

How to Guide - Web page optimisation for search engines (SEO)

1. Why optimize your web pages for search engines?

Experienced Web designers will tell you, "Just build it — and they won't come." It's true. Simply putting up a Web site won't bring visitors. It takes work to entice customers to your site once, and even more work to make them come back.

One way that most people find Web sites is to use search engines such as Google.com. Google accounts for nearly half of all Internet searches. Yahoo! and MSN are the next most popular search sites.

Good rankings in search results are essential to helping people find your site. Many people don't go beyond the first page of the results' pages. Furthermore, top is better than bottom on the list.

Search engines use sophisticated algorithms to order search results. Good page rankings do not happen by chance. Search engine optimization, or SEO, is the process of creating Web pages that will garner high rankings.

Each search engine uses a slightly different algorithm. Moreover, most tweak their algorithms regularly. However, the basics of SEO hold true for all search engines. Although SEO is tricky, a carefully planned approach can increase traffic to your site.

2. How to SEO your web pages.

Here are eight steps to successful SEO.

1. Choose keywords wisely.

Keywords are the words that customers use to find your site when using a search engine. The idea is to optimize your page for these words or phrases. You should choose keywords that accurately reflect your business. They should be specific enough to target potential customers, but not too narrow. Of course, you'll probably have numerous keywords. The best approach is to pick different keywords for different pages. If your business' name is well known, use it as a keyword for the About Us page. But most customers will be searching for your product or service, not your name. For help with keywords, check your server logs to see what search terms have worked for your site.

On a Microsoft Small Business website use the Reports section and select key words. This report will show you the top key words, referring search engine, views per visit etc.

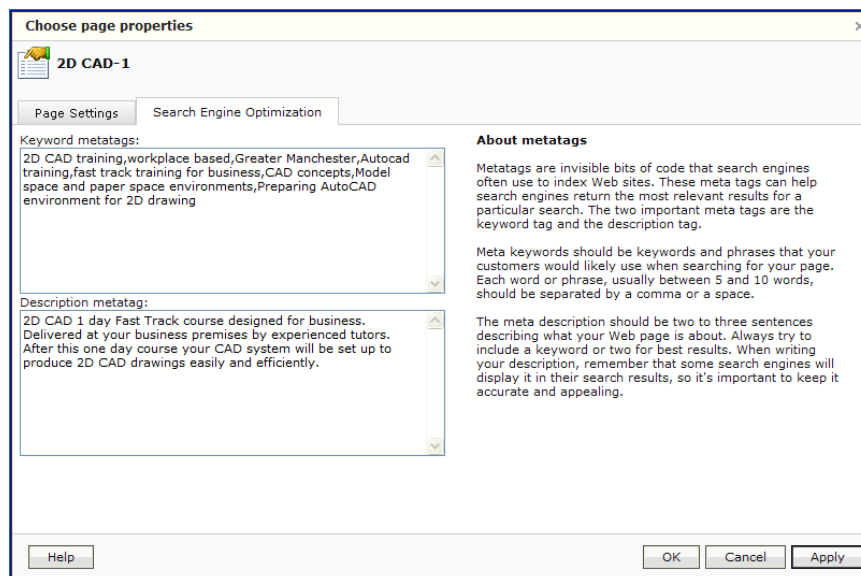
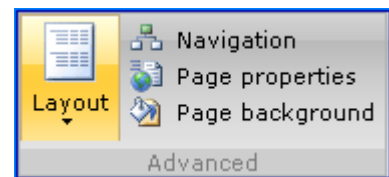
Also, try search terms in Google, MSN and Yahoo to see what works on your competitors' sites.

Top 200 keywords for 2009	
Keyword	
	Cool Cats Computing
	www.coolcatscomputing.com
	computer aided training
	coolcatscomputing.com
	coolcatscomputing

2. Use keywords wisely.

Your site's keywords should appear in each of your pages' "meta title." The "meta title" appears at the very top of the browser window, above the menu bar. Also, the keywords should appear regularly throughout the opening Web page. It is especially important that they appear frequently in the opening paragraphs. However, resist the temptation to overuse keywords. This is called "keyword stuffing." The search engines can spot it and will reduce your page rankings. Tools are available to help with optimal keyword density. However, avoid software that writes the site's pages. Search engines can sniff these out, too. Here's the SEO golden rule: Never sacrifice quality of content for keyword placement. This will affect your page ranking. Most importantly, your site won't appeal to visitors.

