

# Optimizing your Web Site for Search Engines

## *Introduction to Search Engine Optimization (SEO)*

How can your website rank better than your competitors so it will be noticed by its target audience? This is where SEO comes in. Search engine optimization is the process of increasing the amount of visitors to a web site by ranking high in the search results of a search engine.

The higher a Web site ranks in the results of a search, the greater the chance that that site will be visited by a user. It is common practice for Internet users to not click through pages and pages of search results, so where a site ranks in a search is essential for directing more traffic toward the site.

We assume you are familiar with basic HTML as this is required for SEO activities.

So wrap up your sleeves! It's time for you to optimize your web site.

## *Search Engines*

Google and sites using Google's results make up around 50% of the Internet search market on their own. **In other words if you only target Google then you're missing nearly 50% of the market!**

Although this article mainly focuses on Google it also takes search engines like Yahoo! and MSN into account. This nearly doubles the search engine traffic you can target with minimal effort - imagine what that could do for you! Below is a search overview from 2007, although Google is gaining popularity and there are some shifts, you'll see that the other search engines are still important.

Top 10 Search Providers by Searches, June 2007		
Provider	Searches (000)	Share of Total Searches (%)
Google	3,906,877	52.7
Yahoo	1,496,137	20.2
MSN/Windows Live	985,706	13.3
AOL	404,036	5.5
Ask.com	152,268	2.1
My Web Search	76,827	1.0
My Way	35,643	0.5
BellSouth	30,868	0.4
Comcast	30,467	0.4
Dogpile	30,452	0.4
Other	263,431	3.6
All search	7,412,712	100.0

Source: Nielsen//NetRatings, 2007

## *How the search engines work*

Search engines are text-driven and crawl the Web, looking at particular site items to get an idea what a site is about. The disadvantage of search engines is that they won't appreciate a good design or enjoy multimedia content.

Neither are they capable of giving a real time update of your site changes as they need to monitor billions of other sites as well. During this time your SEO efforts will not be rewarded. Unfortunately there is nothing you can do about this. But you can see what a crawler sees from your site by using a [Spider Simulator](#). If your site is not viewable, it will be non-existent for search engines.

When a user uses a search engine it compares the search string that the user has entered with the pages that are indexed in the database. While doing this **the relevancy** of each of the pages in is calculated.

Each search engine has its own algorithm to calculate this relevancy. Relative weights for common factors like keyword density, links, or metatags vary per search engine. That is why different search engines give different search results pages for the same search string. These algorithms also change regularly so if you want to keep at the top of the search results, you also need to adapt your pages to the latest changes. SEO is usually a continuous process.

The last step in search engines' activity is **retrieving** the results. Basically, it is nothing more than displaying them in order of relevancy.

## *Why SEO should be important to you*

The ultimate goal is to make your website appear on the first pages, if not the first page of a search engine's result. This will increase the traffic to your site.

Consider what it would be like if no one could easily find your place of business, or even your telephone number. Most businesses could not continue for long in such a situation. The same thing can happen with your web site if people cannot easily locate it.

## *Link Building*

To find out how to get between those first few precious spots in search engines, ask yourself the following questions:

1. *As link building is one of the most important aspects of SEO, can I put links between related posts on my page or other websites that I might own?* Make sure to put anchor text to your links. The text that is immediately before and after the anchor text also matters because it further indicates the relevance of the link.
2. *Can I write guest articles for other sites that link back to it?* Sites like [DMXzone.com](#), [FLzone.com](#), [FWzone.net](#), [CFzone.net](#) and other communities allow you to post tutorials. As these sites have a high ranking in search engines, their links are very valuable. Make sure to post quality content or the post might not attract a lot of readers or won't even be approved.
3. *Can I get on relevant social news sites (Digg clones) or StumbleUpon.com?* These sites can easily double the traffic to your site. The origin of inbound links are important if the site that links to you is a reputable one or not. Generally sites with greater Google PR and .edu and .gov sites are considered reputable and thus important. The older the links, the better they are.

