

Optimizing Your Website for Search Engine Ranking

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Once you have designed a web site and have it up on the internet, it is important that people find you. We find that most of our customers use their web site as an electronic brochure to refer people to. The web site then presents the products or services a company offers, shows that they are a professional company, and provides a way for people to follow up if they are interested in using the company.

But the web can also be used to generate new business as well. The problem is getting your site “seen” by potential customers when they are using the internet. The primary mechanism for getting your site in front of people is search engines. The job of search engines is getting the right sites in front of people when they are trying to find something.

Your job is to get your site ranked high on search engines so that it will be seen. This process is called **Search Engine Optimization** or SEO. Once you feel like you have your site optimized properly, you need to make sure the search engines know about you. The process of getting your site on search engines is called **Search Engine Submission**. When you have used good SEO techniques on your site, a search engine will rank your site well. This is called **Search Engine Ranking** or **Page Ranking**.

There are many theories about how to optimize your site for high page ranking. If you ask 10 experts, you will likely get 10 answers about what are the most important things to do. That said, there are some tools we have in our SEO tool belts that most experts agree on. In this article, we try to stay with the basic things that are agreed upon in the industry in how to improve your page ranking.

Now that you are a bit more familiar with the process of how search engines work, let’s take some simple steps to get your site found on the internet.

Step 1- Create a Search Term List

When some is trying to find a product or service on the internet, they go to a search engine and type in some words they feel like describe what they are looking for. For instance, if I’m trying to find a place that would repair my lawn mower, I would type in “lawn mower repair”. I would most likely also type the city I’m looking in as well, otherwise, I’d get all sorts of national results that did not pertain to the location of where I am looking. So, we want to put our selves in the place of our customers and think through what search terms they would use to find you.

Something things to consider:

1. People usually type in phrases, not just single words. So, think through phrases.

2. Try to include some general words as well as specific words. The specific words are the ones that will most likely get you found. When I'm using general I'm using more general words, I will be competing against larger companies that will be spending a lot of money on SEO, so try to think through specific words that describes what you do. For instance, if I own a record shop specializing in hard to find 70's rock albums, I'm going to need to find some more specific words than just rock or music. I'm going to want to include 70's for sure, and maybe even some of the key bands that I sell that are hard to find.
3. Much of the time searching is done with a location in mind, some of your key words need to be location specific. At a minimum, you should have one of your search terms be your city and state. You may also want to add another more specific term if you are in a local shopping district as well.

At the end of this process you should have at least a couple search term phrases. If I lived in Portland, OR and had a painting contracting business, I might have a search terms like "painting contractors" and another "Portland OR" and maybe "residential painting service".

Data-Imagery tools:

1. Login and go to Website and then Pages.
2. Click on your Home page and go to properties.
3. At the bottom of the properties page, there is an SEO section and a place to enter "key words"
4. Enter your key word search phrases with a comma separating each one.
5. Make sure you save the page.

Step 2- Create a Home Page Title and Description

Now that you have some key search terms that you think people might be typing into search engines, you need to have a description that they can read if they find you in the search engine. This description is also used by the search engine in ranking your page so it is important that you include many of your search terms embedded in the content.

Your page title is also critical in describing your page. The page title should really be a short version of the page description. There is an added benefit to the page title, because internet browsers actually show the page title in the top of the browser window. Most search engines use the page title as the heading when listing search results, so keep this in mind as well. You want to make it short and easy to understand so that someone that is reading the title in the search engine will be more likely to click on the link to go to your site.

Some things to consider:

1. The description is usually 1 to 3 sentences about what you do.

2. Be smart about including your search terms within the content of your description
3. Don't make it too long or too short.

Back to our painting contractor example, a good description might be, "We are a painting contracting company located in Portland, OR. We specialize in commercial painting but also provide excellent residential painting services."

