

The Search Engine Optimization Process

The first part of the process is to understand how search engines work, in order to formulate and evaluate strategies.

Contrary to the belief that search engines search your website, search engines are programs that search a **database of information** and return a result. A database is a lot like a very intricate spreadsheet. The information in the database comes from “Spiders”. These Spiders are programs that crawl the Internet looking for information. Once they find that information on your website they pick it up and put it in the database. There are a lot of different types of information that the Spider picks up and saves to the database such as:

- How often certain words and phrases are used on a page and how close to the beginning of the page they are used.
- What words and phrases are used in the “meta tags” of a page. Meta tags are HTML tags unseen by the user but visible to the Spider such as Meta Title, Meta Description and Meta Keyword Tags
- Words and phrases that are used in ALT Tags for your images. The user usually only sees these tags if they mouse over an image in Internet Explorer or are browsing without images.
- What words and phrases are part of the domain name? Pathname? Filenames?
- How long has a domain been in existence? How long is it registered for?
- How long has a website been at this domain name and using these keywords?
- Who links to a page? How many other sites link to a page?
 - What information is on their page?
- Where does a page link off to?
 - What information is on these pages?

The search engines also store in the database information from searches on their engine such as:

- How often a phrase is searched?
- What links do users click on most often?

As you can see there are two important components:

- Keywords & Phrases
- Links

Finally, each search engine has its own algorithm, or “secret recipe” for combining these different pieces of information, weighting them and then creating a ranking for webpages when a particular word or phrase is searched.

For example:

Imagine a webpage that uses the phrase “hard boiled eggs” several times in the content of the page near the top as well as in its meta tags, is linked to by other “hard boiled eggs” sites and links to several “hard boiled eggs” sites. This page has the address <http://www.hardboiledeggs.com/hardboiledeggs.html> and has been in existence for 5 years. The domain has been registered for 10 years. Whenever someone does a search for “hard boiled eggs” they are likely to click on this link if it appears.

This site is well optimized for the term “hard boiled eggs”, although not necessary “hardboiled eggs”. Remember this is a PROGRAM making these decisions, not a person. The evaluation is purely mechanical.

Search Engine Optimization Strategy Steps

1. Create a preliminary set of keywords and phrases that you *think* users will want to use to find you.
2. Evaluate those keywords and phrases by:
 - a. Searching on them to see if the results are relevant and using available tools to create synonyms.
 - b. Use available tools to measure how often certain words and phrases are actually searched on. It’s not what you think people are doing but *what they are really doing* that matters.
3. From the evaluated keywords, create a list of high quality keyword phrases. These are phrases that are:
 - a. Actually searched on
 - b. Create relevant results to your target user
 - c. Are specific enough to provide reasonable but not overwhelming competition.
4. Be sure that your website is “spider friendly” and can be crawled completely. If you have information that is for members only, you may want to present a teaser or part of the information to the public to attract the search engines, with a “click for more” for members.
5. Create site maps that help spiders crawl your site and create links.
6. Use the targeted set of keywords to optimize your webpages:
 - a. Individual pages should be dedicated to each keyword or phrase maximizing the natural use of the term in the content and tags.

- b. Solicit links to your information directly and indirectly by providing relevant information.
 - c. Link to other sites that rank high for that keyword phrase.
7. Submit your site to appropriate directories, especially industry specific directories.
8. Submit your site to search engines to invite the spiders to crawl.
9. Create press releases about the new information on your site and submit to online media.
10. Create a pay-per-click campaign for your keyword phrases to guarantee first page listing from day one. This will also improve your click through rate by improving your overall visibility. (This is a rather complicated process and takes time and monitoring as well as money.)
11. Use tools to monitor your ranking and traffic on the various search engines.

By sticking to the fundamentals of:

- Quality Keyword Phrases
- Content Usage
- Content Relevance
- Link Building
- Maintenance

A website can see real results in improved organic (as opposed to paid) listings in four to six months.

Prepared by:

Katie R. Bruno
wddonline

August 2, 2010