On a Microsoft Small Business website use the Page Properties/Search Engine Optimisation tool to set the Keyword Metatags and Description metatags



These are the keywords for our web page describing a Fast Track course.

3. Test keywords with pay-per-click advertising.

Another way to test the effectiveness of Keywords is to use Google's AdSense, MSN adCenter or another pay-per-click advertising program. You will see if your keywords will bring traffic to your site. Also, you will ensure your keywords target paying customers. Pay-per-click can be expensive. However, used correctly, they will bring customers to your site. Pay-per-click isn't a replacement for search engine optimization. It should be used in conjunction with SEO to help you evaluate keywords. If your results are poor, consider changing keywords.

Cool cats Computing does not recommend 'pay per click' for small businesses that have a Microsoft Small business website because of cost. We feel that keyword testing can be done just as effectively by monitoring site Reports and adjusting content and keywords.

4. Build up the links to your site from other sites.

Search engines view inbound links as a vote for your site. Therefore, the more incoming links, the higher your page will rank. There are limits, though. The search engines must view the linking sites as quality addresses. Having disreputable sites link to yours can harm your rankings. Offer to exchange links with sites that are related to your business. If they have a higher rank, all the better. Conversely, ask disreputable sites to remove any links to yours.

You can easily pull up a list of sites that link to yours. In Google's search box, simply type Link: your site name and click Search.

5. Keep your SEO campaign ethical.

Using deceptive techniques to boost page rank will have the opposite effect. It can even get your site banned from the search results. Once you're banned, it is virtually impossible to get back in. Therefore, it's important to avoid anything unethical. Don't overuse keywords. Don't use hidden text such as small fonts or text the same color as the background on your pages. Don't create mirror sites — identical sites linking to yours. Also, make sure content varies significantly from page to page. Having similar content on multiple pages may appear deceptive to search engines. Cloaking, or hiding a page behind your page, is also a no-no. With cloaking, two pages are built. The search site spiders will see one page that is rich in keywords. Visitors see the other page, which might not be related to the keywords. There is an exception: If you have a Flash site, it's almost impossible to optimize. Search spiders don't understand Flash. In this case, you can build an HTML site that opens behind it. Just make sure it contains the same content as the Flash site.

6. Submit your site to the search engines.

You want to make sure your site is indexed by the search engines. If your site has numerous inbound links, the Web spiders will find it automatically. Web spiders "crawl" the Internet monthly and update an engine's database of sites. If your site doesn't appear automatically, you can submit it for indexing, through a service such as Submit It! or on your own. The big three search sites have forms for submitting Web addresses. Here are the submission pages:

Google: <http://www.google.com/addurl/?continue=/addurl>

Yahoo!: <http://tinyurl.com/5oclp> (registration required)

MSN: <http://beta.search.msn.com/docs/submit.aspx>

7. Monitor the progress of your SEO, but be patient.

SEO doesn't happen overnight. It will take months to get good page rankings. Trying to rush your SEO campaign can lead to mistakes. It is important to monitor your progress. Do searches with the major engines for your keywords to see how you rank. You might also be surprised to find you start popping up for related terms. That's icing on the cake. Results will fluctuate. Rankings change daily or even hourly. Check frequently for an accurate gauge of where you stand. If you notice a downward trend, take action. As your site traffic increases, so should sales. If sales aren't increasing, re-evaluate your site content and navigation. Good copywriting and pointers go a long way in increasing sales.

8. Consider outsourcing.

Search engine optimization is an ongoing process, and can be a full-time job. Some companies specialize in SEO. Hiring an SEO company to optimize your Web site will be expensive. Prices will vary depending on your site, services offered and for what length of time. You are hiring experts who will achieve better results than you. And the increased business from good SEO hopefully will more than cover the costs. Bad SEO can be more harmful than no SEO. So it is important to find the right company to handle your campaign. The company should be able to provide a detailed plan. It should include a variety of methods to improve your rankings. Of course, its methods – and pricing plan – should be clear. Watch for companies that create unrealistic expectations. If it promises fast results, it could be using deceptive techniques that may get your site blacklisted.

Remember, though, search engine optimization can only do so much. Well-optimized pages might bring visitors, but only a good product will convert visitors to customers.

That's all there is to it.

If all this sounds a bit too complicated but you wish to optimize your web pages and you have a Microsoft Small Business Website then consider our Website Management service available in our Business Centre

http://coolcatscomputing.com/BC_login.aspx

Resources at www.coolcatscomputing.com