4. *Do I have friends who will link back to my site?*
5. *Are there popular resource sites that can link to me?*

## Keywords

Keywords are another important aspect of SEO. Take a look at this list (ordered by priority) and ask yourself the following questions:

1. *Did I put my keywords in <title> tag?* It's important to place keywords in the title tag as they are displayed in the search engines as your page title. The title tag must be short (less than 8 words) and it is important to place the keywords in the beginning of your tag.
2. *Did I use Keywords in my URLs?* Keywords in URLs help a lot - e.g. - "<http://yoursite.com/DMXzone-seo.html>", where "DMXzone-seo" is the keyword phrase you attempt to rank well for. But if you don't have the keywords in other parts of the document, don't rely on having them in the URL.
3. *Have I placed the right amount of keywords in my text?* Generally speaking it is best to use between three to seven percent of your total content text for keywords. This makes sure you have a sound balance between valuable content and SEO.
4. *Did I check if I have keywords in my anchor text?* This is especially important for the anchor text of inbound links, because this is regarded as getting a vote from the site that links to you.
5. *Have I made sure that the keywords are in my headings (<H1>, <H2>, etc. tags)?* Search engines also look for keywords in your headings. Make sure the headings are content related.
6. *Did I place my keywords in the beginning of a document?* This doesn't necessarily mean the first paragraph - for instance if you use tables, the first paragraph of text might be in the second half of the table.
7. *Did I put my keywords in alternative tags?* It's important to know that spiders don't take into account images but they do read their textual descriptions in the <alt> tag. So, when you use images on your page, don't forget to fill in the <alt> tag with some keywords about them.
8. *Did I use my keywords in metatags on my page?* Google spider often misses that but Yahoo! and MSN still rely on them. So if you are applying SEO for Yahoo! or MSN, fill these tags properly.
9. *Have I measured my keyword proximity or how close in the text the keywords are?* The higher the proximity, the better. It is best if your keywords are immediately one after the other (e.g. "DMXzone extension"), with no other words between them. Consider you have used "DMXzone" in the first paragraph and "extension" in the third one. This also would do, but not as much as using the phrase "DMXzone extension" without any other words in between. Note that keyword proximity is applicable for keyword phrases that consist of 2 or more words.
10. *Did I use keyword phrases?* Yes, you can also apply SEO for keyword phrases that consist of several words - e.g. "Premium content". It is best when the keyword phrases you optimize for are popular ones, so you can get a lot of exact matches of the search string but sometimes it makes sense to optimize for 2 or 3 separate keywords ("Premium" and "content") than for one phrase that might occasionally get an exact match.

11. *Did I apply secondary keywords?* Optimizing for secondary keywords can be a goldmine because when everybody else is optimizing for the most popular keywords, there will be less competition (and probably more hits) for pages that are optimized for the minor words. For instance, "real estate new jersey" might have thousand times less searches than "real estate", but if you are operating in New Jersey, you will get less, but considerably better targeted traffic.
12. *Did I stem my keywords?* This doesn't matter a lot in English because words that stem from the same root (e.g. cat, cats, etc.) are considered related. Therefore if you have "cat" on your page, you will get hits for "cats" as well. In other languages keywords stemming could be an issue because different words that stem from the same root might not be considered to be related and you might need to optimize for all of them.
13. *Did I optimize synonyms?* Optimize for synonyms of the target keywords in addition to the main keywords. This works well for sites in English, because search engines are smart enough to search for synonyms, when ranking sites. For many other languages synonyms are not taken into account.
14. *Did I use named anchors?* Named anchors (the target place of internal links) are useful for internal navigation but are also useful for SEO. They allow you to stress that a particular page, paragraph or text is important. In the code, named anchors look like this: `<A href= "#cats">Read about cats</A>`. In this piece of code "#cats" is the named anchor.
15. *Did I apply keywords formatting?* When a keyword in the document text is in a larger font size in comparison to other on-page text it is more noticeable. Therefore it is more important than the rest of the text. The same applies to headings (`<h1>`, `<h2>`, etc.), which generally are in larger font size than the rest of the text. Bold and italic are another way to emphasize important words and phrases. However, use bold, italic and larger font sizes within reason because otherwise you might achieve just the opposite effect.

