

Search Engine Optimization: Learning the Basics

Every day, there are billions of people who log onto the internet to get what they need. Of these billions of internet surfers worldwide, more than 90 percent of them turn to search engines like Yahoo, Google, and MSN, to help them locate what they need faster. Whether it is for shopping, getting information, or downloading important files, search engines offer convenience unlike any other. For this reason, many companies opt to take advantage of the value of search engines, and incline their websites towards search engine optimization, or SEO.

First of all, what are the goals of search engine optimization, and why are many companies highly prioritizing this aspect of business? In a nutshell, SEO aims to make websites more popular for search engines to list in results pages, such that they are made more visible for internet surfers to visit. The higher the page rank, or if a webpage is listed among the first ten results, the better it is for creating traffic towards a particular site. Many companies prioritize SEO methods and invest a lot in these efforts because a higher volume of website traffic creates more sales, and hence generates more income.

In this basic guide, you will be introduced to some key concepts of SEO, and how you can employ them in your website to be able to drive more traffic in the process. You can only imagine the massive income potential of a website when effective SEO comes into play. Keep in mind that you don't need to be an expert in programming to be able to have an effective campaign for SEO. It just takes a good grasp of the basics and careful planning to drive the success of your website and your business forward.

- **Getting indexed is a top priority.**

Websites need to be indexed by search engines before they can be listed down in results pages. Think of the index of Google or Yahoo as a library of websites, and whenever someone makes a search query, the search engine will look through its index and list down the most relevant ones for the internet surfer to view in search engine results pages (SERP). The programs search engines use to crawl the web and find relevant websites are called bots or spiders.

Spiders or bots generally crawl through all the websites in the web, gathering info with the help of keywords, and determining the relevance and SEO-friendliness of websites. Usually, in a particular website, all pages and sub pages have to be indexed. A way for spiders to go from one page to another is to follow links on web pages. The more links pointing to your site and its pages, the more food you provide for these bots. Another way to get your site on the search engine index is to manually submit each page on Yahoo or Google. This is a more recommended option, especially if websites undergo major changes, as it keeps a more updated index as well.

- **Is your site SEO-friendly?**

As said before, spiders and bots are fond of SEO friendly sites, as there are more places for them to crawl on. A way to make your website SEO friendly is to also make it user-friendly. It depends on how you layout the interface of your site, and how easily navigable it can be. Use menus and functional links to guide visitors as they surf along. At the same time, your content must be relevant, and should be something that will be useful to both the bots and the visitors that come upon your website. Also, keywords are essential, and there is a proper method of using them. More on that will be mentioned in later sections of this guide.

- **Keywords are your friends.**

Keywords, as mentioned in the section about indexing, are food for spiders and bots. These are also flags or markers that search engines take note of whenever a website is indexed. This means that when someone types in search query keywords that are relevant to your website, Google or Yahoo will find your site in its index, and include it in the SERP. Certain keywords are denoted as stronger than others, which makes them more effective to use in the aspects of web design and content creation.

For instance, if your site is about selling baby shoes, the keywords “baby shoes” may have more than 27 million results in Google, and “cheap baby leather shoes” has about 480,000 results. In this case, “cheap baby leather shoes” may deem to be better keywords to use, as the competition is significantly less than the other keyword. You can use these keywords within the articles of your site, integrating them within paragraphs in a well-composed fashion. There are certain tools available in major search engines that can help you research the most effective keywords to use in your website, and you may also monitor these trends as they can change from time to time. This means that strong keywords today, may not be as effective to use later on. It pays to be updated in this regard.

Keywords are used in various aspects of website planning, designing, and development. They are used beyond the text content of a website. Keywords are used in titles, anchor texts, image names, headings, and most especially in HTML tags.

- **Using tags are important.**

Note that HTML serves as the universal language of the internet. Web browsers, like Mozilla FireFox, Netscape Navigator, and Internet Explorer all operate by converting HTML codes into web pages with texts, images, and graphic layouts that can be viewed by online users. Tags are commands used in HTML and are enclosed within the < > symbols. Did you know that search engine spiders and bots crawl over the HTML codes of every web page on the World Wide Web? Because of this, using tags sensible and effectively is a must.

Also, note that spiders crawl through the HTML tags in a top to bottom fashion, and this is why using keywords among the topmost tags is important. You should maximize the use of title tags when you design your websites, and these are seen on the title bars of web browsers. Going back to the example on the baby shoes website, the title tags are denoted in this manner: <title>My Online Baby Shoes Store</title>

Meta tags are also very effective in maximizing the good use of keywords. These are placed within HTML codes for various purposes. This is a good place to put in keywords, without having to compose paragraphs for them. At times, meta tags are used to give a short description of what the page is about, and which keywords the page is optimized for. You can find many resources that provide detailed formats of meta tags you can integrate onto your site. Here is an example of a format: <meta name= "description" content = "This is an online store for all kinds of baby shoes."> And you may also use this: <meta name= "keywords" content = "baby shoes, online baby shoe store, cheap leather baby shoes">

- **In terms of content, it is quality over quantity.**

Why would people come to your website? They surf the web to read your content, of course. Because content serves as an identifier for your website, you should keep in mind that your content quality must be tops. Quality means that your articles, write-ups, descriptions, captions, and the like must be well-composed, follow proper grammar and formats, and provide useful information to its readers. At times, it is more effective to write shorter paragraphs instead of longer ones, because readers can get tired of scrolling down to read more. It is also important to constantly update your content, using newer and more effective keywords every time. Having fresh and always relevant content ensures that your website will have a high volume of traffic, as people will want to come back for more.

