



Organic Search Engine Optimization Tips

by Sharon Housley

According to Matt Cutts there are over 100 factors that affect search engine ranking. For those of you who don't know, Matt is a Google guy guru, he is employed by Google but writes an independent blog and shares information related to Google and search engine optimization. Of those 100 items that account for search engine ranking, it is important to only focus on those you can control and influence to some degree. What are they? Outside of the obvious (webpage title and description) those in which the webmaster has the most control are: PageRank, TrustRank, Anchor Text, Keyword Density, Domain Age, URL, and Relevant Links.

How can a webmaster use these items to help ranking? First off the obvious, each and every web page should have a descriptive page specific title and description. The web page should make use of h1 and h2 tags to emphasize pertinent keywords and phrases. The title, description and header tags are channels to communicate the most important details of a specific webpage. They should be used effectively but not be abused.

On to the less obvious, items. Particular attention should be paid when formatting urls. Keywords related to the webpage can and should be used in the webpage urls. Use hyphens rather than underscores between the keywords. Search engines are designed by developers and programming languages will recognize a hyphen and distinguish separate words, while an underscore blends the words. Keywords in the URL should not be abused, as search engines do not appreciate excessively long urls. Avoid using characters like ID= in the URL as many search engines will see it as a unique session ID and not spider the contents of the webpage.

The websites depth should not exceed 3-4 levels. This will make a search engines deep crawl easier and it will make sure that they are able to spider the entire contents of your website. If you add a new page and wish for it to be spidered quickly add a link to it from an existing spidered web page.



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Domain hosting and location do matter! A .uk domain and a webhost located in the UK will increase the domains search engine position in any .uk search engine. If you are targetting a specific region or market consider purchasing a local domain.

Obviously you control the websites content and bad content or no content means no incoming links. Good content has the potential to attract good quality unsolicited links. So what kinds of content generally attract quality links? Think of JibJab, they portrayed a controversial subject in a humorous way without alienating their audience. While JibJab was able to garner a lot of attention, its a tricky tight-rope to walk. Some easier solutions are to consider adding tutorials that explain a specific technology, create a niche directory, or a topic specific glossary, post industry news, maintain a blog with fresh content, or write how to articles. All are concrete examples that will result in quality content and potential incoming links.

Before we talk more about links there are a few warnings worth mentioning. The first is to attain links gradually, search engines prefer links obtained over time rather than links achieved all at once. Avoid link schemes, link farms or overt reciprocal links, they can be time consuming and have very little benefit. Avoid links on the C block, if you own multiple domains be sure not to triangulate links, search engines have become wise to this they prefer a linking scheme that is more like a star (or web). Take advantage of your content.

If you write a press release don't just send it to the editors, add it to your website in a press center. Submit the press release to public relations websites. There area a number of press related websites like PRWeb that are really good and all will result in good quality incoming links back to your website. Also add your press release(s) to an RSS feed, not only with this communicate with your customers that new products or updates are available but you will also benefit from links from RSS search engines and directories.



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When you post a release or content that has genuine value, use social bookmarking tools (like digg, del.icio.us, furl) to bookmark the contents. These social bookmarking sites are becoming increasingly important in weighing the value of a site and while the large search engines do not yet use social bookmarking in their algorithms its quite possible and highly likely that they will in the future. If the webpage/content has genuine value others will social bookmark it as well. The bookmarks are viral and with increasing popularity their is more emphasis placed on the content. Additionally bloggers notoriously skim social bookmarking sites for content to write about which will result in additional links. Keep in mind that in order to bookmark a webpage it really must have genuine value, do not abuse social bookmarking.

I'd also like to talk a bit about capturing the keyword tail. The keyword tail is based on the Long Tail principle and the idea is that there are a relatively small number of keywords that receive the vast majority of searches, and additionally there are millions of keywords and keyword phrases that make up a fraction of Internet searches. So by capturing the keyword long tail an Internet marketer targets all of the less popular keywords and keyword phrases, because in mass these less popular keywords are a more significant volume than the popular keywords and phrases for a specific business sector. Internet marketers that are able to "capture the long tail" will receive significant traffic. The long tail includes everything other than the popular terms. The idea is that the total volume of lower popularity keywords exceeds the volume of high popularity keywords. Of course tip to tail is ideal when discussing keywords but few if any of us are able to achieve number one ranking for the word software so it is worth considering the keyword long tail approach to search engine optimization.

While the concept of The Long Tail is fairly simple in nature, it is very difficult to implement in practice. The easiest way to "capture the keyword long tail" is to have user generated content on your website like a forum. The phrases individuals use to describe various things contain nuances that are rarely optimized for, by posting user generated content you are increasing the size of your keyword neighborhood.



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Other focused or industry specific keywords and phrases can be emphasized in white papers, industry solutions, and educational articles. The key to capturing the long tail is mass and volume you want to opt to not optimize for software but to focus on more targeted keyword phrases that relate to your product or service. The additional focus will also help increase your conversion. That is not to say it would not be great to appear # 1 for software but you have to be realistic.

When determining what keywords to optimize a website for there are a number of tools that will assess the number of times that a keyword or phrase is searched on and the number of websites/webpages competing for that keyword or phrase and rate the phrase. Obviously the terms that have more searches and less competition are the best to optimize for if and only if they relate to your product or service. If you optimize for terms that are either too broad you will likely increase traffic but decrease your conversions. It is really a balancing act. Two of the more popular tools available are Keyword Discovery and Word Tracker. Also, talk to friends, or family members and ask what phrases they would use to describe your product or service. You might be surprised with the terms they use. Consider optimizing for regional variations, look at the variety of terms used to describe soda - tonic, pop, soda, soda pop, or cola all are relevant and popular but only within a specific region. Examine web logs to determine what your users are using, look at the language used in emails and forum posts and consider optimizing specific pages for popular descriptive terms.

And finally use competitive intelligence to locate links and keywords. What are your competitor's using? Analyze the adwords they bid on, look at their meta tags, look at their anchor links. There is a wealth of information out there, no real mystery to it, so use it to your advantage.