## Metatags

[Metatags](#) were originally very important in SEO as it used to be the main source for the description of your site in the search results. Although they are becoming less important in search engines like Google they are still important to other search engines like MSN and Yahoo! Take a look at the shortlist of tips:

1. *Did I use a `<Description>` and `<Keywords>` metatags?* The metatags that are still important are the `<description>` and `<keywords>` ones. Use the `<Description>` metatag to write the description of your site. Besides the fact that metatags still rock on MSN and Yahoo!, the `<Description>` metatag has one more advantage – it sometimes pops in the description of your site in search results.

The `<Keywords>` metatag also matters, though as all metatags it gets almost no attention from Google and some attention from MSN and Yahoo! Keep the metatag reasonably long – 10 to 20 keywords at most.

2. *Did I use a `<Language>` metatag?* If your site is language-specific, don't leave this tag empty. Search engines have more sophisticated ways of determining the language of a page than relying on the `<language>` metatag but they still consider it.

## Content

1. *Do I provide unique and up to date content?* Having more content (relevant content, which is different from the content on other sites both in wording and topics) is a real boost for your site's rankings.

Frequent changes are favored. It is great when you constantly add new content but it is not so great when you only make small updates to existing content. Recent documents (or at least regularly updated ones) are also favored.

2. *Is my page length correct?* Generally long pages are not favored, or at least you can achieve better rankings if you have 3 short pages rather than 1 long page on a given topic, so split long pages into multiple smaller ones.
3. *Is my site fully accessible?* If the site (or separate pages) is inaccessible because of broken links, 404 errors, password-protected areas and other similar reasons, then the site simply can't be indexed.
4. *Do I have a Sitemap?* It is great to have a complete and up-to-date [sitemap](#). Spiders love it, no matter if it is a plain old HTML sitemap or the special Google sitemap format.
5. *How big is my site?* Spiders love large sites, so generally it is the bigger, the better. However, big sites become user-unfriendly and difficult to navigate, so sometimes it makes sense to separate a big site into a couple of smaller ones. On the other hand, there are hardly sites that are penalized because they are 10,000+ pages, so don't split your size in pieces only because it is getting larger and larger.
6. *Does my site have a consistent theme?* It is not only keywords in URLs and on page that matter. The site theme is even more important for good ranking because when the site fits into one theme, this boosts the rankings of all its pages that are related to this theme.
7. *Do I have a good file structure?* File location is important and files that are located in the root directory or near it tend to rank better than files that are buried 5 or more levels below.

## What not to do

The following search engine optimization techniques are often called spamming, and should be avoided at all costs:

- automatically generated doorway pages;
- cloaking and false redirects;
- keyword stuffing;
- hidden text or hidden links;
- pages loaded with irrelevant words;
- duplicated content on multiple pages;
- misspelling of well-known web sites;
- unrelated and centralized link farms;
- other methods that try to trick search engines.

These and other similar techniques, while sometimes effective in generating an increase in traffic to your site, quickly fail.

Imagine putting a "Detour" sign in the street in front of your place of business, forcing traffic into your parking lot. Yes, your parking lot is full, but how many of those people actually wanted to be there? How many of those people will want to shop there after witnessing such a trick? How long will it take the local police to remove the sign?

The same thing happens to web sites that use such nefarious techniques. People are brought to a site where they had no intention of going. Do you think they will stay to shop? When the operators of a search engine discover these types of tricks, they will often remove the site from their index entirely.

## *Measuring Impact*

Note your current Google ranking before you apply your SEO techniques. And measure your traffic month by month. Build special tracking links to view the results of your campaigns and keywords by using [Google Analytics](#).

Of course, this is a time-consuming practice. But identifying the success of your campaign and adjusting them is an effective tactic in reaching your SEO goals in 2008.

## *Sources*

Take a look at these sites to find out more about SEO:

[The webfonts.com - SEO toolset](#)

[The webfonts.com - SEO tutorial](#)

[PROBLOGGER](#)

[Useit.com](#)

[Webnauts.net](#)

[Dmxzone.com](#)