What if you don't know how to write content for your site? What happens if you don't have time to carefully compose what you want to say online? In this case, there are many companies who opt for paid writing services or content creation. This is an excellent way of maintaining quality in your website content, because research and proper writing guidelines are followed. Furthermore, content must be 100% unique, and not plagiarized from any printed or online source. And for a small amount of investment, this effort can save you time, allowing you to focus on more important SEO aspects of your website and business.

Another thing to note about website content is that writing articles about your company and business can serve as an advertising campaign as well. Besides submitting your pages to Google or Yahoo for better SEO, you may also submit articles to article directories. Most of these directories already have a good page rank in major search engines, and if your articles are posted there, you can help make your business and website more known to others. This is also why many article writers add their website links within the text for better indexing by spiders. Having articles in these databases like Ezinearticles or Goarticles will also establish you as an authority in your given industry, and help give your business a reliable reputation.

- **Things not to do with keywords.**

Though many would immediately think that using as many keywords as possible will be good for indexing, this is not always the case. There have been countless cases of keyword stuffing within website content and within HTML codes. Keyword stuffing is an unconventional SEO technique that involves piling in as many keywords as possible in a single page, or adding in so much within meta description and meta keywords tags. More often than not, these keywords are not well-written within articles, and would make no sense at all to the reader. They are just there for the sake of the spiders or bots who are indexing that particular page.

You should not use keywords in a spammy fashion. There is such a practice called hidden text or hidden links, in which the keywords are repeated several times on the page, but have exactly the same color as the background, so they would not be normally seen. There also some who place keywords behind graphics or images, to fool the bots and consider the page as keyword rich, but not necessarily relevant for SERP. There is such a rule called keyword density, which helps bots determine if enough keywords are enough. Many website owners are well aware of this, usually using keywords that are below 5% of the total word count of the content. Going above this, and you might be considered as spam.

Smartly enough, search engines of today have found ways to go around this abuse of keywords. Because their programs get more and more advanced by the minute, websites who spam their keywords and over stuff their content are removed from search engine indexes, and not to be listed on SERP. Think of proper keyword research and keyword use as part of SEO netiquette.

- **Widen your network: use link building.**

When indexing is the topic for discussion, links are as powerful as keywords in guiding spiders and bots. You may consider links as arrows, telling the bots to “go here” so they can index your site further. For this reason, it is vital to link all the pages of your site together, a method you can apply onto your navigation bar or menu. This way, when a spider indexes a page, it will be directed to the other pages of your site via the links.

Another thing about links, did you know that search engines can also rank pages based on their link popularity? The more popular the link, the higher it will be listed on SERP. This is why your site must have as many back links as possible, or links that point from one website towards your own. Back links can be found in many places, and it is up to your own stratagems on how you can make them more visible and more clickable for internet surfers. The practice of making your links more popular is called link building, and there are many ways by which you can accomplish this.

You can do link building by having affiliate or partner sites post your own link in their sites. In exchange, you also do the same for them. That way, you can take advantage of their good traffic and drive a volume of that to your site. You can also open a social

networking account or a blog for your business, where you can freely add links that point to your site. In a way, constructive commenting on blogs of other people is a channel for placing your own links so others can be directed to you to learn more about you. Again, article submission to directories can also help you build more links. However, there is a certain link density you must follow, and this is dependent on policies of articles databases. This link density also helps prevent excessive link usage and spamming.

- **Learning the tools of the trade.**

As said before, you don't have to be a total expert on information technology or programming to pull off a successful SEO campaign. Furthermore, search engines and specific companies have made it much easier to manage websites, through webmaster tools and free software programs. You may remember the keyword research tools that were mentioned earlier, to help you plan out effective keyword choices and create more relevant and keyword rich content for your site.

Other tools you might want to use are: keyword trackers, which inform you which keywords of yours are more popularly searched for in Yahoo or Google; and HTML validation tools, which let you know if any of your links are broken or malfunctioning, allowing you to make immediate repairs. There are also statistical tools offered by domain host companies and also major search engines that help you monitor the progress of your site. You can find out how many visitors are entering at a given time, which month generated the most traffic, and how well you are earning from your website.

- **Maximizing a site's income potential through SEO.**

Companies highly value effective SEO implementation, because this increases the income generating potential of their websites. A key term you might want to remember is the conversion rate, which indicates the amount of traffic on your site that are converted to buyers and income. The higher this value is, the better it will be for the profitability of your business. This is why in most cases, having a high volume of traffic is not enough, as you really need to exert more ways to get those visitors to buy from your company.

In this case, you can turn to advertising tools offered by major search engines. These will allow you to place your advertisements on Yahoo or Google SERP, making them more visible to potential clients. Such campaigns are called PPC or Pay Per Click. There are many other effective methods that fall under search engine marketing or SEM, and if this is an avenue you want to venture into, you can check out Yahoo SEM and Google AdWords.