Data-Imagery tools:

1. Login and go to Website and then Pages.
2. Click on your Home page and go to properties.
3. At the bottom of the properties page, there is an SEO section and a place to enter "title" and "description"
4. Enter your title and then enter your description.
5. Make sure you save the page.

Step 3- Analyze Home Page Content

Search engines have really become smart in analyzing site content to find the gist of what you are communicating. Site content that is well written and uses a variety of words to express what it is your organization does, will provide high page rankings. If your site was created well, you are well on your way here. If you are concerned about your site content providing a cohesive story of what it is you do, take some time now to update it.

Search engines use equations like relevant content compared to total page content as a part of ranking pages, so you need to find the right mix of content. In general we find that search engines like more content than less content. It isn't always true, but my own opinion is that most every site I see that ranks high on search engines has a lot of content, more than I would expect. More and more, we are seeing sites that even add content in the footer...a lot of content. They will add further descriptions of their products and services, include testimonials, even include content their industry and what some industry trends are.

Some things to consider:

1. Go through your home page content and make sure the content has a variety of words to tell the story of your products/services, mission, history ect. The page should have a minimum of 250 word.
2. Make sure you have used your key words and at least some of your description throughout the content. Don't bunch key words together and don't overuse key words. If you have a key word used too much there is a chance this might hurt you. The best policy is to make it as natural as possible.
3. Use some bolding or different text styles to highlight key content. There is not full agreement within the SEO community about this, but if you can do it without making your site look bad, then do it.

4. Add content in your footer to further describe your products and services, your history and even current trends or thoughts about your industry.

Data-Imagery tools:

1. If you have content changes to make:
 - a. Login
 - b. Go to Website and then Pages
 - c. Click on your home page in the tree and choose design in the drop down menu on the right.
 - d. Update your content, and make sure you save!
2. If you have footer changes to make:
 - a. Go to Website and then Plugins
 - b. Expand Content, and then choose your footer content plugin
 - c. Choose design from the drop down on the right.
 - d. Add the content and make sure you save!

Steps 1,2 and 3 are a really great starting place with SEO. If you are in a hurry, at this point, you could skip to step 7 and submit your site to the top three search engines. Then at a later date, you could complete the rest of the steps.

Step 4- Optimizing Your Site Pages

So far, we have been focusing our efforts on getting your home page optimized. The reason for this is that the search engines really focus on your home page. Usually this is a good thing, because hopefully your home page is designed to draw potential customers into the site. But, it is also important to get the rest of the pages on your site optimized as well. Depending on the size of your site, this could be a sizable effort, which is the reason we made steps 1-3 pretty easy to complete in order to get your site up and seen by search engines.

The next three steps require more work, but really are what will make the difference in getting your site ranked high in search engines. This is where the detail work happens. Unfortunately in the SEO world, ranking has to do with a lot of small things instead of one or two big things. And it takes time, so be patient and stay at it. This is one of the reasons why it costs so much to pay SEO experts, their time is valuable and this stuff just takes time.

The next thing we are going to focus on is analyzing your page names. Some content management systems use page ids in the url to display the page instead of the actual page name, and this is very bad for search engines because page id (like 1004 for instance) says nothing about the page you are on. To prove this point, try doing a search yourself on Google searching for the term "SEO". 7 out of the 10 pages that come up have the search term "SEO" highlighted in the page name. That means that at least part of the reason Google is showing that page is that it found the search term in the page name.

Each page on your site should have the ability to tell the search engine exactly what the page is about. Again, there is some controversy in SEO as to how much weight search engines put on page names, but no one doubts that there is at least some benefit to proper page naming and most experts feel like it is key strategy. We tend to agree and feel like the method that works best is to have a page name for each page that coordinates with a set of key words and the content of the page. Essentially what this means is repeating steps 1-3 for each page on your site, starting with making sure the name of the page correctly describes the content of that page.

