



Search Engine Optimization Basics

A Quick Guide for Getting Great Results

By:

R. Justin Spencer

President/Managing Partner

SpencerSEM



Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is an essential function to a website. There are known, eternal truths of SEO that are included in this quick guide. This is not an all inclusive list of each element, but this is a great start to bringing your website to the forefront of the Search Engine Results Page. This white paper is also intended for HTML coded sites. More advanced sites or ecommerce sites must follow additional rules, as most of these don't apply to database driven sites generated using dynamic pages.

It is important to keep in mind that this list is not all-inclusive, but provides examples of activities that any business, small or large, can take advantage of immediately. Each page of your site is an entry way into your whole site. If a user is searching for "widgets" you want them to find your widget page, not just your homepage and then have to click three or four times to find the widget.

Ready to get to the top? Here's what you need to check:

Title Tags

Title tags are often ignored by designers and users, but they are one of the most important aspects of each page. The title tag is one of the first things that the search engine spider reads on your site. The title tag is like a headline for your site. It should be descriptive of the content on your page and contain keywords that you want to focus on. The most important keywords should come first, as those have a heavier weight when information is being indexed.

Description

The meta description of the site gives a brief snapshot of what the page is about. This description displays on the results page so the user knows what your site is about before the click on the link. The description is usually taken from the content on the page, but when it is not, it is important to control what this reads instead of leaving it up to chance. The description should be a mixture of keywords that describe your site and a quick sales pitch enticing a user to your site. It is important to note that the spiders don't weigh the meta description heavily, as it was taken advantage of by search spammers. Although it is less important, it is still taken into consideration by the search spiders, and therefore you should take it into consideration too!



Keywords

The meta keywords are similar to the description, except the user will never see these. They appear in the code of the site and don't affect the look of the page at all. These keywords tell the search spiders what the page is about. The keywords should be descriptive of each individual page and should be unique to each page. As with the title tags, the most important keywords should come first, as they are weighted differently. The overall weight of the keywords has the same fate of the description. It was taken advantage of by spammers years ago, but it still used by the search spiders.

H Tags and Visual Hierarchy

An H Tag controls the size of the text on the page. Most headlines on a page would have an H1, signifying the browser to display that text large and bold, so you know it's important. The search spiders also see this H1 tag, which tells the spider that it is important and it gives that text heavy weight. Because of this weight, use keywords. Instead of just "Comments", have it read "Various Types of Tax Laws". Visual Hierarchy refers to the fact that the search engines regard text that appears higher on the page to be more important. So the most important information should appear higher on the page.

Content and Keyword Density

Content is the most important part of optimizing a site. There should be keywords that are focused on on each page. These keywords should not be stuffed into the copy. It should flow well, as if it was written for a user not a search engine spider. After all, your website is there for the user! Mum's the word for the search engines when asked exactly how much you should use keywords, so moderation is key.

Linking and Anchor Text

Linking is very important to search engines, both internal and external. When a website links to you, it is like a testimonial from that site saying your site is a good one. When you link out to other sites, it says that you support other sites. But be aware of link farms. These are special sites that do nothing but link to other sites in order to boost rankings. This can have a negative effect on your overall ranking. Internal linking within the site must ensure that all of your links are working. Broken links that send the spiders nowhere are definitely bad for your ranking. The spiders must be able to easily navigate your site. Part of this navigation is the anchor text. This is the text that the user clicks on to navigate to the next page. This anchor text should be descriptive of the page that it's linked to. Don't make the hyperlink "More Info" or "Click Here". Instead, make it "Detailed Information on Polarized Sunglasses". Doing this will help make your site rank highly for the term "polarized sunglasses".



Robots.txt

Robots.txt files tell the search spiders exactly what to index on your site. For the most part, you can tell them to index every page, but that is not always the case. If you have a presentation that is viewed by clicking from page to page, you don't want to index the middle of the presentation. Or if your website contains a link to a login secured intranet. There is no need to index this part of your site. You can generate a robots.txt by visiting <http://www.seochat.com/seo-tools/robots-generator/>. It will create a block of text that you copy into Notepad and save in your main directory of your website. You can also visit www.robotstxt.org to learn more about the robots protocol.

These are just a few ideas to keep in mind, but they give you a good place to start in getting your site properly indexed by the search engines. For more information or for a site audit, feel free to contact Justin@SpencerSEM.com.