

SEO isn't magic!

There can be a mystery that surrounds SEO. It can appear that it is a magical science that only the most IT literate and Internet savvy can hope to understand.

Whilst understanding the mathematical logarithms behind Search Engines is a complex subject, optimising a web site for Search Engines isn't magic. It is in fact more common sense and straight forward than many people realise. This Information Sheet explains more for people looking for a simple guide to understanding SEO.

Search Engine Spiders

Search Engine Spiders are automated software programmes used by Search Engines. Spiders 'visit' a webpage and index the content of the page. It follows any links on the page to other pages and websites.

Improving your website so that Spiders are given, in the format they require, information about your site pages so they can rank the relevance to searches is in reality what any SEO strategy is concerned with.

Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) basics

What is Search Engine Optimisation?

Wikipedia's definition of Search engine optimization (SEO) is "the process of improving the visibility of a web site or a web page in search engines via the "natural" or un-paid ("organic" or "algorithmic") search results... "

For owners of websites the aim of SEO is of course to improve their sites overall position in searches, and to increase the frequency that their site appears in searches. This, in general, then means they will receive more visitors from the search engine. **This gives a site 'web presence', which can then generate more business.**

SEO v's Paid links

As an Internet marketing strategy, SEO considers how search engines work and what people search for. Optimizing a website may involve editing its content and HTML (the code behind a web page) to both increase its relevance to specific keywords, and to remove barriers to the indexing activities of search engine spiders. Promoting a site to increase the number of backlinks, or inbound links, is another SEO tactic. See later for more details on these.

Other forms of search engine marketing (SEM) target paid listings. These help ensure a website will be returned at the top of search results; for example within Google this is in the blue area at the top of a page, and right hand column.

Paid links generally work on a pay per click basis and can be a very effective Internet Marketing strategy. However, these strategies can be costly. Therefore, before embarking on this strategy a website owner's first step should be to ensure that their website is optimised for Search Engine free searches.

Addressing SEO basics

There really is only one aim of SEO. This is to ensure that your website is 'Search Engine friendly'. This means that your website can be 'read' easily by 'Search Engine Spiders', and the relevance of each of your pages is clear so that it can be ranked against searches within their search engine.



The basics for achieving SEO within a website means addressing the following:

1. Keyword identification
2. URL and file names
3. Web page Copywriting
4. Meta Tags (Title, Description, Keywords, Heading, Alt Tags)
5. Hypertext Links, Site Map, and Robots Exclusion File
6. Backlinks

These points are explained below in non technical terms.

Keyword identification

The starting point for optimising your website is to identify the keywords and phrases that your target audience are likely to search for. These will then guide you in the design of your website, creation of your webpages, and writing of page content. When defining your keywords there are two main points to consider.

Firstly, remember that your website will be competing against potentially many thousands of other websites. All of these want the same top-spot as you, so getting a high ranking is not ever guaranteed.

Free Tools for managing your website

Unfortunately, to maximise the ranking of your website it is rarely a one-off job. Whilst you want your site at the top of search engine rankings, there are also thousands of other sites who have the same aim. Fortunately, there are some very good free tools available to help you manage your site and assist you in improving your site ranking.

Google for instance provide free tools such as 'Analytics', and 'Webmaster Tools'. These tools help you identify the traffic to your website, keywords and relevance, Backlinks to your site, Search Phrases your site has appeared in, and crawl errors incurred by spiders, and much more.

All of this information can help in improving your website pages. This helps you work towards optimising your website so that you improve your sites rankings and effectiveness. Basic SEO is common sense as we've said, but unfortunately it can require ongoing hard work to maximise results.

To get an idea of who is competing against you try doing searches against various keywords and phrases that you feel are relevant to your website. You will need to find ways of ensuring your site comes up in at least some searches, but also recognise that getting a high ranking for every search phrase you would like is probably not possible. Trying to optimise your site for a keyword of 'Recruitment Agency' for example is too general. You need to be clear of your target market and find ways of competing against fewer sites. For example, if you're optimizing for a Care Agency and you're located in Swindon, UK, use keywords such as "Care staff recruitment, Swindon" or "Care worker vacancies, Swindon UK" etc.

The second issue to consider is that Search Engines are not very good at identifying the relevance of pages that contain multiple topics. You should therefore design your site so each page is optimised for a different search phrase; each phrase should contain 2 to 3 highly targeted key words.

URL and file names

Your Domain name (URL) is one of the factors for Search Engines in ranking your site for relevance against a search. For example, www.temporary-vacancies.com would be ranked higher in a search for 'Temporary Vacancies' than a domain name 'www.companyname.com'.

However, most of us already have an existing domain name that matches our business name, and adding keywords in the domain name can look unprofessional. An alternative and useful tactic is however to add your keywords into the file names of your pages, such as <http://www.companyname.com/temporary-vacancies.html>.

Web page copywriting

Search engines will look for the density of keywords on a page to help determine the relevance of that page to a search. You should therefore ensure that the page copy reflects your pages target search phrase and keywords.

Text near the top of the page, in keywords at the beginning of paragraphs, and in headings are important to search spiders, Ensure however that you write content for people first and search engines second to ensure your website content remains compelling to your audience.

Meta Tags

These Tags are information contained in the background code of a webpage. Due to misuse of Meta Tags by sites in the past the relevance placed on these by Search Engines is now less than it was. Despite less reliance on Meta tags, it pays to provide in the header section of all your indexable pages the following.

Title and description – The page title appears as the title of a Tab in your browser, and the page listing (together with the Description) when it appears in a search result. Both are indexed by Search Engines so ensure you use appropriate keywords in these.

Keyword Meta tags - List your strategic keyword phrases up to a maximum of 744 characters. Use keywords that are relevant to the page, with or without commas.

Heading (H1) tags – Defining Headings in a page using 'H1' Tags help search engines identify their importance. If using these tags ensure they contain strategic keywords relevant to the page.

Alternate tags - Also called image tags as they contain the text that appears when you mouse over an image. Use keywords to describe the image appropriately.

Hypertext links and Site Maps

Text in page hyperlinks help Search Engines identify the relevance of the page being linked to. Creating a Site Map that can be read by Search Engines also helps them. Robot.txt files help spiders to identify pages they should not crawl, and some engines won't crawl your site unless this file is present in the Root directory.

Backlinks

Most search engine algorithms include link popularity, This works by ranking individual pages based on the number and importance of pages linked to them across the Web. If a site with high traffic links to a page on your site this signifies to the Search Engine that the page is of importance. Identifying your inbound links and increasing the number of important, relevant inbound links is an essential part of your SEO strategy. This is one area that takes time and effort to achieve results, but can be achieved without technical knowledge.

T: 0800 756 6794
E: info@i-businessresources.com
W: www.i-businessresources.com