

   • **Inbound links** - quality is more important than quantity here - that's why those "500 directory links for $49.95" deals are worthless. The easiest links to get are the least valuable/powerful. A single link from Google.com, for example, would outweigh tens of thousands of weaker links - that's how much quality matters.

   • **Website age** - if your website is new there's not much you can do about it without a Delorian and a working flux capacitor ("Marty, the website is in place - now we gotta go back to the future!"). A website that's been around for a

while is simply more trusted by search engines.

    • **Who you link to** - it's not just about inbound links. Search engines also look at what websites you link to from your pages. If you're linking out to SPAMMY websites, they might consider you part of that "bad neighborhood" and penalize your website. Be careful who you vouch for.

There are other signals involved, but if you've got these three trust factors working in your favor you're very likely to dominate the competition.

The bottom line: search engines don't like getting burned by ranking SPAMMY websites. They want to know they can trust your website. Once you've got your on-page factors right (#1 and #2 above), you'll need to build trust signals before your website will rank competitively. - *Mike Tekula*
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Following are the 9 Biggest SEO Mistakes which Web Designers & Web Developers should avoid.

Splash Page
I've seen this mistake many times where people put up just a big banner image and a link "Clíck here to enter" on their homepage. The worst case - the "enter" link is embedded in the Flash object, which makes it impossible for the spiders to follow the link.

This is fine if you don't care about what a search engine knows about your site; otherwise, you're making a BIG mistake. Your homepage is probably your website's highest ranking page and gets crawled frequently by web spiders. Your internal pages will not appear in the search engine index without the proper linking structure to internal pages for the spider to follow.

Your homepage should include (at minimum) target keywords and links to important pages.

Non-spiderable Flash Menus
Many designers make this mistake by using Flash menus such as those fade-in and animated menus. They might look cool to you, but they can't be seen by the search engines; and thus the links in the Flash menu will not be followed.

Image and Flash Content
Web spiders are like a text-based browser, they can't read the text embedded in the graphic image or Flash. Most designers make this mistake by embedding the important content (such as target keywords) in Flash and image.

Overuse of Ajax
A lot of developers are trying to impress their visitors by implementing massive Ajax features (particularly for navigation purposes), but did you know that it is a big SEO mistake? Because, ajax content is loaded dynamically, so it is not spiderable or indexable by search engines.

Another disadvantage of Ajax - since the address URL doesn't reload, your visitor cannot send the current page to their friends.

Versioning of Theme Design
For some reason, some designers love to version their theme design into sub level folders (i.e. domain.com/v2, v3, v4) and redirect to the new folder. Constantly changing the main root location may cause you to lose backlink counts and ranking.

"Click Here" Link Anchor Text
You probably see this a lot where people use "Clíck here" or "Learn more" as the linking text. This is great if you want to be ranked high for "Click Here". But, if you want to tell the search engine that your page is important for a topic, then use, that topic/keyword in your link anchor text. It's much more descriptive (and relevant) to say "learn more about {keyword topic}"

Warning: Don't use the EXACT same anchor text everywhere on your website. This can sometimes be seen as search engine spam too.

Common Title Tag Mistakes

Same or Similar Title Text:

Every page on your site should have a unique <title> tag with the target keywords in it. Many developers make the mistake of having the same or similar title tags throughout the entire site. That's like telling the search engine that EVERY page on your site refers to the same topic and one isn't any more unique than the other.

One good example of bad Title Tag use would be the default WordPress theme. In case you didn't know, the title tag of the default WordPress theme isn't that useful: Site Name > Blog Archive > Post Title. Why isn't this search engine friendly? Because, every single blog post will have the same text "Site Name > Blog Archive >" at the beginning of the Title Tag. If you really want to include the site name in the title tag, it should be at the end: Post Title | Site Name.

Exceeding the 65 Character Limit:

Many bloggers write very long post titles. So what? In search engine result pages, your title tag is used as the link heading. You have about 65 characters (including spaces) to get your message across or risk it getting cut off.

Keyword Stuffing the Title:

Another common mistake people tend to make is overfilling the title tag with keywords. Saying the same thing 3 times doesn't make you more relevant. Keyword stuffing in the Title Tag is looked at as search engine spam (not good). But it might be smart to repeat the same word in different ways:

"Photo Tips & Photography Techniques for Great Pictures" "Photo" and "Photography" are the same word repeated twice but in different ways because your audience might use either one when performing a search query.

Empty Image Alt Attribute

You should always describe your image in the alt attribute. The alt attribute is what describes your image to a blind web user. Guess what? Search engines can't see images so your alt attribute is a factor in illustrating what your page is relevant for.

Hint: Properly describing your images can help your ranking in the image search results. For example, Google image search brings me hundreds of referrals everyday for the search terms "abstract" and "dj".

Unfriendly URLs

Most blog or CMS platforms have a friendly URL feature built-in, however, not every blogger is taking advantage of this. Friendly URL's are good for both your human audience and the search engines. The URL is also an important spot where your keywords should appear.

Example of Friendly URL: domain.com/page-title
Example of Dynamic URL: domain.com/?p=12356

These things are the pillars of Search Engine Optimization and so to your web site's success path. - *Robin Dale*