One very effective technique is taking your major search terms that you created in step one, and making sure that there is at least one page on your site that is completely targeted to that term. So, for instance, if you had a search term “commercial construction Fargo, ND”, you’d want to have a page that was called Commercial_Construction. You’d want to have your search term in your key words on the page, and have a page title like “Commercial Construction Services for the Fargo area”. You’d then want to make sure that the term was embedded in the site content of the page.

Some things to consider:

1. Always start with your page name, making sure that the page name correctly describes the content on that page. We’ve actually seen some pretty long page names, and we think that longer page names are generally better, although obviously, a page name could get too long.
2. Make sure your page has a page title that gives a very short description of the page.
3. Make sure you have a description for the page that gives an overview of what the page is about. The description will be longer than the title, and that is preferable.
4. If you are needing to change the page name, do so with caution, because you may have other pages that are linking to that page, and all those links will need to be updated.

Data-Imagery tools:

1. Our page navigator makes it easier than most programs to move between pages easily.
2. Our page mode switcher also makes this step easier, because we give you the ability to move between page modes easily. This functionality makes it a snap to switch between design mode and properties mode on your page.

Step 5- Using Links

Using links correctly will greatly increase your search engine optimization. The reason for this is that search engines look at the relevance of your links based on the content around them. Also, search engines look at the title of the link to help in the process of

content analysis. It is critical that you take the time to place links within relevant content and that you take the time to type a relevant title when you create the link. This means that your search phrases are linked to another page on your site that gives the reader more detail. On your home page this is especially important, you need to have creatively placed your search terms text into the text on the page, and then make sure you are linking that text to supporting pages within your site.

Another important way to use links is to link to other sites and to have other sites link to you. Google in particular puts a high weight on links to your site from other sites, especially if the link in the other site has content relating to your search terms. The problem is technique is that it is very hard to do, which is probably why Google likes it so much. The only way to do this correctly is to actually talk to people in your industry—partners, vendors, customers, associations, networks. Tell them that you will link to their site if they will link to your site. Google actually keeps track of all these links to your site, and some think this is one of the key items in SEO.

Some things to consider:

1. On your home page especially, but on other pages too, you should have a link for your key search phrases that you established in Step 1. So, if you have a search term that you are targeting, “Home Improvement Los Angeles” then you should type that text exactly on your home page and then link that text to another page on your site that give readers more detail about the services you provide to the Los Angeles area in regards to home improvement.
2. Think through how you can embed your home page link in your content at least once on your homepage. So, you might say, “At **Company ABC**, we are very particular in servicing xyz product. We pay attention to every detail to ensure the success of your experience with us”. The bolded “Company ABC” is the part that would be linked to your home page.
3. When you are creating your links, be sure to include a title for the link relevant to the page you are linking to (see below on how to use our tools to do this).
4. Make sure when you are creating links that the text of the link on the page is different every time, search engines like variety because variety says that a human being has done this, not a machine.
5. If you have images, make sure the image has a description as well. This is helpful not only for your page ranking, but your image might come up on searches, and someone might visit your page from that search.
6. Get your site domain address out to as many partners, vendors and customers as possible. Link to their site and have them link to your site. This is critical to high rankings.
7. Double check the links on your site to see if any links are “broken” meaning they don’t link anywhere. Dead links are bad because you are now fully utilizing the link to show the search engine a page, but also because some search engines will give you a lower ranking if they find dead links.

Data-Imagery tools:

1. When you are in design mode on a page, you can create links by selecting text and then clicking the chain link icon.
2. You can link to other sites by typing in their web address (ie <http://www.google.com>), or you can use the “Link List” to find an existing page on your site.
3. When you are creating your link, there is a title field to enter the link title. This text is a description of the page that the link is pointing to.
4. If you are creating your home page link, be sure to physically type in your full domain name. eg, <http://www.domain.com/>
5. When you insert images, be sure to type in the description of what the image is in the description field. Our software inserts this description as both the “alt” tag and the “title” of the image.
6. Be sure you save your page!

Step 6- Add More Content

Every SEO expert agrees that content is king. The amount of content you have on your site that is relevant to a search phrase is key. Search engines want to link people to sites that are useful and for the most part, good content is useful. So, the more good content you have the better. This is also true because some search engines actually look at how much your content has changed from the last time they visited. If there is a lot of new content they are thinking, wow...this site is well cared for and is updated often. Sites that are updated often usually have more relevant content.

There are a couple primary ways people can update content and add new content. Obviously, just simply adding new pages is one way. Another way is to create a blog. If the blog is built correctly, the search engine should be able to index the content. Blogs are great from just a marketing standpoint as well because it shows that you know your industry and that you are active in your company and care about delivering information to your customers. Lastly, you can create a news updates section of your site. This is simple updates that you'd like to communicate to customers or even employees.

Some things to consider:

1. Try to schedule a day a month to have you or someone in your office think through the site, and update any content that needs to be updated. Also, think through any pages that you might be able to add to better describe what you do.
2. Search engines like deep content, meaning page directory structures that are more than a couple levels deep. It shows that you have a lot of content and have organized it well.
3. If you create a blog or news section, you really need to try to update it weekly if possible.

4. With blogs, post links to interesting articles you've found, or even just thoughts about your industry. If you have new product announcements post those as well along with your thoughts about the significance of how it relates to your product.
5. Remind yourself of your key search terms and try to include those into your content in a way that is as natural as possible. Again, remember not to do "key word stuffing" because most search engines will either not use the content or worse block your site from being indexed.

Data-imagery tools:

1. We have a very easy way to add pages. When you are in the pages module, simply click "Add New Page". Enter the page name, save and then click the drop down to move to design mode. And add lots of content!
2. You can create create a blog or news update by going to those modules under Website and then clicking the + icon in the bottom left. Give it a name and then click "New Item" to start adding posts. It is a good idea to categorize your posts using the "Tags" on the right.
3. If you have created a new instance of a blog or news update module, you will need to insert this instance on a page. To do this, go to design mode on the page you want to insert it on and click the "plugin" button. Then go to news or go to blog and click the + icon to expand the menu and find your new instance. Click "Insert" on the right. Make sure you save your page! Now you should see your new blog or news module on the page.

Step 7- Search Engine Submission

Now that you have put a lot of work into optimizing your new site, it is now ready to submit it to the top three search engines. Submitting your site to the search engines is actually the easiest of all the steps! So, now is where the fun begins.

If this is an existing domain, it might already have been indexed by the top search engines (actually it most likely is). You can resubmit it, but be careful to only do this once because some search engines don't like it if you submit your site too many times. Once the site is indexed by the engine, they will automatically come back and visit your site in 1 to 6 months. We suggest submitting your site to Yahoo, Google and MSN. These three search tools represent a 90-95% market share of search engines.

Some things to consider:

1. Search engines like older domains, so if you have the chance, use an older domain name.
2. Only submit your site once to the top three search engines (Yahoo, Google, Microsoft MSN/Live)

3. It will take anywhere from a couple days to a couple weeks for the search engine to analyze your site and put it into its ranking system, so don't worry if you don't see things happening right away.

How to submit your site:

1. Google
 - a. Go to: <http://www.google.com/addurl/>
 - b. Follow their instructions on the page.
2. Yahoo
 - a. Go to: <https://siteexplorer.search.yahoo.com/submit>
 - b. Follow their instructions to "Submit a Website or Webpage".
 - c. You might also want to submit your site to their directory (not a search engine but a directory of site that are manually reviewed by people). If so, go to : <http://searchmarketing.yahoo.com/dirsb/index.php> and click the "Get Started" button at the bottom. You will need a Yahoo account to do this, so sign up for it and then continue through the process.
3. MSN/Live
 - a. Go to: <http://search.msn.com/docs/submit.aspx>
 - b. Follow their instructions